

## WORD STRUCTURE OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH-BASED PIDGIN

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### **Abstract**

*This paper deals with the structure of words in Nigerian English-based pidgin and the analysis of word forms. It also attempts a validation of the preoccupation of theoretical linguistics which has to do with the investigation of the word structure and the rules which govern the formation of words in Nigerian English-based pidgin. The corpus-based research method was used to identify the structure of the Nigerian English-based pidgin, examine the concept of creativity in relation to the Nigerian English-based pidgin, and to compile a corpus of English-based pidgin words in circulation. The data used in this research reflect the linguistic backgrounds of the Nigerian people and also show how their languages help in constituting the word stock in English-based pidgin. From an examination of the corpus, the following findings were made: the Nigerian English-based pidgin forms its plural by the placement of an independent particle, the agentive morpheme. It was also discovered that verbs in the Nigerian English-based pidgin do not reflect to show tense, and that some indigenous Nigerian languages contribute to the word stock of the Nigerian English-based pidgin, words form adjective through the process of reduplication, it was also concluded that the Nigerian English-based pidgin is a distinct language and not a dialect of the English language.*

Grammarians and linguists have made several attempts to pin down the concept of word to a single categorical and adequate definition. In spite of this, it is obvious that every natural language possesses what we can be called vocabulary.

Grammarians and linguists alike have been able to establish that the words of any language can be classified into categories of

different types - nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections and determiners. Evidence at all levels of linguistic description - phonology, semantics, morphology and syntax - has been advanced to justify their claims (cf Francis, 1965, Quirk and Geenbaun, 1973, Aarts and Aarts, 1982 and Radford, 1988). Moreover, the dynamic nature of 'word' has also been shown by linguists (cf Potter, 1957, Adams, 1973, Matthews, 1974 and Gannon and Czernieksia, 1975).

Similarly, the process by which words are formed and lexicons enriched in any language has been identified and described. This is a direct result of the discovery that every natural language is essentially a system of rule or principles or process (cf Francis, 1965, Huddleston, 1984 and Radford, 1988).

The preoccupation of theoretical linguists has been with the investigation of word structure and the rules governing the formation of words in a language. This is referred to by the term 'Morphology', (cf UdoUdom (1995), Gleason (1961), Udofot (1999), Bauer (1987). Yule (1996:75) on his part said that morphology is a type of investigation which analyzes all those basic 'elements' which are used in a language, and these elements are technically known as 'Morphemes'.

Katamba (1993) attempts an investigation of the validity of word structure even though speakers think of words as

indivisible units of meanings. The source puts the reason behind this misconception down to the fact that many words are morphologically simple. He cites 'the', 'book', 'desk', and 'fee' in English. In Nigerian English-based pidgin which forms a corpus for the researcher, there are such lexical items as 'na', 'de', 'dem', 'oga', 'kolo', 'pikin', 'oyibo' etc as examples of words which cannot be segmented into smaller units that are themselves meaningful.

Based on the above assertion, Katamba (1993) suggests that to understand the meaning of certain divisible parts of words, a profound knowledge of morphology is essential, (p.21) Valdman (1977), for instance suggests that:

An "idealized grammar" of a Pidgin English would most probably contain such major classes of words: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs leaving such minor categories as articles, prepositions, auxiliaries and inflectional affixes. Emissiri (1981), in his study of structural pattern of English-based pidgin reports that Nigerian English-based pidgin has its own syntactic pattern which is a reduced form of inflection and derivatives that differ greatly from that of English language.

Mafeni (1971) explains that Nigerian English-based pidgin is to some extent, complex and shows some variety in form and function from one speech community to the other. Though these varieties may be mutually intelligible, they differ with respect to the indigenous language which influences their phonological, lexical and syntactic peculiarities. One can therefore analyse English-based pidgin in our ways according to Le page (1971). He posits it thus: first with respect to the linguistic properties of pidgin languages; secondly, with respect to social function of this languages; thirdly, with respect to the historical linguistic processes that give shape to them; and lastly with respect to the social processes that give birth to them (cf Adeyanju, 1988).

For the purpose of this analysis: a corpus of words was collected. From the corpus, the

following words have been isolated for analysis: desk, pikin to, bend, katakata, wakawaka, oyibo, wahala, soso, jara, drivers, students, schools, universities, Edikan ikon, water-water, mago-mago and sand-sand.

The following words could be segmented into other words or morphemes, katakata, wakawaka, bendbend, soso, drivers, students, schools, universities, edikan ikon, waterwater, magomago and sandsand, such that each part can stand on its own to be meaningful e.g. 'bend' is a verb in English language. In English-based pidgin, 'bend bend' is a reduplication which is itself an intensifier, 'katakata, is a calque modeled after the sound of English word 'scatter', 'kata' is a word part of a verb formed from reduplicative katakata; wakawaka is a reduplicative in indigenous language speakers and it is a verb and a noun.

### **Inflectional Suffixation in English-Based Pidgin**

Suffixation is a word formation process where a morpheme, (usually referred to as a suffix), is added after a root or base. An inflectional suffix is usually the final element added after a root or a base, as in faith + ful – faithful. Here 'faith' which is a noun is the 'root', while '-ful' is the morpheme – the suffix which helps to create or form an adjective 'faithful'. By the rules of word formation in English, it is not possible to have more than one inflectional suffix at a time, (Eka, 1994, p.61). Suffixes are regularly attached to the appropriate adverbs, adjectives, verbs or noun bases to indicate number (plurality) and the possessive.

In the Nigerian English-based pidgin, words do not take regular inflectional suffixation method common in English language to inflect for adverbs, adjectives, verbs and nouns. These suffixes are not regularly attached to the above-mentioned word classes i.e. adverbs, adjectives, verbs and noun bases, to indicate number

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(plurality) and the possessive.

Books /bʊks/

**Nouns and Nominal**

To inflect for number (plurality) and possessives, the nouns and pronouns are modified. Regular nouns and possessive form plurals by placing independent particles e.g. ‘dem’ after the noun, and for possessive pronoun it is by placing it before the noun and pronoun.

The allomorph /iz/ occurs with word ending in voiced sounds except /z/, /d/.

Bags /bæŋz/

Dogs /dɒŋz/

In Nigerian English-based pidgin, plural nouns are not formed through the above processes, instead they are formed through the use of independent particle ‘dem’ placed after the noun it pluralizes.

E.g. English	Drivers	-
Plural		
English-based pidgin	Driver dem	-
Plural		
English	their Drivers	-
Possessive		
English-based pidgin	Dem Driver	-
Possessive		

**Table 1: Shows How Plural Nouns are Formed from English and in Nigerian English-based Pidgin**

S/No	English	Nigerian English-based pidgin
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1. Drivers (pl) Driver dem – plural
2. Their drivers (pl) Dem driver (plural possessive)
3. His son (possessive) Im son (singular possessive)
4. Books Book dem

To inflect for number (plurality) and possessives in English language, the noun and possessives form plurals by adding the morpheme (-s) to the noun stem, this plural form changes in nature depending on the word environment (phonological environment) in which it occurs: the (s) can be /s/, /z/, /ɪz/. These three set of {-s} morphemes are generally covered in realizational parlance, by one term: the /z/ morpheme, (Eka, 1994:54).

Also one can say that the plural morpheme ‘dem’ is a feature of the English-based pidgin in Nigeria.

**The {Z<sub>1</sub>} Morpheme (Plural Nouns Morpheme)**

The {Z<sub>1</sub>} morpheme relates to plural formation. It can be approached through the allomorphic variation of the morpheme {s} which changes its nature depending on the phonological environment in which it occurs. With regard to (Z<sub>1</sub>) morpheme, four allomorphs are attested in various phonological environments in English, /s/, /m/, /z/, /0/, /zɪ/

The allomorph /ɪz/ occurs with word ending in /s, t, z/ hissing sounds, alveolar fricatives and affricates {s, z, tʃ, dʒ}

- buses /bʌsɪz/  
- roses /rəʊzɪz/

The allomorph /s/ occurs with words ending in voiceless sound except /s/, /tʃ/ and /tʃ/

The allomorph /0/ occurs with words which normally do not have plural reflected in the morphological shapes.

E.g. Cats /kæts/

English	-	sheep	English-based pidgin	De man beat
English-based pidgin	-	sheep dem	him body	

English	Margaret's
care	
English-based pidgin	Margaret im
car	
English	Martin's book
English-based pidgin	Martin im
book	
English	Rose's chair
English-based pidgin	Rose im chair

**The {Z<sub>2</sub>} Morpheme (Possessive Morpheme)**

Just like the {Z<sub>1</sub>} morpheme, the possessive morpheme (the Z<sub>2</sub> morpheme) has the apostrophe in specific places in words. In addition, while the base form is in plural, when the base ends in 's', the 'IIs' possessive marker is often dropped and only the apostrophe occurs after the number affix □ 's'. Now consider the following distribution.

/s/ occurs with words ending in voiceless sounds except /s/, /t/, and /tʃ/ Margaret's /mɑ:grɛts/. /z/ occurs with words ending in voiced sounds except /z/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/, Martin's /mɑ:tinz/. /iz/ occurs with base ending in /s/, /t/, /tʃ/, /z/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/ Rose's /rəʊziz/.

In spite of all the phonological variants, certain possessive pronouns are indicated by suffixing (-s) (without the apostrophe) to the base pronominal form: 'yours; ours; except in 'mind'. Besides, pronouns in English select sentence positions in which they occur. For instance, it will be syntactically unacceptable to use 'she' at the object position of the sentence. Consider the following:

- I taught she yesterday
- I taught her yesterday

Thus the morphological shapes of the pronoun 'she' which is in the subjective case, changes to 'her' in an objective position of the sentence.

In Nigerian English-based pidgin, the {Z<sub>2</sub>} morpheme (possessive morpheme) does not inflect to show possession, instead an independent particle is used. E.g.

English	The man beat his
body.	

**Verbs**

Verbs in English often inflect to indicate tense and number (depending on the subject of the sentence): verb morphemes analysis can be approached through non-past time morpheme and past time morpheme.

{Z<sub>3</sub>} Morpheme) Concord Morpheme)

This morpheme changes in verb pattern occasion by changes in person and number. The distributional patterns are as follows: /s/ occurs with words ending in voiceless sounds except /s/, /f/, /tʃ/. She starts /sta:ts/. /z/ occurs with words ending in /z/, /ʒ/, and /dʒ/. She runs - /fr:ʌnz/. /ɪz/ occurs with words ending in /s/, /tʃ/, /z/, /ʒ/, and /dʒ/. She passes - /fr: pæsɪz/.

In the Nigerian English-based pidgin, verbs do not inflect to indicate tense, instead independent particles are used. Now consider the following like 's' in English singular verb (He) works. Thus we have in the pidgin:

- I troway salute
- We troway salute
- Dem troway salute
- And I troway salute (Non-past)
- I bin troway salue (past)
- I go troway salute (future)

The past tense is indicated by separate particles 'bin', while the future is indicated with 'go'.

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Completive/perfective – ‘don’

Don rule

Continuous - ‘de’ marks aspect

Modals: ‘fo’ - De cal  
 ‘Mos’ - Should – futurity  
 ‘Fit’ - Mut – command  
 Can – possibility

With the above examples, it could be attested that Nigerian English-based pidgin words hardly inflect for tenses and numbers. By far, the greater majority of Nigerian English-based pidgin words are invariable in form and are usually monomorphemic – that is not divisible into smaller meaningful units; though there are a number of compound words consisting of two free morphemes. Thus a simple word can be inflected and it can accept affixes to become more complex words. At other times as in the case of *mammy palaver*, two simple morphemes or words can be combined in Nigerian English-based pidgin to form the following words:

- (V) bend + bend (V) → bend bend (adj)
- (V) belly + palaver (N) → belly palaver (N)
- (V) been + to (pre) → been to (N)
- (V) edikan + Ikong (N) → edikan ikong (N)
- (V) mago + mago (V) → mago mago (N)

The above are examples of how Nigerian English-based pidgin words can be formed by combing simple words to become compound words.

**Adjectives**

In Nigerian English-based pidgin, adjectives or modifiers can be formed by bringing two nouns together to form adjectives, adverbs and verbs etc. through the process of reduplication. These new words can serve as qualifiers and intensifiers in sentences. See the table below.

**Table 1: Shows How Nigerian English-Based Pidgin, Inflection in Adjectives or Modifiers Can Be Formed By Bringing Two Nouns Together**

S/No	English	Pidgin	Sentences
1.	Thief	Tif-tif (adj)	De tif tif man don com die
2.	Walk	Waka waka (adj)	Wakawaka woman no de bon gud pikin
3.	Ory ...	Ory-ory (adj)	Nsima got ory-ory daughter
4.	Gossip	Gossip gossip (adj)	Gossip gossip people do not do well

**Discussion:**

In view of the uniqueness of word formation processes in the language, the researchers observed that there are differences between Nigerian English-based pidgin and English Language. Whereas the Nigerian English-based pidgin forms plural by the placement of independent particle ‘dem’ after a noun, while in English the placement of ‘-s’ suffix to the root after a noun inflection results in the formation of a plural noun in some English language words, the researchers also observed that the addition of suffixes (-let, nette) renders certain of the subclasses of nouns diminutive in English. This peculiar feature of English word formation is not found in Nigerian English-based pidgin.

In English, agentive morphemes are derived by suffixing (-er), (or), pr (-ist) to the verb roots. This is contrary to Nigerian English-based pidgin where an independent particle (im) marked before a noun is used. E.g. Im car de here, Im mama don go overseas.

Verbs in English often inflect to indicate tense and number (depending on the subject of the sentence), in Nigerian English-

based pidgin, verbs do not inflect to indicate tense, (e.g. 's', 'ed'), instead independent particles are used to show past, non past (I bin de), future (de), etc.

Adjectives in English can be derived from nouns and verbs by the processes of suffixation. These derivations can be in the addition of the morphemes (-full) (-or) to noun stems e.g. prayerful, educator, e.g. Mr. Nsima is a prayerful man, Mr. Okon is an educator. The Nigerian English-based pidgin marks adjectives through the process of reduplication etc as in the following water-water soup, sand-sand rice etc.

It is a known fact that a language of a particular community is built around unique characteristics. In spite of language uniqueness, there are also certain features that are similar either in semantic and syntactic structures or in word formation processes to another language. To this end, Nigerian English-based pidgin uses the following methods: Reduplication and compounding in its word formation techniques and are similar to that of English language in one way.

This study revealed that in spite of these similarities and dissimilarities, each language has its own peculiar methods of word formation. Consequent upon the above points the writers can say that Nigerian English-based pidgin is a distinct language on its own and not a dialect of English language.

### **Summary of Findings**

It was discovered that in Nigerian English-based pidgin, word formation processes are largely influenced by indigenous Nigerian languages i.e. the substrate languages. This makes it possible for each speaker of Nigerian English-based pidgin to add the local colour or adopt words common to him into Nigerian English-based pidgin sentence structure so as to serve the communication needs of the Nigerian people who come from different ethnic backgrounds and socio-cultural affiliations.

In studying word formation processes and in view of the uniqueness of word formation processes in Nigerian English-based pidgin, it was also observed that there are differences between Nigerian English-based pidgin and English language. Whereas English-based pidgin forms its vocabulary from the superstrate language, its plural is form by the placement of independent particle after a noun, while in English, the placement of '-s' suffix to the root after a noun in some English language words. Further, it was observed that, the addition of some English language words. Further, it was observed that the addition of some of the suffixes to the subclasses of nouns e.g. (-let, nette) render such nouns diminutives in English. this peculiar feature of English word formation is not found in Nigerian English-based pidgin.

In English language, agentive morphemes are derived by suffixing (-ier) or, (-er) to the verb roots. This is different from the Nigerian English-based pidgin where an independent particle (im) marked before a noun is used.

Still, it was found that verbs in English often inflect to indicate tense and number (depending on the subject of the sentence). In Nigerian English-based pidgin, verbs do not inflect to indicate tens e.g. '-s' '-ed' instead independent particle are used to show past (I bin de), non-past (de), future (de) etc.

Finally, adjectives in English can be derived from nouns and verbs by a process of suffixation. These derivations can be in the addition of the morphemes (-ful, (-ier), (-er) to noun stems. Nigerian English-based pidgin makes adjectives and intensifiers through the process of reduplication.

### **Conclusion**

From the observation of the researchers, it was found that Nigerian English-based pidgin is a language on its own. The fact

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that a great deal of its lexicon comes from English does not make it a dialect of English. Owing to a variety of socio-cultural, historical and linguistic factors, Nigerian English-based pidgin, like other pidgins, has come to acquire the nomenclature English-based pidgin, a composition of pidgin and English. moreover, we have established that one of the means of enriching the lexicon of any language is by borrowing, which also featured prominently in Nigerian English-based pidgin. Word-formation processes, other than borrowing, observable in Nigerian English-based pidgin are compounding, reduplication, creativity, calquing and extension.

Again in order to develop and enrich its lexicon, Nigerian English-based pidgin has borrowed words from Portuguese and some indigenous Nigerian languages, with it has adopted into its own phonological processes.

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