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Aspects of Nativized English in Two Nigerian Sports Magazines and their Implications for Sports Reporting

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Abstract:

The indigenized features of the language of sports reporting and their significance for sports reporting constitute the focal point of this discourse. The socio-cultural and linguistic milieu in which the mass media operates often shapes the tools and modalities employed in the performance of its essential role of informing, educating, entertaining and persuading the audience. The creative adaptation of the English language to the Nigerian socio-cultural context in the communication of sporting activities, with particular reference to football in this case, has engendered the peculiar lexico-semantic and other structural features of the sports pages. This paper therefore sets out to examine some peculiar forms of nativized English in the selected sports magazines with a view to establish their role in the enhancement or impediment of sports communication.

Through a purposive sampling of three editions of the sports magazine, Complete Football Incorporated and its yearly review, Top 20, the content analysis revealed that such unique linguistic features as unconventional inflections, ambiguous mis-analogy, reduplication and redundancy, superfluous descriptive adjectives, misuse of grammatical items, ungrammatical forms and archaic forms characterize the sports pages. While a number of the categories may be considered as beneficial in the effective communication of sports events, others have negative implications for sports communication both nationally and internationally as they reduce intelligibility and ultimately impede effective communication. It is therefore suggested that for better employment and effectiveness of these nativised features, writers should use them in deducable linguistic contexts, avoid erroneous and ungrammatical forms, and make available supplementary information at strategic points in the report to aid readers' comprehension.

Keywords: Nativization, lexico-semantics, intelligibility, acceptability

1. Introduction

Language the world over has remained responsive to and reflective of societal needs and norms. The English language has demonstrated a high level of dynamism in L1, L2, and foreign language situations. As affirmed by Hernberger and Mckey quoted by Mgbemens, (2007), "the varieties and norms for use emerge in response to local community needs." Adebite (2004) noted that the English language employed in Nigerian include such typologies as regional, occupational, stylistic, attitudinal and social varieties. Journalese, the newspaper/magazine English, which may be considered occupational and stylistic in nature, has remained a veritable tool in the communication of sports within and outside the shores of the nation.

While an average Nigerian believes that the Newspaper, magazines and often novels constitute repositories for the enhancement of English literacy skills, it would seem that this educative dimension is often down played for the entertaining edge by some media practitioners. This may not be unconnected with the principal features of sports writing which include informality and originality in language use. This is more so as the content and context of sport is in itself informal. It is often argued in journalistic circles that media contents are not written according to the laid down rules of English language, but are actually deviations from English norms and rules. However, as often maintained by English scholars, journalistic language was not discarded as not grammatically correct but as improper and unethical (Obe, 2005). Nevertheless, a contrary view holds that the adoption of the formal mode of language will not enhance effective communication because most often, the majority of the audience are usually the common people. Besides, the use of the formal language in a context such as that of sports will destroy the social and the interactional purpose of sports.

These opposing stances on language use in journalism, with particular reference to football reporting in this case, compels a balance to be struck in the interest of effective sports communication. To this end, the paper proceeds to look more closely at the various features of nativized English in sports reporting in the sample magazines with a view to establishing their essence and possible implications for the sports writer, the reader and the English language in aspects of acceptability and intelligibility.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language and Sports Communication

The use of language is vital in all societies to man's communicative endeavour, and in the field of sports, the understanding of linguistic and non linguistic signals is paramount to successful communication among sports participants including the audience and the reporters. In Nigeria, the lingua Franca English is employed in sports related activities such as coaching, commentaries, interviews and reports. It is essential that the reporter detaches himself or herself from all racism, emotional undertones and favouritism. As a neutral entity, s/he presents the report on neutral grounds in an informal style which helps present the article in the best readable manner.

Short and active sentences strung with non-conventional interparagraph links give the sports pages their vivid and energetic nature (Medubi, 1999:115). Looking at the sports column, it is evident that like other types of report, various graphological devices are put into use to achieve different effects on the reader. The structure of the report presents the initial paragraph as a summary answering the five "wh" questions of what happened, why it happened, when did it happen, where did it happen and how did it happen. Hence, the entire report is essentially a delicate and systematic business which requires experience and efficiency in language use.

2.2. The Media: Nigeria English, Creativity and Errors

Traditionally, the press has been known to perform four basic functions of informing, educating, service provision and entertaining. To perform these functions creditably, the press must provide accurate reports, balanced analysis, objective comments, intelligent analysis, well informed interpretation and unbiased presentations (Medubi, 2007; Ademola-Adeoye, 2014). These astute qualities conveyed in high level language proficiency have earned newspapers and magazines their recommendations as language enrichment materials (Garret, 1993 quoted by Ajayi, 2002). Summarizing the value of the newspaper and magazine, Umoh (1991) cited Roe et al. thus: newspaper and magazines are excellent media for reading instruction because they are readily available and they treat a wide variety of subject matters. Newspapers and magazines are highly motivating for, and interesting to students who have been turned off by formal reading materials (p. 84).

As a living entity, language however remains dynamic; it varies from place to place and exhibits different characteristics in different sociolinguistic contexts (Faleke and Alo, 2010: 55). And, although today, the English language has become a world language with its fixed orthography, pronunciation and grammatical rules, its employment in diverse spheres of life (technology, entertainment, religion, and journalism) raises the issue of defined and acceptable register in each field. (Lamidi, 2000). The concepts of error and variation are recurrent issues in linguistics and sociolinguistics. Errors are inaccuracies or unacceptable forms that manifest in performance; they are mistakes that may be corrected by replacing them with the acceptable form (Faleke, 2011, Ekundayo et. al, 2013). Variation and variability on the other hand are acceptable differences that may be observed in the way a language is used in a speech community and the range of possible differences which are found across LANGUAGES (Trask, 1999:333; Crystal, 2009:509).

In his article titled "variety signifiers in Nigerian English", Willmot (1979) claimed that lexical differences are more obvious and that much of the English heard in Nigeria could be defined as "substandard" containing linguistic flaws which may seem typical but which should not be necessarily described as Nigerian 'per se'. These include limited vocabulary, poor spelling, misused idioms, a tendency to use verbose and high faulting language often in the biblical or archaic manner, and a weak grasp of structural pattern.

In discussing Nigerian usages of English, Bamgbose (1982:103) identified three approaches; the interference approach, the deviation approach and the creativity approach. The interference approach attempts to trace Nigeria usages to the influence of the Nigerian languages (most relevant in phonetics). The deviation approach involves a comparison of observed Nigerian usage with native English, and labeling of all differences as "deviant", such deviance may result from interference, or from an imperfect attempt to reproduce the target expressions. The creativity approach tends to focus on the exploitation of the sources of Nigerian languages as well as of English to create new idioms and expressions. Hence, a usage which might otherwise have been classified as resulting from interference or deviation is seen as a legitimate second-language creation. The advantage of the creativity approach is its recognition of the development of Nigerian English as a variety in its own right.

It may be observed that each approach throws more light on the nature of Nigerian English but none is by itself adequate to characterize the whole spectrum of Nigerian English. A combination of all the approaches is suggested as well as a certain amount of subjective judgment regarding acceptability in determining what falls within or outside the scope of Nigerian English. The various approaches constitute new ways of looking at the Nigerian English phenomenon, each with its own function and application. The interference approach, for instance, is most relevant to language teaching in a second language situation, while the deviation approach can be used in the identification and establishment of standard, and the creativity approach is most relevant to stylistics and specialized uses of language as that which concerns the present study of Aspects of nativized English in sports magazines and their implication for sports reporting. Bamgbose (1982) observed that most differences between Nigerian English and other forms of English are to be found in the innovation of lexical items and idioms and their meaning. Kujore (1990:8) expounded the theme in pointing out that Nigerian English usage is characterized by the recasting, adaptation, or reinterpretation of British standard forms and expression. However, Kujore concluded that there can hardly be any difficulty in understanding the Nigerian variations, even if it has to be with a little stretch of the imagination because the idea is always there. The salient points in Kujore's account are the issues of "the idea" and "international intelligibility". He opined that since most teachers and learners of English in Nigeria are operating

in an English as second language situation, the fact remains that a different form of the English language will continue to be taught and learnt. However, prime attention should be paid to the issue of international intelligibility so that the codified or standardized Nigerian English does not differ so much from standard British English as to impede intelligibility. Jowitt (1991) treated the lexico-semantic variations of Nigerian English with a wider scope covering one-word lexemes, phrasal lexemes and idioms. Commenting on clichés in the lexis of popular Nigerian English, Jowitt described them as almost inevitable in an English as a second language situation. Unlike collocations, they attract attentions to themselves by such peculiarities as oddity of syntax or lexis, and they are prevalent among journalists and people who write for public audience.

3. Methodology

Data for the analysis was obtained through systematic sampling of some editions of the sports magazines; Complete Football Incorporated and its annual review, Top 20. The choice of the sports magazines in preference to the newspaper column is justifiable in view of their singular focus on football which enjoys a global prominence of place and patronage. Moreover, magazine reports and analysis are more detailed, often incorporating historical and future considerations which are absent in daily newspapers (Ademola-Adeoye, 2014:362). The 1998 editions are of particular interest because the world cup played in France intensified sports journalistic activities in order to keep pace with the tournament. Two editions were selected each for the beginning of the year (before the tournament) middle of the year (during the tournament) and end of the year (after the tournament). The magazines are considered pertinent to this study on issues of creativity, acceptability and intelligibility as they enjoy a good patronage from within and outside the country. And, unlike the newspaper column, more reporters are involved which makes for a wide range of varieties.

4. Data Analysis

A content analysis of the papers follows a procedure of isolating observable instances of nativized English, grouping them into specific categories (with each excerpt introduced with a dash), followed by their description/explanation marked with asterisk.

Note that conventional categories of lexico-semantic variations such as acronyms, conversions, loan shift, and extension, among others, obtainable within the report, do not constitute aspects of our focus in this study.

4.1. Unconventional Inflections

This category involves words which are inflected in the Nigerian English but not in their Standard British English form.

- Many a match which they could have won simply because they let in some stoppable free-kicks. (CFINC, May/June, 98, pg. 12).

*Here, "stop" which is a verb has been inflected to an adjective form "stoppable".

- It left many concluding that the star had played to the gallery on his team's ouster from the world cup. " (CFINC May/June, 98, pg. 13)

*The standard British English verb form of the underlined word "oust" has been inflected with the addition of "er" to obtain the noun form "ouster".

- Yet the same scary loss of scorable chances with reckless abandon has somewhat become the hallmark of the Nigerian game. (CFINC, May/June, 98, pg. 13)

*In the above instance "scary" is derived by inflecting "scare" (a noun) to give us an adjectival form and "score" (a noun) is inflected to give us an adjectival form "scorable".

- Against the reggae boyz in Jamaica. " (CFINC May/June, 98, pg. 17).

*In the above instance, the plural morpheme "s" has been inflected to "z".

- Gomez is continuing from where he took "over from Maturana" (CFINC May/June, 98 pg. 31).

*"continue" has a "being" or "going on" semantic value already, and the other available forms of "continue" are continues, continuity and continued.

- "...opened Nigeria's goals account when his masterful header found the net. (CFINC July, 98 pg. 18).

*The Standard British English meaning of the word "masterful" is someone who loves to dominate or command others, that is, one who behaves like a master. However "master" is inflected in the above instance to mean "one who is perfect in the act of". So in the above instance it connotes a headed ball which the player knows how to play so well.

- "Daver Suker, the golden ball winner thrilled his fans with quality footballing and great goals." (CFINC, July, 98 pg. 40).

*Here the noun football has been inflected by the addition of "ing" to derive a verb.

- "Marcel Desally bagged a red card...when he rammed into CAFU for a second bookable offense" (CFINC, July, '98, pg. 42)

*The standard British English meaning of the underlined word is "that which is available for booking" e.g. a seat on a plane. But the "book" being referred to above is "recording something in an exercise book" and this cannot be inflected into "bookable".

4.2. Ambiguous Misanalogy

These are cases of misapplied analogy. Ordinarily, analogical lexis or expressions derive from a sense of likeness to existing forms in English morphologically, semantically or some other way.

- "A stopper" with immense strength very reliable in aerial battle (CFINC. May/June, '98, pg. 35).

* The Standard British English "aerial" which means "existing in or moving through the air" is employed in the creation of the expression above to signify an aspect of the game where the ball is not in contact with the ground.

4.3. Reduplication and Redundancy

This group involves the duplication of words of the same semantic value.

- After eight straight years in Europe... Sunday Oliseh finally, finally won his first major honour. (Top 20 '98, pg. 30)

* The duplication of the word "finally" with the same semantic value as the first occurrence may have resulted from the influence of the Nigerian Mother tongue (L1) where it is conventional to duplicate such grammatical items.

- "...we know there's no better way of appreciating a tale unless it comes live and direct from the horse's mouth." (CFINC. July, '98, pg. 13)

* This is a common phrase in Nigerian English meaning "directly" or "live".

4.4. Superfluous Descriptive Adjectives

The use of "big" or "text book" English is a common feature of the Nigerian English. Most Nigerians including sports writers use them in order to sound knowledgeable or to win the admiration of others.

- "Sunday Oliseh's match winning master blaster from outside the Spanish penalty area was worthy of winning the cup". (CFINC. July, '98, pg. 14)

* The expression above originated from the bid of the writer to be maximally descriptive and the result is a complex-sounding and less meaningful form.

- "There was no near miss this time as he unleashed a thunderous swearing half volley that courled and squeezed into the goal." (CFINC. July, '98, pg. 14)

* The complex form above, traceable to the effort to be pictorially descriptive, presents the reader with a form that requires familiarity with the game and extra mental effort at meaning processing.

- "Oliseh registered his fair share with further goals... the last one being another 20-meter rocket from nowhere". (Top 20 '98, pg. 30)

* The underlined word is used in order to register an impression of the speed of the ball.

4.5. Misuse of Grammatical Items

This category involves the use of grammatical items e.g. nouns, pronouns, prepositions etc. in a way that is foreign to the Standard British English usage.

- ".....Jacquet dreams of lifting the cup on July when he plans to retire". (CFINC. May/June, '98, pg. 10).

* In the above instance, "on" is made to take the place of "in".

- A hasty clearance in the Spanish area on 77 minutes saw the ball in Oliseh's possession". (CFINC. July, '98, pg. 14)

* The normal preposition used in telling time is usually "in" or "at".

- Even with a full four weeks to spare in the Dutch season, the former European kings had the league title..." (Top 20 '98, pg. 30)

* "a" is a determiner or definite article used in connection with singular nouns not plural forms like "weeks".

4.6. Ungrammatical Forms

- Shooting straight into Zubizarreta's hands and then going was off target two minutes later" (CFINC. July, '98, pg. 14)

* "was" has no grammatical function in the above expression.

- "...but there was nothing to be ashamed (-) about the next ball, that went past him." (CFINC. July, '98, pg. 14)

* The word "ashamed" usually carries the preposition "of".

- "Though they bagged (-) red card in the semi final and final respectively." (CFINC. July, '98, pg. 35)

* In the above instance, there should be the use of a determiner "a" between "bagged" and "red" to evolve a grammatically correct sentence.

- "The Bulgarian captain has bid his compatriots farewell after (-) long service to his nation." (CFINC. July, '98, pg. 39)

* There should be an article "a" between "after" and "long"

- "...in terms of players to pick or select in spite of numerous talents that (are) abound in the legacalcio..." (CFINC. May/June, '98, pg. 40).

* The use of "are" is unnecessary as well as ungrammatical in this instance.

4.7. Archaic forms

This group involves old English words that are no longer in vogue in present British English.

- Whether its due to the presence of keepers without agile reflexes or a defense that lacks the wherewithal of constructing impregnable walls." (CFINC. May/June, '98, pg. 12).

* Wherewithal is an old expression usually used in connection with money needed for a purpose. In the above instance, it implies a defence which lacks "what it takes" to construct impregnable walls.

- "But credit must go to erstwhile Super Eagles handler Clemens Westerhof" (CFINC. May/June, '98, pg. 18).

* The underlined word means "before now" or "former".

4.8. Coinages

- "Before now, the headmaster of Nigerian football had always been an automatic pick..." (Top 20 '98 pg. 15).

* "Headmaster" is the term of reference for the Nigerian player, Mutiu Adepoku who specializes in nodding flying balls into the net. The name is equally applicable to players of the same habit from other countries.

- And so, it looked like ended the reign of the Goalfather whose strikes had fetched Nigeria many conquests in the past". (Top 20 '98 pg. 18).

* "Goalfather" refers to a player who comes by goals easily and has a record on this. In this particular instance, the Nigerian player, Rashidi Yekeni, is being referred to.

- "While the passmaster blasted the living daylight out of them..." (CFINC. July, '98 pg. 21).

* "Passmaster" is the identity marker of a player who is very skilled and accurate in passing the ball to others. The Nigerian player, Oliseh, is the referent here.

- "He is reputed for his controversial position in political issues being a Marxistlennist" (CFINC. May/June, '98 pg. 40).

* The underlined word is derived from the addition of "Marxist" (marx the name of a German economist and Socialist) and "Lenient" meaning mercifulness or mercy shown. So the combination of both makes his stand a controversial one.

- "Sadly, its all on the individual level that the razzmatazz of this squad will be found". (CFINC. May/June, '98 pg. 13).

* This expression is a coinage which connotes "expertise", "sportsmanship" or "talent".

5. Discussion of Findings

The English language has been established as the principal tool of sports communication in Nigeria owing to its inherent properties of flexibility and etymological relevance to such sport as football. The hallmark of sports reporting remains originality and informality, giving the sports pages its practical, image-laden feature which helps the reader capture a vivid picture of the scene being conjured. The critical enlivening and non skeptical report presented by sports reporters is indeed the secret behind the quest of sports fans for these reports even after they might have watched the game themselves.

The effort of sports reporters to indigenize the English language gives the English of the sports pages its distinctive features resulting in such peculiar forms as observed in this study including coinages, unconventional inflections, ambiguous misanalogy, reduplication and redundancy, superfluous descriptive adjectives, misuse of grammatical items, and archaic forms. Some of these language features are equally traceable to the sociolinguistic factors which engender the Nigerian lexico-semantic variations (Adegbiya, 1989; Jowitt, 1991). This assertion may be substantiated thus:

- Socio-cultural differences between the English and Nigerian people → Reduplication and redundancy.
- The influence of the media → archaic forms, unconventional inflections
- Standardization of idiosyncrasies and errors → misuse of grammatical items.
- The predominantly formal medium of acquisition of English → superfluous descriptive adjective.
- Pragmatic aspects of the dynamics of a multilingual context → coinages.

The disparate categories of ambiguous misanalogy and ungrammatical forms seem peculiar to the individual reporters involved.

Although the written report entails a higher level of formality than the spontaneous spoken commentary, and write up are usually edited prior to publication, some of these observable features may have survived proof reading principally by virtue of the genre of sports with its generic emphasis on liveliness, creativity and informality. The sports reporter therefore enjoys the liberty to explore his ingenuity to bring about variety and interest.

Even though these language features represent what Nigerians do and can do with the English language, caution must be applied here especially as regards the employment of ambiguous misanalogy and careless inflections on words which are often detrimental to intelligibility both nationally and internationally.

The use of ungrammatical forms all in the name of variety actually constitutes flaws that can threaten the credibility, status or prestige of the paper concerned. It is therefore evident that the nativized forms can have different implications within and outside the country. This ranges from enhancing communication and enlivening the report when properly utilized, to reduced intelligibility and errors when mishandled.

6. Conclusion

In view of the status and role of English in the Nigeria educational sector, it is expedient that uniformity be arrived at either for communicative or pedagogical purpose. Adherence to the standard British syntax is hereby advocated so that ungrammatical forms and misuse of grammatical items (prepositions, adjectives, articles and determiners) may not be considered as variations of the English language, but rather be seen as errors. Others in the categories of unconventional inflections, reduplication and redundancy, superfluous descriptive adjectives, archaic forms and coinages may be tolerated as stylistic devices; creating a new style as deviation from the norm since they most often lend themselves to meaning deduction from their linguistic context. And apart from the contextual exploitation, supplementary information may also be provided at relevant points to aid comprehension.

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APPENDIX

Name of Magazine	Date	Page	Word/Expression Extracted
Complete Football Incorporated	May/June '98	10	on July
		12	stoppable free kicks
		''	where withal
		''	ouster
		13	scorable chances
		17	razzmatazz
		18	boyz
		31	erstwhile
		35	Continuing
		40	aerial battle
	July 1998		Marxistlennist
		13	live and direct
		14	match winning master blaster
		''	going was off target
		''	Nothing to be ashamed about the
		''	on 77 minutes
		18	thunderous swearving half volley
		21	masterful header
		35	pass master
		39	bagged red card each
40	after long service		
42	footballing		
		bookable	

Table 1: 'Excerpts Used and Page Numbers

Name of Magazine	Date	Page	Word/Expression Extracted
(Complete Football Incorporated) TOP 20	1998	15 18 30	Headmaster goalfather finally rocket With a full four weeks

Table 2: Excerpts Used and Page Numbers