
The Usage and Deployment of Nigerian English in Prose Fiction

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Abstract

The rationale for a Nigerian variety of the English language, a variety that will exhaustively catalogue the things, events and processes in the Nigerian environment; this mode of expression to give prominence to the core symbols, shared meanings, norms and values which may only find expression in the Nigerian variety of English. This works look at the various features that are evident when Nigerian prose fiction writers are writing any text. We analyzed these feature with regards to : Code-mixing/code switching, loan words in text, acronyms, transliterated/ translated local idioms and culture-bound expressions, Syntactic innovations and Discourse particles, Coinages, Proverbs, Reduplication, Reference to religious overtones, and use of pidgin, the standard form or standard English, fidelity to oral tradition like the folklore and through the adoption of traditional story telling devices, we have them in expressions such as “once upon a time”, “as our people say”, “it was our fathers who said”, “our people have a saying”. We look at these features as evidence of Nigerian English in the texts we analyzed such as Purple Hibiscus, Half of yellow sun, Odiuko, the General Army, Americanah etc. these are just a few and they were used to represent the Nigerianess or the way we speak our own English. We thus realized that the English that Nigerians speak daily isn’t devoid of the factors we used in analyzing them and also these features have continued to gain prominence and will continue to as more persons use these and more writers are produced. Thus we encourage us all to continue to use our standard as it is gaining more and more prominence.

Keywords: Usage, Deployment, Nigerian English, Prose Fiction

INTRODUCTION

Stories are part of our everyday life, we constantly enjoy telling them either as things happen to us or people we know. Whether these events are real or formulated we won't be able to make meaning out of our own lives without them. We also love to watch, listen or read stories that we are not certain if the events that occur in them are true or not, but due the fact that the characters, places or events spark our imagination and enable us to experience a different world other than ours we give attention to them. Stories like these are what we refer to as "fiction". People generally would love to watch movies, read novels, songs, music, video games stage plays among others and would love it the most when these are relayed in language they better understand and that appeals to them, this has led to the Nigerian English, this is the totality of the socio linguistic and cultural peculiarities that are evident in the states within the country and the core common varieties that these varieties share with other varieties.

English as a language came to Nigeria around the 15th/16th century when the Portuguese sea merchants and sea pirates came to the West coast of Africa in search of new trade routes; the language thus had

its roots in trade relations, missionary activities and most importantly colonial interest. Nigeria thus came to be colonized by the British. Bamgbose (1995) however identifies three strands that are evident in Nigerian English, contact English (Nigerian pidgin and broken), Victorian English and School English. All these over time has been interwoven and given rise to the Nigerian variety of the English language. During the course of this discuss we would be analyzing a few text to see the ways in which we have over time moved from the contact English, Victorian or school English as we had initially from our colonial masters.

The English we speak is not devoid of phonological features, morphological, lexical, and syntactic and semantics innovations as well as loan words taken from many indigenous languages in the country.

We would analyze the following text to bring out features of the Nigerianess in them in relation to these factors: Code-mixing/code switching, loan words, acronyms, transliterated/ translated local idioms and culture-bound expressions, syntactic innovations and discourse particles, coinages, proverbs, reduplication,

reference to religious overtones, use of pidgin, the standard form or standard English, fidelity to oral tradition like the folklore and through the adoption of traditional story telling devices, we have them in expressions such as “once upon a time”, “as our people say”, “it was our fathers who said”, “our people have a saying”.

These texts would be analyzed to bring these points to light

Purple Hibiscus

Half of a yellow sun

Americanah

The Voice

Things Fall apart.

Odiuko

The general’s Army

Madmajor

METHODOLOGY

For this research, the quantitative research method is used. Here data is collected based on numbers and a summary is taken from these numbers. We would also say that a feature of analytical research method was employed here as the facts summarized or

analyzed have already been confirmed to form the basis for the research before the evaluation of the facts of the material is carried out.

ANALYSIS OF TEXTS

SAMPLE USE OF NEOLOGISMS (COINAGES) IN TEXTS

Neologisms are words or phrases that are invented to describe either new things or to give a new name to an old idea. Neologisms occur in the English language very frequently. Coinages refer to the process of word or phrase creation and it is usually influenced by the prevailing sociolinguistic factors. This device of word coinages has been utilized by a host of Nigerian Prose Fiction writers and would be exemplified below. Using the text *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The following are illustrated

- (i) Pounded yam (p.14)
- (ii) Ghana must go (p. 44)
- (iii) Woman wrapper (p.80)
- (iv) Yori-yori (p.499)
- (v) Money-miss-road (p.94)
- (vi) ...but she did not write at all and when he *emailed* her again, he wanted to tell Gabriel his girlfriend from university had

- just *emailed* him. (p.26) Email is the short form for electronic mail.
- (vii) Oga (p.32&103)
 - (viii) Okada (p.109)
 - (ix) Oyinbo (p.307)

Purple Hibiscus

- (i) You know papa nnukwu's akwam ozu is next week (p.203)
- (ii) Rub his body with okwuma (p.14)
- (iii) Kambila just behaved like an atulu when my friends came (p.150)

The Voice

- (i) You know nothing people (p.121)
- (ii) Wrong doing filled their inside (p.31)
- (iii) Surface water things (p.34)
- (iv) Know nothing footsteps (p.34)
- (v) Black coat wearing man (p.37)

SAMPLE USE OF SHORT FORMS

Americanah

- (i) SATS- Certificates

- (ii) ID- Identity Cards
- (iii) LOCS- Dreadlocks
- (iv) COZ- Cousin
- (v) GRAD- Graduate

SAMPLE USE OF PIDGIN

Pidgin is a grammatically simplified form of language which elements are taken from local language used for communication. Also seen as a simplified means of communication that develops between two or more groups that do not have a language in common: typically, its vocabulary and grammar are limited and often drawn from several languages.

Odiuko

- (i) Tonia, how far? You wan do your hair (p. 100)
- (ii) Get up and lets go to the station, wen you wan kill person you remember sey God dey (p.144)

The General's Award

- (i) Oh boy make you mash am, just put brake. Na dis kind thing they make me vex (p.18)
- (ii) Shoo, una hear swegbe, which kind one year of national waste...follow you like mumu before (p.55)

Madmajor

- (i) You no sabi English, eh? So you want speak Igbo? O.K now, make you speak, but make I warn you when bullets begin to speak, dem no kuku speak Igbo. Sotey dem no kuku speak English sef. Na kpo..kpo..kpo.. and before you sabi wetin de happen, fiam! You don become dead person (p.78)

SAMPLE USE OF ACROYNMS AND LOAN WORDS

Loan words are words adopted from a foreign language with little or no modification while acronyms are abbreviations of other words and pronounced as a word. These features are never exempt from Nigerian prose fiction.

Americanah

- (i) DVD- Digital versatile disc
- (ii) FM- Frequency Modulation
- (iii) CV- Curriculum Vitae

Purple hibiscus

- (i) This is not a good time for NEPA to take light (p.165)

- (ii) rub his body with okwuma (p.14)

Half of a yellow sun

- (i) ...and scribbled WCC; war can continue (p.330)
- (i) I will leave tomorrow because I must attend an umuada meeting (p.239)
- (ii) They have blockaded us kpankpan.(p. 293)

Odiuko

- (i) Are you a student of ABSU (P.102)
- (ii) OD (Doctor of Optometry) and Ody (Odiuko) (p.147)

SAMPLE USE OF TRANSLITERATED /TRANSLATED LOCAL IDIOMS/CULTURAL BOUND EXPRESSIONS

Idioms, by definition, are frozen expressions whose meanings are arbitrary and not retrievable from the meanings of the constituent parts (Gibbs& Colson, 2012) but from the socio-cultural worldview and meaning conventions of the users. They are thus culture and context bound and may not be understood outside the cultural context.

The Voice

- (i) search with all his inside (p.23)
- (ii) take the canoe to the ground (p.53)
- (iii) hunger held him (p.52)
- (iv) tell me the bottom of it (p.40)

Purple Hibiscus

- (i) they said he did not rise well three mornings in a roll (p.156)
- (ii) Which one is for big oga to try and bribe me with an interview? I ask you eh which one is that (p.206)
- (iii) god take power from the devil (p.242)
- (iv) that soup smells like something Amaka washed her hands well to cook (p.155)

Half of a yellow sun

- (I) let the day break (p.291)
- (II) bushman he doesn't know its bee-afra not bayafra (p.289)
- (III) master found a rain holder on the wedding day (p.245)
- (IV) I thought Odenigbo's girl is a human being; he didn't say you were a water mermaid (p.283)

Things fall Apart

- (i) Who killed this banana (p.15)
- (ii) How can we when he did not even understand our tongue (p.124)

Americanah

- (i) Ifeme held her tongue (p.131)
- (ii) Whats shine your eyes (p.480)
- (iii) She went to America and her eyes opened and she forgot about me (p.278)

SAMPLE USE OF IMAGERY

Imagery is visual symbolism, or figurative language that evokes a mental image or other kinds of sense impressions, especially in a literary work. It is used figuratively to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical sense.

Americanah

- (i) She looked improbable like sunlight (p.80)
- (ii) She began over time to feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of peoples stories (p.8)
- (iii) The hair lay on the floor like dead grass (p.50)

Odiuko

- (i) The butterflies gave me the trace I needed (p.6)
- (ii) He looks like a big fish, most of the slay chicks will jump at the offer (p.104)
- (iii) I saw your eyelids twitching (p.141)

SAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS OVERTUNES

Man cannot detach himself from God, and as Nigerians we make reference to God daily and this is also evident in our works.

Americanah

- (i) I did not study because I was sick and yet I passed my exams with flying colours. I had malaria and prayed over it and was cured. My cough disappeared as the pastor started praying. (p.53)

Odiuko

- (i) Take heart Odiuko God giveth and he taketh (p.161)
- (ii) ...whatever one sows, one reaps (p.104)

SAMPLE OF REDUPLICATION

This feature is evident in many Nigerian prose fiction writers. It has to do with the repetition of lexical items in a sentence which meaning is expressed by repeating all or part of a word. This is usually done for the purpose of emphasis.

Americanah

- (i) I need somebody with gra-gra (p.36)
- (ii) They call it big big name (p.39)
- (iii) Please carry your bag and go now now (p.48)
- (iv) Do it fast fast (p.107)

Odiuko

- (i) Your hair long and full well well (p.101)

SAMPLE OF CODE SWITCHING/CODE MIXING

This involves the juxtaposition of two language systems or two language varieties (codes) but while the former reflects the grammar of both codes working concurrently, the latter does not involve the grammars, rather mere intra-sentential switching (Singh, 1985). Sometimes the indigenous code precedes the foreign code and sometimes the foreign code precedes the

indigenous code, suggestive of a struggle for relevance. Moreover, the code-mixed expressions are usually exact equivalents, reminiscent of nouns in apposition

Americanah

- (i) Sunshine in the evening! Asa! Ugo! (p.28)
- (ii) He still thinks that one day I would agree for him, ha odi egwu for where (P.30)
- (iii) Ahn ahn! Ogini? Are you the first person to have this problem (p.30)

Half of a yellow sun

- (i) I na ezuzu ezuzu? Are you stupid? (p 299)
- (ii) Safe journey, ijeoma (p.26)
- (iii) Na gode thank you Hajia (p.46)
- (iv) Kedu how are you (p.22)

Odiuko

- (i) Yesoo, God is good, Jehova wu eze (p.145)
- (ii) Bikonu! Ndi oche azu let one person collect the money from the back row and hand over to me (p.52)
- (iii) Onye ohi! Thief! Thief! (p.7)

- (iv) Iya! I hear abeg go to sleep(p.109)

The General's Award

- (i)Mo gbe , nibo ni wan nipe ni sabo de shanu ?what kind of hustle is that Sabo de Shanu wherein this state? (P.19)

SAMPLE USE OF PROVERBS

Proverbs are short witty known pithy sayings stating a general truth or piece of advice. A proverb is a simple and insightful, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience, also metaphorical in nature.

Things Fall Apart

- (i) He who brings kola brings life (p.5)
- (ii) When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk (p.10)
- (iii) A baby in its mother's back does not know that the way is long (p.71)
- (iv) Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching (p.16)

Odiuko

- (i) A penny for your thought (p.141)

DISCUSSION

The table below shows the Nigerian English in use in the texts by writers. Its important to note that some texts have more feature of a certain mannerism of writing as compared to others. Example Chinua Achebe writing will be filled with more proverbs than others. He is more of a native person or indigenious and wants the culture of the people never to be submerged. Other writers have their various tastes and feelings which is not devoid of our Nigerian culture, the sum total of our way of life or society at large. The table below analyses some of these features and brings them to light.

TEXTS	NEOLOGISMS (COINAGES)	CODE-MIXING/CODE SWITCHING	PROVERBS	PIDGIN
American	<i>Pounded yam, (p. 14)</i> <i>Ghana must go</i>	<i>Sunshine in the evening!</i> <i>Asa!</i> <i>Ugo!</i> (p.28)		

	(p.44) <i>Okada</i> (p.109) <i>Money miss road(p. 94)</i>	<i>Ahn ahn!</i> <i>Ogini?</i> <i>Are you the first person to have this problem</i> (p.30)		
Purple Hibiscus	<i>rub his body with okwuma (p.14)</i> <i>you know papa nnukwu akwam ozu is next week</i> (p.203)			
Odiuko (The Story of an Amazon)		<i>Yes oh god is good, Jehova wu eze</i> (p.145) <i>Onye</i>	<i>A penny for your thought</i> (p.14)	<i>Hol am!</i> <i>Hol am!</i> (p.3) <i>Tonia, how</i>

		<p><i>ohi!</i> <i>Thief!</i> <i>Thief!</i> (p.7) <i>Nkem</i> <i>take</i> <i>care of</i> <i>my</i> <i>bag...ak</i> <i>pa</i> <i>nkem</i> <i>dikwara</i> <i>mu oo. I</i> <i>will be</i> <i>back let</i> <i>me</i> <i>catch</i> <i>the thief</i> (p.4)</p>	<p>1)</p>	<p><i>far?yo</i> <i>u wan</i> <i>do</i> <i>your</i> <i>hair</i> (p.100) <i>Get up</i> <i>and</i> <i>lets go</i> <i>to the</i> <i>station</i> <i>wen</i> <i>you</i> <i>wan</i> <i>kill</i> <i>pesin</i> <i>you</i> <i>remem</i> <i>ber sey</i> <i>God</i> <i>dey</i> (p.144)</p>
<p>The Gene rals Awar d</p>		<p><i>Mo gbe,</i> <i>nibo ni</i> <i>wan</i> <i>nipe ni</i> <i>sabo de</i> <i>shanu?</i> <i>What</i></p>		<p><i>Oh</i> <i>boy</i> <i>make</i> <i>you</i> <i>mash</i> <i>am,</i> <i>just</i></p>

		<p><i>kind of</i> <i>hustle is</i> <i>that</i> <i>sabo de</i> <i>shanu</i> <i>wherein</i> <i>this</i> <i>state</i> (p.19)</p>		<p><i>put</i> <i>brake,</i> <i>na dis</i> <i>kind</i> <i>tin dey</i> <i>make</i> <i>me vex</i> (p.18) <i>Shoo,</i> <i>una</i> <i>hear</i> <i>swegb</i> <i>e,</i> <i>which</i> <i>kin</i> <i>one</i> <i>year of</i> <i>nation</i> <i>al</i> <i>waste..</i> <i>follow</i> <i>you</i> <i>like</i> <i>mumu</i> <i>before(</i> p.55)</p>
	<p>Half of a yello w sun</p>	<p><i>Safe</i> <i>journey,</i> <i>ijeoma</i> (p.145) <i>Na</i></p>		

		<p><i>gode</i> <i>thank</i> <i>you</i> <i>Hajia</i> <i>(p.46)</i> <i>Kedu</i> <i>how are</i> <i>you</i> <i>(p.22)</i> <i>I na</i> <i>ezuzu</i> <i>ezuzu?</i> <i>Are you</i> <i>stupid?</i> <i>(p. 299)</i></p>					<p><i>mes</i> <i>hungr</i> <i>y for</i> <i>a</i> <i>walk</i> <i>(p.</i> <i>10)</i> <i>A</i> <i>baby</i> <i>in its</i> <i>mothe</i> <i>r back</i> <i>does</i> <i>not</i> <i>know</i> <i>that</i> <i>the</i> <i>way is</i> <i>long</i> <i>(p.71)</i></p>	
Things fall apart			<p><i>He</i> <i>who</i> <i>brings</i> <i>kola</i> <i>brings</i> <i>life</i> <i>(p.5)\</i> <i>When</i> <i>the</i> <i>moon</i> <i>is</i> <i>shinni</i> <i>ng the</i> <i>crippl</i> <i>e</i> <i>beco</i></p>					
	The Voice						<p><i>Youkno</i> <i>w</i> <i>nothing</i> <i>people</i> <i>(p121)</i> <i>Surface</i> <i>water</i> <i>things</i> <i>(p.31)</i></p>	
	Mad major							<p><i>You</i> <i>no</i></p>

				<i>sabi</i> <i>Englis</i> <i>h, eh?</i> <i>So you</i> <i>want</i> <i>speak</i> <i>Igbo?</i> <i>O.K</i> <i>now,</i> <i>make</i> <i>you</i> <i>speak,</i> <i>but</i> <i>make I</i> <i>warn</i> <i>you</i> <i>when</i> <i>bullets</i> <i>begin</i> <i>to</i> <i>speak,</i> <i>dem</i> <i>no</i> <i>kuku</i> <i>speak</i> <i>Igbo.</i> <i>Sotey</i> <i>dem</i> <i>no</i> <i>kuku</i> <i>speak</i>
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				<i>Englis</i> <i>h sef.</i> <i>Na</i> <i>kpo..kp</i> <i>o..kpo.</i> <i>. and</i> <i>before</i> <i>you</i> <i>sabi</i> <i>wetin</i> <i>de</i> <i>happe</i> <i>n,</i> <i>fiam!</i> <i>You</i> <i>don</i> <i>becom</i> <i>e dead</i> <i>person</i> <i>(p.78)</i>
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The next table below still shows a few more analysis of the expressions as used by speaker of Nigerian English in their prose fiction writing

TEX TS	ACR OYN MS	CULT URAL BOUN D	IMA GER Y	REDUP LICATI ON
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		EXPRE SSION S		
Amer icana h	DVD- Digita l versati le disc FM- Frequ ency Modul ation CV- Curric ulum Vitae		<i>She looke d impr obab le like sunli ght (p.80) She bega n over time to feel like a vultu re hacki ng into the carc asses of</i>	<i>I need somebod y with gra-gra (p.36) They call it big big name (p.39) Please carry your bag and go now now (p.48) Do it fast fast (p.107)</i>

			<i>peopl es stori es (p.8) The hair lay on the floor like dead grass (p.50)</i>	
Purpl e hibis cus	<i>This is not a good time for NEPA to take light (p.165) rub his body with</i>	<i>they said he did not rise well three mornin gs in a roll (p.156) Which one is for big oga to</i>		

	<p><i>okwu ma (p.14)</i></p>	<p><i>try and bribe me with an interview? I ask you eh which one is that (p.206) god take power from the devil (p.242) that soup smells like something Amaka washed her hands well to cook</i></p>		
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		<p><i>(p.155)</i></p>		
<p>Half of a yellow sun</p>	<p><i>...and scribbled WCC; war can continue (p.330) I will leave tomorrow because I must attend an umuad a meeting (p.239) They have blocked us</i></p>			

	<i>kpamk pam.(p. 293)</i>			
Odiuko (the story of an Amazon)	<i>Are you a student of ABSU (P.102) OD (Doctor of Optometry) and Ody (Odiuko) (p.147)</i>		<i>The butterflies gave me the trace I needed (p.6) He looks like a big fish, most of the slay chicks will jump at the offer (p.104)</i>	

			<i>I saw your eyelids twitching (p.141)</i>	
The voice		<i>search with all his inside (p.23) take the canoe to the ground (p.53) hunger held him (p.52) tell me the bottom of it (p.40)</i>		
Things		<i>Who killed</i>		

fall apart		<i>this banana (p.15) How can we when he did not even underst and our tongue (p.124)</i>		
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The use or choice of a certain feature in writing by a writer is dependent on the writer and the values or norms he wants to share or wants his readers to grasp, but this does not in any way make his writing to be less valued or irrelevant as all of these are what make up our rich cultural heritage and gives us the uniqueness and oneness that differentiates us from other types of Englishes.

Conclusion

The Nigerian prose fiction is not and can never be devoid of the features we have discussed above. These features give us what we are as a nation and continually help

to identify us. These features are part of our culture, the sum total of the way of our lives. The features helps to see the dual cultural make up of Nigerian English; the variety needs constant identity enactment, reconstruction and negotiation for national and international authenticity. We would thus continue to use these features to show our Nigerianess and the uniqueness of our own style or variety of English language.

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