

# Nigerian English Usage in Literature: A Sociolinguistic Study of Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy*

God'sgift Ogban Uwen<sup>1</sup>, Eno Grace Nta<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Correspondence: Dr. God'sgift Ogban Uwen, Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

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## Abstract

This paper examined the imbalances created by social situations and captured in the English language usage by the characters in Wole Soyinka's *The beatification of area boy*. The play, set in the busy city of Lagos, is a theatrical typification of the Nigerian society that creates variety differentiation in language use. The sociolinguistic data for the analysis were extracted from the primary text. The findings indicate that, in the play, Soyinka succinctly displays characters as linguistic pointers to showcase the peculiarities in Nigerian English usage that differentiate the linguistic behaviours of Nigerians from other Englishes. The study reveals the categorisation of the 'spoken' varieties into Nigerian Pidgin, Incipient bilingual, Local colour variety and the Nigerian literary variety. These features which manifest at the phonological, semantic, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic levels altogether combine to represent the typical linguistic situation in a non-native speaker environment. The linguistic variations, when juxtaposed with sociolinguistic variables, explicitly express the domestic adaptations and modifications in English language usage suggestive of the playwright's representation of the Nigerian multilingual society.

**Keywords:** Nigerian English, English usage, varieties of English, sociolinguistic study, literature, wole soyinka

## 1. Introduction

English remains the most important and utilised legacy of colonialism in Nigeria. Its successful implantation has conferred on it the status of an official language which implies its use in politics, administration, law, religion, government and governance, but more importantly as the language of education and creative writing. It presently enjoys a widened and widening communicative space in Nigeria's multilingual canvass. In Kachru's (1986) framework and conceptualisation of English as a world language, English in Nigeria is placed in the inter concentric circle which suggests that its contact with the indigenous languages and people from the diverse ethnolinguistic and sociocultural backgrounds motivated the hybridisation and production of variants of the language. Brosnahan (1958), Banjo (1971), Adekunle (1979), Bamgbose (1982, 1995) and Akindele and Adegbite (2005), among other scholars, have provided insights into the varieties of English in use in Nigeria. The major parameters adopted in their categorisation include the ethnolinguistic background of speakers and their level of education. The two considerations separately produce the regional variety with phonological variants arising from mother tongue interference and the other showing a differentiation in the standard and non-standard usage of English. The interface of English with languages in Nigeria manifests in the phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic variation represented in its oral and written forms (Ekpe, 2012; Aremu, 2015). These sociolinguistic indices have created varieties of English that could be described as 'peculiar' to Nigeria. Nigerian English usage expresses the indigenous and sociocultural norms of the users (Aremu, 2015; Ikoro, 2018). In this direction, Uwen and Ukam (2020) reiterates that English functions as a language of integration in Nigeria because it is a multilingual country; it is the linguistic medium that harnesses the rich sociolinguistic input from the languages.

The peculiarities that define Nigerian English usage abound in literary works. One of such is Wole Soyinka's *The beautification of area boy* (henceforth *TBOAB*). The play published in 1995, captures the complex street life of post-independence cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria represented by the busy Lagos. Sanda, a society-induced University drop out, superintends over three gangsters to form a union, and becomes the voice for the oppressed and downtrodden civilian populace. Through the displaced Maroko settlers and the Sanda-headed gangsters, and the flouting of ill-gotten affluence of the rich, power is pitched against endemic poverty, powerlessness, inequality and

injustice that delineate social class and linguistic boundaries. The social differentiation of characters in *TBOAB* tells the story of Nigeria - the sociopolitical and the sociolinguistic, which ultimately provide clues to the correlation between social power and language use resulting in the imbalances and inflexibility in the linguistic acumens.

Soyinka's *TBOAB* has attracted considerable scholarly explications. For instance, Amonyeze (2016) investigates the historical, sociopolitical and economic dimensions of the play and concludes that *TBOAB* is a dramatic record of the different historical periods in Nigeria, particularly the era of the military which was characterised by pervasive immorality and the struggle by the underprivileged to reclaim her moral fibre. In the linguistic dimension of the play, Ali's (2016) study on *TBOAB* takes a critical discourse analysis approach. Ali states that the textual, political and sociocultural components of *TBOAB* reveal the disproportional appropriation of language to reflect power and inequality in Nigeria. The 'appropriation' of language to communicate the Nigerian sociocultural experience forms a core aspect of Nigerian literary works in English. Achebe (1965) has earlier confronted the language controversy in African literatures with the assertion that, it is the English language and not the writer that should be 'moulded' or 'twisted' to capture and communicate the peculiar African experience without sacrificing the mutual intelligibility of the wider reading audience. Also, Bamiro (2007) asserts that Nigerian English in literary text often provides insights into the principles underlying the peculiar linguistic behaviour of Nigerians. Drawing from Achebe and Bamiro's cautionary submission, the study is anchored on the premise that in Soyinka's *TBOAB*, the use of the characters to establish the Nigerian sociolinguistic situation in the fictional space is yet to be (sufficiently) investigated. The absence of this provides the research gap which the study hopes to bridge. The thrust of the study is on the rich linguistic background of characters that reveal the distinctiveness in Nigeria's English usage. The study will therefore provide insightful clues into its varieties and features guided by the appropriate social and situational contexts that will benefit language and literature scholars.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The study is a sociolinguistic investigation on the use of language in the Nigerian society, represented in Soyinka's fictional characters. The theoretical consideration for this research is the concept of sociolinguistic variables. The concept of sociolinguistic variables is traced to the variationist sociolinguist - Labov. Labov's (1966) large-scale survey of the pronunciation patterns among the residents of New York City (Lower East Side) provided the data for the description and categorization of the relationship between language and social class. The dissimilarities in the speech specimens of the featured employees were separated on the basis of their social class(es). The survey indicated significant differences in the pronunciation of employees of different social classes with remarkable similarities in members of same class. Fasold (1990) modifies the concept of sociolinguistic variables to account for the linguistic elements and non-linguistic variables such as age, level of income, ethnic group, sex, geographical location, country of origin, social class, education or contextual style that combine in the differentiation of language use among speakers. In interactive speech segments therefore, the linguistic features are often correlated with the social characteristics of the speaker. This is determined by the preponderance of linguistic features associated with, and informed by extralinguistic variables in social contexts. Fasold insists that the concept of sociolinguistic variables is theoretically significant because it allows quantitative validations of studies on language use in the society. This could be considered in terms of quantity; speakers' use of more or less a particular variety in comparison with other sets of speakers which result in the variation in language use (Fairclough, 1992). Insights from sociolinguistic variables and their correlation with language use are relevant to the study. The non-linguistic dependent variables such as the geographical location, ethnic group and level of education, among others, that shape the English usage in Nigeria, are combined to produce the unique varieties and features. The focused variations displayed by the characters in *TBOAB*, could be attributed to L1 influences on the learning of English as a second language.

## 3. Methodology

A sociolinguistic investigation is a quantitative and data-driven survey that requires the extraction of linguistic data from the target language users. The data were sourced from the text - *TBOAB* which form the materials for the study. The situational and spatial setting of the play under study is the commercial city of Lagos, Nigeria, while the characters with gradable levels of social differentiation and their correlation with language use form the research population. A critical evaluation and description of the linguistic behaviours of characters in their creatively assigned dialogic exchanges prompted the exposition of the peculiar nuances in English language usage. It is the verbal actions of the characters that suggest the varieties and features that are characteristic of the contemporary Nigerian sociolinguistic situation. Thus, the appropriate data that are relevant to the interpretation of the linguistic features of Nigerians were extracted from the play, collated, analysed and discussed.

## 4. Results

The findings in this study reflect the sociolinguistic practice in the Nigerian multilingual environment. This study on Soyinka's *TBOAB* exposes the consequences of the long co-existence of English language with other indigenous languages in Nigeria. This is seen in the different roles English performs in Nigeria. Nigerian English usage in *TBOAB* is discussed under two broad headings: varieties of Nigerian English and features of Nigerian English.

### 4.1 Varieties of Nigerian English in *TBOAB*

Language use in *TBOAB* is a representation of Nigerian English usage. English language in Nigeria has 'yielded' to some linguistic modifications in adaptation to the Nigerian environment through its pidginisation, nativisation, acculturation and twists to express the local sociocultural concepts, modes, norms and forms in social interactions (Bamgbose, 1995). This process of adaptation has generated the existence of varieties of Nigerian English as captured in the utterances of characters in the play. Omole (1987) has earlier observed that Soyinka's literary works replicate the linguistic situation in Nigeria. Linguistic manifestation in Soyinka's literary writings include the use of Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin (henceforth NP), codemixed expressions and non-Standard English which often reflect the educational and social statuses of the characters. In *TBOAB* however, each identified category is further probed and differentiated based on the preponderance of certain distinguishing features. The prominently deployed varieties in *TBOAB* which are the focus of this study include the NP, incipient bilingual, local colour variety, and a fourth category labelled Nigerian literary variety. For clarity, the page(s) where the appropriate example is culled from the play, is written in bracket ( ) at the end of such excerpt.

#### 4.1.1 Nigerian Pidgin

Brosnahan's (1958) first category of the varieties of English in Nigeria is the Pidgin variety which according to him, is spoken by the uneducated class and those without formal education. This variety has similar features with the NP, a subdivision of contact English proposed by Obiechina (1974) and Bamgbose (1995). According to Elugbe and Omamor (1991), the origin of NP is traceable to the earlier contact between the European traders and missionaries, and the coastal residents of Nigeria. The connection prompted the dire need for a fundamental language for communication. From the contact situations, NP was developed as a rudimentary speech form. It emerged from the contact between Nigerian indigenous languages and their speakers with the target language - English. In this regard, Mafeni (1971) and Elugbe (1995) have attested to the fact that NP is English-based with modifications by the indigenous languages. As it is shown in the play, the use of NP arises from the situational communication needs of the characters drawn from diverse linguistic backgrounds to communicate in this variety with the highest level of mother tongue transfer and interference. In *TBOAB*, NP is presented as a significant linguistic component of the Nigerian sociolinguistic milieu as seen in these extracts from conversational exchanges in the play.

TRADER: ...I no fit read, but I sabbe the world pass you. Even Mama Put's small pickin talk sense pass you – make you go preach to am. (p. 8)

TRADER: Now wetin dat woman go tell in husband when she reach home? (p. 59)

SHOP WORKER: ...Look how I bin run come work...jejely. I tink say I done late so much, dem go sack me. (p. 11)

MAMA PUT: Morning na pickin of the sleep wey person sleep the night before, not so? Make we jus lef am so. (p. 12)

NEWSVENDOR: ...Man no dey see them when something extra dey happen. O-oh, if to say I just get camera. (p. 25)

CYCLIST: Wetin come dey worry all you people? All this wahala just because I wan buy tie? Na trade you come trade or na decorate you just dey decorate street? (p. 25)

CONDUCTOR: ...We no fit take more than four... Hey! You people dey craze? I say only four place dey inside ... Anybody wey no commot for step, na your palava o. (p. 56)

PASSENGER'S VOICE: ...No, lef me, lef me make I die... Take your hand commot, I say make anybody touch am! I go curse anybody wey touch am... (p. 58)

Trader, Shop Worker, Mama Put, Newsvendor, Conductor, Cyclist and the Passenger's Voice are used by the playwright to depict NP as a language of wider usage in the Nigerian multilingual setting. The initial conception that NP is a language of the uneducated (Brosnahan, 1958), no longer holds since its usage cuts across social classes depending on the social and situational contexts. Although the generic identities represented by the namelessness of

the characters - Trader, Shop Worker, Mama Put, Newsvendor, Cyclist, Conductor and Passenger's Voice, suggest Soyinka's alignment with Brosnahan's prescribed class of speakers of NP in Nigeria, these characters' dialogic exchanges with other characters that communicate in Standard English in the play, affirms its mutual intelligibility across social class(es). In the dialogues, the 'nameless' characters presumed to be uneducated are seen to be engaged in meaningful interactions with other characters presented as educated and of higher social class. This development suggests the classlessness in NP usage in contemporary Nigeria. Therefore, NP, in the Nigerian modern context, is not a marginalised or reduced language and not confined to speakers without a common language, or a particular class. It is rather more prevalent with urbanisation, used as language of solidarity and social inclusiveness, and in creative writing and informal discourse against the original conception of its speakers as uneducated. The vocabulary, as Egbokare (2003) claims, is predominantly in anglicised spellings with its overwhelming percentage sourced from English. A closer look at the extract above confirms that the grammar of NP, like Mensah (2012) reveals, contains unique lexical items that develop into morphosyntactic markers while its verb and noun class serve as tense and aspect markers, complementisers and plural markers. This development, according to Mensah, is opportunistic rather than predetermined, and has an insignificant influence from its superstrate and substrate donors (that is, English and Nigerian indigenous languages).

#### 4.1.2 Incipient Bilingual

Adekunle (1979), drawing from the Nigerian complex ethnolinguistic space, suggests a variety called incipient bilingual, to account for a typology with 'heavy' presence of mother tongue transfer and interference. This variety is marked by transliteration at the grammatical level and a deviation from Standard English usage. Adekunle believes that such characteristics appear prominently at the initial stages of the L2 learner of English. The linguistic resources that show features of the incipient bilingual variety in the play are exemplified through these characters.

CYCLIST: You wait small... (p. 27)

TRADER: ...be like prostitute - money for hand, open ya leg... (p. 28)

TRADER: Austerity done catch monkey... (p. 28)

TRADER: Put five on top hundred naira - for save of good luck (p. 30)

TRADER: ...and you begin cry like woman... (p. 40)

BOYKO: ...Just because I see a big man... (p. 41)

SANDA: Someone old enough to be your father is talking and you keep putting your mouth in his ... (p. 42)

SANDA: Follow woman. (p. 43)

PASSENGER'S VOICE: ...don kill me..., don take the only thing I get for this world... (p. 58)

The above expressions by the characters: Cyclist, Trader, Boyko, Sanda and the Passenger's Voice show traces of the incipient bilingual variety. The data indicate some indigenous sociolinguistic forms such as the misappropriation of synonyms, omission of articles, transliteration of variants of indigenous language(s), reduplication and calque formations. For instance, ...*wait small*, *Austerity done catch monkey*, *put five on top hundred naira*..., ...*I see big man*, and ... *putting your mouth in his*... are transliterated expressions and calque formation (loan translation) of the indigenous meanings equivalent among other incipient bilingual features. This variety is characteristic of Nigerians who are at their early stages of mastering English as L2. They are the set of speakers with L1 proficiency in indigenous languages, who experience difficulty in appropriating synonyms of English in their communication activities. In this expressive situation, they rather (mis)appropriate lexical equivalents of English to translate indigenous expressions.

#### 4.1.3 Local Colour Variety

Adekunle's (1979) second variety of Nigerian English is the local colour variety. This typology is marked with the nativisation of English to communicate indigenous attitudes, norms, ideas, concepts, idioms, proverbs and beliefs that highlight the sociocultural peculiarity of Nigerians. This describes the domestication of English language to account for the sociocultural norms and values of the complex Nigerian multilingual nation. Such representation in the play include the use of the linguistic features of this particular variety in the dialogic components of the characters as shown below.

BARBER: Those who make money with black magic. I mean, there are people who do it. It is bad money. It doesn't last... (p.13)

MISEYI: ...Yes. Everything is tonight. The asking ceremony. The formal engagement and the

traditional wedding... (p. 36)

MC: ...That he should arrive with a basket of kolanuts would be in order. That he should be trailed by a lorry load of male yams, palm oil and bags of salt would be answering to his origin...We plunged our calabash into the animal's drinking hole and found it filled with fronting palm wine...Outdo your ancestors as your father did in his time! (pp. 42-93)

MOTHER OF THE DAY: Enh, forgive me, our elders, but it was the cockatoo who pecked too deep inside iroko wood pursuing a worm, that is why its beak is bent till today...the fact that the drum is at rest doesn't mean that the legs won't tap... (p. 94)

Through Barber, Miseyi, MC and Mother of the Day, Soyinka creatively foregrounds the sociocultural components in Nigerian English usage. Barber exposes the prevalence of ritual practices in Nigerians' quest and avaricious tendencies to acquire wealth (...*black magic*..., ...*bad money*...) while Miseyi itemises the procedural stages in Nigerian customary marriage - *asking ceremony*, *formal engagement* and *traditional marriage*. Similarly, MC and Mother of the Day employ folklores and proverbs to create a balance in the festive mood typical of the context of Nigerian traditional weddings. In this context, English is creatively indigenised to capture conceptual norms and culture of the people in the play. For instance, local colour expressions such as *bad money*, *male yams*, *animal's drinking hole*, *basket of kolanuts*, *outdo your ancestors* and *the cockatoo* revibrate the Nigerian context of the English usage that places the non-Nigerian reader on a sojourn in the mind's eye towards the peculiarity and desire to understand the Nigerian culture and tradition.

#### 4.1.4 Nigerian Literary Variety

Another variety of English found in Soyinka's *TBOAB* is the Nigerian literary variety. One of the attempts on the description of the features that constitute this variety is the claim that it is "found in literary genres such as fiction and non-fiction, play or drama text, and poetry and short stories" (Akindele & Adegbite, 1999, p. 153) and used by writers to freely (because of literary license) express their world view through linguistic and aesthetic features. Nigerian literary variety in the context of this study is used to describe the English used in the three genres that satisfies international intelligibility, yet narrates the common situational Nigerian experience in literary works. The use of English to export the 'Nigerianess' in literature for international readership and comprehension is seen to be "situated within the increasing and enormous roles of English" (Uwen, Bassey & Nta, 2020, p. 405). This variety is synonymous with Standard English usage but used creatively to account for the multiple spheres of Nigeria's unique existence. In the play, Soyinka exemplifies the use of this variety through Sanda, Bigman Shopper, Miseyi, Barber and Military Officer, among other characters that use Standard English. Of particular interest is Soyinka's importation of poetry into *TBOAB* which is in the dramatic genre. The playwright's use of the Nigerian literary variety to provide comic and psychic relief is seen in the irregular deployment of dramatic and lyrical poetry. This recreational atmosphere is enhanced through the recitation of the lyrical components of the play as highlighted below.

MINSTREL: ...Action be friends  
 ...soon make amends  
 ...other go scratch  
 ...other go hatch  
 ...plenty done rotten  
 ...some are golden  
 ... as be one  
 ... yesterday I born (p. 18)

TRADER: ... of an optical illusion  
 ...in a time-machine  
 ...not a rural seclusion  
 ... from colonial mission  
 ... pedaling a bike  
 ... on an astronomic hike or else a miracle

- ... body on a bicycle (p. 32)
- BARBER: ... can really happen  
 ... some prehistoric age  
 ... wits to sharpen  
 ... to dent our image  
 ... to school – it's indecent  
 ... status – conscious parent  
 ... for an official vehicle  
 ... letters on a bicycle (p. 32)
- PRISONER I: Invented by a soldier  
 ... where flows the Niger  
 It's the ideology conga  
 ... a notion stronger  
 Invented by a soldier  
 ... that flows the Niger (p. 68)

The stanzas above extracted from the poems in the play have the basic distinguishing elements of poetry such as the rhythm, meter, sounds, imagery and form with a poetic language expressed in the sonic, typographical, sensory and ideational planes (Tizhoosh, Sahba & Dara, 2008). The poems which are sung (characteristic of poetry) by Soyinka's actors - Minstrel, Trader, Barber and Prisoner 1 are seen to be chorused by the audience to generate the intended musical and recreational effect for social solidarity and bond. The microsocial contexts of these renditions narrow the social distance between the participants with the common experience of a society that demeans them. Apart from the Prisoner 1's recitation which is a hexastich, the others are octaves with similar rhythmic and metrical patterns. The rhyming schemes are couplets with regular end rhymes organised in this order: aabbccdd, aabbccdd, aabbccdd and aaaaaa. These distinctive linguistic features are artistically combined as expressive cues to unveil the thematic concerns of the play.

#### 4.2 Features of Nigerian English in *TBOAB*

The features of Nigerian English are outcomes of the contact of English with indigenous languages and their speakers. Nigerian speakers of English as L2 have acquired their mother tongues as L1. Learning English as L2 comes with the exposition of features that are regionally, nationally, and even probably recognised internationally. Nigerian English usage with acceptable structure, pronunciation and mutual intelligibility has "established adaptations in forms of contextual usage and meanings within the Nigerian sociolinguistic milieu" (Uwen, 2020, p. 124). Soyinka's deployment of these features in *TBOAB* are discussed under the phonological, semantic, lexical, syntactic, pragmatic and Pentecostal dimensions.

##### 4.2.1 Phonological Features

Although phonological features are easier to detect in oral than the written medium, writers employ spellings variation for the differentiation of words' pronunciation by characters to present the phonological aspects of Nigerian English in literature. In the play, there abound the phonological distortions of the Standard English usage to highlight Nigerian English usage as shown below.

##### **Replacement of /ð/ with /d/**

The voiced dental frication /ð/ is replaced by the voiced alveolar plosive /d/ just as the fricative sound /θ/ is replaced by /t/. The realisation as it occurs in *TBOAB* is that 'think' and 'this' are replaced with 'tink' and 'dis'.

- TRADER: ... *Dis* one ... replaces /ðis/ this (p. 6)
- TRADER: ... *dese* gods... replaces /ði:z/ these (p. 7)
- MINSTREL: ... *dere* barracks ... replaces /ðer/ their (p. 15)
- TRADER: ... *dat* before ... replaces /ðæt/ that (p. 50)
- PRISONER'S VOICE: *De* ... replaces /ði/ the (p. 50)

**/t/ replaces /θ/**

MINSTREL: I *tink*... replaces /θɪŋk/ think (p. 18)

TRADER: This *ting*... replaces /θɪŋ/ thing (p. 24)

**Deletion of the initial or final consonant**

Another phonological variant is the deletion or elision of the final consonant or letter in a word which has a prevalent occurrence in NP usage among Nigerians. In the following examples, 't' is deleted in 'want', 'must' and 'just', 'r' in 'far' 'd' in 'kind' and 'a' in 'away'.

TRADER: I *wan*' think small ... used in place of 'want' (p. 7)

TRADER: It *mus*' to help ... used in place of 'must' (p. 9)

SANDA: Not *fa*... used in place of 'far' (p. 14)

TRADER: Which *kin*' principle?... used in place of 'kind' (p. 40)

SANDA: Go *'way* ... used in place of 'away' (p. 45)

TRADER: I *jus 'wan*' know ...used in place of 'just want' (p. 64)

**The use of the epenthetic 'O'**

The tonal syllable timed nature of Nigerian indigenous languages occasions the insertion of vowels at the medial or final segment of English words whose pronunciation is stress timed and intonational. It is observed that the "introduction of the epenthetic 'o' at the end of a word or expression is a phonological variant peculiar to Nigerians which appears to represent the transfer of the tonal feature of Nigerian indigenous languages into English" (Uwen & Ukam, 2020, p. 90). The examples used in the play are listed below.

TRADER: See this one o ... (p. 14)

TRADER: Look so o ... (p. 24)

SANDA: No o ... (p. 46)

TRADER: That women o ... (p. 50)

TRADER: ...to dodge o (p. 50)

PRISONER I: ...come o ... correct o ... (p. 71)

MOTEHR OF THE DAY: Sorry o ... (p. 95)

SANDA: No o o ... (p. 102)

**Vowel insertion**

Many Nigerian indigenous languages do not have the syllable final consonants while some have them in restricted numbers. This phonological dissimilarity with that of English presents most Nigerian speakers of English as an L2 with the 'choice' of the introduction of an intrusive vowel after the final consonant in the pronunciation of certain words in English. One of such examples in the play is the Prisoners' song as listed below.

PRISONERS (*Singing*):

Lefu - Rate - Lefu - Rate - Lefu

/Lefu/ - /rate/ - /lefu/ - /rate/ - /lefu/ in place of

Left - Right - Left - Right - Left

/left/ - /rait/ - /left/ - /rait/ - /left/ (p. 65)

In the example above, the intrusive vowel is seen to be inserted after the final consonant /t/ in /left/ while there is the substitution of the long vowel /ai/ with /e/ in /rait/ which is the case of a monothongisation of the diphthong. There is also the introduction of the intrusive vowel to realise /rete/ in place of /rait/. According to Uwen (2019), in a study on English loanwords as a lexical enrichment to Erei language, vowel insertion in Nigerian English usage usually occurs in-between consonants (clusters) and "at the final position of some words ending with a consonant" (p. 63). It is a common phenomenon among those at their early stages of learning English as L2 especially at informal settings.

**4.2.2 Semantic Features**

Nigerian English usage is characterised by semantic extensions and shifts. In these instances, the meanings of

Standard English lexical items are semantically modified and adjusted to account for their ‘domesticated’ meanings other than or in addition to what obtains in the native speaker environments. The semantically modified English words in *TBOAB* are provided below.

### Semantic extension

This is a feature of Nigerian English usage where there is the assignment of other meaning(s) in addition to the literal meaning of the English word. The examples in the play are seen through characters below.

TRADER: True word, my brother ... (p. 27)

CYCLIST: My friend ... (p. 27)

TRADER: ... my brother ... (p. 29)

FOREIGNER: ... my friend ... (p. 38)

SANDA: ... my friend ... (p. 43)

VICTIM: ... friend, ... (p. 51)

POLICEMAN: ... friend ... (p. 52)

BARBER: ... friend ... (p. 59)

CYCLIST: ... Made in Taiwan (p. 29)

*Brother* in the literal sense denotes a male (younger or older) sibling. One infers from its use by Trader and Cyclist to refer to each other, and Victim to Sanda, that *brother* in the social context of the conversations bears an extended meaning which connotes friendship and solidarity beyond a male sibling as often literally conceived. Also, *friend* as used by Sanda, Foreigner, Cyclist, Policeman and Barber to refer to Trader, Sanda, Trader, Victim and Minstrel is rather an honorific item, which in the context of its usage in the play, represents address form for characters with asymmetric relationships. *Friend* here, does not necessarily denotes close acquaintances and confidants but it also socially extended to mean people sharing same sociocultural space and burden. In the same manner, Cyclist’s use of *Made in Taiwan*, apart from its reference to goods produced in the Taiwanese geographical space, it further connotes Nigerian orientation on this terminology that describes any and all fake and substandard products.

### Semantic shift

This is the assignment of meaning to an English word other than its original native speakers’ denotation. It is a shift in meaning away from the semantic field of the original and literal one. Examples in the play are enumerated below.

SANDA: ... insurance... (p. 39)

FOREIGNER: ... Kola, bread, ... donation, gift ... (p. 40)

SANDA: ... Manure ... spread ... (p. 40)

TWO-FOUR: ... Bread ... (p. 46)

TRADER: ... boys ... (p. 55)

In the context of Nigerian English usage as exemplified in *TBOAB*, Sanda’s interrogation of Foreigner on securing *insurance* for his parked car is a pragmatic index for a solicited gratification to the gang members he superintends in order to avert the burglary of Foreigner’s car. Foreigner’s complaint before Sanda who disguises as honest, rather recontextualises the celebrated giving of *kola*, *bread*, *donation* and *gift*. There is the displacement of the literal meanings of these lexical items which in the context of their usage in the play, are semantically glued as one terminology that suggests gratification to appease the raging gangsters from predictable harm. However, the *bread* as used by Two-Four while narrating the incidence of the stolen briefcase to Sanda, has the signification of *money*. *Manure* and *spread* contained in Sanda’s conversation with Bigman Shopper mean *bribe* and *large quantity* respectively, and *boys* as used by Trader are not just young males but a slangy nomenclature for members of the gangs and extortionists.

### Interpretation

Interpretation is a practice in spoken discourse. It is established that, “one of the foregrounded linguistic realities in Nigeria ... is the interpretation of songs composed in English into different Nigerian indigenous languages and vice versa” (Uwen & Ukam, 2020, p. 85). It is the oral rendition of song in one language and interpreted in another for the purpose of comprehension by the listeners or participants. The categorisation of the participants in such songs’



rendition is usually comprised of a set of speakers that understand one of the two languages and another cluster that is proficient in the two. It is a practice among bi/multilinguals. Soyinka also employs this sociolinguistic practice in *TBOAB* thus:

PRISONERS (*singsong*): Lefu-Rete-Lefu! Lefu-Rete-Lefu.

Ati warder, at'elewon

Ikan na ni wa

Ati soja, at'olopa

Ole mbe l'ode... (Yoruba)

Left-Right-Left. Left-Right-Left.

Be it warder, be it prisoner

Both of them are one.

Be it soldier, or policeman

Irredeemable thieves... (English) (pp. 66 & 108)

The setting of the play is Lagos, a place where Yoruba is the dominant indigenous language. This situation has expressive impact on the numerical and linguistic composition of the prisoners which suggests why Warder recites the song in English while the prisoners chorus in Yoruba. The phonological adaption of the English lexical items *left*, *right* and *soldier* to *lefu*, *rete* and *soja* are the manifestations of mother tongue interference. Although *left* and *right* have lexical equivalents in Yoruba (*osi* and *otun*), *soldier* has no lexical equivalent in Yoruba which in this instance adopts *soja* as its replacement. The Warder and/or the prisoners in this context are seen to be bi/multilinguals which becomes the sociolinguistic motivation for the practice of interpretation in the songs' rendition.

#### 4.2.3 Lexical Features

Nigerian English has in its corpora some lexical terms that express the Nigerian world view whose meanings convey conventions other than those of the native speakers. Adegbija (2004) and Ekpe (2012) identify such peculiar features into describable categories. Such words in the play are categorised into direct translation, hybridisation, compounding, neologisms and borrowing.

#### Direct translation

This is the direct translation of the semantic features of indigenous languages into Nigerian English usage; a feature that arises from the initial exposure to English learning with traces of mother interference and influence. Such lexical items with Nigerian meaning equivalents as also used by Soyinka in *TBOAB* include:

BARBER: ... bad money ... (p. 13)

BARBER: ...first customer (p. 31)

SANDA: ... Big people ... (p. 31)

BOYKO: ... big man. (p. 41)

SANDA: ... big do ... (p. 58)

SANDA: ... follow woman. (p. 43)

TRADER: ... Money for hand (p. 28)

*Bad money*, *first customer*, *big people*, *big man*, *big do*, *follow woman* and *money for hand* are direct translations of their semantic equivalents from Nigerian indigenous languages into English. The translations as they are ordered above mean 'money got from evil sources', 'the earliest client', 'persons of high social or political influence', 'an influential person', 'flamboyant lifestyle' and 'a promiscuous male or womaniser' respectively. They expressions are therefore embedded with situated meanings.

#### Hybridisation

Hybridisation, in the context of this study, is the use of indigenous lexical items to qualify a succeeding English word in order to generate meaning within the Nigerian discourse context. The examples in the play are indigenous words in the noun class that perform adjectival functions of modification and/or qualification of the succeeding English lexical item. Examples of hybridised forms in *TBOAB* include the following:

TRADER: ... Kirikiri maximum ... (p. 65)

TRADER: ... Oyinbo man ... (p. 65)

*Kirikiri* and *Oyinbo* are indigenous words for 'a correctional centre for the rehabilitation of prisoners in the Kirikiri neighbourhood' and 'any white-skinned foreigner'. The two content words separately modifies the subsequent English words *maximum* and *man* for descriptive purposes.

### Compounding

Compounding is the joining together of two free morphemes to form a single word. The two words could be of the same or different word class and may be joined by a hyphen (-). However, the realised word often differs in meaning from the two or more joined words where defined separately. In *TBOAB*, Soyinka uses such examples through Mother of the Day.

MOTHER OF THE DAY: ... soup-pot ... (p. 25)

MOTHER OF THE DAY: ... bride-to-be ,, (p. 96)

*Soup-pot* and *bribe-to-be* mean 'an aluminum pot with soup content' and 'a lady engaged to be married soon' which would differ in meaning where the words that make up the compounds are defined separately.

### Neologisms

Neologisms are words used in the play that are created to account for the peculiarities of the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment to indicate the collective ideology, experiences, norms, culture and values. Such examples and their Nigerian English version of meanings include:

TRADER: ... black market ... (p. 65)

CYCLIST: ... second-hand ... (p. 30)

WARDER: ... khaki boys ... (p. 67)

JUDGE: ... born-again ... (p. 74)

*Black market* is a Nigerian coinage which means the buying and selling of goods in secretive and illegal manner, *second-hand* connotes (fairly) used goods or equipment, *khaki boys* refers to military personnel especially those of the lower ranks while *born-again* is a generic name for Pentecostal Christians believed to have evidence of speaking in tongues. These are creations that describe Nigerian sociocultural orientations.

### Borrowing

Nigerian English borrows significantly from indigenous languages to enrich its lexicon; a feature, Soyinka has represented sufficiently in the play. The borrowed items in *TBOAB* are:

SANDA: ... with this ewa afterall... (p. 16)

MINSTREL: ... Haba, this country... (p. 18)

SANDA: ... selling akara... (p. 20)

BOYKO: ...Oga, this place... (p. 22)

CYCLIST: ...All this wahala... (p. 25)

CYCLIST: ... one molue finally arrive ... (p. 30)

TRADER: ... common wayo people ... (p. 40)

MISEYI: ... that megadi uniform ... (p. 48)

TRADER: ... any kind juju attack ... (p. 54)

TRADER: ... this alawada man? (p. 62)

BARBER: ... a new agbada ... (p. 89)

*Ewa* is a Yoruba word for 'beans', *haba* is an exclamation in Hausa used to express 'surprise or sad emotion', *akara* is borrowed from Yoruba and it means 'bean cake', *oga*, *wahala*, *molue* and *wayo* are Yoruba words that mean 'boss', 'trouble', 'intracity commercial bus' and 'fraud' respectively. Others borrowed from Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba which mean 'security guard', 'magical deity', 'a clown/funny person' and 'a loose traditional gown worn by males' are *megadi*, *juju*, *alawada* and *agbada*. The words are indexical significations for the use of indigenous items in literary texts written in English. The borrowed words which are codemixed intrasententially, suggest the expressive force of

Soyinka as a bi/multilingual Nigerian which he employs to demonstrate the linguistic configuration of Nigeria.

#### 4.2.4 Syntactic Features

Igboanusi (2006) in a study on the syntactic processes in Nigerian English proposes that, what appears to be an ‘innovation’ or ‘acceptable variant’ in non-native speakers use of English may be viewed as an error by those who use English as their L1. Igboanusi enumerates such category of utterances used daily by Nigerians to include sentences without subjects or verbs, and those with double subjects. The use of these aspects of spoken English in *TBOAB* indicate their entry into Nigerian literary works to portray the endonormative nature of the Nigeria’s variety of English. The examples used by characters in *TBOAB* represented by the bracket ( ) are discussed under the following categories.

##### **Subjectless sentences**

There are sentences with empty subjects in the utterances of characters in *TBOAB* as shown below.

JUDGE: ( ) Wasted too much of my time (p. 10).

SANDA: ( ) Just wanted to make sure... (p. 23).

CYCLIST: ( ) Is all for this interview... (p. 30).

In the first example above, the subjective second person pronoun *you*, or the subjective third person pronoun *he* or *she*, in which case, either of them is the appropriate item to occupy the subject position is missing in the structure. In the second example, *I* which is the first person subjective pronoun that should have filled the empty subject position is missing just as the objective neuter gender pronoun *it* is omitted before the verb ‘is’ that starts the sentence in example three above. This occurs as a result of sentence shortening which does not alter the meaning in the Nigerian context of usage.

##### **Verbless structures**

In the dialogic exchanges among characters in the play, it is seen that Soyinka also deploys sentences without the verb class. The examples are provided below.

TRADER: You ( ) welcome... (p. 12).

CYCLIST: How much ( ) this tie, oga?

The omission of the verbs *are* and *is* in the first and second examples above will pose comprehension barrier in conversations involving native speakers of English, yet it is prevalent in comprehensible structures among Nigerians.

##### **Duplication of subjects**

In the play, this feature is reflected in the use of double pronouns or the combination of the pronoun and a noun to (redundantly) emphasise the subject which is a manifestation of the transfer of the form in some Nigerian indigenous languages into English. The examples include the following.

BARBER: (That sunrise) must have fooled her... (p. 11).

SANDA: (You people) can take your minds off the satanic work... (p. 23).

##### **Wrong choice of negations**

Another syntactic feature of Nigerian English used in the play is the wrong choice of negations. The utterances that contain this characteristic are listed below.

MINSTREL: (No) blame me... (p. 17).

TRADER: (No) mind me. (p. 28).

Negation denotes a refusal, disapproval, denial or refutation. It converts an affirmative sentence into a negative one. In the two examples above, the appropriate replacement for the negated word in bracket should have been *do not* but the use of *no* as it appears in the structures is understandable among Nigerian interactants.

#### 4.2.5 Pragmatic Features

Pragmatic cues in the play have been alluded to in the earlier sections of this study. They include the various examples that consider the discourse participants and their discursive contexts, which are parameters that shape their language use and the mutually construed meanings in the communicative situation (Aboh & Uduk, 2016). This particular section focuses on Nigerians’ infusion of honorific address and titles to express the cultural values for respect, deference and politeness. The deliberate avoidance of addressing the elderly by name even where such

interactants are contemporaries and its deployment as the sociocultural components in the fictional discourse context of the play, emphasises the value Nigerians have for honorific forms. This section also looks at lexical duplication as a pragmatic device for meaning attainment. The pragmatic features in the play are depicted through MC, Trader, Cyclist, Sanda, Foreigner and Mama Put.

### Address forms, honorifics and kinship terms

MC: Your Excellency... Chief Honourable Surveyor ...Ambassador Extraordinary...Lords Temporal and Spiritual... (pp. 90-91)

MC's English usage is suggestive of examples that show the use of honorific terms in the Nigerian sociocultural space. Commenting on this linguistic behaviour, Anchimbe and Janney (2011) assert that naming and address forms are aspects of postcolonial pragmatics that emphasise their sociocultural relationship with respect and politeness. Examples of the items discussed in this category include: *oga*, *brother* and *friend* (see 4.2.2) used as names avoidance devices and social deixis. The titles, address forms and honorifics defer to Nigerian sociocultural practices which are literarily re-echoed in *TBOAB*.

### Lexical duplication

Lexical duplication in this study, is the intrasentential repetition of a lexical item for pragmatic explications. The examples highlighted in *TBOAB* include:

TRADER: ... Before before ... (p. 27)

CYCLIST: ... Cheap cheap ... (p. 27)

SANDA: ... Now now ... (p. 40)

FOREIGNER: ... No, no ... (p. 40)

MAMA PUT: ... One one ... (p. 26)

TRADER: ... quick quick ... (p. 88)

The lexical duplication of the lexical items in their social context of usage is not intended to create semantic redundancy or reduplication, rather it is devised to provide meaning reinforcement and emphasis to the hearer/listener. It provides the semantic foregrounding of the repeated lexical item within the expression. The lexical duplication of *before*, *cheap*, *now*, *no*, *one* and *quick* narrows the listener's focus to the speaker's intention. That is to say that, in their situational usage, the intensifier and temporal deixis *before* emphasises a common situation in the past as against the present, *now* is also used an intensifier deixis to reiterate the present, *no* foregrounds a disapproval, *one* is used as a quantifier that symbolises a single entity as against pluralisation, *cheap* expresses affordability and *quick* denotes speed used here as an intensifier for the purpose of emphasis. Lexical duplication in the context of the play is a foregrounding stratagem intended to disambiguate the referred lexical item and create meaning within the context of usage.

#### 4.2.6 Nigerian Pentecostal English Usage

The religious consciousness of Nigerians has impacted on the use of English. It is a common linguistic experience that "English usage in Nigeria [is] meant to express religiosity and contextually devised to communicate the religious consciousness of interlocutors... [suggestive of] the shared sociocultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds" (Uwen, 2020, p. 124). The dialogic mechanisms that characterise the religious manifestation in the utterances of characters are creatively scripted in Soyinka's *TBOAB*.

BARBER: ... don't you mind that unbeliever ... (p. 37)

WOMAN: Let's prove it to these unbelievers ... (p. 54)

PRISONER I: ... and Christian preacher go come nuisance themselves with reformation and redemption ... (p. 72)

JUDGE: ...Let your chaplain believe that you have a revelation (p. 73)

JUDGE: ...to become a born-again ... (p. 74)

In the Pentecostal Christian English usage in Nigeria, there is the redefinition and modification of religious registers to recontextualise Biblical circumstances in secular and religious discourse (Aremu, 2013). *Unbelievers* in the Nigerian context is semantically extended to mean those who are yet to accept Jesus Christ as the Saviour of mankind, following conversion, and water and Holy Ghost baptism with visible evidence of speaking in tongues.

This category of Christians is believed to have experienced spiritual *reformation* and the *redemption* of their sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are the sets of Christians called *born-again*, who are also capable of being spiritually inspired to make *revelations* on unforeseeable occurrences. Although Soyinka, through the characters of Prisoner 1 and Judge satirises the contextual conceptions of (*un*)*believers*, *reformation*, *redemption*, the religious registers *born-again* and *revelation* in the Nigerian Pentecostal Christians usage are redefined to capture events in their situational communications.

## 5. Conclusion

The title of the play (*The beatification of area boy*), the names' assigned to most characters (Mama Put, Conductor, Bigman Shopper, Two-Four and Mother of the Day) and the creative distribution of language resources in dialogues, combined to express linguistic significations for Soyinka's conscious typification of Nigerian English usage in literature. This is further demonstrated in the sociolinguistic description of language use in *TBOAB* which revealed characters who, in their dialogic exchanges become fictional linguistic pointers to the Nigerian sociolinguistic situation. By the characters' social identities tied to their social differentiation, Soyinka creatively provides the correlation between social statuses and varieties of English usage that envelopes large corpora and structures of Nigerian English.

In the play, four linguistic varieties were identified. They are: the Nigerian Pidgin, incipient bilingual variety, local colour variety and the Nigerian literary variety. These spoken varieties capture the shared peculiarities in the Nigerian sociolinguistic and sociocultural environment. The extracts from the play, also reflect the Nigerian English features at the phonological, semantic, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic levels. They are used to illuminate the domestic acceptable adaptations, deviations, modifications, redefinitions and recontextualisation of English expressions that convey mutually intelligible frames among speakers. The play *TBOAB* is a fictional representation of a people who have acquired their indigenous languages and confronted with the learning complexities of English as L2. The text showed how spoken Nigerian English is used in literature to demonstrate the linguistic experience of Nigerians. Characters' variations in language usage in the play is a literary ploy that showed urban dwellers' consciousness to be socially and linguistically accommodated in a heterogeneous society where English somewhat functions to bridge the communication gap. The scenario, as the play depicts, and depending on the determining social variables that define the characters, produces varieties of the same (English) language. The playwright's explication of the varieties and irregular deployment of codemixed elements through the characters ultimately captures the linguistic pulse of the Nigerian society.

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