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Nativisation Of The English Language In Nigeria: A Cultural And Linguistic Renaissance

Inyang Udofot

Abstract

Nativisation, in the context of the New Englishes, refers to the process through which a language which is external to a community adapts to the culture and language/s of that community which uses it as an additional language but retains many features of that language as it is used by its native speakers; thus integrating that language into the culture of the community where it is used. In this paper ~~sets out to examine~~ the processes and areas of nativisation in Nigerian English as well as the attitudes to the nativised variety in the Nigerian environment are examined. The paper concludes by debunking the erroneous conception that the nativised variety is an inferior variety because it breaks metropolitan norms in an attempt to adapt to the Nigerian environment. The norm breaking and norm setting processes of nativisation together with the resulting new English which is 'altered to suit the new environment but is still in communion with its ancestral home' are seen as evidence of cultural and linguistic identity, a kind of renaissance.

1. Introduction

Studies in the New Englishes have shown that deviations from native-speaker norms and setting of new norms to meet the socio-cultural conditions of the environment where English is used are responsible for the emergence of the New Englishes one of which is Nigerian English. Owusu-Ansah (1997:23) has observed that

setting new standards often implies breaking old norms, breaking norms often implies deviation from a standard and nativisation inevitably involves breaking native - speaker norms which define standard varieties.

Nativisation can be explained in the context of the New Englishes as the process through which a language external to a community adapts to the culture and language/s of the community which uses it as an additional language but retains many features of the language as it is used by its native speakers. In other words, it is a process of integrating a language into the culture of a community where it is used. This element of cultural integration is stressed by Peter (1994:389) which states:

In order for the non-native culture to make the new language a part of the culture, it must nativise it..." It will then become the kind of English which Achebe (1975:61) advocates for the expression of the African experience:..."

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surrounding”.

Nativisation in the context, of the New Englishes therefore is completely different from what it refers to in second language acquisition (SLA) literature as defined by Richards (1978) for instance, where it is used to refer to the process by which learners become like native speakers in their linguistic habits. In this context nativisation indicates that the transplanted variety loses some of the native speaker characteristics and takes on those of the new community. It becomes, as it were, a native of the new land where it is being used.

The process of nativisation often leads to the recognition of the new variety as part of the linguistic repertoire of the new community as well as its acceptance as an independent variety on its own right. Since nativisation involves a deviation from metropolitan standard norms, such norm breaking and deviations are often looked at as evidence of falling standards using native speaker norms as the criteria for evaluation (cf Gyasi 1990:4 for Ghanaian English and Jowitt 1991:61 on Nigerian English). This is to be expected since human beings generally tend to resist change.

In this paper the processes and areas of nativisation in Nigerian English are examined with a view to upholding the nativised variety as a form of cultural and linguistic identity and thus encouraging Nigerians to use the English Language as a language that contains enough Nigerianisms to qualify it for use in Nigeria without the discomfort related to its colonial history.

2. Processes of Nativisation

Nativisation in this paper refers to two processes: (i) a process by which a language foreign to Nigeria acquires some characteristics not present originally in the language as used by native speakers and (ii) the process by which English begins to carry a sizeable functional load for the purpose of intra group communication. The first process affects the form of the language and takes place at all levels of linguistic analysis: phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics and pragmatics. The new variety which emerges is therefore different from both the native variety and other varieties. Many of the distinguishing characteristics result from the influence of Nigerian languages and culture on English, a phenomenon often referred to as linguistic interference. The second process involves the functional load ascribed to the new language; that is, its role as not only the language of education, business and administration but also the language of “record keeping” and communication between relatives and friends (Banjo 1996: 68).

To the above processes of nativisation can be added Bamgbose’s (1997:16) assertion that “the process of nativisation by which non-native varieties of English emerge consists in innovations in language form and language use”.

If innovation refers to a dynamic and systematic process involving not only language form but also culturally-determined as well as creative uses of English” (Bamgbose 1997:17) rather than deviations which are considered “institutionalized errors” (Jowitt 1991: 47); then innovation is a process that can be identified and illustrated in the nativisation of English in Nigeria. A closer look at each of the three processes should be useful.

2.1. Nativisation through indigenous language influence

The use of certain words, expressions, structures and certain peculiarities of pronunciation have been identified as characterising Nigerian English. Kujore (1985) and Jowitt (1991) are whole books devoted to codification of these Nigerianisms. Bamgbose (1995) and Banjo (1996) have also identified some of these features. Generally, nativisation takes the following forms:

- borrowing of words from Nigerian languages into English e. g. *Oba, Emir (titles for chiefs), agbada, (dress item) danfo (a type of bus), eba, tuwo, edikan ikon, ekpan nkukwo (food items)* ;
- localisation of pronunciation as in the substitution of the indigenous language phonemes for instance the dental fricatives /θ, ð / which do not exist in Nigerian languages and the central vowels / ə, ɜ:/ with the closest phonemes from the sound inventory of the mother tongue of the speaker. Many Nigerians tend to replace /θ / with /t/, /ð / with /d / and / ə, ɜ:/ with /e/. There is also the tendency to introduce epenthetic vowels into clusters to capture the CV-CV syllable structure of Nigerian languages as well as the following features:.
- monophthongisation of diphthongs and triphthongs as in *away /əweɪ/* and *power /paʊə/* / being realised as [ewe] and [pawa].
- devoicing of final consonants as in *was / wəz /* being produced as [wəs] and *alive /əlaɪv/* being realised as [alaɪf].
- simplification of word final consonant clusters as in *child /tʃaɪld/* and *brilliant /brɪljænt/* being produced as [tʃaɪl] and [brɪljæn] (Udofot, 2002:70-71)

At the non-segmental level, there is a general tendency to impose the syllable-timed rhythm of Nigerian languages on English which is stress-timed and the tendency to speak reduced vowels as full vowels resulting in a proliferation of accented syllables. Certain stress placements are also peculiar to Nigerian users. An example is the forward shift of stress in certain words like *‘madam* pronounced *ma’dam*; *‘calendar* pronounced *ca’lendar* and *‘salary* pronounced *sa’lary* while the stress in other words like *suc’cess* and *em’barrass* are shifted backwards to *‘success* and *‘embarrass*. There is also the preference for unidirectional intonation patterns and a preference for the falling tune (Udofot 2002 :78-79). Some of the peculiarities get fossilised and emerge as a national form which transcends mother tongue differences. For example, the Igbo and Hausa languages have both the tense /i:/ and the lax /ɪ / yet speakers from these language backgrounds often pronounce (fi:t/ as /fit / where both /ɪ / and / i: / tend to be pronounced as /i / (cf Jowitt 1991).

Nigerianisms in syntax are fewer but nonetheless present. Prominent ones include pluralisation of non count and invariable nouns as in *equipments and furnitures*; non-native amalgamations as in *afterall, moreso, infact*; the use of reflexive pronouns like *themselves* in place of reciprocal ones (*each other, and one another*); the omission of the article before singular nouns as in: "*He went to market*" and the use of transitive verbs intransitively: *We went to the party and enjoyed*.

It is at the morpho-semantic level that Nigerian English is most productive and noticeable. Aside from the incorporation of lexical items from Nigerian languages into English are the following:

- creative coining of words and expressions to suit the Nigerian environment as in the words : *go-slow (traffic jam), been-to (one who has lived abroad), buharigate (scandal in the political circle); toronto (academic dishonesty), nairacracy (rule by the rich- owners of the Nigerian currency, the naira)* ;
- semantic shifts in words and expressions as in *long legs, (corruption involving nepotism) four-one- nine(a cheat), to branch (to stop over) , stranger (a visitor), to settle someone (to give some money to someone as a bribe or an appreciation)*;
- Non-native use of idioms such as: *to eat one's cake and have it (to have one's cake and eat it), to declare surplus (to throw a party), to put sand in someone's garri (to spoil one's chances), to take in (become pregnant)*;
- Semantic shifts as in the extension of meaning of a verb of perception like *hear* to include the meanings of *understand, smell* and even *feel* as in :

I can hear a nasty smell (perceive).

I can hear water running down my back (feel)

I can hear Ibibio (understand) (Udofot 1999: 106).

Such extensions have equivalent translations in the local languages. Reference of kinship terms are also extended to reflect the structure of the Nigerian society and the size of families. This gives rise to words like *brother, sister, cousin, aunt, and even mother and father* being extended to include not only family relations but also anyone for whom the user feels respect or intimacy. They are also often used to refer to people of the same tribe or religious denominations.

There is in Nigerian English also the non-native use of adjectives like *senior* and *junior* (brother or sister) in place of *elder or younger*.

With regard to pragmatics, there are certain peculiar usages which characterise Nigerian English. Prominent among these are the use of *sorry* (when one is not the cause) as a way of expressing concern, sympathy or condolences instead of *what a shame or ...be more careful* as well as *weldone* (when greeting a person at work); *fine as a reply to how do you do* and *I'm coming* when one is actually going away. These expressions are actually translations from Nigerian languages.

2.2 Nativisation through Innovation

The discussion above highlights aspects of nativisation involving form and use of English which are actually innovations in the sense that they deviate from the standard forms and usages of native Englishes. In this section, we shall examine culturally - determined and creative usages as innovations. In Nigeria, a ready area where culturally determined usages are evident is the area of greeting. Thus greetings like *weldone* (I greet you while you are working) ; *till tomorrow* (in place of good night) ; *sorry* (instead of what a shame or be more careful) are actually related to the Nigerian culture. A Nigerian who is bereaved of a parent or relation will feel quite mocked if a friend came in to say '*what a shame*' as an expression of sympathy or '*be more careful*' if he sustained an injury.

Another area where Nigerian English is innovative and culture- based is in the expression of politeness in forms of address , requests, apologies and the expression of gratitude. These innovative Nigerian forms which have been fully discussed and illustrated in Bamgbose (1994) are further illustrated in the following examples:

- *Dr., Prof.*(as forms of address without the name of the addressed);
- *Sister, Aunty* (instead of first name to address a friend or an elderly female);
- *Mummy, Daddy, Ma, Chief*(used to address people in positions of power instead of their names)
- *Thank you, Sir/ Ma / Chief* etc. (instead of just thank you)

Although Ahulu (1996) has taken Bamiro (1994) to task for describing truncated noun phrases like *luxurious bus, wireless set, and mental patient* as innovations, the fact remains that these expressions have been observed as peculiar to Nigerian English and since truncation as a morphological process for noun formation has not been attested in all varieties of English, it remains an innovation. To this group can be added *smallroom* (a euphemism for toilet, *motor park* (a bus and taxi station) and *headtie* (a woman's head dress).

Creativity is another area of innovation. This refers not only to the way Nigerian creative writers use English to reflect the culture and linguistic backgrounds of Nigerian societies but also to show indirectness and embellishments which reflect the Nigerian societies and languages that prefer idioms, proverbs and indirect references to simple straightforward language. The following passages from Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy* aptly illustrates this.

M.C : Ladies and gentlemen, I think we are about to witness *something rarer than the sight of an elephant giving birth.*

We are about to witness *the secrets of the other side of the moon.* At the end of a fruitless hunt, we sighed and got ready to make do with a wild tuber. *When we pulled it from the hot ashes what did we find? A whole roast antelope!* And we say the age of miracles is gone (93).

Mother of the Day : ...if you are in a hurry, we are not ... if you and your hus...sorry o , you see-e even I have got the hurry-hurry disease. If you and your *intended* are thinking of packing the food and drinks to stock your new home, *you've got another think coming*.

Sanda : (To Boyko) : Someone old enough to be your father is talking and you keep *putting your mouth in his*. Don't mind him Sir. (42)

In the three passages quoted above, the portions in bold print exemplify Nigerianisms in the use of the *indirect style, idioms, the O' intonation pattern* and peculiar expressions which reflect the culture of the people. Although the language used is English and the syntax is correct, it is easy to tell that speakers of the above passages are not British or Americans but people who are against children talking when an elder is talking and people who prefer to speak in proverbs and indirectly.

2.3 Current Functional Load of English

English is used in Nigeria for several purposes other than its legislated role as Nigeria's 'official language'. The purposes for which English is used range from official through friendly to literary (Udofot :1998:1). Banjo (1996:68) describes English as the 'language of record keeping' rather than 'an official language' since it is used not only in government offices and private organisations for keeping records of transactions that were spoken sometimes in an indigenous language but it is also used for letter writing among friends and family members.

The current constitution recognises Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (the languages of the larger ethnic groups in Nigeria) as additional languages of official proceedings in the federal legislature in addition to English as soon as implementation is possible. English is assigned the role of serving as the language of instruction from the fourth year of a six-year primary course to the tertiary level. In addition, English is taught as a school subject right from the first year of primary school (Banjo:1996:33). Secondary school students are encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages in addition to their mother tongues and English. These national policies regarding language in education cannot be said to be fully in operation as English is used right from the first year of primary school in urban primary and private schools while the switch to English in the fourth year of primary school as stipulated in the national language policy (1977, revised in 1981) hardly operates in primary schools in rural areas.

The above discussion shows that English enjoys a pride of place in the Nigerian society. The National Policy on Education has cultivated this prominence by recommending that it be taught right from the first year of primary school. Moreover, literacy in English and/oracy in it guarantees success, acceptance, employment in the country and interaction with Nigerians from other linguistic groups.

The result is that even illiterate Nigerians can boast of a few English words and sentences which they code-mix with words from Nigerian languages at every opportunity if not to show that they are literate at least to be accepted as civilised.

Udofot (2001) has projected that by the middle of the twenty-first century, with more literacy, a situation may arise where even Nigerian languages may become English-based Creoles - hybrids of English words with words from Nigerian languages. Tendencies towards this situation are evident in Esen's (1961) 'Efiglish' and Nwafor's (1974) 'Engligbo', 'Englihausa' and 'Engliyoruba'. The situation is compounded by inter-ethnic marriages now very common in Nigeria which results in children from such marriages, 'acquiring' English, as their first language and situations where parents deliberately want their children to speak English as their first language apparently to help them to do better in school since English is the language of instruction and the textbooks.

This prestige-laden attitudinal differential in favour of English is easy to explain. English is not just the other language available to Nigerian bilinguals but also one which guarantees social advance besides being the tool of national unity among Nigerians. It is fast becoming the language of intimate conversation, and the younger generation in Nigeria speak and write it better than the languages of their immediate communities. English has therefore been nativised in Nigeria.

3. Attitudes to Nativisation

Non-native Englishes' literature is full of varied attitudes to attempts to adapt the English language all over the world to the environment where it is used. An early dissenting voice was that of Prator (1968:464) which warned that "a second language variety of English is a tongue caught up in the process that tends to transform it swiftly and quite predictably into an utterly dissimilar tongue". His predictions have not been vindicated. Conversely, they have been sufficiently refuted by Kachru (1990:100-114). On their part, Quirk *et al* (1985 : 27-28) see nativised Englishes as "interference varieties" "some of which are of such long standing that some believe them stable and adequate enough to be institutionalised and hence to be regarded as varieties in their own right rather than stages on the way to a more native-like English". Nothing can be farther from the truth as even a casual examination of passages from Soyinka's *The beatification of Area Boy* quoted above indicates. In a later work, the same author, Quirk (1990 :4,8) refers to New Englishes as "so called national varieties" which to him are "attempts to justify inability to acquire what they persist in seeing as "real English".

These negative attitudes have been expressed even by scholars who come from countries where non-native Englishes flourish. Commenting on the state of English in Ghana Gyasi (1990: 24) says:

English in Ghana is very ill. The cancerous tumours are countless; false concord; poor spelling due to unfamiliarity with the word or mispronunciation; inability to handle the first person singular in particular, the tenses in general; wrong omission or insertion of the articles; misuse of preposition; errors arising from mother tongue interference, paucity of vocabulary etc.

In reaction to Gyasi's reservations, Bamgose (1997 :18) has asked: "is'nt it just possible that, no matter how they originated, some of the features stigmatized in the quote above have become indexical markers of Ghanaian English" ?

The above attitude of Gyasi to Ghanaian English is comparable to Jowitt's (1991: 61) comments about Nigerian English where "pluralization of uncountable nouns, misuse of the perfect tense, the use of *for* after *demand* and *advocate* used as verbs" are classified as errors which have become 'institutionalized' and regarded as Nigerian English. Eminent scholarly opinions like (Bamgose 1982, 1994, 1995); Banjo (1971, 1993, 1996); Jibril (1986); Eka (1985, 1993); Udofot (1996, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2002) have been expressed concerning the authenticity of Nigerian English as a variety of world Englishes. Bamgose (1997) has argued at length in favour of Non-native Englishes and recommends that efforts be intensified in their codification so that like standard native English they may become " encoded in grammars, dictionaries, and guides to usage, taught in educational institutions, used in print and generally found in the speech of those regarded as educated speakers" (Greenbaum 1990:81) .

Given the processes of nativisation, the functional load of English in the Nigerian environment and noting how the language has been adapted to suit the peculiar modes of expression and the culture of Nigerians, the attitude of this writer is that the nativisation of the English language in Nigeria is a worthwhile process and linguistically inevitable. It is a way of asserting the Nigerian identity through the portrayal of the Nigerian culture and personality in the use of English. This re-fashioning of a language which came into Nigeria as an instrument of colonisation into the language that can express the peculiar needs and culture of a people to the extent that Nigerians not only interact and learn in it at the formal level but also use it for informal interaction such as letter writing and even prayer is a kind of new awareness, a nativisation. English is therefore no longer an external language but an indigenised language which makes it possible for Nigerians from different parts of the country to relate interact and intermarry, "a virtue made out of necessity" (Banjo 1996) . It is expected that by the middle of the twenty-first century this nativised English may become the mother tongue of many Nigerians.

Not only the literate Nigerians use English, "uneducated ones use it in the pidginised and code-mixed forms, while traders use it for their business interactions. A recent research¹ into the language of the open market in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital, a state where Ibibio is understood by every citizen his dialectal group notwithstanding, revealed that 76.7% of the respondents preferred to use English for business transactions

because according to them the use of English is better for their business¹ . English can for these reasons be referred to as a Nigerian language. It is for these reasons that Udofot (2001 : 8) has suggested a change of name from English to *Ninglish* like the North German variety of English which is called *Minglish* coined from the name of the North German language Missingch + English (Martens 1990:261-269). By so doing, the uneasiness surrounding the attitudes to English in Nigeria because of its colonial antecedents may be laid to rest. After all, as suggested by Kujore (1995: 376), the owners of English are as many nations or regions as can validly claim to have viable varieties of the language. The viable variety thus becomes a form of cultural and national identity.

4. Summary and Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the term nativisation and what it implies in the Nigerian situation. Three processes of nativisation namely: nativisation through the influences of Nigerian languages on the pronunciation, syntax, semantics and lexis of English resulting in new pronunciations, new words and new meanings; nativisation through creative and innovative usages as exemplified in the usages of Nigerian writers and nativisation through the expansion of the functional load of English in the Nigerian environment resulting in a gradual change of status from an official language to an unproclaimed lingua franca as well as the first language of the new generation of Nigerians. Various attitudes to non-native Englishes and nativisation have been examined, some of which are negative while others are positive.

The author takes the position that the fact that nativisation is norm breaking notwithstanding, it is a process of creating a new English which is peculiar to and better able to serve the linguistic needs of the Nigerian people. It is therefore not a process of trying to attain a native English standard but that of setting new standards so as to fashion out a new variety of English depicting the cultural and linguistic identity of Nigerians - a process of cultural and linguistic renaissance.

ENDNOTE

1. This research was carried out under my supervision by Miss Ademulaji, a final year undergraduate of the University of Uyo, for her project during the 1998/1999 session

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