

## **Influence of Affixation on the International Intelligibility of Aspects of SNE Lexicosemantics**

**Emama Emmanuel**

### **Abstract**

Significant investigative resources have been directed at investigating the linguistic peculiarities of standard Nigerian English at the lexicosemantic level. However, research imperatives are generally skewed in favour of either describing the processes, the linguistic/sociocultural forces that underpin them, or their implication for English language pedagogy. Commensurate attention has not been given to the effect of such lexicosemantic processes on the intelligibility of Nigerian English internationally. This paper examines the influence that specific morphological processes in standard Nigerian English have on the international intelligibility of its lexico-semantics. The study population consists of one hundred and fifty educated Kenyan users of Standard English. The test items in the research instrument consist of lexical items that have been semantically extended in SNE other SNE coinages. The analysis of the data indicates that SNE words derived using affixation are significantly more intelligible to the study population. The higher intelligibility of this set of SNE words is ascribable to the interpretive/semantic force of affixes attached to ab initio SBE root words.

*Keywords:* intelligibility, morphological processes, diatopic variation, affixation, lexicosemantics

### **Introduction**

The implantation of English in diverse western and non-Western multilingual settings around the world has raised many issues. These ranges from linguistic to political, sociocultural, literary, and pedagogical among others. Consequently, debates on the acceptability and intelligibility of new varieties of English have become a constant linguistic leitmotif in the literature of world Englishes (Jenkins 2006, Seidholfer, 2001, Kachru, 1992). Thus, controversies about the native/non-native divide, the impact of lexicosemantic variations on cross-cultural communication, the choice of a model for English language teaching, and the link between English and identity have stimulated scholarly inquiry in an unprecedented way. as a result, the sociolinguistics literature is inundated with diverse accounts on these

issues. It is therefore not surprising that a plethora of linguistic models has been propounded to capture the spread, variation, and use of English worldwide.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars have extensively examined the peculiarities of lexicosemantic processes and usages in standard Nigerian English. Detailed attention has been paid to the sociocultural, political and other saliences that underpin the lexicosemantics of Standard Nigerian English. Investigative resources have been expended to unravel the roles that semantic extension, narrowing, shift, coinages; and borrowings from the substrates exert on the lexicosemantics of standard Nigerian English (Ogunsiji 2001, Aondover et al 2013, Owolabi 2012; Emama & Maledo 2018). With specific reference to the lexico-semantic role of affixation in standard Nigerian English, two investigative priorities are usually noticeable. First is the investigation of its contribution to semantic productivity in standard Nigerian English (Babatunde & Shobomehin: 2006, Adegbija 2004). The second research imperative is underpinned by contrastive considerations. Thus, a significant number of these studies are pedagogy-driven. This paper investigates the influence of affixation-derived lexical items on the intelligibility standard Nigerian vis a vis those derived through semantic extensions.

### **Methodology**

The study population consists of one hundred and fifty educated Kenyan users of Standard English. The primary criterion for selecting the participants is their level of education. It is significant to note that the educational variable is the most significant factor in the delimitation of what constitutes a standard variety of a language (Brosnahan 1958, Banjo 1975, 1971). The participants are all graduates or undergraduates of tertiary institutions of learning with an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and National Certificate of Education (NCE) being the minimum requirement. It is pertinent to note that Kenya and Nigeria have the OND/HND certification system. Kenya also has the Kenya Certificate of Education (KCE) and the East African Certificate of Education; these are equivalent to the Nigerian NCE certification. The level of education is the most crucial variable in this study. It is expected that the high level of education of the participants should provide the

academic wherewithal to enable them to decipher the illocutionary force embedded in the test items.

The research is testing and questionnaire-based. Lexical units of standard Nigerian English provenances constitute the test items. The test items, forty in number, are made up of: (i) twenty-eight lexical items of standard British English that have been semantically extended in standard Nigerian English (ii) twelve lexical items exclusively of standard Nigerian English provenance derived using affixation. The research instrument is designed to test for two things. The first is to test the intelligibility of the lexicosemantic usages of standard Nigerian at the international level. The first research objective is determined by the respondents' ability to correctly interpret peculiarities of standard Nigerian English lexicosemantics embedded in the test items. The second research task is to test, comparatively, the intelligibility of the test items derived by affixation vis a vis those that are semantically extended. Due to the constraint of distance, the research instrument was administered via a variety of ICT-enabled channels: Facebook, email, and Instagram. The acceptable interpretations provided by the respondents are counted and divided based on the diatopic variety that underpins them. In this study, three varieties are used; standard Nigerian, British, and American English. Simple statistical analysis is employed to analyse the data based on the variety of English (SBE or SNE) that underpin the interpretations.

An important variable in the choice of test items is lexical entrenchment. Lexical entrenchment is the extent to which a new word becomes part of the lexicon of a speech community (Chesley 2011). Entrenched lexical items are deeply ingrained in the speech community and enjoy a high-frequency usage and are widely dispersed. Unlike slangs that are transient entrenched words enjoy longevity (Osakwe 2015). Lexical items such as *celebrant* and *take in* used in Nigerian English differently from SBE to mean (someone celebrating a birthday or some form of achievement/becoming pregnant) are examples of entrenched lexical items.

Only entrenched coinages in Nigerian English are employed as test items. The reason for this is twofold. First, it is expected that such lexical items, by dint of a long-established tradition of usage, have been adequately dispersed beyond the linguistic boundaries of the diatopic variety that coined/semantically extended them. Second, it is also

expected that entrenchment would facilitate the availability of online lexicographical information on such lexical items. The world is increasingly becoming ICT- reliant for information. As a result, the intelligibility of the lexicosemantic usages of non-native varieties of English is increasingly becoming Google-reliant. Thus, the expectation is that lexical entrenchment will facilitate lexical dispersal arising from routine personal cross-national and e-contact.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

The data analysis presented in tables one and two details the intelligibility of the lexicosemantics usages of standard Nigerian English to educated Kenyan users of Standard English. The “comparative lexical meaning” column details aspects of semantic non-convergence in the test items between standard Nigerian and British English. The SNE sub-column is therefore reflective of aspects of meaning unique to standard Nigerian English. Conversely, the “SBE/AmE” sub-column indicates the meanings of the test items in American and British English. The SNE column, therefore, represents the additional meanings that the educated user of standard Nigerian English derives from the test items. Due to the comparative nature of this study, it was necessary to group the test items into more manageable units to expedite clarity and descriptive ease. Consequently, the test items are divided into two groups depending on the operative morphological process. These are:

1. Semantic extensions
2. Affixation,

Tables one and two and the accompanying chart contain the analysis of the international intelligibility of SBE/AmE lexical items that have been semantically extended in standard Nigerian English. Table three; on the other hand, contains the analysis of the intelligibility of SNE test items derived through affixation at the international level.

**Table 1: Comparative Cross Variety Lexicosemantics (Semantic Extension)**

Serial number	Test items	Comparative Lexical Meaning		Acceptable interpretations	Diatopic numbers		Diatopic Percentage	
		SBE/AmE	SNE		SBE/AmE	SNE	SBE/AmE	SNE
1	Celebrant	Officiating priest	one who celebrates	19	8	11	0%	100%
2	Vacate	leave or give up something	holiday	76	76	0	100%	0%
3	Far fetched	Unlikely, implausible	not difficult to discern	45	45	0	100%	0%
4	Belgium	A European country	Used cars imported from other countries	32	32	0	100%	0%
5	Vendor	One who sells something	A seller of newspapers	54	54	0	100%	0%
6	Cramming	Force people or things into a small space	Memorize information to pass an exam	49	18	31	37%	63% <sup>3</sup>
7	Impeachment	To Question integrity	Remove from office	64	31	33	49%	51%
8	Settled	Resolved/end a legal dispute		23	23	0	100%	0%
9	Toasts	To honour someone with raised glasses. To make bread browner	To woo a lady	29	29	0	100%	0%
10	Purge	Rid of unwanted feelings/forcefully remove	Laxative. Empty the bowels/watery stool	69	69	0	100%	0%
11	Pure water	impurity-free water	Sachet water	57	57	0	100%	0%
12	Defected	To abandon a cause/country	Switch party allegiance	29	14	15	47%	53%
13	Go slow	To slow the pace of work	Traffic congestion	39	39	0	100%	0%

The data shows that the international intelligibility of SNE lexicosemantics is poor. Educated Kenyan users of Standard English provided one thousand, two hundred and seventy-one acceptable interpretations for the test items that have been semantically extended in

<sup>3</sup><https://www.kenyaplex.com/resources/2199-how-to-cram-when-you-have-no-other-choice.aspx>

standard Nigerian English. The division of the interpretations along diatopic lines (SBE/SNE) shows that one thousand and fifty-nine of the interpretations were underpinned by the semantics of standard Nigerian English.

**Table 2: Comparative Cross Variety Lexicosemantics (Semantic Extension)**

Serial number	Test items	Comparative lexical meaning		Acceptable interpretations	Diatopic numbers		Diatopic Percentage	
		SBE/AmE	SNE		SBE/AmE	SNE	SBE AmE	SNE
14	Flirt	Behave as if sexually attracted to someone	without inhibitions about sex/ permissive	62	35	27	56%	44% <sup>4</sup>
15	Settle down	Feel at home/ comfortable	Become responsible/ to marry	54	28	26	51%	49% <sup>5</sup>
16	Mobile	Capable of movement	To have a car	29	29	0	100%	0%
17	Flit	Move rapidly	Fumigate	0	0	0	0%	0%
18	Yahoo	An email service provider	A scammer	38	21	17	57%	43% <sup>6</sup>
19	Yahoo plus	An email service provider	A juju-aided scam.	46	24	22	52%	48%
20	Put to bed	Put a matter to rest	Give birth	0	0	0	0%	0%
21	Light	Illumination	Electric power	68	68	0	100%	0%
22	Issues	Problems	Children	52	52	0	100%	0%
23	hemp	A plant used for ropes	Marijuana	67	67	0	100%	0%
24	Query	To question meant to provide clarification	A censure over a bureaucratic misdeed	55	55	0	100%	0%
25	Data	Facts/statistics	Internet subscription	78	78	0	100%	0%

<sup>4</sup><https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/evewoman/article/2001251077/11-tips-to-help-you-improve-your-flirting-skills>

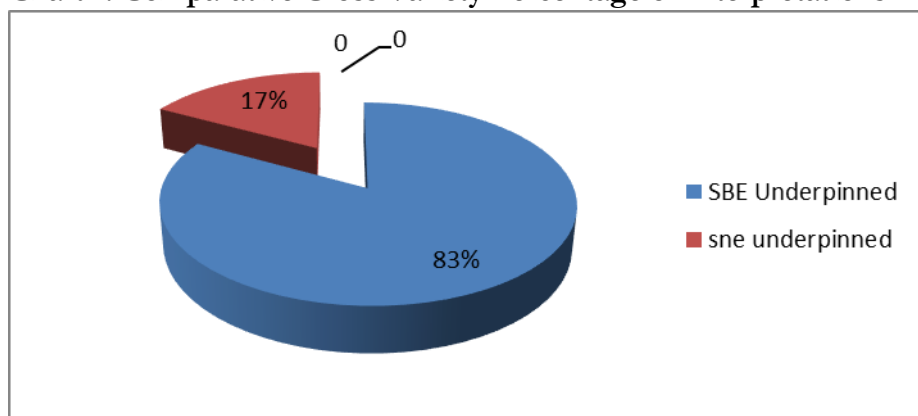
<sup>5</sup><https://www.tuko.co.ke/257403-12-kenyan-celebs-marry-settle-down.html#257403>

<sup>6</sup><http://kenya.shafaqna.com/EN/KE/277120>

26	Attachment	Something attached to another	Artificial or human hair worn by women	68	68	0	100%	0%
27	Decamped	To leave a place suddenly	Leave a political party for another	46	16	30	35%	65%
28	Backyard	A space at the back of a house	A woman's buttocks	23	23	0	100%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>1271</b>	<b>1059</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>17%</b>

The remaining interpretations, two hundred and twelve, reflect interpretations underpinned by standard Nigerian English lexicosemantics. As shown in the chart below, only 17% of the correct interpretations provided by Kenyan respondents reflect SNE meanings. The rest, an overwhelming 83%, are underpinned by standard British English lexicosemantic.

**Chart 1: Comparative Cross Variety Percentage of Interpretations**



Twenty-eight semantically extended test items are used in the study. Of these, seventeen received purely SBE-inclined interpretations. These test items include: vacate, far-fetched, Belgium, vendor, settled, toasts, purge, pure water, go slow, mobile, light, issues, hemp, query, data, attachment, and backyard. The implication is that the SNE meaning components in the foregoing test items are unintelligible to educated Kenyan respondents. They relied solely on SBE diatopic context in interpreting those lexical items; the SNE-underpinned meaning in these test items were completely unintelligible to Kenyan respondents. Test items 17,

(flit) and 20 (put to bed) received zero interpretation. (See Table two). This may be because the context automatically rules out SBE-Inclined interpretations.

However, educated Kenyan users of Standard English were able to understand aspects of SNE meaning embedded in nine of the test items. For instance, test items 1 (celebrant), 6 (cramming), 7 (impeachment), 12 (defected), 14 (flirt), 15 (settle down), 18 (yahoo), 19 (yahoo plus), and (27) decamped got interpretations that are 58%, 63%, 51%, 53%, 44%, 49%, 43%, 48%, 63% SNE-inclined. The intelligibility of this set of test items is salience-driven. The importance or salience attached to them seems to have engendered the availability of online lexicographical information that facilitated their intelligibility. It is pertinent to note that 78% of the respondent stated that they utilized online resources to interpret the test items. The footnotes attached to some of the test items represent instances of SNE-underpinned use of those lexical items in the print and online media in Kenya. The foregoing is indicative of the general acceptance and entrenchment of those lexical items in the lexicon of standard Kenyan English. The educational, political, and notoriety values that underpin these lexical items facilitated the availability of online lexicographical information. Examples include political: (decamped, impeached); notoriety: (yahoo, yahoo plus); educational salience (cramming).

The emergence of modern English owes a lot to technology. The invention of the printing press standardized English orthography and eliminated the spelling chaos prevalent in the Middle English period. Subsequent technological inventions, radio, telegraph, television, cable television, exerted telling influences on the development of English, especially concerning the rapid dispersal of coinages. The emergence of the internet, more than any other invention, has geometrically influenced the development and dispersal of English. The globalizing effect of English and the effect of globalization on the English language is partly Internet-driven. One reason for this is that the internet obviates the strictures inherent in television, cable television, and print media. Simply put, the internet gives the educated user of any diatopic variety of English, using an internet-enabled device, unparalleled freedom to disperse diatopic coinages beyond national boundaries. The phenomenon explains the

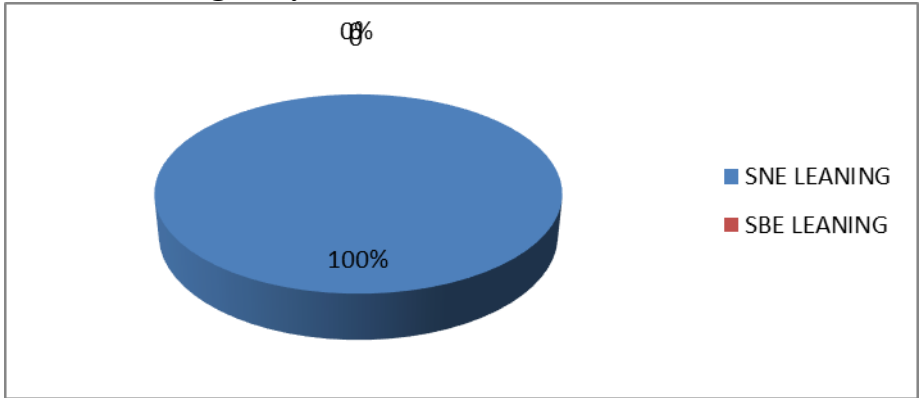


intelligibility of some of the test items. It is interesting to note that even test items directly borrowed from the substrates are intelligible to Kenyan respondents because of the lexicographical resources of the internet.

The analysis of the data discovered two features that expedited the intelligibility of aspects of SNE lexicosemantics (see table three and chart two). First is the role of affixation. For instance, all affixation-based SNE lexicosemantic usages received 100% SNE-underpinned interpretations even though there are no helpful lexicographical resources. This finding is perhaps exclusive to this study. The international intelligibility of these test items is affix-driven; facilitated by the interpretive context provided by the meanings of the bound morphemes in relation to the SBE root words to which they are attached. SNE lexical items such as **Hijabist, plumpy, trafficated, disvirgin, instalmentally, occultic, cultism, guyish, and buharists** were correctly interpreted by simply using the semantic import of the bound morphemes in relation to the root words.

**Table 3: Comparative Cross Variety Lexicosemantics (affixation)**

Serial number	Test items	Comparative lexical meaning		Acceptable interpretations	Diatopic Leaning in numbers
		SBE/AmE	SNE		SBE/AmE
1	Hijabist	N.A	A proponent of the use of the hijab	21	0
2	Plumpy	N.A	Plump	48	0
3	Matured	N.A	Mature/ Of suitable age	13	0
4	Guyish	N.A	Fashionable. Trendy	27	0
5	Opportuned	N.A	An opportunity	56	0
6	Trafficated	N.A	To indicate	23	0
7	Disvirgin	N.A	Deflower	67	0
8	Instalmentally	N.A	in installment	29	0
9	Cultism	N.A	Violent university-based secret societies	45	0
10	Confusionist	N.A	One who causes confusion	17	0
11	Occultic	N.A	Of the occult	19	0
12	Buharists	N.A	Supporter of President Buhari	29	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>397</b>	<b>0</b>

**Chart 2: Intelligibility of Affixation-Driven SNE Test Items**

### Conclusion

Mutual intelligibility between standard varieties of English, especially at the lexicosemantic level, ultimately depends on the availability of lexicographical reference materials. The usefulness of the internet in expediting cross-variety intelligibility has already been established in this study. It is pertinent to note that sixty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they employed online resources to decipher the intelligibility of the test items. Consequently, the availability of online lexicographical information on the lexicosemantics of standard Nigerian English should aid international intelligibility.

In the absence of a dictionary of Nigerian English of international renown, one of the main impediments to the international intelligibility of standard Nigerian English, in comparison to BrE and AmE, is the dearth of comprehensive online lexicographical resources. The world is increasingly becoming ICT- reliant for information. As a result, the intelligibility of the lexicosemantic usages of non-native varieties of English is increasingly becoming Google-reliant. It is therefore our opinion that the intelligibility of Nigerian English can be improved upon if a concerted effort is made to provide a comprehensive online lexicographical reference database.

It is our opinion that the challenges of cross-variety can be largely obviated by some form of international cooperation between relevant bodies in the English-speaking world. In every language system, lexical units are the main carriers of intelligibility. International cooperation,

with the sole aim of enhancing mutual intelligibility at the lexical level, will optimize the utility value to all the federating units. This requires a comprehensive contrastive analysis of standard national varieties of the English language. One primary aim of undertaking such an endeavour is to establish a Corpus of English as an international language. This undertaking will be huge requiring the input of various disciplines but there is no doubt that the topic is primarily one of sociolinguistics. Relevant research associations such as the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) and the English Studies Association can spearhead this endeavour.

Many languages with international utility value have adopted two basic approaches to ensure, among other things, cross-diatopic intelligibility. First, is the establishment of language academies and standardization institutions that exert regulatory powers over such languages. For instance, French is regulated by the Académie Française. The academy, to paraphrase the goals of its founding fathers, is saddled with the task of maintaining the standard of the language by ensuring adherence to a definite set of rules meant to preserve its purity and eloquence. Portuguese has the "Lisbon Science Academy Class of Letters" and the "Brazilian Academy of Letters" located in Portugal and Brazil respectively. Urdu, Chinese, Spanish, and others have academies that, among other functions, regulate the inclusion of unentrenched lexical items into the lexicons of those languages. Some of these academies are not devoid of political intrigues. For instance, political considerations necessitated the establishment of disparate language academies for China/ Taiwan, India/Pakistan, Portugal/Brazil and France/ Canada.

The second approach is that of cooperation largely devoid of political undertones. For instance, the Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung (Council for German Orthography) facilitates cooperation in matters relating to the German language. It covers Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and other German-speaking communities of South Tyrol in Italy, and Belgium. Other languages that have established cooperative language academies include Swahili, Persian, Arabic and Spanish. The Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa (National Swahili Council), domiciled in Tanzania is saddled with the task of regulating Swahili in Tanzania and

Kenya. The Persian language academy covers Iran, Tajikstan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan.

The English language, the world's foremost international language, has no regulatory body. Paradoxically, the lack of regulation is why it has become the unrivalled linguist superpower of the modern world. English speakers rely on dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster's and Oxford English dictionaries. The absence of a regulatory academy for the English language is part of the reason for its emergence as the lingua franca of the world and the reason why it may possess the greatest challenge of cross-diatopic intelligibility.

In the first place, it is important to note that the emergence of English as an international language is a product of cultural diversity and not racial homogeneity. Second, new varieties of English are a product of the influence of substrate languages on English as it took root in different sociolinguistic milieux. Third, the English language is increasingly being used as a tool of communication between peoples who use it in the context of a second or foreign language. Fourth, undermining the norming influence of the native user, as some researchers have suggested, is equally unwise as the native user's variety provides the stabilizing core that holds all the varieties of the language together. Consequently, the challenges of cross-variety intelligibility of English can be better tackled if the inputs of all its users are taken into consideration. The result will be an international English that is not only mutually intelligible cross-diatopically but also caters for the communicative needs of all its users.

## References

- Adegbija, E. (2004). The Domestication of English in Nigeria. In Awonusi, S. & Babalola, E . (Eds.) *The Domestication of English in Nigeria: A Festschrift in Honour of Abiodun Adetugbo*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press
- Aondover etal (2013) <http://www.iostjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol116- issue 5/K01656569.pdf>
- Ajewole-Orimogunje, C. (2013) Lexico-Grammatical Features of Nigerian English. *International Journal of English Language Education*. 1(1), 76-89.

- Alo, M. A. (2006). Creativity and lexical/discourse innovations in Yoruba–English translation. *Ibadan Journal of English studies*, 3(4), 17-36.
- Alo, M. A. (2004). Context and language variation: The EL2 example. In Oyeleye, L. (Ed), *Language, and discourse in society* (pp 73–82). Ibadan: Hope publication
- Are, O.B. (2016). Nigerian English in International Business Communication: Issues, Challenges and Prospects. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 6(4) 167-176
- ‘Babatunde, S. & Shobomehin, T. (2006). A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Selected Nigerian English (NE.) Metaphors. In Adeyanju, D. (ed.) 2006. *Sociolinguistics in the Nigerian Context Ile- Ife. OAU Press*
- Banjo, A. (1995) “On Codifying Nigerian English: Research So” Far in Bamgbose, A., Banjo, A. and Thomas, A. (eds.). *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*. Pp.67-89 Ibadan: Mosuro.
- Banjo, A, 1971. Towards a Definition of Standard Nigerian Spoken English. *Annales de ‘Universite d’ Abidjan*, 14(7) 24-28.
- Chesley, P. (2011) Linguistic, cognitive, and social constraints on lexical entrenchment. PhD. Dissertation, University of Minnesota
- Doi, S. (2013) Japanese Loanwords Found in the Oxford English Dictionary. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Japan: Nagoya University.
- Ekpe, M. B. (2011) Nigerian English in the Determinant Triangle. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 2 (2), 93-99
- Egbe, D. I. (1979) Spoken and written English in Nigeria. In *Varieties and Functions of English in Nigeria*. Ubahakwe.E. (Ed.) pp. 86-106. Ibadan: African Universities Press.
- Ekundayo, S.B. (2013) Lexico-Semantic ‘Interference’ in Educated Nigerian English (ENE) *International Journal of English Linguistics*. 3(6), 121-134.
- Elendu, E. E. (2017) the Lexico-Semantic and Syntactic Variations in the Outer-Circle Englishes: A Study of Nigerian English. *International Journal of English Language and Communication Studies* 3(1), 67-77.

- Emama, E.O. and Maledo, R.O. “Pragmatics and Communicative Competence: English in a Second Language Environment and the Pedagogical Challenges” in *Scholarship and Commitment: Essays in Honour of G.G. Darab*, 2018, PP 412-420
- Jenkins, J. (2006). Implementing an international approach to English pronunciation: The role of teacher attitudes and identity. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39,535–543.
- Kachru, B. (1992). World Englishes. In *Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ogunsiji, A. (2001). Utilitarian dimension of language in Nigeria. In Igboanusi, H., (Ed), *Language attitude and language conflict in West Africa* (pp. 152-164). Ibadan: Enicrownfit Publishers.
- Osakwe, M. I. (2015) Lexicology and Productivity: an Analysis of Meaning in some Nigerian Slangs. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*. Vol. 08, no. 07, p. 279-291
- Owolabi, D (2012). The Domestication of the English Language for Literary Purpose in Nigeria: Creating a National Identity. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, Vol. 2, No. 6.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2001). Closing the conceptual gap: The case for a description of English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 11,133–158.