EXAMINING THE DISCOURSE OF THE NIGERIAN ENGLISH AS A NON-NATIVE VARIETY: FROM EVOLUTION TO STATUS

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Abstract
This study examines the discourse of Nigerian English as a non-native variety, tracing its evolution and establishing its present status within the framework of World Englishes. Focusing on selected lexical items, the analysis highlights systematic patterns of semantic narrowing, broadening, extension, and pragmatic reorientation that distinguish Nigerian English from Standard British English (henceforth SBE). Data were drawn from Nigerian literary texts and newspapers in the bid to ensure authentic representations of usage. Items such as Godfather, conductor, big man, compound, and home training illustrate how English, among World Englishes, has been indigenised to reflect Nigeria's socio-cultural realities and communicative practices. The findings demonstrate that these innovations are neither random deviations nor errors but adaptive processes that enrich the expressive capacity of Nigerian English. The study concludes that Nigerian English has developed into a stable, dynamic, and legitimate variety in its own right, embodying both local identity and global relevance.

Keywords: *Nigerian English; World Englishes; semantic shift; lexical innovation; socio-cultural context*

1. Introduction

The global dispersal of English, facilitated by missionaries, colonial administrators, educators, and merchants, has been central to the emergence of non-native varieties of the language (Kachru, 2005; Bamgbose, 1995). Countries such as Kenya, India, Malaysia, and Nigeria now use English as a second language (Kachru, 2005). A central factor in this development is the necessity for English to accommodate and reflect the cultural and experiential realities of these new contexts (Adegbija, 2004; Jowitt, 1991). Consequently, as English became a medium of communication in these regions, it underwent various naturalised processes to align with the linguistic and socio-cultural environments of its speakers (Jowitt, 1991).

In Nigeria, English is one of the most enduring legacies of British colonial rule (1860–1960). During this period, English functioned as a critical instrument in the socio-political, economic, and educational transformation of the country (Bamgbose, 1995). It also served as a strategic tool in the nationalist struggle, providing leaders from diverse ethnic backgrounds with a common medium of interaction, thereby transcending linguistic, religious, and cultural divides (Bamgbose, 1995; Adegbija, 2004).

In contemporary Nigeria, English continues to occupy a central role as the nation's unifying language in the absence of an indigenous lingua franca. It is the language of education, mass communication, governance, commerce, and industry, as well as the official medium for political, religious, and social transactions (Jowitt, 2019). However, despite its widespread use, the acquisition of English in Nigeria has consistently reflected its non-native status. Even among trained professionals and scholars of English, native-like competence remains elusive. Instead, Nigerians exhibit distinct linguistic features in their speech and writing that are increasingly recognised as characteristic of Nigerian English (Jowitt, 2019; Adegbija, 2004).

Like all language varieties in contact situations, English in Nigeria has been shaped by local cultural realities and communicative conventions (Platt & Weber, 1980; Bamgbose, 1995). The variety spoken within the country is a hybrid, influenced by British English, American English, and distinctively Nigerian linguistic practices. It accommodates borrowings from indigenous languages, exhibits semantic shifts such as broadening and narrowing, and displays unique phonological and syntactic patterns (Jowitt, 2019; Adegbija, 2004). The existence of Nigerian English, however, raises important questions: How is this variety identified and validated? Is it established through everyday interactions, literary texts, media usage, or a combination of these domains? These questions foreground the need for sustained inquiry into the nature, features, and sociolinguistic legitimacy of Nigerian English as a distinct non-native variety.

Over time, the English language in Nigeria has evolved distinctive linguistic features that differentiate it from other global varieties of

English. This development is unsurprising given Nigeria's highly multilingual context, with over 500 indigenous languages (Blench, 2019) and a corresponding diversity of ethnic groups.

Several sociolinguistic and historical factors have influenced the emergence of Nigerian English. Among these are the dialectal differentiation that accompanies the geographical spread of a language, the pervasive influence of indigenous languages on English usage, and the distinctive modes of acquisition, whether through formal education, media exposure, or instruction by non-native speakers (Bamgbose, 1995; Gut & Mesthrie, 2018; Gut & Igboanusi, 2018). These dynamics have collectively produced a uniquely Nigerian variety of English that reflects the country's complex linguistic ecology (Adegbija, 2004; Jowitt, 2013). Although scholars have noted that there may be as many sub-varieties of Nigerian English as there are indigenous languages (Gut, 2012; Jowitt, 2013), debates persist concerning its place in national life. While some advocate replacing English with local languages, others emphasise its pragmatic value as a unifying medium in a linguistically diverse nation (Bamgbose, 2018). The continued growth and adaptation of English in Nigeria affirm its dynamic character, marked by lexical, phonological, and syntactic features that signal its local identity (Gut & Mesthrie, 2018; Igboanusi, 2002; Ekpenyong, 2025).

However, existing research has largely concentrated on the lexical aspects of Nigerian English, particularly semantic shifts such as broadening, narrowing, and the adoption of loanwords (Adegbija, 2004; Ehineni, 2023). Far less attention has been given to how these semantic processes, alongside structural and phonological innovations, combine to define Nigerian English as a legitimate and functional non-native variety (Jowitt, 2013; Gut, 2012). This gap highlights the need for a systematic examination of the language as a sociolinguistic phenomenon in its own right.

The present study, therefore, aims to investigate the distinctive features of Nigerian English across selected domains of use, such as media, literature, and everyday communication and with particular attention to lexical and semantic variations shaped by indigenous linguistic and sociocultural influences. It further seeks to classify and analyse these

variations to identify their linguistic bases, measure their prevalence, and determine their role in establishing Nigerian English as a distinct non-native variety. The analysis is limited to the domains of lexis and semantics. It focuses on patterns of semantic modification such as broadening, narrowing, and meaning shifts, as well as lexical innovations arising from contact with Nigerian languages and sociocultural realities (Ekpenyong, 2025; Ehineni, 2023; Adegbija, 2004). By tracing these patterns, the study demonstrates how Nigerian English is both locally anchored and globally intelligible, embodying the creative adaptation of a world language to local contexts.

This research is significant in several respects. It extends scholarship on World Englishes by providing a focused account of Nigerian English at the lexical and semantic levels, thereby enriching the understanding of how non-native varieties evolve and acquire legitimacy (Kachru, 1992; Jowitt, 2013; Gut & Mesthrie, 2018). It also offers empirical insights into the semantic modifications and lexical innovations that characterise Nigerian English to reveal the systematic and creative processes through which Nigerian speakers have indigenised the language (Adegbija, 2004; Ehineni, 2023). Finally, the study carries pedagogical implications: a deeper understanding of the features of Nigerian English can inform the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria, ensuring that while the variety reflects local realities, it also retains international intelligibility.

2.1 The English Language in Nigeria

English occupies a complex and central role in Nigeria. Although it serves de facto as the official language in government, education, and public life, it has never been explicitly declared by statute as the country's sole official language. The closest formal recognition appears in Section 53 of the 1979 Constitution, which mandates that the proceedings of the National Assembly be conducted in English but allows for Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba when arrangements are made. This formula was replicated by the Constituent Assembly of 1988–89.

Since independence, debate about the status of English has persisted. Critics emphasise that English remains a colonial import and note its limitations for expressing indigenous culture. They argue for replacing or supplementing it with a national indigenous language. Proponents counter with arguments about its practicality, its entrenched role as a unifying medium, and its global status. The absence of consensus among

stakeholders has meant that English continues to function ubiquitously in Nigeria's multilingual society.

In academic scholarship, the notion of Nigerian English has been increasingly accepted, not as an erroneous deviation, but as a legitimate variety of English shaped by contact with indigenous languages and adapted to local sociocultural contexts. Earlier foundational work, such as *Varieties and Functions of English in Nigeria* (Ubahakwe, 1979), established that the varieties of English spoken in Nigeria are distinct from external norms in lexis, syntax, phonology, and discourse.

More recent studies continue this trajectory. For example, Jowitt and Ugwuanyi's (2025) review, 'Nigerian English Research: Developments and Directions', offers a synthesis of over fifty years of scholarship, noting the expansion of research into lexico-semantic, morphosyntactic, and discourse-pragmatic features of Nigerian English. They argue that despite past claims of under-research, Nigerian English has been steadily documented, albeit unevenly disseminated. Akintayo (2024) re-examined attitudes towards Nigerian English and traced emergent trends in the usage and codification of its grammar, showing a shift from questions about whether NigE exists to questions about its distinctive features. Studies of pronunciation among educated Nigerians (e.g., Educated Nigerian Spoken English) also show that even among high-proficiency speakers, locational, educational, and cultural factors yield recognisable Nigerianness in phonology (see Patterns of English Pronunciation among Nigerian Undergraduates, 2012).

These studies collectively suggest that Nigerian English is no longer simply an artefact of colonialism. It is now a dynamic, evolving variety, with increasing scholarly legitimacy. For it to be fully understood and taught, research must attend not only to lexical and semantic innovations but also to structural, phonological, and discourse-level adaptations.

2.2 Features of Nigerian English

English is an everyday means of communication for a large number of Nigerians of different educational qualifications (Adepoju, 2025b). Some scholars have argued that Nigerianism should not be seen as invariably evidence of imperfect English learning, but rather as possible signs of healthy acculturation and the creative capacity typically associated with

mother-tongue learning and use. Others have argued that there is no law of nature or man stipulating that a language must be considered the exclusive possession of the people who were its first owners (Jowitt, 1991; Obafemi, 1995; Adepoju, 2025a).

There was, at one time in the 1980s, something of an explosion of interest in the subject. The new respect accorded by scholars worldwide in the late 1970s and 80s to the general phenomenon of New Englishes and their local manifestations quickened this interest. Platt, Weber, and Ho (1984) define New Englishes as varieties that fulfil the following criteria:

i. They have developed through the educational system, being taught as a subject and, in many cases, also used as a medium of instruction in regions where languages other than English were the main language.

ii. They have developed in areas where a native variety of English was not the language spoken by most of the population.

iii. They are used for a range of functions among those who speak or write them in the region where they are used, for instance, in letter writing, in the writing of literature, in parliament, in communication between friends, and in the family. They may also function as lingua francas, general languages of communication among those speaking different native languages, or even among those who share a native language but choose English for particular communicative purposes.

iv. They have become domesticated, localised or nativised by adopting features of local languages such as sounds, intonation patterns, sentence structures, words, and expressions. In most cases, they have also developed distinct rules of usage for effective communication.

According to Jubril (1982), "if we can tell a Nigerian accent or text, we are usually able to do so because several co-occurring features which collectively mark the accent or text as originating from Nigeria are all present" (p. 73). In his study of Nigerian English, Adetugbo (1977) concludes that English usage in Nigeria has its own characteristics that set it apart from any native variety. The differentiating features occur at the level of phonological realisation and semantic interpretations. To him, those features are not merely deviations from Standard English but rather distinctive markers of what constitutes Standard Nigerian English.

In sum, the features of Nigerian English, ranging from phonological innovations to semantic extensions, reflect the dynamic interplay between English and Nigeria's multilingual ecology. While other Outer Circle varieties, such as Indian English and Singapore English, also display similar processes of nativisation, each is shaped by distinct sociolinguistic environments. For example, Indian English is marked by retroflex consonantal realisations and lexical borrowings from Hindi and Dravidian languages (Kachru, 2005), while Singapore English (Singlish) is characterised by extensive code-switching and syntactic restructuring under the influence of Chinese dialects and Malay (Gupta, 1994). Nigerian English, by contrast, is especially distinctive in its heavy semantic modifications, pragmatic directness, and its role as a unifying lingua franca across more than 500 indigenous languages (Bamgbose, 1995; Jowitt, 2019). This situates Nigerian English not merely as a transplanted code but as a legitimate, indigenised variety of World Englishes that embodies Nigeria's linguistic creativity and socio-cultural realities.

2.3 Lexical Relationships in English

The study of meaning in language requires attention not only to sentences but also to the relationships among individual words. As Lyons (1981) notes, lexical meaning and sentence meaning are interdependent. The meaning of a sentence derives from its constituent lexemes, while the interpretation of lexemes often depends on the contexts in which they occur. Words, therefore, are not merely communicative units but nodes in a network of semantic interconnections that structure human thought and discourse (Bamiro, 1994).

Scholars have emphasised that a working knowledge of a language extends beyond vocabulary lists to an understanding of lexical relations and their communicative value (Cruse, 2011; Murphy, 2010; Ekpenyong, 2025). Such knowledge enables more precise expression, avoidance of redundancy, and rhetorical flexibility in highlighting or downplaying ideas. In English, five principal types of lexical relationships have been identified, namely, polysemy, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and homonymy (Palmer, 1981; Saeed, 2016).

Polysemy refers to cases where a single word has multiple related

meanings. For example, a *bar* may denote a drinking establishment, the legal profession, a block of soap, or an obstacle. These meanings share underlying associations, illustrating the flexible and economical nature of language (Cruse, 2011). Polysemy is central to figurative usage and metaphorical extension that enriches discourse by allowing words to convey layers of meanings.

Synonymy, or similarity of meaning, is generally partial rather than absolute. Words such as inflate, expand, amplify, and swell overlap semantically but differ in contextual appropriateness. One may amplify sound but expand a committee. Awareness of such peculiarities supports stylistic precision and pragmatic effectiveness (Murphy, 2010).

Antonymy describes the oppositeness of meaning. It may be complementary (true/false), gradable (hot/cold), or relational (buy/sell). English also uses derivational morphology (happy/unhappy, legal/illegal) to create antonyms. These contrasts are cognitively significant because they allow speakers to structure thought in binary terms, highlighting distinctions in experience (Lyons, 1977; Saeed, 2016).

Hyponymy captures hierarchical relations of inclusion. The meaning of a superordinate word encompasses that of its hyponyms. For instance, mango, pear, and orange fall under the category of fruit. Such structures reflect categorisation processes in human cognition and are crucial for clarity and inference in communication (Palmer, 1981).

Homonymy, by contrast, refers to words that share form but not meaning, such as well (healthy) and well (water source). Unlike polysemy, which involves related senses, homonymy involves unrelated ones. Distinguishing between the two requires attention to etymology, usage, and semantic association (Cruse, 2011).

Taken together, these lexical relationships demonstrate the systematic nature of vocabulary organisation in English. They also highlight the interplay between semantics, cognition, and communication, where words function not as isolated units but as part of a structured semantic web.

Importantly, in Nigerian English, these relationships often exhibit localised adaptations shaped by sociolinguistic context. For instance,

polysemy is extended in words like *trek*, which in Nigerian usage commonly means to walk a long distance, diverging from the narrower sense in British English (Bamgbose, 1995). Similarly, synonymy often reflects creative borrowing from indigenous languages, while antonyms and hyponyms are sometimes reshaped through cultural concepts not found in Inner-Circle Englishes (Jowitt, 2019). Compared to Indian English, which shows strong lexical influence from Hindi and regional languages, Nigerian English is distinctive in its semantic innovations driven by multilingual interference and pragmatic needs. This underlines the dynamic role of lexical relationships not only in theoretical semantics but also in the evolution of localised Englishes across the world.

2.4 The Nature and Types of Meaning

Though linguists and philosophers agree that meaning is central to semantics, there is considerable disparity among scholars on its exact conception. Based on their understanding of the meaning of meaning, three major schools of thought are often identified: the naturalists, the conventionalists, and the contextualists. According to Firth and other contextualists, the meaning of a word derives from its usage in context, a perspective that has profoundly shaped modern linguistics (Firth, 1957; Lyons, 1981). These approaches to meaning (whether contextual, conventional, or naturalist) remain critical for understanding how language functions.

Beyond these general perspectives, semantics distinguishes several types of meaning, notably thematic, conceptual, and associative meanings (Leech, 1981). Thematic meaning is derived from how messages are organised in discourse. The arrangement of linguistic elements through processes such as passivisation, topicalisation, or focus determines what receives prominence. For example, *A car killed my dog* represents a neutral subject–verb–object structure, while *It was a car that killed my dog* places emphasis on the agent, and *My dog was killed by a car* highlights the object. Stress and intonation can also shift prominence, as in The judge CAUTIONED the prosecution witness (contrast with praised), The judge cautioned the PROSECUTION witness (contrast with defence) and The judge cautioned the prosecution WITNESS (contrast with counsel).

Conceptual meaning, by contrast, refers to the primary, logical, and

denotative sense of words, largely independent of context. It forms the basis of dictionary definitions and enables systematic communication. Structural semantics captures conceptual meaning through componential analysis, specifying features as present (+) or absent (–). For example, the contrast between *man* [+human, +male, +adult] and *woman* [+human, –male, +adult] illustrates how conceptual meaning defines categories within a shared linguistic system (Lyons, 1977).

Associative meaning, unlike conceptual meaning, is variable and influenced by culture, context, and personal experience. It encompasses sub-types such as connotative, collocative, affective, reflected, and stylistic (or social) meaning (Leech, 1981). Connotative meaning reflects personal or cultural associations. For instance, while a fox symbolises cunning in Western cultures, among the Yoruba or Igbo in Nigeria, that role is attributed to the tortoise. Collocative meaning arises from habitual lexical combinations, as in august visitor or nutritious food, which are conventionalised in particular contexts. Affective meaning conveys the speaker's attitude, often through emotive or evaluative choices such as darling or nauseating. Reflected meaning occurs when polysemous words evoke secondary senses, such as meat, once meaning all food, now narrowed to flesh. Stylistic or social meaning reflects the relationship between linguistic choice and social context, revealing formality, region, or status. For example, 'I wonder if I could see you today' signals greater politeness than the casual 'Can I see you later today?'

Beyond the theoretical and descriptive accounts of meaning, its study is especially relevant in the context of Nigerian English, which has emerged as a distinct variety within the World Englishes paradigm (Bamiro, 1994). Semantic modifications in Nigerian English often reflect the interplay between conceptual and associative meanings. For instance, lexical borrowings and semantic extensions from indigenous languages enrich English with culturally grounded connotations, creating expressions intelligible within Nigeria but less transparent to external audiences. Similarly, collocative and connotative meanings in Nigerian English are shaped by local realities, such as the collocation 'senior brother' (for elder brother) or the connotation of 'chief' as a title of respect tied to traditional authority. These features underscore how Nigerian English negotiates meaning differently from Inner-Circle norms, illustrating the adaptability of English to new cultural

environments. Thus, the study of meaning is not only central to semantics but also to understanding how Nigerian English develops, thrives, and asserts its identity as a legitimate English variety (Bamgbose, 1995; Igboanusi, 2002; Jowitt, 2019).

In conclusion, meaning remains a slippery and multifaceted concept, variously defined as referential, cognitive, or associative. Yet it is also practical and embodied in words like seat, book, and print, which mediate everyday life. In multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, the notion of meaning is further complicated by the influence of indigenous languages, leading to semantic transfers, hybridisation, and innovations that enrich English. These dynamics reinforce why the study of meaning is crucial, not only for semantic theory but also for the description and recognition of Nigerian English within the wider family of World Englishes.

3 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative textual analysis to provide a triangulated account of semantic modification in Nigerian English.

3.1 Data Sources

Primary data were elicited through a structured questionnaire administered to sixty participants across education, media, and professional domains. The instrument presented lexical items previously identified as undergoing semantic shifts in Nigerian English and respondents were asked to indicate their awareness, frequency of use, and evaluative stance. However, this is not intended to interrogate the data using statistical tools. The focus of the study is purely qualitative and descriptive. Secondary data were drawn from Nigerian literary texts, which reflect idiomatic and creative usages, and from journalistic writing in *The Punch* and *The Guardian*, selected for their representativeness of everyday and institutional registers. Together, these sources furnished authentic illustrations of semantic modification in both formal and informal contexts.

3.2 Analytical procedure and interpretation

Survey responses and textual extracts were subjected to descriptive linguistic analysis. Modifications were classified as extension, restriction,

shift, and innovation, and their frequencies were compared across domains. Contextual factors (e.g., genre, communicative setting) were considered in mapping distributional patterns. Findings from the survey were cross-checked with textual evidence to enhance validity and to avoid overgeneralisation from self-report data alone.

3.3 Analytical Framework

Pragmatics provided the interpretive lens, enabling analysis of how meaning is realised within Nigerian socio-cultural contexts. Defined by Yule (1996) as the study of invisible meaning, pragmatics accounts for how interlocutors infer intentions that go beyond literal form, drawing on shared knowledge, norms, and cultural assumptions. Foundational work such as Grice's (1975) theory of implicature, Levinson's (1983) accounts of pragmatic principles, and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework underscores how language functions as social action. Applied here, this perspective makes it possible to explain semantic modifications in Nigerian English not as random deviations, but as context-driven innovations reflecting local communicative needs.

4. Data Presentation

Reflecting the methodological framework adopted, the collected data are presented under three thematic categories, each determined by its source of origin.

4.1 Category A

The data presented here are the twenty lexical items selected from the corpus of the Nigerian English vocabulary. All these items have their meanings and usage in the Standard British English (SBE). However. These items have undergone semantic shifts in their usage in Nigeria. Their meaning has either been broadened, narrowed, or given a complete push, that is, a total shift from the SBE meaning. Below are the lexical items as listed in the questionnaire:

A1- Dash; A2- Ms; A3- Dupe; A4- Machine; A5- Give-up; A6- Fuel; A7- Gallop; A8- Garage; A9- Escort; A10- Chairperson; A11- Mineral; A12- Tout; A13- Trek; A14- Saloon; A15- Customer; A16- Branch; A17- Cell; A18- Blood Brother; A19- Sorry; A20- Well done

4.2 Category B

In order to advance the objective of this study, the need to explore other areas where the use of Nigerian English has shown clear evidence of semantic modifications was necessary. Here, an additional ten lexical items, which are used in the literary creativity of Nigerians, shall be presented. This development further buttresses the fact of the social acceptance of these items. They are illustrative quotations extracted from novels written by Nigerians, while some are used or extracted from newspapers published in Nigeria. Two newspapers used in this review are *The Guardian* and *The Punch*. The texts are labelled B1-10 and are presented below.

B1-God father; B2- burst (out); B3- colonial; B4- crack jokes; B5- dress up; B6-exercise; B7-beg; B8- lament; B9- compound; B10- home training.

4.3 Category C

The data presented and analysed in this section were drawn by the researcher through participant observation from everyday use in society. This is premised on the fact that all the semantic alterations examined in this study derive from the researcher's linguistic experiences within the socio-cultural environment. The texts here are labelled C1-C5 as presented as follows: C1- Conductor; C2- Junior; C3-Dowry; C4-Jargon; C5- Big man

5. Data Analysis I

5.1 Analysis of Semantic Shifts in Nigerian English

The data presented demonstrate how lexical items in Nigerian English undergo significant semantic reorganisation when compared with their Standard British English (SBE) counterparts. These shifts take the form of narrowing, broadening, and total shifts, all of which are influenced by the socio-cultural realities of Nigeria. In addition, some lexical items show pragmatic adaptation, reflecting the communicative needs of Nigerian society. Scholars such as Bamgbose (1995), Adegbija (2004), and Jowitt (2019) have consistently noted that the semantic creativity of Nigerian English is one of its most distinctive features.

5.1.1 Narrowing of Meaning

Narrowing occurs when a lexical item that has a broad meaning in SBE acquires a more specific sense in Nigerian English. Several examples from the data illustrate this process.

i. *Fuel*, which in SBE refers to substances such as coal, gas, or oil, is restricted in Nigerian English to mean specifically *petrol*.
ii. *Mineral*, broadly used in SBE to denote naturally occurring substances such as coal, salt, or stone, is narrowed in Nigerian English to mean *soft drinks*.
iii. *Trek*, which in SBE denotes a long and difficult journey, is narrowed in Nigerian English to mean simply *a stroll*.
iv. *Gallop*, which in SBE refers to the rapid movement of a horse, is reinterpreted in Nigerian English to describe *potholes, bumps, or jerky road movements*.

This kind of semantic restriction aligns with Adegbija's (2004) observation that Nigerian English often reflects the communicative realities of speakers by assigning words to highly localised domains of meaning.

5.1.2 Broadening of Meaning

Broadening involves the extension of an existing sense to include additional meanings not found in SBE. The following examples demonstrate this tendency.

i. *Give up*, which in SBE primarily means *t*o stop doing something, is broadened in Nigerian English to includeacceptingdefeat, surrender, or be discouraged.
ii. *Sorry*, which in SBE expresses regret or disappointment, has been broadened in Nigerian English to include apology, acceptance of correction, and a general expression of empathy.
iii. *Well done*, originally a reference to food that has been thoroughly cooked in SBE, has expanded in Nigerian English to serve as commendation, salutation, greeting, and acknowledgement.

Such broadening support Igboanusi's (2002) argument that Nigerian English is not only semantically innovative but also pragmatically creative, with items extending their meanings to suit cultural and interpersonal contexts.

5.1.3 Total Semantic Shifts

Several items in Nigerian English have diverged entirely from their SBE meanings, undergoing what may be described as total shifts.

i. *Dash*, which in SBE denotes a hyphen or a quick run, has shifted to mean a gift.
ii. *Dupe*, which in SBE refers to someone who is tricked, is reversed in Nigerian English to mean someone who tricks.
iii. *Machine*, which in SBE denotes equipment, a computer, or a vehicle in general, is used in Nigerian English to mean specifically a motorcycle.
iv. *Saloon*, which in SBE refers either to a type of car or a large passenger room on a ship, has shifted to mean a barbershop or a beauty parlour.
v. *Garage*, which in SBE means a building for keeping or repairing cars, has shifted to mean a motor park or bus station.
vi. *Chairperson*, which in SBE neutrally denotes the leader of a committee, has shifted to mean a lady or an important woman in Nigerian English.
vii. *Escort*, which in SBE refers to accompanying someone for protection or guidance, is reinterpreted in Nigerian English to mean seeing a visitor off or walking a friend out.
viii. *Tout*, which in SBE refers to an aggressive seller of tickets or services, has shifted to mean an illegal person or area boy.
ix. *Blood brother*, traditionally denoting a ceremonial bond of loyalty in SBE, now refers in Nigerian English to a biological brother, relation by birth, or next of kin.
x. *Customer*, which in SBE denotes the buyer of goods or services, has been extended and reinterpreted in Nigerian English to mean both buyer and seller.

These shifts illustrate what Jowitt (2019) calls the Nigerianisation of English, whereby lexical items are repurposed to capture culturally specific realities and relationships.

5.1.4 Pragmatic Adaptations

Beyond semantic reorganisation, the data also reveal pragmatic shifts

where words acquire new functions in discourse. For instance, sorry is not only a lexical item denoting regret but also functions as a conventional politeness strategy in Nigerian English, used in situations of empathy, correction, or apology. Similarly, well done serves as a cultural marker of encouragement and acknowledgement, moving beyond its culinary origins. These pragmatic adaptations support Bamgbose's (1995) assertion that Nigerian English is best understood as a communicative tool reshaped to meet local needs.

5.1.5 Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that Nigerian English reshapes lexical meanings through narrowing, broadening, and total semantic shifts, with pragmatic adaptation further enriching its expressive resources. These processes are not arbitrary but are shaped by Nigeria's socio-cultural environment, which influences how English is appropriated, redefined, and deployed in daily communication. As Bamgbose (1995) and Adegbija (2004) rightly note, such innovations attest to the dynamism of Nigerian English as a variety that both preserves and transforms the English lexicon to suit local realities.

5.2 Pragmatic Analysis of Data II

As indicated earlier, the data analysed in this study consist of lexical items and expressions drawn from illustrative quotations extracted from two main sources: Nigerian novels and selected Nigerian newspapers (*The Punch* and *The Guardian*).

Text B1: Godfather

In Nigerian English, the term godfather has undergone a significant semantic shift through metaphorical extension and sociopolitical re-contextualisation. While its primary denotation in SBE is male sponsor at baptism, this sense has become recessive in Nigeria, where the dominant meaning refers to a person in a position of influence, often one who secures advantages for others through patronage or power. This reconfiguration is evident in both literary and journalistic usage. Achebe's *A Man of the People* (p. 19) illustrates this: *I had scholarships both to the secondary and the university without any godfather's help but purely on my own merit.* The term also functions ideologically, as reflected in The Guardian: *On your part, in order to contribute to the*

development of democracy, reduce the influence of money in politics and cut off godfatherism, LASEIC has decided not to charge candidates who intend to contest for chairmanship and councillorship seats. This semantic innovation demonstrates how religious terminology has been appropriated into the Nigerian sociopolitical lexicon, reflecting the pervasive influence of patronage networks.

Comparative Table 1: Godfather

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Godfather	A political patron; someone who influences situations to favour another person	A male sponsor at baptism	Semantic shift, metaphorical extension, re-contextualisation

Text B2: Burst (out)

The verb burst in Nigerian English exhibits a novel semantic extension, acquiring a meaning not attested in SBE: to suddenly merge into or join (a path or road). This usage can apply to both physical spaces (e.g., paths or roads) and to human agents navigating them. Its vividness derives from the metaphorical mapping of the sudden, forceful quality of burst onto the act of confluence or convergence. This extended meaning is illustrated in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (p. 18): *Each family group occupied a cluster of compounds, and every compound had a path bursting into the main path running across the village.*

Here, 'burst' metaphorically encodes dynamism and immediacy, marking a distinctive localisation of the verb in Nigerian English.

Comparative Table 2: Burst (out)

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Burst (out)	To merge or join (e.g., a path into another) suddenly	To break open violently; to erupt	Semantic extension, metaphorical mapping

Text B3: Colonial

In Nigerian English, colonial, particularly in the collocation colonial mentality, has developed a sociocultural semantic layering distinct from SBE. While its literal meaning relates to the colonial era, its pragmatic use in Nigeria extends metaphorically to describe attitudes considered unprogressive, conservative, or archaic, often attributed to older generations. The phrase implies undue deference to authority or acceptance of inferior status, reflecting postcolonial critique. Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (p. 28) captures this usage: when Joseph Okeke, a junior civil servant, is disturbed by Obi Okonkwo's impatience during an interview, Obi responds: *That's what I call colonial mentality.* The term thus embodies both literal historical reference and figurative critique, indexing generational and ideological tensions in post-independence Nigeria.

Comparative Table 3: Colonial Mentality

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Colonial mentality	Archaic, unprogressive mindset; deference to authority; inferiority complex	Attitudes and practices linked literally to the colonial period	Semantic layering, metaphorical extension, pragmatic re-mapping

Text B4: Crack Jokes

The verbal phrase crack jokes is a stabilised idiom in Nigerian English that illustrates idiomaticisation and semantic extension. While SBE employs 'make jokes' or'jokes' with relatively neutral force, the Nigerian collocation foregrounds vividness, intensity, and performativity. The verb crack, originally denoting sudden breakage, is metaphorically mapped onto the act of telling jokes, conveying a sense of force, repetition, and often offensiveness. This figurative usage is codified in literary examples, such as Ike's *The Potter's Wheel* (p. 35): *Samuel cycled round the field six times, cracking offensive jokes at Obi each time he passed the mango tree*. This reflects a broader Nigerian English tendency towards lexical intensification and expressive verbal creativity.

Comparative Table 4: Crack jokes

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Crack jokes	To tell jokes with vigour, repetition, or intensity	To make jokes; to joke (neutral)	Idiomaticisation, semantic extension

Text B5: Dress up

The phrasal verb, dress up, demonstrates semantic broadening in Nigerian English. While in SBE it retains a restricted sense of putting on formal or fine clothes, in Nigerian English, the expression is generalised to mean to get dressed, regardless of the nature of the clothing. This de-specialisation represents a pragmatic adaptation, where the form is extended to cover more everyday contexts. In Okpewho's *The Victims* (p. 128), for example, *Cawam and Ogugua looked at each other. She made to dress up and go, but he motioned her to stay.* The expression here signals a neutral act of preparing one's attire rather than donning formal wear. This divergence exemplifies the localisation of English phrasal verbs within Nigerian English, shaped by communicative necessity and socio-cultural realities.

Comparative Table 5: Dress up

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Dress up	To get dressed (neutral use)	To wear smart or formal clothes	Semantic broadening, de-specialisation

Text B6: Exercise

In Nigerian English, the noun exercise demonstrates semantic broadening beyond its established administrative, academic, military, and athletic domains, where it typically denotes a set task. Within Nigerian usage, it frequently acquires the more generalised sense of event, activity, or undertaking. This extension is illustrated in Okpewho's *The Victims* (p. 13a): *The woman took the money and thanked Nwanze for his arbitration. Obanua and Nwanze rose and stretched their bodies; for a*

moment, it looked as though they were set to go. But Nwanze thought briefly to himself, how much really he had gained from the whole exercise.

In this context, SBE would likely prefer the term episode or incident. The Nigerian usage thus reflects a lexical generalisation process whereby specialised terminology is appropriated into everyday discourse.

Comparative Table 6: Exercise

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Exercise	Event; activity; undertaking	Set task (academic, military, athletic, administrative)	Semantic broadening, generalisation

Text B7: Beg

The verb, beg, in Nigerian English is characterised by a pragmatic and cultural re-contextualisation not typically observed in SBE. In Nigeria, begging encompasses a ritualised act of contrition and supplication, often performed after a punishment has been pronounced but not yet enforced. This act may involve verbal pleas, formalised language of remorse, and physical gestures such as prostration or genuflection, all of which aim to evoke empathy and forgiveness from the addressee. For instance, in Okpewho's *The Victims* (p. 160), the expression occurs in a socially marked form: *Tell your parents plainly that I do not want any father or mother to come to my house and beg me. I will send them away.*

In SBE, the closest equivalent would be to plead with, yet this lacks the ritualised and culturally embedded force of the Nigerian English beg. This usage exemplifies how pragmatic conventions tied to indigenous cultural practices become encoded in English usage in Nigeria.

Comparative Table 7: Beg

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Beg	Formal, often ritualised plea for	Plead with; ask earnestly	Pragmatic recontextualisation,

	forgiveness; it includes verbal and bodily contrition.		semantic intensification

Text B8: Lament

In Nigerian English, the verb lament enjoys greater frequency and extended pragmatic usage than in SBE, where its register tends towards the poetic or literary. In Nigerian public discourse, particularly in media reportage, lament is widely employed to mean to deplore, express concern, or complain strongly. For example, *The Punch* reports: *The Ogun State Commissioner for Health, Dr. Abiodun Oduwole, has lamented the exodus of medical doctors from the state's hospitals to federal government-owned health institutions.*

This localisation reflects a semantic shift towards an institutional register, whereby the lexical item acquires a functional role in bureaucratic and political discourse, rather than remaining confined to elevated literary contexts.

Comparative Table 8: Lament

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Lament	To deplore; express concern or complaint	To mourn; to grieve; poetic register	Semantic broadening, pragmatic extension

Text B9: Compound

The noun, compound, illustrates a case of semantic localisation with historical roots. Platt et al. (1983: 75) note that the word originated in colonial India with military associations, denoting an 'enclosed area around a house or group of buildings.' In Nigerian English, the term has shed its military connotation and now designates a wide range of residential and institutional enclosures: the yard surrounding village huts, a bourgeois urban residence, a school, or a mission compound. Contemporary usage extends even further, as illustrated in *The Guardian*: *Unknown gunmen on Monday killed an aide to the speaker of Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, Mr. Emem Victor Bassey, at his family compound in Oron.*

This usage exemplifies how colonial-era lexical items have undergone semantic nativisation, being re-assigned meanings suited to Nigerian socio-spatial realities.

Comparative Table 9: Compound

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Compound	Enclosed yard or area around a residence, institution, or family home	Military enclosure; colonial housing	Semantic localisation, nativisation

Text B10: Home Training

The expression home training represents an idiomatic calque in Nigerian English that directly indexes socio-cultural values surrounding upbringing and moral instruction. The phrase is typically used to comment disparagingly on a person's lack of proper upbringing, manners, or respect for elders. Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (p. 18) illustrates this: *Layeni … was one of the old school of Africans who believed that the younger generation were getting too cute. They were made, did not bow to their elders as of old. They called it 'education'; but he had another word for it. They lacked home training.*

In SBE, equivalent expressions include 'He was not brought up well' or 'He lacks manners,' though these lack the culturally embedded force of the Nigerian idiom. Home training, thus, demonstrates how English idioms are indigenised to encode indigenous moral and cultural frameworks.

Comparative Table 10: Home Training

Expression	NigE Interpretation	SBE Interpretation	Semantic Process
Home training	Upbringing: moral and behavioural instruction at home	Poor upbringing; lack of manners	Idiomatic calquing, semantic nativisation

5.3 Analysis of Category C: observation, societal drawn

This category addresses lexical items that illustrate processes of semantic modification in Nigerian English (NigE). The data reveal systematic shifts in meaning resulting from local socio-cultural conditions, patterns of bilingualism, and the integration of English into indigenous communicative frameworks.

C1. Conductor

In Standard British English (SBE), conductor denotes (i) a person directing a choir or orchestra, (ii) a medium for the transmission of electricity or heat, (iii) a ticket collector, or (iv) a train supervisor. In NigE, however, the semantic range is narrowed almost exclusively to the fare collector on public buses, thereby exemplifying semantic restriction and contextual specialisation.

C2. Junior / Senior

In SBE, junior refers to a younger age or a lower hierarchical position, without kinship implications. In NigE, the lexeme is extended to encode family relations, yielding expressions such as junior brother or junior sister. Conversely, senior is employed to denote elder siblings, as in senior brother. These extensions highlight the role of kinship structures in shaping semantic reinterpretation.

C3. Dowry

While SBE defines dowry as property that a bride brings into marriage, in NigE, the term is frequently conflated with bride price which denotes payment made by the groom to the bride's family. This semantic shift reflects the localisation of English vocabulary within indigenous marital practices, demonstrating the interpenetration of cultural and linguistic systems.

C4. Jargon / Jargons

In SBE, jargon refers to technical or specialised vocabulary associated with a profession or group and functions as a non-count noun. In NigE, the term has undergone both semantic broadening and morphological innovation. It is employed pejoratively to denote nonsense or worthless talk, and is often pluralised as jargons, contrary to its conventional uncountable status in SBE.

C5. Big man

In SBE, big typically denotes physical size or importance, while man refers to an adult male. In NigE, the compound big man functions as a sociocultural marker for a wealthy, influential, or powerful individual, regardless of physical stature. This shift exemplifies semantic broadening, with meaning recalibrated to reflect socio-economic values that equate material success with social significance.

6. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that Nigerian English (NigE) exhibits systematic semantic modifications that differentiate it from Standard British English (SBE). These modifications are neither random deviations nor errors, but rather represent context-sensitive innovations shaped by Nigeria's socio-cultural realities, multilingual environment, and patterns of language contact.

Across the data, three principal processes of semantic change are evident: narrowing, broadening, and extension. For example, the conductor in NigE has undergone semantic narrowing to denote almost exclusively the bus fare collector, a function necessitated by Nigeria's urban transport system. Similarly, Godfather has shifted from its ecclesiastical sense of male sponsor at baptism to an extended, sociopolitical meaning, i.e. a powerful patron who exerts influence in politics and governance. These examples reveal how lexical items are appropriated and specialised within local institutional and political contexts.

Conversely, several items exhibit semantic broadening, whereby the meaning is expanded beyond its conventional SBE usage. The expression crack jokes, more vividly idiomatic in NigE than SBE, conveys not just the act of making jokes but also the intensity and offensiveness of humour in interactional contexts. Likewise, big man extends beyond mere physical or hierarchical reference to index socio-economic privilege, encapsulating Nigeria's material and status-driven value system. The verb burst (out), used in NigE to describe a road suddenly merging with another, also exemplifies broadening, aligning the lexical semantics of physical action with environmental and cultural landscapes.
Instances of semantic extension and reinterpretation also permeate the

data. The use of junior and senior to denote sibling relations reflects the projection of indigenous kinship structures onto English lexicon, while dowry has been semantically redefined to conflate with bride price, aligning the lexeme with Nigerian matrimonial practices. Similarly, compound has shed its military origins and now indexes a range of residential and institutional domains, from village huts to elite urban dwellings, thus reflecting spatial organisation in Nigeria.

The data further illustrate morphological innovation and pragmatic reorientation. The pluralisation of jargon into jargons and its pejorative reinterpretation as nonsense demonstrate creative departures from SBE conventions, while home training represents a culturally grounded idiom that comments on upbringing, manners, and social behaviour in ways not directly captured by SBE equivalents. The pragmatic use of beg, often embedded in ritualised acts of contrition such as prostration, highlights the intersection of language, politeness, and cultural performance in Nigeria.

These patterns affirm the position of NigE as a legitimate and codifiable variety within the paradigm of World Englishes. As Bamgbose (1995) and Jowitt (1991) argue, the systematicity of these changes invalidates the notion of errors or interference, situating NigE instead as a dynamic contact variety that expands the expressive potential of English. The findings also corroborate the claim that Nigerian English, far from being a deficient version of SBE, embodies sociolinguistic creativity and adaptability to reflect local cultural concepts, social hierarchies, and communicative practices.

In sum, the discussion foregrounds that semantic change in NigE is motivated by culture, pragmatics, and ecology. Words such as exercise, lament, or colonial mentality are not arbitrary coinages but are semantically retooled to capture experiences that are uniquely Nigerian. These innovations demonstrate the resourcefulness of language users in reconfiguring English to meet local communicative needs and contribute to the growing body of evidence that validates Nigerian English as an autonomous, context-dependent variety with its own norms and expressive force.

7. Conclusion

This study, titled *Examining the Discourse of Nigerian English as a Non-Native Variety: From Evolution to Status*, has demonstrated how Nigerian English has evolved from its historical roots as a contact variety to a recognised system with distinctive semantic and pragmatic features. Through the analysis of selected lexical items, the research has shown that semantic narrowing, broadening, extension, and pragmatic reorientation are central processes shaping Nigerian English.

The examples examined, ranging from conductor, Godfather, and big man to compound and home training, illustrate how English has been indigenised to capture Nigerian socio-cultural realities and communicative priorities. These modifications, while distinct from Standard British English (SBE), are neither random nor erroneous. Rather, they reveal the internal logic of Nigerian usage and the adaptability of English in multilingual contexts.

The findings affirm that Nigerian English is not a mere learner's variety but a dynamic, contextually grounded system with its own conventions and expressive resources. Its lexical creativity reflects the socio-political, cultural, and institutional life of Nigeria, while simultaneously contributing to the broader discourse of World Englishes.

In conclusion, the evolution and current status of Nigerian English, especially in relation to meaning-making, underscore its legitimacy as a non-native yet fully-fledged variety. It stands as evidence of how English continues to thrive globally by adapting to diverse socio-cultural environments to enrich both local and international linguistic ecologies.

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