



## **NIGERIAN ENGLISH USAGE AND THE DYNAMICS OF LANGUAGE USE IN SEFI ATTA'S *SWALLOW***

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### **Abstract**

*Language by its nature is dynamic as it adapts to any society in which it is used. The use of Nigerian English in literary works showcases the dynamic nature of the English language, how the society shapes and is shaped by language. This work is a study of Nigerian English usage and the dynamics of language use in Sefi Atta's *Swallow*. The purpose of the study is to document and develop useful insights into the usage of Nigerian English in Atta's *Swallow* and contribute to the wider understanding of the linguistic and socio-cultural diversity of Nigeria through literary lens. The study investigated how Atta manipulated language to reflect dynamics of language use in Nigerian society as portrayed in the lives of her characters. A qualitative approach which enabled the researchers to conduct a textual analysis of the text was utilized. The theoretical framework used for the study is Labov's Variationist Theory. The findings revealed the predominant linguistic features of Nigerian English in the novel. These features enriched the characters' voices, added depth to their personalities and reflected dynamics of language use in the society. Social factors such as social class, education, and region which influence language use in the Nigerian society were also found in the novel. The study, therefore, concludes that Atta employed Nigerian English to immerse readers in a culturally rich linguistic narrative, unveiling a complex and authentic reflection of the sociolinguistic realities of the Nigerian society through her masterpiece.*

**Keywords:** Nigerian English, dynamics of language use, social factors, Sefi Atta's *Swallow*.

### **1. Introduction**

The English Language in Nigeria has traversed different domains of use reflecting its dynamic nature. Its adaptation to the socio-cultural nuances of the different speech communities and societies where it is used has impacted so much on its lexical, phonological and syntactic structure leading to the birth of new varieties where Nigerian English belongs. In his description of the institutionalised varieties of English Kachru (1986) classified users of English into three concentric circles – the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. The outer circle according to him comprise those who use English as a second language and are characterised with the capability of developing their own norms and identifying their own regional or national standard. Nigerian users of English fall within this category. Bamgbose (1995) avers that the way English is used in the outer circle birthed the processes of nativisation and development of varying varieties of English where Nigerian English



draws its locus standing. Features of Nigerian English ranging from phonological, lexico-semantic, Morphosyntactic, pragmatic to pidginization have been documented by scholars (Adegbite, 2020; Alabi, 2012; Bamgbose, 1995; Jowitt, 2019). These features collectively contribute to the distinct nature of Nigerian English showcasing the rich sociolinguistic vista of the Nigerian society (Tanyi et al., 2025).

Nigerian English which has been described as the nativised, indeginised, domesticated and nigerianised variety of the English language (Bamgbose, 1995; Adegbija, 2004; Alabi, 2012) is used in different spectrums and spheres of the Nigerian society to conduct transactional, literary as well as interactive and communicative functions. Adegbija (2004) describes the nativisation of English in Nigeria as a natural response to yawning linguistic and socio-cultural needs. Sequel to this, Adegbite (2020) sees the concept of Nigerianisation and domestication of English in Nigeria as a pointer to the fact that English has become Nigeria's property and has been applied to convey various Nigerian experiences and sensibilities. Thus, the recognition of the existence and usage of Nigerian English resonates in its active use for virtually all activities, formal and informal by the vast majority of 'educated' Nigerian speakers of English Abubakar (2012).

In the context of literature, writers have explored the use of language as one of their literary styles to elucidate and illuminate their content for effective understanding. Some Nigerian writers have employed Nigerian English in their works to showcase the dynamics of language use in a social context and how the society influences the use of language as obtained in the real world. The use of Nigerian English is known to be influenced by social factors within the Nigerian environment, and this has been reflected in the literary milieu as depicted by different writers. Sefi Atta by no means stands out as one of the writers who have used the nativised version of English to capture the attention of readers and propel them to understand the dynamics of language use in Nigerian sociolinguistic environment. In her novel, *Swallow*, Atta portrays how language variation and change in communication patterns are influenced by sociolinguistic variables. She showcases the uniqueness of the Nigerian English and how social factors such as social class, education and region influence the linguistic behaviour of characters in the world of the novel as is represented in Nigerian society. This elucidates the views of Holmes and Wilson (2017) and Mu'in (2019) that sociolinguistics examines how language is used within different social groups, cultures, and communities, as well as how factors like social status, education, ethnicity, gender, and geography influence language variation and communication patterns. Hence, a study of Nigeria English usage in Sefi Atta's *Swallow* explores how language is used to reflect the dynamics of language use, social identities and



interactions of the characters in the novel which is also a reflection of the real situation in Nigerian society.

The novel, *Swallow* offers a compelling exploration of the lives and experiences of women in contemporary Nigeria. The story revolves around the protagonist, Tolani, and her friend, Rose, as they navigate the complexities of life in Lagos, one of Nigeria's bustling cities. Set against the backdrop of social, economic, and political changes in Nigeria, the novel delves into the challenges faced by these women, such as societal expectations, gender roles, relationships, and personal aspirations. The narrative provides a candid portrayal of the characters' daily lives, struggles, and aspirations, shedding light on the cultural and social dynamics that shape their existence. Atta's style captures the linguistic dynamics in the communicative patterns of the characters which is a replica of the Nigerian society making it a good choice for the exploration of Nigerian English usage and the dynamics of language use in literature.

Previous studies have been conducted on the works of Seffi Atta as well as the exploration of Nigerian English in literature. The politics of survival in modern Nigeria as depicted in *Swallow* was examined by Nwiyi (2014). The researcher investigated how Atta's use of feminist motifs and approach underscores tensed female positions being strangled between male dominated systems and deplorable socio-economic situations in Nigeria. Similarly, the study of Evangelin and Nirmala (2023) centers on the consequences, processes, and methods of survival adopted by women in Nigeria's dire socioeconomic situation as contextualized in Atta's *Swallow*. The authors x-ray how Atta exposed women's empowerment as a veritable tool for scaling through a tense generational position that is exacerbated by male-dominated systems and precarious socioeconomic conditions. Alharbi (2024) digs into the depths of African woman's experience via an Africana Womanist interpretation of *Swallow*. Using the lens of Africana womanism, the study examines the African woman's struggle against patriarchal oppression and subjugation. It demonstrates the importance of Africana womanism as a valid theoretical structure for investigating and assessing women's experiences and accomplishments in African and African American literature. Pandey and Khan (2024) investigate the influence of political identities and social factors on the experiences of main characters in *Swallow*. The study interrogates how human identities are shaped by politics, the consequences of corrupt institutions on survival, and the significance of resistance and action as demonstrated in the text. Peverga and Shija (2022) interrogate Atta's *Swallow* through the lens of ecocriticism and postmodernism depicting how cosmopolitan environment has gradually given Nigeria its postmodern twist in literary discourse. The writers expose how Atta recreated the Lagos environment and



characters within the world of the novel with utmost knowledge and sensitivity showcasing a recap of reality.

Using the systemic functional approach particularly the transitivity theory, Koussouhon and Agbachi (2016) investigate the representation of male and female personalities in Sefi Atta's *Everything good will come* and *Swallow*. The study revealed the transitivity patterns in the two texts through the different process types, participants and circumstances which helped in bringing out the author's ideology about gender roles. Tarhe (2023) explores a lexico-semantic study of *Swallow*. Combining corpus linguistic and semantic analysis, the study interrogates the lexical and semantic structure explored in the text to explicate the author's linguistic choices and their underlying meanings. The study further investigates how language is used to construct and convey complex characters, relationships and socio-cultural dynamics within the text through the analysis of lexical choices. It underscores the relevance of lexico-semantic analysis as a linguistic tool for showcasing how the choice of language enhances fictional narratives, intensifies messages and provides insights into the social-cultural dimension of a specific setting. While these scholars explore the works of Atta particularly *Swallow* from different thematic perspectives which differ from the focus of this study, other scholars engaged in the study of Nigerian English in other literary texts aside *Swallow*.

Using the Cultural Identity theory via a descriptive approach Inyima (2018) explores how Adichie regenerated/recreated the identity of the Nigerian variety of English as authentic, requisite and appropriate for fictional discourse in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus*. The study insists on a continuous and constant declaration of the validity and mutual ownership of the variety by Nigerian literary artists which will put an end to its age long non acceptance particularly by the Nigerian elite, and pave way for its codification and use for national cohesion. The study of Uwen and Nta (2021) explores the social imbalances captured in the English language used by characters in Soyinka's *The beatification of area boy*. The study reveals that the characters in the play were linguistic pointers to distinctive features in Nigerian English usage that distinguish the linguistic behaviours of Nigerians from other Englishes. The study also reveals the classification of the spoken varieties of Nigerian English into Nigerian Pidgin, Incipient bilingual, Local colour variety and the Nigerian literary variety. Eburuaja's (2023) study on the use of Nigerian English in literary texts interrogated the use of the nativised variety in Imasuen's *Fine Boys* and Agary's *Yellow Yellow*. Using Coupland and Giles' Communication theory, the study underscores how the use of nativised English variety enabled the authors to situate the texts within the right sociocultural and sociolinguistic context. Edung, et al.



(2025) investigates the linguistic features and pragmatic functions of Nigerian English as shown on social media platforms. The study depicts the creativity of Nigerian English users in showing digital presence through the use of social media as a fertile ground for enlisting Nigerian English variants. These studies explored the use of Nigerian English in different literary texts aside *Swallow*, the primary text in this study. The use of Nigerian English was also investigated in these previous studies from different perspectives different from the focus of this study which aims at documenting the features of Nigerian English and the influence of social factors on the dynamics of language use in literature.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Although Nigerian English is growing as a distinct variety with unique linguistic features and cultural implications, there is a lack of in-depth exploration of the features of Nigerian English within literary works to convey social, cultural, and political nuances, especially in relation to Atta's novel, *Swallow*. There is also limited studies on the influence of social factors on the dynamics of language use among characters and how the dynamics of language use contribute to thematic and character development in literature. There is a need therefore to document the features of Nigerian English, and investigate how social factors influence the dynamics of language use among characters, as well as how the use of Nigerian English contribute to the overall literary experience of Atta's novel *Swallow*.

## 3. Research Questions

The study is anchored on the following research questions.

1. What are the predominant linguistic features of Nigerian English in Atta's *Swallow*?
2. How does social factors influence the dynamics of language use among characters in the novel?
4. How does the use of Nigerian English contribute to the overall literary experience of the novel?

## Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Labov's (1963, 1966) Variationist Sociolinguistic Theory. The theory explores how language varies within a speech community and the systematic relationship that exists between such variations and social factors. The theory establishes that heterogeneity is an inherent and structured property of language, and that social forces play a crucial role in shaping linguistic behavior. Labov's (1963) study demonstrated how centralized diphthongs were used by island residents to express local identity and resistance to mainland influence, highlighting



the role of social meaning in language variation. His (1966) New York City /r/ Study was further indicative of a strong and clear correlation between pronunciation and social class and the use of hypercorrection among the lower-middle class. Labov's studies thus establish a strong relationship between language variation and social factors such as socioeconomic class, age, gender, education and ethnicity. In the light of this theory, this study examined how social factors influenced the dynamics use of language by characters in *Swallow*.

### Methodology

The study employed the qualitative approach which orchestrated a textual analysis, well-suited for analysing linguistic features in literary texts. The method focused on identifying predominant features of Nigerian English and how social factors influenced the dynamics of language use within the primary text, *Swallow*. Specific linguistic elements, such as vocabulary, syntax and speech patterns that reflect Nigerian English usage were extracted. Quotations from the text were utilised to illustrate the identified linguistic features and provided context for analysis. The identified linguistic features were juxtaposed with character interactions, narrative choices, and other elements to uncover how Nigerian English is used, how it contributes to character development, and what sociolinguistic insights it provides about the context in which the story is set.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Research Question One

What are the predominant linguistic features of Nigerian English in Atta's *Swallow*?

Predominant Linguistic features of Nigerian English in Atta's *Swallow*

**Table 1:** Improper Spellings and Pronunciation

Improper spellings/pronunciation	Actual spelling/pronunciation
Effec-e-tive (p.6)	Ef- fec-tive /i'fek.tiv/
Unaccept-a-ble (p.6)	Un-ac-cep-ta-ble /ʌn.ək'sep.tə.bəl/
Alo o (p.21)	Hello /he'ləʊ/
Pee-geot (p.22)	Peugeot /'pɜ:ʒəʊ/
Ro-less (p. 22)	Rolex /'rəʊleks/
Imme-e-diatly (p.27)	Im.me.di.ate.ly /i'mi:.di.ət.li/
Zat (p. 27)	That /ðæt/
Letter-ers (p.27)	Let.ers /'let.ərz/
Roace (p. 40)	Rose /rəʊz/
S'cuse me (p.50)	Excuse me /ɪk'skju:z mi/



<b>Improper spellings/pronunciation</b>	<b>Actual spelling/pronunciation</b>
Dats (p.73)	That /ðæts/
Sharrap (p. 120)	Shut up /ʃʌt ʌp/
De (p.120)	The /ði:/
Won-dering (p. 151)	Won.der.ing /'wʌn.dəriŋ/
Die- vorced (p. 157)	Divorce /di'vɔ:st/ (p. 157)

Atta's intentional use of incorrect spellings and mispronunciations captures the authenticity of the characters in the novel and their use of language in a natural social setting.

**Table 2:** Loan Expressions

"eh?" in "We might be coming to ask you for rent money at the end of the month, eh?" (p.37)
"Ha!" in "'Ha', I said clapping my hands in sympathy" (p.35)
"Em" in "'Em', move where by the way?" (p.45)
"Ah! in "Ah! But I exploited him first" (p.108)
"oh" in "Sister dress oh!" (p.120)
"Nawa oh" (p. 84)
"Ah! Ah!" (P. 90)
Abi" (p. 120)

The words and expressions listed in table 2 are features that contribute to the unique characteristics of Nigerian English, reflecting the cultural and linguistic influences within Nigeria, as well as the creativity and expressiveness of its speakers. The characters in the novel use these expressions consciously and unconsciously.

**Table 3:** Lexical Duplication

"You work, work, work" - (p.11)
" ... Funny funny fellows... (p.16)
"... Marriage marriage marriage (p.16)
"... True, true" ( p.25)
" ... No no sir (p. 29)
" He must pay today, today" - (p. 40)
" Quietly, quietly, I ... (p. 51)
"My son, my son..." - (p.59)
"Dat's right, dat's right.... (p. 73)
" I came here and checked myself quick quick" (p. 85)
" ... Not if you wrap the drugs well, well" - (p. 88)



" We take and take and give nothing back (p. 92)
"Don't, don't " - (p.95)
" I thought finally finally" - (p. 109)
" My money, my money ..." - (p.110)
" Today, today we will enter the same trouser" - (p .110)
"Say it say it" - (p. 146)
" Mourners cried and cried - (p. 162)

The text is replete with lexical duplication which is very common in most indigenous Nigerian languages. This also shows the adaptation of English to the linguistic patterns and behaviour of Nigerian languages. Lexical duplication is used for emphasis, rhetorical effect or sometimes unintentionally as a discourse marker.

**Table 4:** Transliteration

"You Nigerian women are all the same" (p. 51)
"You yourself, in what way we're you talking?" (p. 52)
"He himself knows the gravity of the situation" (p.95)
"He with his train noises and she with her chicken legs" (p.112)
"She said we are both women, she and I" (p.112)

The use of transliteration in *Swallow* further shows how the nativized English variety is used to reflect Nigerian experiences.

**Table 5:** Code switching

"He was holding on and whimpering, 'Sanu mi,' mercy. (p.1)
"'Ewo' it's bad..." - (p. 58)
"What is all this wahala about? (P. 56)
"He is my close friend 'ore mi atata' " - (p. 110)
"...but she is wicked, that woman, o ma buru" - (p.114)
" 'Mama mi', I said ' I can't breathe'" - (p. 163)
" 'Ni suuru' he said 'have patience" - (p. 172)

Code switching is used by different characters in *Swallow*. The characters in the course of their conversation switched from English to Yoruba, a Nigerian language and vice versa.



**Table 6:** Lexical Borrowing

<b>Loan words</b>	<b>Intended Meaning</b>
Babalawo (p.23)	Chief priest
Warapa (p. 26)	Epileptic feasts
Goody Goody (p. 41)	Gifts
Bobo (p. 41)	A good looking young man
Oba of England (p. 56)	King of England
Shalanga (p. 66)	Excessive spending
Wahala (p.69)	Trouble
Danfo van (p.98)	A type of public transport
4-1-9 (p.100)	Scammers
Oyinbos (p. 105)	white men
Koboko (p. 120)	An instrument for punishment
Tanda (p.120)	Stand
Ashawo (p. 123)	Prostitute
Yansh (p.131)	Buttocks
Roforofo (p. 137)	Chaos
Juju (p. 165)	Charm

Nigerian English draws extensively from indigenous languages to enhance its vocabulary, a characteristic that Atta richly portrays in her novel as shown above.

**Table 7:** Idiomatic Expressions

<b>Idiomatic Expressions</b>	<b>Intended meaning</b>
He's doing this to pepper me (p.33)	Someone intentionally trying to annoy, provoke, or irritate another person
...We will enter the same trouser (p.68)	the idea of being in the same situation or facing the same circumstances as someone else.
Such is life (p.106)	Resignation or acceptance in the face of an unfortunate or unavoidable situation.
Time itself was the worst of life's tricks, the way it stretched and snapped in contempt of a person's will (p. 161)	The frustrating and uncontrollable nature of time, which can be a source of disappointment or even contempt.

The use of these expressions resonates with the adaptation of the English language to the rich Nigerian linguistic and sociocultural ambience.



Semantic Shifts

**Table 8:** The lexical choices which reflect Semantic shifts in *Swallow*

Words/ phrases	Intended meaning
Big man... (p. 30)	Rich man, wealthy man
He's doing this to "pepper" me - (p.33)	annoy
Is your uncle "backing you "(p. 46)	supporting you
How is "active duty" my daughter? (p. 48)	work
"Chicks dig it" (p. 67)	girls like it
A little girl has just "abused me" (p.169)	insulted me
He hasn't even produced his first "issue" (p. 94)	child

The characters use words and phrases that portray different meanings and connotations from their original meaning in Standard British English which is typical of Nigerian English.

4.2 Research Question two

**How does social factors influence the dynamics of language use among characters in the novel?**

Through linguistic variation, Atta effectively highlights the social disparity and linguistic dynamics that exist among characters in the novel as is obvious in the Nigerian linguistic terrain. She masterfully uses language to differentiate characters based on factors such as social class, education, social setting and region. Different social classes and settings may have distinct linguistic patterns and vocabulary. For example, Mr Salako, who occupies a higher socioeconomic position, uses formal and standard English and expects a high level of English language proficiency from his employees, such as Tolani and Rose. This can be seen in his interaction with Tolani as he demands to know her level of proficiency in the English language while commending the near perfect proficiency of her former secretary 'Rose'.

" ... How is your diction by the way? ' My diction?' 'Yes, your English. I want to know how you speak and write it. Whatever one might say about Miss Adamson, her diction and grammar were excellent." (p. 29).

This conversation indicates that Mr. Salako and Tolani in their interactions maintain the employer and employee relationship. Their linguistic choices and patterns can be seen as formal and respectable compared to the way Tolani interacts outside her job



environment and, when in the company of her work colleagues, Godwin, Franka, Ignatius and Hakeem. The use of language in the office setting is expected to be formal and near perfect if not perfect. This is shown in the internal memo also written by Salako.

"'To personnel', he said. 'Re: Tolani Ajao. I wish to lodge a formal complaint about my secretary Miss Tolani Ajao. This morning, I requested that she retrieve a file from my filing cabinet. She refused and became recalcitrant....'" (p. 70).

Salako uses words that are unfamiliar to Tolani who is less educated than he. His lexical choices are considered too complex for her to spell as portrayed in the novel. This further shows the social divide in language use based on level of education.

Atta's use of Nigerian pidgin English is seen among characters in informal settings and between characters who have cordial relationships. She uses this to showcase language patterns which are acceptable and used during informal settings irrespective of social class and level of education.

Instances of such usages include:

"Why you dey look me like dat?" (p. 119)

"Make you no touch me oh" (p. 119)

"Yes, address yourself to the corner and continue to tando for dat side with your body like bonga fish" (p. 120)

"Who you dey call dog" (p. 120)

"You face like tea without milk" (p. 138)

"How now" (p. 138)

"Short devil like you" (p. 151)

"You think say I fit marry both of them " (p. 151)

Atta further brings out the regional variation of Nigerian English using characters such as Hakeem and Alhaji Umar. This exposes how the English language has been influenced by the Nigerian multicultural and multilingual environment.

Yes. I hexpected it sooner or later. It was a matter of time. That woman does not know 'ow to control 'erself, and Salako 'as been letting her get away with it. Now, see what she's gone and done, disgracing 'im in public like a small boy.... (p. 7)

Here Atta depicts how Hakeem's spoken English accent has been influenced by his Yoruba mother tongue. His speech is always immersed with the 'H factor' in Nigerian



English which refers to the tendency to drop the "H" sound at the beginning of words and add same to words that begin with a vowel. It is a common linguistic feature in the regional variation of Nigerian English and is commonly associated with the Yoruba speakers of Southwestern Nigeria. Hakeem who is an Ibadan man adopts the linguistic characteristics of his local community, Ibadan, although he works in Lagos. Another character whose spoken English is immersed in the regional variation of Nigerian English is Alhaji Umar. His pronunciation reveals that he is from northern Nigeria.

Alhaji Umar was a small man who looked taller than he really was because his body was so narro. He wore glasses and never seemed to see beyond the frames. A man from the North, his accent always sounded foreign to me. 'Mr. Salako', he said, ' has requested zat you be trans-a-ferred downstairs to work for him.' (p.27)

Atta uses the regional variation of Nigerian English to expose the authenticity of the characters as well as the patterns of language use in the Nigerian society. It further depicts the sociolinguistic impact of regional accents and vocabulary on the English language and its acceptability for communicative purposes.

#### 4.3 Research Question three

#### **How does the use of Nigerian English contribute to the overall literary experience of the novel?**

The use of Nigerian English in *Swallow* mirrors the linguistic choices and communicative patterns of Nigerian speakers of the English language. Through the use of Nigerian English, Atta provides readers with an understanding of the essence of Nigerian society from the lens of her characters. This accords authenticity to the voices of the characters and exposes Atta's literary and stylistic ingenuity. This authenticity enhances the reader's immersion in the story, creating a genuine sense of place and culture. Atta also uses Nigerian English to provide a window into the Nigeria's way of life, thus enriching the readers' understanding of the Nigerian cultural and sociolinguistic milieu as well as the narrative progression of the text. The narration of Tolani's mother, Arike, portrays the culture, belief and wisdom of the Nigerian ethnic group that is used as the setting of the story.

We Yoruba believe in the cycle of life. A person dies and passes to the spirit world only to return to the land of the living. I have struggled with this concept in many ways. The last and first breaths for instance, how much time is between? The knowledge acquired in one life, at what point is it forgotten? I certainly do not have a simple existence. Is this ever possible? It is more likely that a simple assumption has been made about my life. I have always said, in



passing judgements on others, that if you want to know the best and worst a person is capable of, try and imagine their greatest fear. No story should remain untold. Death is the state that should follow the surrender of all the secrets we carry, and I have resolved that it makes no difference how much time there is between our successive lives anyway. What matters is what we learn whilst we are living, what we can teach. Therefore, we need not wait for the moment before death to look at each other and say, 'Listen to me. Let me tell you what happened in my life so far...' (p.187)

By employing Nigerian English, Atta defines, differentiates and accords her characters unique voices. The portrayal of linguistic diversity in the text helps the readers to distinguish characters from different regions or social backgrounds, thus bolstering the characterization. Atta also uses Nigerian English as a tool for socio-political commentary as shown below.

'Government minister steals', she carried on. 'State Governor steals, Contractor steals. President steals. You work, work, work. Can't even afford meat to eat at lunchtime. Taking insults from one manager. I swear to God, if I see that man again, by the time I finish with him, he will think he's in Armageddon'. (p. 11)

She employs language to highlight the disparities in society, power dynamics, or the influence of colonial history thereby deepening the thematic exploration of her novel.

He asked about our country's independence and civil war. He wanted to know if we were affected in Makoku. I said 'No, our town is always protected from bad fortune, even from epidemics. Maybe that is why most people here have time for pettiness.' He said even in times of war and sickness people have time for pettiness and I saw in his eyes that he understood me. 'Our civil war saddened me,' I said. 'To think the onyinbos left and we began to fight each other like that. It was not right. Only children behave that way when their parents leave the house.' (p.107)

## Discussion

The findings of the study shown in tables 1-7 revealed that the predominant linguistic features of Nigerian English found in *Swallow* are improper spellings/mispronunciations, loan expressions, lexical duplication, code-switching, lexical borrowing, idiomatic expressions, and semantic shifts. The features align with those documented and found by scholars such as Adegbite (2020), Alabi (2012), Edung, Ekpang, Tanyi and Arihi (2025) Inyima (2018) and Uwen and Nta (2021). Atta intentionally uses improper spellings to portray how the characters pronounced such



lexical items which indicates the dynamic nature of the English language and its endonormative characteristics. It further adds depth of originality to the characters' personalities and provides insight into their social backgrounds. The author uses lexical duplication to foreshadow how the English language has been adapted to the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment, orchestrating its adoption as a local variety. Atta further immersed her characters in the use of transliteration to depict the creativity of the Nigerian users of English as well as the linguistic dynamics of language use and communication patterns within the Nigerian linguistic landscape. Idiomatic expressions and lexical borrowing were also deployed to reflect and transmit Nigerian indigenous languages, culture and lived experiences to the outside world through the characters in the novel. To further portray the conscious/unconscious use of Nigerian English to convey Nigerian sensibilities and experiences, Atta modified, restricted and extended the linguistic choices of the characters to suit the meaning intended in the socio-cultural context and setting of the novel through the use of semantic shift.

The study further revealed how social factors such as education, social class and setting, as well as region influenced the dynamics of language use among the characters in the novel. It was discovered that linguistic choices and patterns differed among the characters based on social class and setting as is reflected in the Nigerian society. This is in tandem with Labov's (1963, 1966) Variationist theory that established the relationship between social factors and linguistic behaviour. The interaction of the characters was found to be formal within the office setting where standard English was used but informal outside the office setting with the use of Pidgin English irrespective of level of education. Within the office setting, level of education occasioned linguistic disparity between employers of high education status and employees of low status. The work relationship particularly between Mr. Salako and Tolani, illustrates social disparities in language use on the bases of level of education. Atta uses improper spelling and mispronunciation, code switching, lexical borrowing and loan words to reflect the educational and social background of the characters. The linguistic choices of characters in the novel are not arbitrary but deeply influenced by social factors. Regional variations in language use are also common among the characters in the novel. By portraying characters with diverse language usage, Atta depicts the Nigerian society, highlighting the tensions, disparities, and the multicultural nature of the country.

The study further depicts that Atta uses Nigerian English to provide readers with an understanding of the linguistic and sociocultural realities of the Nigerian society.



With the use of Nigerian English Atta accords the Characters genuine, unique and authentic voices which immerse the readers in the storyline and enhance the narrative progression of the novel. The dynamics of language use and patterns of communication in the text make the characters more interesting, adding layers to their personalities and infusing life into the settings, while creating a vibrant cultural and linguistic space. The portrayal of linguistic diversity and the dynamics of language use through the use of Nigerian English also help the readers to distinguish characters from different regions and social backgrounds, thus bolstering the characterization and setting of the novel.

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of the findings of the study, the documented dominant features of Nigerian English in *Swallow* enhanced the theme, characterisation and setting of the novel which provided readers with an understanding of the essence of Nigerian society through the lens of the characters. The dynamics of language use portrayed in the text exposed how language is influenced by social factors and how the English language has adapted to the linguistic and sociocultural ambience of Nigeria. Hence, it can be concluded that Atta employed Nigerian English to immerse readers in a culturally rich linguistic narrative, unveiling a complex and authentic reflection of the sociolinguistic realities of the Nigerian society through her masterpiece.

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