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Towards the Standardisation of Naija: Vocabulary Development and Lexical Expansion Processes

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Abstract

From the pre-colonial era to date, Naija which developed as a contact language, and now as a creole, is long overdue for the standardisation of its orthography and vocabulary to empower its speakers' with the benefits that accrue to developed languages. This study examines the recent efforts of a project aimed at producing the Bible and literacy primers in Naija. Since developing standard orthography is a prerequisite to vocabulary codification and development, the study builds on an earlier study which examined the orthography adopted by the project. In this study, focus is on the vocabulary and lexical processes used to express new concepts and technical terms in the light of Naija speakers' usage practices. Findings show that there is an extensive use of loanwords based on the process of lexical borrowing from the superstrate language (English) even where there are Naija equivalents. The study provides a guide for Naija vocabulary development, and the application of lexical expansion processes that reflect speakers' usage practices.

Introduction

Naija¹ is the linguistic outcome of the contact situation between Nigerians and Europeans along its coastal shores, and subsequently shaped by the nation's colonial history and multilingual context. The current scope of Naija is a reflection of its role that has changed over time from a contact language in the pre-colonial era into a language of identity or integration and inter-ethnic communication in the post-colonial era. This development is evidenced by the increasing use of Naija in all practical spheres of life including music, literature, drama, information dissemination (by government and corporate organizations), media, and religion (Elugbe and Omamor 1991, Oloruntoba 1992). However, Naija has remained essentially a spoken language with a population of speakers whose numbers, though not officially established, cut across the geographical, multiethnic, and social class terrain of Nigeria. Indeed, various studies have drawn attention to Naija's creolising status wherein there are speakers who claim it as their first language (Marchese and Shnukal 1982, Donwa-Ifode 1983, Faraclas et al 1983, Agheyisi 1984, Ofulue 2004).

Background

It is in the light of these developments recommendations have been made for its official recognition as Nigeria's lingua franca, and even possibly as national language. (Agheyisi 1988, Elugbe 1995, Egbokhare 2003). But more importantly is the urgent need for its codification which is a prerequisite to vocabulary development and the processes involved. To date, there is no agreed upon consistent way of writing Naija nor is there a standard dictionary. The present situation has given room for various representations in writing. An initial attempt by Ola Rotimi (cited in Faraclas, 1984) to develop a dictionary for Naija is yet to be published. However, the Nigerian Pidgin Language Bible Translation (NPLBT) which is a recent project

¹ The name *Naija* was adopted at the Conference on Nigerian Pidgin, University of Ibadan held in July 2009; following the resolution that what hitherto was referred to as Nigerian Pidgin is no longer a pidgin because it has creolized in some parts of the country; its functions have surpassed the functions of a pidgin; and the term 'pidgin' has helped to encourage derogatory connotations associated with it.

and is the first of its kind, aimed at producing the first translation of the Bible in Naija in conjunction with Literacy International' has developed literacy primers for teaching and learning how to read and write in Naija. In an earlier study, this researcher evaluated the orthography adopted by the project in the light of earlier proposals (Mafeni 1971, Elugbe and Omamor 1991, Faraclas 1996), and the basic principles of standard orthography. It recommended guidelines for standardising Naija orthography based on the findings. Selection of a language variety as the standard precedes and influences the development of the orthography, and vocabulary. The study noted at least two dimensions for the selection of the Naija variety used in earlier studies: a) regional and b) the degree to which the selected variety shows superstrate influence, that is interference from English. The creole continuum features basilectal, mesolectal, and acrolectal varieties. For Naija, the choice of varieties has been narrowed down to essentially two, the eastern (spoken in the eastern states) and the western (spoken in the delta region) varieties. The study observed that the orthography and vocabulary adopted in NPLBT texts reflect the eastern acrolectal (with substantial superstrate influence) variety.

Aim of Study

The present study therefore, seeks to build on the earlier study by examining NPLBT's texts for the use of standard vocabulary and the processes of lexical expansion adopted vis a viz Naija usage practices. For example, it observes that there is an extensive application of the process of lexical borrowing from the superstrate language (English) in the text, even in cases where there are Naija equivalents. The findings of this study should provide a guide for Naija vocabulary development, and the application of lexical expansion processes that reflect speakers' usage practices.

Lexicosemantics in Naija

According to Holm (1988) Pidgin lexicons are usually restricted in size and make up for it through multifunctionality (one word having many syntactic uses), polysemy (one word having many meanings), and circumlocution (lexical items consisting of phrases rather than single words). He also notes that the lexicons have been [and still are] influenced by European lexical sources, African lexical sources, morphological, and semantic changes. The processes by which these take place include lexical loaning/retention, coining, semantic shifts such as broadening/extension, narrowing, syntactic shifts, calquing, and reduplication. Oloruntoba (1992) observed from various speakers' usage practices that Naija's lexicon is quite dynamic and in a constant flux comprising the use of basilectal, mesolectal, and acrolectal varieties all at the same time. In other words, for one word you can have at least two lexical variations e.g. *chop/eat* for *eat*, *ala/shaut* for *shout*, *rishi/rich* for *reach* etc. Faraclas (1996) notes that lexical processes in Naija are mostly derivational processes; they include multifunctionality² in word order, reduplication, compounding, prepositions, serialized verb constructions, and ideophones. Osoba (2004)

² ²The multifunctional nature of Naija words make for productivity in terms of their capacity to function in more than one grammatical class. However, since the focus is not on grammar it is not discussed here.

notes the following word formation processes for Naija: blending, clipping, compounding, conversion, extension and reduplication³.

The following section is an overview of word formation processes that have been observed to be most productive in Naija. The aim is to provide a background against which guidelines can be formulated for the application of these processes. The processes are borrowing, coinages, idiomatisation, semantic extension, and reduplication. Although ideophones are a very productive class of words in Naija, their role in word formation fit more appropriately under borrowing and reduplication.

Borrowing

The main sources of borrowing in Naija are English, the superstrate source, and Nigerian languages, the substrate source. Below are some examples:

<i>Naija</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Source</i>
wuruwuru	corrupt	Yoruba
vejitebu(l)	vegetable	English
miraku(l)	miracle	English
baptizim	baptism	English
tolotolo	turkey	Yoruba
wahala	trouble	Hausa
kpekere	Plantain chips	Southern languages

Coinages

Frozen coinages

These are words which were coined from at least two words but which over time have come to be used at single words to convey a new meaning.

<i>Naija</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
ɔpstie	storey building
ɔntop	upon/on top of
kɔmɔt	come out/leave

³ The grammatical classes which lexical items belong to are not crucial to the aim of this study, and so are not indicated.

getop	got up, rose up
sidon	sit down
fosek of / sekof	for the sake of / since / because of
wotapruf	plastic covering/raincoat
bomboi	male baby
bakhand	illegal (business)
beleful	completely satisfied

Compounding

<i>Naija</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
sidon-luk	'wait and see' attitude
man-pikin	male child (indefinite noun referent)
strong-hed	stubborn

Composition

This process does not appear to be as productive in Naija as it is in many of the substrate languages. Speakers tend to simply borrow the English equivalent if there is no existing word in Naija as seen above. A guiding principle would be to first decide if the borrowed word conveys the intended meaning in Naija. But where the concept may require explanation, the process of composition may be considered. For example:

<i>Naija</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
pesin we de sabi sta dem	astrologer (NPLBTP, modified)
ste togeda	contact (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991)
folo tok	communication (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991)

Calquing

This process involves the translation of words or idioms word for word. Holm (1988) notes that calquing provides evidence for the substantial semantic influence of substrate languages on Pidgins and Creoles. Here are some examples in Naija:

<i>NAIJA</i>	<i>Literal</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
ple am	play him/her	deceive

hat kọt	heart cut	fear
beḷe swit	stomach sweet	well said
lọngatrot	long throat	greedy
wuman rapa	woman's wrapper	lady's man

Semantic extension

Existing words in Naija are extended beyond their original meaning:

<i>NAIJA</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Other</i>
ọga	boss	lord / leader
papa	father	old man (tonal change)
ánti	aunt	general address term for older females
wọta	water	body of water /tears
jam	meet	bump into / hit

Reduplication

There are at least two types of reduplication in Naija. There is the productive process by which new words can be formed from the existing lexicon:

wọsh , wash	wọshwọsh , faded (cloth)
waká , walk	wakawáká , lay about
boi , boy	bọibọí , houseboy
tọk , talk	tọktọk , chatter
shap , sharp	shapshap , smartly, quickly

New words are also formed through frozen reduplication that is, the reduplicated morpheme does not have meaning on its own. Most of Naija's ideophones belong to this category:

bám bam	<i>very beautiful</i>
chá chá	<i>very new</i>
dì m dìm	<i>sound of a bass guitar</i>

magomágó	dribbling dishonest act
smèsme	unstable, neither here nor there

Technical terms

Just as with other languages, there are technical terms which need to be translated in line with lexical processes in Naija. For example, in the NPLBTP concepts such as resurrection, eternal life, disciple, Son of Man, Son of God etc will require more than word for word lexical equivalents in order to convey meaning. The process of composition appears to be more appropriate, and the following is a suggested application guide:

Step I: determine the meaning

resurrection : ‘to rise from the dead’

Step II: find semantic equivalents in Naija

getop rise/get up

fròm preposition

dai dead

Step III: test new word

getop fròm dai: *resurrection*

To derive the term *disciple* in Naija, NPLBTP has applied the process of composition to derive **pipul we de len an foḷo Jesus**. It is not certain if other possibilities such as lexical equivalents already existing in Naija were considered. For instance, the term **folo-folo** meaning ‘one who follows’, is a possible alternative. Other examples include the translation of the term *Son of God* as **God im Sòn** instead of **God im Pikin**.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the processes discussed above are quite productive in Naija. The question is how the processes should be applied to creating new words, and to avoid inconsistencies in Naija vocabulary. The following is a suggested guide:

1. Existing lexical items should always be the first source
2. Conveying intended meaning should be the goal
3. Where there is no existing word, the choice of derivational process to adopt should be determined by the kind of word or concept to be derived. For example, a technical concept, if derived through the process of borrowing directly from English or one of the substrate languages, may not convey meaning.

4. There must be consistency in the application of any of the processes.
5. Recommended orthographic principles of writing in Naija should be adhered to. For example, affixes and their roots, should be written as one word. However, a compound word made up of two nouns of different syntactic categories should be hyphenated. Thus, hyphens between nouns and their plural markers are redundant and therefore unnecessary.

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