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Research paper

Some lexical features of territorial English version of Nigeria

Jerome Baghana[1]*, Olga N. Prokhorova[1], Tatiana G. Voloshina[1], Elena N. Taranova[1], Yana A. Glebova[1]

[1] *Belgorod State University, Russia, 308015, Belgorod, Pobeda Street, 85*
**Corresponding author E-mail: jerome_baghana@mail.ru*

Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of lexical features of the territorial version of the English language in Nigeria in different periods of its historical development. The authors analyze the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the territorial version of the English language in Nigeria and depict some of its individual lexical units. The main aspect of the research stresses the importance of historical, cultural and linguistic interconnection as the single entity of language functioning in the era of globalization.

Keywords: *territorial version, Nigeria, English, globalization, lexical series "food", "drinks", "clothes", "means of transport".*

1. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the largest and most densely populated countries in Africa. Initially the Europeans showed interest in commerce and humanitarian projects in Africa, also there was a strong desire to study its geographical features. By the 1850s, British Government was dominating in West Africa trading, which had been largely driven by competition among European powers. Nigeria became a British protectorate in 1901. Colonization lasted until 1960, when independence movement succeeded in gaining Nigeria its independence [1-3].

Nowadays, Nigeria is a relatively new state whose territorial boundaries were finally formed at the beginning of the XX-th century. It is very difficult to define a unified, modern cultural identity of Nigeria as the country is a mixture of about 250 ethno-linguistic groups. A better option would be to identify three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, who constitute the largest part of the population: Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. English is the official language of the country today, which is used in all formal domains: administration, legislation, education, media, etc. Nevertheless, it's more appropriate to call the language spoken in Nigeria a territorial variant as it combines the Standard British English, Pidgin English expressions and the lexical units of local languages [4, 5].

2. Methods

This article is based on the systemic approach to the interdisciplinary analysis. Due the cognitive cross-disciplinary approach we take into consideration the anthropocentric factor, linguistic and non-linguistic information, intercultural analyses, especially dealing with the problem of mentality and language correlation.

3. Results and discussion

Currently, English is the official language in most African States, the former colonies of Great Britain. Variants of the English language in countries where it has official status and is not native to any ethnic group are called "World Englishes" or "New Englishes" [5-8].

Despite the fact that Nigerian citizens speak more than 200 languages, the official language is English. In the majority of modern companies, firms, schools and universities Nigerians speak English, but most people prefer local languages or "Pidgin English" for informal use. Indigenous languages of the peoples of Nigeria are represented by languages of three major families: Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo. A group of Niger-Congolese languages (one of the biggest groups represented in Nigeria) include Edo, Igbo, Ijo (Izon) and Yoruba. Besides, many of the languages spoken in Nigeria also have dialects, for example, Yoruba is the root language for the dialects of Igala and Itseciri [9].

The ethnic group of Hausa lives in Northern Nigeria and their population is about 21%. Most large cities with a significant part of the population, like Kano, Sokoto and Kaduna are situated in the Hausa-speaking area [10, 11].

. Ethnic culture of the Yoruba is found mainly in the South-Western part of Nigeria, and its representatives constitute about 20% of the total population of the country. Most of the population of this ethnolinguistic group lives in the cities of Yoruba, Lagos and Ibadan [12]. The people, occupying the territory of South-Eastern Nigeria, are the smallest group in terms of population (about 17 per cent of Nigeria's total population). This ethnic group is concentrated on the territory of such cities as Enugu and Owerri [13].

Nigeria is characterized by one of the most developed education systems in Africa, in 2016 there were more than 120 universities where a significant part of researchers and scientists work [12, 14, 15].

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In the process of compilation of dictionaries of indigenous African languages, written recorded sources are usually the key point. As for the linguistics based on the territorial version of English in Nigeria, nowadays it is difficult to study sufficiently the written sources of English in Nigeria as the existing data represents mostly oral or semi-oral sources and thus there is not enough written record to justify the dictionary entries [8, 16].

One of the sources of written Nigerian English is newspapers and magazines that served as the material of our study.

The language of newspapers and magazines in Nigeria is based on the rules of accepted norms of "Standard English" but includes some elements of "Pidgin English". Some forms, such as "done" – the form of Participle II from the verb "to do" – are in the Nigerian English reduced to "don"; while the noun "rubber" has a phonetic difference and is pronounced as "ruba" or "roba" depending on socio-linguistic factors [9].

In Nigerian linguistics, it is customary to distinguish between the Nigerian English and Pidgin English, although it is impossible to trace a clear boundary between them. For example, the word "child" in any Pidgin English is the equivalent of "pickin" and the verb "to know" is transmitted with the word "sabi" [9]. When native English speakers try to characterize the territorial varieties of the English language in Nigeria, it becomes obvious that the personal perception of Nigerians plays an important role in the use of certain lexical means for the expression of certain traditional or customary practices, elements of daily life. For example, such a phrase as "men of the underworld" in the Nigerian newspapers meaning "criminals" is quite common for the Nigerian media, but hardly can be encountered in a modern British newspaper, since this expression is archaic.

The Nigerian English also has distinctive features of spelling pronunciation, the most characteristic of which is pronunciation of the sound (tʃ) while writing the letter combination "ch" even in cases where Standard English has two options: (ʃ) and (tʃ) [14].

The local variant of the English language in Nigeria is also characterized by a layer of vocabulary that was influenced by the missionaries. It consists of the words associated with religious rites that were conducted by missionaries, for example: 'idol', 'fetish' and others. Due to missionaries some lexical items changed their meaning. For example, some nouns designating European and North American animals are used to denote indigenous West African animals, like "fox" is used to denote a genet, "rabbit" to denote a giant rat. Another possible reason for this interpretation of the meaning was the fact that many of the first missionaries had Sierra Leonean, not European origin, and thus interpreted the English language in their own way [17-20].

At the beginning of the colonial era, when special attention was paid to the study of the biological properties of the flora and fauna of Nigeria, many biologists used the names of plants in the territorial versions of Nigerian languages, that were later replaced by the language equivalents of the colonizers. For example, "Canarium Schweinfurthii" - "African olive tree" had the name "bush candle" [13].

Our study focuses on the etymological and lexical aspects of the vocabulary layer denoting "food" in the territorial version of English in Nigeria.

As observations show, the lexical series "Food" is insufficiently studied due to the fact that little attention is paid to its etymological characteristics. The specter of the meaning of the inner form of the lexeme "Food" predetermined a large amount of synonymy. Let us consider some aspects of the lexical range in English language of Nigeria [21].

In the dictionary of the Nigerian English language by Volume Langlo we find the following definition of the lexeme "food":

1. any substance consumed to provide nutritional support for a body;
2. starchy staples – (e.g. I need food, but not snacks).

Lexeme "chop" in the territorial version of the English language in Nigeria has a number of meanings:

1. chop – to eat
e.g. NE "He has chopped too much"– BE "He has eaten too much";
2. chop-food
e.g. NE "Let us go for the chop! – BE "Let's go get something to eat!";
3. chop-bar – a small eating house – "snack bar, small cafe";
4. chop-to embezzle – "assign something"
e.g. NE "He has chopped too much money!" – BE "He embezzled a lot of money" [14].

The noun "butcher" in the territorial varieties of the English language in Nigeria has the meaning "to cut up (any dead meat)" – literally "cut to pieces", e.g. NE "He is butchering the fish" – BE "He cuts the fish to pieces" [14].

In the territorial version of English in Nigeria the lexical series "food" preserved some names of dishes from the Portuguese language, for example:

farina – "dry food and products made from cassava" [14].

A certain range of vocabulary describing "food" in the territorial version of the English language in Nigeria came into use from the most spread dialects, for example:

1. from the Hausa dialect:
grasseater – fish soup (a calque) [14];
2. from the Yoruba dialect:
eba – staple food made from boiled cassava, originally low status compared with yams and standing for cheap food,
eko –boiled food made from cassava,
egusi – melon, or its dried and crushed seeds, used to make a popular sauce [14].

Lexical series " kitchen appliances "in the territorial version of the English language of Nigeria has its own specific features, e.g. a special device –a long hooked stick for picking fruits such as mangoes – is called "go to hell". The etymology of this expression has religious grounds, the process of collecting fruit in Nigeria is compared with the fate of sinners punished by the devil (beat stick – hooked sticks to drag down a sinner) [14].

The noun "card" in the Nigerian English has the meaning "fish drying rack" – "a place for drying fish" and has nothing to do with the lexical meaning of the British English [14].

The process of payment for food or food services is expressed using the lexeme "feeding" – money for food, price [14].

Lexical series "place of food" in the territorial version of English in Nigeria is represented by the following lexemes:

canteen – a supermarket or large grocery store,
buka – a street restaurant [14].

The designation of national dishes and drinks in the territorial version of the English language in Nigeria is characterized by both the preservation of the name of the original dishes and drinks, and the use of modern analogues of the British version of the English language with a certain national specificity.

Examples:

1. Farina – dry food prepared from cassava;
2. moinmoin – a cake made of boiled Bambara groundnuts, commonly sold in markets;
3. pudding – prepared food wrapped in leaves;
4. puf-puf-round– a fried cake made from flour and sugar;
5. soup – sauce accompanying any staple,
6. stew– sauce accompanying staple that is boiled, such as yam, rice etc.;
7. sweet – delicious, good-tasting food;
8. suya – kebab, roasted meat on stick [14].

Drinks in the territorial version of the English language in Nigeria are also a layer of vocabulary that deserves deep analysis, as it reflects the day-to-day life and culture of Nigerians.

Examples:

Drinks:

1. down-wine – wine tapped from a fallen or felled oil palm or raphia;
2. mineral – soft drink;
3. ogogoro – locally-made alcohol;
4. pami-palm– wine made of palm tree [14].

The lexical series expressing the importance of "transport" also deserves special attention within the framework of our research, as its etymology traces the regularities of linguistic and cultural development.
Examples:
1. moto – a car in general;
2. luxury bus – a large coach as opposed to a bus, usually applied to small vans;
3. machine – a motor-bike;
4. molue – a bus used for urban transport;
5. okada – a motor-bike taxi;
6. taxi - park – a place where long distance taxis congregate;
7. tokunbo – a used vehicle, usually imported from Belgium [14].
Lexical series, expressing the meaning of "clothing and footwear" reflects the cultural identity of ethnic groups of Nigeria, reflecting its specificity in the linguistic plan of the territorial version of the English language in Nigeria.
Examples:
1. lace –cloth in style with many gaps;
2. semi-singlet – a type of a T-shirt;
3. slippers – flip-flops, flat-rubber beach shoes;
4. Sokoto – traditional dress associated with Sokoto;
5. up-and-down – woman's dress where the blouse and wrapper are made from the same material;
6. wax – wax-printed decorative clothes [14].
The ongoing study which is mostly theoretical is aimed at the formation of hypothesis of the perspective study of lexical meaning with connotation of assessment. But at this stage it allows to conclude the following principles which will form a basis of the practical part: the mental structure of assessment is a concept which possesses its identical invariant features and is flexible to changes due to interaction with identical mental structures; transparent periphery of concept, its existence as a system of elements able to change shows its resemblance to the synergetic system; the synergetic system of the concept is bilateral (conceptual and lexical-semantic at the same time) and starts its evolution in the discourse; discourse is the means for systemic (extra- and intra-) semantic modifications.

4. Conclusion

The English language was chosen as the official in Nigeria in order to maintain the cultural and linguistic unity of the country. Despite the fact that the territorial version of the English language in Nigeria remains a special prerogative of the urban elite of the nation, it is gradually making its way to the province. In addition to the territorial version of the English language, which a large number of people in Nigeria know at a pretty good level, there are local languages like Edo, House, Yoruba and others. As a rule, most Nigerians can speak both their native language and the official language. When modern linguists try to characterize the territorial variant of Nigerian English, it becomes obvious that personal perception of Nigerians plays an important role in the use of certain lexical means for the expression of various traditional or customary practices and elements of daily life.

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