

# Introduction to the special issue on Nigerian English

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

This special issue was inspired by the need to showcase the breadth and depth of Nigerian English research. As a result of this broad vision, contributions explored a wide spectrum of debates and issues, ranging from foundational conversations touching on the micro-level linguistic descriptions of the unique features of Nigerian English to macro-level issues such as the cultural significance and global impact of Nigerian English, as well as other sociolinguistic issues. The articles in this volume are, therefore, thematically diverse, encompassing aspects of linguistics such as phonology, sociolinguistics, pragmatics and cultural linguistics. Another key aim of this special issue is to highlight the importance of recognising this variety as a legitimate subject in the discussion of the spread and development of English around the world. The volume demonstrates the enormous contributions of Nigerian English to the field of world Englishes.

Nigerian English has been described as the fastest growing variety of new Englishes globally (Kperogi, 2015). Nigeria also ranks second only to India in terms of the number of L2 English speakers worldwide and, of course, has the highest number of English speakers in Africa (Pinon & Haydon, 2010). By 2010, Pinon and Haydon (2010) reported that over 80 million Nigerians – approximately half of the population at the time – use English. Judging by this estimation, this figure is likely to have exceeded 100 million today, considering that the country's population now surpasses 200 million. While a recent UNESCO (2021) estimate suggests that around 53% of Nigerians speak some form of English, a more ambitious estimate by Piller (2022) puts the number of Nigerian English speakers at about 178 million (roughly 70% of the country's population), based on which it may be argued that Nigeria has the third highest number of English speakers in the world after India and the United States.

While speaker population is a significant measure of a language's influence (Crystal, 2018), Nigerian English also exhibits other parameters used in measuring the importance of languages, such as its broad functional allocation across official and private domains, including the fact of a growing number of Nigerians who speak English as their first language (Kperogi, 2015; Jowitt, 2019; Ugwuanyi, 2021). Given Nigeria's population size, its socioeconomic influ-

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ence in West and sub-Saharan Africa, and the increasing prominence of Nigerian English in discussions of the global spread of English, it is clear that Nigerian English is one of the most important varieties of English in the world today.

By bringing together these contributions, we aim to advance the discourse on Nigerian English and highlight its place in the broader world Englishes framework. This special issue showcases diverse methodological approaches, ranging from traditional sociolinguistic surveys and interviews on perceptions of Nigerian English to innovative corpus-based analyses of its phonological, lexico-semantic, pragmatic and cultural dimensions (detailed further in the next section). This methodological diversity shows the multifaceted approaches adopted by the contributors, which, it is believed, provide more nuanced insights into the current developments in Nigerian English.

This volume is the first known special issue on Nigerian English in a world-leading journal such as *World Englishes*. However, Nigerian English scholars have long discussed aspects of this variety of English in different journals since the late 1950s (e.g., Brosnahan, 1958 – widely regarded as the first empirical study of Nigerian English). Scholarly discussions of Nigerian English have also appeared in several books. For instance, Spencer's (1971) *The English language in West Africa* was the first known volume devoted to the growth of English in West Africa, with a focus on Nigerian English. Since then, there have been a number of edited volumes and monographs wholly devoted to Nigerian English, notably Awonusi and Babalola (2004), Kperogi (2015) and Jowitt (2019) – see Jowitt and Ugwuanyi (2025, this volume) for a fuller discussion of the Nigerian English research landscape. While works on Nigerian English started appearing in the earliest editions of *World Englishes* since the 1980s, this is the first attempt to bring the works of Nigerian English scholars together in a special issue in this discipline-leading journal, which makes this special issue particularly unique. This volume serves as both a resource and an invitation for continued scholarly engagement with Nigerian English and its expanding influence.

## 2 | THE CONTENTS OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The 11 articles in this issue can be broadly grouped into four main themes: (a) overview, (b) linguistic description, (c) sociolinguistics and cultural linguistics and (d) Nigerian English research. The first article, 'Nigerian English: Status, functions and features' by Kingsley Ugwuanyi and Sopuruchi Aboh, provides an overview of Nigerian English. The article may be considered an introduction to Nigerian English, providing readers, especially those new to Nigerian English, with insights into what Nigerian English entails. It first provides a historical overview of English in Nigeria, discussing the implantation of English in Nigeria through three critical historical events (transatlantic trade, Christian missionary expedition and British colonisation) and its adaptation into a distinct variety of English. Then, the paper discusses the ever-expanding functions of Nigerian English in both public and private spaces in Nigeria across official, educational and cultural domains. Further, the key phonological, lexico-semantic, morphosyntactic and discourse-pragmatic features of Nigerian English are presented. Finally, the authors argue for a full recognition and institutionalisation of Nigerian English, concluding with recommendations for future research.

The next four articles are categorised as linguistic descriptions of different aspects of Nigerian English. The first in this section by Ulrike Gut and Philipp Meer focuses on a less discussed aspect of Nigerian English phonology: consonant clusters. Using corpus-based analysis, this study explores the production of consonant clusters by educated Nigerian speakers. Contrary to earlier assumptions about the widespread simplification of consonant clusters in both Nigerian English and other new varieties of English (Akinjobi, 2010), the findings of this study reveal low reduction rates. Another interesting finding from this study is that consonant cluster reduction, where it occurs, is conditioned by internal linguistic factors, such as stress, consonant position and phonetic environment, rather than social factors and register, with no evidence of the influence of Nigerian indigenous languages, a finding which challenges the entrenched notions about phonological transfer in Nigerian English (Jowitt, 2019).

Nancy Odiegwu and Nicholas Faraclas's paper titled 'Reduplication in Nigerian English' investigates the pragmatic and emphatic functions of reduplication in Nigerian English, such as 'small small', 'inside inside' and 'half half'. The authors argue that while the presence of reduplication in Nigerian English might be traced to cultural patterns of

communication in indigenous Nigerian languages in which repetition is used for a wide range of reasons, its current sustenance in Nigerian English is attributed to Nigerian Pidgin, as a result of increased contact between them. Among other findings, the study uncovered that, similar to Nigerian Pidgin, only total reduplication is attested in Nigerian English, occurring only in adverbs, adjectives, numerals and verbs. While the range of functions of reduplication in Nigerian English (namely intensification, plurality and pluractionality, distributivity, continuity and habitualness) as found in the study reflect findings from other world Englishes, the authors argue that their finding of the use of reduplication to express displeasure and excessiveness is unique to Nigerian English.

Next, Ifeoluwa Abidoye and Hans-Georg Wolf investigate the phraseological patterns of verbs in Nigerian English, specifically examining their evolution due to cognitive acculturation influenced by cultural and linguistic contexts. Using the GloWbE corpus, the study compares Nigerian English with British English across four verb categories: phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, phrasal-prepositional verbs and verb-noun collocations. Key findings show that, while some similarities in usage were observed between Nigerian and British English users, Nigerian English exhibits broader semantic ranges and unique collocations influenced by cultural factors such as resilience, communal values and religiosity. The findings show how linguistic innovation in Nigerian English mirrors cultural and conceptual frameworks, particularly emphasising the African model of COMMUNITY (Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2007). Based on their findings, the authors argue that phraseological patterning is one of the aspects of language susceptible to cognitively coded cultural influence.

In her paper, Temitayo Olatoye explores the Americanisation of Nigerian English spelling and punctuation in light of the growing influence of American English on Nigerian English. Using data from the Nigerian component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-Nig) and the Historical Corpus of Nigerian English (HiCE-Nig), the study investigates changes from 1960 to the 2000s. While findings reveal a strong historical adherence to British spelling conventions (which the author attributes to educational policies), there is evidence of a gradual uptick in American English spelling variants across multiple registers, especially in science, technology and media. The study attributes this shift to globalisation, exposure to American culture and the widespread adoption of American technology. Despite this trend, British spelling remains dominant in formal contexts, with hybrid forms (e.g., 'driver's licence') reflecting the uniqueness of Nigerian English. Overall, the study indicates that there is an ongoing coexistence and competition between British and American norms in Nigerian English.

The last study in this section, 'Apologising in Nigerian English' by Foluke Unuabonah, Ulrike Gut and Folajimi Oye-bola, interrogate the linguistic and cultural dimensions of apology strategies in Nigerian English. This paper offers a much needed account of the forms and functions of apologies in Nigerian English, as well as the reasons behind the forms of apologies speakers of Nigerian English choose across different text types. Using a postcolonial pragmatics approach, the study compares corpus data and responses elicited through discourse completion tasks, finding that apologies in Nigerian English exhibit distinct nativised features due largely to influence from indigenous Nigerian languages. The study also shows that Nigerian English speakers favour emotional and compound apologies, often combining direct expressions of regret with explanations or offers of redress. Notably, the authors found that mode (i.e. spoken vs. written mode) significantly influences the complexity and structure of apologies, with written modes allowing for more elaborate forms of apologies as found in the discourse completion tasks. This paper contributes significantly to our understanding of pragmatic variation in Nigerian English, situating its findings within broader discussions of speech act realisation in postcolonial Englishes.

The four papers in Section 3 focus on sociolinguistics and cultural linguistics. In the first paper in this section, Kingsley Ugwuanyi and Robert McKenzie explore the nexus of English and national identity, with a focus on what it means for English language ownership within Nigeria's complexly multilingual landscape. Through a mixed-methods approach – including surveys and interviews – the study investigated Nigerians' perceptions of the potential of Nigerian English being regarded as a national language. Findings reveal that participants widely affirmed the capacity of Nigerian English to index Nigerian identity. However, the study also captures the tensions surrounding English in Nigeria as elsewhere: while its colonial associations remain a point of critique, its pragmatic usefulness has entrenched its dominance in both official and social domains. This work provides crucial insights into how an indigenised variety of English can foster national cohesion and index national linguistic identity in a postcolonial context.

Next, Folajimi Oyebola and Osemudiamhe Ilekura's contribution examines speech rhythm in Nigerian English, engaging with ongoing debates on its classification within the stress-timed versus syllable-timed continuum. By employing a robust methodology which integrates acoustic analysis and statistical modelling to analyse recorded voice samples from speakers of Nigerian English across the three major ethnic varieties – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – the study compares speech rhythm in Nigerian English with that of British English, with clear differences found. The authors argue convincingly for Nigerian English's position as a more syllable-timed variety, pointing to phonological influences from indigenous Nigerian languages as the main factor. Interestingly, the findings also reveal a hierarchy of rhythm patterns with significant inter-ethnic variation. This paper makes a significant contribution to the study of prosody in world Englishes, as it underpins the intersection of phonology, ethnicity and linguistic identity in postcolonial Englishes.

In his paper, Sopuruchi Aboh investigates attitudes towards Nigerian English in higher education, shedding light on resistance to adopting Nigerian English norms in academic settings and its implications for endonormative standardisation. The study provides valuable insights into how educational variables, such as academic discipline and secondary school type, shape students' attitudes towards varieties of Nigerian English. Through a verbal guise experiment, the study reveals that (a) STEM participants rated the varieties more favourably across status, solidarity and linguistic quality dimensions compared to non-STEM participants, and (b) participants who attended public secondary schools evaluated the varieties more generously than those who attended private ones. By situating these findings within the community of practice framework, the study highlights how shared experiences and values within academic disciplines and schooling contexts influence language attitudes. Overall, this paper demonstrates the need for educational policies to address resource disparities and encourage linguistic inclusivity.

The last paper in this section is Anna Finzel's 'Cultural conceptualisations and models in Nigerian English', which examines how cultural schemas and conceptual models influence linguistic expressions in Nigerian English. Drawing from her vast research experience in cultural linguistics, Anna Finzel offers an insightful analysis of the cultural adaptation of Nigerian English by examining how FERTILITY and INFERTILITY are culturally conceptualised. Using a mixed-methods approach involving the GloWbE corpus for lexical frequency and collocational analysis, alongside a corpus of Nigerian newspaper articles, the study identifies a network of interrelated cultural conceptualisations in Nigerian English. These conceptualisations are organised into a Nigerian cultural model of FERTILITY and INFERTILITY, emphasising its societal, spiritual and gender-related dimensions. The findings demonstrate how Nigerian English serves as a vehicle for expressing culturally salient beliefs, such as the role of fertility in lineage continuity and community identity, and the association of infertility with stigma, spirituality and societal expectations. By highlighting the ability of Nigerian English to encode culturally embedded meanings, the paper makes a significant contribution to broader discussions of world Englishes and cultural linguistics.

The last section on Nigerian English research comprises just one article: David Jowitt and Kingsley Ugwuanyi's 'Nigerian English research: Developments and directions'. This concluding article reviews over five decades of scholarship on Nigerian English. It discusses key developments in Nigerian English research across key linguistic domains such as phonology, syntax, lexis and pragmatics, as well as the methodological advancements and gaps in the field. Employing a qualitative-oriented synthetic approach, the authors chronicle the growth of Nigerian English research from early general features-based descriptions to recent empirically robust and corpus-based methodologies. The authors acknowledge the growing focus on the pragmatic and cultural dimensions of Nigerian English while advocating for further research into underexplored areas of Nigerian English, such as historical linguistics, digital discourse analysis and comparisons with other African Englishes. The synthesis effectively showcases Nigerian English as a robust variety that is central to global Englishes discourse.

### 3 | CONCLUSION

The articles assembled in this special issue collectively illustrate the linguistic richness, sociocultural relevance and intellectual contributions of Nigerian English. Together, these studies reaffirm the significance of Nigerian English as

a vibrant variety, central to global Englishes scholarship. Some of the articles, particularly the ones by Ugwuanyi and Aboh, and Jowitt and Ugwuanyi, have suggested possible directions for future research in Nigerian English, namely pragmatic and digital dimensions of Nigerian English. It is also suggested that further studies on evolving attitudes and the institutionalisation of Nigerian English could advance the call for its recognition as an official variety. This special issue is a milestone in the study of Nigerian English, and has shown the uniqueness, relevance and contributions of Nigerian English to linguistics. This issue, therefore, serves as an invitation for continued scholarly engagement with Nigerian English.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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