

Nigerian English: History, functions and features

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Abstract

This article offers a comprehensive overview of Nigerian English, a rapidly expanding variety of world Englishes, recognised as one of the fastest-growing varieties of English globally in numerical terms. This article has four aims. First, it discusses the historical developments of English in Nigeria with reference to the events that led to the implantation of English in Nigeria and the periods in which these events occurred. Second, the article highlights the status and functions of English in official, educational, religious, media, creative writing and other domains in Nigeria. Third, it describes the phonological, lexico-semantic, morphosyntactic and discourse-pragmatic features of Nigerian English. Finally, following the survey, this article suggests directions for future research on Nigerian English. A key conclusion drawn from this article is that English has firmly established itself in Nigeria and that the functional range, significance and recognition of Nigerian English are expected to continue expanding.

1 | INTRODUCTION

When a language finds its way into a foreign country, it undergoes a process of adaptation and most of the time acquires the linguistic and cultural features of its new host environment. This adaptation can occur at phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic and discourse-pragmatic levels. English is one of the languages that has been implanted in many foreign countries either through colonialism or globalisation, which has positioned it as a global language for use in domains such as business, diplomacy and education. A notable sociolinguistic implication of the spread of English

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across the world is the emergence of many English varieties. Nigeria is one of the countries where English was introduced first through trans-Atlantic trade relations and was consolidated through many decades of British colonisation. The long-standing existence of English in Nigeria and its interaction with over 500 indigenous languages have resulted in a nativised variety known as Nigerian English, characterised by wide-ranging lexical items, grammatical rules and cultural concepts drawn from standardised British English and the many numerous Nigerian indigenous languages that English has been in contact with.

Nigerian English can be defined from both broad and narrow perspectives. Broadly speaking, Nigerian English is commonly defined as the English spoken by Nigerians, encompassing a wide range of variations and styles. This perspective acknowledges that English in Nigeria is used in diverse contexts, from formal settings to casual conversations, and may exhibit varying degrees of influence from local languages and cultures and spoken by speakers of varying levels of competence. From a narrow perspective, Nigerian English refers to 'the phonological, grammatical, and lexical properties that distinguish the English used in Nigeria from varieties of English elsewhere' (Jowitt, 2019, p. 1). This perspective focuses on the specific linguistic features that distinguish Nigerian English from other varieties of English. It highlights the unique phonological (pronunciation), grammatical (sentence structure) and lexical (vocabulary) characteristics that have emerged due to the interaction of English with Nigerian languages and cultural contexts. This perspective emphasises the systematic nature of these differences, often showing the extent to which Nigerian English has developed its own distinct linguistic norms. In essence, the broad perspective emphasises the sociolinguistic reality of English usage in Nigeria, while the narrow perspective focuses on the linguistic characteristics that set Nigerian English apart as a distinct variety.

The increasing use of Nigerian English and its promotion as a legitimate variety of English has resulted in a burgeoning of research on the variety from a wide range of linguistic standpoints (Jowitt, 2019, also see Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025, in this issue for an overview). Following Walsh's (1967) pioneering work on Nigerian English, arguments for and against the existence of Nigerian English were particularly rife in the mid-20th century. Scholars who argue against the existence of Nigerian English as a legitimate variety of English (Eyisi, 2003; Vincent, 1974) perceive it as usage errors and deficits that must be discarded in favour of Received Pronunciation. Jowitt (2019) refers to this group of scholars as rejecters and prescriptivists. Scholars favouring Nigerian English (Bamgbose, 1982; Jowitt, 2019) see it as a legitimate variety of English that deserves sustained scholarly attention. As is, the debate on whether there is a Nigerian English variety has waned because there have been increasing discussions of Nigerian English both in academic and non-academic spaces. Further argument in support of the status of Nigerian English as an independent variety of English is that it meets the four criteria used to classify New Englishes (Brunner, 2017). First, Nigerian English developed as a result of British colonialism and spread through education. Second, Nigerian English is spoken in a multilingual society in which it co-exists alongside many Nigerian languages. Third, it performs formal and official functions in sites of power, such as education, media and business. Finally, Nigerian English results from the nativisation of English in Nigeria, as evidenced by the presence of specific phonetic patterns, unique grammatical structure and local vocabulary items.

The exact number of speakers of Nigerian English is unknown. However, Pinon and Haydon (2010) estimated the percentage of Nigerian English speakers to be 53. With the increase in Nigerian population from 160 million people in 2010 when they made the estimation to about 220 million people in 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023) and the ever-expanding use, functional range and status of English in Nigeria, it should not be unexpected that the percentage of Nigerian English speakers has exceeded 53%. In light of these current realities, it is possible that the number of speakers of Nigerian English is well over a hundred million. If one exclusively focuses on New Englishes, Ugwuanyi (2025) notes that Nigeria has the highest number of English speakers in Africa and the second-highest worldwide, following India. In light of these facts, Nigerian English is considered one of the most spoken English varieties in Africa.

It is important to note here that there are many sub-varieties of Nigerian English, which are divided along ethnic/regional, educational or socio-economic lines (Aboh, 2023a, 2023b for a discussion of these sub-varieties). Nigerian English used in this article refers to the acrolectal variety spoken by educated Nigerians who typically reside in urban areas. The acrolectal variety, also called the Standard(ised) Nigerian English or Educated Nigerian English, has

been said to be the variety that is closest to Received Pronunciation in phonological, morphosyntactic and discourse-pragmatic features and is acceptable in Nigeria's educational, political, media and literary domains (Kperogi, 2015). In this article, we provide a historical background of English in Nigeria, the status and functions of English in Nigeria and the features of Nigerian English. We end by suggesting some directions for future research on Nigerian English.

2 | THE EVOLUTION OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

The history of English in Nigeria can be approached through both chronological and event-based perspectives. A chronological perspective examines the implantation of English and the spread of English, while an event-based perspective focuses on significant activities or events such as trade, Christian evangelisation, colonialism and independence that contributed to the emergence of English in Nigeria. These perspectives are interrelated and often intersect as the discussion of one aspect (whether chronological or event-based) naturally leads to the considerations of the other. As a result, the presentation of the history of English here combines both perspectives: the discussion of the historical events that shaped the emergence of Nigerian English is couched in specific historical epochs, while the presentation of pre-colonial and British colonial phases also included specific events within each era.

From an event-based perspective, although English was not the first European language to reach Nigeria, its emergence in the mid-16th century and subsequent widespread usage over time has significantly altered Nigeria's sociolinguistic profile (Banjo, 1970). Existing studies recognise Portuguese as the first European language in Nigeria, believed to have been introduced in the 15th century through Portuguese merchants (Adetugbo, 1978). Nigeria's contact with Portuguese explains the presence of several Portuguese words such as *sabi*, *pikin* or *dash* (all from Portuguese *saber* meaning 'know', *pequeno* meaning 'small' or 'child' and *dar* meaning 'give' respectively) in Nigerian Pidgin, some of which are argued to be making inroads into the acrolectal variety of Nigerian English (Jowitt, 2019). The monopoly of the Portuguese merchants as the only European pepper traders in Nigeria was challenged by the arrival of British merchants in the mid-16th century led by Thomas Windham (Adetugbo, 1978). However, this challenge was short-lived, given that fever forced the British merchants to return to Britain. Much later in the 17th century, the British merchants returned and established more trading contacts in Nigeria, thereby challenging the dominance of the Portuguese not only economically but linguistically, as English gradually replaced Portuguese as the language for trade.

The use of English in trade in Nigeria was intensified during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, given that England was a major exporter of enslaved people from the ports of Bonny, Calabar, Benin and Lagos (Adetugbo, 1978). Professional interpreters were trained abroad to offer English interpreting services to ship captains and other merchants, and these interpreters served as intermediaries in the exportation of enslaved people from the ports of the Niger Delta across the Atlantic Ocean (Spencer, 1971). The slave trade contributed to the rise in the English-speaking population in Nigeria as the Nigerian slave dealers needed to learn English to interact with English-speaking Europeans. Other locals learned English by enrolling in English-medium schools where bookkeeping and accounting were taught to facilitate the slave business. The enslaved people who were forcibly transported to Britain and the Americas equally learned English, and when the slave trade was abolished in 1807, some of them settled in Freetown (Sierra Leone), while others traced their roots to Nigeria and resettled in places such as Lagos and Abeokuta (Adetugbo, 1978). With English as part of their linguistic repertoire, these formerly enslaved people returned and added to the number of English speakers in Nigeria.

Following the abolishment of the slave trade, another factor that aided the spread of English to other parts of Nigeria, especially beyond the coastal communities in Southern Nigeria, was Christian evangelisation in the mid-19th century, with the Church of Scotland in Calabar, Church Missionary Society (or CMS, as it is more widely known) in Onitsha, and the Methodists in Lagos (Adetugbo, 1978). The English-speaking missionaries built churches and set up schools in the communities, where they primarily taught new converts English to enable them to read the Bible, serve as interpreters and help convert others. Fafunwa (1991) notes that English was the medium of instruction in these schools because of the early missionaries' inability to speak the indigenous languages. The positive attitudes of parents

towards English-medium education contributed to the emergence of about 36,000 pupils in mission and government primary schools in Southern Nigeria in 1913 (Adetugbo, 1978).

While English was vigorously spreading through education and missionary activities in Southern Nigeria, it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that schools were successfully established in northern parts of Nigeria, such as Zaria and Bida. The different time points that English was implanted in Southern and Northern and the religious differences can explain the variations in the attitudes, levels of proficiency and Nigerian English features between the two regions (Aboh, 2023a). Although trade and Christian missionary expeditions laid the foundations for the implantation of English in Nigeria, the advent of British colonialism firmly cemented the indelible presence and status of English within Nigeria's complex linguistic landscape.

Between 1900 and 1960, Nigeria was officially under British colonial administration during which the Northern Protectorate and the Southern Protectorate (as they were then called) were amalgamated into a single administrative entity, which was called Nigeria. This amalgamation not only brought two geographical regions together but also converged multiple unintelligible indigenous languages, thereby intensifying the need to use English as a lingua franca. During the colonial administration, more English-medium schools were established across the country, which led to an increase in the proficiency of several Nigerians in English, and broadly deepened the spread of English in the country. The status of English as the language of the courts, civil service and the basis for government employment made it to be perceived as an elite language, expanded its functions and intensified the need to learn it (Aboh, 2022). After Nigeria attained independence in 1960, Nigeria's political elite upheld the status of English as an official language, a policy that persists to date, thus continuing to make English flourish in the country.

From the discussions so far, it can be observed that trade and Christian evangelisation events occurred during the pre-colonial period, while the period between 1900 and 1960 captured the colonial period, which includes events such as the amalgamation of the southern and northern parts of Nigeria in 1914 and the independence in 1960. The post-colonial period covers the spread of English in Nigeria after independence in October 1960. While there has not been any obvious tsunamic political event that has caused a radical change in the development of English in Nigeria in the post-independence era (or 'Event X'—to use Schneider's (2007, p. 48) term for this sort of event), it is not in doubt that Nigerian English has continued to grow in numerical, attitudinal and functional strength. In the next section, we describe the status and functions of English in Nigeria.

3 | THE STATUS AND FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

The status of English as a symbol of Nigerian unity and as a tool for upward social mobility resulted in its *de facto* recognition as Nigeria's official language. Although the designation of English as Nigeria's official language is not explicit in the Constitution, the statement in Section 55 of the 1999 Constitution that 'the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate preparations have been made therefore' is interpreted by many to mean that these four languages are recognised as official languages (Jowitt, 2019). Despite the absence of an explicitly *de jure* recognition of English as Nigeria's official language, English wields more power than any other language in the country. It is the dominant language in official, educational, media, religious, creative writing and inter-ethnic communication, as well as in the wider linguistic landscape of the country (Adetunji, 2015).

In the official domain, English is used in all the different federal arms of government: legislative, judiciary and executive. It is the language used by the president, ministers and other political stakeholders in official press conferences, correspondences and virtually all forms of communication. To demonstrate the acceptance of English as an official language, former President Muhammadu Buhari was criticised for addressing Nigerians during the 2017 Eid-al-Fitr in Hausa instead of English (this issue is the subject of discussion in Ugwuanyi & Mckenzie, 2025 in this special issue). The Constitution, by-laws, budget and legal documents are mostly written in English. It is the language used mainly for diplomatic engagements and interactions with foreign governments and organisations.

English also plays a crucial role in Nigeria's educational sector. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education of 1977 (revised many times, the latest being the approval of mother tongue instruction in 2022) clearly recognises

indigenous languages as the medium of instruction from primary one to six, while English would be used throughout secondary and university education (Agbakwuru, 2022), in practice, English is the medium of instruction at all levels of education. Every student is expected to have a credit pass in English before being admitted into any higher education institution, a requirement which does not apply to indigenous languages. In addition, English is a compulsory two-semester subject commonly known as the *Use of English* for all Nigerian students in all higher education institutions. These facts show the power of English in Nigeria's education system. The non-realisation of mother tongue education in Nigeria is partly caused by factors such as the unavailability of instructional materials and qualified teachers in the indigenous languages. In addition, Igboanusi and Peter (2016) found that most parents prefer to enrol their children in schools where English is the sole medium of instruction because it is considered to be the language for upward social mobility and professional opportunities. Due to the power of English in education, it is the dominant language for publishing learning materials, except for books used to teach indigenous languages. In the West African Certificate Examination in Nigeria, English is a compulsory subject that every student needs to pass before being admitted into tertiary education. However, Nigerian indigenous languages are made optional. According to Kamwangamalu (2016), other reasons for the dominance of English in education in sub-Saharan African countries include:

[First] the myth that language diversity or multilingualism is a problem. [Second] Africa's economic dependency on the West. [Third] elite closure, that is, a type of social mobilization strategy by which those persons in power establish or maintain their powers and privileges via linguistic choice [and lastly] the low linguistic instrumentalism of African languages, that is, the fact that there is no demand for these languages in the formal labour market. (Kamwangamalu, 2016, p. 60)

The non-realisation of mother tongue education, given the dominance of English in education, may have resulted in the rise of monolingual speakers of Nigerian English, especially in urban areas. Taiwo (2009) estimates that L1 speakers of Nigerian English are over 4 million, which is expected to have doubled by now, according to Nigeria's population growth rate. For these monolingual English speakers, English has become an inseparable part of their identity (see Ugwuanyi, 2021 and 2022 for a detailed discussion of this group of speakers). Some of them drop their indigenous personal names or anglicise them to assimilate into their perceived dominant English identity (Eze et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the power of English in the media is reflected in the increasing use of English in traditional and new media. Many Nigerian newspapers are published in English, and the number of TV and radio programmes in English outnumber those in indigenous languages (Aboh, 2022). Perhaps with the exception of Nigerian Pidgin, English is the most used language by Nigerians on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram and X, as well as in the Nigerian music industry to engage with a broad audience. Additionally, in Nollywood (Nigeria's movie industry), there is the dominance of films in English compared to those in indigenous languages because producing the former is more profitable than the latter. One advantage of this situation is that the popularity of Nollywood in Africa and beyond has popularised Nigerian English to the rest of the world. English also dominates in creative writing in Nigeria and has led to the emergence of many award-winning Nigerian writers such as Chimamanda Adichie, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. While responding to why she writes in English, Adichie answered that it is the language in which most readers in Nigeria have stronger reading skills. Achebe (1975) argues that his choice to write in English stems from his interest in adapting English to his Nigerian experience, giving rise to a new form of English that best suits the sensibilities of Nigerians.

The functions of English in Nigeria today also extend to religion and linguistic landscapes, which refer to the visible presence of languages in public spaces, such as signs, billboards and other forms of written language. Because of the international and inter-ethnic nature of many Nigerian megachurches, English is the language of worship for the vast majority of Christian groups, which enables the churches to reach all Nigerians and people worldwide, thus further popularising the Nigerian variety of English. Taiwo (2009) notes that many Nigerian Christian youths prefer attending church services in English. With regard to the language of linguistic landscapes, many street signs, advertisements, public transportation and other written or visual displays in Nigeria's public sphere are mostly written in English (Adetunji, 2015).

With over 500 mutually unintelligible indigenous languages, English serves as a lingua franca in Nigeria. As a lingua franca, it is the language for inter-ethnic communication, such as in inter-ethnic marriages, multi-ethnic corporations and workplaces and markets in urban areas. The choice of English for inter-ethnic communication is because it is considered by many people as the most ethnically neutral, since the elevation of any indigenous language as the lingua franca tends to stimulate resentment among those whose language was not chosen (Adegbija, 1994). In recent years, the role of the English language has expanded from facilitating inter-ethnic communication to encompassing intra-ethnic communication. English is now used by some individuals who share the same ethnolinguistic identity and speak the same indigenous language. For instance, *Ohaneze Ndigbo*, a group comprising Igbo-speaking people advocating for the rights of the Igbo people, uses English to conduct its meetings despite the fact that all the members can speak and understand Igbo (Aboh, 2022). As such, Ugwuanyi (2021) argues that English in Nigeria performs wide-ranging functions in public and private domains because Nigerians perceive English as part of their identity and have a high sense of ownership towards it. Therefore, it can be reasonably concluded that the dominance and influence of English in Nigeria are boundless.

4 | THE FEATURES OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH

Based on the growing acceptance of the existence of Nigerian English, there has been burgeoning research on Nigerian English phonetics and phonology (Jowitt, 2019; Olaniyi & Josiah, 2013), lexico-semantics and morphosyntax (Alo & Mesthrie, 2008; Werner & Fuchs, 2017) and discourse-pragmatic features (Unuabonah, 2022). This section of the article provides an overview of some typical features of the acrolectal variety of Nigerian English. The features described here reflect characteristics that distinguish Nigerian English as a variety of English, rather than those associated with learner English because they are widely used by the vast majority of Nigerians and accepted in official domains (Bamgbose, 1998). In fact, the features discussed in this section, and indeed acrolectal Nigerian English in general, clearly meet the five criteria for determining the status of norms in a variety of English outlined by Bamgbose (1998), which are widely referenced in the world Englishes literature.

4.1 | Phonological features

The phonology of Nigerian English is significantly influenced by the phonologies of indigenous languages, which has given rise to ethnic-based varieties such as Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba Englishes (Aboh, 2023a; Jowitt, 2019). The phonological features described here are those that are more salient in the acrolectal Nigerian English variety, so this discussion makes no claim to comprehensiveness.

- a. Nigerian English phonology is characterised by the monophthongisation of diphthongs and the diphthongisation of triphthongs, which has reduced the number of vowels compared to Received Pronunciation. For instance, in Nigerian English, [eɪ] is substituted with [e] as in [mek] for [meɪk] 'make', and [aɪə] with [aja] as in [faja] for [faɪə] 'fire'. Notice also that there is the introduction of a consonantal sound [j] in a cluster that has no consonant sound in the Received Pronunciation, for example.
- b. Consonants and vowels in Received Pronunciation that are absent in Nigerian indigenous languages are approximated in Nigerian English. For example, [t] for [θ], [d] for [ð], and [ɔ], [a] or [ɒ] for [ʌ] or [ə]. Occasionally, there is metathesis in consonant clusters. For example, [ɑ:skɪs] can be realised as [ɑ:ks(s)].
- c. Given that most indigenous Nigerian languages are tonal languages and, therefore, syllable-timed compared to English, which is intonational and stress-timed, Nigerians tend to stress virtually all syllables in their speech or place the stress differently. The substitution of schwa with stressed vowels in Nigerian English also contributes to stressing the often-unstressed schwa. For instance, [sək'ses] is realised as [ˈsɔ.ses] 'success'. The tonal nature of many Nigerian languages also impacts the intonational patterns of Nigerian English.

- d. Nigerian English is generally non-rhotic. This means that /r/ is not pronounced at the end of words or before consonants as in [dʒɑ:] 'jar', similar to Received Pronunciation. However, some Nigerian languages, like Hausa, are rhotic, tending to make Hausa English slightly rhotic.

4.2 | Lexico-semantic features

Nigerian English is characterised by lexico-semantic features influenced by the multilingual context of Nigeria, and these features set it apart from other varieties of New Englishes (Jowitt, 2019; Ugwuanyi, 2021). Below are the major lexico-semantic features of Nigerian English.

- a. Coinages/neologisms: Nigerian English is characterised by several instances of new words. Examples include: *up NEPA* 'conveys the idea of electrical power being restored', *disvirgin* 'deflower', *carry go* 'to proceed or continue with something', *corper* 'a member of the compulsory national service in Nigeria known as National Youth Service Corps', *next tomorrow* 'the day after tomorrow', *been-to* 'someone who has travelled overseas', *ember months* 'the last four months of the year, i.e., September, October, November and December, considered together as a hectic period and when bad things often happen', *off-point* 'off-topic', *talkless of* 'let alone/much less', *carry last* 'to be left behind or to miss out'.
- b. Pleonasm refers to using synonymous words together, often more than necessary, to convey meaning. For example, *short knickers* 'short' or 'knickers', *from now henceforth* 'from now' or 'henceforth' both indicating starting from the present and continuing into the future, *but still yet* used together when the use of either of these words would suffice to convey the intended meaning.
- c. Semantic extension of sense/use: Several words in Nigerian English are used beyond their original or primary sense. Examples include: *flash* 'to dial someone's phone and hang up quickly so they call back or just to alert the person of something', *go-slow* 'a traffic jam', *bogus* 'big', *convocated* or *convoke* 'take part in a university convocation/graduation', *homely* 'well behaved', *branch* 'to stop over; to call at a place', *severally* 'several times/on several occasions', *gist* 'to chat, tell or gossip', *back* 'to carry someone on one's back', *carry over* 'repeat/resit a failed course of study', *chop* 'to eat'.
- d. Loanwords: Nigerian English is characterised by the presence of loanwords from indigenous languages, such as *okada* (derived from a placename) 'commercial motorcycle', *tokunbo* (Yoruba) 'an imported second-hand product, especially a car', *okirika* (derived from a placename) 'imported second-hand clothes', *jara* 'something extra or a bonus, often given for free', *wahala* 'trouble', *buka* 'a roadside restaurant or street stall', *egusi soup* 'soup made from melon seed', *odogwu* 'a person of great importance, strength, bravery or achievement', *japa* 'the act of migrating out of Nigeria'. Occasionally, the meaning of the loanword might be extended. For example, *japa* prototypically means to run swiftly or to escape.
- e. Nigerian English idiomatic expressions include: *take in* 'become pregnant', *on seat* 'be in one's office or place of work', *put to bed* 'of a woman, give birth', *to rub minds (together)* 'to consider a matter jointly; to consult and work together', *long leg* 'the use of undue influence to gain an advantage', *strong headed* 'to be stubborn', *shine one's eye* 'to be alert or vigilant', *to fall someone's hand* 'to disappoint or embarrass someone'.
- f. Other lexico-semantic features include conversion: *off* 'to switch off'; back formation: *opportuned* back-formed from *opportunity* 'have an opportunity'; and clipping: *guber* 'gubernatorial', *agric* 'agriculture'.

4.3 | Morphosyntactic features

The morphosyntactic features of New Englishes are often the most debated, as many believe that the grammar of a language variety should closely align with that of the 'parent' language (Jowitt, 2019). However, the common

morphosyntactic norms in Nigerian English are presented below. Some of these features are not exclusive to Nigerian English as they can be found in other New Englishes, which is typical of world English varieties.

- a. The pluralisation of non-count nouns, such as *furnitures, evidences, advices, slangs* and *luggages*, is common. Given the pluralisation of these words, expressions such as *I want to give you an advice, we bought a lot of furnitures* are common in Nigerian English.
- b. Use of double modal auxiliaries: *You can be able to do it, you must have to marry her.*
- c. Double conjunctions in subordinated clauses: *although she is competent, but I will not vote for her; although he started before others, yet he was the last to finish the race.*
- d. In polar questions, there is an alternation between 'yes' and 'no' responses, where 'yes' is used in place of 'no'. For instance, in the question 'hasn't he come?', the expected response in Received Pronunciation would be 'No, he has not come'. However, in Nigerian English, the response can begin with 'Yes', indicating agreement with the negative proposition, as in 'Yes (what you said is correct), he has not come'.
- e. Double subjects: *my mother she is proud of me, the citizens they deserve to elect their leader.*
- f. Some intransitive verbs are used as transitive verbs: *we discussed about her proposal, the carnival holds next week.*
- g. Prepositional collocations behave differently in Nigerian English: *I am in a bus now, congratulations for your graduation, let's go with your car.*
- h. Omission of articles: *Ø majority of men love football, Ø rate of child mortality is reducing in the world.*
- i. Use of progressive aspect: *Are you hearing me? Is she understanding them?*
- j. Reduplication for emphasis: *small small 'gradually', fine fine 'very fine or beautiful'* (this feature is the focus of Odiegwu & Faraclas, forthcoming, this issue)
- k. Use of object pronoun subject positions: *me and my father will visit you tomorrow, Myself and Ada went to the cinema.*

4.4 | Discourse-pragmatic features

It is only recently that scholarly works discussing the discourse-pragmatic features of Nigerian English have begun to emerge. Notably, the majority of particles that form these discourse-pragmatic features in NE originate from Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous Nigerian languages, which has led to ongoing debates regarding their acceptance into the acrolectal variety of NE. While Unuabonah and Oladipupo (2018) argue that many of these particles are likely candidates for inclusion in Standard(ised) Nigerian English due to their increasing frequency, distribution and functions, Ugwuanyi (2025) posits that some have already been incorporated, such as *sef* and *abi*, which are already recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as Nigerian English words. Some of the discourse-pragmatic features of Nigerian English include:

- a. Discourse particles: *abi* or *ko* 'used in the sense of the generalised *isn't it?* or *right?* tag question; or used to indicate agreement or slight surprise', *haba* or *kai* 'used to express strong surprise', *sef* 'used for emphasis after a statement or rhetorical question, often expressing irritation or impatience', *o* 'used for emphasis or mitigation' (Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2018), *as in (eh)* 'used to indicate agreement' and *sha* 'anyway; in fact'.
- b. Modes of address and greetings: Some common examples are *sir* and *ma* 'used to address any *senior* (meaning "older" in Nigerian English) person or a person of a higher rank, used in both formal and informal contexts'. Another common greeting/address form is *well done*, used to address someone engaged in work.

The discussion thus far in this section provides a snapshot of the features of Nigerian English. These features have been discussed in detail in books and dictionaries (Igboanus, 2010; Jowitt, 2019).

5 | NIGERIAN ENGLISH IN LANGUAGE POLICY

Language policy discourse tends to focus on the roles languages in a country play in formal contexts (Bamgbose, 2020). Reagan and Schreffler (2005, p. 115) maintain that language planning and policies in Africa have been debated on whether to use 'English as the medium of instruction and, in so doing, succumb to linguistic imperialism; or to use a local language and, in this process, cut off students from the international scholarly community'. This debate could explain why the African Union (originally called Organisation of African Unity) in 1986 formulated a 'Language Plan of Action for Africa' aimed at implementing exo-endoglossic policies, which could enable African languages and colonial languages to serve as official languages and media of instruction in schools (Kamwangamalu, 2016).

Although English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have co-official status, English dominates in all domains in Nigeria. The dominance of English in Nigeria is perhaps due to the poor institutional support received by these languages and the use of escape clauses in the policy documents, such as that languages other than English may be used in official domains 'when the government developed instructional materials and qualified teachers available' and 'when adequate arrangements have been made therefor' (Agbakwuru, 2022). These escape clauses provide a convenient justification for inaction, as the conditions for using other languages are often not met, which can result in a lack of progress in the promotion of multilingualism and linguistic diversity. Thus, while Nigeria operates a plurilingual language policy in theory, in practice, Nigeria is officially monolingual, given that English is the language of everyday governance, political and educational discourse and other public spheres.

It is important to note here that Nigerian English as a variety of English is not yet explicitly officially recognised in policy in Nigeria. In the language policy statements mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the reference is simply to 'English', which clearly refers to British English, given Nigeria's colonial legacy with Britain. However, there is an increasingly positive attitude towards Nigerian English and a positive sense of ownership over Nigerian English among Nigerians (Aboh, 2023b; Ugwuanyi, 2021). Public discourse about the recognition of Nigerian English in Nigeria following Google Map's inclusion of Nigerian English voice in 2019 and the inclusion of Nigerian English words in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2020 and 2024 is emerging. These positivities notwithstanding, official discussions about recognising and institutionalising Nigerian English remain absent, resulting in the failure to grant it full official recognition.

6 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR NIGERIAN ENGLISH RESEARCH

This article has shown that the depth and range of the power of English in Nigeria is limitless. With the increasingly positive attitudes towards English, the emergence of monolingual speakers of English and those whose first language is English, and linguistic ownership over (Nigerian) English, the dominance, development and expansion of the functional allocation of Nigerian English are bound to continue. These sociolinguistic realities suggest that Nigerians will not probably continue to associate English with British imperialism given that it is now the language based on which their Nigerian and individual sociolinguistic identities are communicated (see Ugwuanyi, 2021; Ugwuanyi and McKenzie, 2025, this issue, for an elaboration of this argument). This position aligns with Achebe's (1975) argument that he decided to write in English because of his interest in adapting the language to suit the sensibilities of Nigerians. If these positive attitudes continue to grow, we may expect the official recognition of Nigerian English in no distant future.

The increasing use of Nigerian English has also resulted in a burgeoning of research on the topic. Apart from research describing the features of Nigerian English, its cultural conceptualisations and attitudes towards it, corpora of Nigerian English have been developed in major world Englishes corpora, such as the International Corpus of English, Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) and electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English (eWAVE). These corpora provide comprehensive data for linguistic research. Recently, corpora focusing entirely on Nigerian English, such as the Historical Corpus of English in Nigeria (HiCE-Nig) (Unuabonah et al., 2022), have begun to emerge. In line with the development of HiCE-Nig, it will be rewarding for scholars to study how Nigerian English usage has changed over

time. Such changes can be studied at the structural level of phonology, morphology, semantics, discourse and pragmatics or at the sociolinguistic level to investigate how Nigerian English varies across gender, ethnicities, age, and urban vs rural populations.

While there are three locally published dictionaries of Nigerian English usage, there is a need to draw global public attention to Nigerian English by advocating for the inclusion of Nigerian English words in world-leading dictionaries. The inclusion of some Nigerian English words in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2020 is a positive step in this direction. More so, developing digital and online dictionaries based on previously published dictionaries and recent research on Nigerian English is crucial in making Nigerian English accessible.

Recent studies have called for the development of a Nigerian English-based pedagogical model that incorporates features of Nigerian English into the English language curriculum in Nigerian schools (Aboh, 2023b; Ugwuanyi, 2021; Oyebola and Ugwuanyi, 2023). This call is stimulated by the disparity between the variety of English Nigerian students are taught and the variety that they interact with in their daily communication. Future studies may examine the attitudes and perceptions of teachers, students and policymakers towards this pedagogical model and the modalities of incorporating Nigerian English features into the curriculum.

More studies are needed on the pragmatic and discursive features of Nigerian English, including politeness strategies, speech acts and conversational norms. Such studies can be conducted using the existing corpora, generating new naturally occurring interactions or using digital communication platforms, such as social media and online forums. These studies can have implications for cultural understanding as they provide insights into the local discursive practices of Nigerian society. As is, several people still perceive Nigerian English as an illegitimate variety of English. Therefore, it is imperative for Nigerian English research to include a social movement component that advocates the promotion of Nigerian English, aiming towards language and social justice.

7 | CONCLUSION

This article has provided the history, status and functions of English in Nigeria and the features of Nigerian English. The article has also suggested some directions for future research on Nigerian English. Overall, the article has shown how the long-standing presence of English alongside other indigenous Nigerian languages has resulted in the nativisation of English in Nigeria, as evidenced by the emergence of a localised variety known as Nigerian English. Regarding the history of English in Nigeria, the article highlighted the different events, including trade, Christian evangelisation and colonialism, that contributed to the implantation and growth of English in Nigeria and showed that these activities can be grouped in terms of their period of occurrence vis-à-vis pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. Further, this article demonstrated that these historical developments contributed to the use of English in contemporary times as the official language in Nigeria, which dominates in educational, media, religious and inter-ethnic communication domains. This article provided sufficient examples of the phonological, lexico-semantic, morphosyntactic and discourse-pragmatic features of Nigerian English, which sets it apart from other world Englishes. One conclusion that emerges from this article is that English has come to stay in Nigeria and that the functional range, importance and recognition of Nigerian English will continue to expand.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None.

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