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Semantic Innovation in Nigerian English Content Words: Corpus-Assisted Evidence from ICE-Nigeria

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Abstract

English words may develop, extend, narrow or acquire locally conventionalised meanings as they are used in new linguistic and cultural environments. In Nigeria, sustained contact between English and indigenous languages, together with local communicative practices, has produced a range of lexical-semantic

innovations. Although earlier scholarship has documented many such forms, there remains a need for corpus-based evidence showing how recurrently they occur in authentic discourse, particularly among content words. This study investigates semantic innovation in selected Nigerian English content words using data from the International Corpus of English-Nigeria (ICE-Nigeria). Twenty purposively selected lexical items, comprising five nouns, five verbs, five adjectives and five adverbs, were analysed with the Word List, Concordance and Collocates tools in AntConc (Version 4.3.1). The analysis considered frequency, concordance, collocation, semantic preference and semantic prosody to determine how the selected forms function in context. The findings indicate recurring patterns of semantic extension, semantic shift, semantic narrowing and pragmatic specialisation, alongside lexical developments involving borrowing and reduplication identified in the study. The recurrent corpus patterns provide evidence that these innovations are not adequately described as isolated deviations but as contextually established uses within Nigerian English. The study therefore contributes corpus-assisted evidence to the description of lexical-semantic variation in Nigerian English and to the wider study of World Englishes.
Keywords: Nigerian English, lexical, semantics, corpus, Englishes

Introduction

The spread of English across the world has been phenomenal, and this spread has resulted in the emergence of several recognised varieties that are shaped by the linguistic, cultural and social realities of their users. As the language came into contact with different communities, it gradually developed features that reflect local patterns of communication while maintaining its role as an international language. Consequently, scholars now acknowledge that English is no longer the exclusive preserve of its native-speaking communities but that it is now a global language with several growing and recognized varieties (Kachru 11; Crystal 110;

Schneider 3). Each of these varieties bears evidence of the environment in which it has evolved (Hundt et al. 3; Schneider 2).

Nigeria presents one of the most dynamic contexts for studying this development. English occupies a central position in the country's educational system, administration, commerce, judiciary, media and interethnic communication. Over the years, constant interaction between English and Nigeria's indigenous languages has influenced the way the language is appropriated, giving rise to distinctive lexical and semantic patterns that reflect local communicative needs and cultural experiences of its new linguistic environment (Bamgbose 18; Jowitt 7; Adegbija 58). These developments have contributed significantly to the emergence and continued growth of Nigerian English as an established variety within the broader family of World Englishes.

One area in which this development is particularly noticeable is lexical semantics. As societies change, the meanings of words also change to reflect and to accommodate new realities. In Nigerian English, many English words now express meanings that differ from, or extend beyond, those commonly associated with the meanings found in standard dictionaries. Such meaning changes are evident in everyday communication in Nigeria and they illustrate how speakers adapt existing lexical resources to describe their own realities which differ from British realities and which have to be expressed in uniquely Nigerian ways. As Ullmann observes, semantic change is an inevitable aspect of language development because meanings continually respond to changing human experience (193). Traugott and Dasher likewise argue that contextual use in particular environments often leads to the emergence and eventual conventionalisation of new meanings (27).

Semantic innovation has been recognised as an important characteristic of Nigerian English. Studies by Banjo, Bamgbose, Jowitt and Adegbija have documented various forms of semantic

extension, borrowing, lexical transfer and coinage that distinguish Nigerian English from other varieties, especially British English. While these studies have provided valuable insights into the lexical development of the variety, much of the available evidence has been drawn from intuition, literary texts, elicited data or isolated examples. Such approaches are useful for identifying semantic innovations, but they offer limited evidence regarding not just how frequently these meanings occur or how consistently they are used across different communicative settings but also about what factors are responsible for the innovations, what specific semantic patterns explain the innovations and how the are accounted for using corpus tools.

The increasing use of corpus linguistics has created new opportunities for investigating language variation through authentic language data. Rather than relying solely on intuition (which many of the earlier studies relied on), researchers can now examine naturally occurring texts to determine how words are actually used in different contexts. Corpus-assisted analysis makes it possible to investigate frequency patterns, concordance lines and collocational behaviour with greater objectivity and transparency (Sinclair 17; McEnery and Hardie 1). These analytical procedures also help distinguish between occasional innovations and lexical patterns that have become established within a speech community and no longer accidental occurences.

It is important to note that, despite these methodological advances, relatively few corpus-assisted studies have focused specifically on semantic innovation in Nigerian English content words. There is limited existing corpus-based research on the systematic semantic behaviour of content words in Nigerian English as the searchlight has repeatedly beamed more broadly on lexical categories, and therefore provide limited in-depth investigation of content words, which carry substantial lexical meaning. As a result, there is still limited corpus evidence showing how repeated contextual use

contributes to the development and stabilisation of new meanings in Nigerian English. This makes a study that provides corpus evidence of repeated contextual use necessary. It is against this background that the present study investigates semantic innovation in content words in Nigerian English, using data from the International Corpus of English□Nigeria (ICE-Nigeria). By analysing lexical frequency, concordance lines and collocational patterns with AntConc (Version 4.3.1), the study examines whether the meanings associated with these lexical items are recurrent features of Nigerian English or merely isolated instances of language use.

The status and description of Nigerian English have continued to attract scholarly discussion, particularly concerning its development, institutionalisation and relationship with other established varieties of English. In view of the ongoing debate on the status of Nigerian English, and beyond describing these semantic developments, the study provides empirical evidence that contributes to the ongoing discussions about the nature and development of Nigerian English. The study also demonstrates the value of corpus-assisted methods in the study of lexical semantics and offers further support for efforts aimed at describing, codifying and standardising Nigerian English within the wider framework of World Englishes.

Review of Related Literature

The study of Nigerian English has attracted sustained scholarly attention for several decades, particularly in relation to its lexical, grammatical and semantic characteristics. Among these areas, lexical semantics remains one of the clearest indicators of how English has adapted to Nigeria's multilingual and multicultural environment. As English continues to serve diverse communicative functions across the country, many words have acquired meanings that reflect local realities while remaining recognisably English. These developments have strengthened the

view that Nigerian English is not merely a collection of performance errors but the progressive emergence of an institutionalised variety with identifiable linguistic features.

Early descriptions of Nigerian English consistently recognised semantic innovation as one of its defining characteristics. Banjo, Bamgbose, Jowitt and Adegbija, among others, documented numerous examples of semantic extension, borrowing, lexical transfer and coinage that emerged through prolonged contact between English and indigenous Nigerian languages. In fact, the selected content words analysed in this study were drawn from their earlier documented works before being inputed into ICE-Nigeria for attestation. Those studies tried to show that the meanings attached to many lexical items are often shaped by cultural practices, social relationships and communicative needs that are unique to the Nigerian context. The present study seeks to substantiate this observation through a larger corpus-based dataset. In this sense, semantic change reflects the natural process through which language responds to the experiences of its speakers rather than evidence of linguistic deficiency.

Although these pioneering studies laid a solid foundation for understanding lexical development in Nigerian English, they were conducted at a time when large electronic corpora were either unavailable or rarely used in linguistic research. Consequently, many conclusions were drawn from the researchers' observations, literary texts, classroom experiences and carefully selected illustrative examples (Igboanusi 12; Jowitt 19). These approaches undoubtedly enriched scholarship on Nigerian English, but they provide only limited evidence regarding how widespread or stable many of the reported semantic innovations are in actual language use. The emergence of corpus linguistics has changed the direction of research on language variation. Instead of depending almost entirely on intuition, scholars can now investigate naturally occurring language drawn from systematically compiled electronic

corpora. This methodological shift has made it easier to observe patterns that might otherwise remain unnoticed and has strengthened the empirical basis of linguistic description. Sinclair argues that recurring patterns in authentic texts provide a firmer basis for describing language than intuition alone, while McEnery and Hardie demonstrate that frequency distributions, concordance evidence and collocational analysis together provide reliable tools for investigating lexical behaviour.

Recent corpus-based research has expanded knowledge of Nigerian English considerably (Jowitt and Ugwuanyi 24). Resources such as the International Corpus of English□Nigeria (ICE-Nigeria), the Global Web-Based English Corpus (GloWbE) and the International Corpus of English-Great Britain have enabled researchers to examine lexical innovations, grammatical variation, discourse organisation, phraseology and pragmatic features using authentic language data. These studies have improved the empirical description of Nigerian English and reinforced its position within the broader framework of World Englishes (Hundt et al. 5; Jowitt and Ugwuanyi 27).

Even so, content words as an aspect of lexical semantics have not received the same level of corpus-assisted attention as other areas of language study have. Most corpus-based investigations have focused on lexical categories as a whole, grammatical structures, discourse patterns and pragmatic functions, leaving the semantic behaviour of content words, as unique features of Nigerian English, comparatively underexplored. Questions relating to how new meanings of content words emerge, become established and spread across educated Nigerian English have therefore not been examined as extensively as they deserve. Another noticeable gap that necessitates this study concerns methodology. Studies that discuss semantic innovation often identify examples of semantic extension or meaning shift without demonstrating how consistently those meanings occur across different communicative contexts as

done in most corpus studies, particularly in this study. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a reported innovation represents an isolated occurrence (a case of both competence and performance issues), an author's stylistic choice or an established feature of Nigerian English. Corpus evidence is particularly valuable in resolving this uncertainty because repeated occurrences across independent sources and texts provide stronger support for claims about language use in Nigerian English than isolated illustrations.

The present study is situated within this methodological and empirical gap. Rather than relying on intuition or selected examples, it investigates semantic innovation through authentic corpus data drawn from ICE-Nigeria. The use of AntConc (Version 4.3.1) allows the study to examine lexical frequency, concordance patterns and collocational behaviour simultaneously. Looking at these three dimensions together provides a more comprehensive understanding of how meanings develop and become conventionalised within Nigerian English. The study also extends existing scholarship in another important respect. Instead of simply identifying words whose meanings differ from meanings documented in British English, it seeks to explain the corpus evidence associated with those differences. The analysis therefore moves beyond description to demonstrate how repeated contextual use contributes to semantic development. The study offers a stronger empirical basis for discussing lexical meaning in Nigerian English by grounding its interpretations in authentic corpus data,.

Overall, the literature reviewed indicates that semantic innovation and reinterpretation have become an important feature of Nigerian English and that corpus linguistics provides an effective theoretical lens and means of investigating it. At the same time, this study attempts to show that relatively little attention has been given to corpus-assisted studies of semantic innovation in content words in Nigerian English. It is this gap that the present study seeks to

address. By combining corpus evidence with lexical-semantic analysis, the study contributes further evidence to the continuing description, codification and standardisation of Nigerian English within the wider field of World Englishes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: the World Englishes Paradigm and Lexical Semantics. These theoretical frameworks provide an appropriate framework for explaining how meanings change and become established in Nigerian English. Lexical Semantics explains the processes through which words acquire new meanings over time while the World Englishes Paradigm accounts for the sociolinguistic forces that shape language development. The two frameworks therefore complement one another in explaining both the origin and the nature of the semantic changes examined in this study. Corpus linguistics on the other hand becomes the lens through which the exploration is undertaken.

The World Englishes Paradigm, developed principally through the work of Kachru, views English as a global language that has evolved into several institutionalised varieties as a result of its contact with different linguistic and cultural communities of its new linguistic environments (Kachru 15). From this perspective, the distinctive features found in varieties such as "Nigerian English" are not regarded as departures from British or American English but instead, they are recognised as natural outcomes of language contact, localisation and the communicative needs of their users. The framework acknowledges that as English spreads to new environments, its speakers adapt it to express their own peculiar social and cultural realities while preserving its essential broader communicative functions.

This understanding is particularly relevant to the present study. Many of the semantic innovations identified in Nigerian English

have emerged through continuous interaction between English and the country's multilingual environment. Their repeated occurrence in authentic communication suggests that they are not random or individual creations but conventional linguistic features that have gradually become part of educated Nigerian English. The World Englishes Paradigm therefore provides the broader sociolinguistic context for interpreting these developments (Kachru 15; Schneider 3). Closely complementing this perspective is Lexical Semantics, which is concerned with the nature of word meaning and the processes through which meanings develop, expand and change. Unlike traditional views that treat meaning as fixed, lexical semantic theory recognises that the meanings associated with words evolve in response to changing patterns of language use, social interaction and cultural experience (Cruse 26; Traugott and Dasher 39). New meanings often emerge gradually as speakers repeatedly use familiar words in new contexts until those meanings become widely recognised within a speech community (Bybee 11; Blank 64).

This theoretical perspective is particularly useful in explaining the semantic behaviour of the lexical items analysed in this study. Processes such as semantic extension, semantic shift, semantic narrowing and meaning reinterpretation are understood as natural outcomes of language use rather than accidental departures from established norms. Examining these processes through authentic corpus data makes it possible to observe how repeated contextual usage contributes to the conventionalisation of new meanings in Nigerian English.

Holistically, the World Englishes Paradigm and Lexical Semantics provide a coherent framework for the present investigation. The former explains why Nigerian English has developed distinctive lexical meanings within its sociocultural environment, while the latter accounts for the linguistic mechanisms through which those meanings emerge and become established. Their combined application therefore offers a sound theoretical basis for analysing

semantic shift and meaning reinterpretation in the selected content words.

Methodology

This study employed a corpus-assisted descriptive and analytical research design that combined quantitative corpus analysis with qualitative semantic interpretation. The decision to adopt this approach was informed by the nature of the research problem, which required both numerical evidence of lexical occurrence and contextual interpretation of meaning, so this design was found appropriate. Instead of relying on intuition or isolated examples, the study examined naturally occurring language data to determine how semantic shift and meaning reinterpretation are realised in Nigerian English. The data were preselected first from earlier documented studies on the subject, this data was then inputed into the International Corpus of English□Nigeria (ICE-Nigeria), a well-established electronic corpus comprising authentic spoken and written texts produced by educated Nigerian users of English, for attestation. The corpus covers a wide range of communicative situations and therefore provides an appropriate basis for investigating lexical meaning as it occurs in actual language use. The balanced composition of the corpus makes it particularly suitable for identifying recurring semantic patterns across different discourse contexts.

To begin with, 300 preselected words were drawn from earlier documented works of scholars on Nigerian English which were then queried in ICE-Nigeria through the Antconc tool. The final list of selected lexical items was examined to determine their frequency of occurrence, contextual distribution and evidence of semantic variation. Following this preliminary analysis, twenty representative lexical items were purposively selected for detailed investigation. The final sample consisted of five nouns, five verbs, five adjectives and five adverbs. Selection was guided by three considerations: frequency of occurrence in the corpus, richness of

contextual evidence and the extent to which each item demonstrated observable semantic change. Restricting the analysis to these twenty items allowed for a more detailed examination of their semantic behaviour while maintaining a balanced representation of the major lexical categories.

The analysis was carried out with AntConc (Version 4.3.1), developed by Laurence Anthony (Anthony). Three tools within the software formed the core of the investigation. The Word List tool was used to determine lexical frequency, the Concordance tool provided contextual evidence of usage, while the Collocates tool identified recurrent lexical associations. Together, these tools offered complementary perspectives on the semantic behaviour of the selected words. Beyond the quantitative outputs generated by the software, the study also examined semantic preference and semantic prosody to explain how meaning was shaped by surrounding linguistic contexts. Interpreting the corpus evidence in this way made it possible to identify patterns of semantic extension, semantic shift, semantic narrowing and meaning reinterpretation that recur in Nigerian English. Consequently, the findings presented in this study are grounded in the sampled corpus data rather than subjective linguistic judgement, thereby enhancing the transparency, reliability and replicability of the analysis.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the ICE-Nigeria corpus provides substantial evidence that semantic innovation is a recurring feature of Nigerian English. The semantic patterns identified in the selected content words are not isolated innovations or occasional differences from British English reference meanings. Rather, they reflect conventional patterns of language use that have developed through the interaction of English with Nigeria's multilingual and multicultural environment. Their consistent occurrence across the

sampled corpus texts provides evidence of recurrent semantic variation within the broader framework of World Englishes.

The findings further indicate that semantic development does not occur uniformly across all lexical items. While some words retain their traditional British English meanings and simultaneously acquire additional interpretations in Nigerian usage, others display more pronounced semantic shifts that reflect *local* communicative practices and sociocultural realities. These developments should therefore be understood as evidence of linguistic adaptation rather than deviation. They illustrate how an institutionalised variety expands its lexical resources to meet the communicative needs of its users. Another notable observation is the consistency with which these meanings recur throughout the corpus. The frequency distributions, concordance lines and collocational patterns all point to similar semantic tendencies across independent texts. This consistency moves the discussion beyond isolated examples that have characterised much of the earlier literature and provides stronger empirical grounds for describing these meanings as recurrent features of educated Nigerian English within the sampled data.

Taken together, the corpus findings strengthen the argument that semantic innovation is an observable indicator of linguistic variation in Nigerian English. The semantic behaviour of the selected lexical items reflects a variety that continues to develop its expressive capacity while remaining part of the wider English language. Rather than weakening the relationship between Nigerian English and other institutionalised varieties, these developments demonstrate the natural process through which English adapts to diverse sociolinguistic settings. For clarity, the discussion is organised around three complementary corpus indicators: frequency, concordance and collocation. Although each provides a different perspective on lexical meaning, together they

offer a comprehensive account of how semantic variation has emerged and become established in Nigerian English.

Frequency as Evidence of Lexical Entrenchment

Frequency distribution is a useful indicator of lexical entrenchment because meanings that recur across different speakers, texts and communicative contexts are more likely to be established than accidental innovations. The frequency data from the ICE-Nigeria corpus therefore provide a useful basis for examining semantic variation in the selected content words (McEnery and Hardie 49; Stubbs 39). The frequency profile reveals a consistent pattern. Several lexical items occur more frequently in ICE-Nigeria than in ICE-GB, suggesting a stronger presence in Nigerian discourse. Although frequency alone does not prove semantic change, it becomes more meaningful when interpreted alongside concordance and collocational evidence.

The noun *agenda* illustrates this trend. It occurs thirty-three times in ICE-Nigeria compared with only two occurrences in ICE-GB. While this difference does not by itself indicate semantic change, it shows that *agenda* plays a more prominent role in Nigerian discourse, particularly in governance, administration, education and institutional planning. A similar pattern is observed with *gist*. Besides occurring more frequently in ICE-Nigeria, it displays a broader semantic range. Rather than referring only to the central idea of a message, it commonly denotes news, information or the exchange of information. Its repeated occurrence across the corpus suggests that this meaning is an established feature of educated Nigerian English.

The verbs *hustle*, *dash* and *chop* exhibit comparable tendencies. In Nigerian English, *hustle* extends beyond physical effort to include perseverance, entrepreneurship and economic survival, while *dash* and *chop* also occur with meanings that reflect *local* communicative practices. Their regular use across different

contexts indicates that these meanings have become conventional within the variety. A similar trend appears in the adjectival and adverbial data. Lexical items such as *sharp*, *local*, *actually*, *already* and *now-now* occur frequently with specialised meanings that are familiar to educated Nigerian speakers. The pragmatic uses of *actually* and *now-now*, in particular, demonstrate that semantic variation in Nigerian English extends beyond lexical reference to include discourse functions.

Overall, the frequency evidence indicates that the semantic developments identified in this study are firmly rooted in authentic language use. Their repeated occurrence across the corpus supports their description as recurrent features of Nigerian English rather than isolated differences from British English reference meanings.

Concordance Evidence for Meaning Reinterpretation

Concordance analysis complements frequency data by showing how lexical items function in authentic contexts. By examining words within their immediate linguistic environments, it becomes possible to identify how meanings are developed, reinforced and conventionalised in Nigerian English. The lexical item *gist* clearly illustrates this process. Across the ICE-Nigeria corpus, expressions such as “give me *gist*”, “I will *gist* you”, “they were gisting” and “latest *gist*” occur repeatedly in contexts of information sharing. Unlike its traditional British English sense of "the main point of a message," *gist* in Nigerian English commonly refers to information itself or the act of exchanging it. The consistency of these patterns indicates that this extended meaning is well established among educated Nigerian English speakers.

A similar pattern is evident in *dash*. While the verb traditionally means to throw something forcefully, the Nigerian data consistently associate it with voluntary giving, generosity and informal social exchange. Its frequent occurrence in these contexts demonstrates a stable semantic shift shaped by *local*

communicative practices. The adverb *actually* also displays semantic expansion, but beyond expressing correction or contrast, it is often used to introduce explanations, soften disagreement and manage conversational flow. These recurring functions suggest that *actually* has acquired important discourse-pragmatic roles in Nigerian English. An even clearer example is *go-slow* (Evans 17). In every concordance line examined, the expression refers to road traffic congestion rather than industrial action, which is its traditional British English meaning. Its consistent use in this sense reflects the influence of *local* experience on lexical meaning.

Taken together, the concordance evidence confirms that the meanings associated with *gist*, *dash*, *actually* and *go-slow* are not isolated innovations. Their recurring use across authentic texts provides strong evidence that semantic innovation is evidenced as a recurrent feature of Nigerian English.

Collocational Behaviour as Evidence of Semantic Conventionalisation

Collocational analysis provides further insight into semantic development by showing the words that regularly occur together (Firth 195; Stubbs 24). These recurring associations reveal how meanings become established and conventionalised within a speech community. The collocational profile of *agenda* reflects its prominence in Nigerian public discourse. In the ICE-Nigeria corpus, it frequently occurs with words such as meeting, conference, government, committee, development and programme. Although these collocates are broadly consistent with its traditional meaning, they highlight the central role of *agenda* in institutional and administrative communication in Nigeria.

The collocates of *gist* reveal a more noticeable semantic development. It regularly co-occurs with words such as “give, share, receive” and “discuss”, reinforcing its Nigerian English meaning as both information and the act of exchanging

information. These repeated associations indicate that the extended meaning has become conventional rather than incidental. Comparable patterns are observed with *dash* and *hustle*. The verb *dash* frequently collocates with words relating to money, gifts, favours and friends, reflecting its meaning of voluntary giving. Similarly, *hustle* commonly occurs alongside work, business, survival and opportunity, emphasising perseverance and economic activity. These collocational patterns demonstrate that their meanings are well established in Nigerian English.

The adjectival and adverbial data show similar tendencies. *Sharp* is regularly associated with promptness and efficiency, while *actually* commonly introduces clarification or explanation. Likewise, *now-now* consistently appears in contexts expressing urgency or immediacy. These recurring patterns suggest that semantic variation in Nigerian English extends beyond lexical meaning to include discourse-pragmatic functions. Overall, the collocational evidence complements the findings from the frequency and concordance analyses. Together, these corpus indicators demonstrate that the semantic developments identified in this study are systematic features of Nigerian English rather than isolated departures from other varieties of English.

Corpus Evidence for Semantic Innovation in Nigerian English

When the findings from the frequency, concordance and collocational analyses are considered together, a consistent pattern emerges. The semantic developments identified in this study are not isolated innovations but recurring features of authentic Nigerian English. The convergence of these corpus indicators provides robust empirical evidence for semantic variation. The analysis shows that semantic extension is the most productive process affecting the selected lexical items. Words such as *gist*, *dash*, *hustle* and *actually* retain aspects of their traditional meanings while developing additional interpretations that are widely recognised in Nigerian usage. Their repeated occurrence

across different texts suggests that these meanings have become part of the shared lexical repertoire of educated Nigerian speakers.

The corpus also reveals more substantial semantic shifts in lexical items such as *go-slow*, *okada* and *palliative*. In each case, the dominant meanings reflect Nigeria's sociocultural and historical experiences rather than the traditional British English interpretations. Their consistent use across the corpus indicates that these meanings have become conventional features of Nigerian English. The findings further show that semantic innovation extends beyond changes in lexical reference. Lexical items such as *sharp*, *actually* and *now-now* also perform important discourse-pragmatic functions, contributing to clarification, emphasis, promptness and immediacy in communication. This demonstrates that semantic development in Nigerian English involves both lexical and pragmatic adaptation. Overall, the corpus evidence supports the description of semantic innovation as a systematic aspect of the selected Nigerian English data. The consistency observed across the three corpus measures supports the recognition of these developments as established patterns of variation within an institutionalised variety of English.

Implications for the Description and Codification of Nigerian English

The findings of this study have important implications for the description and codification of Nigerian English. The corpus evidence demonstrates that many of the semantic developments identified are neither isolated innovations nor individual usages. Rather, they are conventional patterns that have become established through sustained use among educated Nigerian English speakers. The study also contributes to the broader field of World Englishes by providing empirical support for the view that institutionalised varieties develop distinctive lexical-semantic features shaped by their sociocultural environments. The conventional uses of *gist*, *dash*, *go-slow*, *sharp*, *actually* and *now-*

now illustrate how English adapts to *local* communicative needs while remaining part of the global language.

Methodologically, the study highlights the value of corpus linguistics in investigating semantic change. By integrating frequency distributions, concordance analysis and collocational patterns, it provides a more objective basis for identifying semantic variation than reliance on intuition or isolated examples. The findings also have practical relevance. They may inform future lexicographic work, support the teaching of English in Nigeria and encourage further corpus-based studies on other lexical categories and varieties of English. Such research will contribute to the continued documentation and refinement of Nigerian English. Overall, this study demonstrates that semantic innovation is a systematic feature of Nigerian English. By grounding its conclusions in authentic corpus evidence, it contributes to the continuing description and codification of the variety and advances corpus-assisted research on lexical semantics within the framework of World Englishes.

Conclusion

This study investigated semantic innovation in selected content words in Nigerian English using authentic data from the International Corpus of English-Nigeria (ICE-Nigeria), to show variation. The corpus-assisted analysis demonstrated that the lexical items examined exhibit recurrent patterns of semantic extension, semantic shift, pragmatic specialisation and contextual expansion shaped by Nigeria's sociocultural environment. Evidence derived from frequency distributions, concordance analysis and collocational behaviour indicates that these semantic developments represent conventionalised features of Nigerian English rather than isolated or intuitive innovations.

The study provides empirical support for the view that lexical meaning in Nigerian English develops through recurrent processes

of adaptation driven by recurrent usage in authentic communicative contexts. By integrating corpus linguistics with lexical-semantic analysis, it contributes to the description, codification and continuing standardisation of Nigerian English within the broader framework of World Englishes. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of corpus-assisted approaches in investigating semantic change and offers a replicable framework for examining lexical-semantic variation in institutionalised varieties of English. Future research may extend this investigation by examining larger corpora, additional lexical categories and comparative data from other national varieties of English to provide broader insights into semantic change across World Englishes.

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