

# A Sociolinguistic Study of Semantic Interference Among Yoruba-English Bilingual Secondary School Teachers in Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State

AYINDE NURUDEEN LEKAN

*Research and Development, Lebia Educational Services*

*Abstract- This research work investigated sociolinguistic study of semantic interference among Yoruba English bilingual secondary school teachers considering the semantic arrangement of English language as it has to reflect its new home and describe new concepts which the language, in its original form, may lack linguistic resources to express. The concept of interference is one of the features of bilingualism and multilingualism as Nigeria and most African countries are bilingual or multilingual countries. The concept of interference refers to deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language. It also implies a re-arrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly-structured domains of language such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of the morphology and syntax, and some areas of vocabulary, Culture and discourse (Weinreich, 1974). This study explicated that domestication of English language through interference is not an aberration since it conveys meaning in the context of usage and agree with the grammar of the language. It also asserted that Nigerian English is a variation that reflects the experiences of Nigerians as they have to use the language to explain what they have conceptualized in their indigenous languages and revealed the aesthetic creation of new English words drawn from the rich repertoire of the Yoruba lexicon.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of interference is no more new or strange to linguistic scholars in Nigeria and other African countries because it is one of the features of bilingualism and multilingualism as Nigeria and most African countries are bilingual and multilingual countries. The concept refers to deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language. It also implies a re-arrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements in the more highly-structured domains of language such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of the morphology and syntax, and some

areas of vocabulary, culture and discourse (Weinreich, 1974).

However, this research seeks to examine the interference in meaning mechanism of English Language considering the semantic arrangement as it has to reflect its new home and describe new concepts which the language, in its original form, may lack linguistic resources to express.

## II. DATA ANALYSIS

Linguistic interference refers to a situation whereby bilinguals applying knowledge from their native language to a second language. Akindele and Adegbite (1999) define interference as a situation whereby two different Languages overlap. In such a situation, the linguistic system of one of the languages is transferred into the other in the process of producing the later which is the second or target language. Dulay et al (1982) define interference as the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language. Ellis (1997:51) refers to interference as 'transfer', which he says is 'the influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2'. He argues that transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. In learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules (Selinker, 1971, Seligar, 1988 and Ellis, 1997) with the use of their L1 knowledge, but only when they believe it will help them in the learning task or when they have become sufficiently proficient in the L2 for transfer to be possible. In interference, one of the languages in use in a speech fellowship is prevailing. The characteristics of the prevailing language are transferred to the target language at the level of grammar, phonology, discourse and lexical items with semantic configuration.

Lexical interference takes two different forms. Those which arise within the structure of a linguistic system, in its phonology, morphology, or syntax, and those which come from sources outside linguistic structure, i.e. are conditioned by such nonlinguistic aspects of human activity as social prestige or political influence (Hall 1974, 4). Lexical interference identified linguistically is regarded as error, whereas that identified culturally is not so regarded; when the latter expresses the local colour of socially recognized phenomena (Akindele and Adegbite 1999, 42). Lexical interference can be delineated under the following semantic configuration:

- i. Semantic Extension: Some lexicons in Nigerian English have equivalence in native English but express an extended meaning in Nigerian English e.g. uncle, father, mother, brother etc. In augmentation to its meaning in native English, 'uncle' in Nigerian English does not refer to the brother of your mother or father alone, but any adult male person like your teacher, neighbour etc.
- ii. Semantic Transfer: Some lexicons in Nigerian English are present in native English but the concepts they express in the former are absent in the latter, e.g., bride-price (dowry paid by bride's parents).
- iii. Semantic Contrast: Some lexicons in Nigerian English may have equivalent items in native English but express divergent meanings through them. For example, the word 'masquerade' has to do with ancestral god believed to have descended from heaven but it means a way of behaving that hides the truth or a person's true feelings.
- iv. Coinages: The term loan creation denotes a type of contact-induced lexical change whereby a new complex word is created matching a foreign model semantically, but completely independent formally, some lexicons connote Nigerian English experiences which are sugar mummy (a much older female), etc.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 1

'What specific Nigerianism and coinages are visible in the teachers' conversations?'

In this study, not all the data collected are used, rather, twenty five (25) data are considered from different expressions after sorting because of their suitability to this study.

The following are Nigerianism and coinages that are considered:

- (1) I want to drink garri
- (2) If you see whom I saw, your head will, swell
- (3) Thank you madam, Resp., don't mention
- (4) The chairman was also on the high table
- (5) What I saw today, my mouth cannot say
- (6) The students did not hear the language the man was speaking
- (7) I cracked my brain to remember the student's names
- (8) We were beaten by the rain yesterday
- (9) Your head is not correct
- (10) There was no chance for him in the bus
- (11) I forgot to drop at the designated bus stop
- (12) When did you barb your hair?
- (13) Can you borrow me your pen?
- (14) You told me that senior William dashed you ₦200
- (15) Who is your tight friend?
- (16) They've brought the light
- (17) If God hears my prayer, I will start my business next year.
- (18) I secured this job with my long-leg.
- (19) What says the time?
- (20) The meat I bought yesterday was too strong for my teeth.
- (21) There was a terrible go-slow on the road.
- (22) I ate beans cakes and bread this morning.
- (23) The yam flour I bought yesterday was expensive.
- (24) Thanks your mum for me.
- (25) Conductor, I want to drop here.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 2

'What are the mother tongue (British English) corresponding words or discourse of the Nigerianism and coinages that are visible in the teachers' conversations?'

The expressions highlighted under research questions one are Nigerianism or expressions that reflect Nigerian linguistic milieu and agree with the grammar of the native English (British English).

The Nigerianism and coinages and their corresponding mother tongue (British English) are highlighted below:

	Nigerian English	British English
1	Thanks your Mum for me	Give your Mum my regards
2	If you see whom I saw your head will swell	If you see whom I saw, you will be amazed
3	Thanks you madam, Resp., don't mention	Thank you madam, Resp., it is welcome
4	The chairman was also on the high table	The chairman was also on the platform/podium
5	What I saw today, my mouth cannot say	What I saw today, I cannot really express
6	The students did not hear the language the man was speaking	The students did not understand the language the man was speaking
7	I cracked my brain to remember the students' names	I racked my brain to remember the Students' names
8	Your head is not correct	You are insane/crazy
9	There was no chance for him in the bus	There was no room for him in the bus
10	I forgot to drop at the designated bus stop	I forgot to alight at the designated bus stop
11	When did you barb your hair	when did you have a hair cut
12	Can you borrow me your pen?	Can you lend me your pen?
13	You told me that senior William dashed you ₦200	You told me that senior William gave you ₦200
14	Who is your tight friend?	Who is your bosom friend?
15	They've brought the light	They've restored the power supply / electricity
16	I want to drink garri	I want to eat garri
17	If God hears my prayer, I will start my business next year	If God grants my request; I will start my business next year
18	I secured this job with my long-leg	I secured this job with nepotism
19	What says the time?	What time is it what's the time?
20	The meat I bought yesterday was too strong for my teeth	The meat I bought yesterday was too tough
21	There was a terrible go-slow on the road	There was a terrible holdup/ traffic jam on the
22	I ate beans cakes and bread this morning	I ate 'beans cake' and bread this morning
23	The yam flour I bought was too expensive	The 'yam flour' I bought was too expensive
24	We were beaten by the rain yesterday	We were drenched by the rain yesterday
25	Conductor, I want to drop here	Conductor, I want to alight

### RESEARCH QUESTION 3

‘What semantic meaning do the lexical words in the teachers' conversations convey?’

The lexical words can be categorized into five semantic categories as follows: semantic contrast, semantic extension, semantic transfer, coinages and discourse interference.

#### SAMPLE 1: SEMANTIC EXTENSION

This is a situation in which some lexical items in Nigerian English have equivalence in native English but express a wider meaning in Nigerian English. It shows the ability of the recipient country to acculturate and indigenize English language to suit the foreign linguistic milieu.

The underlined words in the following sentences reflect semantic extension in the teachers' utterances.

(i) The students did not hear the language the man was speaking: The word 'hear' was given an extensional meaning in the sentence. The word is not use in its literal sense but given an extensional semantic meaning. In other words, it extends the native meaning as used by the native speakers of English. The native meaning of 'hear' is to listen or pay attention to somebody or something but in Nigeria; it is at times use instead of the word 'understand'.

In the utterance, it is used to refer to 'understand' because the students listened to the man but did not understand him as he was communicating with Arabic language and the students did not understand Arabic language

(ii) The Chairman was also on the high table: The word 'high table' is used in the wider sense. That is, it is given a wider meaning beyond the native

meaning. The native meaning of 'high table' is a table on a raised platform where the most important people at a formal dinner sit to eat but in Nigeria, it is also used for a raised platform where the guests in an occasion sit either to deliver lecture(s) or to sit as guests in order to differentiate them from the audience. The native English equivalence of 'high table' is 'platform', or 'rostrum'.

(iii) The meat I bought yesterday was too strong for my teeth: The word strong in the sentence is given an extended meaning which transcends its native use. Although, the word 'strong' is a polysemous word (a word with many meaning) but none of the meaning falls in the context of meat. The native meaning equivalence is 'tough', that is, 'the meat I bought yesterday was too tough for my teeth'

(iv) If God hears my prayer, I will start my business next year: The word hears in the sentence is used beyond the native meaning. The native English equivalence of 'hears' as used in the sentence is 'grants' because it is possible to hear a request and not grant it. So, the native English equivalent of the sentence is that if God grants my request, I will start my business next year.'

(v) Can you borrow me your pen: The word 'borrow' in the sentence is given an extended meaning beyond the native meaning? The native meaning of the word is to take and use something that belongs to somebody else's, and return it to them at a later time but it is also given an extended meaning beyond the native meaning. That is, it is always use in replacement of the word 'lend' which means to give something to somebody or allow them to use something that belongs to you, which they have to return to you later. The native English equivalence of the above sentence is: 'can you lend me your pen'.

#### SAMPLE 2: COINAGES (LOAN CREATION)

It involves creating lexical words which denote Nigerian English experience. It also shows the ability of the recipient country to generate an infinite number of lexical items out of those handed over to them. In other words, lexical coinages are result of acculturation and indigenization of English language into Nigerian speech community. That is, the contact of LI (Indigenous Language) and L2 (English language).

The underlined words in the following sentences are loan creation identified in the Teachers' utterances.

(i) I ate bean cakes and read this morning: The word "bean cakes' is a coinage which was derived as a

result of language growth which is peculiar to Nigerian English but denotes native English experience. The 'cake' is native English lexical item which means a sweet food made from a mixture of flour, eggs, butter, sugar, etc. that is baked in an oven but 'bean cake' is peculiar to Nigerian English that denote a sweet food made from beans that is fried with palm oil with similar shape to cake.

(ii) There was a terrible go slow on the road: The word 'go-slow' is peculiar to Nigerian English experience where the vehicles move slowly but also present in native English. The native English equivalence is 'hold up' or 'traffic Jam'. So, the word 'go- slow' is a coinage that denotes Nigerian experience.

(iii) I secured this job with my long-leg: The word 'long-leg' is a compound word of two separate words that produce a single word. 'Long' means measuring or covering a great length or distance, or a greater length or distance than usual while leg means one of the long parts of the body that connects the feet to the rest of the body. The word 'long leg' denotes Nigerian English experience which is also present in native English. The equivalence of 'long-leg in Native English is 'nepotism' which means giving unfair advantage to your own family if you are in a position of power, especially by giving them jobs.

(iv) The yam flour I bought yesterday was expensive: The word 'yam flour' is a compound word of two separate words that produce a single word. 'yam' means the large root of a tropical plant that is cooked as a vegetable while 'flour' is a fine white or brown powder made from grain, especially wheat, and used in cooking for making bread, cakes etc. the word 'yam flour' denotes Nigerian English experience as a result of indigenisation. 'Yam flour' as used in the sentence means a fine white or brown powder made from yam and used in cooking for making 'amala', a food in Nigeria.

#### SAMPLE 3: SEMANTIC CONTRAST

This is a situation in which some lexicons in Nigerian English (NE) have equivalent items in native English (NE) but express different meanings through them. In such a situation, the linguistic system of one the languages (Yoruba language) is transferred into the other (English language) in the process of producing the latter which is the target or second language.

The underlined words in the following sentences reflect semantic contrast:

(i) I cracked my brain to remember the students' names: The word 'cracked' which is the past

form of 'crack' means to break without dividing into separate part expresses different meaning in the sentence. It is used instead of 'rack' or 'wrack'. That is, I racked my brain or wracked my brain to remember the students' names.

(ii) We were beaten by the rain yesterday: The word 'beaten' is the past participle form of 'beat' which means to defeat somebody in a game or competition or to get control of something. The expression we were beaten by the rain is an outright transfer of the mother tongue ('ojoyen no wa gan lano') into English. The Native English correspondence is we were drenched by the rain yesterday. So, the word beaten was given a contrasting meaning in the sentence.

(iii) There was no chance for him in the bus: The word chance has equivalent item in native English that expresses different meaning from the meaning expresses in the sentence. The word 'chance' in native English means a possibility of something happening, especially something that you want. But, it is used in contrast to 'room' that conveys the meaning intended by Nigerian English. The word room in the above context means 'empty space' that can be used for a particular purpose. So, the native English correspondence of the above expression is 'there was no room for him in the bus.'

(iv) I forgot to drop at the designated bus- stop: The word drop means to fall or allow something to fall by accident or deliberate. The expression, I forgot to drop at the designated bus- stop is an outright transfer of the mother tongue where the word drop was given a contrasting mean to the native meaning. The native English correspondence is I forgot to alight at the designated bus-stop.

(v) When did you barb your hair: The word barb in the sentence is given a contrasting meaning from the native meaning? The word only functions as a noun not as a verb and means the point of an arrow or a hook that is curved backwards to make it difficult to pull out. It is used in the sentence as a verb and has

a contrasting meaning from its native meaning. The native English correspondence of the expression is 'when did you have a haircut'.

(vi) You told me that senior William dashed you N200: The word 'dashed' in the expression is given a contrasting meaning. The word 'dashed' is a past tense of 'dash' which means to throw something or make something fall violently into a hard surface. The word has a corresponding native English lexicon as gave. So, the native English correspondence of the sentence is 'you told me that senior William gave you N200.'

(vii) Who is your tight friend: The word 'tight' is given a contrasting meaning to the native English meaning. The word means having a close relationship with somebody else or with other people. The phrase 'tight friend' is Nigerianism that reflects Nigerians social milieu. The native English correspondence of the phrase is 'bosom friend' that means a very close friend. So, 'bosom' is the native English equivalence of 'tight' as used in the passage.

(viii) They've brought the light: This is an outright transfer of mother tongue into English. The word 'brought' in the sentence has a native English correspondence which is use in the native environment. The native English correspondence of the sentence is, 'they've restored the power supply.' The word 'light' also reflects the alien linguistic environment of the language. 'Power supply' or 'electricity' is the native English correspondence word as used in the sentence.

#### SAMPLE 5: DISCOURSE INTERFERENCE

This is interference at the level of discourse in which a bilingual transfers the meaning mechanism of his or her indigenous language (L1) into English language or second language (L2). This is more pronounced at the level of greetings. For instance, the system of greetings in Yoruba differs considerably from that of English. And a Yoruba English bilingual transfers the system of greetings in Yoruba into English.

The following expressions are outright transfer of Yoruba language into English Language.

	Yoruba Language	Nigerian English	British English
1	Dupe lowo momi e fun mi	Thanks your mum for me	Give your mum my regards
2	Ti oba ri eni ti mori, ori e a wu	If you see who I saw, your head will swell	If you see who I saw, you will be amazed
3	Ese ma, idahun, a an dupe ara eni	Thank you madam, Resp., Don't mention	Thank you madam Resp., it's welcome.
4	Ikan ti mori leni enumi o le so	What I saw today, my mouth cannot say	What I saw today, I cannot really express.
5	Ori e o pe	Your head is not correct	you are insane / mad / crazy

6	kinni ago wi	What says the time?	What time is it/what's the time?
7	Agbero, mofe bole nibi	Conductor, I want to drop here	Conductor, I want to alight
8	Mofe mu garri	I want to drink garri	I want to eat 'garri'

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 4

'How appropriate are the lexical words and expressions to the overall understanding of the utterances and what implications do they hold for the Nigerian English as a whole?'

First, the lexical words make reference to the syntactic structure in a precise way.

The words are used in a way that they conform to the syntactic principles. They occupy their specific environment in the structure. In other words, they follow the normal order of arranging the system to form a sentence: Nominal + verbal + adjectival / Nominal +

Adverbial. This is what can be referred to as SPCA.

They also systematically represent the meaning to the single words or more generally, of the lexical elements, including lexicalized phrases like idioms, Isolated compounds etc. They show how structure of words and syntactic relations interact in order to constitute the interpretation of sentences.

In conclusion, the lexical words and expressions indicate how interpretations are related to the things spoken about.

### III. FINDINGS

This study investigated semantic interference among Yoruba- English bilingual secondary school teachers considering the domestication and nativization of English Language to meet the needs of the non-native speakers of English Language in a foreign linguistic environment. The overall goal is to establish the need to codify Nigerian English as it has been long overdue since it reflects the experiences of Nigerians as they have to use the language to explain what they have conceptualized in their indigenous languages.

In order to ascertain the research objectives, we examine the teachers in some selected schools in Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State. The members of this sample are university graduates (first degree holders) and Yoruba-English bilinguals. Also four research questions were evolved to guide the study. The study was a descriptive survey type which made use of direct observation to collect relevant

information from the teachers of selected schools who were randomly selected.

Though, the research focused on sociolinguistic study of semantic interference among Yoruba- English bilingual secondary school teachers and restricted to the research questions but different developments were found to be useful for both native speakers and non- native speakers of English language.

The findings revealed that:

1. English is a bi-parental language because its original parent is Britain and its second parent is whichever country that domesticates or indigenizes the language to suit its socio-cultural milieu.
2. Lexical coinages are unavoidable in English Language as a result of language growth, improvement, acculturation and indigenization which bring about varieties of English Language like Nigerian English, Ghanaian English, British English and so on.
3. The mother tongue English linguistic resources are insufficient to express Nigerian experiences.
4. There is pressing need to codify or standardized Nigerian English for uniformity of use.
5. Lexical words and expressions indicate how interpretations are related to the things spoken about.
6. Lexical words in English have literal and contextual meaning, most especially the polysemous words and in most cases the contextual meaning differs from the literal meaning or gives extended meaning to the literal meaning.

### IV. RECOMMENDATION

For the benefit of literary analysis, the language users' experiential, conceptual, and social life should be given priority or prominence so as to make reference to semantic configuration in a precise way. Also, attention should be given to how structure of words and syntactic relations interact in order to constitute the interpretation of sentences while also indicating how these interpretations are related to the entire discourse.

## V. CONCLUSION

Putting into consideration, the sociolinguistic study of semantic interference among Yoruba- English bilingual secondary school teachers, one must come to agree that utterances need an approach of componential analysis in discourse and lexicosemantics interference. This is an approach to lexical semantics which involves the analysis of the sense of a lexeme into its component parts in order to simplify and make clearer, to the lexical words in the overall sense of the work and outright semantic transfer of mother tongue into English language.

Also, the research work has widened our horizon to note the inevitability of Nigerian English as a result of language growth and domestication to meet the needs of the non-native speakers in a foreign linguistic environment.

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