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CALEL

CURRENTS IN AFRICAN LITERATURE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

In this issue:

- ⊕ African Literature as an Intercourse of Discipline
- ⊕ Celebrating Female Sexuality in select contemporary Novels by African Female Writers
- ⊕ The constraints of Internet based English Testing; Appraising the Nigerian Experience of TOEFL
- ⊕ Contextual relevance of characters in Zainab Alkah's *The Still Born*
- ⊕ Despair and Hope in Lanston Hughes' Poetry
- ⊕ Abuse of Privilege in the Novels of Chinua Achebe and Ayikwi Armah
- ⊕ Labyrinths and Cultural Performance Okigbo's Visionary figure as a masquerade
- ⊕ Serving three masters: The engaging Interplay of Medicine, Literature and Philosophy
- ⊕ Situational Variables in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*.
- ⊕ The Image of the Military in contemporary Nigerian Poetry
- ⊕ The stylistic significance of Language varieties in Joseph Enoki's *The African Dream* and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*
- ⊕ Students' use of the Nigerian Pidgin English in informal conversations: Reasons and Effects
- ⊕ World Standard English: Universality versus Nationality
- ⊕ Of Coinayes and their Boundaries: Morphological Flaws in English as a Second Language in Nigeria
- ⊕ Representation of (Step) Mothering and Identity Formation of Children in Plural Marriage Settings in two Nigerian Children's Narratives

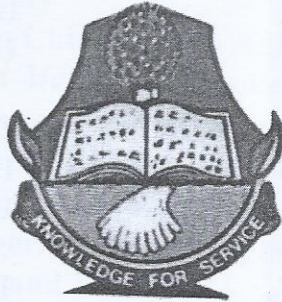
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CONTENTS

African Literature as an Intercourse of Discipline - - -	1
Celebrating Female Sexuality in select contemporary Novels by African Female Writers - - - - -	28
The constraints of Internet based English Testing; Appraising the Nigerian Experience of TOEFL - - - - -	40
Contextual relevance of characters in Zainab Alkah's <i>The Still Born</i> - - - - -	56
Despair and Hope in Lanston Hughes' Poetry - - -	65
Abuse of Privilege in the Novels of Chinua Achebe and Ayikwi Armah - - - - -	85
Labyrinths and Cultural Performance Okigbo's Visionary figure as a masquerade - - - - -	94
Serving three masters: The engaging Interplay of Medicine, Literature and Philosophy - - - - -	112
Situational Variables in Chimamanda Adichie's <i>Purple Hibiscus</i> and Chinua Achebe's <i>A Man of the People</i> - - -	128
The Image of the Military in contemporary Nigerian Poetry	149
The stylistic significance of Language varieties in Joseph Enoki's <i>The African Dream</i> and Chinua Achebe's <i>Anthills of the Savannah</i>	164
Students' use of the Nigerian Pidgin English in informal conversations: Reasons and Effects - - - - -	182
World Standard English: Universality versus Nationality -	195
Of Coinayes and their Boundaries: Morphological Flaws in English as a Second Language in Nigeria - - -	207
Representation of (Step) Mothering and Identity Formation Of Children in Plural Marriage Settings in two Nigerian Children's Narratives - - - - -	218

**OF COINAGES AND THEIR BOUNDARIES:
MORPHOLOGICAL FLAWS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Morphological flaws are errors in the formation of words in a language which are detectable by the application of the language in question.

While the native speaker of a language exhibits high competence in the use/formation of words in the language, the non-native speaker is likely to exhibit shortfalls in this area and in the areas of phonology, syntax and semantics. So, flaws occur often in the formation of words by Nigerian speakers of English of English as a second language. There are forms of generalizations and/or misapplications of the morphological rules of English by users in Nigerian. This paper examines those generalizations and/or misapplications as these occur in both the spoken and written English of Nigerians; it assesses the acceptability of some Nigerian English coinages and it suggests an adherence to the rules barring all academic or scientific formulations that describe disciplinary phenomena, notions or concepts not common in everyday use of language.

INTRODUCTION

Human languages have sets of rules that guide their users. The users of a language internalize such rules whether they acquire the language

naturally in its native environment or they learn the language formally at school because it is being used in its non-native environment. The rules and the fact of their internalization by given language users enable members of the language community to communicate mutually intelligibly.

Human beings are able to internalize language rules and apply them because they possess an in-born ability to acquire or learn language, that ability being species-specific (human specific). Chomsky's (1965) innateness hypothesis posits the existence of a Language Acquisition Device (LAD), an innate language faculty in human beings through which they come to possess the rules or "a mentally represented grammar" (Radford et al, 1996:6) of the language they speak. And, humans are able to acquire or learn any languages they are exposed to. That is why the language faculty is said to:

...be constituted in such a way as to cope with any human language to which it is exposed, and, conversely, all human languages must be amenable to its operation (Singleton, 1989).

With being exposed to more than one language, a person may come to possess a first language, a second language, a third language and so on, first language (L1) and second language (L2) being technical terms.

The sets of language rules which humans internalize include morphological rules, phonological rules, syntactic rules and semantic rules. These sets of rules guide users of a given language to form words, produce speech sounds, combine words into sentences and to interpret these respectively.

In this paper, we are concerned with the set of rules which guide the users of English to form words and to understand the structure of words in the language – morphological rules – and how the violation or misapplication of such those has brought about the malformation of words in English as a second Language in Nigeria.

English is certainly a "second language" in Nigeria in the technical sense of the term (Banjo, 1996; Jowitt, 1991; Eka, 2000) in that it is a non-native language which is however the language of societal communication, government, school instruction. Also:

It has become "localized" or "nativised" by adopting some language features of its own such as sounds, intonation patterns, sentence

structures, words, expression (Platt et al 1984)
quoted in Banjo, 1996).

While English has the status of a Second Language and it has become "nativised" by adopting some features of its own, some words that occur in the English of Nigerians are formed in outright disregard of the morphological rules of the English language.

Morphology and English

Gleason (1969) identifies morphology as one of the two branches of grammar and defines it as "the description of the intimate combination of morphemes, roughly what we familiarly call words" (58). He describes the morpheme as "the smallest meaningful units in the structure of a language" (53). Radford et al (1999) includes the examination of the "processes of word formation" in the purview of morphology and Tomor: (1977) adds that morphology studies "the rules governing the formation of words in a language" and that every "language has its unique rules of both morphology and syntax". It is evident that the concern is the structure or form of words in a language; it is a concern with the ways in which the "basic elements which are used in a language" (Yule, 1996) are structured and are combined following some consistent processes, as allowed in the language.

The general rule of English morphology is that the smallest meaningful units (the minimal units of meaning or grammatical function) which have been called morphemes combine consistently categorially, according to their acceptable environment. For instance, "educate" is a minimal unit of meaning that can combine with other minimal units such as "-tion" (as in education), "-al" (as in educational), "-ly" (as in educationally) etc where the initial morpheme is a free one and the added ones are bound. The minimal units here are added at their acceptable environments where the root "educate" and the stem allow the appropriate combination: "educate" cannot take the minimal unit "-ment" to produce *"educatement".

The points are that (i) rules are followed in the formation of English words and (ii) each language has its unique rules of word formation. English, French, German, Russian, Bokyì etc have their unique rules and the rules of one language cannot be transferred to another one. For example, some English nouns are formed from verbs with the use of derivational suffixes. Agree-agreement; combine – combination teach – teacher, etc. But the

equivalent nouns in Bokyì are formed with derivational prefixes: *banghe* (agree) – *obanghe* (agreement), *tsibe* (combine) – *Kiintsibe* (combination), *tanghe* (teach) – *Ntange* (teacher).

Therefore, despite some recognizable inconsistencies or a number of confounding issues in the formation of words or in the structure of words in English, there are regular processes involved. These processes, referred to as morphological processes (or rules) in English include derivation (and inflection), coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, neologism, dipping, backformation, conversion and acronym.

Through some of those processes, (new) words do evolve and find their way into the vocabulary of English which has been expanding its frontiers with its attainment of the colossal status of a world language (Williams, 1990; Jowitt, 1991; Banjo, 1996; Eka, 2000 etc). Yule (1996) opines that “the constant evolution of new terms and new uses of old terms (is) a reassuring sign of vitality and creativeness in the way a language is shaped by the needs of its users”. It is recognized that as English has spread throughout the world, it is “bent” to adapt to its various new environments through some sort of indigenization or acculturation. Achebe (1975) writes that: “the price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use”. But he also makes the point that the language should not be altered “to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost”.

The implication of the above is that the words that find their way into the English vocabulary would seem still to be bound by the morphological rules of the language such that a formation not in the nature of English words can be so recognized. Otherwise anarchy will be loosed upon the realm of English word-formation and “the falcon would not hear the falconer”.

Before going into the misapplications or generalizations of the rules by Nigerian users of English, we take a brief look at some English morphological processes.

Derivation is one of the most common and most versatile processes of word formation in English (Yule, 1996; Matthews, 1974). It is the process by which a derivational affix is added to the root or stem of an existing word, to form a new word, usually another grammatical category of the word: from “legal” (noun) can be derived “legalize” (verb), “legalization” (noun) “legally” (adverb) etc. Very many English words (roots) undergo the

derivation processes. Some others undergo inflection processes where words change forms to reflect number or concord or tense with syntactic implication: box-boxes, criterion-criteria, phenomenon-phenomena; come-came, take-took-taken, seek-sought, sort-sorted etc.

Coinage, another word-formation process, is the invention of totally new words. Yule (1996) says coinage is "one of the least common processes of word-formation in English". Francis (1975) notes that "...wholly new coinages are both harder to make and less likely to be remembered and used". However, completely new words do come into the language from time to time and over a period, such words assume currency and acceptability: nylon, quiz, slang, Xerox, zipper and so on.

Borrowings come from other languages like French, Arabic, German, Dutch, Italian, Latin, Spanish etc. Words such as alcohol, bayonet, bonanza, croissant, de facto, imbroglia, rendezvous, robot, status quo; sentinel are not of English origin. There are many such words in English. By the structure of some such words, they can be recognized as borrowed.

Compounding is much like the derivation of words as it involves the creation of new words by conjoining existing morphemes (words) into new words called compounds. According to Matthews (1974:38) compounding, which he also calls composition, is a part of derivation. Like derivation, compounding is very common in English (Yule, 1996; Francis, 1975) and as Radford (1999) put it, "there is no theoretical limit to the lengths of compounds because the process of forming compounds can feed itself ad infinitum: bookcase, casebook, wallpaper, cardboard, flowerpot, ice-cream, ice-cream box, ice-cream box lock, real estate, real estate salesman and so on.

Other word-formation processes include backformation, clipping, blending and conversion. These processes act upon existing words. Backformation is the reduction of a longer word to a shorter one bringing about a new grammatical category of the longer one. The new shorter one is usually possible because the longer one exists: donate from donation, edit from edition, burgle from burglar, enthuse from enthusiasm, sculpt from sculpture, liaison from liaison. The "backformed" words above did not exist originally in English.

Clipping is the reduction of existing words without changing the grammatical category of the "full" word: gas from gasoline, phone from telephone, plane from aeroplane, fan from fanatic, flu from influenza, exam

from examination etc. Blending is combining two separate words to produce a single new one: breakfast + lunch = brunch, smoke + fog = smog, teleprinter + exchange = telex, information + entertainment = infotainment etc. Conversion is to convert the grammatical function of a word, for example, from a noun to a verb and vice-versa as in these nouns being used as verbs: They bottle the water; I will butter my bread; I'll be vacationing in New York; He shall house you when you arrive Okundi.

So far, we have dwelled on the morphological processes (rules) of English which allow or guide users of the language to create words. There are also rules that prevent the formation of words. Udofot (2005:87) writes:

The term blocking is used to refer to factors which limit the application of word formation processes whose conditions of application would other-wise have been met... One of such condition is the existence of another word with the same meaning as the newly created word.

This is where the newly derived word has an existing form and would not need a new creation.

With English as a second language in Nigeria, Nigerian users of the language overstep the boundaries of its word formation processes. Some of the resulting morphological flaws are syntactically influenced. The effort to observe a syntactic rule can lead to a word-formation/inflection error.

Morphological flaws in Nigerian English usage

We now look at cases of word (mal) formation or the misapplication of English morphological processes in Nigeria English usage. The following are some malformed nouns arising from the misapplication of rules:

Malformed Noun	From	Existing Correct Form
*academician(s)	academy(ic)	academic(s)
angriness	angry	anger
convocant	convoke	convocation
delayance	delay	delay
enablement	enable	ability
emphasy	emphasise	emphasis
gossipper	gossip	gossip

matriculant	matriculate	matriculation
centage	rent	rent
ponsorer	sponsor	sponsor
upliftment	uplift	uplift
witchcraftcy	witchcraft	witchcraft

“Academician” is a correct form but it means “a member of an academy, not a university teacher” as it is erroneously applied.

*These are given as matriculating student or convoking graduand.

Some nouns which have only the singular forms but which are also used in a plural sense are erroneously given plural forms:

Wrong pluralization	Form	Singular (Unchanged) form
advices	advice	advice
aircrafts	aircraft	aircraft
ammunitions	ammunition	ammunition
cattles	cattle	cattle
cutleries	cutlery	cutlery
*damages	damage	damage
drainages	drain	drainage
evidences	evident	evidence
equipments	equip	equipment
furnitures	furniture	furniture
infrastructures	infrastructure	infrastructure
incidences	incident	incidence
informations	inform	information
luggages	luggage	luggage
machineries	machinery	machinery
personnels	personnel	personnel
*properties	property	property

*“damages” is correct when used to mean “money paid or claimed as compensation for a loss or injury caused”.

*“Properties” is correct when used to mean “pieces of land and buildings in them” or “the characteristics of a substance” in science.

Some nouns that occur in plural forms only such as knickers, shorts, pants, trousers are wrongly clipped as knicker, short, part, trouser.

The following are cases of erroneous derivation of verbs from adjectives and nouns:

Wrong verb	Form	Existing Correct Form
conscientize	conscience (noun)	no verb form
Practicalize	practical (adjective)	practice (verb)
pregnanted	Pregnant (adjective)	impregnate (verb)
opportuned	opportune (adjective)	opportune (adjective)
trafficate	traffic/trafficator (noun)	no verb form
tribalize	tribal (adjective)	no verb form
fighting	tight (adjective)	no verb form
tantamounts (-ed)	tantamount (adjective)	no verb form

Wrong inflection of tenses in the English of Nigerians also occur:

Wrong past tense form	Form	Correct past tense form
binded	bind	bound
bursted	burst	burst
choosed	choose	chose
grinded	grind	ground
hanged	hang	hung
hitted (confused with heat)	hit	hit
seeked	seek	sought
sinked	sink	sank
striked	strike	struck
Thrusted (confused with trust)	Thrust	Thrust

*hanged is the past tense of hang (to kill)

There are many more wrongly inflected verb tenses arising from the confusion with the structure of the words. Francis (1975:28) observes that:

In fact, the morphology of English past tense has a good many irregularities. Even native speakers are sometimes in doubt and must consult the dictionary to make sure of the past tense forms for verbs like "swing" and "strive".

Indeed, this observation relates to more than just past tense forms of verb as seen in the other cases given. Irregularities recurring in the derivation of other classes of words complicate the situation.

In some cases, there arises a complete adulteration of the word or the phrase:

Wrongly derived word	From	Correct form
everly	ever	forever
majorly	major	mainly
instalmental(ly)	instalment	(by) instalment (s)
insultive	insult	insulting
haphazard(ly)	-	haphazard(ly)
half cast	-	half caste
full-fleshed	-	full-fledged
riff-rat	-	riff-raff
per say	-	per se
offed/onned	off/on	off/on
rumously	rumour	rumour
theirselves	their	themselves
*bags and baggages	-	bag and baggage
*poke nose something	poke	poke one's nose into

*“bag and baggage”, the correct form is an idiomatic expression with an adverbial function meaning “with all one’s possessions”; “poke one’s nose into something” is also idiomatic, “poke” and “nose” not being one word.

Many of the morphological flaws found in the English of Nigerian are attributable to false hypothesisations about and generalization of the rules of the language and also to the potential and actual confusion raised by some irregularities or inconsistencies in the rules Jowitt (1991) notes that the propensity of Popular Nigerian English (PNE) to treat some uncountable mass nouns as countable is encouraged by:

1. Legitimate cases of SBE (Standard British English) pluralization of certain polysemic words in respect of one or more but not all meanings e.g. properties, damages.
2. Legitimate cases of pluralization dictated by the need to differentiate kinds of the noun in question e.g. chalk-chalks, grass-grasses, fish – fishes.

Nevertheless some of the malformed words that occur in the English of Nigerians as listed above can well be described as morphological oddities and remarkable aberrations, to use Jowitt's terms.

CONCLUSION

The ability to effectively use at least one language defines the humanity of mankind. Even where humans may not go through any formal tutelage, they come to possess and use language. Fromkin and Rodin (1983) point out that: "The possession of language, more than any other attribute, distinguishes human from other animals". The possession of a language entails the knowledge of a language, the capacity to produce linguistic items that will be understood by others and that to understand items produced by others. Again, the source points out that:

When you know a language, you can speak it and be understood by others who know that language. This means that you have the capacity to produce sounds that signify certain things and to understand or interpret the sounds produced by others (4).

Without the mutuality of intelligibility, the whole essence of language – communication – would be lost. The point is that knowing English, for instance requires that it be understood by others who know English worldwide. To express knowledge of English and to be understood requires, among other things, that you recognize English words and form words that are bound by the morphological rules of the language. Agreed that the language is versatile, creative and productive like all living languages, and so it is able to take in innovations, such innovations that lie outside the boundaries of the rubrics of the language will bring about aberrations that could make communication difficult. Therefore, users of English should be guided by the rubrics of word-formation in the language if they are to be understood. It needs be noted that there are disciplinary coinages, that is, word forms in certain academic fields, not to be found in general usage but which are applicable or acceptable in such areas of learning.

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