

Nigerian English research: Developments and directions

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Abstract

This article describes the progress made by scholars over a period of more than five decades in the field of Nigerian English studies. It will thus serve as a useful tool for those researching in this field; and apparently there has been no such attempt to date to review the research landscape of Nigerian English in order to show its key concerns. The article makes the case that, despite the claim that Nigerian English is under-researched, Nigerian English has been the subject of a substantial body of research, even if much of it is unknown outside Nigeria. Following the qualitative-oriented synthetic approach to literature review involving a synthesis of common themes across studies, research preoccupations, developments and directions in all the various language areas are examined, with opportunities for further research highlighted. Finally, prognostications are offered concerning the future directions of Nigerian English research.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Essentially, this article is a review of the scholarly research carried out in the field of Nigerian English (NE) studies over a period going back ultimately to five decades ago. Even though the earliest known work on NE was published in late 1950s (Brosnahan, 1958), sustained interest in NE became well-established only from early 1970s. There is a certain validity in the claim that NE has been under-studied (Jowitt, 2019; Werner & Fuchs, 2017), and part of the truth of the claim lies in the fact that in the early decades of NE studies articles and books were published mostly within Nigeria and were not easily available outside Nigeria, especially as this was the pre-Internet age. As the review below shows,

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however, the history of NE studies is actually constituted by a substantial and varied body of research. At the beginning of this review, it is first worth mentioning afresh some general sociolinguistic facts about NE.

The implantation of the English language in many parts of the world is one of the most striking outcomes of the British imperial expansion of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. In the former British colonies, the language has continued to perform significant roles after independence. As most of the then new postcolonial nation-states were characterised by multilingualism, most countries' language policy favoured a single linguistic umbrella as a pragmatic 'solution' that would enable easier communication, and English was a natural and inevitable choice for most of them. Nigeria was almost unique in that it is composed of over 250 ethnic nationalities speaking over 500 languages (Eberhard et al., 2022); and, as elsewhere, English has continued to deepen and widen its functional load in Nigeria since the attainment of independence. Even though an English-based pidgin (i.e. Nigerian Pidgin) was used in the country as a language of trade long before colonial rule was established, it was colonialism (and Christian missionary activity) that implanted English in all regions of the country. While during colonial times English served mainly official purposes, the country's current sociolinguistic profile indicates that the language now performs wider roles not only in public domains but also in the private lives of most Nigerians (Ugwuanyi, 2022a).

Not so long ago it was claimed that English was an elitist language in Nigeria (Bamgbose, 1971). But currently it is estimated that Nigeria has over 178 million speakers of English (Piller, 2022), making it the country with the third-highest number of English speakers in the world after the United States and India, and suggesting that over 70% of the country's population speak English to some degree. It is also increasingly recognised that a growing number of Nigerians have English as their main or only language; in other words, English is gradually becoming the L1 for some Nigerians (Kperogi, 2015; Ugwuanyi, 2021). This justifies the assertion of Jowitt (2019), that 'English is no longer a foreign language in Nigeria, but has become a Nigerian language' (p. 26).

Correspondingly, scholarly interest in English in Nigeria has been on the increase. Scholarly publications on NE now appear in all major relevant research outlets, and the topics investigated span the length and breadth of linguistics. To date, however, there has been no known attempt to review the research landscape of NE, showing its key concerns and research methods. Following the qualitative-oriented synthetic approach to literature review in which the 'synthesis of common themes across studies' (Schirmer, 2018, p. 100) are undertaken, the study discusses works of similar thematic concerns under the same heading. Such stock-taking of a variety can underline the extent of its development, highlight areas that have not received sufficient attention, and so help in predicting directions for future research. Existential questions about any subject matter are part of our understanding of it; hence a review of the various attitudes that NE has evoked seems first desirable.

2 | ATTITUDES TOWARDS NIGERIAN ENGLISH: THE RIGHT, THE LEFT AND THE CENTRE

Jowitt (2008, 2013) shows that the range of attitudes to NE forms an ideological spectrum, ranging from 'the Left' (i.e. the 'accepters') to 'the Right' (i.e. the 'rejecters'). To those tending towards 'the Right', distinctively Nigerian usages are 'errors'; to those tending towards 'the Left', they are (acceptable) variations.

Implicit in the 'Left' point of view is 'the World Englishes philosophy', which found classic expression in the work of the late Braj Kachru (Kachru, 1985). Its implications for Nigeria were expounded by pioneering NE scholars such as the late Abiodun Adetugbo (1979), the late Adama Odumuh (1987), the late Efurosibina Adegbija (2004) and others. According to this view of English, there are a number of distinctive varieties of English in today's world; none of them should be considered in any sense 'superior' to the others; and the norm for usage in any variety should not be external or 'exonormative' but internal or 'endonormative'. In most cases, however, such a Standard is yet to be fully codified. As a result, 'errors' are problematic: either they continue to be judged as such according to the exonormative Standard; or—as a common 'Left' position—their occurrence or importance is minimised.

As in other ideological contexts, Right–Left debates over NE correlate to a considerable extent with age, as Ugwuanyi (2021) shows, with younger, more educated Nigerians tending to be more enthusiastic about NE usage than their ‘conservative’ elders. One implication is that either in a few decades from now there will no longer remain any hostility to NE in Nigeria; or the present, younger ‘progressives’ will become more ‘conservative’ as they get older, so that hostility will remain.

For attitudes to NE, a ‘Centre’ position (or positions) on the spectrum can be identified. It recognises that not all NE forms are used by all Nigerians; that in any variety there is a difference between, on the one hand, formal and written usage and, on the other, informal and spoken usage; that ‘prescriptivist’ and ‘descriptivist’ approaches to language both have their place; that ‘errors’ cannot be ignored, and that, in the absence of a codified endonormative Standard, an exonormative Standard will continue to operate in identifying and seeking to correct them. This cluster of views is found, more or less explicitly, in the work of Banjo (1996), Esimaje and Nnamani (2018), Jowitt (1991, 2019), Okoro (2004), Olatoye (2022a), Oyebola (2020) and others.

As just demonstrated, the Centre shows due respect for the prescriptivist approach. In more recent years, this has been represented notably by Eyisi (2003). Yet the Centre has been more interested in contributing to descriptivist studies of NE. This is partly because NE usage presents opportunities for fertile comment in terms of the incidence, provenance and others, of its various linguistic forms. Moreover, this procedure offers greater exercise for the intellectual faculties than a preoccupation with errors.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the study of attitudes of Nigerians towards Nigerian and other varieties of English. Most of these studies have focused on Nigerians’ attitudes towards varieties of English, often juxtaposing their attitudes towards these varieties with their attitudes towards NE, usually to determine whether or not Nigerians demonstrate greater solidarity towards the latter (Esimaje & Nnamani, 2018; Olatoye, 2022a; Oyebola, 2020). However, a few studies in this direction have specifically focused on attitudes of Nigerians towards NE (Aboh, 2023; Ugwuanyi, 2021). More recently, some NE researchers have attempted to measure the attitudes of diasporan Nigerians towards accents of English, often using the verbal-guise test, which is one of the methodological approaches now common in NE research (see Section 4 for the discussion of other methods; Ugwuanyi & Oyebola, 2022).

We turn in the next section to descriptivist studies of NE, whether representing a position ‘more of the Centre’ or ‘more of the Left’. Reference is here made, however, only to works in which the distinctiveness of the Nigerian variety of English is demonstrated; the scope of the survey does not extend to a very large number of other works that lack this narrower focus. We recognise, however, that it is not always easy to keep these two perspectives apart and to classify a work accordingly.

3 | NIGERIAN ENGLISH: A SUMMARY OF ITS RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

WE scholars have attempted to develop classificatory models to show the various areas of research focus in the discipline. A notable attempt was developed by Bolton (2003, 2005), based on which other models of classification have been proposed (e.g. Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2009). Bolton’s model categorised WE research into 11 areas of research, namely English studies, English corpus linguistics, sociolinguistic approaches/the sociology of language, a ‘features-based’ approach, Kachruvian studies, Pidgin and creole studies, applied linguistics, lexicography, popularisers, critical linguistics and linguistic futurology. One clear strength of the model is that it provides the key proponents, objectives and indicative timelines for each approach. However, as Wolf and Polzenhagen (2009, p. 3) observe, ‘Bolton’s undertaking was a characterisation of the WE paradigm in general, without focusing on the literature on a particular region’. As our review focuses on a specific WE variety, we preferred to follow a theme-based classification, which roughly corresponds with the different levels/areas of linguistic analysis/research. More importantly, our classification reflects the synthetic approach to literature review (Schirmer, 2018) described in Section 1. However, it must be acknowledged that, as is the case with classificatory models, there are works that defy exclusive inclusion in one area because they

can fit into more than one category. In the sections below, we outline the wide range of research areas that NE research has focused on in the last five decades.

3.1 | The concept of a 'Standard'

In Nigeria, as shown above, there has been much interest in discerning a possible 'Standard' for English that, evolved internally, would be reflected in, for example, English teaching syllabuses. Efforts to identify it have been made, in fairly general terms, by Bamgbose (1982) and Udofot (2002). As Jowitt (1991, 2007a, 2019, Banjo (1971, 1996)) has pointed out, one of the problems associated with these efforts is the difference between 'Standard' (meaning a prestigious variety of a language that represents the usage of the highly educated relatively few) and 'standard' (meaning a variety that represents the usage of a wider social group, thus really meaning 'common at all levels'). Although it has not been widely adopted, Jowitt (1991) introduced the expression 'Popular Nigerian English' to refer to distinctive usages that could be considered in this sense common or widespread; a contrast is thus implied between what counts as 'Popular' and what counts as 'Standard'. An example is that the imperative *off the light* is widespread (popular, common, 'standard') among less educated Nigerians, while the 'Standard' *turn off the light* (or *switch off the light*) is preferred by the more educated speakers.

'Educated Nigerian English' and 'Standard Nigerian English' ought to have the same denotation (Bamgbose, 1982). But 'educated' is also a problematic expression. The number of students enrolled in Nigerian tertiary institutions has steadily grown over the decades, and there is little sense today in bringing together under one 'educated' category all those who have undergone education beyond, say, primary level. Even if the category included only those educated at the tertiary level, it would refer alike to undergraduates (a very large class), graduates (another large class), higher degree holders (a steadily growing class), professors, professionals, among others. Even though some studies include participants from these subgroups (Esimaje & Nnamani, 2018), none has yet to analyse the English usage of these groups: of, say, Nigerian degree holders. This is surely a potentially fruitful line of future research.

3.2 | The concept of 'varieties'

Another concern of certain scholars, closely allied to the search for 'Standard' Nigerian English, has been that of the identification of the varieties of NE. The first substantial proposal was that of Brosnahan (1958), who, incidentally, authored the first known published work on NE; he identified four 'levels' of spoken English, as did Banjo (1971). Later came the proposals of Adekunle (1979), Adesanoye (1973), Bamgbose (1982), Udofot (2002) and Ugorji (2010). All of them postulated three varieties, perhaps because three is the number of main stages (or varieties) on the educational ladder: primary, secondary and tertiary. It is also the number of 'lects' making up the 'post-Creole continuum' in Caribbean countries proposed by Bickerton (1975); and in Nigeria, this lectal triad is naturally correlated with the Varieties I/1, II/2 and III/3 of Banjo and Bamgbose, so that Variety III/3 (already correlated with 'Educated Nigerian English' and with 'Standard Nigerian English') is the NE acrolect.

Specifications of the varieties have been curiously neglected, however. Some scholars have tried to specify Variety III/3, but none has attempted characterisations of the other two varieties, except for Udofot (2002) and Ugorji (2010), who were both concerned only with phonology. The great problem is that demarcating varieties is an arbitrary business: if they are differentiated according to speakers' level of educational attainment, an individual may not abandon this or that usage on moving from one level to another. An example is that the tautology *can/could be able* is used by secondary school students, but it is also much used by undergraduates and graduates.

The triadic approach ought, therefore, to be abandoned. The safest option seems to be to limit ourselves to at most two polarities on a continuum of usage: one end represents 'Standard' (or 'acrolectal') and the other 'non-Standard' (or

'non-acrolectal'). This approach has been proposed by Okoro (2004) and Jowitt (2019). These observations apply to the 'vertical' (i.e. educational) parameter, and they show that the attempt to differentiate varieties in this way is problematic. Less problematic is differentiation according to a 'horizontal' parameter (i.e. according to geographical region or ethnic group). Here, the most interesting proposal so far is that of Jibril (1982). He produced a model in which the speech forms of all Nigerians could be accommodated, using both vertical and horizontal parameters. 'Hausa English' and 'Southern English' were each represented by a continuum that ranged from the 'Sophisticated' (i.e. Standard) to the 'Basic' (i.e. non-Standard). However, except in phonology (see Subsection 3.4), little work has been done along the lines of correlating NE usage with Nigeria's ethno-geographical groups.

3.3 | General works

In the early days of NE studies, articles appeared that sought to describe all the salient aspects of the distinctiveness of NE in all the main language areas. They include Bamgbose (1971), Jibril (1982) and Ajani (2007), although the latter does not treat phonology. These earlier works generally tended to focus on justifying the existence of NE, for 'it is right that emphasis in world Englishes research should initially be on justifying the very existence of world Englishes and their viability' (Bamgbose, 2020, p. 668).

Book-length publications of the same kind are Adeyanju (2009), Bamgbose et al. (1995), Banjo (1996), Dadzie and Awonusi (2004), Jowitt (1991), Kperogi (2015) and Jowitt (2019), Kujore (1985), Odumuh (1987), Ubahakwe (1979). Ubahakwe's book is a collection of papers presented at the first-ever conference on English in Nigeria, held at the University of Ibadan in 1978. Kujore adopts listing as his organising principle, providing little general analysis but giving little attention to phonology. Although it includes chapters from other West African Englishes, Bamgbose et al. (1995) is particularly rich as it covers wide-ranging areas of NE, including language policy, language teaching, literature in NE, varieties of NE and the place of corpora. Odumuh's book is a collection of essays, not all of which are by Odumuh himself. The chief merit of each book is that it brought to the attention of a wider public—more within Nigeria than outside—a great number of NE words.

Here seems to be a suitable place to mention the substantial chapter or section on Nigeria and NE that features in the seminal work of Schneider (2003, 2007, 2011). He maintains that Nigeria is deeply into 'nativisation', the third stage in the evolution of a 'postcolonial' English, as espoused in his Dynamic Model of the evolution of postcolonial Englishes. The applicability of his Dynamic Model to Nigeria has been evaluated by Ugorji (2015) and Ugwuanyi (2022b). For instance, Ugorji and Ugwuanyi argue that there is now sufficient evidence to posit that NE has reached Stage Four of the Dynamic Model, if not Five.

Another significant foundational work with a general outlook is Jowitt (1991). In the opinion of Schneider (2007, p. 212), Jowitt (1991) 'comes closest to an authoritative description of Nigerian English'. Along with some general analysis, it has chapters on morphosyntax, phonology and lexis, followed by a substantial 'glossary' of NE expressions. Banjo's book is a wide-ranging collection of essays on various aspects of English in Nigeria, while Dadzie and Awonusi (2004) provide a useful collection of essays by University of Lagos scholars of NE. Kperogi's approach is more journalistic than scholarly, and he virtually ignores phonology; but he describes a great variety of common usages, some of them for the first time. Jowitt (2019) is by no means a rehash of Jowitt (1991), especially as it includes a chapter of samples of writing in English by Nigerians from the late 18th century onwards and another outlining the history of English in Nigeria.

Book-length publications also include festschriften, a number of which have appeared since the beginning of the new millennium as scholars who came to prominence earlier have reached old age or retired. Those that include one or more chapters relating to NE are Awonusi and Babalola (2004) (in honour of Adetugbo); Owólábi and DasyIva (2004) (for Banjo); Ndimele (2007) (for Jibril); Okoro (2010) (for Akere); Udofot and Udoudom (2011) (for Eka); Opeibi et al. (2015) (for Awonusi); Babatunde et al. (2016) (for Jowitt), along with Oladipupo et al. (2020) (for Akinjobi), Daramola et al. (2021) (for Awonusi) and Jolayemi et al. (2022) (for Atoye).

Another strand of research that might be categorised as belonging to the 'general works' pertains to studies that investigated the extent of the Americanisation of NE. The key works in this regard are Awonusi (1994), Igboanus (2003) and, more recently, Olatoye (2022b). Interestingly, the findings from these studies indicate that, although there is a significant influence of American English on NE, there remains a strong preference for British English among NE speakers across lexical, syntactic and phonological domains.

3.4 | Phonology

General survey articles on NE phonology include those by Eka (1987) and Gut (2008). All of these show that, by comparison with inner-circle varieties, NE has a 'reduced' vowel system. The distinctiveness of one ethnic group or another, often reflecting 'L1 influence', has received some attention. Jibril's (1982) preference for treating the phonologies of Igbo English and Yoruba English together (as 'Southern English') instead of separately has been challenged by Okoro (2004) and Anyagwa (2015). Ugorji (2010) rivals Jibril (1982) in offering a comprehensive description of NE phonology that also pays attention to ethnic differences. Other studies have investigated the usage of other ethnic groups (e.g. Essien (2011) on the Ibibios of Akwa Ibom State, Igboanus (2006a) on Igbo English and Yoruba English, Muhammad (2021) on the speakers of Hausa, Igbo, Kanuri and Yoruba).

Works by Awonusi (2004a, 2007) have served to emphasise the differences in phoneme realisation between Received Pronunciation (RP) on the one hand and an undifferentiated 'Nigerian English Accent' (NEA) on the other. Awonusi has also been a prominent advocate of regarding the NEA as a 'Standard' for Nigeria, and, in line with his arguments, Jowitt (2015) suggests some adjustments that might be 'officially' adopted to bring about a 'Nigerian Received Pronunciation': for example, the realisation of the GOAT vowel as a monophthongal [o:]. Josiah and Babatunde (2011) provide a summary of the numerous inventories of phonemes compiled by earlier scholars, also with the aim of identifying a Nigerian 'Standard'.

The suprasegmentals of NE phonology have been more intensively researched since the 1980s. Eka (1985) wrote the first known doctoral dissertation to be concerned primarily with this subject. While Gut (2005) adopted a general approach to the prosody of NE, a number of other studies have addressed specific aspects of NE prosody. For example, word-level stress has been given considerable attention by Jolayemi (2006), Jowitt (1991), Kujore (1985), Simo Bobda (1995, 2007, 2010), Sunday (2011) and Omachonu (2011). Kujore lists a number of words that are stressed differently in RP and NE (e.g. RP *suc'cess* vs. NE *'success*); Jowitt emphasises the Nigerian preference for 'forward' stress in verbs such as *civi'lise*; Sunday examines stress in compounds, a still neglected aspect. Simo Bobda's works particularly compare NE phonology with that of its West African varieties (especially Cameroon English), offering the most thorough description to date, and see distinctive NE stress patterns in terms of the differing ways in which 'constraints' operate. The concept of constraints is also central in the work of Omachonu (2011) because he uses optimality theory as the framework for his account of stress. The theory is also used by Ugorji (2010) in his extensive account of NE phonology, designed with pedagogy in mind.

Stress in NE connected speech, once neglected, has been investigated along with rhythm notably by Udofot (1997, 2003) and Akinjobi (2006, 2009). Both address the question of whether NE should be regarded as 'syllable-timed', like Nigerian languages and in contrast to the 'stress-timed' inner-circle varieties. Udofot emphasises that here again there is a continuum of usage. Akinjobi examines the lack of vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, and shows that the strong forms of function words are used in connected speech. Emphatic stress in NE has received little attention; Awosika (2019) is the only known study so far published. A more general outlook on NE connected speech is a recent work by Jowitt (2023).

Intonation is now represented by a growing body of work, which includes Akinjobi and Oladipupo (2005) and Atoye (2005), Amayo (1986), Eka (1985), Jowitt (2000, 2007b), Udofot (2002). These studies all show that NE intonation makes almost exclusive use of simple tones (the fall and the rise); the fall-rise is little used except in pre-final subordinates; its falling and rising patterns are correlated invariably and exclusively with grammatical functions.

Some studies of the intelligibility of spoken NE to non-Nigerians (Cunningham, 2012; Ekong, 1978; Müller & Mair, 2023; Onwochei, 2019; Tiffen, 1974) have been carried out, with Tiffen showing that intelligibility failure is due chiefly to the way in which suprasegmentals are used. The intelligibility to Nigerians of non-NE speech has been investigated by Adedeji (2015).

3.5 | Morphosyntax

Due to the limited research on constituent ordering in NE and the close interplay between morphology and syntax, both levels were discussed together under this section as 'morphosyntax'. Although certain grammatical forms that occur in NE usage can be characterised as distinctively Nigerian, it must be acknowledged that some of them are also found in other non-inner circle varieties (Simo Bobda, 2000). In NE, the incidence of morphosyntactical forms is greatest at the 'less educated'/'non-Standard'/'non-acrolectal' end of the continuum of usage and decreases as approach is made to the 'more educated'/'Standard'/'acrolectal' end. For this reason, they are widely regarded as learners' errors that have become fossilised. As such, they naturally feature in pedagogy, and lists of them are found in such works as Jowitt and Nnamonu (1985) and Eyisi (2003). The view that the syntactic features of educated speakers of NE are markedly different from those of uneducated speakers is further developed in Obiegbu (2018) based on corpus evidence. However, nearly half of the 192 respondents (comprising 125 graduates and 67 undergraduates) in a questionnaire-based study described in Alo and Igwebuike (2012) considered such an omission in *the man is fond of accepting bribe* and other uniquely Nigerian syntactic expressions to be correct, which implies that some morphosyntactical features of NE might in fact be more widespread than most scholars thought. Ugwuanyi (2021) has also argued that the omission of the definite article is a feature of acrolectal NE. As pointed out earlier, scholars influenced by the world Englishes framework, such as Bamgbose (1998), Odumuh (1987), and more recently Lamidi (2007) and Mustapha (2011a), tend to take a more positive view of what some would characterise as grammatical errors. One now quite hoary test case is the pluralisation of uncountable nouns and collective nouns such as *staff* and *equipment*.

Overall, the morphosyntax of NE was until recently little studied within a descriptivist perspective. While Alo and Mesthrie (2008) was a general survey, another earlier work (Igboanusi, 2006b) focused on syntactic innovation in NE. The picture rapidly changed with the arrival of electronic corpora and other sources of data (see below). Where morphosyntax is concerned, these aids encourage a descriptivist approach to non-Standard forms. Some studies based upon the data supplied by them include Gut and Fuchs (2013) on the progressive aspect, Okoro (2013) on collocations, Werner and Fuchs (2017) on the present perfect tense, Akinlotan (2017) on the definite article, Akinlotan and Hausen (2017) on the noun phrase, Iyabo (2019) on cohesive devices and Olatoye (2023) on irregular verbs. The e-WAVE (Kortmann et al., 2020) seeks to show the frequency of various grammatical usages in a number of world Englishes, with ratings of frequency offered by experts. Those for NE are provided by Rotimi Taiwo, although some of his judgements are open to argument. Other studies focusing on the general features of NE morphosyntax include Opara (2019) and Jowitt (2019).

3.6 | Lexis

This area of NE usage has attracted more attention than any other, undoubtedly because here 'acculturation' or 'domestication' is most easily observed. Various categories have been proposed for the classification of the NE lexis. In Adekunle (1974), they include 'loan-translation' and 'loan-rendition', borrowed from the literature of 'languages-in-contact' such as Weinreich (1953). Adebijaja (1989) has five categories; Bamiro (1994) ten; Adebijaja (2004) adds two more to his earlier five; while Jowitt (2014, 2019) proposes a division into three 'major' categories and at least ten 'minor' ones. The major categories are so called because a great percentage of the total number of lexical items belong to them. Major categories are 'coinages' (e.g. *corper*, *area boys*), 'extensions' of sense or use (e.g. *severally*, meaning 'several times'; *tea*, used to refer to what speakers of British English, for example, call 'hot chocolate'), and 'transfers' from

an indigenous language (i.e. loans such as *egusi*, calques such as *bush-meat*, loan-renditions such as *sorry*). Minor categories include pleonasm or redundancy (e.g. *rose flower*), backformation (e.g. *barb* from *barber*), clipping (e.g. *guber* from *gubernatorial*), acronyms (e.g. *FRSC*), archaisms (e.g. *thrice*), reduplication (e.g. *five-five naira*) and prepositional variants (e.g. *on the long run*).

Outside the categories specified above, certain scholars have focused their attention on a particular register, such as kinship terms (Akere, 1982; Alo, 2004), idioms (Adegbija, 2003; Muhammad et al., 2016), proverbs (Nimram et al., 2021) and student slang (Akinremi, 2015; Blench, 2005; Longe, 1999). The study of (university) students' slang has gained increased interest in Nigeria today in view of Nigeria's huge student population. The contrast between formal and informal registers deserves more attention than it currently receives because of its importance to writers of academic English: some studies are Adetugbo (1979), Jowitt (1991, 2019) and Osundare (2014), Ubahakwe (1974), while clichés are discussed by Jowitt (1991, 2019). A study such as Wolf and Igboanusi (2003) has attempted to compare NE lexis with that of Cameroon English.

Efforts have been made to produce a general dictionary of NE, by Blench (2005) and Adegbite et al. (2014), Igboanusi (2002a), while Okoro (2011) is the first part of a projected two-part work and more of a glossary than a dictionary, but rich in insightful comments. They all have merits and demerits. Thus, Igboanusi is rich in loan words (although the second edition published in 2010 includes a wider range of words) and Blench in names of flora and fauna, but each is far from being comprehensive. Adegbite et al. features more than 1000 headwords. Although it is weak in including loan words, it includes many items belonging to the basilectal end of NE, such as *under must*, colloquially meaning 'necessary' and *off the light*, mentioned previously. Overall, however, apart from these glossaries and dictionaries, there has not been significant research engagement with NE lexicography.

3.7 | Discourse-pragmatic research in NE

The discourse-pragmatics investigations of NE deserve greater attention than they have received. This is surprising considering that NE speech is larded with discourse markers, often drawn from indigenous languages and Nigerian Pidgin, but until recently these received nothing like the attention given to, for example, Singaporean English *lah*. The earliest known works of NE pragmatic markers are Adegbija and Bello (2001) on *okay* (OK), Ogoanah (2011) on *as in* and Fuchs et al. (2013) on *even* and *still*, but it is the works of Foluke Unuabonah (and her collaborators) that signal the current explosion of interest in the study of NE discourse-pragmatic markers. These include *o*, *sha* and *abi* (Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2018), *na wa*, *shikena*, *ehn* and *ehen* (Unuabonah, 2020), *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, *chai* and *mtchew* (Unuabonah & Daniel, 2020), *jare*, *jor*, *shebi*, *shey*, *biko* and *fa* (Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2021), *now* (Oladipupo & Unuabonah, 2021), *oya* (Unuabonah, 2021), *abeg na* (Unuabonah, Oyebola & Gut, 2021), *mehn* (Unuabonah, 2022), as well as commentary pragmatic markers (Unuabonah & Gut, 2018) and discourse marker variability (Unuabonah, 2019). Other discourse-pragmatic themes investigated include stance markers (Gut & Unuabonah, 2019; Unuabonah, 2017a), metapragmatic comments (Unuabonah, 2017b), intensifiers (Unuabonah, Adebileje & Oladipupo, 2021), question tags (Westphal, 2022) and general extenders (Unuabonah & Oyebola, 2023).

Religiosity is another striking feature of Nigerian discourse; but the study of its expression in English is represented only by a few recent articles, such as Awonuga (2016) and Uwen (2020), Chiluwa (2007). Nigerian society also places a high value on the use of greetings and honorifics and the expression of politeness, and politeness is made a subject of study by Adegbija (1989) and Ofulue (2011); but it deserves more thorough investigation. Another relevant study is Mustapha (2011b), which investigated compliment response patterns. Aspects of the Nigerian linguistic landscape, in which English, Pidgin and indigenous languages may be mixed, are described by Adetunji (2015) and Nwagbara (2008). The latter focuses on the language of the slogans inscribed on buses and lorries.

Another line of research on NE discourse in recent years focuses on NE usage online, especially on social media platforms (Hofmann, 2020; Schmied, 2015; Udofot & Mbarachi, 2016), discussion forums (Honkanen, 2020, 2021; Lamidi, 2012; Mair, 2013), and email/text message communication (Awonusi, 2004b; Chiluwa, 2008, 2010). Mair's

and Honkanen's works focus on the NE discourse of diasporic Nigerians, an area of NE study that is gradually gaining traction. Other prominent works on this theme include Chiluya (2016) and Ugwuanyi and Oyebola (2022), Chiluya et al. (2014).

3.8 | Cognitive-cultural linguistic investigations of NE

Until recently, interest in the cognitive-cum-cultural linguistic aspects of NE has been scant, and this does not only pertain to NE, as Wolf and Polzenhagen (2009) show that world Englishes research underpinned by the theoretical notions of Cognitive Linguistics began to emerge only in the early 2000s, notably the works of Sharifian (2003, 2006). This delayed interest in the cultural-cognitive dimension of world Englishes is surprising given that 'the cultural-cognitive linguistic perspective is already implied in Kachru's thought, and, in some passages, he even makes explicit that the cultural dimension of language has to be sought out at the cognitive level' (Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2009, p. 28). As, according to Wolf and Polzenhagen (2009), the unsuitability of the descriptive tools of variationist sociolinguistics available at the time might be responsible for this, the growing availability of world Englishes corpora might have been the trigger for the recent interest in this important dimension of world Englishes, including in NE.

While what might be considered in this dimension the earliest work on NE (Alo, 1989) did not adopt a clear cognitive approach, it used the prototype framework (which is well-situated in Cultural Linguistics) to study five kinship terms in NE, namely *father*, *mother*, *brother*, *sister* and *uncle*. The study found, inter alia and like other studies after it, that these such consanguineal terms are used in NE to express unique social relationships and meanings, such as respect for seniority or status. Another early attempt in this direction is Medubi (2003), who used the Conceptual Metaphor theory to analyse Nigerian text-based cartoons.

Following the above foundational works, there emerged more cognitively oriented studies by a group of mostly German-based world Englishes scholars, chiefly Hans-Georg Wolf, Frank Polzenhagen, Anna Finzel and Marcus Callies. Although these scholars have studied many varieties of African English (with no study focused entirely on NE), their studies mentioned here are those that include NE as a key case study. For instance, Frank Polzenhagen's doctoral work (monographed in his 2007 *Cultural Conceptualisations in West African English*) explored the African sense of community, where he developed what he called the 'African Community Model', which he characterised as kinship-based (Polzenhagen, 2007; Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2007). The work also studied other conceptual networks (such as *LEADERSHIP*, *WITCHCRAFT* and *ENRICHMENT* as *EATING*), as well as cultural schemas such as linguistic expressions of corruption (the cultural conceptualisation of corruption is more fully studied in Polzenhagen & Wolf, 2007, 2021). Similarly, Wolf and Polzenhagen (2009) explore the conceptualisations of *COMMUNITY* and *FAMILY* (which they regard as overlapping), as well as *SPIRITUALITY* in various varieties of African English, including NE.

Other studies have focused on a wide range of cultural conceptualisations, such as the colonial subject (Polzenhagen et al., 2021), gender and homosexuality (Finzel, 2021a, 2021b; Finzel & Wolf, 2017), cultural conceptualisations of food-related idiomatic expressions (Callies, 2017), as well as metaphoric conceptualisations (Callies, 2021; Callies & Onysko, 2017), specifically the underlying cultural conceptualisations of animals, such as *EAGLE* (Keškić, 2021) and *GOAT* (Keškić, 2023). As the cognitive-cultural linguistic investigation of NE continues to evolve, the few existing studies reviewed here indicate the viability of this aspect of NE. However, what remains to be seen is NE-specific studies, which is clearly an area for future research.

3.9 | NE and Nigerian literature in English

Although linguistic investigation into Nigerian literary works (broadly known as stylistics) has, in recent times, become a popular focus of research among scholars and students in Nigerian higher institutions, surprisingly less attention is given to the use of NE in such works. However, a few relatively earlier works have focused on this line of inquiry,

namely Taiwo (1979) and later by Igboanusi (2001, 2002b). Works such as Adebileje and Araba (2012), Ajidahun (2014) and Uwen and Nta (2021), Bamiro (1991, 2006) primarily seek to demonstrate the existence of NE as a general fact, but they locate instances of it in Nigerian literary texts; while Aremu (2015) and Aboh and Uduk (2016) focus on the pragmatics of NE in Nigerian literature.

3.10 | History

Little attention has been given to the history of the English language in Nigeria, including the development of NE. The subject has great research potential, but so far it has been treated only in chapters in books or short articles, notably Adetugbo (1978), Ogu (1992), Omolewa (1979), Osisanwo (2016) and Jowitt (2019). Jowitt's chapter makes considerable use of Fafunwa's (1991) history of education in Nigeria. Schneider (2007), of necessity, includes a summary of the history of English in Nigeria for the purposes of specifying his Dynamic Model. A significant portion of Ugwuanyi's (2025, forthcoming) work is devoted to a description of the history of NE.

4 | METHODOLOGY IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH STUDIES

Initially, studies of NE were broadly 'impressionistic'. This was hardly surprising at a time when linguistics, in general, had not yet wholeheartedly espoused empirical methods. Increasingly, however, empirical data were provided by 'authentic' written materials, laboratory texts, interviews, responses to questionnaires and so on. Today, the use of such methods has become normal. The recent interest in the study of attitudes of Nigerians towards NE as well as other English varieties has, naturally, led to the deployment of psycholinguistic methods, chiefly the verbal-guise test (Olatoye, 2022a; Oyebola, 2020), which has been, in some sense, the go-to instrument for measuring implicit attitudes in social psychology and language attitudes studies. Similarly, Ugwuanyi (2021) utilises the acceptability judgement task to study the English language ownership attitudes of speakers of NE.

In recent decades, studies in the field of linguistics (and not only here) have been revolutionised with the compiling and the use of electronic databases or corpora; and 'corpus linguistics' now has an impact felt in every branch of linguistics. The study of NE, in particular, has been greatly transformed by the completion of the 1-million-word Nigerian component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-Nigeria) in 2013 (Gut, 2012; Wunder et al., 2010). A number of published studies have already resulted from it, including some of those mentioned in Subsections 3.5 and 3.7. It seems that the corpus has been most used in the study of NE syntax (Akinlotan, 2018) and pragmatics (Esimaje et al., 2019). ICE-Nigeria is not the only such corpus available for the study of NE, however. Another is the 1.9-billion-word Global Web-Based English Corpus (GloWbE; Davies, 2013), which represents a number of worldwide varieties of English, including NE; while other smaller corpora have been designed for the study of NE alone or for this and at least one another variety, such as the Corpus of Nigerian and Cameroonian English Learner Language (CONACELL; Esimaje, 2019). More significantly, the Historical Corpus of English in Nigeria (HiCE-Nigeria) has just been published (Unuabonah et al., 2022), opening up the exciting prospect of investigating NE diachronically.

5 | CONCLUSION

In this article, we have attempted a survey of NE research, covering major works and areas of scholarly interest in this vast and rapidly developing English variety. We make no claim to have included all important works; some might have escaped our net, but we believe we have successfully provided a first mapping of the research landscape, which will prove useful to scholars seeking a general understanding of what has already been accomplished in the field. In different sections of the paper, we have provided what we consider to be possible research paths that future NE research

can consider. Let us now emphasise and extend these. First, the study of the use of NE in online spaces is likely to increase, given the increased online engagements among (young) Nigerians. Second, the already sprouting interest in the study of NE in the diaspora is likely to grow, especially because Nigerian diasporic populations (who are known to take their language with them) are growing exponentially. Third, the investigation of NE usage of the more distant past (i.e. before 1960) is likely to be intensified, especially with the Historical Corpus of English in Nigeria (HiCE-Nigeria). Fourth, the comparison of NE with other varieties (especially African varieties) will be an increasing matter of investigation. In the years ahead, the various electronic aids now available will make possible much further empirical research in the areas just mentioned. Nevertheless, certain limitations of corpora are beginning to come to light. Their findings may not always be reliable, but because of their relative novelty, it is easy to over-value what they offer. More traditional methods of research (such as surveys and ethnographic methods) will, in fact, continue to be useful, and they can and should be used in conjunction with corpora for a more nuanced understanding of linguistic phenomena. But all in all, the prospects for the future of NE studies are rather exciting.

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