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Nigerian English in informal email messages

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This study applies a sociolinguistic and discourse-analytical methodology to the study of features and manifestations of Nigerian English in computer-mediated communication, particularly informal emails. The data comprise 133 email samples consisting of messages received or sent within a seven-year period, i.e. between 2002 and 2009, from typical Nigerian environments, as well as by the youth, adults and the elderly. Analyses reveal that the rise of new media technologies and digital communication has provided a resource for the use and dissemination of Nigerian English alongside Nigerian cultures. The study shows that Nigerian English in informal emails comprises the construction of local thoughts through a range of characteristic properties. In non-standard Nigerian English features like misuse of words, grammatical inconsistencies and a mixture of local pidgin also exist. The study of Nigerian English in informal emails reveals that email samples provide resourceful data for the study of English regional varieties in computer-mediated communication. It also shows that a variety of English is a cultural medium for expressing language habits and socio-cultural practices.

Keywords: Nigerian English, informal email, social practice, internet, computer-mediated communication

1. Introduction

As internet literacy and email communication become widespread across countries of the world, personal and workplace emails increasingly reveal interesting aspects of people's cultures and language habits. Studies have shown that workplace emails, for instance, contribute significantly to the construction of aspects of speakers' social and professional identities and relationships and provide indications of workplace culture and sociolinguistic variables of status, social distance and gender of interlocutors (Waldvogel 2005, 2007). Like workplace emails, personal and informal emails reveal socio-cultural practices, social identities and features of varieties of English. A study of email greetings and closings, for instance,

reveals that they construct status differences, social distance, discursive practice and national identity (Waldvogel 2007). They are also often governed by factors such as sex, religion and local communicative strategies (Al-Khatib 2008). While scholars in computer-mediated communication (CMC) research acknowledge the unpredictability and dynamism of online communication, some agree that information technologies do indeed have a significant effect on language use (Warschauer 2001; Bergs 2006; Berman 2006). According to Crystal (2001: 107), email will certainly include “a much wider stylistic range than it does at present, as the medium is adapted to suit a broader range of communicative purposes”. However, literature on how New Englishes are mediated by CMC is almost non-existent. This article aims at reviewing peculiar features of Nigerian English (NigE) and examines how these features are reflected in CMC, i.e. emails. It seeks to establish that email texts written in English are language samples that reveal regional varieties. It also investigates how NigE as a variety of new World Englishes has adapted to the rise of new media technologies.

The study centres on “informal emails”, which implies that they are not situated workplace emails. They are “personal” or “private”, i.e. those written by and sent to friends, colleagues (from different workplaces), relations (spouses, siblings, *etc.*) or acquaintances. Data have been collected from Nigerian email users (teenagers, adults and the elderly) in typical Nigerian environments. The study shows that Nigerian urban dwellers who have gained considerable skills in online communication adopt the use of email for their day-to-day communication needs.

In the light of the growth of new World Englishes certain features are noticeable that are peculiar to contexts and regions. A number of researchers have observed the existence of standard and non-standard NigE. Okoro (2004) argues that rather than delineating two different varieties of NigE, what one finds is the existence of two distinct application contexts of the same variety, i.e. standard and non-standard, which vary on the basis of education, status and social exposure of the users. The non-standard variety is a mixture of English and the Nigerian Pidgin. Standard / educated NigE, on the other hand, shares common grammatical “core features” with British and American English (Jibril 1982; Egbe 1984). It also exhibits lexical items with local “colouration”, i.e. elements with peculiar Nigerian expressions and those with local Nigerian “flavour” (Awonusi 1987; Adegbija 1989). These include coinages some of which are influenced by transfer from the indigenous languages. There is also evidence of items with culturally indicative features of “Nigerianness”, including words directly borrowed from the local languages. There is usually no attempt to vary the length of sentences for rhythmic or stylistic effects so that Nigerian writing sometimes appears to be characteristically bookish (Egbe 1984). According to Jowitt (1991) category shifts such as reclassification of grammatical items, insertion of categories (of parts of speech) and

deliberate omissions of some items are some of the features of NigE grammar, while spelling pronunciation, stress shifts or localization of stress / tones are other features of its phonology. Such variants are often due to “over-generalization” and mother-tongue interference, so NigE may deviate considerably from Standard British English. On the whole NigE has assumed a status and identity of its own which establish it as a member of the new World Englishes.

2. Data and methodology

The corpus consists of 133 email samples written by 93 writers (men and women) comprising youths (ages 16–20), adults (ages 21–49) and the elderly (50 and above). This categorisation is loosely made for the purpose of this research only. The researcher targeted the age range of the various people that were asked to send emails. Those within the 16–20 age brackets are mainly university students. The messages were written over a seven year period, i.e. 2002–2009, in the Lagos and Ota regions of Nigeria from a university community and the Nigerian civil service. For the purpose of this study I grouped all other emails from outside the university community under “Nigerian Civil Service”.

Data were obtained primarily from email messages forwarded to the researcher’s inbox by friends, church members and colleagues at the university, who in turn received email samples from their friends from the Civil Service and a few others in the private sector on the request of the researcher. Data were collected between September 2008 and February 2009. It was discovered that “personal” emails were not common in most people’s inboxes. Most of the emails tend to be business-oriented, comprising mostly attachments and forwarded items. From interactions with some of the people that provided the email samples the researcher realised that people prefer phoning or texting to emailing for communicating informal messages; emailing is generally considered as a formal medium which is best for business communication and not for communicating private matters. Unfortunately, in my view, workplace emails do not reflect as much “Nigerianness” as do informal emails, so they were not included in the corpus.

The 133 informal emails under study have been selected from a corpus of over 350 emails received during data collection. “Informal emails” were differentiated from workplace and business emails on the basis of style, content and language use. For instance, informal emails contain informal address patterns such as “dearest”, “God bless you sir”, or “dear brother ...” (Table 4) with closing formulas such as “love”, “bye” or “best” (Table 5). Some do not include any formal opening at all and deal mainly with issues that border on family, career or religion. Some reflect issues associated with culture, festivity, and social concerns. Language use in

private emails is also more creative and perhaps more “original” than in the formal emails. Unlike informal emails, workplace emails are characteristically business-like in terms of content and language use. They deal mostly with matters of the workplace, such as administration, reports, appointments, reminders of meetings *etc.*, and are often accompanied by attachments and forwarded items. In the selection process, emails between students and their professors that are essentially about academic projects or research have been treated as “formal” and have therefore been excluded from the corpus. The 133 email samples eventually selected were considered to have met the criterion of being “private” in terms of their style and socio-cultural contents.

Given that emails typically refer to personal topics, the researcher specifically advised the writers who forwarded the emails not to include mails that they considered “too private” to them, and they did so. The nature of the study to be carried out with the emails was clearly explained to them so that anyone who would not like his / her private email messages to be publicised was advised not to forward such emails to the researcher. The 133 emails therefore are those whose owners freely sent them to the researcher and would not mind if they were used for study and published for academic use only. In the analysis, however, the actual identities of the writers are not disclosed. The “names” of the emails writers are mere pseudonyms; the email addresses have also been extensively modified.

Table 1 shows the number of sample emails and the percentage of messages received from each age group. Table 2 shows the number of writers according to their age groups, while Table 3 shows the number of emails and the percentage of messages received from the University Community (UC) and the Civil Service

Table 1. Emails by age groups

	No of Emails	Percentage
Youths (16–20)	58	44%
Adults (21–49)	56	42%
Elderly (50 and above)	19	14%
Total	133	100

Table 2. Email writers by age group

	No of writers	Percentage
Youths (16–20)	45	48%
Adults (21–49)	37	40%
Elderly (50 and above)	11	12%
Total	93	100

Table 3. Emails by age and social groups

	The University Community	The Civil Service
Youths (16–20)	43	15
Adults (21–49)	24	32
Elderly (50+)	12	07
Total	79	54
Percentage	59	41

(CS) alongside the various age groups. The proportion of men and women who supplied emails in the data set is not provided, as this is not a goal of the current study.

3. Analyses: Features of email discourse

Analyses are based on a sociolinguistically inspired methodology and on computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA), the latter being a framework that describes properties of online discourse, including the social and contextual factors that shape it (Herring 2001). CMDA generally describes structures of texts, and provides an interpretation of meanings in the text and an explanation of the social practice mediated by the text.

The concept of “Nigerianness” in English language use (Chiluya 2008a) recognizes the fact that language is sensitive to its context (Halliday 1978). The English language in Nigeria, though still in the process of domestication / nativisation, has developed local varieties as well as register differences with some cultural and institutional distinctions. These varieties are marked by new words and expressions that reflect new ways of perceiving and constructing the environment. Hence analyses are not limited to the examination of vocabulary and semantics of NigE in the emails under study; they also identify the syntax and pragmatics of social discourses in the emails. This is intended to illustrate the domestication of English in Nigeria and how it has gradually been integrated in the discursive practices of the host community.

The following analyses examine the style level of emails and the sociolinguistics of greetings and forms of address as an aspect of social practice in the emails. This is followed by the description of features of email discourse, identifying strategies such as code-mixing and first language transfer phenomena, lexical borrowings, *etc.* It concludes with the interpretation and explanation of social practice in the closings of the email samples.

3.1 Greetings and forms of address

In emails, greetings naturally set in motion the tone and content of the message. Greetings and closing remarks usually establish the basis for future communication and in most cases reflect cultural discursive traits (Waldvogel 2007). As we noted above, standard NigE shares common core features with other varieties of English across the world. Address and greeting forms such as “Sir”, “Dear sir”, or “Hello sir” are commonly used in the emails. In addition, there are elements of Nigerianness in some of the greetings, especially those that reflect the indigenous culture and extreme religiosity of Nigerians. Generally, the style of openings in email messages by Nigerians is determined by the age and social status of the sender and that of the receiver. For example, openings by teenagers to teenagers differ from those from youths to adults and the elderly. Emails between teenagers do not always begin with any form of opening or greeting. In contrast, emails from teenagers and youths to the elderly reflect status and social roles of the addressee, while emails from adults to teenagers and those from the elderly to either the adults or teenagers begin with either the receivers’ first names or no opening at all (see Table 4). Most emails in the corpus from young people to adults and the elderly begin with:

- (1) a. Sir (2, 92, 96, *etc.*)¹
- b. God bless you sir (4, 17, 18, 19, *etc.*)
- c. Hello sir (23, 103, 107, *etc.*)
- d. Dear Sir (24, 27)
- e. Good afternoon sir (67)
- f. How’re you sir (46)
- g. Good evening sir (102, *etc.*)

Like in most cultures, the use of the address form “sir” in the above examples provides evidence of the impact of local culture, especially in recognition of the addressee’s age, roles and social status. In the Nigerian cultural context, it is mandatory for a younger sender of a message, whether through texting, verbal or other means to add “sir” when addressing an elder. Even in the religious context the “sir” requirement is also mandatory, so some of the emails begin with:

- (2) a. God bless you sir
- b. May God bless you sir *etc.*

This kind of opening normally functions as greeting and marker of politeness and indicates the type of message that follows and the kind of feedback that is anticipated. Furthermore, most of the openings, usually from younger persons, indicate

1. Individual emails in the sample are identified by quoting their consecutive number.

not just the attitude of showing respect but also construct the social or professional status of the receiver. This way the message first of all introduces the receiver's professional or cultural titles or religious identity. Adult-to-adult and elder-to-elder messages do the same thing. The most common of these forms of address in the data include:

- (3) a. Prof
- b. Good day prof
- c. Igwe (equivalent to 'chief' or 'ruler')
- d. Oga Zlie (*Oga* is equivalent to 'master')
- e. My dear Prof
- f. Dear Dr. Gaht

The tone and style of opening of adult mails in the above examples are rather formal. While most youth emails begin with "Hello", "Hi", or "Hey", those of the adults begin with "Dear sir", "Dear brother", "Dear Dr. X", *etc.* The same style follows in the contents and closings. As a matter of social practice, the average Nigerian likes to be recognised and addressed by his or her social or professional titles. In some cases individuals are addressed as "Rev. Dr." or "Chief Dr." *etc.*, reflecting the many academic degrees as well as traditional titles they have acquired. It is often taken as a serious offence if a younger person fails to recognise an elder by adding "sir", or a title like "doc", "prof" or "chief". In the emails under study, the openings and greetings clearly show this kind of title-conscious tradition. An adult-to-adult or elder-to-elder message, however, may also consist of informal greeting forms such as:

- (4) a. Prof my broda (*broda* is a colloquial form of 'brother'; 8)
- b. My brother (14)
- c. Dearly beloved (11)
- d. Thanks Chbro (13)
- e. My prof. (20)
- f. Dear Sozlta (51) *etc.*

Address forms such as "Prof my broda" or "My prof" are peculiarly Nigerian and rooted in tradition. The personalised "My prof" reflects deep friendship and regional pride — "regional pride" in the sense that the person so addressed is likely the only professor in his town or region. Interestingly, the data reveal that openings such as "hello" or "hi" are not common in greetings among adults and elders (see Table 4). Even while communicating with younger persons, the most frequently used opening is simply addressing the receiver by his first name like "Sozlta" or "Bnmz". By using the short form of the bearer's name, the email writer conveys elements of informality and friendship. This may also function as a greeting at the same time; for some, the introductory part of the message would still

Table 4. Types of address forms used by the various age groups

Greeting type	Youths (16–20)	Adults (21–49)	The Elderly (50 and above)	Total
Greeting word + title e.g. dear Prof/Dr.	01	09	05	15
Greeting word + the generic 'sir'/dear sir	03	08	00	11
Greeting word + first name (e.g. dear Sola)	02	08	02	12
First name only (e.g. 'Sola')	06	05	03	14
Greeting word + religious title (e.g. dear Pastor xy)	00	04	00	04
Greeting using 'Bro'/'Sis'	00	05	02	07
Greeting using religious benediction, (e.g. 'God bless you sir')	00	02	00	02
Greeting formula indicating affection (e.g. 'dearly beloved')	00	03	04	07
Greeting word only (e.g. 'hello', 'hi', 'hey')	24	03	00	27
No greeting at all	20	08	03	31
Others (oral features) (e.g. 'blessed morning', 'good evening', 'kudos')	02	01	00	03
Total	58	56	19	133

include greeting forms such as “how’re you”, “happy new month” or “compliment of the season”. As in youth emails, adult-to-adult emails sometimes do not include any form of opening. This reflects the degree of acquaintance, the informality of relationship and how frequently they communicate with each other.

3.2 Style level of emails

Looking at the textual contents of the emails in the data, it is quite clear that emails by the youth are flexible and include a style of English comparable to that of a native speaker, while those by adults and the elderly are typically formal and bookish. While adult emails deal with family, work, promotion, career, religion and festive seasons, emails of the teenagers centre on school, holiday, friendship, music and

fashion. The greater degree of flexibility in Nigerian youth English is attributable to more direct influence and contact with first language communities. Some Nigerian youths are born abroad and have their preschool and primary education there. Those who later return to Nigeria tend to speak and write with style and expressions that reflect their foreign backgrounds. Examples of American informal speech such as *gonna* or *wanna* can be found in the emails (e.g. email no. 71 below). Other factors include the influence of the mass media and that of highly educated parents. Little wonder, the emails by teenagers are mostly creative and are often outright bizarre. In adult emails spelling is conventional but the youth's is characteristically influenced by electronic texting conventions. The latter are also stylistically more dynamic and drastic than that of the adults and the elderly. They generally consist mainly of short words, often spiced with the local pidgin. Consider emails 71 and 76 below.

(5) (71) From: gge <georzeno01@yahoo.com>

Subject: I'm impressed!

To: chdna <speity@yahoo.com>

Date: Friday, January, 2002, 10:30 PM

To: dopinlako@yahoo.com

hey i was really impressed after the fone call i would like to advice us both, pls lets stop wat we never started, do you know u really hurt me wen u said u were gonna do to me wat my last gf did that was very awfull of u.anyway theres nothing to fear now that u have your life to leave without me pestering you. its been your pleasure, and i guess u enjoyed it while it lasted. good bye. Your friend

Chdna

(6) (76) From: jaspz daniels singtopremmy2000@yahoo.com

Subject: Re: lady doyin waz up

Date: Wednesday, October 8, 2008, 6:35 AM

yes ooooo thank you, how are u? how is Randle? hope u are having fun in school. and i have not forgotten bashan o! 18102008, hope u are jackin oh! i trust u now .all u 5 pointers and the song im still on it. u wont believe since i got home i stopped. i m on it sha. take care of u, sleep tyt 2nyt mehn! i can rhyme.i m gud, i gud, i m gud. c ya.

Electronic spelling in the two emails above is characterized by phonetic spelling (e.g. *fone*, *gud*, *wen*, *etc.*) and some common abbreviations (e.g. *u*, *tyt*, *c*, *2nyt* ['to-night'], *etc.*) which have become a common feature of CMC. There is also a deliberate play on sound which is characteristically local, i.e. the addition of "ooo" at the end of a word for emphasis. None of the emails above begins with any form of opening / greeting but the language forms are reflective of the socio-cultural root

of the writers. Interestingly the tone of the mails is quite informal and familiar. Reading them, one generally gets a feeling of intimacy.

Adult emails often follow the traditional formal letter structure, i.e. a sequence of introduction (including formal opening), body (message content) and conclusion (including sign-off). Thus, the mails begin and end the way the average NigE tutor would insist on in the foundation English classes. Interestingly, some Nigerians living in first language communities also write with this style. Consider Email no. 106 below.

(7) (106) Dmolz Wndt: dw0ede@gmail.com

Sat, Jan 31, 2007 at 7:42 AM

Hello sir

I'm very happy for your concerns and your love. I got your mail and the content was well understood. Mr. Dmolz, i know you love me and you have been a brother right from my undergraduate days. Thanks for showing deep concern and your advices. I'm not taking the decisions wholly on financial pressures, may be my mail to proff didn't say it all.

I already heard from God more than 6 months ago on what is happening right now. I even knew the period i would work for. I have never based my decisions on circumstances or situations. God told me the way forward. Due to this, without getting a work (Just by following God's instruction), God said i should not even extend my visa on studentship and i complied. Also, i did not book for an accommodation for this year in Unizulu 'Even without getting a job'. Thirdly, i was asked to put in for summer workshop, but i replied that God said my time is up and he has other plans for me.

Pls, sir, do not be offended. Kindly see in my own directions too. Even if my proff offered me much more bursary than any company will do, i wouldn't have stayed this year in Unizulu. I knew that long time ago. I take proff as a father, and he will always be. I just pray he understands and see from my own angle too. I love him and will always do. I also pray our 2 years relationship would not be spoilt with this decision that i have made. I wish you a save return and hope to chat you soon. Say me well to your family, i'm being impatient to call you Dr Dmolz. You are there in Jesus Name. I love you.

Compliments of the Season.

Yuorp.

Like many of the emails written by adults, the above mail from an adult to another adult combines features of both formal and informal letter style, also dealing with a number of topics ranging from religion to studies and career. The opening sounds formal but it ends in an informal note ("I love you, compliments of the

season”). This is the kind of message we often see in the informal emails. The adult and elderly writers will generally begin with an introduction, then the body and then conclude with a formal “yours faithfully”, or “yours sincerely”.

3.3 Nigerian Pidgin forms in Standard English email texts

Nigerian Pidgin is spoken and used for social interactions and business transactions all across Nigeria, cutting across more than 350 ethnic groups. It is still expanding rapidly, extending to more dimensions of usage, reaching wider society and often preferred to standard NigE because it is easy to learn and creative to use. According to Ihemere (2006), Nigerian Pidgin is a mother tongue to over 6 million Nigerians, with another 75 million that use it as their second language. The increasing acceptance of the pidgin language and the kind of innovations to be found in its usage are reflected in most communication media, including the entertainment industry, mass media, CMC, advertisement, literature and music. It is not surprising therefore that in the corpus under study some of the emails, especially those written by the youths, feature a deliberate mixture of pidgin forms in the texts. Email no. 60 below is an example.

(8) (60)

Subject: Na Waooo

To: “aunty4” <oolab@yahoo.co.uk>,

Date: Thursday, February 12, 2008, 12:13 PM

Na wa 4 U sef, U sabi waka ooooooooo. I hear say U and Grace comot 4 morning and U came back with Joy. U spent Ur night with Peace and woke up with Blessing discussing about the Favour waiting 4 U at the office, while Happiness and Prosperity are waiting 4 U in the car. Make U carry go cos na so dem go follow U thru out this year. GOD has Blessed U and it cannot be Reversed. Have a lovely day!! Your Dreams will not die, Your Plans will not Fail, Your Destiny will not be Aborted, the Desires of your Heart will be Granted. Say a Big AMEN. Money will know your name and address from now on. If you Desire to claim it send it back 2 ME and ALL UR FRIENDS.

Nigerian Pidgin is used mostly in informal situations and its forms vary depending on the context. Even when it is used in formal situations, it functions to diffuse tensions where such may exist and to broker some air of friendship. This is what we find in the above email; the tone immediately captures informality and implores politeness. The subject of the above mail is simply “Na Wao”, which does not have a direct English translation but is generally used to express surprise (e.g. “how awful”) or even excitement. The first line then mellows the message down with “Na wa 4 u sef, u sabi wakaoooooooo ...” (“you know how to walk”).

Nigerian Pidgin appears to be much more popular among the youth and teenagers than adults and the elderly in Nigeria. This is largely due to its flexibility and unpredictability. In the university community, it is used as the second most preferred language after Standard English, though local languages are also used among staff and students for communicating some socio-cultural topics. Emails written by adults and the elderly sound a little more direct or “formal” in their contents probably because the writers do not intend to sound too familiar with the addressee, especially while discussing religious topics or offering advice to a younger person; they may also want to maintain some distance in the circumstance. Even while communicating among one another, the adults and the elderly still prefer to write in standard NigE. In Nigeria, despite the currency and popularity of the pidgin among the various social classes, it is still considered as “sub-standard”, “rotten” or best for the “low class”. So there is always a smile on the face of a “high” or middle class person speaking it. This is probably why the status of the Nigerian Pidgin as a creole language remains a subject of controversy among scholars. While some believe that it is already a creole language, some think it is still creolizing, since most speakers are not native speakers, though many children learn it early (Ihemere 2006; Akhimien 2004; Shnukal and Marchese 1983).

3.4 Code-switching and first-language transfer phenomena in the email texts

The multi-lingual nature of the Nigerian society and the need to express local thoughts where the English language fails to provide adequate equivalents of the intended meaning makes it often mandatory for speakers and email writers to code-switch or code-mix. The former implies an alternative use of two or more languages in a speech event (Hymes 1974), involving a mixture of words, phrases and sentences across sentence boundaries, while code-mixing includes the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes, words or phrases (Bokamba 1989; Kachru 1989). In the corpus, examples of code-switching are evident only in emails written by the adults to one another or to the elderly. Language use by adults often employs discourse strategies that may demand lexical transfers from the local language. Idiomatic expressions and proverbs are examples where adequate English equivalents may be lacking, hence requiring code-switching or mixing. In some cases these are used to spice up certain meanings which may be insipid without them. While it is true that youths and teenagers indeed employ code-mixing in informal communication, emails written by them in the data have little evidence of code-switching. With creativity and proficiency approximating that of the native speaker it is expected that the need for code-switching among teenagers may not always arise. As a matter of fact, many modern Nigerian youths have not learnt the local languages, since many educated and widely travelled parents choose to

speak English at home. Emails no. 102 and 77 below are examples from the corpus showing code-switching in emails written by an adult (102) and a youth (77).

- (9) (102) From: JTI IBKN <talk2bukn@yahoo.com>
Subject: Apoti Eri ni eni to gbe laptop yin gbe
To: abjac@yahoo.com
Date: Tuesday, September 9, 2008, 3:36 PM
Good evening sir,

How is mummy and the children? I believe that they are fine. Thanks so many sirs for the text msg and the e mail. Oga, e ma worry about the laptop blc the person has carried apoti-eri that will make him restless until he returns it. God will scare the person whether his asleep or awake. Lets thank God for its recovery. I am very sorry that I couldn't communicate with you for quite some times. All is well. We have not reach conclusion with regards to my master yet blc my sister plan was towards late next year for the master's programme after my youth service. For now, her plan was that I should apply for job when we get back to Nigeria depending the time she will be able to raise money for the programme. My strong believe in God is that He will make all things to work out together for my good. I really appreciate your effort regarding the exemption letter and your concern about my plan. God will perfect everything that concerns you and your family in Jesus name (Amen). Mi o gbabe iwe yin sir, we have not bought it but by God's grace I will get it as soon as my sister is able to go to the bkshop with me. Have a wonderful night rest sir.

- (10) (77) Tuesday, 16 September, 2008 11:22 PM
From: "Yebom Waniko" <yesoko4eva@yahoo.com>
To: singforemmy2000@yahoo.co.uk

Young man kosi nkankan to n shelee. sho oo wa kpa sha. hope the Yoruba isn't too complex 4 u.....or lets go English. how are you doing.....or lets go down to broken eng chairman, guy, bros sie, how far, hope say na u dey hammer life, say no b life dey hammer u. oh boy hope u have started writing ur own novel cause his mail is a classic best seller..... i hav neva recved a mail dis long in y life...tanx 4 making d record. hey i don't agree wit u on d fact dat girls are way more confused than women or in fact boys. may not hav the prove now but will jam u in skl wit d prove. i believ the rule that ladies first was put as a form of protection and as a form of elevating any form of stress...TAKE CARE

As noted above, one important function of code-switching is to adequately render thoughts that may be difficult to express in English, such as swear words, taboo words, imprecations or idiomatic expressions. The subject of email 102 above, for example, is actually a curse or an imprecation in Yoruba which is better rendered

in that code. The author (a younger adult) writing to an elderly person (notably an academic mentor) assures him that whoever stole his laptop has in fact carried away “apoti erin” (the ark of covenant), comparing it to the Philistines in the Bible who carried it away from the Jews and later returned it because it became a plague and destructive to them and their cities. By implication it is suggested that the stolen laptop would serve as a force of destruction to the thief. This kind of meaning is taken for granted in a normal conversation in its local discourse context. Towards the end of the message, the writer again code-switches to Yoruba, which is a typical way of ending an informal message in a traditional context: *mi o gbabe iwe yin sir* (‘I’ve not forgotten your book sir’). This kind of code-switching is actually a polite way of asking for more time to keep the book, or appealing for understanding for not returning the book earlier. So code-switching can and does indeed function as a politeness strategy, since it identifies with the hearer’s culture and language habits. In email no. 77, the writer (a youth), who addresses another youth, begins the first statement with a code-switch to establish an initial cultural rapport: *kosi nkakan to n shelee shoo o wa kpa sha* (‘nothing is happening, I hope you’re alright’). Then she adds some spice of pidgin (*hope say na u dey hammer life, say no b life dey hammer u ...*) and again switches to English with CMC’s peculiar spelling manipulations. Hence informal emails present us with an influx of discourse styles and strategies which clearly illustrate the dynamism of language and communication in its local context. A lot of these discourse strategies enable the writer to convey the aesthetic of the native language and to express meaning satisfactorily and with a sense of originality, because NigE carries the Nigerian thought pattern not only to communicate information but to actually do things with words. Certain expressions immediately lose their colour and density if expressed any other way. Some have argued that code-switching reflects lack of English language proficiency. But in the case of NigE, it is rather an evidence of “communicative competence” (Hymes 1974). Rather than lose essential meanings in their original cultural context, most NigE speakers would prefer to transliterate and code-switch.

3.5 Structure and loan words in informal email discourse

Another common feature of email discourse in the corpus is lexical borrowings from local languages by the writers and some fair share of NigE grammar. The latter feature is, however, not too obvious. In the examples above, there are manifestations of loan words particularly from Yoruba and Igbo, e.g. *Oga* (email no. 106, etc.), *Igwe* (email no. 10), or *aburo* (email no. 101). *Oga*, which features in about five places in the data, is originally a Yoruba word for ‘master’, but has long become a national form of address for an elderly man or a boss and sometimes for a husband. The word functions prominently in NigE. Similarly, *Igwe*, occurring

once in the data, is an Igbo address form equivalent to ‘chief’ or ‘ruler’. In Christian circles, it is a title used for Jesus Christ. In most cases email writers use these indigenous address forms the way they are used in local discourse in order to retain their illocutionary force. *Obidiya* in mail no. 72 (below), meaning ‘her husband’s heart’, is an Igbo language word for ‘wife’. Compare the expression: “how is your wife?” with “how is ‘her husband’s heart?’” The latter is stronger than the former. A local usage like *Ndewo* (Igbo form of greeting; email no. 15) enables the writer to express a cultural bond and creates a sense of belonging. In email no. 101 the writer asks: “how is mama and your aburo?” *Aburo* is a Yoruba word for “younger brother(s) / sister(s)”. The *-s* in *aburo* (a form of pluralisation) by this youth writer is superfluous and uncalled for. These forms of expressions are, however, acceptable in spoken NigE, where the discourse function of an expression outweighs its structural form. As a matter of fact, in many instances the English language of an average Nigerian speaker is actually an expression of concepts in a local language in English words. Consider the examples below.

(11) (2) From: “ogelt” <obthiagr@yahoo.com>

To: chloo2004@yahoo.com

Sir,

Happy new year and much thanks for your wishes. I really felt like a king, no, I mean queen. Who am I that my whole dean could condescend to send me a text. Thank you sir, I so much appreciate it. One more request, please leave your line open once in awhile so that mere mortals like us can reach you. I am still full of appreciation for what you did for me when you wrote the recommendation letter. Much thanks. My God is still blessing you on that account.

Regards to your family and my friends there.

(12) (91) Tuesday, April 20, 2004 3:44 PM

From: “Fsthr” <ladpot2001@yahoo.com>

Add sender to Contacts

To: “Addyem” <lutmiaad@yahoo.com>

Hallo Busu,

How his Mama and ur wife? help me say hallo to them. did you see all my messages try to reply all.. how his people from ILARE ? did u here from them.. Things is not OK For me that is why I can not come down to IBADAN..When I have some changes I will give u a call and i will try to come to IBADAN before i will come i will give u a call i,m sill on the same no..009009–95789.COTONOU ... bye till i read from u...BYE

Best Regds.

Da

- (13) (72) From: tpce@yahoo.com>
 To: sngu <seckpy@yahoo.co.uk>
 Date: Tuesday, April, 2006, 12:00 A.M
 How expressive. So it is out of sight out of mind right? no problem.
 How's work and your Obidiya. The next time you send me a mail I would appreciate a little more detail (oh ye programmer). Have a wonderful tym.
 Sngnu

The thoughts expressed in email no. 2 above are typically Igbo. The structure “my whole dean”, is simply expressing the Igbo order of seniority. The writer sees herself as unworthy of whatever favour she had received from the receiver of the email. Because she is full of gratitude and probably unable to express it the English way, she does so the traditional way using English words. This is a major discourse feature of NigE. Furthermore, certain structural forms in the emails are characteristic of non-standard NigE. Some standard NigE expressions are nevertheless quite localised in thought and presentation: consider emails nos. 91 and 102. Expressions like “how his Mama and ur wife? Help me say hallo to them ... things is not OK for me ... did you here (hear) from them ... ?” (email no. 91) almost sound like Nigerian Pidgin. This mail clearly reflects the literacy level and social exposure of the writer. But most importantly, the writer still succeeds in communicating his / her thoughts. Email no. 102 (above), quoted in (9), also represents an imperfect version of standard NigE, showing various communicative strategies including the use of loan words. Notice also that it begins in the usual bookish format of an informal letter.

The textual contents of these informal emails mirror the various manifestations of discourse and communicative strategies in emails written and sent out by Nigerians. The vocabulary comprises regular English words but alongside borrowed local words and expressions, used in order to reinforce the cultural milieu of the Nigerian society. NigE as illustrated in the emails under study shows how language reflects the features of its physical, social and cultural environment. NigE is bookish, but structurally similar to any other variety. In some cases, however, expressions are characteristically transliterations in order to encode local thoughts.

3.6 Religious sentiments and topics in email messages

Most of the emails in the corpus convey religious messages and sentiments, in line with Nigeria's extreme religiosity (Chiluwa 2008b). They also follow the opening, body and closing discourse structure, with peculiar church-based address and greeting forms (see Table 4 above). Many of the openings follow the usual formal letter opening style. In NigeE, these kinds of openings and addresses establish the Christian tradition and prepare the grounds for the Christian message. Some of

the messages are purely Christian in content, such as warning, prayers, well-wishing, homily and celebration. Consider the examples below.

(14) (82) Jesus is surely in control

Thursday, January 8, 2009 12:59 PM

From: "pastor@gdmbasy.org"

View contact details

To: oltmid@yahoo.com

Dear Adrgb,

Blessings in the name of Jesus! Thank you for writing. I appreciate your encouraging and uplifting words! Thank you also for your prayers and support for the situation in Ukraine. This is what we believe in and stand on: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed." Isa. 56: 1. Let this year bring you joy, and the fulfilment of God's perfect plan — for the sake of His name!

Yours in HIM!

Pastor Sdya Adja

(15) (11) Wednesday, July 30, 2008 8:52 PM

From: "Addosu Adeab" <dosu@hotmail.com>

To: famle@hotmail.com,

Dearly beloved,

JESUS is COMING AGAIN SOON!!! WE MUST BE READY.

(16) (38) Congratulations to Wurla and Lla, the Lord will increase your strength and provide all you need to bring up these lovely ones in the way of the Lord. Happy New Year to everyone!

Snkanm Nee Adsn

(17) (43) Flag this message

Tuesday, December 23, 2008 3:15 AM

From: "bos brat" <retmytp@yahoo.co.uk>

To: pbass@yahoo.com

God bless our celebration of his joy, our families, our heart. May this time bring glory to his holy name in all that he imparts. may u have the gladness of xmas which is hope, the spirit of xmas which peace and the heart of xmas which is love.

Nigeria is said to be the most religious country in the world, with about 95% of the population attending religious service (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001; Chiluya 2008b). In Nigeria, like in many other countries in Africa, religious practices play significant roles in moulding the thoughts and lifestyle of the people. As the data on the opening and address pattern of the email messages have revealed, religious

undertones are common, e.g. by ending with prayers or well-wishing. And because of religious sentiments and the fact that Christian topics are frequently discussed in the mails, a religious register is quite dominant. Address forms such as “bro”, “sis”, or “brethren” have become essential lexical items of NigE. More than 85% of the emails in the adults and the elderly categories address Christian thoughts and ideas. Email no. 11 above is simply a Christian word of advice or warning. Like many others in the corpus, it shows that NigE strongly reflects various directions in the culture and traditions of the Nigerian people.

3.7 Closing

Closing performs similar discourse functions like opening. Closing formulae are used as markers of politeness and for sustaining future communication. Again, adult-to-adult (and the elderly) emails close on a formal note. Many of them follow the traditional letter-writing subscription pattern, such as:

- (18) a. I remain yours truly (1)
- b. Regards to your family (2)
- c. Kind regards (5)
- d. Thanks (10)
- e. Regards (96, 97, 98, 105, 108)
- f. Kindest regards (14)
- g. Warm regards (62)
- h. Best Wishes (63)
- i. Yours (64, 94)
- j. I remain your humble landlord (32)
- k. Sincerely (18) *etc.*

A few, especially from the youth emails, end on a friendly informal note, such as:

- (19) a. Best
- b. Cheers
- c. Love
- d. Bye
- e. Have a nice day *etc.*

But most of the mails end on a formal or informal religious note, such as:

- (20) a. Long life and prosperity is yours in JESUS Name. Shalom! (3)
- b. Peace (4)
- c. God bless you. (6, 65)
- d. Remain blessed (7, 89)
- e. peace of the Lord be with you (9)

- f. We give God all the Glory (18)
- g. Stay blessed (59)
- h. Good news will never seize from our mouth ... AMI (37)
- i. May God bless you richly? Amen! (66)
- j. Blessings in HIM (80)
- k. Remain blessed IN HIM (81)
- l. Yours in HIM! (82)
- m. Be blessed till then. (88)

Most of the writers of the above closings still sign off with their names. As we can see, some closings are actually prayers, showing the religious inclination of their writers. As noted above, the overriding religiosity of Nigerians does indeed have its

Table 5. Closing formulas by age groups

Type of Closing	Youths	Adults	The Elderly	Total
Closing formula + name (e.g. 'gud night', 'have sweet dreams', 'have a wonderful time', 'have a nice day' <i>etc.</i>)	03	04	01	08
Closing with 'thanks' + first name	02	02	01	05
'Thanks' / 'tanx' only	03	01	00	04
Closing with 'best', 'best wishes', 'regards', 'best/kind regards', 'warmly' <i>etc.</i> + name	02	05	01	08
Closing formula only (e.g. 'take care', 'cheers', <i>etc.</i>)	11	06	01	18
Closing with 'yours', 'your friend', 'truly yours', <i>etc.</i> + name	03	05	02	10
Closing formula with reference to the family + name (e.g. 'My regards to your family' <i>etc.</i>)	01	04	05	10
Others (with or without name) (e.g. 'bye', 'bye for now', 'c ya', 'see you at tubely', 'I love uuuu' <i>etc.</i>)	10	04	00	14
Christmas/new year wishes + name	00	04	01	05
Religious closing formula + name (e.g. 'God bless you', 'remain blessed', 'shalom', <i>etc.</i>)	02	07	03	12
Religious closing only	04	05	03	12
No closing at all	12	06	01	19
First name only	05	03	00	08
Total	58	56	19	133

impact on their English language use. So again we can see that the NigE of emails has been greatly influenced by religion, particularly Christianity. More emails end with closing formulas than begin with formal openings. In other words, even informal emails (youths and adults) without openings usually end with some form of closing remark (see Table 5). More importance is attached to closing formulas than to the openings. A closing formula appears to stand out as a normal feature of an email especially among adult writers of personal email messages. Table 5 below shows the frequency of the patterns of closings.

4. Conclusion

Language as a fundamental part of a people's culture expresses that culture. Even a second or foreign language, as in the case of English in Nigeria, soon becomes indigenised to the point that a native variety emerges which inherently connects people's thoughts with that variety. Discursive practices peculiar to that society and people soon become interwoven with the language both in spoken and written forms. As Nigerian users of English acquire internet literacy, they communicate freely in NigE. In fact, NigE is so strong in its features and manifestations that in the modern digital age the internet provides simply another resource for its use and dissemination. It is not clear that new trends in and manifestations of NigE have emerged with the rise of new media technologies. What may be considered "new" are the spelling manipulations which are generally assumed to be peculiar to CMC. This is common in text-messaging and email communication. In NigE, however, Nigerianness manifests itself also through phonetic spelling (Chiluwa 2008a). *Bro-da* for "brother", *wen* for "when", *dat* for "that", *etc.* can be seen in the emails.

The study shows that the NigE genre of informal emails comprises elements such as the construction of local thoughts resulting in transliteration, borrowing from local languages, code-switching and bookishness. In non-standard NigE, however, several features like the misuse of words, grammatical inconsistencies and mediocre transliterations also exist. NigE informal emails reveal that email samples provide resourceful data for studying English language varieties and habits. This study has also shown that a variety of English is a cultural medium for expressing socio-cultural practices.

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