STANDARDIZATION AND CODIFICATION OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH: BLUEPRINT FOR GRAMMATICALITY AND ACCEPTABILITY

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Abstract
The existence of the Nigerian English (NE) has been a topical issue amongst scholars, and this has birthed scholarly research into its nature and structure. This paper seeks to look at what constitutes a Standard Nigerian English and ways to codify the Nigerian English variety which has been accepted as standard, as steps towards ensuring its grammaticality and acceptability. Dynamic Model and Triangle of Three determinant theories by Edgar Schneider (2003) form the theoretical bases of this paper while four hundred questionnaires were used to extract data and SPSS analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings showed that Nigerian English is a unique and meaningful variety for the citizens of Nigeria and that the compilation and codification of the Standard Nigerian English would give this unique variety a sense of belonging; a home and deep root in the linguistic ecology of Nigeria and in so doing make its existence concrete and generally acceptable. Language experts and language policy makers are hereby enjoined to use a corpus-based approach in codifying expressions peculiar to the Standard Nigerian English in dictionaries and books.
Keywords: Nigerian English, Standardization, Codification, Grammaticality, Acceptability

Introduction

An Overview of the English Language

The English language and its users keep growing at an alarming fast rate and as an acceptable language of international communication, mass media and so on and as Graddol (2006) in UK Essays argues 'knowing English has become a basic skill in the global world' (web). Kachru (1985) in his three concentric circles of the spread of the English language presents three circles of users of the English language: the inner circle which represents the base of English language occupied by those who use the English language as MT, the outer circle representing places where the English language serve as a second

language and as an indispensable tool in a multilingual setting and used in recognized institutions in the country. The areas that make up this outer circle include former colonies of Britain and USA. The English language serves as a foreign language to users in the expanding circle who have to learn it for one reason or the other. And this, Chukwu captures in his book 'Understanding Spoken English' (2018) thus,

> English language is spoken as a native language, second language and foreign language. As a native language, it is the Mother Tongue or first language spoken in Britain, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa of the Apartheid period. As a second language in the British colonial world of some African and Asian countries, it is the official language of education, government, legislature, diplomacy, judiciary, the media, and certain formal business transactions. As a foreign language from far eastern countries, French speaking countries and the countries of the former Soviet Union, it is a little learned, to aid business transactions with other English-speaking countries.

As a global language, English has spread and acquired many varieties which range from regional, standard, non-standard to dialect varieties and McArthur in his Wheel Model captures eight regional standard and emerging standards of which World Standard English (WSE) forms the hub of the wheel: Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific Standard English, Britain and Irish Standard English, American Standard English, Canadian Standard English, Caribbean Standard English, West, East and South (ern) African Standard(izing) English, South Asian Standard(izing) English, East Asian Standard(izing) English. NE is a natural variety found in the West, East and Southern African Standardizing English within which we can find sub-national varieties of Igbo-English, Yoruba-English, Hausa-English *etcetera*. McArthur's Wheel not only recognizes hybridized and nativized varieties but also provides an avenue for them to be critically analysed in terms of their process of standardization and their overall input to the WSE. Ekpe (2006) notes that,

> The most important thing about the "wheel" and the "Concentric" circles is the idea of nativization in outer-circle varieties. That is the adoption of a once foreign language so that it becomes indigenized and fully adapted to the new local context. "Nativization has to do with the degree of functional nativeness of English in a given social context, in particular the range of functions of English in general and its use for literary writing in particular.

To this end, the problem of this study lies in the willingness of Nigerians and other speakers of English language to socially accept the SNE and use them unrestrictedly in domains of commerce and government, despite the backlash it has received from critiques who see it as an aberration and misnomer. The purposes and objectives that seek to address this pertinent research problem are:

a. To discover if the NE is a misnomer, if there are deviations of the NE from the WSE and if it is intelligible to English users outside the Nigerian environment
b. To find out the perceived attitude of people towards codifying the NE
c. To find out to what extent Nigerians are ready to accept the SNE
d. To identify how the SNE will add to the WSE scheme of things and its acceptance outside Nigeria

Nigerian English (NE)

Nigerian English (NE) is a nativized variety of English language that is peculiar to the Nigerian environment and takes its characteristics from the Nigerian environment. This environment includes peculiar Nigerian experiences and cultural practices of the people resident in the country. This nativization has been termed 'domestication' by Adegbija (2004), 'glocalization' by Ekpe (2006) and 'Nigerianness' by Chiluwa (2007) and it captures the ability of the English language to meet the needs of the people who are creative enough to innovate new forms out of a foreign language in a new environment. The nativization of English in Nigeria to Bamgbose (1995) includes the creative development of English, including the evolution of distinctively Nigerian usages, attitudes, and pragmatic use of the language. Ekpe is of the view that Kachru's concentric model "opened up new arenas in the description of world Englishes (second-language varieties) like Nigerian English which were seen as mere deviance. This model has become increasingly accepted forms of English which are developing their own norms and standards".

Having been brought to Nigeria in the 16thc by the Europeans, the "colonial masters who needed to communicate with the natives but claimed not to have the 'special gift of ear' to catch the complicated variations of any of the indigenous languages in Nigeria, imposed their language on their host and ever since then, the English language has grown from the status of 'unintelligible talk' to a status of 'elitism' and has become the language of science and technology, religion, music, government, education and so on'. The language now finds itself serving as a unifying factor in a language pluralistic setting, while at that, developed a variety and sub varieties with ethnic dialects' colouring in the lexical, syntactic, semantic, and phonological aspects. Over the years, the English language started conforming to the Nigerian environment and even makes up the linguistic ecology in Nigeria which grants its users the

platform to express themselves in English language with a Nigerian style and flair. Kachru (1985a) is of the view that,

> The institutionalized second-language varieties have a history of acculturation in new cultural and geographical contexts, they have a large range of functions in the local educational, administrative, and legal systems. The result of such uses is that such varieties have developed nativized discourse and style types and functionally determined sublanguages (register) and are used as a linguistic vehicle for creative writing in various genres.

Standardization of Nigerian English

Standard has been defined as falling within an acceptable range of quality, excellence or usability. Standardization on the other hand is an attempt by a community of language users to formulate a norm or a benchmark to measure the grammaticality of any language. A language which is considered as standard follows a set of rules which a mistake in any of them results in a deviation. Quoting Richard and Schmidt 2010:554 and Finegan 2007:14, Wikipedia defines a standard language to be "a language variety that has undergone substantial codification of grammar and usage and is employed by a population for public communication". The variety which is standardized is the one "spoken or written in centres of commerce and government" (Curzan, 2002).
Codification on the other hand means setting something into a body of knowledge in a systematic way and Wikipedia defines it as "the process of selecting, developing, and laying down (prescribing) a model for standard language usage". It requires setting up orthographic systems, pronunciation, vocabulary and spelling systems which would be fixed in normative or prescriptive dictionaries and books.

Codification processes usually succeed standardization or after appreciable creative changes have taken place in a language and involves setting the grammar and vocabulary into a body of knowledge through social, political or educational means. Codification processes entails constituting a data base of all varieties of English used in various contexts - social, academic, regional and academic – and making a critical examination of grammatical forms, lexis, spellings and phonology that could be used to write a reference book for the SNE. Furthermore, enumerative measures that seek to pinpoint actual deviant usages, its consistency and frequency from the SBE, tracing and reviewing the origin of words by etymologists are also part of the codification process and make up what is referred to as the Corpus stage (a collection in form of writings or an electronic database on a specific genre and so on used for linguistic analyses). It is only when these are done that the variety regarded as standard can be wholeheartedly received. And this raises a pertinent question regarding the codification of the SNE: have language planners in Nigeria gotten to the

codification phase? Abdullahi-Idiagbon writing in response to claims and counter claims by individuals or bodies on the issue of the Standard Nigerian English states that,

> The Nigeria English Studies Association (NESA) organized the 26th Annual National Conference at Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun state, in which a committee was inaugurated to collate entries of lexical items from which experts would finally identify and compile words that were qualified to enter into the Nigerian English lexical usage. The Association reiterated the continuity of this assignment in the 27th NESA Annual Conference held at Covenant University, Ota, also in the same state.

He also noted that the codification of Nigerian English requires a lot of public and private participation for its success, in which the federal government would take the responsibility of financing the project and to formally pass it as the accepted variety of English that is distinctively Nigerian, where after, not only would official transactions be conducted using this variety of English but it would also be included in the nation's language policy, after a corpus-based approach has been used as a method for codification to reflect the true situation on ground. He also notes that loan words are also incorporated in codification as borrowing is part of building a language. Along the same line, attempts at codification have been made by Herbert (2002), Odumuh (1984), Kperogi (2015) and so on and this contribution serves as a point of reference to the grammatical levels of the SNE and gradually, as people refer to it, it attains a social prestige and becomes acceptable. The idea of a SNE presupposes the fact that there must be a substandard variety. NE encompasses standard and substandard varieties. Paraphrasing Ahulu (1999) he also makes a valid observation that a language is not just standardized because it is used and accepted by native speakers but also on the acceptability of such usage among educated people. Now, how do we recognize the standard variety that must be codified? Scholars have gone on to identify the varieties of English available in Nigeria according to speakers' educational background and competence level in the Standard English. These forms according to Jowit (1991), Brosnahan (1958), Akere (2004), Banjo (1996), Egbe (2004), Bamiro (2006) and so on generally fall under four categories:

i. Variety used by people with no formal education
ii. Variety used by those with only primary education
iii. Variety used by those with secondary education
iv. Variety used by those with university education

The variety used by those with university education has been regarded as the SNE and Kperogi (2007) takes note that this variety is the one "broadly spoken

and written by Nigeria's literary, intellectual, political and media elite across the regional and ethnic spectra of Nigeria. This particular form spoken by educated Nigerians originated from the combination of the competent knowledge of speakers' MT and the prospective knowledge of Standard English.

Theoretical Framework

The Dynamic Model and the Triangle of Three Determinant as propounded by Edgar Schneider (2003) were used for this paper because they explain the emerging varieties of English and some processes involved of which the SNE is at one of the stages. He describes five stages in the Dynamic Model *viz-a-viz:*

i. The foundation stage where the native speakers of the English language settled in non-native areas just like the Britons settled in Nigeria. The native speakers are seen as settlers.
ii. The exonormative stabilization stage where the English language attracts a quality peculiar to languages exported outside its native environment. Phonological interference, transfer features and words from the foreign environment become adopted into the English language as more people learn the language because of its economic powers.
iii. Nativization stage which involves the creation of a new native variety of the English language. There seems to be a remaking of the identities between the native speakers' language and the learners' English language as the language becomes more adapted to the environment with indigenous norms implanted in it, but the two varieties still maintain a level of sameness. This nativized variety do not wholly attain a linguistic, political, or social reality.
iv. At the fourth stage which is the endonormative stabilization, the nativization is thus far gone that it becomes accepted and attempts to codify it in textbooks and dictionaries are embarked on.
v. Differentiation which is the fifth stage centres on stabilizing new sub-national varieties within the codified stable national variety. The establishment of these new sub-varieties will lead to English dialects within a nation.

Presently, the NE is at stage four where attempts at codification are being considered. It is important to note that two stages can overlap because as codification processes are underway in Nigeria, scholars are also carrying out research characteristic of the differentiation stage by identifying sub-national varieties such as Hausa-English, Igbo-English, Yoruba-English and so on.

Schneider proposes three factors responsible for the emergence of New Englishes in his Triangle of Three Determinants thus:

i. The common core which is the variety the native speakers of English speak from which other varieties are the English language have in common.
ii. The interference variety is the intrusion of the MT in ESL situations in phonological and syntax levels.
iii. The norm developing refers to the ingenious ways learners of ESL adapt the English language to their own environment. They create new expressions based on their linguistic creativity. This is also called autonomy. It is at this level of autonomy that the NE is presently, which has necessitated questions, inquiries and demand for its standardization and codification to mark its place as a healthy variety of the WSE.

Methodology

Quantitative survey method was adopted, and the area of study is Nigeria where the NE is spoken. Purposive sampling was used in choosing three major ethnics groups to represent all the ethnic groups in Nigeria. Random sampling was carried out to choose thirty-four (34), thirty-three (33) and thirty-three (33) respondents respectively out of the selected three ethnic groups: Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba to make a total of 100 respondents who constituted the sample of this study. Dynamic Model and Triangle of Three determinant theories by Edgar Schneider (2003) form the theoretical bases of this paper while structured questionnaires were used to extract data and SPSS analysis was used to analyse the data.

Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using SPSS in line with the four purposes of this research. The results are presented below:

IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 24)
Response Output

1. **To discover if the NE is a misnomer, if there are deviations of the NE from the WSE and if it is intelligible to English users outside the Nigerian environment**

You have heard of a variety of English called SNE

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	25	25.0
	Yes	75	75.0
	Total	100	100.0

The SNE is different from the WSE in form

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	75	75.0
	Yes	25	25.0
	Total	100	100.0

The SNE is as a result of errors

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	78	78.0
	Yes	22	22.0
	Total	100	100.0

The SNE is intelligible to English language users outside the Nigerian environment

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	19	19.0
	Yes	81	81.0
	Total	100	100.0

From the result of the valid percent shown in tables 1 and 4 above, over 50 people out of 100 answered 'Yes' to having heard of the NE and think it is intelligible to speakers' of English language outside Nigeria which raises its chances of being accepted while tables 2 and 3 show a significant rise in the number of respondents who answered 'No' showing that they do not think the NE is different from the WSE because they have a common core nor is it an error or inferior to the WSE but shows a healthy effect of language contact which causes adaptation and hybridity.

2. **To find out the perceived attitude of people towards codifying the NE**

SNE should have a recognized orthography

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	31	31.0
	Yes	69	69.0
	Total	100	100.0

SNE should have it's own recognized phonology

		Frequency	Percen
Valid	No	32	32.
	Yes	68	68.
	Total	100	100.

SNE should be encoded in literature textbooks and dictionaries

		Frequency	Percen
Valid	No	29	29.
	Yes	71	71.
	Total	100	100.

SNE should borrow from other languages in it's codification process

		Frequency	Percen
Valid	No	41	41.
	Yes	59	59.
	Total	100	100.

Valid percentages of respondents who answered 'Yes' in tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 show that above 50% are in support of codifying the phonology and orthography of SNE in textbooks and dictionaries and are even open to the idea of borrowing. The few who answered 'No' were of the opinion that a lot of codified systems are already in use: the WSE, the indigenous languages and/or other languages they may have learnt and that adding another codified system is cumbersome to language learners.

3. **To find out to what extent Nigerians are ready to accept the SNE**
   SNE should be used in meeting correspondences

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	40	40.0
	Yes	60	60.0
	Total	100	100.0

SNE should be used often in conversations

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	15	15.0
	Yes	85	85.0
	Total	100	100.0

SNE should be used in classrooms and examinations

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	50	50.0
	Yes	50	50.0
	Total	100	100.0

SNE should be used in conferences, seminars, and workshops

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	21	21.0
	Yes	79	79.0
	Total	100	100.0

Nigerians should use only SNE varieties of English

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	50	50.0
	Yes	50	50.0
	Total	100	100.0

Tables 1, 2 and 4 show that there are valid percent above 50 in the 'Yes' category showing the favourable dispositions of Nigerians towards accepting the SNE in conversations, conferences, workshops, seminars and in writing correspondences, while there are equal valid percent in the 'No' category in tables 3 and 5. They were of the opinion that SNE and WSE should be used equally in classrooms and examinations and that Nigerians should use both varieties instead of only using SNE because of the question of intelligibility in the wider English circle.

4. **To identify how the SNE will add to the WSE scheme of things and its acceptance outside Nigeria**
   SNE will contribute scholarly inputs to the WSE

		Frequency	Perce
Valid	No	38	38
	Yes	62	62
	Total	100	100

SNE is good enough to be considered a co-hyponym of BE/AE

		Frequency	Percen
Valid	No	49	49.
	Yes	51	51.
	Total	100	100.

SNE will deviate totally from the WSE in the future

		Frequency	Percen
Valid	No	89	89
	Yes	11	11
	Total	100	100

Other countries will look down on the SNE

		Frequency	Perce
Valid	No	89	89
	Yes	11	11
	Total	100	100

The valid percentages of 'Yes' in tables 1and 2 which are above 50 show that respondents think the SNE will contribute meaningfully to the WSE status as a global language and is good to be considered a variety of the WSE and Banjo (1995) comments on this thus,

> It appears to be generally recognized that it is in the lexical, semantic areas together with distinctive idiomatic expressions that Nigerian English is likely to make a real contribution to the development of the English Language worldwide, and so research has been intensified in this area, not only in thesis and dissertations, but also in publications.

Also, there is an above 50 valid percentages in tables 3 and 4 showing that the respondents do not think that other countries will look down on the SNE nor will the SNE deviate totally from the WSE thus confirming the existence of the common core. These show that the respondents think the SNE generally has chances of being accepted in the wider English community.

Conclusion

From every indication, the English language in Nigeria has become nativized and owing to this, has been established as a variety of English language. As

with the processes of emerging languages, the SNE is at stage 4 (endonormative stabilization) which calls for the codification of this unique variety after having been marked from 1960 onward by the features and characteristics typical of phase 4 which Mfon lists as:

(i) It is used in a wide range of communicative situations such as administration, politics, media, education and academia, trade and commerce, book publication and film industry.

(ii) It is used by Nigerian creative writers to express their world view and as the communicative vehicle. This can be seen in the creative works of esteemed and award winning writers as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Adichie.

(iii) Standard Nigerian English comes out of the development of the local form of English (non-Standard). Nigerian English is an evidence that English in Nigeria is now widely seen as an indigenous language with acceptable local features.

(iv) This variety being an emerging acceptable local variety of English has passed through a lot of linguistic filters as many Nigerian scholars like Jowitt (1991), Adegbija (2004) among others have made conscientious efforts in describing it. This has exerted much influence on this evolutionary phase of Nigerian English.

(v) Standard Nigerian English has gone through the criteria for standard language which are selection, codification, elaboration of function, acceptance and intelligibility. In the identification of Standard Nigerian English, scholars have identified varieties noticeable among Nigerians on the criteria of local acceptability and international intelligibility.

The data gathered from the questionnaires show that in standardizing and codifying the SNE, it would become more acceptable and seen as grammatical on the criteria of local acceptability and international intelligibility. Language experts and language standardizing bodies are hereby enjoined to codify the SNE to give it a place of acceptance in Nigeria and by extension, the world.

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