



Features of Nigerian English in “Everything Good Will Come” by Sefi Atta

Hussaini Ibrahim Kaoje^{1*}, Mukhtar Mohammed², Hassan Ibrahim Kaoje³

¹Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria

²Waziri Umaru Federal Polytechnic, Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State, Nigeria

³M.A. Student (Literature in English), Department of English and Literary Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

***Corresponding Author**
Hussaini Ibrahim Kaoje
Department of English and
Literary Studies, Federal
University, Gusau, Zamfara
State, Nigeria

Article History
Received: 20.01.2024
Accepted: 27.02.2024
Published: 03.03.2024

Abstract: This article is directed to study "Features of Nigerian English" in Everything Will Come by Sefi Atta. The English known as Nigerian English (NE) is a variety of English that stands between Pidgin (a grammatically simplified form of a language with elements taken from local languages, used for communication between people not sharing a common language) and the world's standard English. The English used in West Africa reveals varying degrees of vernacular influences at the morphological, syntactic and semantic levels; as well as at the phonological level of spoken and written English. And that may be the reason why in many novels written by Nigerians, we notice some vernacular languages and some forms of deviation in the above-mentioned aspects which all together can be termed as "Nigerian English". The study uses a descriptive research design and the theories adopted are New Criticism and Russian Formalism.

Keywords: Nigerian English (NE), Standard Nigerian English (SNE), Standard British English (SBE), Nativised, Indigenised, Vernacular languages.

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INTRODUCTION

It is now commonplace to say that languages change over time and space (Aitchison, 1981) and that this change is, indeed, an essential characteristic of human language. The view that a language should be fixed and unchanging for all time is now thoroughly discredited. The situation we are describing here is common in many former British colonial territories, among them, for example, Anglophone Africa, the Indian sub-continent, Malta and Singapore. In these environments, English may be used for any or all official purposes, such as policing, military activities, civil service, etc. English may also be the medium of education for any or all levels of state and/or private education.

The spread of English can be attributed to the colonization of Asia and Africa, which led to the development of 'New Englishes', the second language variety of English. Currently, there are approximately 75 territories where English is spoken either as a first language (L1) or as an unofficial or institutionalized

second language (L2) in fields such as government, law and education. It is difficult to establish the total number of English in the world, as new varieties of English are constantly being discovered.

Therefore, apart from the standard British and American English, there are other sub-varieties spoken around the world such as Indian English, Scottish English, Caribbean English, Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian English, African-American English, South African English, Ghanaian English and of course a 'Nigerian English'. All these varieties, Nigerian English inclusive are to a greater extent 'nativised' and 'indigenised' to suit the communicative needs of their respective environments.

MAJOR DISCUSSIONS

The Concept of 'Nigerian English (NE)'

The concept of 'Nigerian English' or 'Nigerian English usage' refers to English in Nigeria-one of the varieties of world standard English since it

Citation: Hussaini Ibrahim Kaoje, Mukhtar Mohammed, Hassan Ibrahim Kaoje (2024). Features of Nigerian English in "Everything Good Will Come" by Sefi Atta. *Glob Acad J Linguist Lit*; Vol-6, Iss-2 pp-47-52.

is one of the many general and complete language systems used by a substantial number of people. This system also possesses characteristics that differentiate it from other varieties of English spoken around the world.

'Nigerian English' is loosely referred to as 'a variety of English spoken in Nigeria, which has international intelligibility and acceptability and could serve as a model for use in Nigeria. The character of Nigerian English is that it has been 'nativised', 'localised', 'indigenised' and 'Nigerianised' because it has stayed in the country performing every kind of function in our national life.

Jowitt (2000) in this vein opines: "The 'Nigerian English' is the mixture of standard form and the popular Nigerian forms, which are in turn consisting of errors and variants. It is not evidence of imperfect learning but signs of healthy acculturation. This kind of English has common core features and indexical markers peculiar to this variety alone.

Nigerian English is a variety of English which has often been suggested to differ significantly from other varieties of English, especially in the area of prosody. Significant differences were found in speech rhythm, where 'Nigerian English' groups between West African languages: Anyi, Ega and Ibibio and British English.

Furthermore, Nigerian English syllable structure is different from that of British English, and the tonal structure of Nigerian English is more similar to that of a tone language than an intonation language. The phrase 'Nigerian English' has appeared in the last four decades or so.

According to Ogu (1992, Walsh, 1967) was among the first to draw attention to the existence of a variety of EL (English) known as 'Nigerian English (NE)'. Ogu quoted Walsh as saying, that:

"The varieties of English spoken by educated Nigerians, no matter what their language, have enough features in common to mark off a general type, which may be called 'Nigerian English' (1992:88)".

Bokomba (1982, 1991) recognized the existence of a 'Nigerian English' and referred to it as a variety of what he called 'West African Vernacular English (WAVE)'. Similarly, Jibril (1982) saw NE as part of the continuum of 'West African English'. Akere (1982) likewise, spoke of the emergence of a 'Standard Nigerian English' Odumuh (1987, 993) recognized 'Nigerian English' as one of the new Englishes and had this to say:

"Our position is that there exists at the moment a single superordinate variety of

Standard English in Nigeria, which can be recognized as a 'Nigerian English'".

Some Major Features of Nigerian English (NE)

'Nigerian English' has some features that are peculiar to the variety alone. These features or characteristics can be syntactic (i.e. grammatical), Lexico-Semantic and phonological and they differ considerably from those features of the Standard British English (SBE).

The Syntactic Features of Nigerian English

Among the syntactic features of NE are:

Reduplication: Kachru (1982) noted that there is an element of 'reduplication' in NE and this comes as a result of emphasis, pluralisation or to creation of new meanings. Bobda (1994:258) has rightly identified three categories of words, which generally undergo the process of 'reduplication': numerals, intensifiers and quantifiers; e.g:

NE: Please drive slowly because the road is bad.

SBE: Please drive very slowly because the road is bad.

NE: Those are simple jobs to do.

SBE: Those are very simple jobs to do.

NE: Give me half a bag of rice and beans.

SBE: Give me half a bag each of rice and beans.

NE: He is busy building big houses.

SBE: He is busy building several big houses.

The above examples indicate how Nigerian speakers of English make unnecessary reduplications or duplications in their daily conversations to create new meanings, emphasise or for the sake of pluralisation.

Subject less Sentences

NE: Is very far (SBE: It is very far).

NE: Is about ten dollars (SBE: It is about ten dollars).

NE: Is the woman (SBE: It is the woman), etc

In this regard, the above examples show that Nigerian English users frequently use sentences that neither have nouns nor pronouns (i.e. subjects of a sentence (s)).

Wrong use of Pronouns

NE: It is him who did it.

SBE: It is he who did it.

NE: Me and you know that.

SBE: You and I know that.

NE: It was them.

SBE: It was they, etc.

Lexico-Semantics (Morphological) Features of NE

The lexico-semantics or morphological features of Nigerian English comprise some loan words and coinages that are peculiar and understood by the speakers of Nigerian English (NE) alone.

Loan/Borrowed Words

Borrowing is a sociolinguistic situation in which a word or phrase which has been taken from one language is used in another language. When borrowing is a single word, it is called a loan word (Adeyanju 1986). A loan word is a word taken over from one language into the vocabulary of another language (Garba 1979). This transfer of words, phrases or even ideas from one language to another is technically called borrowing.

Similarly, borrowing is of two types, namely: direct and indirect borrowing. Direct borrowing is a situation whereby a word is carried directly from one language and used in another language without changing the morphological, phonological and semantic aspects of the word, e.g the word 'wahala' is directly borrowed from an indigenous Hausa language into Nigerian English (NE) where it retains its original meaning.

On the other hand, indirect borrowing is a situation whereby a language borrows a particular word from another language after which another language (a third language) also borrows the same word into its usage. That is to say, language B borrowed from language A and later on language C borrowed the same word from language B. For example, the word 'Mallam' (originally 'Mu'allim) was borrowed from Arabic by the Hausa language and later Nigerian English (NE) borrowed the same word into its lexemes and there is a little modification in its morphology.

Moreover, the English language itself in the Nigerian context has been nativised or Nigerianised; to suit the societal needs and the environment. Bakomba (1979) calls NE, a nativised and Africanised English, while Kachru (1982, 1986) calls it an institutionalized variety of English.

Moreover, the English language itself in the Nigerian context has been nativised or Nigerianised; to suit the societal needs and the environment. Bakomba (1979) calls NE, a nativised and Africanised English, while Kachru (1982, 1986) calls it an institutionalized variety of English.

Alo (1998) has outlined some devices used by African writers to reflect local or indigenous nuances in their styles viz: Coinages, borrowing, the use of native similes and metaphors, the transfer of rhetorical devices from native languages, the translation of native proverbs, idioms, the use of culturally dependent speech styles, the use of syntactic devices and deviation, Code-switching and code-mixing, transliteration, among others.

According to Omodiaogbe (2010), most deviations and innovations in Nigerian English (NE) are found in the vocabulary. Igboanusi (2002) in 'The Nigerian English Dictionary' has documented many lexical items that are peculiar to Nigerian English such as AFA, abiku, ashewo, Shakira, wahala, big chic, K- leg, egunje, jambite, Kia-kia bus, okada, security man, etc.

Nigerian English speakers have also created new lexical items, compounds and phrases made up of restructured English materials such as bed sheet (BrE: sheet), off-head (BrE: by heart/off-hand), half-naked (BrE: half-dressed), luxurious bus (BrE: luxury bus), last but not the least (BrE: last but not least), You and me (BrE: you and I), etc.

Nigerian English (NE) coinages

Chewing-stick, Pounded-yam, Ghana-must-go, Egusi-soup, Hand-bag, Bush-meat, Kiakia-bus, Go-slow, Motor-park, etc.

The coinages or compound words above are parts of Nigerian English that are either wrongly combined a mixture of an English word with an indigenous word (i.e.Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) like in the case of 'Egusi-Soup' where 'Egusi' is a Yoruba name for certain plant while 'soup' is an English word. So also, 'Kiakia-bus', where the word 'Kia Kia' means 'fast' in the Yoruba language while 'bus' in English is a large vehicle in which people are driven or conveyed from one place to another. The coinage is made to mean a 'fast-bus' in 'Nigerian English' (NE).

Pluralisation of mass/non-count nouns

Loads, Luggages, Equipments, Furniture, Machines, Informations, etc.

In the Nigerian English context, the above non-count nouns are considered count nouns hence the addition of 's' to them to signify pluralisation.

The phonological features of Nigerian English

The regional variations in English in Nigeria are embedded mainly in the spoken form of the language. The greatest influence on the pronunciation of English by Nigerians is from the sound systems of the regional languages.

According to Bamgbose (1971), most of the phonetic characteristics in the English of Nigerians can be traced to the transfer of features from their local languages. An example of such a typical feature is that Igbo speakers of English, even well-educated ones, tend to transfer the vowel system of their language into English. They usually pronounce /folio/ for the word 'follow' instead of /foləu/ because the sequence of /o/ in two successive syllables is not permissible in Igbo. The Igbo speakers

of English are also fond of pronouncing /problem/ for the word 'problem' instead of /probleim/ thus replacing /r/ with /l/.

Hausa speakers of English tend to replace /p/ with /f/ in words like 'people' 'problem' 'pyramid' and so on. They tend to pronounce /fi:fl/, /problem/, /from/. They also tend to insert a vowel between a syllable-final consonant and the initial consonant of an immediately following syllable. For instance, /rezigineifn/ instead of /rezigneifn/ for the word 'resignation'. In the same way, Hausa speakers of English also realise the dental fricatives /t/ and /d/ as /s/ and /z/ which are alveolar fricatives. They tend to pronounce /sin/ instead of /θin/ for the word 'thin' and /ze/ instead of /ðə/ for the word 'the'. An interesting example according to Bamgbose (1971) is the case of the phonemic distinction between /i:/ and /i/ as in 'seat' and 'sit', 'bead' and 'bid'.

Most Yoruba speakers of English do not make this distinction because it does not exist in their first language. Also, they generally nasalized English vowels, which are preceded by nasal consonants, for example, they pronounce /morin/ instead of /mɔ:niŋ/ for the word 'morning'. Some other variations in English are due to Yoruba dialectal interference. For example, an Ekiti speaker of English usually pronounces /faɪld/ instead of /tʃaɪld/ for the word 'child' while an Ibadan or Ijesha speaker of English usually pronounces /sua/ instead of /juə/ for the word 'sure'.

Generally, most Yoruba speakers of English pronounce the following words faultily: /feri/ instead of /veri/ for the word 'very' /tɔ:t/ instead of /θɔ:t/ for the word 'thought', /deə/ instead of /ðeə/ for the word 'there' etc. All these are because the phonemes /v/, /θ/ and /ð/ are not present in Yoruba phonology; they tend to replace these sounds with others that are near to them in Yoruba phonology.

Some Manifestations of Nigerian English in *Everything Good Will Come* by Sefi Atta

Here, some features of Nigerian English in the above-mentioned novel are presented and analysed under the following sub-headings: Pidgin-influenced structures, faulty structures, subjectless sentences, reduplication, misspelling and mispronunciation, Nigerian coinages, loan/borrowed words, verbless sentences, among others.

Pidgin-Influenced Structures

According to LaretoToad (1984), a pidgin is a marginal language which arises to fulfil certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common linguistic denominator-especially when two or more people speaking mutually unintelligible languages come in contact. It cannot

therefore be regarded as mere jargon or a bastardised version of standard language. Some examples of these structures from the novel are:

NE: "Instead you gave me wahala" (SBE: "Instead you gave me trouble") p.15.

NE: "Oyinbo pepper" (SBE: "Whiteman's pepper") p.29.

NE: "If you eat-ee pepper" (SBE: "If you eat pepper") p.29.

NE: "You go yellow more-more" (SBE: "You will become very white") p.56.

NE: "I still have a pretty face, abi?" (SBE: "I still have a pretty face, isn't it?") p.59.

NE: "You and your boyfriend sha!" (SBE: "Anyway! You and your boyfriend") p.59.

NE: "She was wearing a yellow agbada" (SBE: "She was wearing a yellow outfit") p.98.

NE: "Kabu-kabu and Danfo" (SBE: "A commercial motorcycle and a bus") p.101.

NE: "Chief Bakare done die" (SBE: "Chief Bakare has died") P.104.

NE: "God no go vex" (SBE: "God will not be angry") p.107.

NE: "He's Obatala" (SBE: "He is the Yoruba god of creation") p.114.

NE: "Who dat?" (SBE: "Who is that?") p. 114.

NE: "Aburo, the artist has judged you" (SBE: "My younger sister/brother, the artist has charmed/cast a spell on you") p. 130.

NE: "Drive his wife commit" (SBE: "He drives his wife away") p. 139.

NE: "What's laughing you laugh?" (SBE: "Why are you laughing?") p. 162.

NE: "Obirin meta" (SBE: "Three women") p. 182.

NE: "Sanu, Madam 'he said,' Sanu Mallam." (SBE: "Good day/you are welcome Madam, 'he said, good day/welcome Sir," I replied") p. 198.

NE: "How - for- do?" (SBE: "How do you do?") P. 205.

NE: "Nawa, can't you children take pity on me?" (SBE: "Oh! Can't you children take pity on me?") P. 229.

NE: "Sistah, why did you stop like that?" (SBE: "Sister, why do you stop like that?") p. 236.

NE: "Who told you that?" common, common. (SBE: "Who told you that? Go away") p. 236.

NE: "Sistah, you no fear?" (SBE: "Sister, don't you fear/ are you not afraid?") p. 236.

NE: "Begin to go" (SBE: "Start moving/going") P. 236.

NE: "Why did you not talk before?" (SBE: "Why didn't you talk before?") p. 236.

From the above structures, it can be understood that the author has resorted to mixing direct borrowings of words like abi?, Obatala, Agbada etc, from her Yoruba mother tongue with English words which made the structures Pidgin-influenced structures. Also, most of these words came from the domains of question tags, clothing as well as other indigenous products.

Faulty Structures

These are the structures (i.e phrases, clauses and sentences) that are considered not in conformity with the grammar of Standard British English, examples:

NE: 'Me and my grandma!' (SBE: 'My grandma and I') P. 19.

NE: 'It's you?' (SBE: 'Is it you?') p. 94.

NE: 'Man mi.' (SBE: 'My man') p. 121.

NE: 'And you dudu' (SBE: 'And you black') p. 137.

NE: 'Me and you' (SBE: 'You and I') P. 170.

NE: 'You can speak the language?' (SBE: 'Can you speak the language?') p. 187.

NE: 'Should-in case' (SBE: Either 'should or in case') p. 274.

The above structures are regarded faulty hence having features of Nigerian English because of the way the author, probably for artistic reasons misuses some pronouns, adopts some indigenous words and reverses the normal way of forming a question in English grammar – that is inverting the auxiliaries.

Subject less sentences (Ellipsis)

The following are some examples of subject less sentences from *Everything Good Will Come*:

NE: 'Hope our boys finish them off; (SBE: 'I hope our boys finish them off;') p. 13.

NE: 'Serve you right' (SBE: 'He/she serves you right') p. 16.

NE: 'Depends how you look at it' (SBE: 'It depends on how you look at it') p. 19.

NE: 'Want some? Sheri asked. (SBE: 'Do you want some?' Sheri asked) p. 203.

The author might have purposely omitted subjects in the sentences above to create an artistic effect by diverting from the normal way of English grammar.

Reduplication

Although reduplication has been treated by Bobda (1994) and Igboanusi (1998) as the lexical process of innovation, Kachru (1982) has noted that the reduplication of items belongs to various word classes. For instance, some English words are often reduplicated or repeated consecutively either for emphasis, pluralisation or to create new meanings. Bobda (1994: 258) has rightly identified three categories of words that undergo the process of reduplication: numerals, intensifiers and quantifiers. As Igboanusi (2002) has observed, while the occurrence of a second numeral denotes 'each' (as in one-one, half-half), the reduplication of an intensifier or quantifier may be for emphasis (as in many- many, now- now, before- before, fast-fast, fine- fine, slowly – slowly) or for pluralisation (as in big- big, small-

small). Some examples of reduplication from the novel are:

NE: 'Nothing – nothing' (SBE: 'Nothing at all') p. 12.

NE: 'And I'll beat you at ten-ten' (SBE: 'And I'll beat you ten times') p. 20.

NE: 'Just pretty-pretty' (SBE: 'Just very pretty') p. 80.

NE: 'Cut well – well' (Cut very well') p. 125.

NE: 'Or dark- dark Africa' (SBE: 'Or very dark Africa') p. 255.

NE: 'That is very very good, indeed' (SBE: 'That is extremely good') p. 265.

NE: 'Quick- quick, like that?' (SBE: 'Very quick like that?') p. 282.

NE: 'I am sorry' (SBE: 'I am sorry') p. 314.

The above Nigerian English structures are reduplicated for the sake of emphasis, and pluralisation and to create an entirely different meaning. However, a kind of reduplication is found in Standard British English though it is not as common as in the case of Nigerian English usage where even well-educated people frequently use it to create new meanings. Also, the examples cited above are "complete reduplication" whereby the English words reduplicated in the NE are not anyway changed or transformed.

Mis-spelling/mispronunciation

This is a situation whereby some English words are misspelt in the novel which leads to mispronunciation and that may be an imitation of how typical Yoruba people mostly pronounce English words; perhaps to create humour, examples:

NE: 'My bress' (SBE: 'My breast') p. 16.

NE: 'Evuh-ning' (SBE: 'Evening') p. 112.

NE: 'Sharrap' (SBE: 'Shut up') p. 137.

NE: 'Insh- Wurance' (SBE: 'Insurance') p. 236.

NE: 'We specialise in 'Gorerea, sifilis, AID' (SBE: 'We specialized in Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, AIDS') P. 305.

NE: 'Your license' he said. (SBE: 'Your licence' he said) p. 236.

Referring to the above NE structures, it can be noticed that there are some pronunciation difficulties of some words by Nigerian English speakers (particularly Yorubas) in that respect. This happens especially due to the mother-tongue interference. And the author (Sefi Atta) might have decided to imitate how the majority of her Yoruba people (especially the less-educated ones) pronounce some English words.

Nigerian Coinages

This is a situation whereby an English word is combined with a word from an indigenous language or two English words joined together to create a new meaning. It is also one of the features of Nigerian English. Examples of such combinations from the novel are:

NE: 'I will call you aburo' (SBE: 'I will call you a sister') p. 20.

NE: 'Sheri's mother had prepared akara for everyone to eat' (SBE: 'Sheri's mother had prepared bean cakes for everyone to eat') p. 31.

NE: 'Game of Ayo' (SBE: 'A game of gambling made with a kind of beads') p. 39.

NE: 'Who rose early to salute Mecca' (SBE: 'Who rose early to say/perform his morning prayer (s)') p.48.

NE: 'Danfos-cars' (SBE: 'Large commercial buses/vehicles') p.325.

NE: 'Go slow' (SBE: 'Traffic jam, hold-up or tailback') p. 325.

In the instances of NE above, we found that some sentences/phrases are coined by joining English words with some words from indigenous or native languages such as aburo, akara, ayoetc, which is one of the features of Nigerian English.

Loan/borrowed words

The following are some instances of loan/borrowed words in the novel *Everything Good Will Come*.

NE: 'Apollo' (i.e. Conjunctivitis in NE), (SBE: A large creamy white butterfly with black and red spots, found chiefly in mountains of Europe) p. 15.

NE: 'Baba' (from the Hausa language), (SBE: A father) p. 16.

NE: 'Agbada' (from Yoruba language) (SBE: A large gown worn by men) p. 16.

NE: 'Alhaja' (An indirect borrowing, first from Arabic into Hausa language and later NE), (SNE: A Muslim woman who makes a pilgrimage to Mecca) p. 36.

NE: 'Ala' (from Yoruba language, SNE: Either a boundary or dream) p. 113

NE: 'Abi'? (from Yoruba language), (SBE: 'Isn't it?') p. 36.

NE: 'Kiri-kiri' (from Yoruba language), (SBE: 'A prison') p. 113.

NE: 'Oyinbos' (from Yoruba language), (SBE: 'Whitemen') p. 170.

The above NE lexicons are mostly borrowed from Nigerian native languages. The words have become part and parcel of Nigerian English. Some words like Baba, Agbada, abi? Etc, are borrowed from the indigenous languages of Hausa and Yoruba which can be termed as direct borrowing, while the word 'Alhaja' is said to be an indirect borrowing' because it is originally from Arabic, then into Hausa and finally into the Nigerian English.

CONCLUSION

Nigerian English (NE) has some peculiar features with which it is identified; these features can be syntactic, lexico-semantic or phonological. The syntactic features may appear in the forms of

reduplication, subjectless sentences, wrong use of pronouns and so on. Lexico-semantic or morphological features are in the forms of loan words, Nigerian English coinages pluralisation of mass/non-count nouns, among others. The phonological features of Nigerian English, mainly in the spoken form of the language reflect the regional variations of its speakers; particularly Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, the three major languages in Nigeria. According to Bamgbose (1971), most of the phonetic characteristics in the English of Nigerians can be traced to the transfer of features from their local languages.

Similarly, the English language itself in the Nigerian context has been nativised to suit the societal needs and the environment (Bokoamba, 1979). Also, African writers use some devices to reflect local or indigenous nuances in their writing styles (Alo, 1998). Most of the deviations and innovations in Nigerian English (NE) are found in the vocabulary (Omodiagbe, 2010). Nigerian English and other varieties of English language found elsewhere reflect the fact that languages the world over are dynamic, not static; they change with the changes of time (Aitchson, 1981).

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