METHODOLOGY IN THE CODIFICATION OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH

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Abstract
In this study, the author explores the procedure for codifying Nigerian English (NigE), as a step towards the identification and characterization of Standard Nigerian English (SNE). Using relevant information and data from available literature and documents on Nigerian English usage as bases, he discusses issues pertaining to both the content and logistics of codifying documents of Nigerian English. In terms of content, the author argues that linguistic features of the BrE and AmE present in NigE usage are to be complemented by ‘popular’/widely acceptable features in Educated Nigerian English (ENE). The logistic issues pertain to the personnel required, the data sources, instruments required, funding and elaboration processes. The codified efforts already made by scholars are examined with a view to utilising them as inputs into novel codification efforts. The author expects that a panel of experts on Nigerian English studies would come together and embark on the codification project as a matter of national service towards the development of English language in Nigeria.

Key words: Nigerian English, codification, Standard English, methodology

Introduction
Kperogi (2009), writing in an article under the sub-heading: Conceptualizing Nigerian English asserts that the “Nigerian English has not yet been purposively standardized.” We all know that there is such a thing as British English, as the progenitor of all subsequent "Englishes" in the world. And we do, of course, know that there is American English, not only because it is the earliest national variety to rebel against some of the quirky conventions of British English, but also because America’s current preeminent position in the world ensures that its variety of English is now relentlessly universalized through an imperceptible but nonetheless powerful process of pop-culture-induced linguistic osmosis. What of Nigerian English? Is there such a thing as Nigerian English? If there is, how is it different from and similar to British and American English? If there isn’t why do we have such radically idiosyncratic usage patterns that set us apart from other users of the English language? And why should we care?

Okpako (2010) believes that we should care because English is not just another language in Nigeria; it is a national language. But, more than that, it is now practically the lingua franca of the world. It is the primary
international language in communications, information technology, entertainment, science, business and diplomacy. It is also, by international treaty, the official language for aerial and maritime communications, as well as one of the official languages of the United Nations, the European Union, and most international athletic organizations, including the International Olympic Committee. That’s not all. It is also the language of scholarship. Recently, for instance, the Science Citation Index reported that 95 percent of its articles were written in English, even though only half of these scientific articles came from authors in English-speaking countries. It has also been said that over 80 percent of information stored in the world’s computers is in English. That is why English is spoken by hundreds of millions of non-native speakers in the world today.

It is thus not out of place for us to reflect on how we write and speak our own variety of English in Nigeria and, in so doing, develop a self-conscious knowledge of how our usage of the language in relation to its two dominant varieties converge and diverge. This may provide a springboard to start a process of codifying and taking pride in our idiosyncratic use of the language that we are forced to deal with both because of the peculiarities of our socio-historical experiences and because of the reality of the architecture of the current world setup, which privileges the English language over all other languages in the world — at least for now.

Codification is a major factor and a pre-condition of the standardization of a language. It is one of the five factors of standardization mentioned by Bamgbose (1998) and four factors mentioned by Schneider (2007). Bamgbose identifies five measurements of the degree of standardization of linguistic innovations as demographic, authoritative, geographical, codification and acceptability (cf. Gut 2008). Among these, he claims that codification and acceptability are the most important (Bamgbose 1998:4). According to Schneider (2007:49), “standardization or the acceptance of local forms of English as a means of expression of a new identity involves acceptance of structures as adequate in formal usage, the positive evaluation of structures, structural homogeneity of a variety and codification. The requirement for codification is the description of a structure or behavioural norm in reference books such as dictionaries, grammars, pronunciation or usage guides or their inclusion in the specified target of language of instruction in schools (Akere 2009, Adegbite 2010). Adegbite (2010:17) claims that the tasks of codification and elaboration are among the issues in current contention among scholars of Nigerian English (NigE).

**Statement of problem**

The need for the codification of Standard NigE has been emphatically stated. Kujore (1995:373) writes:

> The need for a dictionary of Nigerian English or a dictionary of international English which features, among others, Nigerian English usage can be felt. A comprehensive codification of these features of English, sanctioned, through usage, by ‘educated’
Nigerian speakers and writers of the language, will doubtless enhance mutual intelligibility at the international level.

Although it would appear that so much time has been spent preparing the ground in terms and concepts than carrying out the real task of lexicography and grammatical description, the efforts of a few scholars are worth mentioning as charting a course on the subject; for example Kujore (1985), Jowitt (1991), Igboanusi (2002) and Wunder, et al. (2010). The above efforts, not withstanding, the search for a comprehensive dictionary still continues (cf. Jowitt 2008).

**Aim and objectives**

This paper describes the methodology or procedures to be followed in the codification of Nigerian English via the compilation of a comprehensive. The factors to be considered are the personnel, English usage data, instruments and modalities, funding and follow-up activities. Adeniran (2005:3) focuses on what the making of a conventional dictionary of NigE might benefit from past and present efforts elsewhere.

**The Methodology of Compilation of a NigE Dictionary**

**The Personnel**

The works of a few scholars, however, need to be pointed out as charting a course on the issue, even though these have been descriptive rather than prescriptive, sometimes characterising errors and loan words in their collections. First is the notable work of Kujore (1985) which presents a long list of expressions in English usage in all the areas of language (phonology, grammar and lexis). Another presentation of a glossary of forms in NigE covers an extensive section of Jowitt’s (1991) publication. The latter work bears similarity with the former, but it goes further by providing information about the context of use. Also worthy of mention is Igboanusi’s (2002) compilation of distinctive NigE expressions, which Jowitt (2008) considers as perhaps the longest inventory so far, but still tentative because the judgements are provisional. The above efforts undoubtedly represent a step in the right direction, but the search for a comprehensive dictionary still continues. Jowitt (2008:29) himself recognises the limitations of the previous efforts when he asserts that:

> The task of differentiating variants from errors – of deciding which usage should be lifted out of the category of (merely) ‘popular’ expressions and exalted to the status of Standard, and so prescribed expressions – is thus an interesting one. It is invidious for an individual, however, even if that individual is a Professor of English, to start making solo pronouncements. The task is one of delicacy and needs to be carried out by a team of experts, not by an individual.

It is also proper at this point to recognise the insightful project on NigE corpus that is being undertaken by a group of scholars coordinated by Prof. Ulrike Gut at the University of Augsburg in Germany. The ICE (International Corpus of English) Nigeria project aims to collect a 1-million-word corpus of spoken and written data of English usage by educated Nigerians and it contains text categories and annotations specified by the ICE project.
International (Wunder, et al. 2010). The written part of the corpus, consisting about 400,000 words, is already completed and work is in progress on the spoken part. The corpus could undoubtedly be utilised to facilitate the codification of NigE.

Thus, a team of English language experts is suggested following Jowitt's (2008) observation. Older academics are preferable, to assure competence, which is correlated with level of education, age, length of education and training as well as exposure to English usage and uses (Jowitt 2008, Adegbite and Gut 2010). The experts, who may not be limited by number, would be representative of the geopolitical zones of the country as well as represent broadly the major and minor ethnic groups – three major and three minor. The expertise should also spread across the areas of phonology, lexico-grammar and sociolinguistics. Roles may be assigned among them such as coordinator(s)/editor(s), an advisory body, resource persons and research assistants, who may come from middle and lower cadre academics.

**Sources of English usage data**

Features of NigE scattered in journal articles, conference proceedings and books (Adeniran 2005). A lot of features have been identified and described by scholars in available literature. Acceptability and intelligibility tests (Obanya 1979, Ekong 1980) also confirm the suitability of ‘educated’ Nigerian English data (cf. Banjo 1995). The standard is to be located somewhere between social acceptability and international intelligibility (Banjo 1995: 224). Previous codification attempts, e.g. Kujore (1985), Jowitt (1991), Igboanusi (2002), Blench (2005) and the ICE Nigeria corpus described by Wunder et al. (2010). There are also hints about some previous codification attempts which are not yet documented. Existing reputable dictionaries in the Nigerian market that are useful to ESL learners could serve as reference materials (Adeniran 2005), e.g. the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (OALD) and *Longman Contemporary Dictionary of English* (LCDE). Words with peculiar acceptable NigE pronunciation, grammar, meaning and usage are picked out and described at the various levels above. Nativized lexical items missing in those dictionaries are to be included and accounted for. The estimated number of words in the first instance is between 10,000 and 20.000 words.

**Guidelines for Writing Entries**

The following suggestions may serve as a guide for compiling the dictionary:

The dictionary would be of a general nature, which would provide information on NigE to a broad user group.

The dictionary is expected to have between 5000 and 10,000 entries, which means an average of 200 to 500 entries per English letter (of the 26-letter English alphabet).

The entries must be accessible and should focus on the most frequent and current senses and usage of words.

Conventional resources such as dictionaries, reference books, encyclopaedias and glossaries as sources of words for the entry, but only...
words that have peculiar Nigerian English usage are to be listed. Data from previous lists, analysis and description on NigE usage should provide relevant sources for the compilation.

5. English words that do not exist in native speakers’ English dictionaries but have a wide usage in Nigeria are to be listed.

6. Proper nouns (e.g. names of persons, places, rivers, titles, etc.), loan words from indigenous languages or any words that would normally require inverted commas in written English are not to be listed; exceptions, however are such common terms as ‘okada’, achaba, etc. that cut across ethnic groups.

Information about pronunciations, parts of speech, senses and usage of NigE alone is to be provided under each entry. Since native English varieties form part of Standard NigE, it would be redundant to indicate information about them in the dictionary.

The entry style may follow an acceptable convention with the following features:

a. Entries provided in soft and hard copies using MS-Word document, 12 point on Times New Roman.

b. Each lexical entry to be presented in bold forms.

c. Pronunciations to be presented in phonemic forms within double slanting lines, followed by stressed syllables in capital letters and unstressed syllables in small letters (The information about stress indicates the pronunciation of the word in isolation. While it should be noted for general information that the last unstressed syllable is usually heightened in connected speech, it would be necessary to avoid redundancy by indicating this for every word in the dictionary.)


e. Senses to be numbered 1, 2, 3, etc. and each sense illustrated with a sample utterance in usage.

f. The usage to be written in italics, with the word highlighted in bold form.

A Model Entry
abandoned /əbændənd/ LHL, adj. 1. – project: (contract) project left undone or uncompleted despite having collected money – A committee has been set up to review all the abandoned projects in the state and make recommendations to the government. 2. – property: left for some time due to immediate unforeseen circumstances – All we have around the Niger Delta are abandoned projects, in the name of NDDC. 3. – woman: a. a jilted
woman, b. a woman who remains unmarried at the appropriate time – *If you think you can just make me an abandoned woman just like that, you are joking. The parents advised her to get married before she becomes an abandoned woman.*

**sorry** / sɔr/ HL, interj. Expression of greeting to someone who sneezes – “Sorry sir!” the students echoed after the teacher gave a loud sneeze. (Note: The recipient may say ‘Thank you’ in reply.)

**Conclusion**

This study has raised some issues pertaining to the compilation of a comprehensive dictionary of NigE. We have contended that features of educated Nigerian English usage already identified and described in available literature should provide the data for the compilation. The twin criteria of social acceptability and international intelligibility would serve as conditions of measurability. Other issues pertaining to methodology such as personnel, sources of data and guidelines have also been considered. Beyond the scope of this paper, some other issues that may require discussion as a follow up include the publication of the dictionary and feedback from the users, which may eventually result in adding to, removing or changing re-writing the meanings of words in the dictionary.

**References**


