

Nigerian English Syntax and Usage: Between Deviance and Deviation

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Abstract

This study tries to distinguish the term "deviance" from the term "deviation" in Nigerian English. The two terms, which are comparatively different, are discussed within a socio-linguistic framework of M.A.K. Halliday's systemic grammar, which later developed into Functional Linguistics that places emphasis on the issue of meaning in grammatical theory. Typical Nigerian English innovations are related to the local socio-cultural and linguistic contexts of Nigerian culture and society. The paper touches on Nigerian English syntax and partly on lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English to bring to the fore the distinction between the terms in focus-deviance and deviation. The work also discusses and attempts to show how some Nigerian English expressions erroneously made can be corrected and be made to move near the native English so as not to encumber intelligibility and create misinterpretation for the native speakers and other Nigerian users of English who are adept to the native speakers' usage. The implication of deviance and deviation in Nigerian English is therefore discussed with reference to international intelligibility and communicative strategies. The source of the data collected is from the day-to-day English use by some Nigerian English users.

Keywords: Deviance, Deviation, Nigerian English Syntax, Usage, Functional Linguistics.

1. Introduction

The users of English around the world have been classified into three concentric circles: the "norm-producing" inner circle, made up of native speakers; the norm-developing outer circle, made up of second language users; and "norm dependent" expanding circle, comprising speakers of English as a foreign language (Kachru 1985:29). Since the English language was introduced into Nigeria, its contact with many indigenous languages has precipitated phonological, grammatical and lexico-semantic changes in norms and forms of English spoken within the country. In the light of this observation, this paper investigates the distinction between deviance and deviation in Nigerian English, a critically important dimension of how the English language in Nigeria differs from the Standard British English.

This study aims primarily at achieving three main goals: first, to differentiate between deviance and deviation and examine the types of deviation in the English language in Nigeria; second, to exemplify such deviations; and third, to highlight some implications especially for the students of English in Nigeria and the generality of both the socio-linguistic scholars and the speakers of English in the country. The methodology of collection of data for the work is a random sampling of the rather consistently common utterances of the English speakers and writers in Nigeria.

2. Deviance versus Deviation

Deviance is a term used in linguistic analysis to refer to a sentence (or its units) which does not conform to the rules of grammar, i.e. it is ill-formed (Crystal 1980). Deviance in Nigerian English occurs because most Nigerian speakers stop learning the language at an adolescent level and in many cases, when the formal use of language is no longer called for; these speakers revert to their first language. Related discussion of the issue of deviance and deviation as observed by (Adeniran 2005:2) goes thus:

... these are other aberrant and deviant forms- results of mother tongue interference or imperfect learning of standard English. Banjo (1982:4) describes them as errors associated with approximate systems, such as: Tutuola's usage typifies. They do not feature in any serious consideration of standard NE, and are unacceptable. On the other hand are different from the native speaker varieties of English. They are usage forms the syntax of which does not do any communicatively disabling violence to the grammar of English as used worldwide, nor to international intelligibility. As the joint level of lexis and semantics, and even of phonology, they represent ways expressing the elements in the multilingual and the multicultural environment in which this dialect of English is used, differently from the ways of the emigrant native-speaker varieties would. It may not even be an overstatement to say that the native speaker varieties may not ever be able to effectively express the cultures in the Nigerian environment as the "socio-linguistically motivated' deviation (see also Bamgbose, 1982)

Umummwangho (2009: 26), in expressing Adekunle's 1974 opinion on three major dimensions of the Nigerian English identified, which shall be used to analyze the varieties of the samples of the Nigerian English mentioned in this paper, stated that there are varieties such as the ones that can be said to be the 'near native speaker variety' which can be identified with the educated elite in Nigeria; the local color variety which is commonly found among the Nigerian literary prose writers; and the 'incipient bilingual type' that is characterized by local socio-linguistic factors. To expatiate this, the more, Umummwangho explains that

It is equally desirable to briefly sketch the varieties of English in Nigeria. Using purely sociological praxis, Mobolaji Adekunle (1979) provides three convincing types identifiable. The first is the near-native speaker variety whose main characteristic is that it is not much influenced by local socio-linguistic factors. Expressions that are commonly used can be traced to either American or British variety of English in terms of structural patterns, lexical items, idioms, allusion and proverbs. The variety is more prominent in the written forms than spoken. The local color variety is marked with a preponderance of local ideas, attitudes and conceptual peculiarities. Here, there are borrowings, adaptations and translations influenced by the local lexical items, neologisms, idioms and proverbs from local languages and norms. Examples of this abound in Nigerian prose in English. The third variety is that which he calls the incipient bilingual type marked by local socio-linguistic factors with traces of inappropriate choice of synonyms or prepositions as well as omission of articles, which may reflect initial stages of the proper mastery of the English language.

Indeed, the three main varieties of Nigerian English as enunciated here by Umummwangho are represented in the randomly sampled instances of the English spoken and written in Nigeria in this paper. For example, the ones named as the standard British English are typified in the 'near-native' variety'; the instance of the ones cited from Achebe's works represent the local colour variety, in which the aspect of the one noted in deviation could be found, while the last one named the incipient bilingual type that are characterized by wrong omission or inclusion of articles and preposition or influenced by apparent influence of the Nigerian indigenous languages are seen as the 'defiant ones' The following examples from the Nigerian English syntax are instances of deviance.

- 1 I hear English '(NE) (incipient bilingual, deviant)
I understand English ' (SBE) (near native variety)
- 2 "I can hear a smell" (NE) (incipient bilingual, deviant)
"I can sense a smell" (SBE) (near native variety)
- 3 "The food is too sweet" (NE) (incipient bilingual, deviant)
"The food is delicious" (SBE) (near native variety)
- 4 "Don't move with bad boys (NE) (incipient bilingual, deviant)
"Don't associate with bad boys" (SBE) (near native variety)
- 5 "They" are calling you"(for one person) (NE) (incipient bilingual, deviant)
He is calling you" (SBE) (near native variety) (no honorific pronoun in English)
- 6 "He has finished his house in Ibadan "(NE) (incipient bilingual, deviant)
"He has completed building his house in Ibadan (SBE)(near native variety)
- 7 "Don't reverse back your car" (NE) (incipient bilingual, deviant)
"Don't reverse your car" (SBE) near native variety)

Nigerian English (the incipient bilingual variety) largely contains expressions that are not in conformity with the norms of the British English. Such expressions are seen as conspicuous errors or deviance(s). The expressions are unacceptable to the native speakers of English. The use of 'equipments' as cited in David Jowitt's book as a form of Nigerian English usage is purely not an error.

'Equipment is a non-count noun in the standard English usage. Therefore, it does not take the plural suffix '-s'. Deviance, therefore, is an unacceptable complete departure from the norm of native English or from what is considered normal or customary.

Adesanoye (1977) notes that many deviant features of syntax in Nigerian English are often as a result of L1 negative transfer, inadequate visualization leading to the misspelling of words, inadequate vocabulary, deviant verb forms, especially the 'be' and 'have' forms. Crystal (1994) observes that; "In linguistic enquiry, the notion of individual difference- of linguistic effect which does not conform to a rule or norm-is an aspect of what is commonly referred to as deviance. In its extreme form, deviance produces instance of language effect, which does not conform to a rule, or norm- is an aspect of what is commonly referred to as deviance. In this area, deviance produces instances of language which are totally unacceptable; 'cat the' is a deviant form at the level of grammar" there are, however, different levels of deviance-degrees of departure form the norms which identify the various varieties of English and form the structures they have in common.

Examples of erroneous expressions abound in the incipient bilingual syntactic variety. The following sentences

are outright errors of the types.

- 1 (i) Going towards the bank, a car speed past (NE) (incipient bilingual type)
(ii) Going towards the bank, I saw a car speed past me (SBE) (near native variety)
- 2 (i) I wish to apply for my annual leave which will due July, 2013 (NE) (Incipient bilingual type)
(ii) I wish to apply for my annual leave which will be due in July, 2013 (SBE) (omission of 'be' after 'will' in SBE) (near native variety)
- 3 (i) I have been wanting to see you (NE) (incipient bilingual type)
(ii) I have always had it is mind to see you. (SBE) (near native variety)
- 4 (i) We cannot end up thanking God (NE) (incipient bilingual type)
(ii) We can't stop thanking God (SBE) (near native variety)
- 5 (i) The goods worth millions of naira (NE) (incipient bilingual type)
(ii) The goods are worth millions of naira (SBE) (near native variety)
- 6 (i) This is the first time of my coming here (NE) (incipient bilingual type)
(ii) This is the first time I have come here (SBE) (near native variety)
- 7 (i) "I and the accused went with him" (NE) (incipient bilingual type)
(ii) "The accused and I went with him" (SBE) (wrong word order in NE) (near native variety)
- 8 Deviant infinity
"It was at this stage that counsel sought and was granted adjournment to enable him bringing the present application". (NE) (Incipient bilingual type)
... to enable him to bring... (SBE) (near native variety)
- 9 Excessive deletion 'I arrested charged and cautioned the defendant in Yoruba language, he volunteered a statement in Yoruba, read it to him—and signed it as correct.
(NE) (local colour type)
I arrested, charged and cautioned the defendant in Yoruba language, he volunteered a statement in Yoruba language, I read it to him in the language and signed it as correct (SBE) (near native variety)
- 10 Mixture of tenses
"I told him he is the man they wanted to see" (NE)
I told him he was the man they wanted to see (SBE)
Other examples of deviant expression in Nigeria English are:
The Accountant is not on seat (not available)
We hope you didn't see the rain (fairly Nigerian L1 prompted)
She is my intended (fiancée)
I want to chase or toast that girl (woo or court)
These are the invitees (guests) e t c.

2.1. The Notion of Normalcy in Deviance

Some expressions are described, according to Crystal (1994), as deviantly normal. It would be difficult to think of a clearer case of strange linguistic behaviour than the deliberate use of unintelligible speech. An example is the range of nonsensical expressions, which may accompany a moment of sudden emotion.

More complex levels of systematic nonsense also exist. Glossolalia is an interesting domain; speaking in tongues' is practiced by large numbers of Christian in Nigeria as part of their regular religious behaviour. It is a radically modified form of the speaker's own language, which is used as a sign of spiritual conversion or belief. We view the act of speaking in tongues as one of the areas of linguistic abnormality.

2.1.1 Deviation

Deviation is an institutionalized error, which is widely accepted, and it enjoys universal acceptance. It is an acceptable departure from the norm.

In addition, it is a way of writing or speaking that is attributive of an individual or society.

Deviation is or the socio-linguistics strategies of discourse similar to those identified by Scarcella and Brunak (1981). Considering the pragmatic competence involved in politeness in speech, the following examples are instances of deviation from the target norm of standard British English.

- 1 SBE 'She wants to see you' (A student referring to a female teacher)
NE; They want see you (A student referring to a female teacher)

So instead of the 3rd person singular pronoun, we have the 3rd person plural pronoun for a person.

From the definitions of the two key words- deviance and deviation- it could be said that while 'deviation' is merely a slight turning around from the set standards, 'deviance' is rather an apparent shift or departure from the expected course of grammatical rule of a given language. The question now is "What is the distinction between a deviation and a mistake and how much deviation from the norm is acceptable pedagogically, linguistically and above all the acknowledgement or reference since it does not belong to the

linguistic norm of the English language.

3. Nigeria English Syntax

Syntax is concerned with rules for sentence building and when we talk about Nigerian English syntax, the noticeable differences between the standard British English syntax and the Nigerian English syntax are regarded as deviations.

Selectional restrictions are violated in be+ ing constructions. Statute verbs assume the role of dynamic verbs in Nigerian English. For instance, the verbs 'have,' 'hear' and 'see' are misused in Nigerian English

SBE (near native variety) (NNV) NE (local colour type) (LCT)

1. I have your book I am having your book

I can hear you I am hearing you

I can see you I am seeing you.

2 As earlier observed, deviation is seen in the pluralization of non – count nouns (mass/abstract) by Nigerian speakers of English. Nigerian English has more count nouns than British English. Thus, the following expressions are common in Nigeria English, which are instances of local colour variety and constitute deviation.

a Listen to these informations.

b Where are your luggages?

c Keep your loads

d The teacher gave me much advices

e He has many furnitures in his room

These occur frequently in Nigerian English syntax

3 In some contexts where there should not be determiners, Nigerian English employs them vice versa. For instance

I have a bright future (SBE) (near native variety)

I have bright future (NE) (local color type)

He is at the University of Lagos (SBE) (near native variety)

He is at University of Lagos (NE) (local colour type)

Naturally, an article or a determiner as appropriate usually precedes the singular form of count nouns. However, Nigerian English Syntax is characterized by the omission of these articles where necessary.

I went to the health center (SBE) (NNV)

I went to health center (NE) (LCT)

Give me a pen to write with (SBE) (NNV)

Give me pen to write with (NE) (LCT)

I am member of the committee (NE) (LCT)

I am a member of the committee (SBE) (NNV)

In addition, the tendency to add an article or a determiner where it is not required is another penchant of Nigerian English syntax of the local colour type (LCT)

Did you watch the football match from beginning to end? (SBE) (NNV)

Did you watch the football match from the beginning to the end? (NE) (LCT)

The Abuja stadium is in process of construction (SBE) (NNV)

The Abuja stadium is the process of construction (NE) (LCT)

I don't want to start from scratch (SBE) (NNV)

I don't want to start from the scratch (NE) (LCT)

Aircraft is fully booked (NE) (LCT)

The Aircraft is fully booked (SBE) (NNV)

Although, some determiners can co-occur with another in the nominal group, Nigerian English speakers of the local color type sometimes deviate from this norm by combining the wrong ones: it is acceptable, for instance to have: possessive and numeral - her third aspect article and qualifier – a few oranges; demonstrative and numeral – those three boys.

Nigerian English syntax will display:

NE (LCT) SBE (NNV)

That your sister That sister of yours

This our lecturer That lecturer of ours

This my wife This wife of mine etc.

4 In Nigerian English, verbs are used in reciprocal sense without "each other"

"We have known for the ten years: (NE) (LCT)

"We saw this morning (NE) (LCT)

"We have known each other for ten years. (BE) (NNV)
 "We saw each other this morning" (BE) (NNV)
 There is also the tendency to use "themselves" where "each other" is required.
 "They really love themselves" (LCT)
 "They really love each other" (NNV)

5 Deviation is noticeable in the different use of prepositions by Nigerian speakers of English. Standard British English combines a certain verb with preposition. Nigerian English of the local colour type omits the preposition.

SBE (NNV)	NE (LCT)	
I have replied to your letter	I have replied your letter	
The policeman demanded #20.00 bribe	The policeman demanded for #20.00 bribe.	
The victim died at 12 o'clock	The victim died by 12 o'clock	
Mr. Olu is the principal of our school.	Mr. Olu is the Principal for school	our school.
In the long run, this won't work. On the long run, this won't work		
These prepositions are not suitable for the contexts in which they are used.		

6 Some adjectives and adverbs are reduplicated in Nigerian English of the LCT
 Deviation is also seen in these examples:

- (a) Could you repeat the answer again?
- (b) Remove the bag or else I beat you.
- (c) Let us return back to school
- (d) I corrected him yesterday still yet he made the same mistake today.

7 Phrases such as isn't it? Won't you? Are they? are incorrectly added to statements in Nigerian English that shows the local colour type.

SBE (NNV)	NE (LCT)
He is a thief, isn't he?	He is a thief, isn't it?
I love him don't I?	I love him, isn't it?
We have a pen, don't we?	We have a pen, haven't we?

Some other commonly used expressions; in Nigerian English syntax and their British English alternatives that portray both the local colour type (LCT) and British English alternatives the near native variety (NNV) are as follows:

Let charity begins at home	NE
Let charity begin at home	SBE
Let the oyin (honey) flow continues	NE
Let the oyin (honey) flow continue	SBE
A trial will convince you	NE
A try will convince you	SBE
Let the gentlemen knows	NE
Let the gentlemen know	SBE
The rain beat me	NE
I was drenched in the rain	SBE
I'm coming	NE
I'll be back in a moment	SBE
I took my eyes away from it	NE
I ignored it	SBE
Come and shake me	NE
Come and shake hands with me	SBE
He is an indigene of Ibadan	NE
He is an indigenous person of Ibadan	SBE

(The word indigene does not exist in the English dictionary)

I write to invite you to a special congregation meeting scheduled to hold as follows. NE
 (the meeting cannot hold itself; it is the human beings that will hold the meeting)

I write to invite you to a special congregation meeting scheduled to be held as follows (SBE)

Birds of the same feather flock together NE (Chinua Achebe: *Anthills of the Savvanah* (p. 55) (LCT)

Birds of a feather flock together (SBE) (NNV)

It cannot possible	NE (LCT)
It cannot be possible	(SBE) (LCT)
You are a gossip	NE (Chinua Achebe: <i>A man of the people</i>) (LCT)
You are a gossip	SBE (NNV)
He traveled in a luxurious bus	NE (LCT)
He traveled in a luxury bus	SBE (NNV)

Like I was saying NE (LCT) ("like" is an adjective used as a preposition here. In English, a pronoun in the subject form cannot precede a preposition in the subject form)

As I was saying (NNV), BE

Nigerian English is marked by some local linguistic colour. Nigerians prefer 'in/inside' to 'on' in the expression "get on the train" because they view a train as an enclosure. They prefer "get down from the bus" to "get off a bus" because "getting off" gives the impression of being forcefully pushed out of a bus. Linguistic features, which mark off Nigerian English from British English, are also seen in the redundant use of preposition e.g.

Ask from him NE (Local colour type); Ask him (SBE) (NNV) let's discuss about politics (NE) (LCT) Let's discuss politics (SBE) (NNV) Deviation is a natural concomitant of situation of languages in contact. Such situations cause many lexical items with new denotations and collocations different from those in the native variety to develop. Most of the examples of deviation given are a result of socio-cultural differences between cultures represented by English and the Nigerian indigenous languages.

4. Implications

One obvious implication of deviance and deviation in Nigerian English is reduced international intelligibility. That is, whereas deviance and deviation endow English in Nigeria with a fresh Nigerian uniqueness, they can also obstruct the ready and full understanding of the variety by non-Nigerians. As argued in Adebija (1987: 55-60), such errors and deviation could occasionally lead to misinterpretations of the communicative functions of utterances. In effect, the new communication norms develop for English in Nigeria could result in the performance of a communicative act which a Nigerian encoder does not intend, and which the foreign decoder unfortunately misinterprets. The principal implication of this, as further argued in Adebija (1987:59) is that:

... participants in an international exchange in English as a second language environment may always need to make greater allowances for unintended speech acts than is a first language context. In an L2 context therefore, there is a need for extra sensitivity to the context in which communication could hold the key to the genuine, bonfide functions of utterances"

Closely related to the foregoing is the fact that the appropriateness conditions of similar utterances in Nigerian and native English context may not necessarily be coterminous. Adesanoye (1973) regards most of the lexico-semantic and lexico-syntactic variations in Nigerian English as deviations. In view of their being different from native English Adekunle (1974) accounts for them on the basis of interference. Obiechina (1974) attributes the deviations to creativity. People who are 'being deviant' or 'strange' are being so for a purpose and the effects are specific and noticeable.

As Bamgbose (1982:104) argues, however, "a combination of all approaches is ---required and a certain amount of subjective judgment regarding acceptability will be required in determining what falls within or outside the scope of Nigerian English".

On a positive note, however, the nativization of English in Nigeria could make the learning of English in the country much easier, particularly when taught by Nigerians. In the other words, contrary to widely held opinions and popular intuitions, in many parts of the world the best teacher of a second language is not necessarily the native speaker, but rather a speaker versed in the local norms that the language has developed within the community in question. Hence, in view of the fact that English in Nigeria has developed its own norms (in the areas of lexis, semantics and syntax) which are most suitable for the Nigerian socio-cultural and pragmatic contexts, such norms are best encoded and decoded by Nigerians or foreigners brought up within the communicative norms of English in Nigeria.

5. Conclusion

Adetugbo (1977) in his study of certain characteristics of Nigerian English concludes, "English language usage in Nigeria has its own characteristics that set it apart from any native variety. The differentiating features occur at various levels of grammatical structure. These features are not simply deviations from the norms of standard English but features which characterize standard Nigerian English." Deviation feature in Nigerian English because of the dynamics of the pragmatics of a multilingual context. Studies done by scholars such as Haugen (1972) and Skutnabb-Kaugas (1975) have demonstrated beyond doubt that the pragmatic consequences of the presence of many languages in a particular context involve lexical borrowing, language mixing and code

switching. Different linguistic systems often have to mutually co-exist and struggle for predominance both in the individual and in the society as a whole. In the Nigerian context, the English language, through deliberate governmental political ineptness, has outdone all other indigenous languages in establishing itself functionally as *primus inter pares*. Translation from Nigerian languages into English shows an instance of deviation and cross-linguistic reverberation. Deviations do not constitute what many people will regard as outright errors in Nigerian English. These deviations from linguistic normality should be rather be seen as products of the inconsistency of English language rules and cultural influence on language. Very shortly, many of the features of the indigenous languages are likely to become stable and ultimately standardized. A distinct Nigerian variety of English, probably associated with a certain level of education will then emerge (if it has not already emerged)

A common thread that holds all the examples we have given together is their imaginative freshness. Undoubtedly, they more adequately express the Nigerian mentality, psyche and experience than any native English gloss one might succeed in providing for them. Deviant expressions in Nigerian English contain words that are very much English but certainly they are a kind of English far removed from the native shores, shaped to reflect a new life, minted to convey a new social, cultural and linguistic reality.

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