

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The taxonomy of Nigerian varieties of spoken English

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The dream of a Nigerian English dictionary has recently been actualized. The academic body of teachers and researchers known as NESA recently published a dictionary of the Nigerian English. The corpus of words and expressions in the dictionary represents the meaning and pronunciation of words as used by Nigerians. As a headlamp into the major and minor languages spoken by a vast population of Nigerians, this article seeks to stratify the varieties of Nigerian English on the basis of the popularity of the various ethnic groups which culminate in the variations that subsist in the accents of English available in Nigeria. As a result, in the first instance, a pyramid which classifies the over three hundred languages into three levels (in a pyramidal structure) is proposed. Secondly, coalesced phonemic inventories from all the varieties of Nigerian English are linguistically reconciled. From the methodology of the study to the findings, formal and informal interviews, perceptual and acoustic experiments carried out textually and inter-textually form the background of results which have been corroborated in the literatures of Nigerian English. This study is basically an appraisal of Nigerian English without any bias for the educated, uneducated, standard, or sub-standard varieties. Whereas, linguistic, educational and ethnic parameters have been used in describing Nigerian English, the multi-ethnic influences on Nigerian English, being spoken in Nigeria has given it an appealing status among the colony of Englishes around the world to researchers. Thus, Nigerian English should begin to assume a status whose taxonomy will aid its international identity.

**Key words:** Multi-ethnicity, taxonomy, Nigerian English, Standard British English, dialects, topos, genesis, techne, nomos, polis, onyma, glossa, ethos.

## INTRODUCTION

The three parameters which have gained wider acceptance in the business of differentiating the dialects of English spoken in Nigeria include the linguistic, ethnic and educational. These parameters have been championed by Brosnahan (1958), Banjo (1979), Jibril (1982) among other researchers in the area of English as Second Language in Nigeria. In the literature of Nigerian English, one prominent means of classification when

talking about Nigerian English and its differentiation is the ethnic parameter. From time immemorial, however, Language has often been used as a code of communication and to define ethnic boundaries. It is thus essentially a property of society. On ethnicity in Nigeria, a lot has been written by Brann (2006). Brann (2006) identified certain elements as predisposing factors of the linguistic behavior of the speakers of English as second

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language speakers in Nigeria. We have discussed taxonomy, ethnicity and the state of English language in Nigeria as key issues. There is the need for an expatiation of the relevance of ethnic compartmentalization and diversity in the tongues of those who inter-ethnically and intra-ethnically need to communicate with one another in different formal contexts as part of the role which the further tongue plays in Nigeria.

Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba subjects have been interviewed in the several studies on Nigerian English (cf. Banjo 1979; Jubril, 1986; Udofot, 2004; Josiah, 2009). Thus, corporal of Nigerian English is available for analyses and inferences. The three ethnic groups mentioned above represent the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Brann, 2006:32; Adegbija, 2004:6). The three major ethnic groups however, belong to three major geo-linguistic blocs in Africa. The three blocs include the Khoisan, Niger-Kordofanian and Afro-Asiatic. Hausa languages in the world emanate from the Afro-Asiatic, while the Igbo, Khoisan and Yoruba, Niger-Khodofanian respectively. This knowledge helps in the hypothesis that the same traits are observable in those who speak these languages respectively all over the world.

### **Purpose of the study**

The primary purpose of this study is to attempt a taxonomy of the varieties of English spoken in Nigeria across the over three hundred ethnic groups and dialects. Already in the literatures of Nigerian English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba Englishes have been recognized as the “big three” or the major second language varieties (Eka, 1985). An attempt is made in this paper to further identify the smaller fractions of the Nigerian varieties of English according to their popularity which is affirmed by demographic strength, political as well as statutory policies of the Nigerian government.

### **Towards the taxonomy of Nigerian English**

The taxonomy of language and ethnicity has been perceived differently by linguists and ethnographers, and still more differently by sociologists and political scientists. According to Gandonu (1975, 1978), there are in Nigeria some 250 ethnic groups, whilst, according to K., Hansford, et.al (1976), there are some 400 linguistic groups. It is thus clear that there is no one-to-one relationship between the two concepts – language and ethnicity. For details on the ethnos of the three Nigerian Languages visit Brann (2006:95-105) and the tentative register of Nigerian languages, read Adegbija (2004:6). Eight markers of ethnicity have been identified by Brann (2006:97). They include: *Topos* (t) which represents ‘territory’, *Genesis* (g), meaning ‘origin’, *Onyma* (o), as ‘identity’, *Polis* (p), meaning ‘organization’, *Ethos* (e) for the ‘values/beliefs’, *Nomos* (n), for ‘customs’, *Glossa* (l),

‘language’ and lastly, *Techne* (t) representing ‘material culture’.

The influences observed in the spoken English of both educated and uneducated Nigerians in earlier studies such as those of Jibril (1982), Eka (1985), Akinjobi (2004), among others have revealed that the factors listed above account for the accentual variations observable in Nigerian spoken and written English, as shown in Table 1.

### **Topos (Territory)**

The three ethnic groups in Nigeria have the same kind of territorial affiliation. Unlike the minority languages such as Tiv and Idoma which have interrupted territories and the Idomas/Etulo within Tiv or the many settlements where the major three languages are spoken, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have what Brann (2006:97) describes as continuous topos. Hausa language is spoken in nations beyond the four borders.

To the north, Nigeria is boarded by Niger Republic, another nation that belongs to the Afro-Asiatic region. Senegal and Mali also have Hausa speakers. Hausa nation is composed of various ethnoi like the *Gobirawa*, *Zamfarawa*, *Adara*, *Arewa*, *Kebbewa*, *Aukoyawa* (Hansford et al., 1976:15) and *Gungawa* (Salamone, 1976 cited in Brann, 2006:96). Those countries where Hausa language is being spoken display the same character trait with the Hausas in Nigeria. This is the case with the Yoruba-speaking nations across the globe. Yoruba language is said to be spoken even in Brazil. The nation is reported in *Polyglotta Africana* by Koella (1914) to have been made up of some fourteen warring tribes, recorded as separate linguistic entities in the mid nineteenth century. The Igbo nation is also reported to be made up of Western *Aboh*, *Kwale*, Eastern *Izi*, *Ezas*, *Ikwo*, *Mgbo*, Southern *Ethchie*, *Egbema* and many others. The territorial affiliations and socio-cultural nativity go to explain the socio-cognitive features of the educated Nigerians that we have interviewed in our corpus.

### **Genesis (Origin)**

The social features observed in our subjects can be traced to their Genesis. By ethnic origin, educated Nigerians display a biologically self-perpetuating unit of distinct physical traits. These traits are as a result of a traditional, external origin. For instance, the Chadic speaking Nigerians originated from the north east, the Bantu people appear to be from Cameroun and the Yoruba speaking tribes (*kwa* speaking) have myths of origin both\ locally (e.g. *Oduduwa* in Ife) as well as from across the desert – Egypt and Mecca. Those external influences remain with the ethnic groups in Nigeria and thus inform the social and linguistic traits evident in not only the languages but also the social life of the people.

**Table 1.** Social categorization of ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Group	Topos	Genesis	Onyma	Polis	Ethos	Nomos	Glossa	Techne
Hausa	Continuous	External	Congruent	heterocentric	Arabic	Islamic	Hausa	warfare
Igbo	Continuous	External	Congruent	heterocentric	Idolatry	Christianity	Igbo	craft
Yoruba	Continuous	External	Congruent	monocentric	Traditional	Christianity	Yoruba	farming

### Onyma (Identity)

Ethnic identity is a major distinguishing factor among Nigerians. In the articulations of our subjects, as “educated” as they are, they could not conceal their identity. The three language groups displayed a congruent kind of ethnic identity. This is not a study in sociology. Thus our observations are based on the limits we can get in investigating social and linguistic traits in the three groups of Nigerians. According to Jibril (1982:22), Nigerians, educated or not, ‘could have a very poor impression of a person’s education, if he made the most trivial grammatical mistake in his speech or writing but would not object at all if his phonology is virtually that of his mother tongue’. In other words, while grammatical errors are objected to, it is taken for granted that it is only natural for one to speak English with one’s mother-tongue accent.

Olaniyi (2005) identified some linguistic shibboleths, which are common with the three ethnic groups in Nigeria. Socially, however in this scheme, the three groups show traits such as /t/ and /s/ for /θ/ as well as /d/ and /z/ for /ð/ in HE and YE as the case may be. Those features are enough to make them stereotypes in their own right.

### Polis (Organization)

Table 1 clearly shows that Hausa and Igbo speakers of English are influenced politically according to history by some external forces. In Nigeria generally as reported in Brann (2006:99), a monocentric monarchical system had been in operation before colonialism. These monarchies had favoured the development and imposition (author’s emphasis) of standard language forms, such as Yoruba on *Oyo*, *Edo* on *Benin*, *Kanuri* on *Yerwa (Maiduguri)*. The political system of the Igbo and Yoruba system is monocentric. The monocentricity of these regions culminate in the social lifestyle of the people.

Hausa language became standardized and used as language of wider communication in the North when Kano was able to assert its centrality as the main emporium, for which reason it was chosen as the standard by the British Administration, while the Sokoto dialect, supported by the Caliphate, remained a classical side-standard (making use of Arabic script, whereas Kananci uses Roman or *boko* script). Conversely groups such as *Jukuns* who had powerful polity in the central north, split

into several centres at *Kona*, *Abinsi*, *Wurkum* and others, for which reason a central standard could not develop and their language was consequently weakened.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the three ethnic groups in Nigeria differ socially. The socio-cultural differences in history and linguistic patterns inform the variations observed in the 150 subjects that we have socially and phonologically observed in order to establish the features of Nigerian English among World Englishes.

### Ethos (Beliefs)

The belief systems of Nigerian people are similarly divisible into the trichotomy of Traditional, Islamic and Christianity, with its corresponding use of vernaculars, Arabic and major languages-cum-vernaculars. Whereas traditional religions are essentially local, and often rural, and command local languages, the two ecumenical religions have their faith-fuls spread ubiquitously across the country even though Islam is dominant in the North and Christianity in the South.

To the extent that individual ethnic groups have their own tribal/national ethos, this is also educational ideal, as with *omoluabi* of the Yoruba, the *mutmin kirki* of the Hausa (Green and Igwe, 1963) or the Pulaaku of the Fulbe (Verbeke, 1966) and is expressed in the ethnolect. The ethos of the learned man (in scripture), the *malam*, is, however, expressed in Arabic, *rabi* in Hebrew and *oluwo* traditionally (vernacular) whereas the aspiration to ‘modernity’, with its frequent material value system, is expressed in English, - no longer the language of Christianity but of the West. Where there is a change of religion, there is a corresponding change of language use. The religious affinity of the three ethnic groups in Nigeria, undoubtedly contributes to the social and linguistic culture of the Educated Nigerians that we have chosen for this study.

### Nomos (Custom)

The same explanation as above goes for the custom of the Nigerians. Brann (2006:102) comments that the “rites of passage of Nigeria’s 300-500 peoples, formally in the hands of the elders of ‘secret’ societies, have been taken over gradually, over the past centuries, by two world religions: Islam in the North and Christianity in the South, with synchronization (sic) by both”. Whereas the

traditional customs were expressed in the various ethnic languages, often in formulaic and archaic ritual, Islam has always favoured the use of Quranic Arabic, whilst Christianity in Nigeria has tended to continue the use of the vernaculars in name-given ceremonies, marriages and burials even though English serves as a *koine* on larger occasions. The situation is similar with educational systems. Traditional systems survive in forms of apprenticeships and are expressed in the languages of the soil – *chthonolects*. All the aforesaid so far (in this chapter) describes the social pattern of living of Nigerians and particularly our subjects who represent the microcosm of the larger Nigerian society.

### **Glossa (Language)**

The three ethnic groups speak no different language from their nomenclatures. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are spoken by subjects from the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups and many others as second languages. But for some minor ethnic groups in Nigeria, who have survived the loss of ethnic language by retaining their identity, (such as *Fulbe* or *Bororo'en* pastoralists), their native languages are the easiest indicators of their ethnic identities. Herderian philosophy would make us believe that language is inseparable from ethnic identity, i.e., that language is the soul or core of ethnicity. Apart from the ethnic languages, any Nigerian is easily identified whenever he or she speaks a few words of English.

### **Techne (Occupation/Material culture)**

This term describes the occupation with which the three ethnos in Nigeria are identified. The Hausas are identified with warfare (*Jihad*), the Igbos with craft (business) and the Yorubas with farming. Customary techniques of home, agriculture, warfare, building and manufacture are thus couched in the various languages of ethnicity. We submit in this study that the occupational history of the Nigerian people largely influence their social attitudes or natures today.

We have tried to discuss the social characteristics of Nigerians using 150 subjects as specimen. The main issue in this study is their phonology. It was important we delved into the social studies of Nigerians in our corpus to allow us the possibility of reconciling their social and linguistic behaviours. We found out that the linguistic characteristics are group-based and not individualistic. In other words, shibboleths are deficient linguistic traits observable in a group, i.e., ethnic groups. In the next section, we shall further discuss how the corporals of English in this article were gathered.

### **METHODOLOGY IN NIGERIAN CORPUS OF ENGLISH**

This research work attempts to provide a sociolinguistic

view of phonological features of Nigerian English, (NE) to explain the way such features tend to identify speakers either by dialects, or ethnic identity. The methods used to carry out the study are formal recordings, casual conversations, reading tasks and word lists. News broadcasts, lectures and students' seminars fall into the formal category, while casual conversations on the streets viewed in the Nigerian home movies recorded from the NTA fall into another category.

The voices of over 200 Nigerians were recorded after which only 150 participants were considered for transcription and analyses. The 150 participants were stratified based on certain 'ascribed' individual characteristics such as age, sex, ethnicity, etc. (Preston, 1989:53). 150 voices of Nigerians who are of the Northern, Western and Eastern origin were sorted for analysis in this research. The ethnic groups which had at least 50 participants each also accommodated some minority groups to ensure a national outlook. The participants whose voices were chosen for acoustic analysis were those whose ethnic backgrounds were known. The ethnic groups have been stratified according to their popularity into three big circles as the inner, outer and expanding circles taking a cue from Kachru (1982).

We have carefully elicited our data from strictly formal settings. All our subjects were not informed when their voices were being recorded. The lecturers and students were not informed when their seminar and paper presentations in parallel and plenary sessions were being recorded. All the effort was to forestall affectation or pretense on the part of the subjects in the course of recording. The procedures employed in this study for the analysis of our data include orthographic and phonemic transcription of the speeches. Over all, more than 10,000 words (corpora) were transcribed by the researcher. We used Gimson's (1980) Transcription System for the Standard English control data. Thus, the broad transcription method and symbols were used.

The intended population for this study are all the over forty million Educated Nigerians from the 150 million Nigerians according to the 2006 population census estimate. However, for time constraints and in fact, the huge financial involvement, only 150 educated Nigerians carefully chosen from the over 200 Nigerians whose voices were recorded, were considered as population for this study. The subjects were selected from tertiary institutions, media houses, banks and hospitals. The 150 L2 speakers of English include 50 Nigerians, each from the three major ethnic groups – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, and other minority ethnic groups such as Efik/Ibibio, Izon, Northern Cross River languages, etc.

### **The taxonomy of Nigerian English**

The general information about the language situation in Nigeria is useful in providing appreciable sub-varieties of Nigerian English. The varieties are classified according to

their macro-consanguine and not their micro groups. In descending order, the three languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, in Nigeria belong to the Afro-Asiatic and the Niger-Kordofanian family of languages. “While all Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages are located in the Northern part of Nigeria, the majority of the Niger-Kordofanian languages are concentrated in the Southern parts, as well as in parts of Jerawa and Taraba States in the North. In effect, many of Nigeria’s languages share a great deal of structural similarity with each other, at least in terms of their genetic classification (Voegelin and Voegelin, 1977; Banjo, 1982; Agheyisi, 1984; Brann, 1990; Akinaso, 1991; Ruhlen, 1991; Adegbija, 2004).

Our classifications of Nigerian varieties of English into three levels in a pyramidal schema are based on the about 450 documented indigenous languages available in Nigeria (Adegbija, 2004). Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have been constitutionally recognized as “major”. This recognition has given them a kind of celebrity status among Nigeria’s numerous languages (Adegbija, 2004: 46). The celebrity languages or the big three, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, each (has) with at least twenty million speakers, have been referred to as “decamillionaires” (Brann, 1990:4). In terms of numerical strength of speakers, the major minor languages, each has about five million speakers scattered within and outside the territory of Nigeria. The three major languages have in the literatures of Nigerian English earned the nomenclatures of Hausa English, Igbo English and Yoruba English as the sub-varieties of the Ningsh (Udofot, 2004). The highest level in the pyramid of Nigerian English therefore is occupied by the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba English.

The lower level of the pyramid, similar to Kachru’s (1982) outer circle is occupied by the major minor language varieties. The languages seen in that light in Nigeria are those languages which have a vast number of speakers in terms of population following the big three. These languages spoken by over three million Nigerians include: Fulfulde, Annang, Ibibio, Tiv, Angas, Kanuri, Nupe, Bassakome, Idoma, Epira, Edo, Ibibio, Itsekiri, Igara, Igala, Urhobo, Ekiti, Igbomina, Ijebu-Ijesa, Egba, Gwari, Ilaje, Ondo, Agatu, Idoma, Kananci, Efik, to mention a few. The dialectal strains of Nigerian English have been proven to be evident in the accent of Nigerians who belong to the ethnic groups, referred to as the major minor groups. Findings from several research activities such as those of Dunstan (1969), Bamgbose (1971, 1995), Emenanjo (1991:65), Elugbe and Amayo, cited in Elugbe (1990), on *Bini* orthography, Omamor, in the seventies with *Ogbe* language, Williamson (1990), Adegbija (1992a), with Oko, Osisanwo (2010), on Ondo phonology, Akinjobi (2004), on Yoruba stress placement, Udofot (2004), Atoye (2008), Olaniyi (2011), among many other related works.

The lowest level in the pyramid, similar to Kachru’s (1982), the expanding circle is occupied by all the remaining over one hundred and fifty languages in Nigeria.

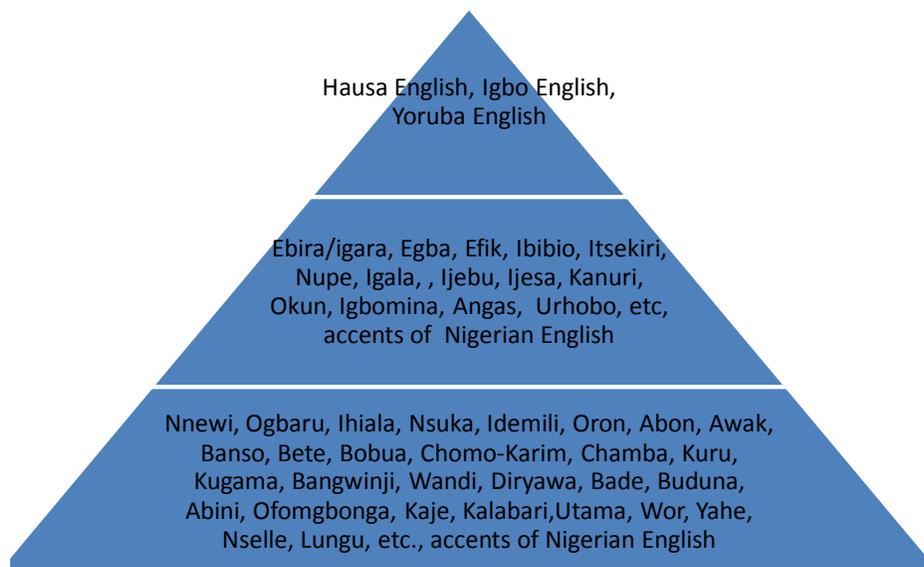
Nigerians who belong to these ethnic groups are really in the minority. They include Nnewi, Ogbaru, Ihiala, Nsuka, Idemili, Oron, Abon, Awak, Bansa, Bete, Bobua, Chomo-Karim, Chamba, Kuru, Kugama, Bangwinji, Wandu, Diryawa, Bade, Buduna, Abini, Ofomgbonga, Utama, Wor, Yahe, Nselle, Lungu, Kaje, Kalabari among others. The expanding status given to the minority languages fits them because they are the languages which are the least developed in terms of orthography, formality and educational use. While the big three major languages have standardized written and spoken forms, the major minor languages such as Efik, Batoonum, Epira, Nupe among others are being codified and standardized. These languages already show some semblance of standardization. The corpora of these languages have been developed and are accessible in most literatures of Linguistics and Nigerian languages. However, they remain relegated to the national background. The governments in Nigeria have nevertheless supported the committees such as the Igbo Standardization Committee and the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC), and the Igbo Language Association (*Otu Ndi Nzuka*) on Igbo Central, on the basis of the varieties spoken in Nsukka, Onitsha and their environs. Efforts of the Hausa Language Board resulted in a well-developed vocabulary for the domain of government and those of the *Egbe Onimo Ede Yoruba* (The Yoruba Studies Association) and *Egbe Akomolede Yoruba* (The Yoruba Teachers’ Association) have resulted in considerable development of Yoruba, especially in learned journals and literature.

The picture painted so far can be represented in Figure 1.

Nigerians, like other Africans speak the English language so differently to the extent that the ethnic divides are evident in their accents. There have been social, ethnic, physiological, and cognitive reasons given to explain differences in speech behavior by researchers. These explanations are presented in the following sections.

## WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL FEATURES THAT DISTINGUISH THE THREE NIGERIAN VARIETIES OF ENGLISH?

The social features of Educated Nigerian English, for instance are traceable to the ascribed sociolinguistic elements which include education, ethnicity, age, sex, exposure time to L2 (linguistic factor) and other cognitive factors such as status, specialization, fluency and individuality, as acquired individual characteristics. First, we shall discuss the place of status because second to it is ethnicity which is given utmost priority in this research. We shall re-examine the class distribution of the Nigerian society subjectively considering deductions from the sample speech communities used for the experiment.



**Figure 1.** The pyramid of the Nigerian varieties of English.

As revealed in Plotnicov's (1970) model, there are the elites and sub-elites. On this basis, formal western education or knowledge of the English Language is the major distinguishing factor between the masses – most of whom speak the basic-uneducated Nigerian English filled with the deviant forms (at the lexico-semantic level). In this research, as important as economic status is to the description of class in Nigeria, our yardstick for measuring the educated or enlightened upper class is basic university education and post - school training. This judgement is however subjective.

Plotnicov (1970) and Adegbite (2009) in their models provide for the farmers, and artisans, as part of the masses. They are regarded as the group outside the formal sector of the economy (that is, not in paid employment) and who often regard themselves as less fortunate than the educated people who are in the formal sector of the economy and who are guaranteed a secure income (cf. Adegbite, 2009:14). However, an uneducated person may acquire wealth and even be in a position to employ members of the elite. In such a case the wealthy person may be viewed as belonging to the 'ambiguous elite' (Plotnicov's term). Whereas economic and political powers are elitists' status symbols in Nigeria, we do not see any correlation between phonological variation and occupational, economic or political power. This may be an area of future research to whoever is interested. Many unprivileged Nigerians belong to the lowest level of the pyramid. Just a countable number of this sect is lucky by exposure to education and so might have been economically empowered.

In this article, the varying articulatory patterns of phonemes of English as rendered by Nigerians have been tested for expected results. The results are in the

frame of the L2 competences of our subjects while the unexpected results are in the patterns of alternative variant phonemes produced for the standard British English phonemes by our subjects, despite their familiarity with training in and level of education in spoken English language. Putting it very simply, we can say that L2 languages (contrastive analysis) select from the human articulatory potential and that the L2 inventories systematize that selection. In consequence, individual languages (and dialects) are normative, in the sense that speakers operate within the limits imposed by such selection and systematization.

In L2 phonology, phonological normativity is not of course a matter of legal obligation or moral duty, nor in most cases does it emerge from formal training or instruction in pronunciation; rather it unfolds in the process of our growing up in a particular speech community – Northern, Western, Southern or Eastern Nigeria, and acquiring and maintaining the speech habits of the three major regions of Nigeria.

Common responses to strange accents of English language form part of our expectation in this research. Instead of feeling disgusted or uncomfortable like other researchers who may view NE phonology as deviant, our acceptance of the dialects sufficed in the light of its being a stereotype world English Phonology. L2 speakers of English show negative response to what we describe as "linguistic normativity" in a dozen of ways – often quite informally or even subconsciously – whenever they identify a particular pronunciation – say HE, IE, or YE accents as strange, foreign or uneducated (cf. Olajide and Olaniyi, 2013).

For cognitive reasons, none of our subjects is loyally attached to either the standard dialect or the second

**Table 2.** Prototype Nigerian English phonemes.

Typology	Convergence	Divergence	Coalescence
<b>Hausa</b>	All R.P. Phonemes	/f/, /p/, /θ/, /ð/, /b/, /əʊ/, /ɜ:/ /	Diphthongs starting or ending in the short, mid central vowel /ə/. /θ-/t/, /ð-/d/, /ɜ-/ /ʒ/, /j-/ /u/, /h/-/silence/, etc.  Vowel intrusion in cases of consonant clusters, i.e., pipul for pi:pl, edukelʃon for /edjukelʃn/, etc.
<b>Igbo</b>	All R.P. Phonemes	/eɪ/, /lə/, /ɛə/, /ʊə/, /l, r/	
<b>Yoruba</b>	All R.P. Phonemes	/f, v/, /ʃn/, /ɜn/, /ɜ:/, /l, /ð/, /θ/, /ʊə/, and other diphthongs	All long vowels rendered in their reduced quality, e.g., /a: /- /a/, /ɔ:/- /əʊ/ overlap in words such as 'holy', /həʊli/ for /hOʊli/, etc. Mid vowels /ə/ , /ʌ/ and /ɜ: / are rendered /ɛ/, /a/, /ɔ/ in differing word contexts While vocalic systems are reduced but for tense vowels they are lengthened in ENE and vice versa.

language learner's accent. Just as native speakers have their standard and local dialects so do Nigerians speak with accents that sound more educated than the Basic Nigerian English (BNE), spoken by a large population of Nigerians considering Plotnicov's pyramid and Adegbite's classification. In fact, the Received Pronunciation (RP) is said to be heard only on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news, from the Queen of England, Southern Englanders and on very formal occasions. Elsewhere, Olajide and Olaniyi (2013) have proved that Educated Nigerian English forms the core of a regional "RP".

#### HOW DISTANT ARE NIGERIAN ENGLISH VARIETIES IN TERMS OF SEGMENTAL PHONEMIC APPROXIMATION FROM THE STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH?

To discuss the question above will be tantamount to passing judgments. Therefore the approach to be employed is implicational. In other words, we shall explain how the phonological features of Nigerian varieties of English are noticed in the speech of Educated Nigerian Speakers of English. Educated Nigerian varieties of English differ only in the major points of divergence. These divergent features are to be considered as the regional variants of the Standard British English and not deviant forms (Cruttenden, 2008:75) (Table 2).

#### HOW ARE THE FEATURES THAT MARK THE NIGERIAN VARIETIES OF ENGLISH NOTICED IN SPEECH CONTEXTS?

The features that mark ENE are the various *shibboleths*. The shibboleths (that is, the problematic phonemes in terms of articulation) in ENE identify Nigerian varieties of English. Two categories of phonemes present themselves as 'convergence' and 'divergence' in the Standard English inventory. Where Nigerians experience no difficulty in producing the almost target language proficiency in

English, it is described as a case of 'convergence'. On the other hand, where they experience difficulty or produce affected forms of the L2, it is described as a case of 'divergence'.

The ethnic variables that identify Nigerian English do so because they (the variables) can be called 'stereotypes'.

A small number of sociolinguistic markers rise as a result of constant and habitual use to become *stereotypes* (cf. Giglioli, 1972:292). Thus, phonemic markers of identity such as /z/, the voiced alveolar fricative instead of /θ/, the voiceless interdental fricative, /f, v/, voiceless and voiced labiodental fricatives instead of the /p, b/, voiceless and voiced bilabial plosive phonemes that identify Educated Hausas when they speak few words of English are *stereotypes* of their 'back lashing'.

Whereas the Hausas have difficulty in articulating those fricatives, mentioned above, the Yorubas do not, but have their own difficult sounds that mark them sociolinguistically as *stereotypes*. Such include the articulation of the voiceless glottal fricative, /h/ and the misplacement of /f/ for /v/ and /s/ for /ʃ/ in speech contexts. The Igbos are identified when they produce /e/, the mid short front vowel instead of /eɪ/, a diphthong and /l/ the voiced alveolar liquid, instead of /r/, the post alveolar frictionless continuant consonant among many other examples identified in this paper. The different ethnic variables in Nigerian English, described by Giglioli (1972) as sociolinguistic variables, have risen to overt consciousness among Nigerians, and linguists and so have not only earned NE a *stereotyped* non-native World English but has remained the means of ethnic identification in speech.

#### WHY DO ETHNIC VARIABLES MAKE EDUCATED NIGERIAN ENGLISH RECOGNIZABLE AS NIGERIAN?

Familiarization with non-native varieties of English in Africa has revealed that all the consonant and vowel systems in all the African languages are similar although minor differences exist. This present study did not focus on other African English varieties but information which

we gathered from literatures such as in Schmied (1989: 23), Jibril (1982: 333) and inferences gathered from the heterocentric relationship that exists between the ethnic groups in Nigeria and neighbouring African countries inform the similarities that exist among the varieties of English in Africa. For clarity, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba share boundaries with countries belonging to the Afro - Asiatic, Khoisan and Niger - Khodofanian blocs respectively. This goes to support the fact that the differences between Nigerian English and Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean or Gambian English can not only be physiologically and socially explained they can as well be explained phonologically. Whereas two people can hardly speak the same way, an individual may not also consistently articulate same sounds the same way.

## Conclusion

A close look at the discussions in this article reiterates some salient issues about Educated and Uneducated Nigerian English. The findings are summarized according to the specific mannerisms in terms of articulatory attempts put up by the subjects in this study. The major attention-catching manners of articulation are in the *Affricates, Fricatives, Stops, Continuants and Central vowels*. In order to keep a record of the frequency of cases of failed attempts in the articulation of the listed phonological features without any need for judgment among the speakers or their ethnic affiliations, statistics of points of convergence and divergence in previous researches have been corroborated in this study. One notable feature of Nigerian varieties of English is observable among Nigerians who use strong forms of the weak vowel phonemes when they are supposed to use the weak vowel phonemes. One of such works is that of Akinjobi (2004). In her submission Akinjobi (2004:283-284) states that "the investigation into vowel weakening and word stress in relation to disyllabic, polysyllabic, and words that could function as noun/adjectives or verbs revealed remarkable scarce use of weak vowels and syllables in Educated Yoruba English". Among Educated Nigerian speakers of English, there is the "preponderant use of strong vowels... (cf. Akinjobi, 2004:284)". This suggests that Educated Nigerians are weakest in the articulation of central vowels.

Following the central vowels in order of deviation in articulation from the Standard British norm are the affricates and fricatives. In the stops and continuants, a good number of the subjects could not approximate the Standard British English norm. A further enquiry into the classifications of plosives into *voiced* and *voiceless* revealed that out of the 75 female subjects, 50 of them could not produce the quality of consonants expected. Female devoicing and lack of trill phonemes accounted for a 66.7% deficiency in the articulations of our 75 female subjects. In other words, 66.7% of the 75 females

could not produce some consonant phonemes with the full voiced quality similar to that of male speakers. This study has some phonological and sociolinguistic implications. It is not only relevant at a time like this when the embers of Nigerian English corpus is being fanned but also a corroborative plus towards the International Corpus of English (ICE) project.

The missing link therefore appears to be the reliable large-scale empirical data on usage of forms in educated speech. These data are expected by the ICE researchers to enjoy prolonged distribution across generations and genders. The ICE researchers also expect the data to be a corpus of at least one million words from different text types or four hundred thousand written words and six hundred thousand spoken words, printed and unprinted.

In this present study, 150 subjects provided additional corpora which may necessarily be a contribution to the effort of the International Corpus of English project. The list of coalesced forms in this research will have a great implication in terms of access to information which are useful for the codification of the standard spoken as well as the written variety of Nigerian English.

## Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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