

Lexico-Syntactic Study of English Usage in Online News Responses and Their Implications for 21st-Century Pedagogy

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Abstract

Online news reading is becoming a part of people's daily lives, and this medium gives readers the opportunity to comment and share their opinions. It is noteworthy that the comments posted in response to online news articles encompass the entire Nigerian populace of over 250 ethnic groups and more than 400 languages for whom English is a second language. Therefore, this study examined the diverse ways in which Nigerians use English in their comments on online news articles and how these usages affect the teaching and learning of English in the 21st century. A study corpus of about 100 sentences was collected from Opera news responses over a period of three months. Analysis revealed that the use of English in online news responses differs from standard English usage due to users' habits to code switch and mix, translate directly from their mother tongue to English, give different meanings to existing words, or coin words to represent things that are new to ease their communication. In the attempt, grammar, punctuation, and spelling were either badly used or omitted. This linguistic habit, when transferred by students to their academic work, influences how they are subsequently evaluated. Therefore, there is a critical need for teachers to identify and distinguish between the usages of English that are "incorrect," "dialectal," and those that conform to "Standard English" so that students do not mistakenly interchange them.

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Introduction

Language contact often results in language interference, and this interference on most occasions does cause variation in language use. As a multilingual society, Nigeria is, English came in contact with many indigenous languages. In spite of the fact that English was adopted as the official language in Nigeria to solve communication barriers and tribal problems, and it became the language of government, education, media, etc., English cannot adequately cater to all the cultural peculiarities imbibed in Nigerian societies. There are some words or phrases that express the cultural background of the people that are either lacking in English or better expressed adequately in their own languages, so Nigerians use English to express their cultural peculiarities. Hence, this brings about a variety of the English language known as 'Nigerian English.'

Eliheni (2016) sees Nigerian English as a reflection of the use of English in the Nigerian linguistic context. It is the use of English in a way that has been adapted to suit the dictates of its users and their environment. It could be inferred, then, that Nigerian English is the English spoken in Nigeria for Nigerians. It is the extension of English lexicons to accommodate the sociocultural peculiarities and sociolinguistic features of the Nigerian context. When spoken to a non-Nigerian, there is a possibility for such expressions to be misinterpreted.

Expressions like "I can't stand" are sentences that every Nigerian speaker of English would understand to mean that the person who made the statement could no longer wait, but a native speaker might be tempted to think that the speaker had probably developed an illness and was unable to rise to his feet. This shows that Nigerian English is used and understood by Nigerians. We may then agree with Adgbija (2004), who asserts that Nigerians have adapted English for home use and made it applicable to our numerous conveniences, experiences, nuances, and sensibilities. Just as "a domestic servant does what the master requires, so English in Nigeria is now made to do precisely what Nigerians want it to do" (Adgbija, 2004)

Jowitt (1991), as cited by Ajewole-Orimogunje (2013), establishes Nigerian English as something real and identifiable and that 'Nigerianisms' are not necessarily evidence of imperfect learning of English, but instead are possible signs of healthy acculturation and of the creative capacity normally associated with second language learning and usage. While he considers the variation regarding syntax and morphology as an error, he, however, believes that the variation in terms of lexis is an innovation. Citing the examples that Adetugbo (1986) provides to illustrate how Yoruba speakers of English would mould the language to suit the Yoruba worldview, Daramola (2004) says the Yoruba use of *Sir* is an address form for an elder instead of addressing him by using the first name, and by addressing people of one's father's age-group as *father* or *mother*

The rapid expansion in the vocabulary used by Nigerians to translate their thoughts into language has brought about different coinages and expressions to suit the situation and context of usage. The inability of the English language to perfectly capture aspects of Nigerian culture has led to importations derived from Nigerian English lexis and culture-specific vocabulary to reflect the Nigerian experience. As expressed by Ogunsiji (2007), new words and expressions are coined daily to express the Nigerian linguo-cultural realities. Hence, according to Bankole and Ademokoya (2012), we have expressions such as 'I met him well' (he was eating while I met him), 'you will see my red eyes' (you will see my bad side), 'her husband is a big man' (her husband is a wealthy man); 'he was given a lift' (he was hitched a ride), 'he paid the transport money' (he paid the transport fare), 'senior sister' (elder sister), 'go-slow' (traffic jam), and so on

Many studies have often focused on several domains such as Nigerian media, newspapers, speeches, social media, text messages, lectures, and students' academic writings to explain the usage of English in the Nigerian context. This study, however, examines a different yet promising context of language use in Nigeria - the responses of readers in online news -

essentially to inform about the various ways in which Nigerians use English and to draw certain implications for linguistic usage and English pedagogy.

Online news reading is becoming more deeply embedded in people's daily lives than it has ever been as a result of the growth in the invention of wireless internet, mobile technologies, and portable devices. Yadamsuren and Erdelez (2011) assert that online news reading has become a part of people's everyday life information-seeking processes and that people are engaged with news both purposefully and unconsciously. When compared with newspapers, television, and radio, news websites employ profitable modes of news production. News websites produce and distribute content during a 24-hour news cycle without fixed deadlines. These sites are continuously updating publicized content with additional information and correcting inaccurate reporting promptly. Although the update cycle varies for news websites, traditional news media cannot overcome the update speed of news websites (Wikipedia, 2019).

Readers' comments posted in response to online news articles are a form of participatory journalism that gives the public a medium for expressing their perspectives on current issues. Commenting in response to online news provides an opportunity for readers to interact with each other or express their agreement or disagreement with the content of the article or other comments. "Commenters" may also correct what they believe to be misinformation in other comments, provide support, share anecdotes, and provide 'facts' and links to websites with additional relevant content (Henrich and Holmes, 2013).

It is worthy of note that the dominant language of communication in online responses is English, and the readers' comments posted in response to online news articles encompass the entire Nigerian populace of over 250 ethnic groups and more than 400 languages for whom English is a second language. Apparently, the use of language in this domain is often overwhelmingly influenced by the necessity to communicate messages to the Nigerian audience, which in itself is very diverse. Thus, the study attempts to explore the diverse ways in which Nigerians use English in their comments on online news articles, the extent to which their usages differ from the British Standard variety of English, and, more importantly, how these usages affect students' communicative competence and English pedagogy in the 21st century.

The Observed Problem

Information and Communication Technologies have grown rapidly around the world, and advancements in internet technology have given mass media a new shape; the growth of online news has been noticed in the last 10 years. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2017), around 15% of all internet visits are related to reading news online. Now, digital media has become an inherent part of modern society, and many people nowadays are accessing the internet for updated news in any place and at any time. Given that almost all online news articles on major news sites allow for the posting of comments, readers can choose to comment on those topics that are of greatest personal interest, and due to the fact that readers are from diverse settings, the socio-cultural aspects of the Nigerian languages are often transferred into their usages of English. Readers' comments, in terms of the writing system, vocabulary, and grammar, often reflect the "Nigerianess" of the commenters. People tend to code switch and code mix, translate directly from their mother tongue language, borrow and loan words from the language of the environment in order to express their thoughts and ideas.

This on its own is not an error; the problem that arises is that in the Nigerian situation where English is learnt as a second language, students might find it difficult to attain proficiency in the language. They might be unable to adjust successfully to the

accepted speech habits and norms of Standard English usage, even in formal settings. Most students do not understand that the linguistic features of Nigerian English differ from the accepted norms of Standard English. This set of students is beguiled by the grammar and vocabulary of English used in Nigeria to assume that they are the same as Standard English. As a result of this ignorance, many students impose the grammatical structure and lexis of the former on the latter in their written and spoken English. Consequently, this has grave effects on their performance in internal and external examinations and limits their opportunity to communicate with a wider audience. Hence, this study is motivated to examine the usage of English by Nigerian speakers and users in their daily conversations in order to identify its implications for the teaching and learning of English as a second language in this 21st century.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

- i. find out the linguistic features of English as used in online news responses at both the lexico-semantic and syntactic levels
- ii. justify the implications of these features for 21st century English pedagogy

Literature Review

English in Nigeria is spoken as the second language, and it is the official language used in government, media, business, law, education, and so on, and it has continued to spread across cultures. In Nigeria today, to aspire to any meaningful political post, to have economic clout, to have social recognition, to secure a good job, to do any meaningful international business, to communicate meaningfully and with ease both in Nigeria and outside, one must have a fairly good grasp of the language, both in the spoken and written forms. And every Nigerian wants to succeed in one or the other of those spheres of life; so everyone wants to “master” or use it “somehow” (Uzoezie, 2004)

Njemanze (2012) asserts that the English language is evidently the most colonial legacy of the British colonial masters to Nigeria, which added to the already existing multiplicity of languages. Njemanze notes that the multiplicity of native languages in Nigeria actually created a problem of understanding in communication among the different ethnic groups. It was difficult for Nigerians to adopt any of the three languages: Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa as their official language. It was in this controversial situation that English came as a ‘savior’ to the language needs of Nigerians, hence its adoption as the country’s official language. This made the English language a tool of communication between and among people in the country.

Olagunju (2014) opines that the wide acceptance of the language resulted in a situation where it has not only become the mother tongue of many Nigerian children, but the English language has also made a great influence on the various indigenous languages in Nigeria such that linguistic interference has brought about an increase in the number of vocabulary items in the indigenous languages. As rightly observed by Taiwo (2007), the increasing adoption of English as a second language has made a hybrid language to evolve in order to meet the cultural and communicative needs of the speakers.

Ajewole-Orimogunje (2013) expresses that the various cultural and socio-linguistic thoughts of Nigerians which could not be adequately expressed in the standard form of the English language propelled Nigerians to reshape it with a distinctive flavour to suit their experiences. This explains the different lexical derivations, innovations, and improvisations in the use of the English language so as to suit the situation and context of usage of the language.

As asserted by Mbisike (2007), what distinguishes members of a speech community are certain shared features in their use of language, as each language variety develops some non-shared features which distinguish it from others and allow it to express the socio-cultural reality of the speech community. Over time, English usage in Nigeria has developed some linguistic features which have distinguished it from other varieties of English. These features, which distinguish Nigerian English from other varieties, are identified by Adeniyi and Atolagbe (2004) at the phonological, lexico-grammatical, and discourse levels of usage. To Adigbija (2004), these features manifest at the lexical, idiomatic, phonological, grammatical and syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and cultural levels, which reflect how English has been domesticated in Nigeria. All these reflect the English domestication and accumulate to what is accepted today as “Nigerian English”. This, according to Ogunsiji (2007), is the reason why when a Nigerian speaks English, no matter his level of education, native speakers of English have no difficulty identifying the speaker as a Nigerian because of the reflections of some of the structural characteristics of Nigerian languages. Thus, ‘Indigenization’, ‘Nativisation’, ‘Domestication’, ‘Nigerianisation’, ‘Acculturation’, and so on are some of the terms linguists and researchers use to connote the adaptation of English to suit the Nigerian environment or to show that “English has been given Nigerian citizenship” (Adegbija, 2004).

While some scholars have argued and referred to the Nigerian variety of English as error and a manifestation of mother tongue interference which is non-standard, impure, and a deviation, many scholars in their publications have acknowledged the existence of a global English variety called Nigerian English (Surakat, 2010). Since we have nonstandard English users even among the Britons as a result of having different varieties such as Welsh, Scottish, etc., then there is no reason Nigerian English cannot be accepted as a dialect of English since it’s mutually intelligible among Nigerian users (Ogunsiji, 2007).

In the opening address of the “Dictionary of Nigerian English, Ulrike Gut (2014) comments that one of the characteristics of English in Nigeria, which it shares with many other varieties of English spoken in postcolonial societies, is its variation across speaker groups. Varieties of English spoken in Nigeria have been classified by several linguists. Banjo (1975) identifies four varieties of English spoken by Nigerians. He describes the linguistic features of the varieties based on the degree of deviation from, or approximation to, Standard British English. Udofof (2004), however, reclassifies the varieties of English spoken in Nigeria into three varieties. Variety one (non-standard) is common among primary, some secondary school, and secondary year university undergraduates, holders of OND and NCE certificates, and primary school teachers. Variety two (standard) encompasses the third and final year undergraduates, secondary school teachers, university graduates, lecturers, and holders of HND certificates. Variety three (sophisticated) includes the university lecturers in English and linguistics as well as graduates of English and the Humanities. All these varieties within the variety of Nigerian English are intelligible to all English users in Nigeria.

However, Ogunsiji (2007) maintains that the transplantation of language leads to the problems of “what” and how to teach the language. In the Nigerian context, English used in education is the Standard British English which serves as the model for the description of students’ spoken English and academic performance. Egwuogu (2007) contends that English taught and learnt in schools in Nigeria is the British variety and any deviation is seen as “incorrect”. Hence, the teaching and learning of English in the face of Nigerian English is likely to face some problems.

Olajire (2004), citing Akere (1993), laments that in spite of English dominance in the educational system, the standard of English expression is very poor and pupils lack the proper knowledge of the communicative tasks at the various levels of education. Olajire (2004) states that interference from Nigerian indigenous languages manifests in Nigerian speakers of English. It is not

uncommon to see even an educated Nigerian saying “I am coming” when in fact the speaker is moving away from the listener. Even though this statement is intelligible to a Nigerian man, it is unacceptable to the norms of Standard English and unintelligible to a native speaker.

Expressing dissatisfaction about this, Adetugbo (1979) describes the setting of native grammatical competence as standard for the goal of language acquisition as derogatory. To him, the acceptability of Nigerian English in the Nigerian social context is more important than whether the Nigerian variety of English is acceptable or unintelligible to native speakers of English.

Agreeing with him, Olajire (2004) stresses that Nigerians have adopted English as a common language to talk to one another and that their aim of learning English is not to be integrated into English culture, or to appease anybody, but to learn to use it because of its functional relevance for the education of Nigerians. Therefore, linguists like Aliyu (1993) argue that the British variety should cease to be the Standard English for the Nigerian educational setting since the context differs. Aliyu (1993) notes that it is inappropriate for educational institutions and examining bodies like the West Africa Examinations Council (WAEC), the National Examination Council (NECO), and the State Examination Board to impose the British Model of communicative competence in English on the Nigerian learner, or to use it uncritically as a norm against which to evaluate his attainment in English.

In his own contribution, Uzoezie (2004) puts in that the argument about standards is engaged in mainly by those who constitute the crux of the elite such as academics, and even among them, what constitutes the norm or the standard is still a subject of heated debate. For the majority of Nigerians who are less competent users, what constitutes the standard may not be clear, nor do most of them bother about it. Their interest is that whatever type of English they speak or write serves their purpose, hence the majority of them lump English together with pidgin as the same language.

In my opinion, some people hide under the concept of Nigerian English to use incorrect English because most people are totally ignorant as to what constitutes Nigerian English, an incorrect utterance, or a Standard English Variety. They are more concerned about expressing their thoughts and pay little or no attention to the correct and incorrect usage of the language both in their written and spoken utterances. This means that not all English used in Nigeria can be classified as Nigerian English. Daramola (2004) asserts that the use of *senior/Junior* for *younger/elder* is not really Nigerian English but an error which many Nigerians, including even university graduates in disciplines other than the English language, are yet to understand clearly. To Daramola (2004), the use of *borrow* for *lend* is indicative not of Nigerian English but clearly of an error which is as a result of a poor pedagogical approach to the teaching of the language by teachers who are themselves second language users or as a result of sheer ignorance on the part of the users. The implication of this is that the majority of Nigerians use English as it appeals to them without necessarily following the rules of the language. Many of them cannot differentiate Nigerian English from Standard English, and some do not know what makes an utterance incorrect. Hence, the need for this study to examine the diverse usage of English by Nigerians in online news responses and their possible implications on the teaching and learning of English in the 21st century

Methodology

In this study, the researcher adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population of this study was readers of online Opera news. Opera news is a major news site that allows the posting of comments by readers. Responses of readers

were observed, and 100 readers' comments in response to online news articles that deviate from Standard English usage, which the researcher came across within the period of data collection from January to September, 2021, were purposively collected and examined. Features of English which reflect the English usage of Nigerian users on the Opera news platform were identified. This was used to explain how people use English, the differences in Standard English usage, and its implications for 21st-century pedagogy

Theoretical Orientation

This study is anchored on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). Halliday's SFG is hinged on the fact that language affords its users so many options to choose from while using it for communication, and the choice made is used to perform a particular communicative function. SFG theory therefore describes language in use, creates systemic relations between choices and forms within the less abstract strata of grammar and phonology on one hand, and more abstract strata such as the context of situation and the context of culture on the other hand.

SFG has four main theoretical assumptions about language. These are: language use is functional, its function is to make meanings, these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged, and lastly, the process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meanings by choosing. As such, "language is a resource for making meaning, and meaning resides in systemic patterns of choices" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2015). As a theory which describes the communicative usage of language and the choices speakers make from the available set of options for communicative purposes, it is therefore appropriate for exploring the diverse ways in which Nigerians use English in their comments on online news articles

Findings and Discussion

Some peculiar linguistic features of English used in online news responses are identified and discussed below. These include code-switching, translation equivalents, metaphor and idioms, semantic extension, distorted spellings and punctuations, deviant use of grammar, and coinages

Code-switching and Code-mixing

1. Yorùbá-English

News Item: Man beats his wife blue and black after DNA test shows he isn't the biological father of his children

- a. ..olorun maje ki a shi iyawo fe. She must be from the vampire world
- b. 'I don't know why these people shey funny gan' (I don't know why these people are so funny)

News item: SARS official arrested for robbery in Benin City

- c. 'mo ya look away
- d. 'they are yeye people
- e. They are not o

f. 'oya now'

g. 'My padi'

Igbo-English

News Item: Pure water causes kidney failure, cancer, and liver diseases, by the World Health Organization

- a. That one na story for the gods, NAFDAC no know or see all these things before they approve the...
- b. I no blame una. small time una go tell us make we no eat garri again. Book just dey confuse una brain
- c. Tell us the water to drink, writer. Na wa ooh...
- d. Chineke God, truly the end is near

Hausa- English

News Item: When I return from surgery, many marriages will break- Bobrisky

- a. You don't mean it ba?
- b. Shikini money

Pidgin - English

News item: SARS official arrested for robbery in Benin City

- a. 'She don tell you'
- b. 'Na wetin dey eat you up again'
- c. 'No wahala'
- d. 'Make you no worry'

News Item: Man beats his wife blue and black after DNA test shows he isn't a biological father of his children

- e. 'You don forget am'
- f. She no fit kill this one mao. Slot
- g. ..to all the single men out there, abeg marry your size o
- h. This one na bad omen o
- i. no go carry wetin pass u for craze..

Though English is an official and second language in Nigeria, the use of code-switching in online news responses involving features of local languages reflects the influence of the country's linguistic diversity. Many people find it convenient to switch from standard English to dialect in order to ease communication. As seen in the above extracts from comments of online readers of Opera news, it's obvious that code mixing and code switching, which involves Yoruba- English, Igbo- English, Hausa- English, and Pidgin English, are common, depending on the indigenous language of the user. Hardly can the readers comment without including a morpheme or sentence from the indigenous language into English communication

Translation equivalents

In the responses of readers of online news examined, there were direct translations from Mother Tongue to English. The expressions below, extracted from readers' comments, have been influenced by both Yoruba and Igbo languages. There are grammatical deviations in the expressions such as omission of function words, redundant use of modifiers and adjuncts, spelling errors, and so on because of the transfer of the direct or exact meaning of a word from the native language into the target language regardless of the context or grammar of the utterance

News Item: Man beats his wife blue and black after DNA test shows he isn't a biological father of his children

- a. Seriously, was the man asleep? How could his three children belong to another man (meaning the man was so daft not to have realized the situation in time)
- b. The writer is a mad liar (meaning the writer is lying)
- c. She has to return every penny spent on her head
- d. All this thing is by prayer (this entire situation is as a result of prayer)
- e. That's very, very good for her. Others should learn if you like (meaning she deserved what she got)
- f. Such a heartless being. Very painful. This is sheer wickedness
- g. I think the man's organs were not functioning very well; that's why the woman went the extra mile to..... (meaning the woman became unfaithful because of the man's infertility)
- h. The family should be ashamed of their daughter

News Item: When I return from surgery, many marriages will break- Bobrisky

- i. That should be the day after tomorrow
- j. she will miss my absence if she comes
- k. Small time he will understand
- l. Carry a taxi from Ojotata. You will meet me there

Metaphors and Idioms

Examining the comments of readers in online news, it was seen that some of the readers resort to the use of metaphor and idioms in the indigenous languages to express their thoughts and cultural realities. Therefore, many of the readers use various words to describe some things in a way that is different from the normal use, in order to show that the two things share similar qualities. The following are extracts from the responses of readers of online news

News Item: Man beats his wife blue and black after DNA test shows he isn't the biological father of his children

- a. Someone married Dracula thinking he married a wife.
- b. This one married a thug and thought he married a wife
- c. He can't be blamed. She's worse than a dog.
- d. She is a beast
- e. The woman supposed to be killed silently
- f. When you marry a good wife, you get heaven on earth..... But if you marry a foolish one, the devil is your in-law
- g. How cold can a woman be?

News item: SARS official arrested for robbery in Benin City

- h. A child that says his mother will not sleep will not sleep too.
- i. 'the yahoo guys are big men'
- j. They are biting more than they can chew
- k. The head of the mother of those they kill will judge them
- l. Soft work
- m. Hmmm, the English language has been murdered. The writer should have just written it in his/her dialect

Semantic Extension

As observed in the extract of online news responses, there is a reassignment of meanings to words. Due to the influence of indigenous languages, meanings of words were extended so as to cover extra dimensions. The following are some of the extracts;

News Item: Women attack their FMC doctor husband in Owerri, cut off his nose, upper teeth

- a. It's not **ordinary** that women were the only ones the devil whispered to first

News Item: Pure water causes kidney failure, cancer, and liver diseases, according to the World Health Organization

- a. Are you advising me to **drink from the gotta** (gutter)

News Item: Man beats his wife blue and black after a DNA test shows he isn't the biological father of his children

- a. **Very good** for her, stupid woman
- b. Maybe she did it to cover both their shame
- c. Could he really father a child?
- d. A woman sleeping with a man outside her marriage is capable of murder
- e. The problem with women in this life is they only think forward without thinking backward
- f. Think very well before you cast the first stone
- g. The man is man enough
- h. Good job well done by the husband
- i. Infact, it was a criminal offence
- j. Beat well well but no kill am o.... used cane to flog am well well
- k. Woman is evil, I'm telling you... the husband even mercy her by beating her, only god ponish her
- l. How could the man be so blind for more than three good years of marriage not to notice

News Item: When I return from surgery, many marriages will break-Bobrisky

- m. She has literally killed her husband by deceiving him
- n. 'I will show you pepper'
"I don't understand him again o"
- o. Foolish idiot like you... you just showed you are a cheat

- p. No single truth from their mouths
- q. 'I am sorry, I don't hear Yoruba'
- r. The madam should throw to herself a survival party, if she later survives

Absence of punctuations and distorted spelling

It was observed that almost all the comments examined in the Opera News comments were wrongly punctuated. Punctuations were not indicated where necessary. Also, many words were misspelled, which distorted the meaning of many sentences. The rule of capitalization after a full stop was not observed. Also, SMS abbreviations such as u, d, 2day, 2, and so on were used. This is mostly a reflection of their low proficiency in the English language and not necessarily a quality of Nigerian English. The following are extracts from readers' comments in Opera News

News Item: Pure water causes kidney failure, cancer, and liver diseases, by the World Health Organization

- a. We are **note (not)** made to live here forever
- b. It depends on **were (where) d** the factory is and **were** (where) they **digg** (dig) the **born** (borne) hole

News Item: Man beats his wife blue and black after DNA test shows he isn't the biological father of his children

- c. Please don't **blem** (blame) dat man; if it is me, I will **kin** (kill) dat woman
- d. No she **disave** (deserve) d beat (ing)
- e. Most Nigerian women are **scum (scam)**
- f. No blame the man at all... but if I may ask, **is the (he)** impotent?

Deviant use of Grammar

News Item: Woman attacks her FMC doctor husband in Owerri, cuts off his nose, upper teeth

- a. This looks like **a cook up story** to me
- b. Bad news always in 9ja
- c. You will cough tire, nothing will come out

News Item: Man beats his wife blue and black after DNA test shows he isn't the biological father of his children

- d. The way married **women cheats** on their husbands is overwhelming
- e. He **cant not** be blamed
- f. Beating is not the solution, men
- g. I'm not understanding

Coinages

These are words formed based on the events within the Nigerian social environment. The following are some of the coinages extracted from the comments of readers in online news

News Item: Pure water causes kidney failure, cancer, and liver diseases, by the World Health Organization

- a. 'Oga Corper' - a member of the National Youth Service Corps program
- b. 'Pure water' - a type of water packaged in a sachet

News Item: Man beats his wife blue and black after DNA test shows he isn't the biological father of his children

- c. 'Okada' - a commercial motorcyclist
- d. weyrey wife.. (Crazy Wife)

News Item: When I return from surgery, many marriages will break- Bobrisky

- e. River h2O - water

News Item: SARS official arrested for robbery in Benin City

- f. 419 -- *dubious person*

Implications of English Usage in Online News Responses for 21st Century English Pedagogy

This study reveals the extent to which the linguistic situation in Nigeria influences the use of English by Nigerian speakers. It has been seen that the use of English in Nigeria is overwhelmingly influenced by the linguistic knowledge of various indigenous languages in the country. While it is attested that English plays a major role in the country and that Standard English is the yardstick for measuring the communicative competence of students, the use of English is being increasingly localized within the Nigerian sociocultural and linguistic space as seen in this study. Therefore, students' usage of Standard English is likely to be largely influenced by their linguistic context. This affirms the findings of Bankole et al.. (2012), who discover that many students of tertiary institutions write mostly in a variety of English known as Nigerian English. Most of their constructions that are correct are written in Nigerian English, and other sentences are either incorrect or full of errors. This reflects the low mastery of the language by students and the unconscious influence of the Nigerian context on students' use of Standard English.

Based on the features of English usage in comments on Opera News, it is obvious that readers' usage of English possesses certain linguistic features which are stylistically different from the official English usage often used in Nigerian educational institutions. Incidentally, this linguistic habit is often transferred by students (unconsciously) to their academic work, and this influences how they are subsequently evaluated. Although these features of English used in online news could be said to enhance communication (informally) in a Nigerian context since no technicality is required in the expressions, yet this paper expresses the fear that it has a negative bearing on students educationally as regards communicability in the Standard English language and academic performance. The situation is worrisome because the English that exists in Nigerian educational institutions is deeply British English-based. It strictly obeys the rules of pronunciation and the structures of British English, which serve as the model, and any deviation is seen as incorrect. This means that the academic performance of Nigerian students in the English language and other subjects could be determined by their conformity with the acceptable norms of English usage, which is the British variety. No wonder *Ojetunde* (2013) laments that the poor performance of students in the English language in the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE), National Examination Council (NECO), and General Certificate in Education (GCE) is borne out of the fact that students use the dialect of English (Nigerian English) that is not acceptable to the

examiners.

Though language cannot be separated from the society in which it operates, which is the reason Nigerian English is a variety of English that cannot be denied existence. As a matter of fact, many scholars have argued and are of the view that the Standard Nigerian English variety should be adopted as the Standard English in the teaching and learning process. Presently, Nigerian English is undergoing a standardization process, especially with the publication of the *Dictionary of Nigerian English* in 2014, edited by Wale Adegbite, Inyang Udofot, and Kehinde Ayoola, which comprises roughly 2000 words that are peculiar to Nigerian English. Yet, there is a need for teachers to identify and distinguish between the usages of English that are “incorrect,” dialectical, and those that conform to Standard English.

This is because most students believe they speak Standard English when they do not. Many would find it difficult to believe that “I will see you next tomorrow,” “I saw your message” (I got your message), “dress to the other side” (shift to the other side), “He’s not on seat,” “Repeat again,” “Raise up your hand,” “off the light,” “The lecture started by ten o’clock,” and so on are Nigerian English. Some people even speak completely incorrect English with the belief that it’s Nigerian English, and it continues to enjoy widespread usage among Nigerians. Thus, it is essential that teachers of the English language consider all varieties of English, not just British Standard English or American Standard English, but also Nigerian English. These varieties need to be closely examined in order for students to know how their first language (L1) deviates from Standard English at the various levels of language description. Efforts should be made to distinguish between these varieties of English so that students do not mistakenly interchange them. Equally, communicative language teaching should be prioritized. As suggested by Ojetunde (2013), students should be engaged in adequate expressive activities both in written and spoken forms rather than the memorization of complicated rules which is characteristic of the grammar translation method.

Conclusion

Online readers’ comment forums represent one of the newest ways for readers to be heard, and they are providing increasing opportunities for online journalism involving the public. The likelihood is that more and more people will join these forums to debate issues of importance to citizens. Through these forums, English will continue to gain attention worldwide. As demonstrated in this study, it is clear that English has become an important language that cannot be discarded in Nigeria. It has become a Nigerian language that has provided another means for Nigerians to express their culture. Though the Nigerian dialect of English remains an easier way through which expressions are made lucid and all-embracing, yet, if students become solely reliant on such a way of communication, it might pose a threat to their linguistic knowledge in the Standard English usage, which is still the parameter for *determining* communicative competence. Therefore, students should bear in mind that they need to acquire the repertoire of Standard English for them to improve in their academics. Students should ensure to imbibe the practice of writing and speaking with adherence to the grammatical conventions and writing mechanics of Standard English. Also, when teaching English in the educational setting, Standard English should be strictly adhered to in order for students to have a good mastery and proficiency of Standard English. Teachers of the English language should strive to improve their teaching skills by using methodologies that will enable the students to gain competence in the use of Standard English.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare in this paper.

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