What Orthography for Naijá?

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Abstract

In deciding on the orthography for Naijá, the goal is to select an adequate and functional writing system that practically represents the spoken variety of the language as used in everyday situations. To achieve this goal, the theoretical foundation for this work was built on Kay Williamson's functional parameters of good orthography as well other practical considerations. Thus, this study surveyed the major spelling traditions that have so far been used in writing Naijá with a view to determining the extent of each tradition's effectiveness in laying out a standard spelling system for the language, and on the basis of such evaluation recommend the best way(s) of spelling the language.

1.0 Preliminary considerations

"What orthography for Naijá?" is a question that presupposes the existence of a variety of methods for spelling or writing Naijá (Nigerian Pidgin). And this translates into several considerations: that one out of the existing orthographies be adopted as the standard for writing Naijá, or that modifications be made on any of the existing orthographies to standardise it, or that an entirely new orthography be devised for the language.

Deciding on an acceptable writing system or orthography for Naijá throws some interesting challenges before the orthographer, particularly because it is a very important step in the standardisation of the language. But arriving at an acceptable and functional writing system is not as easy as it seems at first. There are of course a number of important issues and problems that must first be taken into account.

Designing an orthography for a language is not just about standardisation as much as it is about the portrayal of the identity of it speakers. The real challenge in orthography design is not posed by linguistic factors but by non-linguistic factors. How do we represent a language that has a unique origin and identity? How do we represent a language that is typically Nigerian, spoken by over 50 million Nigerians and used as the language of music, jokes, commerce and of wider communication among one of the most linguistically diverse people in the world?

The job of the orthographer as facilitator involves charting an appropriate course for the development of a practical writing system for the language. The challenge before him/her is to effectively manage both the linguistic and non-linguistic elements in the design in order to bring about the development of a beneficial and acceptable writing system for the language.

In deciding on an orthography for Naijá, choice of alphabetic symbols and how to combine them must therefore be guided by a combination of the linguistic features of the language with the social, cultural and political realities of the linguistic community, as well as by the various layers of identity to be referenced by the orthography (Bird, 1999; 2002; Easton, 2002). These shall ultimately help us to evaluate the successes and failures of the various spelling systems that have so been used in writing Naijá.

2.0   Theoretical framework

The plank of a functional writing system is that it must have a practical and distinct way of symbolising all the distinct sound patterns of the language it represents. And it should be based on the spoken form of the language (Esizimetor 2002a). So, in adopting a functional writing system for Naijá, the orthography should be based on the spoken form of an acceptable native variety and not on a non-native variety.

Having come to the conclusion that the orthographic standardisation of Naijá should be modelled functional, let us now explore in some detail the theoretical and functional parameters for determining what Standard Naijá Orthography (henceforth SNO) should look like.

In line with the parameters laid out by Williamson (1984) in her book, *Practical Orthography in Nigeria*, SNO should comply with the principles of accuracy, consistency, convenience, harmonisation, and familiarity. And in addition, SNO should adhere to such other parametric considerations as popularisation, pedagogy and redundancy.

2.1   Principle of accuracy

On the principle of accuracy, Williamson (1984) quoting Bamgbose (1965) observes that a good orthography "should represent all and only the significant sounds in the language" (p. 8). Quite simply, a good orthography must agree with the sound system of the language it represents. It must have a distinguishable way of representing all the different significant sounds or the vowel and consonant phonemes of the language. And this translates to writing all the different significant sounds in the language either by using distinct letters or a distinct combination of letters (Williamson, 1984).

Since the sound system of a language is the basis of its orthography, and Naijá has at least 7 pure vowels and about 26 consonants, SNO should have a clear-cut way of representing all these different significant sounds by distinct letters and combination of letters. In addition, since Naijá is a tone language (Mafeni, 1971; Oyebade, 1983), SNO should also have a distinct way of representing all the significant tones in the language to make meaning clearer by using tone marks or some distinct combination of letters.

2.2   Principle of consistency

The principle of consistency comes to play when the same significant sound unit is written with the same letter or combination of letters wherever the same sound or phoneme appears (Williamson, 1984). To this end, Wolff (1954) states that, "consistency means that any letter or letter combination should stand for the same sound or sounds throughout the system" (p.8).

Based on this principle, SNO should be consistent in representing each of all its significant sounds – vowels, vowel sequences and consonants, wherever they appear. This principle also becomes applicable to how words should be consistently divided, hyphenated or compounded in Naijá.

2.3   Principle of convenience

As to the principle of convenience, Williamson (1984) specifies that for any orthography to be convenient, it must not employ too many symbols that are difficult to write, type or print. And while employing the principle of convenience in orthography, she warns that an orthography should not

become too convenient, to the extent that it makes the language difficult to read and hence violate the principle of accuracy earlier set out.

In so far as convenience borders on the simplicity of spelling words in a language, the proposed orthographic system for Naijá should not be too cumbersome to write nor too convenient to be accurate.

2.4   Principle of harmonisation

The principle of harmonisation dwells on the similarity of an orthography to another existing orthography. It stipulates that, as much as possible, an orthography should be similar to another which is in use in that region (Wolff, 1954). This principle may apply to a language at either the local or the international context, especially where cross-cultural or inter-regional relationships and identity between peoples are involved.

In respect of the proposed orthography for Naijá, harmonisation counts as a unifying feature to reduce the diversity that may arise from dissimilar orthographies in a region. Harmonisation may help to establish the unique identity of the language and its users. Now, the big question is, should SNO be similar to the orthography of its substrate or superstrate languages? Or should the orthography be similar to those of other pidgins/creoles in the region or in other regions?

Whatever choice is made, it should be one that should strengthen the cross-cultural relationships among the people whose orthographies are harmonised; as well as promote the identity of the people for whom the orthography is designed.

2.5   Principle of familiarity

Finally, Williamson's (1984) principle of familiarity establishes that people are happier with something they are familiar with. And if something new is to be introduced, people want to be convinced that what is being introduced is better than what has been. However she cautions that if too many things in an orthography are changed, the orthography may not be accepted or may become controversial.

In employing the familiarity principle, the proposed SNO should be acceptable to native speakers as well as second language users of Naijá based on the fact that the spelling system and spelling rules of the language should not be too different from what people are used to. Hence it is important for Naijá alphabet and writing system to get the support of users, especially its native speakers and to a large extent its second language users.

Besides these functional principles, there are the additional consideration of popularisation pedagogy and redundancy, which also come into play in the standardisation Naijá orthography.

2.6   Popularisation consideration

The popularisation consideration is actually a practical, non-linguistic strategy that should be used to bring an orthography to regular use and acceptance. No orthography would make itself known without first getting the would-be users to know why and how they can employ a new/reformed writing system. No matter how well or functionally crafted an orthography may be, even when it does not violate the

principles of accuracy, consistency, convenience, harmonisation, and familiarity, if not popularised, the orthography would come to naught.

It is particularly about how to make the proposed writing system known to its non-linguist users. Here, government and institutional support count as some of the most important popularisation requirement for any orthography. When government or institutional policy expresses support for an orthography, users are more likely to accept newer changes than when government or institutional involvement is absent.

To popularise SNO is to make it known to users. This naturally would involve getting users to know its alphabets, spelling conventions and rules. This would also involve the development and circulation of promotional materials of the orthography to would be users. A practical, active and engaging process, popularisation would bring SNO closer to the people, as well as make it relevant to them.

Like every new enterprise, stakeholders must be involved in its popularisation. This process also offers the orthographer a chance to review the orthography based on users' recommendations.

To make possible the general standardisation of Naijá via the popularisation consideration, SNO should have the authority of written fictional and non-fictional texts, as well as translated popular literature, both secular and religious. And with the direct involvement of government, the media and other institutions, the process becomes even faster and its impact greater.

2.7   Pedagogical consideration

As for the pedagogical consideration, the concern here is having the new/reformed writing system well adapted for teaching and learning. Learning and mastering a writing system is made easier when the functional principles are well followed and the spelling rules are well stated. Thus, SNO would not only enhance the reading and writing of Naijá but would also facilitate teaching and learning other languages in the environment.

With a standardised Naijá writing system, the world of education and educational opportunities would open up to both pupils and educators who use Naijá. Again, the problem of what orthographic standard to teach would not be there when SNO is in place; since books and learning materials produced in SNO would make teaching and learning in the language less cumbersome and more rewarding.

Pedagogically, an orthography should be such that learners/users of the language – especially in a multilingual setting – should easily distinguish between the writing/spelling system in one language from the writing/spelling system of another language. SNO should in this wise be able to limit the confusion that may arise from having similar words existing in English and in Naijá but have different meanings in the languages.

Research has shown that phonemic writing systems aid in the early acquisition of reading/ literacy skill than non phonemic writing systems (Bird, 2002; Koffi, 2006). The pedagogical consideration in the standardisation of an orthographic system for Naijá is one that should best position the language as a tool for teaching and learning.

2.8   Redundancy consideration

Redundancies are repetitions that exist in orthographies for a variety of reasons ranging from etymology to extreme accuracy. One observable fact in orthography design is that users prefer a more convenient style of writing their language. Because redundancies are superfluous features in orthography, users often consider them unnecessary and discard them for more convenient writing. And by far the most regular victim of redundancy are diacritics. Users often ignore writing them where they are avoidable.

It is good to have diacritics (tone marks, sub-dots etc) in a writing system, especially since they reinforce the accuracy of an orthography. It has been shown that diacritics are helpful especially when dealing with expatriate language learners, but they are often not necessary for children learning to read and write their own languages or for adult literacy programmes (Bird, 1999). Citing a personal communication with William Bright, Bird (1999) notes that the good thing about diacritics is that they are easily treated as optional, not needed and so they are left out of the writing entirely.

In designing SNO, we must take this into account. To create a uniform, unified and an acceptable writing system for Naijá, means leaving out features that users would find too inconveniencing or unnecessary to implement. However, not all diacritics are unnecessary. Diacritics are especially essential in reducing the ambiguity that arises from tonal minimal pairs in tone languages.

Even in well established orthographies, diacritics are often used optionally. Here, optionality is a useful feature of diacritics which should be exploited in SNO. If we are employing diacritics to disambiguate the minimal pairs in Naijá, as Bird (1999) advises, it is better to have all the members of the minimal set distinguished, and since this disambiguation is affected primarily by phonological information, it should be termed phonological disambiguation.

Hence, the redundancy consideration is one that should guide us in deciding what orthographic practise we should retain or discard in SNO.

3.0   Survey of Naijá orthographies

Naijá has not always been a written language. People first started using the language for conducting business and trade activities with Europeans in the Niger Delta for centuries before any real attempt was made to write down the language. Historically, the earliest recorded attempt to write Naijá dates back to the late 1700s.

And since that time we have witnessed about three major trends in the orthographic conventions so far employed in writing the language. Clearly the attempts or traditions of writing Naijá can be summarised into, the Early Orthographies (EOs), the Press Orthographies (POs) and the Linguistic Orthographies (LOs).

So, in adopting a practical approach to deciding what orthography for Naijá, we intend to analyse the existing orthographies for their weak and strong points, and where necessary, suggest modifications for reviewing the most suitable candidate(s) among them or layout the parameters for the construction of a new orthographic standard for the language.

Note that some of the examples we have used here may not fall squarely into the domain of pure Naijá texts as it is viewed today. But they sure serve as clear examples of the pidginisation process that established Naijá language in the country. And importantly, they show the somewhat historical trend in the attempts that have so far been made in writing the language.

3.1   Early orthographies (EOs)

The early versions of written Naijá made no real efforts at having a standardised writing system for the language. They simply presented the language in the way it was spoken at that time, as some sort of broken or contact English.

We find evidence of these in the diaries and reports of early merchants, sailors, missionaries, explorers and even natives who at some point in time did business in the Niger Delta. These early attempts at writing the language showed that Naijá was still very much a contact language. And the spelling system adopted was some sort of contact orthography. The orthography employed large-scale English spellings or what some consider as etymological spelling system. Even so, local content words in Naijá were surprisingly also spelled in the non-phonemic spelling system of English. The following texts, samples I – III, exemplify some of the general trends adopted in writing the EOs.

(I)   **Antera Duke's Diary 1785-1788**

Soon after I see one of my men was Liv with him to canow com
up and tell me Enyong peoples tak my canow way for Landing
so I Run and Go Down for Landing I find no canow…
(Forde, 1956; Bamgbose, 1995, p.12)

 (II)   **Antera Duke's Diary entry for 8 February 1786**

At 5 a.m. in aqua Bakassey Crik and with fine morning
and I git for aqua Bakassey Crik in i clock time so I find
Arshbong Duke and I go longsider his canoa to I tak
Bottle Beer to Drink with him and wee have caqll first
for new Town and stay for landing come way so we go
town in 3 clock time so we walk up to plaver house sam
time to putt grandy Egbo in palaver house and play all
night Combesboch go way with 639 slaves & Trotter.
(Forde, 1956; Banjo, 1996, p.9)

(III)   **King Opubu in 1824**

Brudder George… send warship look um what water
bar ab got, dat good, me let um dat. Brudder send boat
chopum slave, dat good. E no send warship cappen no
peakeme, no lookee face. No,no; no me tell you, No;
Suppose you come all you mont full palaver, give e

reason, why e do it, me tell you, you peake lie, you
peakeed-n lie. Suppose my fader, or my fader come up
from ground and peake me why English man do dat, I no
sabby tell why.
(Mafeni, 1971, p. 97; Banjo 1996, p.10)

Texts I & II were produced by Antera Duke in a space of 3 years, while text III was produced by the King of Opubu some 36 years later. And there are some remarkable similarities as well as differences in the spelling systems employed across the texts.

Generally, Duke's texts indicate some near phonemic spellings in texts I & II. In text I, he uses <liv> for 'leave', <tak> for 'take' and <way> for 'away'. In text II, Duke spells 'creek' as <crik>, 'get' as <git>, 'alongside' as <longsider>, 'some' as <sam>, 'put' as <putt> and 'granny' as <grandy>. Although he consistently spells 'canoe' as <canow> thrice in text I, but inconsistency creeps in when he spells the same word as <canoa> in text II. Surprisingly also, within the same text II, he writes 'palaver' as <plaver> in one instance and as <palaver> in another. Similarly, 'we' is spelt as <we> in one instance, and as <wee> in another. Even the local words, 'Bakasi' and 'Achibong' are respectively spelt English-like as <Bakassey> and <Arshbong >.

In text III, the King of Opubu writes 'brother', as <brudder>, 'them' as <um>, 'that' as <dat>, 'he' as <e>, 'captain' as <cappen>, 'speak to me' as <peakeme>, 'speaking' as <peaked-n>, 'look him' as <lookee>, 'mouth' as <mont>, 'speak/tell' as <peake>, and 'father' as <fader>, while the Portuguese word, 'sabir' is spelt as <sabby>.

From the above texts, we notice that while the EOs pioneer the first orthographic system for Naijá. They made the spelling system more dependent on English spelling forms rather on the spoken form of Naijá. Although, they may have represented the contact language the way it was spoken at that time, the writing system seem to have presented Naijá as a simplified language in contrast to English, as seen in such spellings as <liv>, <crik>, <e>, <dat> and <fader>.

At some point, however, one cannot help but wonder if those who used the EOs really knew how to spell English properly. Or that they probably just wanted to represent the contact language or the early Naijá by deliberately misspelling English to make it look different. They probably may have spelt Naijá that way because at that time the language was considered a 'bastardised' form of English; such that a 'bastardised' English spelling system was all that was needed to represent the language as perceived.

In general, the EOs clearly violated the principles of accuracy and consistency, which made them quite inefficient at representing the language. Although the writing system was familiar to those who knew English already, but the system must have proved difficult to non-speakers of English. Moreover, one would have needed to first learn how to spell in English before attempting spell in the EOs.

Even so, by far the most consistently spelt words that have come to us today are <e> and <dat>, used in King Opubu's writing. They may be regarded as some of the earliest indicators of an independent Naijá language orthography.

3.2 Press orthographies (POs)

The POs were born of the publishing culture of pre and post independent Nigeria. They included the writings of journalists and authors who wanted to give distinct Nigerian flavour to their writings in English, as well as a few others who wanted to write in the typical 'language of the streets'.

The POs demonstrated a greater enthusiasm than the EOs; people wanted to express themselves in Naijá, an extended pidgin that was also fast creolising. The various attempts to write Naijá were published in newspapers, magazines, novels, billboards, cartoon strips, essays, novels, poetry and television.

The POs were not significantly different in style from the EOs. Just like the EOs, they attempted to present Naijá as spoken without being too phonemic in spelling. Again, as with the EOs, various authors experimented with a range of spelling styles. And like their predecessors, the POs still adopted the non-phonemic spelling style of English for many of its words, except for a handful of words from other sources.

A significant number of authors of Nigerian literature have made attempts to cast the use of Naijá in their works, and here are some examples of the spelling systems so far adopted.

(IV)   **Ogali in '*Veronica My Daughter*'**

Wettin I say be, you sabi grammar, me I sabi money pass you.
I go tell you say money pass book.
(Ogali (nd.); Bamgbose, 1995, p. 14)

(V)   **Wole Soyinka in '*The Interpreters*'**

But oga, how we go manage dat one now?
Wetin a go call you?
Ah oga no do dat kind ting. Den go come now now. Matter of
fac' Chief Winsala don enter. After him na only one remain.
(Soyinka, 1966; Bamgbose 1995, pp.14-15)

(VI)   **Chinua Achebe in '*Anthills of the Savannah*'**

Na only poor man de sabi him brother never chop since
morning. The big oga wey put poor man for sun no dey
remember. Because why? Him own belle done full up with
cornflake and milk and omlate.
(Achebe, 1987; Bamgbose 1995, p.14)

(VII)   **Ifeanyi Ayuba**

Wen
Big belle man no gree person
Sabi pregnant woman again;
Church choir people take dia gown
Dey confuse who bi graduate;
Man-o-war boys
Refuse person sabi who bi soja;
Wetin stop lazy woman
Mix oil an krafish for water
Call am soup?
Time dey wen soup be soup;
 Wen man pikin go wak finish,
Lick 'm finger kpukom!
Dat na di time
Woman no dey consult book
To make soup;
Na di time
Woman dey go village, learn from gran mama;
Dat na di time
Wen jet age
Never bring kitchen palava
(Ifeanyi Ayuba, 1986, p.3; Jibril 1995, p. 245)

(VIII)   **Ken Saro-Wiwa in '*Dis Nigeria Sef*'**

Nigeria, I beg make I aks you small question
Na which one be your own condition?
Abi you too big to get small sense?
Why all your tings na soso confusion?
Even sef dem broke yu small small
Every piece go make more confusion
I don tire for dis Nigeria
For oder place phone dey go quick message
Nigeria phone too get stronghead
Send am 'e go complain, I get headache…
Sorry, de train will delay till next week
Well, I must complain to de oga
Sorry sah, oga is not on seat…
(Saro-Wiwa 1987, Jibril 1995, pp. 246-247)

In text IV, Ogali experiments with phonemic spellings for <wettin> and <sabi>, while everything else in the text appears in Standard English orthography. With the consonant digraph <tt> in <wettin>, Ogali imports some of problems of English spellings into Naijá. Even so, the spelling of <sabi> reflects a greater level of accuracy than other words in the text.

In text V, Soyinka, displays a greater degree of accuracy in writing the following Naijá words: <oga>, <wetin>, <a>, <dat>, <den>, <don> and <na>. However, <fac> and <ting> are more of clipped English forms rather than any real attempt to write them in Naijá. Yet, like Ogali in *Veronica my Daughter*, he mixes his genuine phonemic spellings with the non-phonemic spelling style of English.

Similarly, in text VI, Achebe spells in the same kind of mixed orthography used in many POs. Even so, he is quite inconsistent. He spells <de> without <y> in one instance and spells same with <y> in another, while <oga> and <sabi> are conveniently spelled in the phonemic spelling style used by the author of text V.

Unlike in previous texts, text VI takes Naijá spellings a little further. Although the author attempts to spell Naijá as spoken, yet his pidgin spellings are mixed with other regular spelled English words. While <wen>, <sabi>, <dia>, <bi>, <soja>, <wetin>, <krafish>, <di>, <wak> and <gran> are spelt accurately, <gree> and <belle> seem quite confusing with their English like use of the digraphs <ee> and <ll>.

In Saro Wiwa's text, we also find out that he based his spelling style on the spoken language; and like other PO writers, he mixes his orthography at will. He spells <aks>, <abi>, <sef>, <dem>, and <sah> quite accurately and consistently, but his spelling of <yu> in one instance and <you> in another is bewildering. He also displays the same inconsistency in spelling <de> in one instance and <dey> in another.

Common to all POs is the attempt to spell Naijá accurately. But because the writers have been used to writing in English, they never really succeeded in extricating themselves completely from the confines of English orthographic style, and so mixing was common place. Perhaps the writers also believed that Naijá is a variety of English rather than a language in its own rights and with its own identity. However, one thing is clear, the POs moved toward a more accurate and more consistent spelling system than did the EOs. Because of the variety of media in which authors of many POs expressed themselves, the POs are perhaps the most popular orthography ever used in writing Naijá.

Drawing from the various attempts made so far in writing Naijá in an acceptable orthography is the fact that we can actually capture some consistent trend in the EOs, and the POs. The following spellings have been fairly regular: <bi>, <dat>, <dem>, <di>, <dis>, <don>, <na>, <oga>, <pikin>, <sabi>, <sef>. This is surely indicative of the desire of many early and later writers of Naijá wanting to write the language more accurately. And this certainly forms the basis on which the Linguistic Orthographies were born.

3.3   Linguistic Orthographies (LOs)

With the EOs and the POs paving way for the LOs, Mafeni (1971) and Agheyisi's (1971) works actually pioneered the phonemic tradition of writing Naijá. Enthused by strong interest in studying the English based pidgin and creole in Nigeria, they needed to set out an orderly and accurate method of writing the language.

Mafeni and Agheyisi's spelling methods, though significantly similar, were later followed by those of other linguists who seem not to have given serious consideration to their pioneering work in the development of their own orthographies. These other linguists simply went about writing the language using their own phonemic equivalents. And as with the POs, this eventually led to a multiplicity of phonemic orthographies, with none adopted as standard.

(IX)   di drayva dem de kom
         (Mafeni 1971, p. 110)

(X)   No bi se Jon no wan mek Meri no go fo maket.
         (Agheyisi 1971, p.144)

(XI)   //bed nɔ fit ves fɔ tri/
         bikos no haw i ves riʃ/
         wén i flaj flaj na ɔntɔp tri
         na im i gò sti land//
         //eni pikin we no se i nɔ sabi
         tɔk wel/mek i nɔ tɔk//
         (Semire (nd), p. 6)

(XII)   Dὲm tọk tẹl mì se 'Wì layk yù.'
         (Abi) yù go makẹt àbi yù go skul?
         Dὲm sàbi se hu giv yù nyam fὸr haws?
         (Faraclas, (nd.) p. 13)

(XIII)   Awa stet govunọ Col. John Mark Inienger dọn sẹn mẹsej
         tek salot pipul of di stet fọ di sẹlibreshọn of dis yiẹ krismas.
         (Elugbe and Omamor 1991, p. 168)

(XIV)   Evri-bodi noh sei dis na sentiuri of kompiuta dat na im bi sei,
         hu no sabi kompiuta ikwos to liv-am-fo-bak. So diafo to akwaya daun
         kompiuta edukeshon foo veri shot taim, na foo City Computer
         we de 19 an 101 Wire Rod, nie Faiv Jonshon, na im yu go go.
         (Esizimetor 2002b, p. 206)

Texts IX-XIV parades various degrees of phonemic orthographies that have so far been used in writing Naijá. And they all have one objective: to accurately, consistently, conveniently and harmoniously represent Naijá the way it is spoken.

Noticeable in text IX and X, is the fact that Mafeni and Agheyisi's orthographies do not use diacritics of any sort. In text IX, Mafeni writes the pure vowel [i] as <i> in <di> but the vowel sequence [ai] is written as <ay> in <drayva>. Text X is similar to text IX, except that in Agheyisi work, we do not find the letter combination of <ay> and <aw>.

Both text IX and X do not specifically distinguish between the +/- ATR feature of /ɛ/ and /e/ and between /ɔ/ and /o/. While /ɛ/ and /e/ are written as <e>, [ɔ] and [o] are written as <o>. And as such, the reader would have to rely on his knowledge of the language and on context to distinguish between the pair. This however is not unusual in orthographies. Yet, the texts above offer one of the most convenient and practical way of writing Naijá, both for those who already know the language and those learning the language. The fact here is that texts IX and X are technically extensions of the phonemic side of the EOs and the POs; and so, they are not dramatically different from what people are used to. One therefore thing lacking in Mafeni and Agheyisi's phonemic writing of Naijá is the absence of tone marks or some other strategy for marking tones.

In text XI, Semire writes Naijá in an orthography that combines phonetic symbols with regular Roman alphabets. Although employing symbols as <ɔ>, <ʃ>, <tʃ> and digraphs like <aw>, <aj> does make the orthography compliant with the accuracy principle, but it violates the principle of familiarity, convenience and harmonization. And if anyone is reading the language in this sort of orthography, he/she would have to rely on the knowledge of phonetic symbols. Text XI also makes good and practical use of tone marks, marking only the grammatically significant tones, especially the low tones. Semire's position, for its combination of IPA symbols and tone marks may however prove too extreme for Naijá users who are already quite familiar with the POs.

But in text XII, Faraclas uses a phonemic orthography in which tone marks and sub-dots are employed. In the text, <o> is used for [ɔ]and <e> is used for [ɛ] as distinct from when <o> and <e> are written without sub-dots. Because of the inconvenience often created by sub-dotting ATR vowels, Faraclas used a more practical method of underlining the affected letter.

In addition, the digraph <ay> is used for the vowel sequence [ai], and <aw> for the sequence [au]. This is similar to Semire's, but it violates the orthographic principles of familiarity and harmonization and may not enjoy popular acceptance. Even so, Faraclas marks only the low tones for the tonally significant words. But many speakers of Naijá would be able to read texts where these tone marks are absent since marking low tones instead of high tones may have little or no significant burden on lexical or grammatical meaning.

In text XIII, Elugbe and Omamor spells Naijá like a Nigerian language, similar in many respects to Faraclas's. The spelling system is quite simple and employs sub-dots to distinguish the +/- ATR vowels, between <e> and <ẹ>, and between <o> and <ọ>. Writing Naijá this way would mean contending with the problems of diacritics in everyday writing; and this may prove really inconveniencing where computer keyboards are not particularly fitted with these special letters. The orthographies used in both text XII and text XIII may be regarded as very phonemic, and may not be popular with Naijá users who are already familiar with the POs.

Another issue with this writing system is that it harmonises Naijá to look like a local or ATR Nigerian language. It is important to point out here that both the Faraclas and Elugbe-Omamor Naijá orthography proposals would certainly make for easy reading and writing for people who are already familiar with the

orthography of southern Nigeria languages, but it may not be so for those familiar with the languages of Northern Nigeria, where other strategies have been adopted to mark the same +/- ATR features.

In text XIV, Esizimetor proposes a convenient spelling system that does away with diacritics. The system does not spell as simply as Agheyisi's, because he adopts spelling variations to reduce the problem that homophones and homographs may cause. This itself may result to developing elaborate spelling rules that many users maybe too impatient to learn, and may lead to some of the problems often encountered in spelling English. While this spelling system has good potentials in terms of it similarity to other pidgin /creole orthographies in other parts of the world, it violates the consistency principle: in some instances he writes <oo> in words like <foo> (for) and <o> in words like <jonshon> (junction).

All in all, the advantage of the LOs is that they present Naijá more accurately, consistently, conveniently and more harmonized with the local orthographies than the EOs and POs. They also tend to give Naijá a unique identity as a language in its own right, independent of English or the local languages. While arresting the problems associated with mixed orthographies by making the spellings for the language simpler, the LOs seem to have more pedagogical advantage than previous orthographies.

Because the LOs are phonemic, they stand a better chance for standardisation than the mixed writing systems. The mixed orthographies have no clear rules as to the choice of alphabetic symbols that represent distinct speech sounds. They may be convenient and quite familiar to writers who are used to writing in English, but they violate such principles of good orthography as accuracy, consistency and harmonisation.

With no apparent regard for the pedagogical consideration, mixed orthographies complicate issues at two orthographical extremes – the phonemic and non-phonemic, making teaching/learning in the language more complicated than it should be. Such unnecessary complexity often leads to confusion.

Spelling Naijá in an English like orthography also means inheriting all the problems and inconsistencies already inherent in the English orthography. Moreover, even professional writers in English often need to check the correctness of their spellings against a dictionary, and it would therefore be an arduous task to consider spelling Naijá that way because it would be a wholesale transfer of English spelling problems into the Naijá language.

As we seen in our survey of the EOs and the POs, writing in a mixed orthography means that individual writers often have to determine how exactly they wish to spell all their words. Since there is no common rule, the phonemic quotient of their writing systems may oscillate anywhere from 5% to 50% of the words used, especially as there is no laid down principle for determining how much of Naijá words should be written in a phonemic or non-phonemic writing system.

To be able to use such mixed orthographies, writers and readers must therefore have a good knowledge of English, which is not at all a necessity in learning and mastering Naijá. In fact a huge percentage of the people who use Naijá in Nigeria have little or no formal education since formal education is the basic condition for acquisition of competence in English. If education and knowledge of English are not the

preconditions for the acquisition of competence in Naijá, why then should its orthography be made to depend on English?

Although, writing in the English-like orthography may have etymological value but it is a practice that was once prevalent at a time when many pidgins around the world had no recognised orthographies of their own. And according to Yule (1987), such etymological spellings made pidgins look like some 'clumsy' and 'stupid' dialect of English. But adopting modern and phonemic spelling system like many pidgins and creoles around the world have done seem to have imbued in the orthographies linguistic features which make them advantageous for easy learning, speaking and writing (Yule, 1987).

And since the EOs, POs and the LOs have all been focused on developing a standard writing system for Naijá, we need to be able to harmonise them into a single position if we are to arrive at an acceptable writing system for Naijá or at the proposed SNO. SNO must hence not move too far away from it predecessors. The way to do this is regularise the spellings of the orthographies into a single rule-governed and unified spelling system. And since this would make SNO significantly similar to previous orthographies, it would make it better accepted.

4.0   Concluding remarks

As we established at the beginning of this study, we noted that the acceptable writing system for Naijá should be based on the spoken form of the language (Esizimetor 2002a). This is the background against which the standardisation of Naijá orthography must be built. And as shown in our survey of Naijá orthographies, to achieve SNO means adopting a system by which we can write and read Naijá in the most independent, practical, accurate and successful way.

Recent advancement in linguistics has shown that using phonemic spelling systems are more advantageous than non-phonemic ones. This is particularly attributable to the advent of the phonemic theory which seeks a one to one correspondence between phoneme and grapheme. In this vein, Yule (1987, para. 14) informs that when the official standardization of Neo-Melanesian pidgin was promulgated in March 1956, it was predicated on the premise that "the ideal orthography for a language is a completely phonemic one."

Thus, SNO should be able show how Naijá is spoken; that means it should be spelled as pronounced. It should be convenient enough to make for easy writing and reading without confusion. And it should be able to show when bilingual speakers switch codes between Naijá and English or a Nigerian or foreign language, without the associated problems that non-phonemic orthographies generate.

Having seen from our review that the LOs are better positioned for writing Naijá, we need to decide which among the LOs would become the acceptable candidate for SNO. At least two proposals – the Agheyisi and the Elugbe-Omamor orthographies would readily qualify. The two orthographies are quite similar, except that the latter makes use of sub-dots while the former does not.

Although the Elugbe-Omamor orthography may be more accurate than Agheyisi's, but the biggest weakness Elugbe-Omamor orthography is that it spells like one of the local languages of Southern

Nigeria. For the millions of people for whom Naijá has become a first language, these local languages may be familiar but only a small number of Naijá native speakers can really read and write in these local languages. This of course would make Naijá spell or look too much like a local language and rob it of its unique identity and perhaps its neutrality.

And if SNO is to become popular and acceptable to users, it should carry on with what people are familiar with rather by employing a rather unfamiliar approach no matter how accurate it may be. From the POs, people are already familiar with spelling many Naijá words phonemically without diacritics; such that introducing an orthography with sub-dots at this point of standardisation would be inappropriate and would do the SNO no good. Since people can spell words like <dem>, <don>, <oga>, <sef> without sub-dots, using the sub-dotted version as follows <dẹm>, <dọn>, <ọga>, <sẹf> would make for a terribly inconveniencing spelling system that may not find acceptance among many Naijá users.

In a recent survey conducted by the researcher in August 2009, to test the acceptability of SNO, the researcher asked respondents to determine whether the version with diacritics is preferred to the version without diacritics. 60% of the respondents comprising students and professionals from Edo and Delta states said they preferred the version without sub-dots because they felt it is easier to read and write, that it is better in print, that it uniquely represents the language and that it is convenient and acceptable.

This, for us, is very important because it clearly demonstrates that the best way to write SNO is to use the spelling convention adopted by Agheyisi in her 1971 PhD thesis. This orthography which makes no use of diacritics can be necessarily modified to function as the SNO. That means, to get SNO right, we will still need to draw on all the positive elements of the other orthographies that are not present in the Agheyisi orthography.

Surely, we cannot do away with all diacritics in SNO. We may do away with sub-dots because they pose no serious problem to anyone familiar with the language, but we may not be able to do away with marking tones in Naijá.

Using tone diacritics is certainly an efficient way of marking tones as a distinctive feature of Naijá. To avoid the problem of tonal density resulting from full tone marking, it is necessary employ an optimal tone marking in Naijá. Marking tone in SNO must be such that the orthography complies with the tonal minimal pair principle, which prescribes that only lexical and grammatical items that are distinguished only by tone should be represented in the orthography (Koffi, 2006, p. 14).

Bird (2002) argues in favour of optimal tone marking, stating that too much or too little may impact on the usability of the orthography. Hence tone marking must be efficient and convenient. And a very efficient and convenient way of distinguishing between the significant tones in Naijá is to mark one of either phonemic tones. And this is in order with the tone economy principle, which according to Williamson (1984, p. 42), states that:

If we are marking the tones fully in the language, we can reduce the number of diacritics used by agreeing to leave the most common tone of the language unmarked. This is a kind of spelling rule (Koffi 2006, p. 14).

Considering the low tones as the common tone in Naijá, in compliance with this principle, we can then only indicate the high tones in the orthography.

The job of the orthographer is never complete until his design or proposal finds acceptance or becomes modified to suit the users. This of course means that orthography design goes beyond the phonological concerns that orthographers are usually preoccupied with. In fact the success of any orthography largely rests on the shoulders of a whole range of sociolinguistic and ideological issues (Bird, 2002).

The phonological concerns of course may set out the foundation for standardization of an orthography, but the real impetus for standardization comes from what the users want or would accept. Having based our foundation for SNO on such functional principles as accuracy, consistency, convenience, harmonisation and familiarity, what is required would then be to layout practically how SNO works. And this we would do in a subsequent study.

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