

# INSTANCES OF NIGERIANIZED ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS IN ELECHI AMADI'S THE CONCUBINE

HAPPY DUMBI OMENOGOR

## **Abstract**

*The English Language is no longer a sole possession of its original owners. The language is used for communication in many parts of the world. It is used in many countries in addition to its original country. Consequently, it is used with modifications to suit its environment of use in different regions. This is why some Nigerian literary artists have Nigerianized it in their works. This technique is utilized by Elechi Amadi in The Concubine. This paper therefore examines each Nigerianized expressions, their stylistic significance and overall effects in putting across the message of the text.*

## **1. Introduction**

The origin and growth of the English language in Nigeria has been traced by Nigerian scholars (See Banjo (1970), Akere (1995) and Osakwe (2005a and 2005b). According to Osakwe (2011), 'The English language was brought to Nigeria through commercial contact with English merchants'. The above authority further notes 'that missionary work, ambivalent attitudes, government policies, pogrammes and projects influenced the growth of English.' Today, English is a very important language. Quirk et al. (1972) cited in Oseafiana (2009) observes that 'English is the world's most important

and most widely used language.' English functions as the medium for discharging Nigerian talents across the world.

The English language in Nigeria has developed some features that make it different from the standard British English (SBE). A variety of English with peculiar Nigerian features has emerged. From the manner the English language is now used, it is no longer a sole property of its original owner. This is probably why Osakwe (2011) stipulates that "If England lays the first claim to English, she will not deny that the nativization of the language on the Nigerian soil entitles Nigeria to some claims of its ownership.' The skill of utilizing two or more languages to a creative advantage is obviously a developmental stride. This development is not just intellectual, literary and linguistic but also socio-cultural, political and economic. Consider the socio-cultural, political and the economic implications of the translation of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), an African novel, written in English into Italian, Spanish, Slovene, Russian etc. Achebe's route to this development was certainly English, which was for his purpose, inevitable. Achebe (1975) expresses this inevitability thus:

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding.

The new English referred to above is a child of necessity and it is this linguistic phenomenon which is also viewed as Nigerianizing English that Amadi utilized in *The concubine* (1966).

## **2. Instances of Nigerianized English Expressions**

The adjective 'Nigerianized' is a coinage from 'Nigeria'. In the course of using the expressions, Nigerians try to maintain or comply with the principles and norms of the English language but give local colour or some features of Nigerian local languages in the English expressions used. It is the type of expressions explained above that we have termed 'Nigerianized English'. The expressions being described exist in the English of Nigerians (Elechi Amadi inclusive) as a result of 'interference' which, according to Akindele and Adegbite (2001), is regarded as “instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language”.

Interference features in phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic levels of language. Interference occasions a situation whereby some lexical items and notions are translated from the first language (mother tongue) of the Nigerians into English. Some of the lexical items might have equivalent meanings in the English Language; whereas some might not as indicated in the following examples given by Oluikpe in Balogun et al (2003).

'Eat money' for 'embezzle money' 'Hear English' for 'understand English' 'Hear smell' for 'perceive odour' 'Know book' for 'being intelligent academically' 'Head bridge' for 'Bridgehead' 'Change' for 'Balance' 'Watchnight' for 'Night Watchman' 'Wonderful accident' for 'Ghastly accident', (86)

These types of expressions are what Jowitt (1991) refers to as 'popular Nigerian English' or 'inter-language'. For instance, he explains as follows:

On the basis of our broad definition of P N E (popular Nigerian English) it is now natural to regard P N E as an inter

language between', that is, the L1 (first language) or MT (mother tongue) (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba...) and the TL (Target language), which for most of the history of English in Nigeria has been S B E [Standard British English].

The above authority further stipulates that "P.N.E is an inter language simply because, in general, Nigerian users of English must be regarded as learners of English, in the sense of the word which applies to a situation where English is L2 [second language]"

Elechi Amadi, a Nigerian writer writing in the English language, made use of Nigerianized English, (Popular Nigerian English) (P.N.E.), inter-language or expressions with interference of the mother tongue features. Amadi used the above expressions not because of his ignorance or his inability to use the standard British English (SBE) which is the target language (TL). He made use of the expressions because of three basic factors, namely to capture reality in literature. Amadi used the expressions in order to portray a true slice of life in his work and this he achieved very well. This is why many students who read *The Concubine* declared "that of all the Nigerian novels they have read, *The concubine* was the only novel they could respond to," according to Palmer (1966), quoted at cover page of *The Concubine*. Moreso, Amadi used the expressions so that communication can be effective between him and his Nigerian audience in particular and African audience in general. Much as it is true that such 'Nigerianized' expressions make it rather impossible for the writer to be understood internationally, it is also true that many Nigerian readers will find it easier to understand expressions with local colour than they will understand the Standard British English (SBE). The last reason responsible for Amadi's usage of such expressions is that such usage is a

reflex action (an action one cannot control). As a Nigerian, brought up in Nigeria with an African language as his mother tongue, such Nigerianized expressions or words with local colour cannot but find their ways into his novel. No matter how careful a writer may be, this must happen because one's language is part of his culture.

The expressions used by Amadi as reflective of Nigerian colour will now be pointed out and explained. They will be revised to show how they ought to have been presented in order to guarantee international intelligibility. The stylistic value of the expressions lies in the fact that they are easily understood by the Nigerian audience and the local colour in them makes the audience feel at home and respond appropriately to the expressions in particular and the novel in its entirety.

(i) 'You big eyed fool, how dare you touch Ihuoma' (The Concubine p.69)?

In standard British English, the sentence would be reconstructed as 'You greedy fool, how dare you touch Ihuoma? The 'Nigenalized' expression in sentence (i) above is 'big eyed' Nnadi, Ihuoma's

brother in-law made the above statement to Madume, who was Emenike's antagonist after Emenike's death. Nnadi by this statement means that Madume is a greedy fellow but he used Nigerian local colour by saying that he has

'big eyes'[anya Uku in Igbo language]. This description fits Madume according to the account of the novel because he is never satisfied with what he has, he always wants more.

Madume has one fault most villagers disliked. He was 'big eyed', that is to say he was never satisfied with his share in anything that was good. He would roar until he had something more than his companion's shares

(The Concubine Pgs.4-5)

(ii) My daughter, Wigwe began, we thank you for the great help you rendered us this afternoon. Many a woman would have hesitated over a situation like that, but you acted promptly and calmly as if you were his sister. Thank you, my daughter. The gods will reward you (The Concubine P.154)

The expression used in a Nigerianized form in the above quotation is 'my daughter' used in two places. Wigwe, Ekwueme's father, made the statement to Ihuoma while he was appreciating the assistance Ihuoma rendered to them with respect to Ekwueme. Wigwe addressed Ihuoma as 'my daughter' as if he gave birth to her as he did Ekwueme. The fact is that in standard British English, this expression is not accepted but it is used and accepted by Nigerians. A Nigerian man can address anybody he is old enough to father as 'my son' or 'my daughter' depending on the sex of the person referred to. In standard British English, the statement would have read:

'Ihuoma', Wigwe began, 'We thank you for the great help... thank you Ihuoma... the gods will reward you.'

The usage of 'my daughter' in the quotation is of some stylistic value because Elechi Amadi used it to demonstrate the fact that a Nigerian was talking to a Nigerian in a Nigerian society.

iii. Thank you, my son. Ah, this is the beautiful girl in question, I m sure he [Agwoturumbe} said, regarding Ihuoma appreciatively, all will be well my daughter, even if I have to make a journey to the bottom of the river myself. (The Concubine P.206-207)

The above statement was made to Ekwueme and Ihuoma by Agwoturumbe, the famous native doctor from Aliji. The lexical items that are used in a Nigerianized manner are: 'my son' and 'my daughter'. As we earlier pointed out, addressing someone not biologically fathered by the person making the address as my son or my daughter does not conform with the convention of standard British English (S B E). Agwoturumbe just used the expressions because that is the manner in which they are used in Nigeria. The stylistic value of the expressions lies in the fact that their usage makes Amadi's work very natural and real to the Nigerian audience. In standard English, the expressions 'my son' and 'my daughter' would have been 'Mr. Ekwueme' and 'Miss Ihuoma' or simply 'Ekwueme' and 'Ihuoma' in a completely informal setting.

iv In the first year of her marriage, Ihuoma had been slim and quite a few of her more plumpy mates had remarked that food was being wasted on her

(The Concubine P. 11)

The Nigerianized word in the above quotation is 'plumpy'. Elechi Amadi must have been influenced by the Nigerian society with respect to the usage of this word. The use of 'plumpy' is an example of some lexical items that are popularly used by Nigerians but they are either non-existent in English or wrong. According to Hornby (2015), the appropriate word that would have been used in the above quotation is 'plump'. The authority in question further explains that 'plump' as an adjective means 'having a soft rounded body, slightly fat, looking soft, full and attractive to use or eat (1125).' The first two meanings tally with the meaning Elechi Amadi tried to portray in the sentence. Jowitt's position on this usage by Amadi supports ours on the matter.

...'plumpy' is sanctioned by the standard dictionaries, the usual modern S B E (Standard British English) word is 'plump'. In P N E (Popular Nigerian English) 'plumpy' is common (226).

We will excuse Amadi on this mistake if we call it one, on the grounds that he is a Nigerian and he is writing for Nigerians in order to portray a slice of life and capture reality in all ramifications.

v "Tell her I like her and I very much want us to be friends, real friends.' There was a pause. 'Will you relay the message?' 'I shall Ekwe.' 'When will you bring me word again?' On the evening of the brother of tomorrow. 'Where will I meet you?' 'At the entrance to your compound.' You should be there when I shall be passing to fetch water. (The Concubine P. 63)

The above quotation is a conversation between Ekwueme and Nneda, Ihuoma's friend and neighbours on the occasion that Ekwueme, a beginner in love affairs gave her a love message for Ihuoma, the woman he truly loves ..... 'the brother of tomorrow' is a clear case of Nigerian English. Its application is deliberate on the part of Elechi Amadi and its stylistic significance lies on the fact that it enables Amadi to make his characters use words the way Nigerians would use them in real life. This makes it possible for the novelist to capture reality. The Standard British English of the expression in question is 'The day after tomorrow.'

vi ' Wine carrying was expensive on both sides.'  
Wagbara, with the help of his neighbours prepared a great feast for his guests and made sure that nothing was lacking' (The Concubine, P. 123)

The Nigerianized expression above is 'wine carrying'. It is a transliteration of Nigerian expression into the English



Language. It is used for the same reason as other expressions in the novel namely, to capture reality, because this novel was written to portray an African society was still intact with respect to its tradition. The Standard British English equivalence of the expression is 'Wine Presentation.'

### **3. Conclusion**

Instances of the Nigerianized expressions have been examined. Amadi uses them to add local colour to his text. With their aid, he displays the Nigerian linguistic culture communicating effectively with his Nigerian audience in particular, in a Nigerian society about the affairs of Nigerians.

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