Semantic Extension as a Factor in the Growth and Acceptability of Nigerian English

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the nature of meaning as a factor in the evolution of the variety of English in Nigeria, which has been developing in the Nigerian situation of English as a second language. The purpose was to show how the coding of meaning leads to the creation of certain expressions that are usually identified in the English expressions of Nigerian English speakers/writers. Data were collected from oral and written sources, particularly from the speeches of Nigerian English, bilinguals from all walks of life, ranging from students at secondary, college and university levels, graduates and post - graduate students and people who belong to different occupational categories. Data were also collected from written essays of students as well as published texts with samples of Nigerian English expressions. Findings show that the English expressions that can be identified as reflecting the Nigerian variety of English occur mainly as a result of interference of the speakers or writers first language. The meaning being communicated is influenced by the situations of the local environment, including socio-physical features, which usually strikes speaker/writer initially in his or her first language. In the process, the first language tends to transfer some Nigerian Language expressions into target language, English.

Keywords: English expressions, Nigerian English, Nigerian Language, Semantic Extension

INTRODUCTION

Semantics is the technical term for the branch of linguistics which deals with the study of meaning. The study of meaning however, took a dramatic turn with the publication of the meaning of meaning by Ogden and Richards in 1923. Semantics is concerned with the uniformity in the use of language. It tries to study not the specific instances of language but generalizations, as language rather than speaking. This distinction is also drawn in Udofot (1998), Edem (2015b, 2016) as competence and performance. Both sources stress that we cannot be concerned with individual idiosyncratic meanings but the usual meaning of a particular word or expression. It becomes necessary therefore in semantics to draw a

distinction between the usual meaning of a word or utterance and the meaning it has in specific circumstances (Edem, 2005, 2022 and 2023). For instance, the word 'sweet' in a sentence like: 'Mary is a sweet girl' means more for a poet than the usual meaning of the word 'sweet' referring to a pleasant taste. Similarly, the word 'start' used by a doctor has a different sense from the usual everyday meaning of the word as can be seen in the following two sentences, one from a doctor and the other from a teacher:

1.   The start dose is four tablets.
2.   It is twelve noon: start.

A start dose here means a treatment that is taken once and for all while the teacher's order means that the students should begin. Thus, a semantic analysis of a given language according to Ndimele (1997) must explain how words, sentences, including non-linguistic features like facial expressions and gestures are understood, interpreted and related to objects and situations in the real world.

The Concept of implicatures

The concept of implicatures was first introduced into language studies by a Philosopher, H. P. Grice, in 1975 to refer to the meaning attached to an expression over and above what is actually said. The essence of Implicatures Is to account for what the speaker can imply, suggest or mean as distinct from what he literally says, i.e. what is overtly expressed. So the notion of implicature rests upon a distinction between what is explicitly said and what is implied (i.e. not overtly expressed). As native speakers of our language, we often notice that there are certain aspects of the meaning of utterances which are not directly observable from their linguistic contexts. Let us examine the following exchange between Rose and Betty cited by Ndimele (1997).

Rose: I would like you to accompany me to Lagos on Friday.
Betty: My elder sister is getting married that day.

As speakers of English, we can infer from Betty's response that Rose's 'request is not granted. Betty's elder sister's wedding is an excuse for not accepting the offer from Rose. This implied meaning of refusal is not directly deducible from the linguistic context of the expression. A much more direct refusal would have been something like:

I'm sorry; I'll not be able to go because my elder sister is getting married that day.

In talking about semantic implicatures, it is imperative to mention the term 'pragmatics'. This is because implicature belongs to the domain .of pragmatics. Pragmatics deals with the appropriate use of language as a branch of linguistics to which semantics rightly belongs. Pragmatics, for the purpose of linguistics is defined as the study of meaning in relation to speech situations. It has also been defined as 'the ability of language users to pair sentences with the context in which they would be appropriate (Levinson, 1983, Edem, 2005, 2015, 2016 and 2017).

For an utterance to be meaningful, it must be appropriate to a given situational context. This appropriate use of language is the concern of pragmatics (Edem, 2022 and 2023). Again it is concerned with how words are used and what speakers mean. Sentence meaning and speaker's meaning are not always in consonance. For example, one who says: Is that your daughter? May mean any of the following:

    a. I didn't know you have a daughter.
    b. So you are married and now have a daughter.
    c. What a beautiful girl you have.

The implication is that an utterance/expression can have various meanings, ranging from admiration to disapproval, warning and so on.

The English Language in Nigeria

One of the most striking features of the English language today, according to Eka (2000 and Edem, 2018), is its unprecedented spread to nearly all parts of the world. Numerous research findings have also tend to conclude that English is the most viable candidate for a world language (Edem, 2018, 2019). Thus we might say that English is a language having many different varieties, spoken in different countries or in different parts of the same country. This situation therefore accounts for the issue of Nigerian English as distinct from the English spoken in other parts of the world.

Eka (2000) and other scholars such as (Edem, 2016, 2018, 2022 and 2023) opine that it is almost certainly true that whenever a language leaves its original home to another geographical region, it must acquire the local colours of the new environment, thus, English, having been established as a second -language in Nigeria, has adopted the local colours of the Nigerian environment, hence we have Nigerian English Usage", which reflects the culture and identity of Nigerian people, for as Essien (1977) will say, language is not only a part of a people's culture but also a medium through which that culture can be -transmitted. It is true some aspects of a people's culture - the visual arts for example, can influence other cultural traits of a linguistic nature that can easily be transferred or acquired when one learns another language. Such cultural traits are what have been transferred into the English language in Nigeria, thus giving rise to what is called Nigerian English.

In Nigeria, which is a multilingual state, numerous interference problems occur, which led some scholars to believe that it is impossible to have one Nigerian, 'English', that it is more realistic to talk about Nigerian varieties of English, in which case we would have Hausa English, Igbo English, Yoruba English, Ibibio English among others. It is no gainsaying, therefore to say that, for such a country like. Nigeria; the meanings which Nigerian English convey are often times different from that of the English of the native speakers, having adopted the local colours of the Nigerian environment. However, scholars have often made the point that there is a difference between correctness and acceptability.

A communication issue which is productive is most likely to be acceptable even if it is not correct in the old sense. Thus, in Nigeria, we have kinship terms like fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and a child can claim to have ten fathers or three mothers-referring to those who can take care of him. Such usage, though unknown among native speakers is quite acceptable in Nigeria, having logical semantic implications (Edem, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2023b).

It is because English is a second Language in Nigeria, semantic extension play a vital role as the meaning of utterances are often not deduced from the way it is .overtly 'expressed but implied. For instance, in parting with a friend at night, a true Ijaw man would say; "may we live to see ourselves tomorrow", while the Igbo's would say; "May dawn come" or "May it dawn". This expression has a deeper and implied meaning of a wish or a prayer because the grave is sometimes likened to an endless night and it is only the dead that go to the grave, so as people who are living, they don't wish to have an endless night so they pray that the dawn should come so they can see one another again. This is a way of expressing the people's thoughts and sensibilities.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian learner or user of English is regarded as a bilingual -because apart from his mother tongue he has learnt English as a second language, and in the process of using English, the Nigerian has often produced statements that are regarded as district from other varieties of English. So what is known as Nigerian English today according to Enang and Edem (2022) is usually identified along the lines of grammar, idioms, translations and transliterations and cultural influence. However, the underlying factor in the production of expressions in English is the making of meaning. This making of meaning comes from attempts to convey local concepts and phenomena in English. Thus the Nigerian English speaker has to represent the words of his mother tongue in English. In the process, the first language or mother tongue of the bilingual Nigerian often interferes because meaning is involved. This making of meaning could be said to be central to the differences that constitute Nigerian English. It is therefore worthwhile for the present study to examine or investigate the role of meaning the samples of English expressions used by Nigerians in the context often regarded as Nigerian English.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to achieve the following aims among others:
To investigate the nature of the English expressions made by Nigerian English bilinguals. The study aims to contribute to the scholarly interest in extension and meaning by looking into the extent of interference of the first language L1 on the English expressions of the people in the speech community.

By studying the phenomenon of extensions in the speeches of our subjects and the written expressions, our focus is to examine and discover the implied meaning encoded in these expressions other than the literal meaning presented overtly and to proceed from the meanings so discovered to arrive at some conclusions in relation to the role of extensions in Nigerian English.

The overall purpose of the study is to establish and portray instances of Nigerian English expressions whose meanings differ in most cases from those of the native English and thus confirm the reality of the existence of a district Nigerian variety of English.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:
- At what level of English language use in Nigeria does semantic extension affect meaning?
- What features of semantic extension can be found in the ESL variety identified as Nigeria English?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

What is Semantics?

According to Ndimele (1997), semantics is an area of linguistics which studies the meaning of words and sentences in language. Although the term 'semantics' came into popular use about the first half of the twentieth century, it does not suggest that the study of meaning is as recent as that. He goes on to note that since the time of Plato and Aristotle, scholars have been interested in investigating the nature of meaning. Scholars from philosophy, logic psychology, anthropology, and linguistics have paid great attention to the study of the nature of meaning; each of these disciplines according to him makes its peculiar demands on the use of meaning. Palmer (1981) notes one occurrence of semantics in the phrase semantics in the phrase semantics philosophy meaning divination in the seventeenth century besides another occurrence in a paper titled 'reflected meanings: a point in Semantics which was read to the American philological Association in 1894.

Language and Meaning

Language as defined by Udofot (1998) is the means by which people from the same and related communities interact and express their thoughts and feelings to one another while Edem (2005) sees language as a means of conveying information from one person to another for purposes of spread and mobilization. Eka (1996) sees language as the most brilliant and also about the most useful of human inventions. A classic explication of language is that of Sapir (1921), which explain language as 'a purely human and non-instinctive method of

communicating ideas, emotions, and desire by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (Eka, 1996, Edem, 2015). Language has several definitions. Thus, Udofot (1998) opines that it is difficult to give a comprehensive definition of language. A necessary implication of tile use of language for the purpose of communication is that information expressed by language has to be meaningful to the hearer; otherwise, communication or interpretation does not take place. This idea is stressed by Gimson's (1980) description of language as: 'A system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community. This pattern of convention covers a system of significant sound units, the inflection and arrangement of words and the association of meaning with words.

The Nature and Use of Language

Language according to Bloomfield and Haugen (1974), quoted in Sperber & Wilson (1995), is a wonderfully rich vehicle for communication. We can use it to convey wishes and commands, to tell truths and to tell lies, to influence our hearers and vent our emotions, and to formulate ideas, which could probably never arise if we had no language in which to embody them. We can even use language to communicate with ourselves; in fact, such self-communication seems to constitute much of what we call thinking.

As Bloomfield and Haugen (1974) note, the very richness of language as a communication system is paradoxically the source of many human problems. Every language exists in many styles; it offers different ways of speaking and writing appropriate for different occasions. Language is our all-encompassing medium, almost certainty the oldest means of communication and expression, which is both central to and pervasive in the realm of all human thought. It is the basis of whatever social cohesion we can attain, it determines in a large measure the way we look at the world and enables us to control it. To a large extent, it defines our very human existence. Thus Edem (2023), quotes Bloomfield and Haugen (1974) as seeing language to be by far the most ingenious, flexible and productive of all the communication systems used by human beings. These view were collaborated by Edem (2015, Enang and Edem, 2022, Edem, 2020, Edem 2022 and Edem, 2023)

Discussions of Findings
At this stage, we are going to discuss the observations and findings from the analysis so far carried out.

Group A:
The data in this group are 25 in number, categorized according to the kind of expressions they are. In this categorization, six expressions are translated from the speakers' mother tongue. These include: samples A3, AS, A10, A18, A19 and A25. Seven expressions' are

direct transfers from mother tongue, in other words transliterations. These include samples A4, A9, A11, A12, A13, A14 and A21. Three expressions are idiomatic; these include samples A1, A7, and A15. Five expressions are proverbs; these include samples A6, A8, A21, A22 and A23. Three expressions are, colloquial, this include samples A16, A17 and A20. And finally one expression is drawn from culture and that is sample A2.

Table 1: Incidence of occurrence of features of Nigerian English in Group A

Transfer and Translation	Idioms	Proverbs	Culture	Colloquial
Sample A4	Sample A3	Sample A1	Sample A6	Sample A2	Sample A16
Sample A9	Sample A5	Sample A7	Sample A8		Sample A17
Sample A11	Sample A10	Sample A15	Sample A21		Sample A20
Sample A12	Sample A18		Sample A22		
Sample A13	Sample A19		Sample A23		
Sample A14	Sample A25				
Sample A24					
Total 7	6	3	5	1	3

Total number of sample = 25

From what we have for group A data in table 1 above, a greater transfers and transliterations from mother have the highest number of samples. This situation could as a result of the interference of mother tongue in spoken by the Nigerian subjects observed. This follows from the fact that in a situation where two languages overlap, the features of the dominant language are transferred into the subordinate language .at the phonological lexical and grammatical levels. This situation also accounts tor the cause of deviations from the norms 0 standard native English.

Group B: The data in this group are those collected from students' essays, subdivided into Bi and 82. In group Bi, the total number of expressions analyzed is fifteen out of this; two expressions are translated from mother tongue. This includes samples (Bi) 3 and (Bi) 12. Three expressions are idiomatic and figurative usages, this include samples (B1) 1, (Bi) 9 and (Bi) 10. Two expressions are drawn from culture. This includes samples (Bi) 8 and (Bi) 11. And eight expressions reflect grammatical error. This include samples (Bi) 2, (Bi) 4, (Bi) 5, (B1) 6, (B1) 7, (Bi) 13, (Bi) 14 and (Bi) 15. This is summarized in table 2 below:

Table 2: Incidence of Occurrence of Features of Nigerian English in Group 81

Transfer from Mother Tongue	Idiomatic and Figurative Usages	Errors	Expressions drawn from Culture
Sample 3	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample8
Sample 12	Sample 9	Sample 4	Sample11
	Sample 10	Sample 5	
		Sample 6	
		Sample 7	
		Sample 13	
		Sample 14	
		Sample 15	
Total 2	3	8	2

Total number of sample =15

For the data in B2, four expressions are translated from mother tongue, these are samples (B2) 1, (B2) 7, (B2) 9 and (B2)15. Five expressions fall under colloquial and coinages. This include samples (B2)2, (B2) 3, (B2)4, (B2)11 and (B2) 12, Two expressions are idiomatic and figurative usages. These are samples (B2) 6 and (B2)13. And four expressions depict error, this include samples (B2) 5, (52) 8, (52)10 and (52)14.

Research Question 1:
At what level of English language use does semantic implicatures affect meaning?

From the analysis of all the data collected from different sources and from 'people from different walks of life, with different educational attainments, semantic implicatures is found to affect meaning at all levels of English language use in Nigeria- at the secondary level, university level, amongst graduates, civil servants, politicians, businessmen and women.

In fact, so long as the variety called Nigerian English exists, meanings are tied to the' Nigerian context, and these meanings are in most cases implied. Also, so long as the problem of mother tongue interference exists in the Nigerian English situation, the expressions of Nigerian English speakers are bound to carry implied meanings by reason of the transfer of words in the native languages into English which might mean different things in the native English. Therefore, I want to say that at all levels of use of the English language in Nigeria, semantic implicatures affect meaning.

Research Question 2:
What features of semantic implictures can be found in the ESL variety identified as Nigerian English?

A number of features of semantic implicatures were identified with Nigerian English from the analyses carried out, ranging from mother tongue interference, which gives rise to translations and transliterations from the local languages into the English language, deviations from the standard native English. This is a situation where most expressions in Nigerian English deviate from the norms of Standard English. Some of these deviations constitute errors. Creativity and coinaqes -some creative usages are identified with Nigerian English expressions, and some terms are coined by Nigerian English speakers to suit the context of situation on. For instance, such expressions as 'gas/ow' noted in Eka (2000), cited in group C samples, and 'face-me-l-face you' apartment, cited in group B are examples of creative terms and coinages used in the Nigerian context. However, these creative terms and coinages are accepted in the Nigerian environment and understood by Nigerian English speakers. The use of idioms and proverbs is very common in the Nigerian context, and these carry implied meanings. Some expressions are found to have their origins from the people's culture. In this case, the meanings encoded in such expressions are only understood in the Nigerian context. These features amongst a few others are found to be present in the ESL variety identified as Nigerian English.

CONCLUSION

Having come to this final stage of the study, arid from all that we have been able to gather from this research, the researcher concludes that there is Nigerian English and semantic extension has been a major factor in establishing Nigerian English. However, if Nigerians fail to acknowledge the fact that English is a language of international communication, by using it in a way that can only satisfy Africans, then the problem of unintelligibility is bound to exist. According to Ogu (1992), the task of the English teachers in Nigerian is not to make Englishmen out of people, but to make them literate in English as a second language so that they will be in position to express their thoughts and sensibilities using the English language in such a way that it will be universally intelligible.

The English language, having helped to solve the problem of linguistic diversity in Nigeria by bringing into one linguistic umbrella people of Nigeria who speak different languages, I would therefore say that the Nigerian variety of English is indeed an achievement because it might have been tantamount to betrayal of our culture if there was no variety of English to express it. 5ut because we have English that can carry the weight of our African experience and at same time satisfy universal intelligibility, it portrays the fact that the language is attaining development in Nigeria.

Implications of Findings

The implications of the findings of this study can be seen to involve a good number of areas such as the teaching, the acquisition and use of English as a second language in Nigeria as well as the inevitable evolution of the variety known as Nigerian English.

As for whether the Nigerian English expressions used by Nigerian English speakers are likely to remain or whether the users can be taught a more proper way of using the English language, from all indications, these expressions are not just likely to remain but they are already existing and accepted in the Nigerian environment.

The indigenes are able to communicate well in it and at the same time it can satisfy international intelligibility. Thus as English is inevitably a second 'language in Nigeria, the Nigerian English variety (which, according to Chinua Achebe in his essay, caries the weight of our African experience and portrays the people's thoughts and sensibilities) has come to stay. This is to say by implication therefore that all other environments where English are used as a second language also have their own varieties of English. This is more so given the fact that English is always in competition with the native language of those environments. The expressions, coinages and creative usages, including idioms found in our investigation are products of the transfer of meaning from the host languages into the frame of English, but they must he properly structured to obey the grammatical rules of English when they are rendered in that language. In the teaching of English as a second language in Nigeria, the implications for teachers is, that, from the nature of Nigeria's (ESL) situation, it should become obvious that teachers of English ought to use the principles developed by researchers for teaching English as a second language. Thus, as Ogu (1992) rightly opines, in a second language situation, the question of standard should not be seen most fundamental, rather, to improve the Nigerian students' competence and performance. In English, we must gear our teaching to functional and practical English. Given this fact therefore, the task of the teachers of English in Nigeria should be to make people literate in English, in order to be able to communicate well in it and not to make English men out of them.

However, the expressions in our analyses of data noted as errors, either in grammar or resulting from creativity and coinages, as well as expressions noted to be deviations from the norms of Standard English are subject to corrections. In other word, the implication of having expressions that depict grammatical errors that there is a more correct usage. Thus, learners can learn to use the more appropriate form of English which only reflects the Nigerianness of the language and not necessarily grammatical errors. This competence can be attained as learners advance in education and the use of English.

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