

**A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE SYSTEMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
NIGERIAN ENGLISH AND FIJI ENGLISH VARIETIES**

Oluwayemisi Florence FATILORO, Phd

Department of Language and Communication Education

School of General Studies Education

Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria

fatoro.oluwayemisil095a@fces.edu.ng +2348035942822

and

Folake Janet JENYO

Department of Communication & Media Journalism

School of Communication, Language and Literature

College of Humanities Education and Law

Fiji National University

Fiji Islands

folake.jenyo@fnu.ac.fj

Abstract

This study examines the concept of World Englishes with focus on Nigerian English and Fiji English. Both varieties share notable similarities, including their status as second languages and official languages in multilingual nations. In Nigeria and Fiji, English functions as the principal language of education, governance, and interethnic communication. The paper explores the global evolution of English as it migrates across regions and adapts to local linguistic and cultural contexts. As English spreads worldwide, it continues to exert significant sociopolitical influence while simultaneously absorbing features from indigenous languages. Consequently, both Nigerian English and Fiji English exhibit distinctive local characteristics that diverge from Standard British English. The study concludes that the global diffusion of English and the resulting linguistic interference demonstrate the flexibility and adaptability of languages.

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Introduction

Due to British colonialization, Fiji and Nigerian Englishes are variants of the British English. Nigeria is in West Africa while Fiji is in the South Pacific, yet both languages adopted English Language as an official language reflecting their local identities and mother tongue colourations. Just like Nigerian English is influenced by the indigenous languages like Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba languages; Fiji English, in the same vein, is influenced by indigenous Fijian and Fiji Hindi languages. These dialects and mother tongues influence the phonological, semantics, syntax and lexical aspects of both languages. Like in Nigeria, Standard British English is the language of communication, business, education and entertainment in Fiji. It is the medium of communication and thus fundamental instruments of existence and peaceful co-existence among the people of the countries. Without English language in the two countries, interactions, official and government assignments may be impeded. Among its many functions, it enhances economic and political capacity as well as supporting learners' education.

Awonusi (2009) explained that Old English existed between 450-1150 while middle English took place between 1150-1500. Many early users of English perceived their language uninfluential and not well linguistically organized. For example, Mulcaster (1582) in Awonusi (2009) commented that

"our English tung is of small reach...it stretches no further
than this island of ours, native not there over all"

However, in the 21st century, the English Language has become one of the foremost global languages used for national and international communication. According to Rocío (2012), English is now spoken by millions of people across Europe. It is also the common language in international business in EU institutions. Banjo (2016) stated that about 600 million people in the world speak English Language although not all of them have English as their mother tongue.

Brief History of the Use of English in Nigeria

Awonusi (2009) explained that most historians and Researchers agree that it is not an easy task to date the beginning of the use of English in Nigeria, however, it is speculated that Anglo-Nigerian contact may date as far back as the 15th century. It was widely believed that the years of the interaction between West Africans and Europeans, first in legitimate trade and later in the inhuman slave trade, brought the English culture and language closer to Nigerians. Okere and Nwulu (2016) equally opined that the history of English Language in Nigeria has no specific date. According to them while some claim that English Language came to Nigeria in the 16th century; some say it began to play a significant role in Nigeria in the 19th century when the European merchants and missionaries settled in the shores of Nigeria. In all, it is obvious that English Language came into Nigeria through business activities, missionaries and colonization.

According to Okoh (2006) English is a language that has displayed great migratory powers not only travelling right from England to Nigeria but also maintaining a predominant position on the linguistic landscape of the latter...even more striking is the fact that the country is separated by at least three thousand miles from the natural habitat of English, namely England, yet, the language functions today not only as an important link between both countries, but also as the official language in Nigeria. All the above assertions about English show its relevance and importance in the human existence and interaction across the world ,especially in Nigeria.

Olagbaju (2020) opined that in Nigeria, English has matured from the colonial master's language to an official language and lingua franca. English is the official means of communication and the language of instruction from the primary school level to the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is a core subject in all levels of Nigerian education. Thus, various skills are used in teaching it. The gateway to tertiary institutions is success in English Language. The learners, either as a second or third language, struggle with its learning as well as their native languages.

English Language is employed as language of education in Nigerian classroom. According to Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004), the need for Nigerian National Policy on

Education came about as a result of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference which was attended by a cross section of Nigerians as a result of general dissatisfaction with the then existing education system which was considered irrelevant to national needs, aspirations and goals. The policies, since its first edition in 1977, had been reviewed thrice, in 1981, 1998 and 2004 with the English Language as a core subject and language of instruction. The heterogeneous nature of Nigeria also makes English Language an official language of education in Nigeria. Beyond these two roles and many more, English Language is a prestigious language which demands mastery by both the learners and the teachers.

According to Olutayo, *et. al* (2022), English language has continued to function effectively in Nigeria as the language of international business and communication. No native Nigerian language is used officially at the African Union, Economic Community of West African States or the United Nations. This shows the importance of English Language beyond the shores of Nigeria. Sasu (2024) submitted that English is the official language of Nigeria with 60 million speakers. In addition, Banjo (2016) explained that although Nigeria as a political entity only dates back to 1914 when Lord Lugard amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates, institutions like the Hope Waddell Institute, Calabar, the C. M. S. Grammar School, Lagos and St. Andrew's College, Oyo had been teaching the English Language in the area now known as Nigeria from about the middle of the 19th century. There are also records corroborating the fact that the language had been in the same area since the eighteenth century and in West Africa generally since the sixteenth century. Thus, the English language was there before the political entity known as Nigeria was inaugurated.

Moreover, Kaan (2013) stated that, English language in Nigeria dominates the workplaces, schools, religious centers, businesses and the media. English language has reached the heights that most native languages in Nigeria are yet to attain. However, Oshodi and Owolewa (2020) averred that despite the status of English in Nigeria as a very important and prestigious language, many Nigerians still find communication in it difficult because Standard English is the acceptable English employed for all formal purposes and occasions in the country.

Odebunmi (2006) submitted that English is consciously learnt in Nigeria as a second language unlike indigenous languages like Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Ibibio, Fulfulde, etc. that are acquired sub-consciously as a mother tongue. The acquisition of English as a second language

refers to its formal acquisition across schools. Consequently, certain socio-cultural variables influence the English variety in Nigeria. Since we express realities and experiences which are peculiar to our communities in another language, it is expected that the Standard English will have some differences. Such differences have produced Nigerian peculiar words like 'introduction' (a preliminary formal meeting of the families of the would-be husband and wife), "bukateria' (cafeteria) etc.

Brief History of the Use of English in Fiji

Fiji is a small island nation, in the Pacific which comprises Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijian. Fiji got her independence from Britain on October 10, 1970 after being under British rule for 96 years. Indigenous Fijians speak Itaukei while Indo-Fijian use Fiji Hindi , a variety of Hindi that developed among indentured labourers brought to the islands from India during the colonial period. English was later introduced to Fiji through contacts with whalers, traders and beachcombers and subsequently expanded under British colonial administration (Tent 2001).

Nevertheless, it had little impact on the Fijian population until the late 1920s when it became the language of instruction after class three' (Tent 2001, Ali- Chand, 2021). As the primary language of education and religious instruction until independence in 1970, largely due to the establishment of mission schools by Wesleyan missionaries where the Fijian language was used as the medium of instruction. (Tent 2001, Ali-Chand.2021)

As noted by Siegel (1986), colonial cadets were required by their contracts to obtain a pass in oral and written examinations in the Fijian language, because it was the language of the colonial administration. However, this changed in the 1930s, when the New Zealand government took over the education sector. They were saddled with the responsibility of educating Fijians, and they brought in a lot of their teachers who were not interested in learning the Fijian language, thus English language became the language of instruction and gradually became the lingua franca. (Tent 2001. Ali- Chand. 2021).

Nigerian English

Nigerian English is a variant of many Englishes in the World like Canadian English, Indian English, American English, British English, etc. According to Dadzie (2009), when a language is

removed from its native habitat and planted elsewhere, there is a tendency for the language to assume forms which are different from the original. However, there is also a tendency to preserve some of the characteristics of the old language. This is evident in different ways English is spoken in many countries of the world. These nuances have glaringly brought about different Englishes in the world. In the view of Okoh (2006), language is not static; language "clash" brings mutual changes to and in both languages. English Language has variants in Indian English, British English, Canadian English, American English, Ghanaian English, etc.

Nigerian English is the English being spoken by Nigerians in West Africa. Nigeria has over 500 indigenous languages. Some of them are Hausa, Yoruba, Nigerian Pidgin, Igbo, Fulfulde, Kanuri, etc. Thus, English Language is a mixture of different dialects and accents of Nigerians which bring about variants of Nigerian English in Igbo English, Hausa English, Yoruba English, etc. Nigerian English shares some affinities with Standard English however it has some distinct features which make it unintelligible to native users of English.

Fiji English

Fiji English is another variant of standard British English. It is a unifying language in Fiji Islands. The vocabulary of Fiji English is as distinctive as that of any other post-colonial variety of English. It is used for much (but certainly not all) inter-speech community (inter-ethnic) communication. In Fiji, research shows that nouns are, undoubtedly, the most frequently borrowed class, comprising fifty two percent of all Fijian and Hindi loans. They denote novel objects, materials, and concepts and function to fill lexical and cultural gaps.

General overview of Standard British English, Nigerian English and Fiji English Varieties

Standard English is the English that is spoken by the native speakers and the second and official languages in Nigeria and Fiji. It is employed by government for international meetings, schools and colleges, political interactions, news and other formal communication. Many varieties of English exist in the world with their few differences in pronunciation and in grammar. Moreover, non-standard forms also exist in various regional dialects and they differ from each other. The choice of which variety to employ is left to individuals. Learners of English are,

however, taught to use Standard British English in most situations. Standard English has four levels namely syntactic level, semantic level, lexical level and phonological level.

Phonological level- At the phonological level, English language sounds differ from Nigerian English sounds, in some ways, as some English sounds are not in Nigerian sounds. The following sounds according to Fatiloro (2014) are lacking in most Nigerian Indigenous language sounds which make users of English as a second language find international intelligibility difficult. The sounds are

Voiceless dental fricative /θ/ thin think

Voiced dental fricative /ð/ their, them

Voiceless palate-alveolar affricative /tʃ/ chair, church

Voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ vein, volume

Voiced alveolar fricative /z/ zinc, zip

Voiced palate-alveolar fricative /ʒ/ pleasure, measure

Voiceless palate-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ special, wash

Voiced palate-alveolar affricate /dʒ/ jump, germ,

Voiced velar nasal /ŋ/ ring, sing

Moreover, four English sounds and the eight diphthongs are also not part of the sounds of most

Nigerian Indigenous languages. Some of them are

/æ/ park, sack

/ɜ:/ bird, first

/ei/face fake

/aʊ/ fowls scouts

/ai/ ripe mile

/əʊ/ home ghost

Omoniyi (2009) corroborated the above claim when he stated that the phonological systems of the various indigenous languages in Nigeria are different from those of English and because English is learnt as a second language, what simply takes place is an adaptation of indigenous phonological systems for English speech sounds and patterns rather than an attempt to manage two phonological systems separately. Omoniyi (2009) further explained that at the segmental level, most Nigerian languages have between five and ten vowels and have no diphthongs.

Fijians' two languages (Fijian English and Fiji Hindu Fiji English) impact the phonetics and the phonology of Fiji English in some aspects. According to Suzanne, Sharynne and Paul (2015), the impact of the Fiji dialects affect the Fiji English and polarized them as basilectal (heavily accented) speakers and acrolectal (lightly accented). Also, in Fiji English, standard British English diphthongs are mispronounced. Voiceless and voiced dental fricatives are also lacking in their symbols while voiced palate alveolar fricative /ʒ/ is mispronounced like Nigerian English. The Fiji stress can be placed anywhere in their words unlike standard British English.

Syntactic level-This encapsulates arrangement of words and phrases in a specific order. According to Omoniyi (2009), there are rarely any points of convergence between the syntactic structures of a number of indigenous Nigerian languages and the English Language. At the syntactic level, Nigerians find some aspects of Standard English cumbersome. Thus, in Nigerian English, problem of overgeneralization, mother tongue interference and inter language abound.

The indigenous languages interfere a lot with English Language. For example, among the Yorubas in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, the sense of respect accorded elders leads to errors of plural formation as follows;

a. Won (My mother) wa si ibi yii lana. (Yoruba)

They (My mother) were here yesterday. (Yoruba English)

She (My mother) was here yesterday. (Correct Expression)

b. Won (Baba) ti jeun tan. (Yoruba)

They (Baba) had finished eating. (Yoruba English)

He (Baba) had finished eating. (Correct Expression)

In Fiji English, errors of concord is common. Erroneous sentences such as “The students is shouting.”; “The lecturers is teaching”; “The country are rich”; exist. Also, omission of essential verbs to meaning as in “The man reading.” “They come again.” “The students laughing” permeates students’ essays.

Lexical level- The issue of appropriateness is germane to lexis in English. Appropriateness, a norm in English centers on the choice of correct word in discourses. The Nigerian users of English more often than not lack enough vocabulary or lexis at possession for expression. The Nigerian users of English as a second language have issues with zero plurals like furniture, equipment, etc. and inconsistent formation of plurals with 's', 'es', 'ies', 'ves' etc. confuse users of English as a second language in Nigeria a lot. Another lexical issue is the wrong verbal formation of past tense and past participial tense. For example:

I travel yesterday. Instead of I travelled yesterday.

Ahmad had did it. Instead of Ahmad had done it.

Fiji English also has some lexical variants as influenced by their indigenous languages. Some examples are

The teacher *kekere* (borrow) the student pen.

The woman bought *Tanoa* (bowl) yesterday.

I ate at *curry house* (Indian restaurant).

Semantic level- Semantics revolves around meaning in English. Nigerian English possesses expressions which lack international intelligibility. Expressions like invited guests, gateman, wake keeping are strange to the native speakers of English. In the same vein, some English expressions in Fiji English are densely influenced by their dialects.

Conclusion

This study has examined World Englishes with a focus on Nigerian English and Fiji English. It argues that the emergence of English varieties is largely the result of mother tongue interference and sociocultural adaptation. As English continues to spread globally, it inevitably absorbs local identities and linguistic structures. Consequently, Nigerian English and Fiji English reflect distinctive indigenous features while maintaining links to Standard British English. This phenomenon underscores the dynamic, flexible, and adaptive nature of language.

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