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Lexico – Semantic Analysis of Viewpoint Column of The Nation and The Punch Newspapers

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Abstract

Linguists have come to the understanding that the English spoken and written in Nigeria is a variation of the Standard British English (SBE) rather than its deviation. Hence, this study investigates the extent to which Nigerian Newspaper columnists employ the Lexico –Semantic features of the English spoken and written in Nigeria in their write-ups. To this effect, this study is adopting the lexico- Semantic variations of the Nigerian English as identified by Babatunde (2001) as its analytical parameters. The data for this study are drawn from The Nation newspaper and The Punch newspaper, published in the year 2016.

Keywords: Lexico -Semantic analysis; Viewpoint columns; The Nation newspaper; and The Punch newspaper.

Introduction:

Language, generally, is a means of communication. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2024), it is a "system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves."(<https://www.britannica.com>).

This language is employed to enhance effective communication. Nigeria, as a country, has people with different languages and cultures. One of the languages spoken in

Nigeria is English Language. This English Language is employed to perform diverse functions. Some of these functions are: business transaction, education, administration and entertainment. Nigerian newspaper columnists do make use of English Language in their efforts to relay their messages to their reading audience. The variety of English they use to express themselves is Nigerian English. This variety of English helps them to express themselves well to their reading audience in Nigeria.

A look at the Nigeria English used by the Nigerian newspaper columnists shows that it experiences some changes at its lexemes. This change is expressed through coining, compounding and blending processes. This change is equally noticeable at the meaning (semantics) of the words it uses to express its message.

As such, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate the extent at which the lexis and the meaning of the Nigerian English differ from those of the Standard English as contained in the viewpoint columns of *The Nation newspaper* and *The Punch newspaper* published in the year 2016.

Apart from this, the purpose of this study is to identify the causes of the lexico-semantic variation obtainable in the Nigerian English, which is employed in the viewpoint columns of *The Nation newspaper* and *The Punch newspaper*.

It is significant to note that this study will not look into all the lexico-semantic changes that emanate in the course of using English in Nigeria. Instead, it will pay attention to such lexico-semantic variations as: alphabetism/lexicalization of acronym; proverbs/idioms; clipping; translation equivalent; semantic extension; coinages, loan-shift; and semantic under differentiation. This is so because they are the

features that are constantly used in the written English of an average Nigerian newspaper viewpoint columnist. In doing this, the study will draw its data from the selected copies of *The Nation newspaper* and *The Punch newspaper*, published in the year 2016.

Nigerian English as a Concept

Nigerian English is the variety of English used in Nigeria, either in a spoken or written medium, as a means of communication. Medubi (2007:12) observes that “English came into Nigeria with the British settlers, whose expansionist programmes saw them colonizing a good number of countries all over the world”. Consequent upon this, the social, political, economic and religious events have greatly influenced the variety of English spoken and written in Nigeria, giving it its own form and structure.

Medubi (2001:12) affirms this when he notes that “English in Nigeria displays some aspects of the social and cultural life of the speakers to such a degree that researchers have tagged it Nigerian English”

The implication of Medubi's assessment of English in Nigeria is that it exhibits some forms of social and cultural outlooks that are native and indigenous to Nigerians. It harbours some qualities or characteristics that make Nigerians to feel at home while using it. According to Babatunde (2001:144),

“English as a second language in Nigeria is expectedly a phenomenon that is assessed and reassessed continually. The major reasons are its history and the social, political and economic contexts of its operations in Nigeria”. Babatunde is right in his assessment of the form of English used in Nigeria. English in Nigeria serves as a second language, given the fact that Nigerian English users already have their native languages as their first language. As a second language, English is compelled to bear the weight of the Nigerian history and social and cultural outlooks.

For Odebunmi (2006), English in Nigeria is spoken as a second language and not as a first language. “It is the language that we learn consciously unlike our native languages that we acquire sub-consciously”. Ruminating on this, Bangbose (1971:42) cites in Alabi (2005:138) notes that:

The major differences between English in Nigeria and English in other countries are to be found mainly in spoken form of the language. The greatest influence on the pronunciation of English by Nigerians is the sound system of the vernacular language.

Hence, Nigerian English is said to be unique and maintains its own features.

Standard English as a Concept

According to Bex (1996), Standard English is “a variety of English to which all English speakers can aspire” to speak and write. For Medubi (2007:12), Standard English is “the core repository of lexical items and grammatical units at once supra-national and comprehensible to all users of all the language no matter the race or subject matter”.

Striven (1983) notes that”

Standard English is a particular dialect of English being the only non-localized dialect of global currency without significant variation, universally accepted as the appropriate education target in teaching English, which may be spoken with an unrestricted choices of account.

Lexis

Lexis is an independent linguistic form which exists in a language. For Jackson and Amvela (2007), “the notion of word is central in the study of lexicology”. This word is expressed in *The Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary* (2001:1374) as “a single unit of language

which means something and can be spoken or written”.

A morpheme is what is being built up to form a word. In English, a morpheme can be seen a word. When this occurs, it is said to be a free morpheme. E.g boy, girl.

Jackson and Amvela (in 2007) noted some characteristics of words:

First, the word is uninterruptible unit.

When elements are added to a word to modify its meaning, they are never included within that word. They respect the internal stability of the word and are added either at the end as suffixes...

Second, the word may consist of one morpheme. When it consists of one morpheme only, then it cannot be broken down into smaller meaningful units. e.g. dog, hand, man....

Hence, it is evident that any morpheme that is added to a word gives additional information or meaning about the word. Jackson and Amvela (2007) further notes that words appear in the structure of phrases, which are

built up to become clauses. The clause, on its own, is built up to sentences.

Semantics

Semantics is, simply, the study of meaning. According to McGregor (2009:129), the idea of meaning in linguistics is about that which is expressed by sentences, utterances, and their components by language, the message or thought in mind of a speaker is encoded in a way that sends signal to the hearer in such a way that the message can be understood. From this, we come to the realization that both the speaker and the hearer of a language contribute in giving appropriate meaning to a word or an expression in a language.

Saeed (2007) observes that “semantics is exclusively concerned with the meaning of linguistic entities such as: words, phrases, grammatical forms and sentences, but not with the meaning of actions or phenomenon”.

For Daris and Elder (2004:48).

Semantics is that part of linguistic description which deals with meaning. It is often divided into lexical semantics, dealing with the meaning of word and grammatical semantics, concerned with how morpheme meanings are combined by

grammar to form
the meaning of
utterances.

Lehtonen (2002) suggests that “meanings are in an environment, certain position at the core of human life.... Meanings have diversified irreversibly, perhaps we all struggle to make some kind of sense of our lives”.

For Blake and Moorhead (1993),

Meaning resides
shallowly in the
morpheme less so in
the word less so
again in the phrases
or sentence or
paragraph, but
meaning only
comes to its fullest
flower in the
context of an entire
way of life.

From what we have so far noted, it is obvious that semantics is the study of meaning, and meaning is something that is permanent and ensuring in all languages.

Lexical Semantics

Words, evidently, have meanings. This meaning, as expected, is got from the sequential arrangement of letters that make up a word. McGregor (2009) observes that “words often have connotation, unstable meaning associations such as emotional overtones”.

According to Fromkin, Rockman and Hyams (2007), “meaning of many words is a

function of the morphemes that compass it... the meaning of words is part of the linguistic knowledge”. They further opine that speakers of a language are the negotiators of meanings of most words and all morphemes, making the word meanings to change from time to time.

In the words of Jackson and Amvela (2007),

...The meaning of
a word involves at
least, its reference
to an entity in the
word of
experience, as
well as in the
sense relations. It
contracts with
some words in the
vocabulary and
the collection
relations that may
hold between it
and other co-
occurring words.

This is a way of saying that words do not exist in a vacuum. They are used to achieve certain objectives and aims. This shows that the meaning of a word must be connected or related to the word itself and its environ. Hence, a competent speaker of a language must know how and what word to use in any context that he/she finds himself/herself.

Hall (2005:69) observes that “the meaning of a word can be seen as the concept.... With which word form is conventionally associated”.

Lexico- Semantic Variation in Nigerian English

Lexico-Semantic variation of a language occurs when a language has two or more varieties in use. There is bound to be lexical and semantic variations from the Native Speaker's form of language use to other forms. It has been noted that the English spoken and written in Nigeria has reflected the socio-cultural features of the Nigerian society through some lexis that have been imported into it. Babatunde (2001:109) says that: "The most productive and vibrant area of change is the level of lexis and meaning. It is here that pragmatic reason compel the English Language user especially on the outer circle, to flout existing conventions of reference and thus stretch the English language to meet the needs of the new culture into which the language has been transplanted". Odebunmi (200:61) opines that "socio-cultural differences between English people and Nigerians allow new lexical items to develop". New lexical items will also gain meanings definitely, therefore, the more new words are formed, the more new meanings are being generated. Adegbiya (1989) cited in Babatunde (2001:109) proposed six causes of lexico-semantic variation, which are:

1. Socio-cultural differences between English and Nigeria people
2. The dynamics of the pragmatics of a multilingual context.
3. The exigencies of differing discourse constraints.
4. Media influence.
5. The standardization of idiosyncrasies and errors.
6. The predominantly formal character of the English taught in Nigeria.

Types of Lexico-Semantic Variation

According to Babatunde (2001:101-115), the lexico-semantic typologies are: transfer, analogy, acronyms, semantic extension, narrowing, coinages, loan words, hybridization and idioms.

1. Transfer: Here, a meaning foreign to English but present in the mother tongue is directly translated into English. E.g. moi-moi; akara.
2. Analogy: Words, in this category, are formed on the basis of partial resemblance with words that are already existing in the mother tongue or English. Examples include: nairaful, koboless, lesson teacher, etc.

3. **Acronyms:** These are words formed letters or some parts of existing words, phrases or terminologies, which may not be pronounced. Examples indentified by Babatunde (2001:111) are JAMB (Nigeria: joint Admissions Matriculation Board), NEPA (Nigeria: National Electrical Power Authority), ASPOLY; (Abia State Polytechnic) and ASUU (Nigeria: Academic Staff Union of Universities). Acronyms are always in capitals.
4. **Semantic Extention:** This happens when the semantic scope of an expression is made to enlarge beyond its usual limit. In this case, a set of wider referents develops from an erstwhile narrow sense. The word “uncle”, for instance, was used for mother’s brother. But, it has now extended to mean a reference to any older person.
5. **Narrowing:** This happens when the semantic scope of a word or utterance which is now restricted to a part of that class in English Language. E.g. kick bucket.
6. **Coinage:** This occurs because of the necessity to accommodate new experiences, feelings, though,

patterns and modes of life, examples are: half-current, house girl, carry over, etc.

7. **Idioms:** This is another exciting mode of change in contemporary English-usage. English Language suddenly becomes the means of expressing an indigenous culture in an ESL context. An example is, the old woman shudders at the tale about a tattered basket”. (Babatunde, 2001:114).

The Lexico- Semantic Variations in *The Nation Newspaper* and *The Punch Newspaper* Published in the Year 2016.

There is a lexico- semantic variation between the Nigerian English and the Standard English. This variation occurs both in the spoken and written an Nigerian English language speaker and writer, when compared with an average Standard English language speaker and writer. In this study, we are more concerned with the written English of the Nigerian English speaker as well as the written English of the Standard English writer.

For the purpose of our study, we are more concerned with Nigerian English employed by Nigerian newspaper viewpoint columnists in their articles, which they publish in the national newspapers. Incidentally, we are

going to delimit ourselves here to two national newspapers: *The Nation* newspaper and *The Punch* newspaper. Through random sampling technique, we selected four copies of *The Nation* newspaper and *The Punch* newspaper respectively, published in the year 2016.

In *The Nation* newspaper, published on the 26th of September, 2016, Garde Phillips wrote an article, titled, "Taraba: Knocking at the critical doors for help". In the article, Phillips made use of alphabetism. This alphabetism or lexicalization of acronym, according to Kevin Ibeh (2016:40) "deals with a set of letters, arranged in a particular order, and used in writing. It is also said to deal with an acronym, which is a typical Nigerian word formed from the initial letters of a set of words". Acronym is a common type of lexico-semantic variations in Nigerian English with different sectors in the country making use of different acronyms. They take the form of nouns when they appear in sentences. At this stage, they are said to be lexicalized. In the said article, Phillips (2016) used an acronym, "EU", which means "European Union ". This meaning is available in both Standard Nigerian English as well as in Standard English.

In the same newspaper, Tony Marinho wrote an article titled, "Our Girls: Ex-presidents', Lagos -Ibadan express track". He (2016) made use of alphabetism, "ASUU," which means "Academic Staff Union of Universities". This meaning is available in Standard Nigerian English. But, it is unavailable in Standard English.

In *The Punch* newspaper, published on the 26th of September, 2016, Eze Onyekwere wrote an article, titled, "Where is Buhari's Economic Management Team?" Here , he (2016) made use of alphabetism, "EMT", which means "Economic Management Team ". This meaning is available in Standard Nigerian English as well as in the Standard English. Equally, in the same newspaper, Louis Obyo Nelson (2016), in his article, titled, "What Kind of Economists do we have?", made use of alphabetism, "CBN", which means "Central Bank of Nigeria ". This meaning is available in Standard Nigerian English and not available in Standard English.

In *The Punch* newspaper, published on the 27th of September, 2016, Azuka Onwuka wrote an article, titled, "Is health truly wealth?". In this article, he made use of idioms and proverbs. This idiom, according to Ibeh (2016:45) "is a type of change in contemporary English usage. Idiom is used to

express an indigenous culture in an English as a Second Language context. The same thing is applicable to proverb. It is a way of capturing our indigenous culture in an English as a Second Language context." Onwuka (2016:23) in the article said, "What prevents work to be carried out is work". In Standard Nigerian English, this proverb means "it is only a serious business that will make someone to leave everything for it". But, in Standard English, it means "urgent problem requires urgent attention".

Similarly, in *The Punch newspaper* of 11th October, 2016, Chibuzo Ziggy Azike wrote an article, titled, "A layman's guide out of recession". He(2016) made use of an idiom, "The goose that lays the golden eggs". In Standard Nigerian English, this means "something that is gainful". But in Standard English, it means "something that is profitable."

In *The Punch newspaper* of 28th September, 2016, Jide Ojo in his article, "As Edo decides today", makes use of an idiom, "The die is cast". This idiom in Nigerian Standard English means "a decision that cannot be revised". But, in Standard English, it means an irrevocable decision.

Another feature of lexico- semantic variations employed in *The Punch newspaper* by the newspaper viewpoint column writers

is coinage. According to Ibeh (2016:47), "coinage takes place in an attempt to accommodate new experiences, feelings and thought - patterns. Coinage is contextually determined. It is a type of lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English that gives room the ways of life, feelings and experiences of Nigerians".

In *The Nation newspaper*, published on 22nd of November, 2016, Komolafe wrote an article, "Osun in the last six years". In the article, he(2016) made use of a coinage, "Omolabi scale". This coinage in Standard Nigerian English means the removal of cheating and the leverage on the control of commodity pricing. Its meaning is not available in Standard English.

Olakunle Abimbola (2016), in his article, "With WS on Wolexit", published in *The Nation newspaper* of 22nd November, 2016, made use of a coinage, "Wolexit". In Standard Nigerian English, this refers to Wole Soyinka's statement that he will tear his American Green card. This coinage is not available in Standard English.

Again, we have clipping as a feature of lexico- semantic variations employed by the Nigerian newspaper viewpoint column writers. This clipping is a word formation process which consists in the reduction of a word to one of its parts. Clipping is also

known as truncation and shortening. In *The Nation* newspaper of November 22nd, 2016, Olakunle Abimbola in his article, "With WS on Wolexit", made use of the following clippings: "Medic" and TV. These two words, "Medic" and "TV" means medical and television in Standard Nigerian English and Standard English respectively.

Again, Nigerian newspaper viewpoint column writers do make use of semantic extension in their write ups. This semantic extension is the expansion of the meaning of an expression. It deals with words that are present in Standard English that have their meanings narrowed or broadened as the case may be. At times, their meanings are shifted. In *The Punch* newspaper, published on October 11, 2016, Chibuzo Ziggy Azike (2016), in his article, "A layman's guide out of recession" made use of semantic extension, "Taiwan". In Standard Nigerian English, this "Taiwan" means fairly used products. But, in Standard English, it means a name of a country, where Nigerians buy fairly used products from.

Equally, in *The Punch* newspaper, published on November 22nd, 2016, Olakunle Abimbola, in his article, "With WS on Wolexit", made use of semantic extension, "Constant Jeremiah". In Standard Nigerian English, "Constant Jeremiah" means a person

that suffers for others constantly. In Standard English, it means Jeremiah, a prophet of God. In Nigeria, newspaper viewpoint columnists also make use of translation equivalent in their efforts to express themselves to their readers. This translation equivalent is the similarity between a word in one language and its translation to another. A translation equivalent is a corresponding word or expression in another language. This is normally seen in a bilingual person. At times, the expression he uses in his native language may be directly translated into English.

In *The Punch* newspaper of October 14, 2016, Fola Ojo wrote an article, "The Jackleg Judge". In this article, he (2016) made use of a translation equivalent, "I am in boundless joy" (Obi jurum n'anuri). In Standard Nigerian English, this means "I'm very happy". But, in Standard English, it means, "I'm filled with joy".

In *The Nation* newspaper of November 22nd, 2016, Santa Oni wrote an article, titled "Who defends public interest?". In this article, he (2016) made use of translation equivalent, when he writes, "...to live along the corridor". In Standard Nigerian English, this means "to be very close to something". In Standard English, it means "to stay near to something".

We also have semantic under differentiation as a lexico- semantic variations feature employed by Nigerian newspaper viewpoint columnists in their efforts to relay their messages to their reading audience. A semantic under differentiation occurs when emotive distinctions in the meaning of words are neutralized or under-differentiated.

In *The Nation newspaper* of November 22nd, 2016, Olakunle Abimbola in his article "With WS on Wolexit" made use of semantic under differentiation, when he writes, "empty sounding". In Standard Nigerian English, this means "a meaningless statement". But, in Standard English, it means "a meaningless utterance".

In the same article still, Olakunle Abimbola made use of another semantic under differentiation, when he writes, "godhead". In Standard Nigerian English, this means, "a superhuman". But, in Standard English, it means, "a supernatural being".

Conclusion

From the issues discussed above, it is very clear that the columnist viewpoint, which is majorly captured in the Editorial of any Nigerian newspaper, particularly *The Nation* and *The Punch*, contains some elements of the lexico-semantic variations of the Nigerian English. The columnists make employ the features of Nigerian English in their effort to

communicate effectively with their reading audience. Thus, it is evident from this study that majority of speakers of Nigerian English are not very competent in English Language. This is why the localized, nativised and indigenized variety of English is preferred to the standard variety of English in the Nigerian context.

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