

**NON-NATIVE LITERATURES IN
ENGLISH AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR
ENGLISH TEACHING:
THE NIGERIAN EXAMPLE**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, it is suggested that Nigerian literatures written in English provide models and methods of (1) teaching English as linguistic variation and (2) teaching English as linguistic deviation, mistakes, and solecisms. These phenomena are discussed with examples drawn from the novels of two prominent Nigerian creative writers: Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe.

As indicated in this study, linguistic variation occurs as Nigerian creative writers of English use various linguistic devices to contextualize the English language in their own local cultures. On the other hand, linguistic deviation alludes to forms of English which are characterized by mistakes, solecisms and an imperfect knowledge or usage of the English language.

It is thus indicated that studies such as this help to provide linguistic and cross-cultural explanations to show (a) how English has been nativized in Nigeria, (b) how stylistic innovations are determined by the socio-cultural context, (c) what effect such innovations have on, for example, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability, and (d) the implication of using English for cross-cultural communication.

This study thus provides materials for what is called 'communicative language teaching'.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, the value of literary texts for English teaching inheres in the fact that “reading literary discourses can assist students in the development of sense-making procedures of the kind required for the interpretation of or sensitization to language use in any discursal context” (Carter, 1989a: 17-8). Widdowson relates this idea succinctly when he states in an interview that:

If you're a sensible teacher you use every resource that comes to hand. But the difference between conventional discourse and literature is that in conventional discourse you can anticipate, you can take short cuts; when reading a passage, let's say, you often know something about the topic the passage deals with, and you can use that knowledge while reading naturally in order to find out what's going on in the passage. This is a natural reading procedure: we all do it. The amount of information we normally take out of something we read is minimal, actually, because we simply take from the passage what fits the frame of reference we have already established before reading. Now, you can't do that with literature... because you've got to find the evidence, as it were, which is representative of some new reality. So, with literary discourse the actual *procedures for making sense* are much more in evidence. You've got to employ interpretation procedures in a way which isn't required of you in the normal reading process. If you want to develop these procedural abilities to make sense of discourse, then literature has a place (1983, original emphasis).

However, specifically, scholars of English as a second/foreign language have suggested that the experience embodied in literary texts can be contemplated from two broad angles: the *extrinsic* and the *intrinsic*. The extrinsic dimension deals with all those biographical, political, sociological, philosophical, cultural, psychological, etc. facts that have informed a particular literary work. The extrinsic dimension is supposedly the preoccupation of literary critics. The

intrinsic dimension of a literary output focuses attention on those aspects that have to do with words on the printed page; this can be further extrapolated as the phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic core of a literary text. The intrinsic dimension is supposed to be the domain of linguistic stylisticians and textlinguists/discourse analysts although, in practical terms, stylisticians and textlinguists/discourse analysts often attempt to build a bridge between the extrinsic and the intrinsic.

Non-native literatures in English are "... a rather specialized body of English literature which is written by *non-native* users of English. A non-native user is one who has acquired an institutionalized variety of English as a second language (L2)" (Kachru, 1986b: 140, original emphasis).

The significance of non-native literatures in English lies in their semantic and pragmatic values or what Kachru (1986b: 140) has termed "... (the) awareness about teaching language as a 'meaning system' related to various societal functions" and "... how a non-native writer of English uses various linguistic devices to contextualize a non-native language in his own 'un-English' culture" (Kachru, 1986b: 143).

However, if the relevance of non-native literatures in English (which as mentioned earlier generally show sensitivity to local sociolinguistic contexts) for teaching English internationally is anchored to *models* and *methods* of teaching, then, we cannot really discuss the implications of non-native literatures in English for English teaching without briefly alluding to the controversy surrounding the use of English as an international language or the ontological status of the so-called 'new Englishes' or 'new varieties of English' which has resulted in distinct functional varieties, for example, basilect vs. educated English in Singapore and Malaysia, bazaar vs. educated English in India and Pakistan, Nigerian Pidgin vs. educated Nigerian English in Nigeria, Japlish (Japanese English) etc. The consequence of the spread and use of English in the global context is "a multiplicity of semiotic systems, several non-shared

linguistic conventions, and numerous underlying cultural traditions” (Kachru, 1988: 207).

The reactions of linguists and teachers to the status of the new varieties of English are of two kinds. One group of language specialists views them in terms of the ‘bilingual’s creativity’ and ‘sociolinguistic reality’ while the other group views them as ‘deviation’ and ‘mistakes’.

The most vocal of the first group of language specialists is perhaps Braj Kachru who avers that “... as English spreads, and as more people include it in their verbal repertoire, it continues to absorb – and unfold – ‘meanings’ and ‘values’ from diverse cultures, both as an international and intranational language” (1988: 209). Basing his argument on ‘Indian English’, Kachru indicates that “Indian English maintains varying degrees of *Englishness* which is graded from pidgin to educated Indian English” (1986a, original emphasis). On the implication of non-native varieties of English for teaching English as a second foreign language, Kachru indicates that “On the cline of *Englishness*, non-native varieties of English may be low but they exist and work, and they call for the replacement of ‘pedagogical models’ that have become suspect” (1986a, original emphasis). According to him:

The pragmatics of the uses of the English language can be understood only if a dynamic polymodel approach is adopted (1986a).

On the other hand, there is a group of language specialists who believe that non-native varieties of English are not only examples of linguistic deviation and mistakes but are also products of bad language learning and teaching. The most vociferous of this group is Professor Randolph Quirk. As pointed out earlier, Kachru posits that the existence of non-native varieties of English calls for the replacement of ‘pedagogical models’ that have become suspect. However, Quirk is quick to point out that:

It is not encouraging to reflect that although Kachru has been publishing on Indian English for 25 years – prolifically, eloquently, elegantly – there is still

no grammar, dictionary, or phonological description for any of these non-native norms that is, or could hope to become, recognized as authoritative in India, a description to which teacher and learner in India could turn for normative guidance, and from which pedagogical materials could be derived (1988: 235-6).

Quirk thus notes that "... interest in varieties of English has got out of hand and has started blinding both teachers and taught to the central linguistic structure from which the varieties might be seen as varying" (1990: 4). In short, Quirk sees the non-native varieties of English as the result of the increasing failure of the education system and thus drives home the point that "It is neither liberal nor liberating to permit learners to settle for lower standards than the best, and it is a travesty of liberalism to tolerate low standards which will lock the least fortunate into the least rewarding careers" (1990: 9)

Since some of the contending issues on the status of non-native varieties of English — with special reference to 'Nigerian English' — have been discussed in Bamiro (1988: 65–80), we shall not wade further into these controversies here. Suffice it to add that the significance of Nigerian literatures in English for English teaching lies in the fact that they represent varieties of English used in the Nigerian literary context, varieties which are fast diverging from British or American English norms due to a transition to local English norms as dictated by a host of variables in the Nigerian environment. Consequently, Nigerian literatures in English thus help to indicate that in Nigeria, just as in Singapore, the Phillipines, Japan, etc. internal norms of phonology, lexis, syntax, and pragmatics are used for speech events in English and the norms of British or American English are being gradually eroded in many Nigerian contexts. They thus help to codify, on a permanent basis, how the English language is being 'nativized' or 'indigenized' in the Nigerian socio-cultural and psychological environment.

However, if linked to their potential as resources for methods and models

of English teaching, and provision of ample materials for ‘communicative language teaching’, we would like to suggest that Nigerian literatures in English provide models and methods of (1) teaching English as linguistic variation, and (2) teaching English as linguistic deviation, mistakes and solecisms. We would discuss these phenomena in turn by drawing examples from the novels written by two prominent Nigerian authors, Wole Soyinka, the Nobel laureate for literature in 1986, and Chinua Achebe, whose first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), was hailed as a classic, has sold in millions, and has been translated into over forty languages around the world, including German, Italian, Spanish, Slovene, Russian, Hebrew, French, Czech, and Hungarian languages.¹

NIGERIAN LITERATURES IN ENGLISH AS MODELS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS LINGUISTIC VARIATION

Linguistic variation in Nigerian literature occurs as Nigerian creative writers of English use various linguistic devices to contextualize the English language in their own local cultures. Kachru (1981, 1983, 1986a, b), has used the terms ‘nativization’, ‘translation equivalence’, and ‘transcreation’ for such processes which exhibit “a relationship between the use of linguistic nativization processes and the resultant acculturation of English” (Kachru, 1986b: 143). Consequently, linguistic variation results as Nigerian creative writers use translation from their native languages into English as one of the productive devices not only for correlating the speech event with its appropriate formal item but also for creating contextually and stylistically appropriate innovations for ‘Nigerianizing’ Nigerian literary texts. It should be pointed out, however, that ‘translation equivalents’ are not the only evidence for linguistic variation; other evidence for linguistic variation includes lexical innovations, and contextual redefinition of lexical items of English in new contexts.

Linguistic variation in Nigerian literatures written in English thus underscores

the ‘Nigerianness’ or the Nigerian idiom of English as opposed to the ‘Englishness’ of British English and the ‘Americanness’ of American English.

Although linguistic variation assumes various forms in Nigerian literature in English (conventional sayings, proverbs, and other relevant art forms drawn from the social milieu, e.g., modes of address, modes of reference, loan translations, prayers, invectives, ritual communication, panegyrics, etc.), models to be discussed in relation to English teaching are (a) The doric style: idiomatic expressions, and (b) Kinship terms. It is worth emphasizing that the relevance of these forms to English teaching inheres in the fact that they hardly violate any native English norms but differ from native English in terms of the pragmatics of communication and other sociolinguistic variables. These are unique expressions to which the native speaker of English might be unable to assign semantic interpretation in spite of the fact that no grammatical rules are violated. We shall discuss each of these in turn.

(a) The doric style: idiomatic expressions

The doric style, writes Halliday (1987: 142), represents natural language “in its commonsense, everyday, spontaneous spoken form”, as it functions “way below the usual level of consciousness” (Halliday, 1987: 143). In other words:

The doric style, that of everyday, commonsense discourse, is characterized by a high degree of grammatical intricacy — a choreographic type of complexity. ... It highlights processes, and the interdependence of one process on another. The attic style, that of emergent languages of science, displays a high degree of lexical density: its complexity is crystalline, and it highlights structures, and the interrelationships of the parts — including, in a critical further development, *conceptual* structures, the taxonomies that helped to turn knowledge into science (Halliday, 1987: 147, original emphasis).

As implied in the introduction, Nigerian writers of English generally subject

the English language to a process of adaptation to meet their Nigerian experience by incorporating into dialogues and narration many art-forms translated from their mother tongues. In this direction, the doric style is concerned with how Chinua Achebe is able to capture in English language the idiom, metaphor, the 'hidden' grammars, and the ordinary spoken language — in their everyday, commonsense contexts — so typical of the Igbo people. I alluded to Chinua Achebe only because this kind of doric style is not attested in Soyinka's novels.

The kind of idiom used by the Igbo man to relate his experience is often constrained by such sociolinguistic variables as participant, topic, setting, and situation. Chinua Achebe himself, as a creative artist, is aware of the doric style. Achebe himself (1975: 61) uses the following passage from *Arrow of God* (henceforth *AOG* after quotations and extracts from the novel) to illustrate his approach to the use of English, the doric style:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow (*AOG*, pp. 45-6).

The author then gives us what he considers as the standard English rendition of the same passage:

I am sending you as my representative among these people just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight (Achebe, 1975: 62).

According to Achebe, "The material is the same. But the form of the one is *in character* and the other is not. It is largely a matter of instinct, but

judgement comes into it too” (1975: 62, original emphasis). The main point is that while the first passage above reflects the doric style, the second reflects the ‘attic’ style or what Halliday (1985: 321) has termed ‘grammatical metaphor’.

Without a doubt, all the novels of Achebe bristle with the doric style but for purposes of illustration, I will take a few examples from his *Arrow of God*. In the examples that follow, the doric style is furnished as found in the novel while the ‘attic’ or the English ‘grammaticalized’ approximation is given in parentheses.

1. May children *put their fathers into the earth* (p. 6).
(May children bury their fathers)
2. I have already said *what this new religion will bring to Umuaro wears a hat in its head* (p. 45).
(I have already warned of the dangers inherent in this new religion)
3. Moses Unachukwu, although very much older than the two age groups, had come forward to organize them and *to take words out of the white man’s mouth for them* (p. 77).
(Moses Unachukwu... had come forward to organize them and to interpret the language of the white man for them)
4. Akuebue was one of the very few men *whose words gained entrance into Ezeulu’s ear* (p. 93).
(... one of the very few men to whom Ezeulu listened)
5. When he took his wife to his hut after the sacrifice, *would be find her at home?* (p. 118).
(.... would he discover that she is a virgin?)
6. Every girl knew of Ogbanje Omenyi whose husband was said to have sent to her parents for a machet to cut *the bush on either side of the highway which she carried between her thighs* (p. 122).
(Every girl knew of Ogbanje Omenyi whose husband was embarrassed by her overgrown pubic hair)

7. But let me see you come back from the stream with *yesterday's body* (p. 123).
(But let me see you come back from the stream with your body unwashed.)
8. Somewhere near him someone *was talking into his talk* (p. 142).
(Somewhere near him someone was interrupting him)
9. When I called you together it was not because I am lost or because *my eyes have seen my ears* (p. 145).
(... it was not because I am lost or mad)
10. ... too much palm wine was harmful for a man *going in to his wife* (p. 193).
(... too much palm wine was harmful for a man about to have sex with his wife)

In the foregoing examples, the doric style is underscored for emphasis. As I mentioned earlier, the doric style is often constrained by topic, setting, and situation. Obviously, in examples 5, 6 and 10 above, the doric style is used to circumvent bawdy and obscene expressions.

(b) Kinship terms

The function of kinship terms noted in the novels of Chinua Achebe attests to the fact that such kinship terms as *mother, father, brother, sister, husband, wife*, etc. are characterized by semantic widening; that is, as used in the texts, such kinship terms indicate a wider semantic area than in British or American English. They are thus one of the defining features of Nigerian literatures written in English.

Kachru (1966) has noted the same feature in Indian English. According to him:

In the speech-functions in Indian English the effect of culture on the use of kinship terms is contextually significant, and... may differ from the use of kinship terms in British English. In British English, the lexical set of kinship

terms may comprise, among other items, the following items: *brother*, *brother-in-law*, *cousin*, *father*, *mother*, etc. In Indian English these terms need different formal and contextual statements since (i) the members of one British English set operate in three sets in Indian English; (ii) the members of a set, in Indian English, have been increased; (iii) the meaning of the items has been extended (Kachru, 1966: 275).

Akere (1978) also considers the wider social meaning attached to kinship terms like *father*, *mother*, and *uncle*. According to Akere, in native-speaker situations, “X is a member of Y family” would be understood to mean “X can only be any of father, mother, son, or daughter in the family and no more”. The implication is that these kinship terms are extended semantically in the Nigerian situation, and this is a part of what constitutes Nigerian English.

The variation in meaning, for example, of the following kinship terms, *brother*, *son*, *wife*, as used in the novels of Chinua Achebe has to be accounted for by socio-cultural factors which redefine these systems in the Nigerian environment:

1. ‘So my *brothers*,’ continued Nwodika’s son, ‘that was how your *brother* came to work for the white man ...’ (AOG, p. 170).

To account for the variation in meaning of *brother* as used in the context above, we can chart its basic features as it occurs in English and Igbo socio-cultural contexts as follows:

<i>English</i>	<i>Igbo</i>
+ male	+ male
± adult	± adult
← + parent (Nucleated)	← + parent (Extended)

As used above, the arrow ← means “is child of” (Leech, 1974: 248). The difference in meaning can be accounted for by the fact that in English situations, while *brother* is ‘the son of only X parents’, *brother* in the Igbo context —

and by implication in the larger Nigerian socio-cultural context — has a wider sociological and cultural implications; in the Nigerian context, a *brother* is morally and socially accountable to the whole community (including his near and far relations) in which he functions and participates. In other words, while in the English cultural context, a *brother* is ‘son of the same parents as another person’, in the Nigerian socio-cultural context, a *brother* is the son and brother of the whole community which serves as the collective watchdog of his moral upbringing and socialization. The same socio-cultural dimension applies to the following:

2. ‘Ezeulu! he saluted.

‘*My son*’ (AOG, P. 110).

Relating to this interaction, the variation in meaning of the term, *son*, between English and Igbo contexts can be charted as follows:

<i>English</i>	<i>Igbo</i>
+ male	+ male
± adult	± adult
← + parent (Nucleated)	← + parent (Extended)

In example 2 above, the fact that Ezeulu, who is not Obielue’s paternal father, addresses him as ‘My son’ indicates that in the Nigerian context, a *son*, regardless of his parentage, is morally and socially accountable and responsible to the whole community. Such a situation is not obtained in native-speaker contexts.

In the following examples, the various socio-cultural meanings attached to the term *wife* as defined by the Nigerian context are also instructive:

3. Apart from *children* which we all want, some men want a woman to cook their meals, some want a woman to help on the farm, others want someone they can beat’ (AOG, p. 63).

4. ‘...Your *wife* will bear you nine sons’ (AOG, p. 120).

5. Okonkwo called his three *wives* and told them to get things together for a great feast (*TFA*, p. 116).
6. ‘... And let our *wives* bear *male children*...’ (*AOG*, p. 6).
7. ‘...When *my wife* here came to me and said: Our daughter has a child and I want you to come and give her a name, I said to myself: Something is amiss ...I did not hear of *bride-price* and you are telling me about naming a child...’ (*Anthills*, p. 210).

Based on the implications in the foregoing examples, we can chart the features of *wife* in English and Igbo contexts as follows:

<i>English</i>	<i>Igbo</i>
+ payment (dowry)	+ payment (bride price)
± communal responsibility and accountability	+ communal responsibility and accountability
– polygamy	± polygamy
± procreation	+ procreation
± male children	+ male children

For example, as can be gleaned from the features above, while the English wife enjoys exclusive right to the husband who cannot enter into similar relations with other women, the Igbo husband — and many other ethnic groups in Nigeria — can, if he so wishes, enter into a similar agreement with other women at the same time.² Notice also that in example 7 above, the speaker addresses the woman as ‘my wife’ whereas he is not her legal husband; this kind of mode of address would be considered odd and eccentric in British or American contexts, for example. This again corroborates the argument that such terms like *father*, *mother*, *brother*, *sister*, *son*, *wife*, etc. have an extended meaning in the Nigerian socio-cultural context, the logic being that of an obligatory communal responsibility and accountability. Ezeulu’s prayer that “... let our wives bear male children” (*AOG*, p. 6) is very significant. In most cases, a Nigerian wife who does not bear male children who will eventually

continue the patrilineal heritage of the family may be jettisoned by the husband.

Apart from the fact that they are marked for communal responsibility and accountability, such secondary terms as *nephew*, *uncle*, *mother-in-law*, *niece*, *cousin*, etc. are also attested in Nigerian cultures; however, such terms submit themselves to the logic of Nigerian languages. Consider the following examples, all from Achebe's *Arrow of God*, where such terms as *cousin*, *uncle*, and *mother-in-law* respectively are subjected to an explicit descriptive technique not only as modes of address (connoting solidarity) but also as marks of respect and emphasis:

8. Undezue took his three visitors to the house of Otikpo, the town-crier of Okperi. He was in his Obi preparing seed-yams for the market. He rose to greet his visitors. He called Udezue by his name and title and called Akukalia *Son of our Daughter* (p. 22).
9. 'If war came suddenly to your town how do you call your men together, *Father of my Mother?*' (p. 23)
10. 'I have been looking for you two all over the market place,' she said. She embraced Adeze whom she called *Mother of my Husband* (p. 73).

From the foregoing account of kinship terms as used in the novels of Chinua Achebe, sociological and cultural factors in the Nigerian context must be taken into account for the total meaning of terms like *father*, *mother*, *brother*, *sister*, *wife*, etc. as used by a Nigerian writer or speaker of English to be understood, say, by a British or an American.

NIGERIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH AS MODELS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS LINGUISTIC DEVIATION

Unlike linguistic variation which only portrays lexicosemantic variation in Nigerian literatures written in English, linguistic deviation alludes to forms of English which are characterized by mistakes, solecisms and an imperfect

knowledge or usage of the English language. These forms display a norm that is low on the cline of Englishness; this will become clear from the examples to be furnished presently.

The significance of linguistic deviation noticed in Soyinka's and Achebe's novels must be discussed in relation to the polylectal speech situation in Nigeria. The polylectal speech situation in Nigeria is evidence of the fact that the English language has been or is being nativized in Nigeria. That there is an internal norm is evident in the fact that a lot of structures which would be totally unintelligible to native speakers of English are used officially at the highest level of government in Nigeria. Such forms are found at all levels of language analysis: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

The polylectal speech situation in Nigeria presupposes the availability of several 'lects' in the Nigerian speech environment. Three main varieties of English have been identified in Nigeria and in other English-as-a-second-language situations: (1) the higher variety (*acrolect*), which is the internationally intelligible variety; (2) the intermediate variety (*mesolect*), which is the intranationally accepted variety, and (3) the lower variety (*basilect*), which is the context variety used by the illiterate and semi-literate population. However, some scholars have suggested that in reality these three varieties are not discrete levels but are a sort of continua. According to Todd, "To suggest that such divisions exist is... a gross oversimplification because each of these varieties influences the other and each is itself a conglomerate of overlapping variants" (1982: 132). Richards also points out that:

... the situation is more complex in reality, in that an individual speaker may use an acrolectal speech variety as a rhetorical style and the mesolectal variety as a communicative style on some occasions, and on some occasions the same speaker may use a mesolectal variety as a rhetorical style and the basilectal variety as a communicative style, depending on speaker, role, and other situation variables (1979: 7).

The numerous examples of the 'lectal' ranges found in the novels of Soyinka and Achebe are an eloquent testimony that the English language is being nativized in Nigeria. However, as found in these novels, the lectual ranges are used by both authors (1) to attest to the polylectal speech situation in Nigeria and (2) to characterize the position and status of certain characters in the social structure. Since the concern of this section is with Nigerian literatures in English as models of teaching English as linguistic deviation, only the first of the above will be discussed. We will, therefore, discuss the linguistic deviation attested in these novels under two principal headings: (a) The *basilect* and (b) The *mesolect*.

(a) The Basilect

As indicated earlier, the basilect is the lower or context variety used by the illiterate and semi-literate population. Consider the following extract from Soyinka's novel, *The Interpreters*, in which Nigerian Pidgin English, a basilectal form of English language, features prominently. It should be noted that the core population of regular Nigerian Pidgin speakers generally belongs to the lower social strata educationally, occupationally, and economically. It is also worth emphasizing that Nigerian Pidgin English has not risen to the position of the acrolect or prestige variety and, in fact, it is still treated as uneducated speech in Nigeria. In the following extract, Nigerian Pidgin English is underlined while translation in standard English follows in parentheses.

1. *'A-ah, God catch me plenty today. But make a tell true, no to say a dey go shit for there, a no fit self. Same ting cleaner dey tell me. When 'e siddon, in belle go tight, nuting fit comot. How man go fit shit for room we dem make like room an' parlour?'* (God has caught me today but to tell the truth, not that I use the toilet; I am not even in a position to use it. The cleaner tells me the same thing that whenever he sits on the toilet bowl, his stomach becomes so taut that he can't really ease himself. How

can somebody use a toilet that looks like a room and a parlour?). He flung the door and gestured inside with a flourish, 'Abi you no see?' (Can you imagine this?) (*Interpreters*, p. 82).

The following two examples of basilectal varieties of Nigerian English are also noted in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*:

2. 'Let joking pass,' said the old man.... (p. 72).

This usage represents an 'interference' phenomenon since the above could have resulted from the old man's attempt to translate from Igbo to English language, word-for-word. The correct form should have been 'This is not a matter for joking' or 'I am not joking'.

3. A letter in a semi-literate hand caught his eye. He brought it out and read again.

Dear Sir,

It is absolutely deplorable to me hence I have to beg you respectfully to render me with help. At one side of it looks shameful of my asking you for this help, but if only I am sincere to myself, having the truth that I am wanting because of the need, I wish you pardon me. My request from you is 30/- (thirty shillings), assuring you of every truth to do the refund prompt, on the pay-day, 26 November 1957.

I wish the best of your consideration

Yours obedient servant

Charles Ibe (p. 87)

The writer of the letter above is "one of the messengers in the department" (*NLAE*, p. 88) where Obi, his boss, works. The basilectal form, therefore, is an indication of his very low educational attainment and socio-economic status in the social structure. Notice the 'hypercorrection' that informs the letter in such locations as "it is absolutely deplorable...", "looks shameful of my asking you...", "assuring you of every truth to do the refund prompt", "I wish the best of your consideration". This hypercorrection indicates certain tendencies

that have been associated with Nigerian — and, indeed, many foreign learners' — English usage, whether acrolectal, mesolectal, or basilectal. For example, Quirk, *et al.* (1972: 24) point out that the style of foreign English language users is “attitudinally invariant”. They further go on to claim that “it is commonplace to notice an invariant literary, archaic flavour in the speech of foreign students, and even a Biblical strain in the speech of students from some parts of the world” (1972: 24). However, while this viewpoint is correct, it has to be realized that the Nigerian English situation arises partially from the peculiar way in which English is learned in the country. According to Abiodun Adetugbo:

Nigerian English users are better exposed in the main to literary or written forms of the language. The grammar of Nigerian English is that of the written medium. It is as if in our view of language the written form is primary while the spoken form takes a secondary position... Nigeria's ascription of primacy to the written medium has been justified all along by the traditional grammarians' concentration on the language of literature as the language par excellence, and which serves as the model for all who want to acquire what is called good grammar (1980: 73).

(b) The Mesolect

It is at the mesolectal range of language use that we have most of the features associated with Nigerian English given the indisputable fact that the averagely educated Nigerian speaks the mesolectal variety. This is the communicative norm which is quite acceptable. However, even in terms of the internal norm, a lot of the expressions in the mesolect are grammatically deviant.

Copious examples of the mesolectal variety are attested in the novels of Soyinka and Achebe, especially in the latter's. I will discuss the mesolectal forms attested in the novels under two broad headings: (1) Morphology and

Syntax, and (2) Lexis and Semantics.

Morphology and Syntax

The following is the language of the managing director of Sagoe's newspaper:

4. 'Just let him go Chairman. *How can an interview be conductable* with someone who is not taking the matter serious? ... *You* small boy, *you* come here begging for job. *These* small fries *they* all think they are *popularly in demand*, just because they have a degree...' (*Interpreters*, pp. 78-9)

The mesolectal forms derive from:

- (a) Periphrasis: 'How can an interview be conductable...' (How can we conduct an interview...)
- (b) Peculiar grammatical usage involving a manner adjunct: 'serious' (seriously)
- (c) lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy: 'popularly in demand' (in demand)
- (d) Double subjects in which a focus construction is used, involving the subject of the sentence as focus and an anaphoric pronoun subject: 'You small body, you...', 'These small fries, they...'
5. 'Right', said Obi, feeling his hip-pockets. 'Write a receipt for me.' The boy did not write. He looked at Obi for a few seconds, and then said: 'I *can be able* to reduce it to two pounds for you' (*NLAE*, p. 27).

The mesolectal form derives from lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy. The correct form is 'I can reduce it...' or 'I will be able to reduce it...'

6. The President called the young men '*ungrateful*' *ingrates* whose stock-in-trade was *character-assassination* (*NLAE*, p. 73).

Here again, lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy, and periphrasis are at work. The speaker is uneducated but the code is typical of 'hypercorrected behavior', an hypercorrection towards the linguistic norms of educated speech.

All the following remaining examples of the mesolectal variety under morphology and syntax are from Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*:

7. He is *not on seat*, Sir' (p. 25).

This is by a confidential secretary to one of the characters in the novel. This usage is typical of Nigerian English and it means that someone is not in the office or at his desk. It is a direct translation from Nigerian languages; for example 'He is not on seat' is a direct translation of the Yoruba expression 'Ko si l'ori ijoko'. This kind of expression is so pervasive in Nigerian English usage that we come across it again on page 157 of the same novel and this time it is used by a top brass in the Nigerian Army, Colonel Johnson Ossai:

8. Well, yes.... You see I have this very important message for Commissioner Oriko from His Excellency... I have tried him at the Ministry of Information several times but *he is not on seat*' (p. 157).
9. 'An important somebody has just come in who needs no introduction. *Still yet*, we have to do things according to what Europeans call protocol' (p. 111).

This form involves lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy and is well attested in standard Nigerian English usage.

10. The Superintendent gazed at them in turn without sayng a word. In his code they were all guilty at this stage.
'... *To go about contravening important people... Stupid ignoramuses. Who contravened him on Friday night?* (p. 121).

The language use above points to the Superintendent's little education despite his lofty position in the Nigerian civil service hierarchy. The mesolectal forms derive from lexicosemantic duplication and redundancy ('stupid ignoramuses') and wrong analogy. Since the Superintendent deals most of the time with offenders who 'contravene' traffic rules and regulations, he extends the same analogy to human beings, not knowing that *contravene* is a material process which admits only of goals marked + *inanimate*.

Lexis and Semantics

As has often been observed, “Most differences between Nigerian English and other forms of English are to be found in the innovations in lexical items and idioms and their meanings” (Bamgbose, 1983: 106). Patterns of meaning changes identified by Bamgbose (1983: 106-7) include the following: (a) coining of new lexical items from existing ones or the borrowing of new lexical items from local languages or from pidgin either directly or in translation, e.g., *barb* from ‘barber’, *invitee* from ‘invite’, *bush-meat*, *akara balls*, etc.; (b) giving new meanings to lexical items, e.g., *corner* is used to represent a bend on a road, *globe* is used for an electric bulb; (c) some lexical elements retain older meanings no longer current in native English, e.g., *dress* is used to convey the desire for people to move in order to create room for additional persons; (d) giving new forms or meanings to certain idioms, e.g., ‘to eat one’s cake and have it’ as an inversion of ‘to have one’s cake and eat it’; (e) developing entirely new idioms, e.g., *to take in* for ‘to become pregnant’, *off-head* for ‘from memory’, and *to take the light* means to make a power cut.

Numerous lexical innovations of the kinds discussed by Bamgbose above are to be found in the novels of Chinua Achebe but none is attested in the novels of Wole Soyinka. In the examples that follow, the standard native English equivalents are given in parentheses.

No Longer at Ease

11. ‘Otherwise I would have suggested *seeing* some of the men before hand’ (p. 30).
(Using one’s position to influence another person)
12. ‘...They will probably ask you to pay five hundred, seeing that you are in the *senior service*’ (p. 38).
(top position in the civil service)
13. Joshua was now asking his countrymen to ‘*borrow*’ him ten pounds ... (p. 71).

(lend)

14. ...by her sophisticated un-Nigerian accent she showed that she was a *been-to*. You could tell a *been-to* not only by her phonetics, but by her walk...* (pp. 84-5).

(someone who had lived abroad, especially Britain or America)

15. The women... wore white *head-ties*...* (p. 128).

(women's headdress)

16. ... it would appear as if Obi had accepted the principle that his *town-people* could tell him whom not to marry* (p. 134).

(countryfolks)

17. He told his *house-boy* Sebastian not to cook supper* (p. 136).

(servant or house-keeper)

Arrow of God

18. Ezeulu's neighbour, Anosi, who ways passing by *branched* in...* (p. 44)

(called or stopped by)

A Man of the People

19. His wife looking grandly matriarchal in a blue velvet '*up-and-down*'... (p. 133).

(a kind of dress)

20. But the *gateman* refused to let my car through* (p. 103).

(gate-keeper)

Anthills of the Savannah

21. It was Elewa asking if I would take her to the beach in the afternoon to buy fresh fish from fishermen coming ashore before the "*thick madams*" of the fish market had a chance to gobble up everything (p. 33).

(influential women)

22. It was quite a revelation, and quite frankly it bothered me for a while, especially the crude insinuations of what our men sniggeringly call

*bottom-power** (p. 77).

(women's power negotiated by sex)

The asterisk after some examples above indicates that they actually occur in language in the 'outer frame', that is, language characterized by direct communication between author and readers as opposed to language in the 'inner frame' which involves the protagonists and characters of the narrative and what they communicate to each other whether expressed in direct or reported speech. The inverted commas noted with some of the examples are the author's. The fact that the author consciously or subconsciously uses some of these expressions indicates that their usage cuts across various educational strata in the country.

However, the foregoing mesolectal examples suggest certain linguistic behavior among Nigerian users of English language:

1. Translating or borrowing directly from Nigerian languages as in examples 11, 18, and 20 above. For instance, example 11 above translates in Yoruba as "Mo ba gbero wipe ki *nri* won siwaju" where the *ri* in Yoruba carries the same connotation as in the original version.
2. Obeying the principles of least effort and economy of expression as in examples 12, 14, 16, 17, 21, and 22. For example, such compounds or word groups as *senior service*, *too-know*, *been-to*, etc. collapse potentially longer expressions and structures.
3. Imperfect language learning which is probably owing to bad language teaching as in example 13 above.
4. Subjecting English language forms and norms to the socio-cultural logic and imperatives of the Nigerian environment as in examples 15 and 19 above. For example, the lexical innovation, *head-tie*, must have resulted from the fact that this kind of costume involves 'tying' a dress or cloth around the head while *up-and-down* tries to capture the mode of a kind of costume worn by Nigerian women.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, it has been suggested that Nigerian literatures in English provide models and methods of (1) teaching English as linguistic variation and (2) teaching English as linguistic deviation, mistakes and solecisms. We have discussed these phenomena by drawing examples from the novels of two prominent Nigerian authors, wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe.

As indicated in this study, linguistic variation occurs as Nigerian creative writers of English use various linguistic devices to contextualize the English language in their own local cultures. On the other hand, linguistic deviation alludes to forms of English which are characterized by mistakes, solecisms and an imperfect knowledge or usage of the English language.

As also emphasized, the relevance of linguistic variation in Nigerian literature for English teaching inheres in the fact that certain expressions and art-forms hardly violate any native-English norms but differ from native English in terms of the pragmatics of communication and other sociolinguistic variables. These are unique expressions to which the native speaker of English might be unable to assign semantic interpretation in spite of the fact that no grammatical rules are violated. Teaching English as linguistic deviation affords the teacher the opportunity of showing students the central linguistic structures from which the deviant forms might be seen as diverging.

It is in this light that a teacher wishing to teach one of the non-native literatures written in English would do well to juxtapose it with those written by native speakers of the language to show how far the non-native variety has varied or deviated from native English language and norms. This practice will thus enhance 'comparative textology' since "... there is little doubt that particular features of a text are placed in sharper relief through a process of comparison" (Carter, 1989b: 172).

Furthermore, given the fact that this paper is an attempt at grading Nigerian

literature through textlinguistic means, it has direct relevance not only for non-native English teachers and learners, but also for teachers and learners who use English as their native language. It is in this respect that Kachru (1986b: 148) has noted that studies such as this one help to show (a) how English has been nativized in non-native English contexts, (b) how stylistic innovations are determined by the socio-cultural context, (c) what effect such innovations have on, for example, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability, and (d) the implication of using English for cross-cultural communication.

Notes

1. Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe are typical examples of English-knowing bilinguals in a Nigerian cultural and linguistic setting who use the English language for recreating typically Nigerian social, cultural, and emotional contexts and who, as writers of English, also use various linguistic devices to contextualize English language in their respective cultures. To date, Soyinka has published two novels, *The Interpreters* (1966) and *Season of Anomy* (1973), while Achebe has published five, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987).
2. Adejare (n.d.), as indicated in Adegbija (1986), uses the same approach to chart the variation in meaning of the term *wife* in English and Yoruba contexts. However, in this study, his feature, 'conjugal responsibility', is replaced with my 'communal responsibility and accountability' because the former feature ('conjugal responsibility') does not seem to capture the onerous responsibility expected of a 'wife' in the Nigerian socio-cultural context. Also, his feature 'single participant', is replaced with my 'polygamy' because the former feature ('single participant') is considered to be too vague. Finally, my analysis introduces a very important variable, 'male children'.

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