

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE BEYOND 2020: A FOCUS ON SYNONYMY

By

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is geared to x-ray the effect of teaching synonymy and its mastery on the development of English Language beyond 2020. Synonymy is an aspect of lexical Semantics. It is one of the numerous meaning relations. Meaning relations has to do with the organization of lexemes of a language in such a way that lexemes that are related by virtue of shared semantic properties do not exist in isolation but belong together and form a sub group within the lexicon of the language. To achieve the purpose of this research, data on English synonymy as taught to and used by the students were collected from respondents through direct interview and Essay text Data collected were analyzed. Errors identified were grouped. Based on our findings it was concluded that adequate knowledge of synonymy could lessen the difficulties experienced by learners of English as second language. Recommendations that lexical semantics be introduced as a subject in primary and secondary schools and other suggestions were made to smoothen the development of English Language beyond 2020.*

The mere thought of a world growing without language elicits depression, boredom and retrogression. That development is promoted by a common language, was demonstrated by the tower of Babel biblical event. The world became divided because of the numerous Babel of voices (different languages). If maximum development beyond 2020 must be achieved, English has emerged as the world's most sought after language and its development is focused on here as a very powerful driver for developing humanity globally.

English has been described variously as a global language, and the lingua franca of the modern era and as world language (Osakwe, 2010). English is the official language of Nigeria; it is the language of governance, of media, of education, of interactive communication and surprisingly of intimate interpersonal discourse even in homes where couples share homogenous indigenous languages (Osakwe, 2010) it is both an object and subject language.

Over the years, a quiet revolution in teaching English Language has been underway. Linguists have begun to engage in serious standard setting and a general clamour for the development of English Language. This idea of standardizing English reflects a growing knowledge based and a growing consensus about the dominance of English and its various communicative roles. Thus teachers are constantly made to know and constantly be able to help all students learn according to challenging new standards. Most countries have launched efforts to restructure schools and to invest greater in language development. These initiatives are partly a response to major changes affecting our society and our schools. Rapid social and economic technological transformations require greater learning from all students, society is reshaping the mission of education. Schools are now expected not only to offer subjects, but to ensure learning.

*Teachers are expected not only to “Cover the curriculum” but to create a bridge between the needs of each learner and the attainment of challenging learning goals. These objectives – a radical departure from former education’s mission demand that teachers should understand learners and their learning as deeply as they comprehend their subjects. For vision of educating our students well come 2020 rest first and foremost, upon the development of English Language which is the Language of education in Nigeria. The contribution of English to the Nigerian nation has been largely expressed by Osakwe (2010) especially with respect to the growth and development of the country. To pin-point the role of English in Nigeria, she beamed her focus on the pivotal role of the language beyond the border of politics to its educational value, thus she noted that, English is a strong humanization discipline which has nurtured and continues to nurture true humanism in building the Nigerian nation. As a school subject, it has contributed to thinking, evaluation and judgment in promoting developmental activities. English as a basis for research in descriptive and applied linguistic, continue to harness linguistics opportunities for education and socio-harness growth including broadening of academic knowledge. (60 – 61).*

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By the above excerpt, Osakwe is foregrounding the utility value of English in Nigerian thus supporting emphatically the fact that the development of the English Language is important for the development of other disciplines or sectors. Synonymy is an important topic in English which is hard to avoid in examination. Students are constantly asked to fill in gaps with suitable synonyms in National Examination Council, West African Examination Council and Universalteetary Matriculation Examination , hence an important area to the development of English Language beyond 2020.

### **Synonymy, linguistic semantics and semantic theory**

Synonymy is an aspect of linguistic semantics. Linguistic semantics is the scientific study of all aspects of meaning encoded in natural languages from the meaning of individual words grouped into phrases and clauses in the lexical and grammatical structure of specific languages Jackson (1988, P.64) traces the origin of the term synonymy to the Greek word “syn” “same and nymy name. the word synonymy therefore, means sameness of meaning: that is the relationship in which more than one word has the same meaning or alternatively the same meaning being expressed by more than one word (name). this definition, sounds straightforward enough but still cautions that the notion of synonymy is rather curious. The question according to him, is why should a language have more than one lexeme to express a particular meaning” the existence of synonymy however, suggests that languages also demonstrate redundancy. Kreidler (1988,p, 164) says that synonymy is not a simple matter, for two lexemes never have the same range make predictions about the sameclass of referring expressions, they are likely to differ in what they suggest.

Ullmann (1962, p.407) and Hurford (199. p. 407) also argue that examples of synonymy or identity of meaning are less easy to find because where items have identical, meanings; speakers tend readily to build previous marginal connotations into their core meanings so that synonymy ceases to exist. It is interesting to note that Ullmann believes that such occurrences are rare, he assert/insists / believes / etc. it would be wrong to deny the possibility of complete synonymy. His contention is that there are very few words that are completely synonymy in the sense of being interchangeable in any context without the slightest alteration in objective meaning, feeling-tone or evocative value. He however admits that it is perfectly true that absolute synonymy runs counter to our whole way of looking at language because when we see different words, we instinctively assume that there is, in fact a distinction even though it may be difficult to formulate.

### **Analysis of Essay Text From Our Respondents**

An analysis of the essay texts written by our respondent show that most of the errors were related to wrong use of synonymy. For instance retaliate and reciprocate

carry the notion of paying back. While retaliate is paying back evil for evil, reciprocate is paying back good for good. Our respondents used these two interchangeably. Teachers only teach students words that have similar meanings without drawing the attention to collocations and denotative and connotative differences.

A close observation of the table of deviant expressions below shows that errors of collocation of synonymous lexemes were numerous. Synonymous lexemes in English usually collocate with some particular situations. Knowledge of such synonyms is incomplete without knowing of which situation Lexemes usually accompany them. Violations of such collocations even where intelligibility is not interfered with marks the usage as non-standard some texts with this kind of deviation are below: (the deviant usage is underlined).

She is a *handsome* girl.

Okon is rally *beautiful*

Eno *Purchase* okro yesterday.

My landlord will *emit* us from his house

The spirit of insult must be *expelled*

Cheats will be *ejected* from our school

The quantity of food for my house is *diminishing*.

The extracts above show improper mastery of synonymous lexemes and their collocates. The collocation problem was broken down into other smaller groups and we had error of probable collocation which had to do with the breaking of mutual expectancies that holds between words. It is not enough to know that certain words collocates, the context of the use of such words are equally important. Examples of violation of such expectancies are:-

- (i). If possible *post* me a mail
- (ii). Immediately we hear the *rang* of the bell
- (iii). I think you are *sitting tight* for your examination
- (iv). The rate they are using to teach us is very *high*.

It is evident from the extracts above that the writers know the past tense of ring as rang and that rang the bell collocate, their usage here however is wrong. Mail means “the postal system directed and worked by the government” according to the Longman’s dictionary of contemporary English. The word is uncountable but sometimes plural with singular meaning. In the latter sense, it means letter and anything received by post, e.g. “the mails arrived early today”. In English, mail and post do not collocate in the sense the respondents used in the words in the extract. Rang, the past form of the verb ring refers to the act of casing a bell to sound and not the sound itself as the respondents used it above. The use of the word “hear” indicates that the respondents intended to refer to the sound and not the act.

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**Meaning similarity:** The data reveals that the writers are not always aware that it is not all contexts that words that are similar in meaning can be interchanged. Partial synonymy is sometimes responsible for the inappropriate choice of lexical items, for example:-

- (i). My spoken English is gradually increasing
- (ii). My school as created in 1994
- (iii). The school possess many students
- (iv). SS1 to 3 were shared into classes
- (v). We collected the Ika L.G. cup last year

The word increasing is used in a relation to quantity as opposed to quality. One's English cannot increase because evaluation of a phenomenon such as spoken English in the sense the respondent is doing it cannot be done in terms of numbers but rather in terms of quality. However, one's vocabulary stock can be measured in terms of the number verbs like create, begin, found, and start, have the same connotation; the idea of setting out. The contexts, in which they are used, however, will determine their specific meanings. Schools can only be founded (start buildings) and not created as the respondents put it.

### **Sound Similarity**

Errors in this category were very easily identified since they dealt with spelling. They are two different manifestations of sound similarity errors in the data. The first one shows the use of certain homophonous words, e.g.

- i. I saw the principle of the school
- ii. Their will give them prizes for good performance
- iii. We also have security officers guiding us.
- iv. Hope teachers there are not lazy
- v. At list we have rest now.
- vi. Buy us spay shoes
- vii. Go and great cassava

### **Meaning Duplication**

There are sometimes two or more lexical items available to convey a meaning. The data reveals that the writers sometimes insert the two alternatives. They may be said to be exhibiting "lexical indecision" i.e. inability to decide on the appropriate word from alternatives. They therefore insert both, leaving burden of choice to the reader. This results in redundancy or meaning duplication errors.

- i. Now that I now a master of these three calculations
- ii. The teachers is more interested in some students more than others.

The words now are more appropriate in either of their positions they are put in texts: the most parabolic reason for the word duplication is absent mindedness and transfer of 1.2 patterns; other examples are below;

- i. My school is a mixed school of boys and girls.
- ii. My school has upto a population of about one thousand
- iii. I was veryso happy when I arrived there.

The examples above could be traceable to the lack of one to one correspondence between English words and various indigenous Nigerian languages. Other reduplication errors found in our respondent’s scripts were reduplication of synonymous lexemes for emphatic reasons e.g.

- i. Reverse back again
- ii. Should incase

### **Analysis of How Teachers of English In Primary and Secondary Schoolls Teach the Concept of Synonymy In The Class Room?**

The teachers of English interviewed by this researcher accepted that in teaching synonyms they will first define synonyms as words that express sameness in meaning and give the students examples thus:

- Frightful .....shock.....horrified
- Swallow.....drink.....gulp
- Entire.....whole.....total

Teaching synonymy like this is not enough because words do not have meanings in isolation. In general, the meaning of a word is related to the meaning of other words in ways that may be simple or complex. So for example, young is more closely related to old, than it is to lazy. Likewise, rose is related in one way to flower, in another way to liac, and in another way to red. Much of the business of lexical semantics lies in clarifying these relationships in meaning.

Synonymy is one obvious way for words to be related in meaning. Synonymy is a case in which words are said to have identical meanings? Yes and no for instance in pail and bucket, anything which can be called a pail can also be called a bucket, and vice versa, so to that extend they are synonyms. However, these words are not interchangeable. One’s choice is affected by where one comes from. In England, in whales, and in the Southern U.S.A. bucket is normal and pail is, the unmarked word, and pail is rustic, while in Scotland and northern U.S.A. pail is normal and bucket is rustic. The little complication aside, the point here is that even when two words can be applied to exactly the same range of objects or events, they often have different associations the

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violin/fiddle, big/large are also good examples. Examples of meaning similarity errors which were traceable to synonymous are:-

- i. My spoken English is gradually increasing (instead of improving)
- ii. My school was created in 1994 (instead of founded)

Sound similarity errors are traceable to homophones (e.g.)

- i. I saw the principle of the school (principal)
- ii. They will give them prices for good performance (award)

Learners who never mastered the lexical resources of the language focus on the decontextualized lexical items as listed in the dictionaries thereby losing sight of words association, such learners often belabour their speeches by using long and convoluted expressions for simple and complicated ideas.

The findings in this study show that our respondents had problem of defining the semantic boundaries that separate lexical items. As a result of this, they failed to observe the rule of restrictions on the co-occurrence of lexical items. The implication of this is that learners of English will find it difficult to produce coherent and meaningful text as long as their learning of these lexical relations is imperfect. A clearer understanding of sense relation can provide greater precision in guiding students toward meaning and in helping them to define boundaries that separate lexical items.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study had been to highlight synonymy to reveal how poor mastery of synonymy is capable of affecting learners of English language beyond 2020. The study had also intended to evaluate the usefulness of semantic relation (synonymy) to meaning interpretation and also to recommend ways of improving the performance of students thus enhancing the development of English beyond 2020. From the finding, the following conclusions / suggestion were made:-

- i. Synonymy is an important concept in the teaching and learning of English since errors in its usage can distort communication.
- ii. Connotative and collocative meanings which certain lexemes may have bring about difference in a set of synonymous English lexemes.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the finding, we proffer the following recommendations: -

- i. Firstly semantics should be introduce as a core subject in primary and secondary schools and teachers should be taught to teach synonymy in details, paying attention to collocation, connotative differences.

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- ii. Text book writers should take synonymy as serious topic and should treat synonymy in detail.
- iii. English teachers should also recommend books that synonymy and others semantics relation are taught properly.
- iv. Curriculum planners should include that synonymy and other relations be taught in details.

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