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# Cultural Influences as Inputs of Development of Naija Language

C. Ailende ATIVIE  
Department of Political Science/General Studies Unit  
Novena University, Ogume  
Delta State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study projects, as its objective, the description of the new function and the linguistic properties of Nigeria Pidgin, now referred to as Naija language or simply Naija. It enacts the model of linguistic nativization of the English language in Nigeria as presented by Ayo Bamgbose (1995); a model which this essay adapts as framework to investigate the burgeoning sociolinguistic situation of the Naija language in both lexico-semantic and pragmatic usages. The study shows how these presently undergo changes to accommodate, in the framework, the various cultural inputs of Naija spoken around the country with a brief history of the spread of the language in Nigeria. It therefore prescribes a uniform Naija as a desideratum for national integration since the language performs multiple roles for various citizens in present-day Nigerian speech community.

## 1. Introduction

The Nigeria Pidgin, heretofore referred to as Naija language or Naija, and its variant Pidgins the world over, rose from contact situations and are referred to as trade, minimal or auxiliary languages –so called because, although they have no native speakers, they “fulfil certain restricted communication needs among peoples who have no common language” (Todd, 1984). So much has been discussed, in the literature, of the emergence of Pidgins around the world; in West Africa and, of course, in Nigeria as a language of contact between the multilingual coastal communities of Nigeria and the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and then, the English traders to the West African coasts. This gave rise to the English-based pidgin in Nigeria which is a variation of English produced by contact. As appraised, this language has had to grow from a rudimentary speech form to an elaborate one, aided initially by gestures among peoples who had no common language but who did make imperfect attempts at communicating in one of the others’ languages (see Elugbe and Omamor, 1991). Naija, as a language, has since developed from a *debased* or *makeshift* or *minimal* language (since the conditions which gave rise to it have ceased to exist) into a fully crystallized and expanded language, spoken around the country today. It has transited, over the decades, as Bickerton (1981) rightly affirms, from a minimal pidgin through a stabilized pidgin onto an expanded pidgin, and now to becoming a Creole or an evolved language shift of a more developed and expanded pidgin lingua franca, in parts of the Niger Delta involving people of dissimilar cultural linguistic backgrounds.

The function of this paper is to describe the burgeoning sociolinguistic situation of the Naija language, as we attempt to pigeon-hole the inherent semantic and pragmatic usage of the language, arising from substrate influences which derive from the various Nigerian local language cultures. It speaks volumes of a ready acceptance of the new form of the Naija language which signals a readiness for national integration in Nigeria despite obvious sociocultural and linguistic differences countrywide.

## 2. Origins and development of Naija

The English based Naija language has been in the country for upwards of five hundred years now, especially in the Niger Delta where it was initially cultured. A school of thought, the Monogenetic theorists<sup>1</sup>, contrary to the Polygenetics, believes that Naija developed from contact, resulting from massive voyages embarked upon by the Portuguese who spoke the language with the African in their quest for trade around the fifteenth century. The opinion holds that when the Portuguese departed, they abandoned some of the vocabulary for the English in their first coming, and then the Dutch, both of whom came separately around the sixteenth century. As these groups departed, they also handed down some of the vocabulary to the French in their brief expedition, following which much of it was picked up again by the English who used them in their second coming from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Many critics of the language argue that Naija originated as a result of contact between European traders who came, sailing along the West African coast and met the peoples in the region of the lower Niger tributaries. According to Bediako (2001):

*The Portuguese were the first Europeans who traded pepper and slaves from the Nigerian coastal area. They first arrived in Benin [City, Nigeria] at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. From the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, the British took over as major trading partners (5).*

As trade in slaves was subsequently abolished at the beginning of the nineteenth century, British interest shifted to agricultural production in which they had much contact with the “Nigerian” local population. Evidence abounds of materials found in original manuscript sources of trade voyages between Europe and Africa from the fifteenth to nineteenth century which lie presently in archives and printed sources in London, Paris, Rome, Lisbon and The Hague. This body of evidence, in their ontological state, attests to the fact of Naija language use in Benin kingdom and along the trading coast of West Africa up to the Bight of Benin, and a little way hinterland (See Allan Ryder’s Appendix, 1977). Jowitt (1999) asserts that at this time, “Pidgin served as a language of trade for communication between English men and Nigerians living along the Nigerian coast, and like pidgins elsewhere, was useful because it could be learnt quite easily by both races” (13) who had no common language. Rightly put, therefore, Naija could be said to be “a variety of language which developed for some practical purpose such as trading among groups of people who had a lot of contact but who did not know each other’s languages” (Yule 1997).

Until recent as the 1980s when Naija began to gain greater significance all around the country, it had remained basically a trade language among communities or among people who do not speak each other’s languages. This is besides the consideration hitherto that Naija was the language used by people of little or no education and generally, the language of those with lower social economic status which gave it the semblance of a stigmatized language. For this reason, Naija was repudiated by the educated elite in Nigeria for so long. And for that length of time, linguists in Nigeria did pay little or no attention to

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<sup>1</sup> Global discussion topic: *The Extinction of African Languages* on BBC Radio Programme, *Africa Have Your Say*, in London, Wednesday, January 4, 2006.

the language which is why it lacked, until latterly, a standard (written) model because it is learned informally. Yuka (2001) argues:

*It is formally acquired in the streets, in the neighbourhood and at home, in contrast to either English or French that is in each case formally learnt in school (147).*

By this very fact, Naija had no fixed convention of orthography; no standardization, until the birth of the Naija Languaj Akẹdẹmi (NLA)<sup>2</sup>, a school which seeks to develop and to defend the Naija language. Prior to founding the Academy, some critics of Naija did note: "It appears as if in order to speak NP [Nigeria Pidgin], many people take English as the beginning point, break a few rules of English grammar and insert some NP words at the appropriate positions" (Egbokhare 2001). It is, therefore, "quite common for many writers of NP to use anglicized spelling characterized by the writing of most Nigeria Pidgin words exactly as in English, altering only a few words" (Elugbe 290). Indeed, Naija became stabilized somewhat when it began to acquire certain norms of meaning, pronunciation and grammar with variation, though, resulting from the transfer of features from speakers' first languages (Holm, 1988). Arising from the twin factor of time and broadening of contact between the peoples of Nigeria and migrants into the country, Naija gained a forward leap in its development and growth to assume an expanded or extended proportion of use especially in the Southern parts of the country. Emanating from this form of language today are noticeably the Eastern Delta and the Western Delta varieties of Naija language spoken in the environs of Port-Harcourt, Calabar, Uyo, Brass on the one hand, and in the environs of Warri, Sapele, Uvwie and Benin on the other hand, with a tendency of creolizing in these regions.

Of the ethnolinguistic situation in the country, Michael Crowder (1978) writes:

*Nigeria today is inhabited by a large number of ethnolinguistic groups ranging in size from a few thousand to many million, speaking between them several hundred languages...classified into a number of linguistic groups which give a fairly good indication of their wider cultural affiliations (13).*

This diversity of linguistic groups in Nigeria in the past tended to create some medley in the Naija (lexico-semantic and pragmatic) usage amongst the older generation of users of the language in the country. But such diversity of usage, today, in some sense, enriches, to a large extent, the lexicon of the language which is enhanced by the many new words and expressions from the majority and minority languages, as could be used in combination even in a single sentence by the younger generation of speakers of the new wave Naija language. And because the language is fast spreading in the multicultural and multilingual society of Nigeria at large, different dialects of the language abound with as many local varieties or sociolects as there are major speech communities that have adopted the use of the language ranging from one geographical location to another. In other words, Naija is heavily influenced by substrate or underlying and nurture pressure languages in lexis, phonology, syntax and semantics although, essentially, it is English lexified; a language from which it derives its superstrate or

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<sup>2</sup> For the NLA standard orthography, see section 4.0 ff. of David Esizimotor's *What Orthography for Naija?*, 2010 [in this volume of publication.

exterior and outlying influence. Thus, the lexical, phonological, syntactic and semantic meanings that derive from Naija language rely heavily on the languages and cultures of the host regions or communities where it is spoken. See, for instance, the following Naija expressions:

**(1) Ọdiọ́n na di rat we de put hol fọ́ pọ́t.**

It means “Ọdiọ́n is the rat that drills a hole into a cooking pot”. Semantically, this statement presupposes that “Ọdiọ́n is a traitor or a sell-out”. This is one example of cultural influence which bears from the Edo language of the Niger-Delta region onto Naija. Consider yet another Naija language expression:

**(2) Ọmọ̀nigho tek shem chọp winch.**

This is a direct translation from the Edo/Delta cultural languages which denotes that Ọmọ̀nigho ingested witchcraft willy-nilly [for being too shy to turn down the offer in order not to offend the giver]. The semantic connotation here is that Ọmọ̀nigho agreed to terms and conditions that were not agreeable with her, or that she acquiesced regardless. Again, the following example of a sentence drawn from the Igbo culture reveals the lexical items that have found their way into Naija language:

**(3) Nwokem, im sabi se mi a nọ́ gri kọ́mọ́t hand fọ́ di sek of se dis wan na chacha.**

This statement is interpreted to mean: “My man, he knew I couldn’t be persuaded to withdraw for, as you are aware, this particular one is brand new”. In pronunciation, we could have a Naija sound variety that derives, for instance, from a Hausa phonological interference thus:

**(4) Luk mai prọ́nd, mek yu fut mọ́r epọ́rt pọ́r diz viznes, d’Allah.**

When interpreted, this statement would read: “Look my friend, you need to put more effort into this business, I beg of you”. Now, consider the Naija expression:

**(5) Shebi a dọ́n kuku tọ́k am befọ́ befọ́ se dis fud nọ́ gud fọ́ mai beḷe at ọ́l’.**

Here, the meaning of the Yoruba-interfered Naija expression is: “I did mention before now that this sort of meal is not agreeable with my system of digestion”.

In spite of the different cultures and contexts from which the examples above draw, each of the sentences is intelligible to the average user of Naija around the country today. The individual examples above notwithstanding, each of the Edo/Delta, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages draws phonological, semantic, lexical and mostly, syntactic interference from their local culture into Naija. Because the Naija language is expanding, it is characterized by a noticeable increase in the number of its vocabulary items. Elugbe and Omamor observe that as the language rises to cope with all kinds of ideas, a certain convergence between it and the English language becomes inevitable. As Naija is called upon to handle subjects that it had not hitherto handled, lexical items from English or other contact languages are bound to be borrowed, and new coinages and loan translations are bound to be induced by such contact in which case, lexical items from substratum or outcrop and nurture influence languages find their way into the lexical inventory of the language as seen in the examples above. In the new age of Naija language usage, therefore, it will not be out of place to hear a speaker from any part of the country,

especially from the southern parts, where the language has expanded, do code-mix an expression such as the following, and still remain quite intelligible:

(6) **Shoo-o! na whish kain yawa bi dis? A de waka mai onu jeje yu jos kol mi kom de tok sme sme! Abi na bikos yu jos wan gbeghe mi?! A beg, mek yu waka yo onu; Oya, de go; mi, a no wan wahala-o!**

Now to pick out the culturally interfering lexical items and attempt an explanation of each, we have:

- **shoo-o** – exclamation of Delta State origin which could mean *what?! or why?!*
- **yawa** – slang of Hausa origin which could mean *nonsense or rubbish or calamity*.
- **jeje** – word of Yoruba origin meaning *gently or to mind one's own business*
- **sme sme** – slang of Edo expression which means *nonsense*
- **abi** – word of Yoruba expression meaning *or/is it that...?/not so?*
- **gbeghe** – slang of Delta expression which means *to quake or to destabilize*
- **oya** – word of Yoruba origin meaning *now or right away*
- **wahala** – word of Hausa origin meaning *trouble*
- **chacha** – slang of Igbo expression meaning brand new.

Essentially, example text (6), is an admixture of both the pidginized variety (a low quality variety of basilectal or little/no education usage) and the creolizing variety (a medium-high level quality variety of mesolectal and sophistication usage) of the varieties of Naija including slangs which, when interpreted, will mean

*“Why?! What sort of rubbish is this? You did not have to come to tell me nonsense even as I mind my business. Or, are you out on purpose to destabilize me? Please find your way, and be on the move; now, and count me out of trouble, okay?!”*

Consequently, the Naija language has come to accommodate loan words from the various Nigerian regional languages and cultures (plus slangs used for ease of social interaction and to enrich the language [Burke 2000]) in spite of which users of Naija are very comfortable with the synchronic system of the language i.e., the grammar, the phonology and the vocabulary. In consequence, the Nigerian local languages/Naija language code-mixing involves the retention of the local language syntax and the insertion into this syntax of words and phrases of Naija expressions and slangs. Seen from the examples above, modern speakers of Naija tend to use the language much like Nigerian English (its superstratum or language of exterior and outlying influence)

*“... along lines more familiar in their first languages; or may define words differently (e.g. go-slow for traffic jam); or they may adopt words to give them wider grammatical scope (e.g. enjoy, used without an object; or on, off, proud used as verbs) etc.” (Odumuh, 1993).*

In this respect, Naija has become, for most of its users, a language of cognition.

Generally speaking, Naija language usage in many parts of the country falls between the acrolectal sociolect (i.e., a Naija speech form which, in its features, is closest to the language of its superstratum or outlying influence (English) as a result of massive interference from the latter language) and the basilectal sociolect (i.e., a much low quality Naija variety used by people with little or no education) of which Faraclas (1996) speaks. Indeed, Faraclas identifies three sociolects, in which addition to the two lects above, he contends that the third, the mesolectal Naija (i.e., a medium-high language developed to a level of sophistication by speakers with higher levels of education) is the creolizing variety in the Niger-Delta; for while the acrolectal or decreolized Naija draws much superstratum or outlying influence from Nigerian English used mainly by literary artists, the basilectal or pidginized variety draws significant substratum or base origin and underlying influences from Nigerian local languages. This variety is used in markets and motor parks located in other geo-political zones of the country besides the Niger Delta region.

Although much of Naija also draws influence from the local regional dialects where it is spoken, pressure from cultural practices of the environment in Nigeria is modifying on the use of Naija language overall. Despite the fact that Naija, as initially observed, had no native speakers, but at the moment, the language finds *nativity*, as it were, amongst its present-day users whose various regional language backgrounds serve the cultural inputs which, to a large extent, influence the positive development of the language in our day. Thus Naija, like its mother variety, the Nigerian English, could be said to be transiting through a like-process of nativization via influences of language cultures. Cultural influence, therefore, is part of the development of Naija which involves introducing into the language new concepts, values and modes of interactions as a reflection of the Nigerian regional cultures. This, Bamgbose (1995) says, could be matched by the adoption of certain ways of life which relate to modes of dressing, food, religion, trees, musical instruments, titles, etc. The result is a transfer of patterns from the first or regional language of the speaker into phonological, lexical, semantic and syntactic patterns of the second language as with Naija nowadays. Furthermore, Bamgbose speaks of the new *form* “not limited to the usual features of transfer of phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic patterns ... (but) also concerned with the creative development of ... [a language] including the evolution of distinctively Nigerian usage, attitudes and pragmatic use of the language” (21). He identified three aspects of the process of development viz: the linguistic, the pragmatic and the creative development which Udofot (2003) re-branded the linguistic, the lexico-semantic and the morpho-semantic features respectively.

To examine these features in present-day Naija, we will take some example texts from the short stories in *Skeletons* (2000) written by Sam Ukala, as we consider the Naija text below; an illustration of modern inter-comprehensible Naija language which dots usage around the country, though with acrolectal (i.e., decreolized or depidginized with massive influence from English) features. The main text below is immediately followed by the NLA recommended transcription and then, an English translation.

Main Text

**You bi good man, ‘Tosin. You bi good man. But you bi foolish man too. Proper foolish man. You go de help Govment de fight crime. We Nigerians no de like such person. We de call am mumu, olodo, okpe, or ewu. We go se ‘e no go better lai lai. Even Govment no de like am. Daz why you dey here. And everybody fit forget you for here... Na people like us Govment like. No**

be guardroom I dey here-o. Na rest house. Na my arrangement with D.P.O. be dat. If I succeed with better operation, I go go meet D.P.O. – yes, Divisional Police Officer – and give am his share. Den he go put me and my boys for Rest House. Na my boys you de hear de laugh for di next room so. D.P.O. go put us for here. Den he go send C.I.D. go dey look for us for town. Wen dem tire, D.P.O. go recall dem, and we go check out of Rest House. D.P.O. no bi Govment? Oh-ho! .... I know se you bi taffia, talku-talku mouth. Na him make you go tell Govment se you see person dey sell human body parts. But look....You know sey I fit burst your troat like dat? ... Just to show you how I go burst your life if you taffia this tin wey I tell you now to anybody. (Taken from “Money, Guns and Justice”, a short story in Sam Ukala’s Skeletons (2000)).

#### NLA Translation

Yu bi gud man, ‘Tosin. Yu bi gud man. Bọt yu bi fulish man tu. Prọpa fulish man. Yu go de hẹp gọvment de fait krait. Wi Naijerians nọ de laik sọch pẹsin. Wi de kọl am mumu, olodo, okpe ọr ewu. Wi go se i nọ go bẹta lai lai. Ivun gọvment nọ de laik am. Das wai yu de hiẹ. An ẹvribọdi fit fọgẹt yu fọ hiẹ... Na pipul laik ọs gọvment laik. Nọ bi gadrum a de hiẹ-o. Na rẹst haus. Na mai arenjment wit DPO bi dat. If a sọksid wit bẹta ọpreshon, a go gọ mit DPO – yẹs Divishona Polis ọfisa – an giv am im shẹ. Dẹn i go put mi an mai bọis fọ rẹst haus. Na mai bọis yu de hiẹ de laf fọ di nẹst rum so. DPO go put ọs fọ hiẹ. Dẹn i go sẹn CID go de luk fọ ọs fọ taun. Wẹn dẹm taya, DPO go rikọl dẹm, an wi go chẹk aut ọf rẹst haus. DPO nọ bi gọvment? O-ho! ... A no se yu bi tafia, tọk tọk maut. Na im mek yu go tẹl gọvment se yu si pẹsin de sẹl human bọdi pats. Bọt luk ... Yu no se a fit bọst yọ trot laik dat? ... Jọs tu sho yu hau a go bọst yọ laif if yu tafia dis tin we a tẹl yu nau tu ẹnibọdi.

#### English Translation

You are a good man, ‘Tosin. Certainly, you are! But you are foolish all the same. A real fool you are! You were helping the authorities to fight crime?! We Nigerians do not like such a patriot. We often refer to such a do-gooder as stupid, a dunce, unthinking or, even call him a goat! And we believe such a person will never ever prosper. Even the authorities loathe such a character, which is the real reason you are locked in here. And, you could rot in here, you know ...? You see, the authorities only like my kind of person. To be certain, I’m not in a guardroom here. For me, this place is a Rest House. It is my private arrangement with the DPO for sure. If I succeed with a good operation, all I do is- go to the DPO – yes the Divisional Police Officer – and give him his own *cut* then, of course, he brings my boys and me into the Rest House. Those are my boys whose orgies you hear so from the next room. The DPO keeps us here, and then he delegates some officers from the CID unit to *trail and crackdown* on us in town. When eventually the team makes no headway and is left frustrated in its investigation, the DPO recalls them and pop, out we go! We check out of the Rest House. Now, you tell me ... Isn’t the DPO a part of the authorities ...? There you are! Well, I know you are a talkative and a tale bearer which was why, in the first instance, you alerted the authorities by telling them that you saw someone who was selling human body parts. Look here ... You know I

**could burst your throat like this ...? That's only a prelude to show you how I shall waste your life away if you dare reveal my secret to anyone.**

It must be re-emphasized here that although Naija had had no standard written form, writers who attempted to codify the language devised individual orthography which was personal to their writing, as demonstrated in the main text above. They produced a confusing spectrum of spellings, combining the English non-phonemic orthography with individually devised phonemic orthographies, sometimes of same words with different spellings, more often than not, within the same text. The pattern portrays mixed orthographies of the Early and of the Press conventions that lack clear rules regarding the choice of alphabetic symbols which represent distinct speech sounds. Thus, there has been, and still is, an orthographic deficiency that is common to individual writings as seen in the main text, as a result of regular writing of English, even though this example of spoken Naija is the type which hardly betrays a speaker's cultural identity, besides the consideration of phonological features which cannot be determined intra-textually in the illustration.

### **3. Linguistic features of Naija**

Pidgin languages are real, and they are used for serious purposes that have describable and distinctive linguistic structures (Janet Holmes, 1992). The English related pidgins in use in the present day "are characterized by an absence of any complex grammatical morphology and a limited vocabulary" (George Yule, 234). Southerland and Katamba (1996:512) observe that pidgins "usually present a syntactic structure that is comparatively simple and they exhibit certain characteristic relationships to their source languages. They normally reflect the influence of their higher status (or dominant) languages in their lexicon and that of the lower status language in their phonology (and occasionally syntax)". It must be stated clearly here that besides the ancestor language influences on the West African pidgins, English supplied more of the vocabulary to Naija while the Nigerian local languages have more influence on the grammar of the language which tend to have a simplified structure in its morphology, phonology and syntax unlike the English system which has inflections for gender, number and person on the noun and tense, and verb negation, et cetera. Reflecting on this, therefore, is the fact that users of Naija language often express themselves in words and sentences that have certain peculiarities of grammar and meanings which bear carry-over effects from their cultural ways of speaking onto Naija. Such ways are now being adopted by other speakers from the other regions of the country, in addition to their own modes of speech –all to complement the new form of Naija usage. Consequently, a new mode of Naija language speech is gradually emerging among its speakers in general with some features that remain peculiar to the language overall, seen in the following sub-headings.

#### **3.1. Phonological features**

A handful of scholars, in the literature, have examined the phonological features of Naija. They believe its sound system is simple and have pointed out the fact that the Naija system has almost entirely eliminated the elaborate system of English (cf. Elugbe and Omamor 1995; Faraclas 1996; Mafeni 1971). These scholars, among others, have highlighted the main differences as a result of the different systems. A general trend in the segmental and non-segmental features and functions of Naija can be discerned in the following sound patterns from their English language guide which but record some phonological peculiarities in the language:

### 3.1.1. Segmental features

Far more than the English language, Naija uses fewer of segmental features, i.e., vowels and consonants, and these features show tendencies of approximation or near equivalents in Naija from English language pronunciations as in the following:

#### Consonants

As speech sounds produced by partly or totally blocking the path of air through the mouth, Naija sounds are involved in the substitution of the symbols of consonants of the speaker's first or regional language to replace, for example, the voiced and voiceless dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ with the voiced and voiceless alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ as in **dat** for *that* and **tin** for *thing*. This pattern is also repeated with the velar nasal /ŋ/ sound which is replaced by the alveolar nasal /n/ sound such as /nɔθŋ/ which is pronounced [**notin**] in Naija language. The voiced and voiceless post-alveolar affricate sound /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ are replaced by the voiced and voiceless post-alveolar fricative sounds /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, as in the pronunciation of "church" /tʃə:tʃ/ which in Naija is often pronounced "**chɔch**" [ʃɔ]. This is also true of "judge" /dʒʌdʒ/ which is pronounced "**joj**" /ɔʒ/ in Naija, etc. Generally speaking, there is a transfer in the use of digraphs, of the "labial-velar" plosives /kp/ as in "**kpɛle**", as well as in the bilabial plosive and velar affricate sounds /gb/ and /gh/ respectively, both in the example word "**gbeghe**", etc. from the stock of consonant sounds of the Nigerian speakers' first languages into Naija as could be located on the Naija consonant chart (Table 1) below. This also applies to the nasal sound /ɲ/, which is realized in the palato-alveolar region in the words "**nyanga**" and "**nyanfun nyanfun**", etc. This sound is different from the English alveolar nasal sound /ŋ/ which is equally functional in Naija, seen with other (Naija) sounds in Table 1 below.

p b	t d	(tʃ) dʒ	k g	kp gb
	f v	s z	(ʒ)	
m	n	(ɲ)	ŋ	(ŋw)
	l			
r	j	[ɣ]		w h

Table 1: Phonemic Consonants of Naija

p b	t d		k g
		tʃ dʒ	
f v	θ ð	ʃ ʒ	(x) h
m	n		ŋ
	l		
w		r j	

Table 2: Phonemic Consonants of English

It must be mentioned here that Elugbe and Omamor postulated some twenty-five phonetic consonant sounds of Naija, used in the Niger Delta and parts of Southern Nigeria; seen in the data provided by Mafeni (1971) and Oyebade (1983), while the authors consider the sounds to be mostly influenced by substrate or base origin languages of Naija. Elugbe and Omamor contend that in all of the sounds in Table 1, "four are of a doubtful status and are thus placed in parenthesis" (79). Nonetheless, this researcher believes that a twenty-sixth consonant, the /ɣ/ sound (written /gh/ in the orthography), though not a phoneme of frequent use in Naija, has only recently indeed made a recognizable debut into the language because of its constant use by the youthful Western Niger Delta speakers of the slang and verb form "gbeghe" from which the /ɣ/ sound derives, represented in square brackets in Table 1 above. This phoneme symbol represents one important describable sound which linguists and

proponents of Naija have hardly considered in the development of the language. It is a voiced fricative sound produced in the velum region. To be certain, /ɣ/ occurs mostly in proper nouns such as “**Ɔmɔnigho**”, “**Oseghale**”, “**Aghoghɔ**”, “**Aghɛdosa**”, “**Oghara**”, “**Aghalokpe**”, etc. and in other word classes of the substrate languages from which Naija draws significant influence. Therefore, the sound will and does function as an essential aspect of the phonological system of Naija which has its roots in a handful Niger-Delta substrate and lower status languages into the Naija consonant system, and should be rightfully accounted for on the Naija consonant chart to cater for such proper nouns, etcetera. Another innovation is the example of a consonant used in the local language-dominated Naija is the sound /ɲw/. This sound is used in the realization of the word “**ngwa**” (now/ok), a variant of “**ɔdinma**” in the Igbo cultural language which has found its entrance into the Naija language expression.

Again, we find in Naija, the omission of consonant sounds before vowels (and sometimes vowel sounds before consonants) like ‘**im** instead of *him*, and ‘**e** for *i* instead of *he* (or *she*) and **tafficator** [**tafiketɔ**] instead of *trafficator* (a Nigerian English neologism and corrupt form of the native English words “traffic indicator”) in the sentence “... *But dem go lef di body, di chassis and di plate number make di owner take identify ‘im motor wen ‘e return*” [“... *Bɔt dem go lef di bɔdi, chasi an di plet nɔmba mek di ona tek adɛntifai im mɔtɔ wɛn i ritɔn*”] (*Skeletons* 63). This example can also be found in the sentence “... *if na rear lamp, dem go take am, tafficator-o, mirror-o, ...*”, [“... *if na riɛ lamp, dem go tek am, tafiketɔ-o, mirɔ-o, ...*”] (*Skeletons* 63) as well as in “*You dey help Govment fight crime*” [Yu dɛ hɛp gɔvmɛnt fait kraim”] (*Skeletons* 70). Notice, however, that it is only in the plosive sounds, i.e., the bilabial /p b/, the alveolar /t d/ and the velar /k g/ sounds, as well as in the labio-dental fricative /f v/ sounds in which we find equivalence in the pronunciation of Naija and English sounds. Also to be found in Naija is the insertion of vowel sounds into consonant clusters in, for instance, the word “strike” /straik/ which speakers sometime pronounce as **sitiraiki**, and “straight” as **sitiret**, etc. Yet again we notice the devoicing of final consonants in words like **bɔis** (boys) unlike what obtains in English where the final consonant is voiced in [bɔiz].

### Vowels

These are speech sounds produced by the passage of air through the vocal tract with relatively little obstruction. It has been established that a stabilized variety, like the Naija language, is made up of five short *vowel* sounds. With the extended or expanded sociolect of Naija spoken in the Niger Delta, two additional vowels are added to give the following seven vowel sounds overall: /i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u/ as represented in Table 3 below. It contrasts in its simplicity with the twelve English vowels in Table 4.

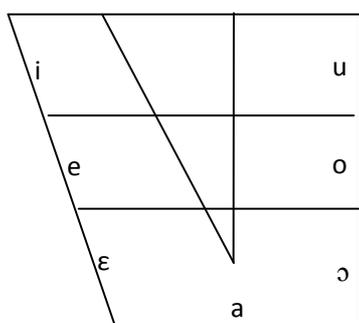


Table 3: Phonemic Vowels of Naija

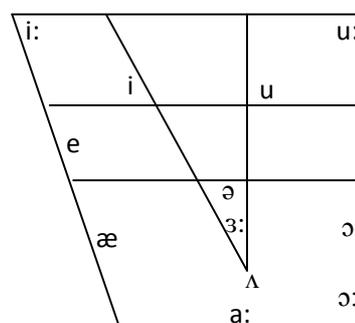


Table 4: Phonemic Vowels of English

Consequently, we notice from the charts above that vowels in Naija are essentially of short length. In other words, vowel length is not distinctive in the language. However, in Naija, the length feature is replaced by the +/- ATR feature, opposing  $\epsilon/e$  and  $\text{ɔ}/o$  (resp  $\text{e}/e$  and  $\text{ɔ}/o$  in orthography). Minimally, the Naija vowels can co-occur freely to form a set of diphthongs in the language such as the **ɔi**, **au** and **ai** sound sequence in **bɔi** (boy), **shaut** (shout) and **mai** (my) respectively. Through the Naija vowel sounds, speakers of the language around the country maximally realize the Monophthongisation of diphthongs and triphthongs. Being two-in-one (diphthong) and three-in-one (triphthong) sounds respectively with an articulation which involves a glide from one sound to another conventional with English, for instance, Mafeni (1971) is of the opinion that diphthongs [like triphthongs] in Naija language are realized as vowels plus approximant sequences. Naija does not have the basic English diphthongs like the  $/\text{əu}/$ ,  $/\text{uə}/$  and  $/\text{ei}/$  as a result of its different system. This is also true of the English triphthong sounds like  $/\text{aiə}/$  and  $/\text{auə}/$  which are not used in the language. This is why a diphthong in English such as “take”  $/\text{teik}/$  will be pronounced **tek** in Naija, and an English triphthong as “tyre”  $/\text{taiə}/$  will be **taya** in such sentence as “... **if na tyre dem like, dem go don take am, ...**” [“... if na taya dem laik, dem go don tek am, ...”] (*Skeletons* 63). Further examples can be cited in such English diphthong sound in “away”  $/\text{əwei}/$  for instance which, in Naija, is often pronounced **awe**, as certainly the triphthong in “power”  $/\text{pauə}/$  which is pronounced **pawa**.

### 3.1.2. Non-segmental features

Essentially, the non-segmental features of a language account for the or stress, tone and intonation functions within a language. The Naija language, it must be stated, is tonal like most African languages with high and low distinctions. It is at the same time syllable-timed. Indeed, Mafeni (1971) and Oyebade (1983) have shown that tones are used in Naija to distinguish between the lexical and grammatical meanings in a significant number of minimal pairs. In addition to this, the South Western variety spoken in Warri, Sapele and Uvwie has some distinctive intonation with varied speakers, some of whom use the language as mother tongue. Thus, Oyebade above argues that Naija is a “pitch accent language” where “both the tonal and the intonational pitch systems have become ... intertwined” (71). Certainly, Elugbe and Omamor (84ff.) contest this, and would rather describe Naija as a pitch-accent language strictly; syllable-timed but never a tone language.

Characteristically, the West African Pidgins, of which Naija is a branch, usually have tone systems as a result of the west coast substratum or lower status language influences of the Niger-Congo language family which are typically tonal (with the exception of Swahili) and affects pidgins in the region (see Aleksandra Steinbergs, 403). It must be emphasized here that tonal distinctions of the substratum or substrate languages in some instances are simplified in the Naija language with some speakers – predictably the Ijaw group– stressing a vowel sound at the end of a word, tone or no tone! Though it is known that tone languages do not change the pitch levels or contours on tones to mark stress, but a pattern which is similar to that apparently occurs with speakers when there is a relative prominence of speech, marked by exaggerating the vowel length or pitch contour; an adjunction for emphasis, or simply a mannerism of speech(?), seen below in exemplification of an expression of a suitor, for instance, who addresses his would-be father-in-law.

**Papá-è, dat dé a de kòm wit mai pápa-é!** (Father, I shall be here on that day with my aged father!)

Besides the “papá/pápa” and “dé/de” tonal distinctions in the sentence, the two vowels that are prominent by the combined effect of a significant pitch and loudness, are /è/ and /é/ sounds, the result of which are syllabic-end segment prominence of the high-low *papá-è* and the low-high *pápa-é* tones. Indeed, these vowel end-segment prominence sounds, i.e., the /è/ and /é/ sounds, seemingly emphasize length from the tone words *papá* and *pápa* (despite the language’s syllable-timed nature) to give a unique intonation to the variety of Naija spoken by many in the region of the Niger-Delta. Besides other characteristics, we notice the relocation of stress in the production of sounds in Naija words like **prɔ́pa**, the equivalence of the English word “proper” which a speaker of English would rather pronounce [ˈprɒpə]; **bɛ́ta**, the equivalence of “better” which the same speaker of English would prefer to pronounce [ˈbetə]. This much goes for the Naija word **gad’rum**, whose pronunciation in English is [ˈga:dru:m], etc.

Besides other characteristics, we notice the relocation of stress on syllables by accent in the production of sounds in Naija words like **prɔ́pa**,

### 3.2. Lexical features

Because the Naija language is English-related, most of its vocabulary, and by extension, its word pronunciations tend to sound like English, its *higher* lexifier language. By this very fact, the outlying influence of Naija is, indeed, English while the language has, as its substratum and underlying influence, the Nigerian local languages. Without a doubt, much of its earlier vocabulary derives from the remnants of the ancestor languages of the nucleus pidgin –Portuguese, Dutch, and actually, a few from Spanish and French, most of which were handed down to the English in their first and second comings for trading and missionary purposes (see *Benin and the Europeans 1485 to 1897*, 1977. And such words, from the aforementioned Western European languages of higher status influence on West African pidgins became relexified and sometime, had their meanings extended : **pikin** (Portuguese, *pequeno*), small one/child; **hala** (French, *holloer*), holler/yell/shout; **sabi** (Portuguese, *saber*; Spanish, *sabe*), savvy/know/practical knowledge; **vɛks** (French, *vexer*), vex/angry; **palava** (Portuguese, *palavra*), speech/trouble; **bɔku** (French, *beaucoup*), many/plentiful/abundance, etc. These, and many more, have been retained in present-day Naija lexicon and usage. Added to this is the borrowing/translation/creation from the Nigerian indigenous languages which beefs up the vocabulary of the language to give it new domains of use. Besides the earlier examples provided in section two above, such loan-creation from the Nigerian indigenous languages which have not by themselves experienced morphological changes nor relexification like their Western European language counterpart examples above, includes local words like **yanga** (Hausa), pride/vanity; **wɔwɔ** (Edo/Delta), ugly/unattractive; **ɔga** (Yoruba), boss/master; **isi-ewu** (Igbo), goat-head delicacy; **agbero** (Yoruba), motor-park tout/uncouth; **wayo** (Hausa), trick/deceit; **shakara** (Yoruba), show-off/bravado; **tatafo** (Edo/Delta), gossip/tell-tale; **jɔɔ** (Yoruba), I beg of you/please, etc. all serving to enrich the lexicon of the Naija language. (To emphasize, these words have not been relexified, nor have they gone through any form of morphological changes from their conventional root meanings. Traditionally, some were slangs which now function beyond the colloquial. But at once, each serves as its own root word from the Nigerian local language where it derives). Again, we have examples of words, belonging to everyday register of food, dress, insult, interjections, titles, etc. as loan words into Naija emanating from different Nigerian language cultures from which further examples could be cited as follows:

- Food – (**ẹba, paundẹd yam, bush mit, suya, ẹgusi, amala** [*Skeleton:71*], **edikaikọn, tuo**, etc.)
- Dress – (**agbada, kaftan, rapa, buba, shokoto, danshiki**, etc.)
- Insult – (**mumu, olodo, okpe, ewu**, [*Skeleton:70*] **ọzuọ**, etc.)
- Interjection – (**haba!, ewo!, otio-o!, eiyah-h!**, etc.)
- Titles – (**Diọkpa, ọtunba, Ohẹlẹn, Ovie, ọnojie, Ojie, Sẹriki, ọdọfin**, etc.).

Certainly, the Naija language, like many languages in the world, at the moment, is a mixture composed of elements from foreign and many Nigerian local sources. This gives the language a unique character because going by the current tradition of lexicon expansion, Naija ceases to be a product of one clear historical evolution.

### 3.2.1. Lexico-semantic features

Though Naija has been characterized by the linguistic factors above, over the years, its lexical inventory has had to grow especially with the restricted and, of course, the extended sociolects to have large vocabulary items for self and/or communal expression(s) in Nigeria. Undeniably, speakers of Naija now device certain linguistic means to extend their limited vocabulary via lexico-semantic and pragmatic features arising from their mother tongue influence which is transferred into the language. Holm observes that through the processes of multifunctionality, polysemy and circumlocution, the lexicon of Naija and its global variants have been influenced by European and African lexical sources including morphological and semantic changes in the processes of lexical loaning/retention, coining, semantic shifts, reduplication and calquing. This, according to Faraclas (1996) includes, among others, compounding, prepositions, serialized verb constructions, ideophones, etc. Without a doubt, this gives a function to Naija. As well, it enhances its geographical spread and acceptance because of the sense of cognition inherent in the language.

Again, expressions that bear semantic extension of meanings can also be found in Naija usage most of which two base words or compound words are combined to form a coinage, or a new word with an extended meaning derived such as:

- **tiye-rọba** – brand new
- **si-finish** – to take for a ride
- **aduman-dubọdi** – a boomerang
- **gbagbati** – pugnacious
- **afta-wan** – a lady (especially a single parent) who has borne a child
- **tokunbọ/Belgium** – imported second-hand good
- **wuru wuru** – backhand business/corrupt(ion)
- **basket-maut** – a gossip
- **shap shap** – a quickie
- **pepe-ai** – transferred aggression
- **họt-drin(k) or họt** – spirit-liquor
- **kolo** – crazy/mad
- **tai-fes** – to bear creased brows when upset
- **waka-jugbe** – to roam aimlessly
- **skata laf** – to break into sudden laughter

- **pik res** – to break into a sudden race
- **swit-maut** – art of sophistry
- **bad-maut** – art of sarcasm
- **moluẹ** – large vehicular contraption used by commuters in the city of Lagos, Nigeria and hence something gigantic and/or decrepit.
- **hom-trọbo** – ill-luck orchestrated by the household enemy
- **bad-bẹlẹ** – inherent hatred and/or ill-tempered draw
- **marid-bachẹlọ** – a man who lives without his wife
- **kamkpe** – solid/strong
- **eria-bọi** – hoodlum/gangsterism
- **tanda** – to stand
- **kpẹmẹ/kpafuka/kaput** – die/death
- **jaga jaga** (a variant of **skata skata**) – disarray/reckless
- **tait-han** – tightfistedness
- **Bọn-trowe** – to be culturally severed from one’s own roots or culture, et cetera.

Note that the two base words or compound words in the examples above are fashioned out of the existing Naija reduplicatives such as **tọk tọk** (talkative), **bẹn bẹn** (crooked), **krai krai** (lachrymose), **tif tif** (theft/stealing), **kata kata** (catastrophe/crisis), etc.

### 3.3. Morpho-semantic features

Creative development or morpho-semantic expressions are found in the direct transfer of Nigerian local expressions into Naija, or expressions created into the language through morphological processes, having unique and clear-cut semantic implications from their traditional meanings. Certainly, there is a morphological process of a free morpheme or the base form of a (single) word that can stand on its own but which combines with another free morpheme to become two compound morphemes. Such two morphemes often come together to present a new coinage of a unique meaning, seen in some of the examples above such as: **aria + bọi = aria-bọi**, **swit + maut = swit-maut**, **pik + res = pik-res**, **skata + laf = skata-laf**, **tai + fes = tai-fes**, **bad + maut = bad-maut**, etc. Yet, Janet Holmes adds: “words generally do not have inflections, as in English, to mark the plural or to signal the tense of the verb” (91). Like most pidgins, therefore, the archetypal and correct Naija expressions contain structures which lack inflectional suffixes on nouns such that the possessive ‘s as well as the plural -s are not to be included in the structures, **di man haus** (i.e., ‘the man house’) to mean ‘the man’s house’ and **tri hankachif** (i.e., ‘three handkerchief’) to mean ‘three handkerchiefs’. And, finding a commonality with the pidgin of its origins, the Naija system of modal expressions, in their roots and inflected forms – shall/should, can/could, will/would, may/might – have but one simplified system of marking tense in the present continuous form: **[fit ...]** (or **[go fit ...]**; this latter form, obtained in some basilectal usages) to express possibility or necessity, used as paradigm for all of the modals. As a result of the use of Naija in spheres previously limited to English, Naija adopts words and expressions, as well as slangs which were, without a doubt, non-Naija until the introduction of such words and expressions into the language. An example is the loan creation, **Jizọs go kọm laik tif fọ nait** (Jesus will come like a thief in the night) and the coinage **Eseọghẹnẹ dọn bikọm marid-bachẹlọ** (Eseọghẹnẹ now lives without his wife), as well as the reduplication in **I de liv jagajaga laif** (He lives a reckless life) for the traditionally known Naija alternative,

**Nọ bi beta laif im de liv** (S/he doesn't live a good life). Besides reduplication, loan-creation and coinages, we find encrypted into the development processes of Naija, the multifunctionality influence of words and expressions which give such words/expressions a syntactic function of a shift in meaning from its traditional word class meaning as in the example: **A beğ, mek yu of dat redio**. (Please, do turn off that radio). Here, *off* has a traditional adverb function which takes on additional syntactic function of a verb in Naija though *turn* has encountered morphological deletion in the structure. Another example of a morphological process is seen in the use of a supposed ordinator "wan" (one) which rather serves as an article in the Naija expression "**A si wan [one] man fọ hię**", typical of usages in the Nigerian local languages. It is unlike what is generally heard in an English expression where "the" or "a" serves as articles in, for instance, "I saw a man here". Again, the Naija morphological process undertakes the use of the deictic *this* in place of a definite article *the* in **If yu si dis bọi, i tọl wẹl wẹl** to mean "If you should see the boy, you would realize how tall he really is!" et cetera. It is factual to say, therefore, that more often than not, whole Naija expressions are based on some underlying semantic expressions of the regional language of its speakers. Further examples of creative/morpho-semantic expressions in Naija usage will be found in the following expressions:

1. **Chif nọ sẹn ẹnibọdi at ọl at ọl!** (Chief doesn't care a hoot/Chief is apathetic)
2. **Shi sabi ęnta pęsin bọdi wẹl wẹl.** (She knows perfectly how to work her way into a person's heart)
3. **A beğ, a nọ fit dai.** (Oh no! I cannot work myself to death/bring myself to ruin)
4. **Odjugo dọn opun ai tiyę.** (Odjugo now has a sense of wisdom)
5. **Hm-m, yu dọn hama!** (Surely, you have hit a jackpot!)
6. **God dọn bọta mai bręd.** (Now, my prayers are answered)
7. **A beğ, mek yu nọ puọ san san fọ mai garri.** (Please don't [pour sand into my meal of garri] ruin my chances)
8. **Mek yu shain yọ ai wẹl wẹl** (be cautious/be vigilant/be wary)
9. **Dis wan na hẹlẹlẹ** (this is fantastic/wonderful)
10. **Na di ogbongę tin wẹ dę bi dat** (that is the main thing/the core issue involved)
11. **Im giv wuman bẹlẹ** (he made a woman pregnant)
12. **Bọdi de bait am** (he is edgy or he is on edge)
13. **Mai onu na to sidọn-luk** (mine is simply to sit and watch/... to show apathy)
14. **I de kari wuman wẹl wẹl** (he is a philanderer)
15. **Di nait wey ęnta yęstade mọnin** (two nights ago)
16. **Na so i kari chọch fọ hẹd** (he is given to fanaticism)
17. **I go no hau fa jus-nau jus-nau** (he would soon get to realize his folly/... get the real essence of)
18. **Di gẹl de kari du** (The girl is flirtatious)
19. **I na kọręt gai** (he is an understanding/a happy-go-lucky/admirable person)
20. **As di man tek supa-glu hol mọni fọ hand, na so Oyinbo de swit fọ 'im maut** (the man may be tight-fisted though, but he has a good command of the English language)
21. **I go tek hẹd waka** (He would be elated/ecstatic)
22. **Efe ai tu de shuk fọ mọni** (Efe is so money conscious)
23. **Yọ onu de yọ bọdi!** (Your own form of insanity is beginning to manifest),
24. **Dẹm dọn swẹr fọ ram** (S/he is bewitched/under a spell/... has been cursed, etc.

Again, we have in the development process, the use of polysemy – one word which has multiple meanings or many uses such as the word “fọ” which could be used to mean *near, under, by, in, inside, on*, etc. An example is seen in the following sentence: **Tolu dọn de ste fọ di eria te tè.** (Tolu has lived in the neighbourhood for long). Thus, polysemy also assures such Hausa influenced Naija expression which is phonologically realized as follows: **Mek yu tẹl am ọọ (fọ) mai brọda ọọ Legos se mi a go kọm ọọ Sallah ọọ dis** (Do tell my brother that I will be in Lagos for the Sallah celebration this month), convoluted in the example (Do tell [him[=for]] my brother that[=for] I will be in[= for] Lagos for[=for] the Sallah celebration [for=]this month). Notice that in spite of the basilectal or low quality usage of the Hausa phonologically interfered speech form inherent in this Naija expression, it is still quite intelligible to virtually all users of Naija in the country.

Calquing is another development process of loan word which, though derives its form and meaning from the Nigerian local language structure, is adapted phonologically into Naija. It is a translation of a productive mechanism for sentence formation typical in Naija usage. . Much like reduplication, its uses in the Naija/local language code-mixed example will include such regular words found within Naija sentences as **kpatakpata**=(Yoruba)=completely/at the most, **wallahi**=(Hausa)=I swear, **lai lai**=(Yoruba)=for life, **alele**=(Igbo)=be-on-the-move, **nkọ**=(Yoruba)=what about..., etc. An example of a modern Naija calquing, therefore, is **Ngwa, shẹ(bi) yu go kọm si mi kuma?.** **Ngwa**=(Igbo)=ok, **shẹ(bi)**=(Yoruba)=hope, **kuma**=(Hausa)=also/after all set and done. Expressively, this means: “Ok, (I) hope you will come and see me also”. Such intelligible expression cuts across speakers of Naija in the country.

Much of creative development also occurs in Naija literary writings where idioms, witty remarks and figurative expressions are translated from a speaker’s cultural language into Naija to reflect the character of the language. The mood of the speaker and his essence of speech, arising from his cultural background experiences are rightly captured in Naija. The speaker, therefore, transmits his mood, his speech essence and his cultural experience into the non-inhibitive language of Naija even to the non-speaker of his ethnic language because he has a ready facility in the local imagery, irony and innuendos which are similar or near similar to his neighbours’ stock. And this, he transliterates into the easily inflectionable linguistic systems of Naija with the fear of breaking no rules of “grammar”.

### 3.4. Syntactic features

Linguists have examined the grammatical features of Naija and have come to the conclusion from the systems of groups and clauses – the nominal, verbal, adjectival/adverbial and prepositional – that Naija has a Subject/Verb/Object (SVO) sentence structure. Without a doubt, the influence of this kind of structure on Naija emanates from the Niger-Congo family languages with substrate speech pressure which bear manifestations from their SVO structured nature, on the one hand. And, on the other hand, most pidgins around the world, including those of the Naija ancestor language derivation, show remarkable similarities in their grammars, and have SVO word order (cf. among others, Heine 1979, Ofuani 1984, Faraclas 1996, Steinbergs 1996, Southerland and Katamba 1996, Mowarin 2004). In sum, these linguists have observed that “each pidgin, like each language, is unique but they share some characteristics: word order is fixed; there is little or no inflection; negation usually involves a “no” word in front of the verb; nouns and verbs are regular; the ... vocabulary is used creatively; and speakers use local idioms, metaphors, and proverbs” (*Encarta Dictionaries*, 2008). Syntactic features, therefore, stand

out in Naija which has its own word order used for statements, questions and commands with the stabilized variety spoken in most parts of the country, though Mafeni (1971) looked at the relative sophistication exhibited by Naija in form and function from community to community in Nigeria. It has been observed, however, that sustained contact between Nigerians and the English-speaking migrants was vital to the growth and development of the marginal speech which expanded to produce the varieties of Naija, and to give the language its structure overall. Holm, like Jowitt, believes that the syntax of Naija (including the verb in their lack of inflection) has been heavily influenced by the languages of the Southern Nigeria; the most predominant influence being Yoruba, a lingua franca in South Western Nigeria besides the Niger-Delta language influences. As noted by Elugbe and Omamor, the speech or vocabulary of Naija spoken in the Niger Delta sounds like English though, but “not so the structure that emerged when Nigerians tried to string these words together” (9). To be certain, scholars have examined the structure of Naija, and have come to the conclusion that the Naija language sentence structure is usually made up of one or more clauses which could be simple or complex. So much research has been carried out on the clause of Naija, its modifier, verb/verb phrase, tense and aspect marker, mood, negation, etc. Essentially, we shall consider in this paper one or two other characteristics besides the aforementioned which are outstanding in the sense that they follow the pattern of structures from most Nigerian local languages. Such features include:

The omission of articles before titles and proper nouns in a sentence like “If [ ] C.M.A. se dat I do sometin, make I se I no do am?” [“If [ ] C.M.A. se dat a du sɔmtin, mek a se a nɔ du am?”] (*Skeleton*, 61), “[ ] Devil bend your neck” [“[ ] Dɛvu bɛn yɔ nɛk”] (*Skeleton*, 69) and Even [ ] Govment no dey like am” [“an ivun ɔvment nɔ de laik am”] (*Skeleton*, 70), etc.

On the other hand, we notice the inclusion of the morpheme –o as a topicalizer, which helps to avoid positing a phantom verb “be” in the following words/expressions: “... tafficator-o [tafiketɔ-o], mirror-o [mirɔ-o], bumper-o [bɔmba -o], ...” (*Skeleton*, 63). It is common knowledge that within the discourse-related properties of the Internal information structure of topic and focus of a language, the lexical domain noun phrase in structures like “be it the traffic-indicator”, “(be it) the mirror” or “(be it) (even) the bumper” is assumed to be the structural layer at which predicate-argument relations are defined (Aboh, 2004). But far more than English does, Naija optimizes on the exchange of information between speaker and hearer. This is demonstrated, in the example above, by the displacement of the clausal domain “Be it” topic phenomenon to have the focus phenomenon functioning with “o”, a topicalizer which but replaces the displaced “Be it” clausal topic. Thus, added to the existence of the expression of focality in Naija of each of the tafiketɔ, mirɔ and bɔmba noun words, is the topicalizer “o” to make the expressions read: “...tafiketɔ-o, mirɔ-o, bɔmba -o, ...” each in a syllabic-end segment prominence, more for the purpose of emphasis. This is made possible because within the structure, information that has been ellipted can be assumed to be presupposed at discourse level.

For a second time, the inclusion of the “o” morpheme to words in a sentence could also be used as a warning, conventional of use in the Nigerian local languages. Much of this is transferred into Naija as in the sentence “Hol’ your sis pencie-o” [Hol yɔ sis pɛnsi-o] (Be ready and keep your six pence coin handy!), “Kosi change-o” [Kosi chenji-o] (Be warned that there is no change!), You go knock your belle for ground-o” [Yu go nak yɔ bɛlɛ fɔgraundi-o] (Be warned that you may fall flat on your face (belly) [onto the ground!]), “Wait-o” [Weti-o] (Please be patient!) (*Skeleton*, 23).

### 3.5. Pragmatic features

Some of the instances of the way in which Nigerian cultures have impinged on Naija usage bear testimony on the rule of language use typical of Naija language in native situations. Bamgbose notes that the pattern of indigenous greetings is reflected in the use of such expression as *sorry* (expression of sympathy e.g. to a person who knocks his leg accidentally against a stone, or to someone who had just had a misfortune), *well-done* (greeting to anyone at work), *thanks for yesterday* (appreciation for favour done the previous day), *till tomorrow* (a greeting which may stand for “good night”), et cetera which definitely have found their way into Naija like the Nigerian English (Naija’s superstratum influence). Indeed, much of the forms of Naija at present record social meaning imputations from Nigerian local languages such that kinship terminologies, which differ from native English usage, now are in use. According to Alo (2004) in Okunade (2004), “these include the phenomena of politeness and social cultural values of solidarity, respect, sociality and altruism”. Other forms of lexico-semantic or pragmatic uses to which the Naija language is put include:

#### 3.5.1. Politeness and respect

In Naija, kinship terms are used to express politeness where an elderly man or woman, whether of one’s extended family or not, is referred to as **Papá** or **Mamá**. In the same vein, the terms **onkul** and **antí** may be used to refer to a male and female personalities respectively, considered to be older than the speaker, and who probably is a complete stranger to the speaker. The same principle applies to the use of the words, **chif** (chief), **ma, sa**, (ma’m, sir), etc. Thus, “social use of kinship terms is governed by the underlying principles of seniority by age, generation and social status” (Alo in Okunade, 2004).

#### 3.5.2. Solidarity

Solidarity is often expressed in Naija in such a way that a pronoun of kinship term may be used, and this is realized in terms of common background, shared goals and ethnicity. For example, **Dis wan na awa onu pikin** (This is our own child [son or daughter]). Here, the referent **pikin** is seen to belong to a group or tribe with whom the larger family or ethnic group shows solidarity. Also, kinship terms of **brother** or **sister** may be used for solidarity as in the case with a Nigerian who refers to his fellow countryman or woman, or even one of another country and bosom friend as **mai brɔda** (my brother) or **mai sista** (my sister). In the Naija language of today, this has been extended to the dimension of Christian and Islamic religious sentiments, where members of the same denomination or sect prefix one another’s names with **brɔa** (brother) or **sista** (sister), and the speaker is not in any way related to the referent. E.g. **Brɔda Balami nɔ kɔm chɔch tɔde?** (Didn’t Brother Balami come to church today?).

#### 3.5.3. Greetings

Without a doubt, the expressions above and many more found their way into Nigerian English through their constant and repetitive use in Naija. There can also be found in this category the Nigerian cultural form of greetings which have since found their way into Naija language as in the following:

- **Wɛl dɔn-o** (This is a job well done [translated as a form of greeting to somebody at work or recently, to someone or persons at rest])
- **Hau tins?** (How are your affairs?)
- **Hau wɔk nau?** (How is your job?)
- **Hau di chidren de?** (How are the children doing?)
- **Akada nkɔ?** (How are your studies?)

- **Mek yu grit Mama fọ mi-o.** (Do give my regards to Mama, please).

#### 4. Sociolinguistic situation of Naija

In an earlier survey conducted by the present researcher on Naija, 84.14% of respondents around the country affirmed that they often speak the language, while 81.37% affirmed that they enjoy jingles and other radio/television broadcast programmes in Naija. A further 83.60% of the population affirmed that Naija is the broader language (than English) in which they are better able to express their inner-most selves (Ativie, forthcoming). These findings, as of the present, follow from the distant history and roots from which Naija has come, having had a long history of expansion in the country.

Historical facts flourish to authenticate the claim that Naija has since been in use in the Niger Delta as trade language, certainly as it is presently a language of the Niger Delta regional reference. There was huge traffic of trade along the creeks and lagoons in the Niger Delta in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which connected the groups owing to the Naija language factor, and the trade extended from Onitsha through Benin (and parts of Yorubaland), as well as the Delta and Oil Rivers areas, and led to Igboland. Of significance were the Edo, Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Efik, Ibibio, Ikwerre, Kalabari, et cetera elements. Undoubtedly, what gave Naija a foothold in the Niger Delta was the linguistic heterogeneity of the people. Lending weight to this, Egbokhare (2001) says “it was the balance of power in the Niger Delta ethnicities, broadening of contact ... and time that stabilized NP and propelled its growth” (108).

Although the intelligentsia who was emerging due to Christianity and western education did receive Naija as inferior, trade with the British in the nineteenth century extended along the Rivers Niger and Benue up to the Middle Belt, proceeding to the Hausa hinterlands of Kano, Katsina and Sokoto, and then to the Borno and Adamawa regions. In order to monitor effectively and to protect their trading activities, the colonial government opened up the country, and this resulted in increased urban settlements and greater economic activity which in turn had a tremendous effect on Naija. The colonialists needed support staff for their administrative and missionary duties. They engaged cooks, stewards and gardeners, cleaners, messengers as well as interpreters who communicated in Naija. “The natives spoke no English at first, except those from the coastal areas who spoke Pidgin” (Odumuh, 7). To further enhance their economic activities, the colonialists constructed roads and rail lines to link the South with the North. Towns and cities soon developed along the transport routes which initially were *rest* places and served as commuters’ meeting points. Here, and at such points, commuters, like the transporters, spoke Naija as a common language. Also developed were inland waterways linking the Niger Delta creeks to the lagoon. And, Naija language began to spread in rapid fashion.

As government established Tin Mines and sundry companies in the North (like in other parts of the country), more and more people began to relocate up country where, according to Coleman (1958), “wage employment could be obtained” (333). This factor led to the drift from the South of a sizeable number of technicians, pseudo-technicians, artisans and traders, especially Igbos, and those who could take up jobs in the civil service as clerks and messengers. Ofulue (2004) contends that “the introduction of white-collar jobs into these societies attracted people of various ethnic origins from their villages...thus creating a multilingual setting of a different sort” (268). And, Naija was used as a means of communication. At this juncture, the Naija language was becoming one standard medium of

communication. Even as Northerners began to take up employment as clerks and messengers Naija, which was the language of the lowly, began to spread and was used for easy communication. One or two highly placed individuals condescended to communicate in Naija with the lowly once they were in a new environment. “Stigmatization did not stop Pidgin from spreading far and wide through Nigeria, and from acquiring a new and important function as a lingua franca for use among Nigerians” (*Nigerian English Usage*, 1991). Since a large number of Nigerians were still uneducated, the number of those who used Naija increased daily because they did not want to be “alienated from the new world of English-speaking people. The closest they could come was to be proficient in Pidgin” (Ofulue, 269). Egbokhare observes, however, that “since NP was already existing in some form, it easily filled this need as a neutral language. Because it also sounded like English, it enjoyed some prestige by association and spread far and wide” (118). Interregional civil service transfer and military postings of personnel, especially the rank and file who moved with their families, accelerated the spread of Naija around the country. In military formations and barracks, for instance, Naija was freely used as the medium for inter-ethnic communication. In his reminiscences, Matthew Ashimolowo (2002), a Nigerian-born London-based world evangelist observes: “one of the fondest memories I have as a child is of growing up in the Army barracks; where every tribe [was] a Nigerian. They knew who they were; [yet] they were just one”, all bond together, mostly linguistically in the culture and use of the Naija language.

The more Naija spread in the country, the more it became entrenched in the developing towns in the Niger-Delta where it originated in Nigeria. The language began to assume a level of sophistication due to the factor of Second World War. Here, demobilized war veterans from Burma and India spoke such forms of English as of a Naija variety as they had learnt in camps and trenches. Cinema pictures, especially Indian romance films, Chinese Kung-fu and karate pictures and American cow-boy movies became another factor that provided much vocabulary to the usage of Naija for the semi-literate and the lowly. The popular Onitsha market literature was yet another factor which flourished with a pamphleteering tradition in and around Onitsha market; and of course, the influx into Nigeria of Asian nationals and Lebanese, and their forms of spoken English which sounded like Naija also helped in the spread of Naija. (See *Sociolinguistics and Nigerian English*, 1993). And the effect of the above factors began to spread horizontally and vertically up and around the country. With the creation again and again of new political structures in Nigeria –first of twelve states, followed by the creation of nineteen, then twenty-one and later, thirty-six states plus Abuja, different people from various ethnic background migrated freely within the country to find jobs. And, the various regional languages receded to their ethnic domains, giving rise to the proliferation and use of Naija as a means of communication. As the spread continued, Naija acquired more and different vocabularies from the various cultural background influences of the regions where the language had reached, leaving it with the stretch and expansion situation as it stands presently.

Without a doubt, Naija language now assumes the status of a cultivated, domesticated and indigenized language in the country, spoken with a passion. Oscar Benbow (2005), a freelance journalist in Lagos summarized the spreading bug in Naija when he said “You speak it instinctively when you see a stranger, in the markets, in the bus, at bus-stops ... in church ..., even when you try not to speak this ... language, someone will force you” (20). In its present mode of speech, the Naija language is taking over the centre stage in the regions where it is spoken while the local languages are virtually thinning out. This is one indication that Naija is the language of wider communication in Nigeria today. Presently, many writers in

Nigeria now publish in Naija as governments and corporate individuals also place advertisements in the media in Naija. As well, this language is now used in places of worship, in music, in radio programmes and in local television soap operas, etc. Aghogho (2004) observes: “Unlike the pidgin of *yesterday* which was tagged *inferior* the pidgin of today is spoken almost everywhere, and it is spoken even by the university graduates, [the] literate and illiterate, the high and the low, and it cuts across tribes, age, professions, etc.” (17). And so, Egbokhare notes: “It is now employed to convey important information, for poetry, news dissemination, public enlightenment propaganda, etc.” (113). Indeed, because members of every regional, ethnolinguistic, religious and socioeconomic group in the federation speaks Naija (*Nigerian Pidgin*, 1996), government now considers that most of their messages be sent in Naija. “Thus NP has become the primary language of health campaigns such as Oral Re-hydration Therapy, Breast Feeding, AIDS Awareness, Immunization, etc.” (*The Nigerian Linguistic Ecology and the Changing Profiles of Nigerian Pidgin*, 114). Naija has assumed a wider dimension than previous periods in the history of Nigeria. It now cuts across a wider audience than any other language in Nigeria and its spread has spilled over into the classrooms for, indeed, “it may [now] be spoken by more people than any other language in Nigeria” (Rose Aziza, 1990). It is in this light that Adetugbo (1979) argues that there is usually a resort to Naija as a vehicle of informal communication even among the highly educated teachers of English in Nigerian universities. As an instance, this writer received a text message scripted in Naija from a colleague and friend, Sunny Awhefeada, who offered the benediction of a new month, arising from the norm that has taken roots in Nigeria since the advent of the GSM telephony. Thus,

<b>Mek yu fain kola put fọ plet;</b>	<i>Do find some kola nut and put in a dish;</i>
<b>sidon kuleh-h, brek am.</b>	<i>Relax and make yourself comfortable, then break the nut.</i>
<b>Nau, mek yu de laf de go-o...</b>	<i>Now, you could do with a broad, endless smile ...(because)</i>
<b>Dis mont we wi ęnta so,</b>	<i>in the new month that is beginning so,</i>
<b>God go blęs yu yanfun yanfun;</b>	<i>God will bless you in abundance;</i>
<b>I go protet yu pas oęl paip lain</b>	<i>HE will protect you far more than an oil pipeline is protected</i>
<b>an oł yọ ęnęmi go fọl yakata!</b>	<i>such that your enemies, all, shall crash helplessly!</i>

Presently, Naija functions as a utility language among technocrats, captains of industries, the military brass hat, academics, top notch politicians, professionals, government officials and among those in high echelon of the Nigerian society because of its intelligibility and cognitive function. Furthermore, the Naija language, by reason of attaining the status of a utility language, is sometimes, at crucial moments in a discussion or wittingly, in mid sentence, exploited and perhaps dumped again, now and then, in a code switch with English or the vernacular. And, in most cases, it is spoken almost throughout in the conduct of official business. By reason of the broad inter-comprehension of the language in the country, the immediate past President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, very often, indeed, resorted to Naija in his official engagements while in office. In one instance, as he fielded questions on the state of tourism in the country, Obasanjo berated the conduct of some unscrupulous security operatives whose itchy palms and general rash conduct towards migrants and tourists did negatively impact on government’s efforts at wooing prospective investors into the Nigerian economy. To demonstrate the irascibility of the operatives, Obasanjo went melodramatic: **Oya, we yọ paspọt?!** (Now, where is your passport?!), the then president quipped, mimicking a security operative who intimidates a supposed tourist into giving a “tip”. **A se we yọ paspọt?!**, he demanded a second time. He simulates receiving the document from the holder; feigns a gaudy movement of a few steps of operative aside,

pretending for a moment to scrutinize the document. He turns almost sharply afterwards and declaims, **Si am?! I nọ ivun kọrẹt sẹf!**<sup>3</sup>. (See?! It isn't even properly validated!). Similarly, Obasanjo had a few weeks earlier on official engagement in Calabar responded to an appeal made by a journalist to release to the states the national ecology fund: **Di mọni? Dẹm dọn shẹr am! Abi?"**], he added, for the host governor's confirmation. (The fund? It has been appropriated to the states in the federation! Hasn't it?). Obasanjo did speak Naija, and still does so very often, and on countless occasions, so much like every user of Naija, to express his inner-most self in putting across his message via the popular language of the day. Obasanjo, like many others, uses this language because of its broad inter-comprehension in Nigeria and among the English-speaking West African communities. And as a part of human experience, speakers of Naija, like Obasanjo, find the language so very useful in that Naija connects to them and they connect to Naija especially in their cognitive psychology. Naija has, therefore, become a language of the expression of cultures and a way by which the Nigerian perceives and understands his neighbours' experiences. This is because in Nigeria, people are better able now to evaluate cultures, attitudes and one another in any other part of the country by Naija. Consequently, Naija has become the emergent unofficial national language whose imbibing cultural influence and communicative functions cannot be equally located in the use of the English language because, as pointed out earlier in this paper, "the vocabulary of NP is [reasonably] English ... its grammar is [purely] Nigerian" (*Nigerian Pidgin: Problems and Prospects*, 1995). In point of fact, Naija impacts the world of its users in its own form, and it serves as a major influence in the development of present-day Nigerian neo-nationalism, "being the only ethnically neutral language" (Elugbe, 291) spoken in the country today.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has examined cultural influences in Naija, and has proved that the language has evolved a distinctively Nigerian attitude which finds expression in the transfer of phonological, syntactic, lexico-semantic and pragmatic patterns of Nigerian languages onto itself. The essay has proved that Naija is not only communicative but also, it constitutes a total cultural experience in the Nigerian social milieu. Arising from the broad inter-comprehension that exists between the sociolects of the language spoken in Nigeria (and along the West African coast); the zeal with which the language is spoken, as well as its ready acceptance by all, we are confident to say that Naija is becoming the transcendent criterion for national integration which must serve as a tool to mobilize the citizens of Nigeria to achieve genuine nationhood.

Elsewhere, this writer has had to advocate for a Naija official adoption and usage in order for the country to achieve unadulterated nationhood. This is built on a Naija linguistic approach to nationalism which concept hinges on the complete and absolute unification of all ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. This is so because, in practical terms, Naija represents the pulse of the nation going by its present rate of employ across board. Although speakers of Naija use the language with a lot of *freedom* and *creativity* (Elugbe, 287) as examined with the linguistic and lexico-semantic/pragmatic features in this paper, there arises the urgent need to codify this language in some official quarters (as in the Naija Languėj Akẹdẹmi

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<sup>3</sup> Clips from Nigerian Television Authority Network News Programme, Friday, January 20, 2006.

endeavour) for normative reference. In this wise, the need for a uniform orthographic convention for Naija will be absolute, so as to achieve standardization in both the written and spoken forms for a rapid national and regional integration. In this context, this paper advocates a uniform Naija language adoption around a received pronunciation (RP) in one of either the Eastern or the Western varieties which form has expanded (see Aziza and Mowarin, 2006), and is a creolizing variety in Nigeria today.

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