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English as a Contact Language: Nigerian English as a case study

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0. Abstract

Throughout the 16th century, the colonial aspirations of the British Empire took the English language to territories where it got in contact with different linguistic realities. These contact situations resulted in new English varieties emerging that exhibit exclusive indigenous features of languages native to the territories colonized by the British sailors. This paper focuses on Nigerian English, one of the many English varieties that have resulted from these language contact situations.

The linguistic scenario of the country was already complex before the arrival of the English. Nevertheless, it became more complicated when English started to get in contact with a high number of the more than 500 languages spoken across the Nigerian territory. For the English language, this entailed the borrowing of countless features coming from Niger-Congo languages. Consequently, the diffusion and development of the English language went through some difficulties in its initial steps. However, English became the administrative, educational and judicial language of Nigeria in the 19th century and thus it has been possible for English to become nativized. In this moment, signs of endonormative stabilization (Schneider 2007) are visible as actions are taken to establish a standard form of Nigerian English.

This paper aims at giving a description of the morpho-syntactic features believed to be representative of Nigerian English while reflecting on their nature. Curiously, some of these features explained have been found in other varieties of English as well as in different contexts where English is used as a communicative means. Therefore, the features can be subdivided into three main kinds: (i) features reminiscent of English as a Foreign Language contexts (due to the former status that English held in Nigeria), like particular uses of articles or prepositions; (ii) features exclusive to African English varieties, like the determiner + noun + possessive word order coming from a Bantu L1 background; and (iii) features common to other new varieties of English emerging from a similar language contact context, like the use of the invariant tag question *isn't it*. It should be remarked that all these features share the fact that the outcome of a language contact situation tends to be a simpler linguistic form, in this case, morphologically speaking.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the English colonial era around the 16th century, the English language has been undergoing a constant expansion both in the number of its speakers and the territories where it is spoken (native and second language). Nowadays, English enjoys a global reputation and status as a lingua franca that facilitates communication at all levels. The expansion of the British Empire brought along the establishment of English as the colonial language in all its overseas dependencies. Thus, we can witness many different types of language contact situations, each of them with its own particular features. Additionally, in the current globalized world that we live in, English is used as the international means of communication in all arenas (Graddol 1997).

This paper focuses on the language contact situation between English and the languages of Nigeria or, more specifically, on the emergence and development of Nigerian English (NigE). This contact situation was triggered and encouraged by trade contact situations in West Africa, infamous for its slavery past. At the beginning, the contact situation was limited as it was reduced to some coastal points. However, English sailors began to colonize the interior areas of those territories and colonies like Nigeria or Ghana were established. Since so many languages are spoken in these countries (more than 500), the contact among them and English from settlers brought about a very complex linguistic scenario which, in turn, gave rise to the emergence of NigE, a variety that shows exclusive features of Niger-Congo languages (Taiwo 2013).

The aim of this paper is to give a description of the main morpho-syntactic characteristics of the English variety spoken in Nigeria and to provide an overview of how this contact situation has been conditioned and has developed. The second objective is to examine the nature of these characteristics and determine if there are similarities in different varieties of English emerging from language contact situations. For these purposes, the paper will reflect on Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes, a model that proposes an evolutionary perspective on the development of the English language in former British colonies.

2. Emergence of New Englishes

Globalization, scientific development, an enormous international market and an incessant movement of people worldwide have raised the English language to a privileged position. Apart from being the mother tongue of millions of people in Anglophone

majoritarian countries, it is also regarded as a foreign language, a second language (Nigeria, Ghana), a link language (Nigeria) or an international language (Egypt, Tanzania) (Schmied 1991; Graddol 1997). Thus, Standard English has been labelled as *World English*, that is, a worldwide lingua franca. However, all the newly emerged English varieties are typically referred to as *World Englishes* (Graddol 1997). Due to their similarities in spelling, both terms are mistaken as synonyms. Semantically, the former refers to the status of lingua franca at a world scale that English enjoys whereas the latter is used for regional and nativized varieties of English that have emerged in different parts of the world. Thus, each of the territories once formal colonies of the British Empire has developed its own nativized English variety (Graddol 1997).

Then, if we speak of *World English* referring to Standard English (StE), should the linguist community speak of Standard Englishes when talking about *World Englishes*? We observe how several countries today have their own standard variety of English (Australia, USA, South Africa), while some others do not have a completely developed standard variety of the English variety spoken in that country (Nigeria, Zimbabwe or Zambia). In this sense, the linguist community should discuss Standard Englishes when tackling the term *World Englishes*, as each of the varieties meets the requirements to be the standard variety in the country where it is spoken.

Narrowing the scope to Nigeria, the English language in this country is on the path to recognition as a standard variety, as will be shown in section 3.2. We can see attempts at developing an endonormative norm so that a standard variety is completely established thus making the expansion of the English language easier in Nigeria.

3. Linguistic scenario in Nigeria

The linguistic scenario in Nigeria, and by extension in Africa, can be subdivided into two main eras. The first one corresponds to the pre-colonial era, when Africa was ruled by different kingdoms that its ethnic groups formed, each of them having their own language(s). The arrival of European sailors to the African coasts entailed the end of the tribe-ruled Africa and the beginning of a new era. As Schmied (1991) and Melchers & Shaw (2011) state, the first English contact with Africa took place in the 16th century, though the first NigE written records date back to the end of the 18th century (Melchers & Shaw 2011). The first English sailors arrived at the African continent with commercial goals in mind, mainly to trade in products such as spices and, simultaneously, slaves for

their colonies in the American continent (Schmied 1991). Therefore, several companies were founded with the sole aim of funding these activities (namely, the *Company of Merchant Adventures for Guinea* in 1561 and *Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa* in 1660 among others; see Schmied 1991).

Nonetheless, in the case of the Nigerian colony, the contact was very limited at the beginning (Schmied 1991), though the commercial transit in the Guinea Gulf and in West Africa overall was of a colossal importance (Schneider 2007; Melchers & Shaw 2011). The colonial dependencies were established in geostrategic locations primarily, but growing industrialisation in the metropolis (United Kingdom) required to secure sources of raw materials (Schmied 1991) and the British hegemony in the African continent as well. Consequently, sailors and traders began to colonize the inland areas of the continent, especially after the Berlin conference held in 1884-5 (Melchers & Shaw 2011). This represented a turning point in the future of the African continent, as it was scrambled among the different European colonial powers without any consideration for the previous territorial organization (Melchers & Shaw 2011).

From this moment on, English-speaking African interpreters were needed to carry out the trading activities normally (Schmied 1991). The imposition of European values and morals brought about a change in the perception of reality Nigerians had. The administrative, legal and educational fields took English as the language of work (Schneider 2007). Furthermore, Schmied (1991) points out how native languages were relegated to a secondary position, as they were perceived as not worthy of being used in institutions. Despite leaving the indigenous languages aside, British colonial officials still needed a basic knowledge of some of the indigenous languages to get promoted (Schmied 1991; Schneider 2007).

Socially speaking, the English language started to gain popularity among Nigerians and soon its mastery became fundamental in order to obtain financial aid and to be able to access high education (Schmied 1991, Schneider 2007). Similarly, the British government started to sponsor the learning of the English language as they believed that the indigenous inhabitants of Nigeria should at least know one of the ‘civilized’ languages (Schmied 1991). As the linguistic form used by the speaker holds the power to determine his/her social class (Bamiro 1991ab), a correlation between the social class and the linguistic form (lect) used is established. Bamiro (1991b) describes NigE as a linguistic

continuum of the lects (acrolect, mesolect, basilect) where each social class would adhere to a different lect.

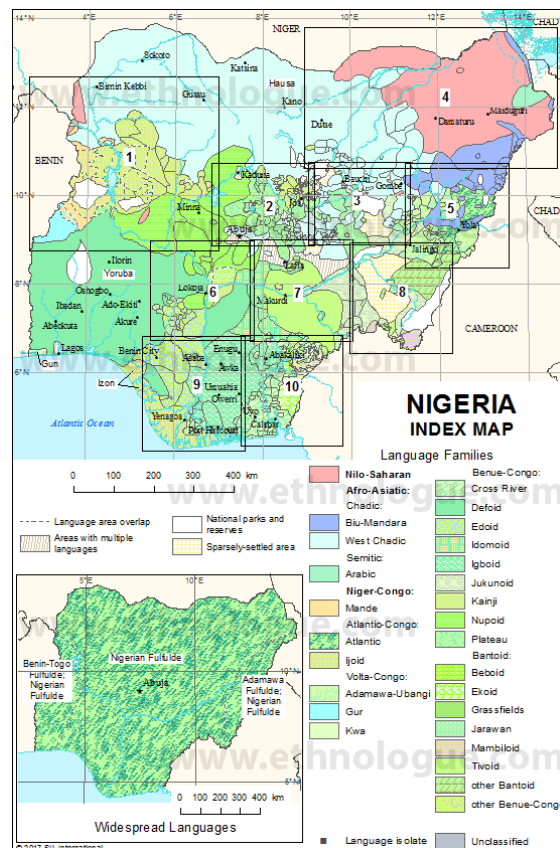
The acrolect represents the upper-class English speakers, usually monolingual English speakers with a RP accent of Nigerian origin regarded as annoying and snobbish (Bamiro 1991b). The mesolect is the representative of the middle class and their speech is regarded as the common popular NigE variety, where very marked morpho-syntactic and lexical/semantic features are to be found (reduplication, borrowings, hyper-corrected behaviour...) (Bamiro 1991b). Regarding the basilect, it is the lect of the working class showing a higher interference between English and Nigerian languages, reflected in the “abundant hypercorrections” (Bamiro 1991b: 9). Bamiro (1991a) describes it as a pidgin-like lect.

Both the acrolect and the mesolect speakers are regarded as the speech dominant communities over the basilect speakers. However, the mesolect speakers are also under the power of the acrolect speakers, as the latter are the dominant class both socially and linguistically due to Nigeria’s elitist tradition (Bamiro 1991ab). Therefore, the use of a certain lect means the ascription to a certain social group, showing solidarity and friendship among the group members, especially from the dominated group against the dominant one.

Thus, a polarized linguistic scenario is implemented in Nigeria with the elites in one end and the masses in the other one (Schmied 1991; Schneider 2007). However, the heterogeneous introduction of English in the country has also contributed to the complex linguistic scenario. When the English language began to spread across Nigeria, a different language contact context was established between English and each of the languages spoken in Nigeria. As English was transferring linguistic features from different languages, a different NigE emerged from every language contact environment posing difficulties for the emergence of a nationwide NigE that could serve the communicative needs of all the linguistic communities present in Nigeria.

In the aftermath of the independence in 1960, this multi-ethnic society was in an urgent need for a link language that would not fuel tensions among the more than 500 languages spoken in the country. As the principal objective of the new government in the following decades towards independence was to modernize Nigeria, English was the language chosen to accomplish such a mission (Melchers & Shaw 2011) due to the

possibilities it offers in regard to economy or social cohesion to name a few. Moreover, it was considered a “language of emancipation and liberation” (Schmied, 1991: 18), as it implied using the colonizers’ language to criticise the former colonial period as well as to make their position understood worldwide. Map 1 below illustrates Nigeria’s linguistic diversity and complex linguistic scenario.



Map 1. Linguistic map of Nigeria’s complex linguistic scenario. (Simons & Fennig 2017)

3.1 Influence of native languages and cultures

As expected, the influence of Nigerian native languages has conditioned the development of NigE. However, due to space constraints, this section will only deal with the influence of the Yoruba language and how it has interacted with English.

The Yoruba language is currently the most widely spoken Nigerian indigenous language and it has been in contact with English since the early 19th century (Bamgbose 1982). Before the English language started to enjoy its dominance, the Yoruba language did so as many newspapers were almost entirely published in this tongue (Bamgbose 1982). As the trading activities with the English continued to flourish and grow, the

Yoruba people soon realized the potential of the English language. A bilingual reality came into being in the Yoruba-speaking areas of the country and both languages started to enrich each other. As will be shown in section 4 in this paper, morpho-syntactic structures, countless lexical items and expressions and cultural concepts were interchanged creating a large part of the current Nigerian English characteristics. In addition, English has also managed to modify some aspects of Yoruba, especially the lexical component of the language through numerous loanwords (Bamgbose 1982).

Like in most bilingual situations, the contact between Yoruba and English produces many instances of code-mixing. As Bamgbose (1982) states, in this language contact context, the base of the resulting mixture comes from Yoruba syntax primarily as English linguistic units and syntactic patterns are both borrowed and integrated into Yoruba (Bamgbose 1982). It should be said that this code-mixing situation is not only restricted to Yoruba and English, as any Nigerian English speaker that is bilingual in both English and his/her mother tongue will present traits of code-mixing to some extent.

3.2 Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes (PCE)

Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model gives a detailed account of the emergence and development of the varieties of English in countries with a British colonial past. According to him, all post-colonial English varieties go through the same process of formation where some similarities are likely to be found. Here lays the reason why some of the features of the so-called "new varieties" of English are shared among varieties spoken in different continents (i.e. dialects that are not in contact with each other). Schneider (2007) claims that the evolution and development of the post-colonial Englishes is "a sequence of characteristic stages of identity rewritings and associated linguistic changes affecting the parties involved in a colonial-contact setting" (Schneider 2007: 29). He gives a diachronic evolution from the implementation of English until a new variety of English emerges, differentiating itself from other English varieties (Schneider 2007). This diachronic evolution is further divided into five different stages that are: foundation, exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization and differentiation. Each of the stages will contemplate four different aspects: socio-political background, identity constructions, sociolinguistic conditions and linguistic effects.

As regards NigE specifically, the variety is undergoing a shift from nativization to endonormative stabilization as efforts are being made to create a distinctive Standard Nigerian English (StNigE). The presence of English in Nigeria started when it was implemented by the Settlers Speech Community (STL) (Schneider 2007) around the early 19th century starting phase 1, foundation. As Schneider (2007) explains, the linguistic contact was only serving utilitarian purposes as both parties – settlers and indigenous communities – were not prone to establishing more cordial relations. Thus, a pidgin – later known as Nigerian English Pidgin (NigEP) – emerged which had English as its lexifier and Niger-Congo tongues as the substrate languages. Additionally, English became the lingua franca.

Once the colony of Nigeria was completely formed and established in the beginning of the 20th century, phase 2 started. The STL and the Indigenous Speech Community (IDG) (Schneider 2007) began to interact more and, consequently, interethnic relations became normal. A bilingual reality was sponsored as English became the institutional language, highlighting its economic and social power. Therefore, English turned to be the majoritarian L2 in Nigeria provoking a large influx of borrowings and a code-switching situation (Schneider 2007). In the exonormative stabilization, the variety brought by the settlers becomes the norm and local uses of the language are not encouraged.

Phase 3, as in every former British colony, started after the World War II. In this phase, the STL feels it belongs to the colony but movements in favour of independence encouraged by the IDG community start to gain prevalence. The English language becomes completely nativized as it acquired native speakers in both English and Nigerian English Pidgin (NigEP) (Schneider 2007). The language became even more dominant in institutional contexts as well as in the mass media pressuring the IDG community to acquire the STL language, English. Schneider (2007) shows how the transfer from mother tongues forces English to undergo phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical and semantic changes. The outcome would be a “corrupted” form and accent, what would be known as NigE (Schneider 2007).

In phase 4 the PCE form is recognized by codifying it, thence, reaching a linguistic homogeneity (Schneider 2007). Independence is fully achieved and the newly formed

nation becomes responsible for its language matters, accentuating the importance of “cultural self-reliance” (Schneider 2007: 48).

Lastly, in phase 5 linguistic internal differentiation starts to be heard as dialects are developed. Again, different identities will appear as in phase 1, but this time they will hold a positive connotation (Schneider 2007). As a consequence, certain linguistic forms will become representative of group membership as Schneider (2007) explains.

4. Main linguistic features of Nigerian English (NigE)

Throughout the following pages, this paper will give account of several characteristic features of Nigerian English, paying special attention to the morpho-syntactic features that make this variety distinct from the so-called StE. Additionally, the most prominent lexical and pragmatic features will be explained as well due to the distinctiveness they hold.

4.1 Morpho-syntactic features

This section is subdivided into three main sections: verbal features, nominal features and clausal features. In the first subsection, we will be looking at the most prominent verbal forms employed in NigE as well as how they differ from StE. Regarding nominal features, we will mainly see how NigE employs pronouns and articles differently. Finally, in the third subsection, we will describe some of the most notorious word orders of NigE.

4.1.1 Verbal features

4.1.1.1 Use of the progressive form

NigE speakers present a lack of differentiation between stative and non-stative verbs as it is described in Alo & Mesthrie (2004: 815). This means that both types of verbs can appear in the progressive form in this variety. Consider sentences (1) to (3) below:

(1) *I am **smelling** something burning.* (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 815)

(2) *It is **tasting** terrible.* (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 815)

(3) *We **are having** something to do.* (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 815)

NigE speakers apply the progressive form structure *be + -ing* to all the stative verbs, no matter if the verb is a perceptual stative verb or an emotional one (Alo & Mesthrie 2004).

The reason for the occurrence of this construction in the English spoken in Nigeria may reside in the influence and transfer from the mother tongue, as no difference between stative and non-stative verbs is present in Niger-Congo languages.

However, Taiwo (2013) shows that, in this variety, the progressive form *be + -ing* is extended to habitual contexts as well. Consider (4) below and notice that the progressive form is only marked by the auxiliary and by an appropriate adverb of frequency and not by both the main and auxiliary verbs:

(4) *Every Saturday, I **am** usually go to my village.* (Taiwo 2013)

Example (4) shows how NigE speakers take as progressive actions those actions that tend to be repeated over a period of time, meaning that the end of the action will not be expressed until the habit has been abandoned. Therefore, the progressive form will be the best candidate to express habitual actions in NigE.

Ajani (2001) points out to the transfer of aspects from Yoruba into English as the source for the overuse of the progressive form in NigE. English is a highly-tensed language (at least when compared to Yoruba) while Yoruba is highly marked in terms of aspect. He argues that the function of the incompletive-aspect marker *ń* is directly transferred to English, the progressive form being the nearest in the English language to express such an aspect.

Finally, I would like to point out that the four examples given and analysed are in the present tense suggesting that possibly the overextension of the progressive form may be more pervasive in the present tenses than in the past tenses. I consider it would be interesting to research whether the present progressive forms are more pervasive and, if so, what motivates such a choice.

4.1.1.2 Auxiliaries

Overall, the auxiliary verbal forms used in NigE tend to be simpler than the ones that StE makes use of. NigE speakers will tend to avoid complex verb tenses like future perfect, perfect infinitive and continuous forms of perfect tenses (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 816). Furthermore, NigE speakers favour the simple future tenses instead of verbalizing present and past continuous tenses with a future reference (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 816).

Nevertheless, and no matter the verbal time that is being used, NigE speakers will always delete the auxiliary *to be* in the progressive form as Taiwo (2013) states. Look at (5) below in order to see an illustration of this finding:

(5) *Everyone suppose to know him by now* (Taiwo 2013)
'Everyone is supposed to know him by now.'

Example (5) shows the verb *suppose* not inflected. However, it is a stative verb in StE and the use of the progressive form is extended to stative verbs in NigE. Therefore, the deletion of *be* is possible in this environment. The use of auxiliaries in NigE does not only differ in declarative sentences but in *Yes/No* questions too, as whenever the verb *to have* is used in the formulation of a question, an appropriate form of the auxiliary *do* is required in the answer (Alo & Mesthrie 2004). Look at example (6):

(6) Q: *Have you been to university of Ibadan, today?*
A: *I didn't go* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 816)

In (6) we can observe that NigE does not distinguish between past simple and present perfect suggesting that both can be used interchangeably without repercussions on the communicative situation.

Another different use of the auxiliary forms heads us to the tag formation. As Alo & Mesthrie (2004:817) point out, NigE favours the use of the invariant tag *isn't it*. NigE is not the only variety that favours the invariant tag *isn't it* as it has been found in several other varieties of English in Africa (Cameroon English) and Asia (Indian English and Singapore English) that do the same (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004; Siemund, 2013: 248).

(7) *You like that, isn't it?* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 817)

This phenomenon is not only present in countries with an English-speaking colonial past as in Welsh English (WeE) the invariable tag question *isn't it* has also been attested. Penhallurick (2004) explains that due to the transfer of the Welsh confirmatory interrogative *ydy fe?* WeE speakers will apply the tag *isn't it* irrespective of what main verb is used. Additionally, other varieties choose their own invariant tag questions.

Though the English language is subject to very strict agreement rules, these examples of the use of the invariable tag question *isn't it* in the new varieties of English emerging from language contact situations show how transfer sometimes outweighs agreement rules across clause boundaries.

4.1.1.3 Infinitives (with and without *to*)

The use of infinitives in NigE could be divided into two main groups: the dropping of *to* after certain verbs that requires its presence in other English varieties and the substitution of an *-ing* form for a *to*-infinitive (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004).

In the first category, it can be observed how some verbs provoke the loss of *to* in the following verb in complementation constructions (Alo & Mesthrie 2004). Such tendency may derive from the influence of Nigerian English Pidgin (NigEP), as this pidgin does not favour the use of infinitival forms (Faraclas 2004). Observe the dropping of *to* in (8) below:

- (8) *enable him \emptyset do it* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 818)
'enable him to do it'

Furthermore, the infinitival particle *to* is also inserted after verbs that do not allow so in StE. *Make* would be the best example that Nigerian English exhibits:

- (9) *Make her to do the work* (Alo & Mesthrie, 204: 818)
'Make her do the work'

In StE *make* takes an infinitival complement only in the passive form (*We were made to do it*), but it seems that NigE does not take voice of complement clause into account in this respect, as example (9) above has shown.

Moving onto the second category, Alo & Mesthrie (2004) describe how the construction *to* + infinitive replaces the *-ing* forms. Consider (10) and (11) below:

- (10) *Instead of him to travel home for the vacation, he was one of those who travelled to Sokoto for the sports competition.* (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 819)
'Instead of him travelling home...'
- (11) *He asserted that instead of the press to highlight that, it resorted to capitalising on his arrest.* (*The Triumph*, 1/11/1986; Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 819)
'...of the press highlighting that, ...'

We can observe a pattern in both (10) and (11), where the *to* + infinitive construction replaces the *-ing* form whenever the latter goes after the prepositional expression *instead of* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). This is a clear instance and illustration of the overgeneralization of the infinitive rules, an overgeneralization that is also present in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

4.1.1.4 Phrasal and prepositional verbs

Regarding the phrasal and prepositional verbs, NigE shows a partially different use of them. As Alo & Mesthrie (2004) explain, we encounter three different sets of usages: the first set would correspond to the addition of a preposition where there is none in StE; the second set corresponds to the absence of prepositions where a preposition in StE is expected to appear; and the third amounts to a different usage of the preposition. Examples of these uses would be those illustrated in (12) – (14) below:

(12) Set 1: *Cope up* (cope); *discuss about* (discuss) (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 824)

(13) Set 2: *dispose* (dispose for); *operate* (operate on) (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 824)

(14) Set 3: *congratulate for* (congratulate on) (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 824)

At this point I would like to point out that these “novel” uses of prepositional contexts are also common in EFL contexts since the examples above are regarded as typical deviant forms in the compositions we non-native speakers of English write for our foreign language classes.

4.1.1.5 Modal verbs

One of the most distinctive features of Nigerian society is the explicit manifestation of politeness. This is reflected in NigE too. Therefore, the respect for the listeners in the communicative situation holds a crucial importance in NigE exchanges. However, as Siemund (2013: 164) points out, the use of modal verbs related to politeness in NigE is different, as the modal verbs *will* and *want* replace *would* and *would like to* in their most typical contexts of occurrence. Therefore, the politeness that *would* and *would like* convey will be expressed in NigE by the politeness marker *please*, as in (15) (Siemund 2013):

(15) *I will be happy, if you can come, please.* (Siemund, 2013: 164; Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 815).

‘I would be happy, if you can come.’

This substitution has also been observed in some of the English varieties spoken around Nigeria, as in Ghanaian English, as well as in Scottish and Irish English where the modal *shall*¹ is substituted for by *will* (Siemund 2013).

¹ *Shall* is replaced by *will* only in the context in which the speaker makes him/herself available to do something or to keep on with an ongoing action.

4.1.2 Nominal features

4.1.2.1 Reflexive and reciprocal pronouns

A general tendency to use the plural reflexive pronouns as reciprocal is observed in the use of reflexive pronouns in NigE. Generally, the reflexive pronoun is built by putting together a plural indefinite pronoun and the *-selves* suffix. However, and as mentioned above, NigE speakers will use, for instance, *themselves* both with the reflexive and reciprocal meaning (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). Thus, the examples in (16) show the use of a reflexive pronoun with a reciprocal meaning:²

- (16) a. *Adebanjo and Suliati love **themselves**.*
‘Adebanjo and Suliati love each other.’
- b. *After greeting **ourselves**, Tolu and I started work.*
‘After greeting each other, Tolu and I started work’
- c. *James and Lanre like quarrelling with **themselves**.*
‘James and Lanre like quarrelling with one another.’

Despite the confusion these uses may seem to provoke, the context (both linguistic and extralinguistic) provides NigE speakers with the appropriate interpretation. However, this does not apply to speakers of L1 English as they may misunderstand the message.

Taiwo (2013) also describes how in coordinate subjects the reflexive pronoun *myself* substitutes for the first person singular pronoun *I*. See example (17):

- (17) *My mother and myself went for my sister’s graduation* (Taiwo 2013)

This apparently peculiar use of reflexives that we find in (17) is also attested in colloquial variants of other varieties of English including General American English (Landa, personal communication). Additionally, this substitution is not only restricted to the first person singular pronoun as Taiwo (2013) has also attested this process with the rest of the reflexive pronouns.

4.1.2.2 Resumptive pronouns

Resumptive pronouns in relative clauses are pronominal replicas of other sentence elements. For instance, *lo* and *him*, in Spanish and English respectively, in (18) and (19)

² Examples taken from Alo & Mesthrie (2004: 822).

below, are pronominal replicas in the sense that they restate the direct object (DO) of the relative clause verb:

(18) El anciano que *lo* vio mi hermano.

(19) The boy that you like *him*.

According to Alo & Mesthrie (2004), NigE permits the use of resumptive pronouns in non-subject relative constructions, as in (20) and (21) below. Linguists like Bokamba (1992) have proposed that this phenomenon has a direct connection with the interference of the speaker's mother tongue, as resumptive pronouns are supposed to be a typological characteristic of African languages (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004).

(20) *The guests whom I invited **them** have arrived* (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 818)

(21) *I know the person who **his** father has died* (Jowitt 1991: 122)

Notice that in (20) *them* marks the objective case of a nominal already expressed by *whom* (DO) and that in (21) the possessive case is indicated after a coreferential *who* (that is, *who* + *his* are equivalent to StE *whose*). Linguists have proposed that these constructions are just the outcome of language contact in general as they have been attested in different contexts without the interference of African languages. For instance, Landa (1992) describes how in Los Angeles Spanish pronominal replicas are found in relative clauses, as example (22) illustrates:

(22) *Mercedes es la negra de ella que **ella** estaba...* (Landa 1992: 211)
'Mercedes is her black that **she** was...'

Similarly, Siemund (2013: 266) argues that resumptive pronouns are encountered in varieties and languages in all continents as they are not bound to specific varieties of English. Thus, Bokamba's (1992) and Alo & Mesthrie's (2004) claim that resumptive pronouns are a typological characteristic of African languages is proved to be wrong or, rather, there is evidence that this feature is not exclusive to the languages spoken in Africa.

4.1.2.3 Articles

There is a generalized tendency in NigE to omit the definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a/an* where StE requires these types of determiners (Alo & Mesthrie 2004). We can see in (23) that both definite and indefinite articles are omitted indistinctively in NigE:

(23) Ø *Depreciating value of the naira and Ø increase in Ø cost of wheat in the international market have been identified.*

In the first and third omissions, the definite article *the* is avoided, whereas in the second one we could argue that either the definite *the* or the indefinite *an* are omitted. Although articles seem to be omitted quite freely, notice that the speaker uses the correct zero form of *wheat*, and does not omit two other definite articles (*the naira* and *the international market*) (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). Therefore, it is not clear whether the omission of both definite and indefinite articles follows a specific pattern or rule. However, Jowitt (1991) identifies the existence of a general tendency among NigE speakers to drop the indefinite article in a particular environment, regardless of the variety of NigE they speak (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). These authors paraphrase Jowitt's (1991) words and refer to "(...) a tendency (...) to drop the indefinite article before a singular countable noun functioning as the object of certain high-frequency and semantically full verbs" (Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 820).

As the use of articles shows so much variability in EFL too (as the unwanted omissions and hypercorrections we make prove), I believe it would be interesting to research whether any parallelisms can be established between the contexts that trigger these phenomena in EFL, ESL and the new varieties of English.

As regards the indefinite article *a/an* in NigE, there is a kind of variability in its use that is also reminiscent of other phenomena we find in EFL discourse, that is, the use of *one* as the equivalent of *a* as well as replacement of *a* by *the* (Alo & Mesthrie 2004), as in (24):

(24) *Gari is **one** man who does not tell lies, he calls **the** spade a spade* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 820)

Notice in (24) that the ordinal numeral *one* is used as an equivalent of the indefinite article *a*.

4.1.2.4 Lack of class differentiation

The omission of both indefinite and definite articles in some contexts but not in others and the confusion between the numeral *one* and the indefinite *a/an* show a problem related to the impossibility of establishing a proper class differentiation. By a lack of class differentiation we mean the use of generic nouns from StE as plural forms in NigE or treating mass and abstract nouns as count nouns (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004).

Nigerian English treats mass and abstract noncount nouns as if they were count nouns. Therefore, it is not surprising to find *furnitures, informations, gossips* or *evidences* referring to more than one piece of whatever mass meaning these nouns have in StE (Alo & Mesthrie 2004). Similarly, generic nouns that cannot have a plural form in StE have a plural form in NigE, e.g. *the poors* or *the blinds*. This is a result of applying the rules of regular nominal plural formation to irregular nouns, again, a process found in many EFL contexts.

I would like to state that the different uses of articles may be the phenomenon that triggers treating generic nouns as plural forms or noncount nouns as count nouns. As in some cases no distinction is made as regards the qualities of the noun, NigE speakers will resort to overgeneralizing the plural formation rules.

4.1.3 Clausal features

4.1.3.1 Subordination and coordination

Alo & Mesthrie (2004) list a particular use of subordinate conjunctions in NigE, as the use of double conjunctions is favoured in this variety over simple conjunctions. Jowitt (1991) explains how the subordinate clause carries a subordinate conjunction while the main clause carries a coordinating conjunction. Therefore, examples like (25) below are commonly found both in the daily speech of speakers and in newspapers:

(25) *Although he is rich but he is stingy* (Jowitt, 1991: 123; Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 819)

Similarly, NigE has introduced some innovations regarding the construction and form of conjunctions. As Alo & Mesthrie (2004) state, NigE favours the combination of StE related conjunctions. Thus, utterances like (26) are common in this variety too:

(26) *Though he was instructed about what to do, still yet, he made some mistakes.* (Taiwo 2013)

Notice that in StE only one of the conjunctions would be used in a similar linguistic context.

4.1.3.2 Left Dislocation

Left dislocation is a construction in which a sentence element is fronted while leaving a coreferential pronominal replica behind. It is a common information packaging construction in English (Ward, Birner & Huddleston, 2002):

(27) *Mami_i John saw her_i yesterday.*

In NigE, left dislocations are so commonly used that both simple and complex NPs can appear on the topic position (Alo & Mesthrie 2004), as illustrated in (28), (29) and (30):

(28) [*The politicians and their supporters*]_i, *they_i don't often listen to advice.*
(Bamgbose 1982: 155; Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 823)

(29) [*A person who has no experience*]_i, *can he_i be a good leader?*
(Bamgbose 1982: 155; Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 823)

(30) [*The students*]_i *they_i are demonstrating again.*
(Bamgbose 1982: 155; Alo & Mesthrie 2004: 823)

In sentences (28) and (29) we have complex NP subjects in the topic position: in the former a coordinated NP while in the latter a complex NP (i.e. an NP containing a relative clause) (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). On the other hand, (30) shows a simple NP in the topic position.

4.1.3.3 Reduplication

Reduplication refers to the repetition of a word, phrase or construction. In NigE it can be used with the aim of emphasizing a concept or creating a nuance (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). This phenomenon is directly triggered by the influence of languages like Yoruba, a language in which reduplication is a grammatical device to convey different types of emphasis. However, this strategy is not only exclusive to NigE as it has been observed in other languages like Basque, where reduplication expresses some sort of emphasis or intensity.³

In the case of NigE, adjectives and adverbs are the main categories affected by reduplication. Consider (31) - (33):

³ Examples of lexical reduplication in Basque would be *gorri-gorria* “very red” or *banan-banan* “one by one”. Furthermore, in Basque Spanish (BqSp), due to the influence of the Basque language, BaSp speakers will reduplicate adjectives to show emphasis as in *rubio-rubio* “very blond”. General Spanish uses other types of reduplication to convey different nuances: *señor-señor* “a gentleman”, *abogado-abogado* “a serious lawyer”, etc. Own examples and translations.

- (31) *He likes to talk about **small-small** things.* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 825)
 ‘He likes to talk about insignificant things.’
- (32) *My friend **before-before**...* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 825)
 ‘My former friend...’
- (33) *Tell Mr Bello to come **now-now*** (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 825)
 ‘Tell Mr Bello to come at once.’

In (31) and (33) it can be seen that the speaker is putting an extra emphasis on the lack of importance and in the urgency with which the speaker wants the action to be carried out. In contrast in (32) the speaker is creating a nuance, implying that his/her friend are no longer in contact.

4.1.3.4 Determiner + N + possessive order

As explained in section 3, languages indigenous to Nigeria have exerted a large and incessant influence on the English spoken in that country. Apart from being visible in the lexis and the syntax, this impact is also apparent in word order. For instance, whenever a demonstrative pronoun and a possessive pronoun co-occur in the same NP, NigE speakers with a L1 of a Bantu background will follow the Bantu word order rule of determiner + N + possessive (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). Besides, this rule functions as a parameter for the family of Bantu languages, therefore, it will not only wield influence on Nigerian English but on the several English varieties in the area of West Africa as well (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). Observe (34):

- (34) *I met **the teacher our new*** (Bokamba 1992: 133; Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 823)
 ‘I met our new teacher.’

In (34) the adjective is placed in a postnominal position. Now, it is interesting to point out that the application of the Bantu word order rule is not obligatory. Consider (35) and (36) below:

- (35) ***That your brother**, will he come?* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 823)
 ‘Will your brother come?’
- (36) *Saying Amen to **those his prayers**...* (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004:823)
 ‘saying Amen to prayers/those prayers of his...’

Notice that the possessive can be either preposed, as in (35) and (36), or postposed, as in (34). Additionally, (35) illustrates the left-dislocated construction mentioned above.

4.2 Lexical features

Once a thorough description of the main morpho-syntactic characteristics has been presented, the paper will shift its focus now to the most prominent lexical features that NigE shows. The focus will be placed upon the semantic expansion and shift in meaning that English words have suffered in NigE. Additionally, a detailed account will be presented of the borrowings from the main native Niger-Congo languages spoken in Nigeria today that tell the NigE speaking community apart from the rest of English varieties spoken across the globe.

4.2.1 Semantic expansion and shift, euphemisms and idioms

Several English terms used daily have widened their meaning in NigE (Alo & Mesthrie 2004). There is the possibility of organizing these words according to their semantic field as Alo & Mesthrie (2004: 825-826) do. Kinship terms, expressions of sympathy or politeness and association of anatomical terms with a spiritual meaning are the most recurrent subdivisions used to explain the semantic expansion in this variety. However, linguists like Bamiro (1991b) and Ebunlola Adamo (2007) also include the semantic expansion of verbs used daily that have acquired a secondary meaning to reflect the corrupt scenario that Nigeria is enduring. Nonetheless, kinship terms and expressions of sympathy and politeness will be further analysed in section 4.3 devoted to pragmatic features.

Semantic expansion also reflects how different societies see the world. As Akere (1982:90) explains, differences in cultural categorization and social norms between the British and Nigerian societies have led to lexical and semantic distinctions between the varieties spoken by both of them. We shall take the so-called “bribery and corruption verbs” (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 825) as an example of this. As Akere (1982), Bamiro (1991b) and Alo & Mesthrie (2004) describe, the way Nigerian society has been constructed has influenced the development of the English language. Common words like *eat*, *deliver* and *understand* have experienced a semantic expansion meaning also ‘embezzle’, ‘fix/rig an election’ and ‘to be ready to offer a bribe’ respectively (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004: 825-26). In addition to words obtaining new meanings, new euphemisms have emerged (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004). Other expressions would be *to see someone* ‘using one’s position to influence another person’ or *settle* ‘to offer gratification of one form or another in order to win favour, bribe’ (Ebunlola Adamo, 2007: 45). As expected, the

unceaseable corruption that has been hitting the country since its independence has turned these new expressions into part of NigE’s daily vocabulary. This is expected since, as Akere (1982: 98) says, “the sociolinguistic reality is that Nigerian English cannot but exhibit features of the cultural life and of the pattern of social behaviour of the people who use it”.

Apart from the aforementioned verbs of bribery and euphemisms, regular words like *globe* ‘light bulb’, *corner* ‘bend in the road’, *overload* (N) ‘an excess of passengers or goods carried by a vehicle’, *station* ‘the place where one works’ or *machine* ‘a motor cycle’ are other useful examples of semantic shift and expansion (Bamiro 1991b: 12-13; Ebunlola Adamo, 2007: 44-45).

Nigerian English has proved to be a rich variety when it comes to changing the form of some expressions and developing new idioms (Bamiro, 1991b). The list in (37) gives account of it:⁴

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| (37) a. <i>been-to</i> | ‘one who has been abroad on an extended stay’ |
| b. <i>big/senior boys</i> | ‘men who are rich and influential’ |
| c. <i>cash madam</i> | ‘wealthy woman’ |
| d. <i>bottom power</i> | ‘undue influence of females using sex’ |
| e. <i>to take in</i> | ‘to be pregnant’ |
| f. <i>long leg</i> | ‘use of undue influence to reach a goal’ |
| g. <i>national cake</i> | ‘the common wealth belonging to all Nigerians’ |

Briefly said, we can observe how the English language has been influenced and transformed into a variety that meets the local necessities and ways of expressing the concepts that the Nigerian society makes use of.

4.2.2 Borrowings and loan translations

As English was imposed over indigenous languages, the latter have directly influenced the English lexis. Research has been mainly focused on the Yoruba influence as shown by the borrowings and loan translations presented here. These borrowings show the need to make up for the lack of Nigerian everyday life concepts in the English language (Bamgbose 1982; Ebunlola Adamo 2007). Due to the vast richness this area offers, only the most remarkable examples will be given so as to illustrate the importance

⁴ All the following examples have been taken from Bamiro (1991b: 13) and Alo & Mesthrie (2004: 827).

of borrowings in Nigerian English. See the following NigE expressions in (38) along with their StE translation:⁵

(38) a. <i>to take the light</i> (Yoruba origin)	‘to make a power cut’
b. <i>adajaki, oba</i>	‘chieftaincy titles’
c. <i>agbada</i> (Yoruba origin)	‘a kind of flowing dress for men’
d. <i>akara</i>	‘beancake’
e. <i>abaranrigo</i> (Hausa origin)	‘a kind of long, loose dress for men’
f. <i>bolekaija</i>	‘a bus with tightly packed seats’
g. <i>danfo, okada</i>	‘a mode of transportation’

These borrowings are a proof of a different conceptualization of reality, as they are mainly related to the national folklore. Furthermore, code-mixing situations have also led to borrowings as (38a) shows. The expression *to take the light* is a direct translation from Yoruba that shows how the Yoruba people conceive a power cut as someone depriving them from a basic element for living and not just an accidental event.

4.3 Pragmatic features

Another linguistic rich spot deriving from this contact situation is related to the pragmatic features Nigerian English shows. A mixture between local traditional customs and English has derived in a series of interesting ways of greeting people and in the semantic expansion of English kinship terms.

4.3.1 Greetings and Politeness

Within the cultures native to Nigeria, greetings hold an enormous importance. As Akere (1982: 91) explains:

“Among the Yoruba people and many other cultural groups in the country, greetings are more than mere instances of phatic communion, or openings for establishing social interaction. In the indigenous cultures, there are greetings for almost every sphere of activity.”

The greetings formulae used in NigE have been taken from the English language, as direct translations from native languages into English are not possible. Therefore, NigE speakers will choose the nearest translations in English (Akere: 1982: 92). Examples of these greetings would be *you are welcome/welcome* used to greet someone coming back

⁵ The following examples have been taken from Bamgbose (1982: 335), Alo & Mesthrie (2004: 826) and Ebunlola Adamo 2007: 44).

from a journey, *sorry* whose meaning has been expanded to signify ‘sympathy or pity for almost every kind of accident’ or *congratulations* employed to congratulate a person even on the smallest kind of achievement (Akere 1982). Besides, special greeting forms are used in special occasions closely related to religion (Akere 1982).

Similarly, greetings are related to politeness. In Nigerian traditional societies, and in Nigeria overall, the age and status of the interlocutors have a vital importance. Therefore, greetings are going to be based on the respect showed towards the elder groups of society or the people that hold important roles in the community – teachers, officials or the chiefs of the traditional communities (Akere 1982). Thus, we find that the forms *good morning, good evening, good afternoon, good night* are used in their full form when a young interlocutor is talking to an older one (Akere 1982). Together with this, *hello, hi, how are you* are used from an old interlocutor to a younger one but not the other way around (Akere 1982).

4.3.2 Kinship terms

The Nigerian conception of family differs from those present in the rest of English-speaking countries and especially from the one(s) in Anglophone Western countries, that being the reason for the different use of several kinship terms in Nigerian English. As Akere (1982) explains, the more complex organization of the pattern of kinship relationships and the kinship categorization of the several cultures living together have made the traditional kinship terms to get wider semantic features. As families in Nigeria would be traditional, polygamous or extended, each of them would have their own terms (Akere 1982). Concepts like *mother, father, brother, sister* are used address to the member of a traditional family or to refer to distant people, without any kind of relation to the family of the speaker or the participant used as reference (Akere 1982).

5. Discussion

The analysis of the features of NigE has thrown some very clear findings. Regarding the nature of the characteristics analysed, it has been found that some of these features resemble mistakes produced by English speakers in EFL classroom contexts. Instances of this are the different use of the articles, phrasal and prepositional verbs or the lack of class differentiation between count and noncount nouns. If we were to follow Okoro (2000), we would describe these novel uses of the language as a corrupted form that should be avoided in favour of StE and we would also deny the existence of NigE as

an English variety in its own right. However, these uses do not account for a current EFL reality in Nigeria as English has been nativized in that country. Therefore, the question rises of why such similarities between NigE and EFL mistakes exist. The way English was introduced into the country during the colonial era is the best candidate to explain such parallelisms, as English was acquired and taught as a foreign language (FL) in Nigeria. As it is common in EFL contexts, the L2 English speakers did not enjoy the possibility of interacting actively with native speakers, thus, resorting to overgeneralizing the English rules they knew and fossilizing these uses commonly referred to as mistakes in EFL handbooks.

Similarly, we have noticed how some morpho-syntactic features are common to several English varieties, revealing some parallelisms among PCEs emerging from EFL contexts regardless of their geographical location and the language(s) English has been in contact with. English has shifted from an EFL context to an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) contexts in Nigeria and these countries due to the use of the language as a lingua franca facilitating communication between speakers of different L1s. Seidlholfer (2005) and Swan (2012) claim that the speakers of ELF refuse to conform to the norms of native English varieties while keeping linguistic traits representative of their L1. Thus, the patterns or tendencies that we have found would correspond to patterns found in ELF contexts. In this paper, the use of invariant tag question *isn't it* is the main parallelism encountered (present in Africa, Asia and Europe). Moreover, we also should bear in mind that many ELF speakers were once EFL speakers as English was introduced as a FL in their respective countries, thus also accounting for the existence of shared features across PCEs resembling EFL uses.

The characteristics mentioned in this paper show that NigE is simplifying the morphological aspect of the English language despite the simplicity that StE morphology already exhibits. This is especially prominent in the case of verbal morphology in NigE, as the use of the progressive form shows. Thus, we can describe NigE as an English variety that exhibits more complexity at the syntactic level than morphologically speaking, and this is probably a reflection of the languages with which English is in contact in Nigeria. Even though some morphological distinctions are reduced and simplified, NigE makes use of external lexical markers, like temporal adverbs, to convey the information that has been left out, and that is morphologically expressed in other varieties of English. Linked to this, Thomason & Kaufman (1988) describe how the nature

of the contact situation results in a different linguistic outcome. In their opinion, in a language contact situation two mechanisms of interference exist that compromise the linguistic outcome directly: interference deriving from an imperfect group learning during the process and interference resulting from the borrowing of linguistic features. Applying this theory to the case of NigE, a possible imperfect learning of English due to the complex sociolinguistic scenario and a massive borrowing from Nigerian indigenous languages into English has resulted in a morphologically simpler English variety. Nonetheless, syntactic features tend to be more accessible to transfer than morphological features.⁶ This outcome may also be due to the typology of the languages from which features were transferred into English. The majority of features explained in section 4.1 are of Yoruba origin, an analytic language whose morphology is very reduced.

Finally, the last finding that we have witnessed is how the majority of the features explained in the paper come from a Yoruba-English contact situation. This poses a problem when it comes to the description of the general characteristics of NigE, as English has not only been in contact with Yoruba in Nigeria. We can argue that is in an overgeneralization to represent NigE with only characteristics that are deriving from a Yoruba-English situation when more than 500 languages are spoken within Nigeria's borders. Therefore, I personally believe that more research is needed to determine to the level to which the rest of the contact situations have influenced the development of NigE as well as to observe if there are morpho-syntactic features representative of NigE of a non-Yoruba origin.

6 Conclusions

As observed, the colonial past of the country has deeply influenced the development of the English language in Nigeria. Due to how it was introduced and established in the country, NigE was regarded as a list of erroneous uses of the language. However, we have seen that NigE truly is a variety in its own right. A desire to differ themselves from both their colonial past and their colonizers has driven the NigE speakers to embrace their characteristic use of the English language. NigE has shifted from an EFL context to an ELF context, where the focus is placed upon the understanding of the

⁶ Notice, for instance, that in the context of contact between Basque and Spanish it is much more likely for there to be a transfer from one language to the other in terms of word order (thus producing SVO sentences in Basque or SOV sentences in Spanish when not expected) than in terms of inflectional morphology (i.e. we would not expect to find Ergative marker *-(a)k* in Spanish or nominal plural marker *-s* in Basque).

message between speech communities of different L1s and not upon a correct use of the language copying what StE dictates as proper English. Similarly, we can claim that what many linguists have described as mistakes have hindered neither interaction nor understanding from happening. This constitutes another crucial piece of evidence to argue in support of the existence of NigE.

The colonial past mentioned in the first paragraph has also been pivotal to the establishment of the NigE features explained in this paper. The fact that the contact-situation started before in the coastal areas – where Yoruba is mainly spoken – has determined the Yoruba domination in the development of NigE. This means that the English spoken by the Yoruba people will potentially become the Standard Nigerian English (StNigE) in the future. However, the linguist community in Nigeria has not been able to reach an agreement regarding the formation of StNigE and an uncertain future is in NigE's horizon.

Another conclusion that we reach to is how the typology of the contact languages plays a pivotal role in the development of the contact variety. In this case, a language contact situation between two analytic languages – note that Yoruba-English has been the most studied contact context in Nigeria – has resulted in difficulties in the transfer of the Yoruba morphological aspects into English, especially in inflection (Yoruba makes use of aspect markers while English uses inflectional bound morphemes). Therefore, we can conclude the existence of a correlation between the typological distance and the simplicity/complexity of the morphology in the final product of the contact situation.

As a final thought, I would like to say that the globalized world that we are living in today has influenced the field of language contact as well. NigE is a variety that has emerged from 'face-to-face' (Mair 2013) contact. However, nowadays the impact of technology and media has changed the dynamic that motivates language contact situations and makes it possible to encounter contact situations in a non-physical environment. This poses new challenges to the future of NigE, as its status is on play – will NigE features manage to become globalised? Will NigE get in contact with other varieties of English and suffer modifications? What is certain is that the linguist community is witnessing the birth of a global non-standard variety of English as Mair (2013) points out, where features of several non-standard varieties like NigE become mingled with each other.

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