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GLOCAL ENGLISH

The Changing Face
AND Forms OF Nigerian
English IN A Global World

FAROOQ A. KPEROGI

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of Nigerian English
in a Global World



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ADVANCE PRAISE FOR GLOCAL ENGLISH

"What is wonderful about Professor Kperogi's book is its erudition, its non-sense approach, and its familiar language. In other words, the reader is in for a treat.... [F]or many of us who thought we knew what 'English' meant, reading this book will teach us not only how language works and how English has changed, but about its speakers in Nigeria, their world, and the world of how they talk to each other. The British and American reader should emerge somewhat humbled by this process, and the Nigerian reader perhaps very satisfied over what marvels have been created in his or her own homeland."

*Extract from the Foreword by Kenneth Harrow, Distinguished Professor
of English, Michigan State University, United States*

"This delightful book by Farooq A. Kperogi gives a comprehensive overview of the peculiarities of the meaning and usage of words and phrases in Nigerian English. It contains numerous examples and demonstrates through comparisons with American and British English how the Nigerian variety of English has developed its own distinct vocabulary and rules of usage. Moreover, it traces general mechanisms of change in meaning and usage in these three varieties of English. Written in a highly accessible style that is at the same time entertaining and instructive, this book is a very enjoyable read for both scholars and non-linguists interested in Nigerian English and varieties of English as a whole."

*Ulrike Gut, Chair for English Linguistics,
University of Münster, Germany*

"*Glocal English* is a brilliant and provocative exploration of several intriguing dimensions in the grammar of Nigerian English, one of the 'Englishes' fathered by British English. This new English is struggling against many unavoidable odds and influences to secure its legitimacy and respect, uncertain whether to disown the norms of an uncomfortable parent and of 'caregivers,' but willing to be (mis)understood in the global centres of English language use. Farooq A. Kperogi provides deep and admirable insights into the slippery borders separating usage from abuse and errors of construction from terrors of construction. The book, which has emerged from his famous 'Politics of Grammar' column, is a restless hound that must keep an eye on the game. It is impossible to ignore this book in both popular and intellectual discourses on the changing colours of English. It is highly recommended for courses in world Englishes, particularly Nigerian English."

*Obododimma Oba, Professor of Cultural Semiotics and Stylistics,
Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

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AND SEMIOTICS

Irmengard Rauch
General Editor

Vol. 96

This book is a volume in a Peter Lang monograph series.
Every volume is peer reviewed and meets
the highest quality standards for content and production.



PETER LANG

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To my children—Sinani, Maryam, and Adam—whose unfailingly cheerful and loving disposition continues to give me the strength to cope with the trauma of their mother’s tragic passing.

Preface

Trying to ignore the English language in today's dizzyingly globalizing world is like trying to avoid daylight: you can do it, but with an effort so exacting it reaches the point of absurdity. The English language is, for all practical purposes, the world's lingua franca. It is the principal international language in the fields of communications, information technology, entertainment, science, business, diplomacy, and so on. Its status as the language for aerial and nautical communications and as one of the languages of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the International Olympic Committee, and most other international organizations enjoys official recognition, prompting one scholar to characterize the English language as the "Latin of globalization" (Ivan, 2011).

Most importantly, it is the language of scholarship and learning. The Science Citation Index, for instance, revealed in a 1997 report that 95 percent of scholarly articles in its corpus were written in English, even though only half of these scientific articles came from authors whose first language is English (Garfield, 1998). Scores of universities in Europe, Africa, and Asia are switching to English as the preferred language of instruction. As Germany's Technical University president Wolfgang Hermann said when his university ditched German and switched to English as the language of instruction for most of the school's master's degree programs, "English is the lingua franca [of the] academia and of the economy" (The Local, 2014). His

assertion has support in the findings of a study in Germany that discovered that publishing in English is “often the only way to be noticed by the international scientific community” (The Local, 2014). So most academics in the world either have to publish in English or perish in their native tongues. In addition, it has been noted in many places that between 70 and 80 percent of information stored in the world’s computers is in English, leading a technology writer to describe the English language as “the lingua franca of the wired world” (Bowen, 2001).

These facts explain why English is spoken by hundreds of millions of non-native speakers in the world today. If you take into account the fact that most educated Chinese people now speak and write some English, the number of people who speak English in the world should exceed a billion. David Crystal, a widely cited retired professor of English at the University of Reading, estimates that there are now up to 2 billion English speakers in the world, the vast majority of whom are non-native speakers. As Edgar Schneider notes, the phenomenal expansion in the numerical strength of English speakers globally “has been driven not by native speakers—their number is stable at somewhere around 350 million to 380 million. The strongest increase has been found in countries where English serves as an official or de facto ‘second language’ (ESL), with strong internal functions, mostly in former British colonies such as India or Nigeria” (Schneider, 2014, p. 16). This fact demands that careful attention be paid to the distinctive structural character and flavor of old and emerging non-native varieties of English. That was what Schneider (2014, p. 16–17) meant when he said “An ongoing debate on ‘Who owns English?’ has its focus on the independent growth and increasingly distinctive character of these varieties.” So what are the distinctive features of Nigerian English that set it apart from other varieties of English?

While there is a plethora of literature on the grammar of several varieties of English, there is a paucity of books that compare the usage norms and conventions of native and non-native varieties of the English language. There is, in fact, no book in print that compares the usage patterns and stylistic imprints of the world’s two dominant native varieties of English (that is, British and American English) with Nigerian English, a semantically rich, syntactically robust, and rapidly evolving non-native variety of the English language that must rank as the English world’s fastest-growing non-native variety, thanks largely to the unrelenting ubiquity of the Nigerian (English-language) movie industry in Africa and in the historic Black Atlantic Diaspora (Rosati & Vaccarelli, 2012) and the remarkably vast migratory flow of Nigerians across the globe. This book derives inspirational strength from a desire to fill this gap.

In this book, I coalesce and substantially expand the series of well-received essays I’ve written in my newspaper grammar columns and on my blog over the

last several years. The columns compare the grammar, vocabulary, distinctive usage patterns, and phonological attributes of Nigerian, American, and British English. This book takes off from these essays. It expounds the conceptions of Nigerian English, compares it with and differentiates it from Nigerian Pidgin English while highlighting the overlaps between them. The book not only isolates the peculiar structural, grammatical, stylistic, and phonological characteristics of Nigerian English; it also shows its points of departure and similarities with British English and American English. The influences of both British and American English on contemporary Nigerian English as well as the often humorous points of divergences between the varieties are laid bare.

Several chapters also capture nascent, social media-induced forms of Nigerian English that have not been written about in any scholarly, systematic fashion. In addition, there is a chapter that chronicles common English words with African, especially Nigerian, origins.

Nigerian English is one of the world's fastest growing "glocal Englishes," defined by Pakir (2001, p. 346) as "English that is global and yet rooted in the local contexts of its new users. Glocal English is language that has international status in its global spread but at the same time expresses local identities." It is found in countries like Nigeria, Singapore, India, Malaysia, etc. where English enjoys what Pakir (2001, p. 346) calls an "institutionalized role." That is, where English, though not a native language, serves as the medium of instruction at all or most levels of education, where English is the language of the mass media, the courts, and of official communication. In other words, Nigerian glocal English is a variety of English that is inflected by local Nigerian socio-linguistic quiddities, while strongly rooted in the basic grammatical traditions of Global English.

The book deploys news stories, Op-Ed articles, anecdotes, and personal recollections to illustrate several key features of Nigerian English. For the most part, the book avoids jargon; it is written in an informal, narrative, and anecdotal style. This will broaden its appeal beyond academia and extend its usage in academia beyond English and linguistics departments. Overall, the book teaches English grammar, highlights common errors in English, and exposes readers to the constant dialectics between historical and emerging Englishes.

It is hoped that what is laid out here provides a springboard to start a process of codifying the idiosyncratic use of English in Nigeria and also provide an accessible chronicle not only of historical and contemporary Nigerian English usage, but of the emerging, as yet unformed, but nonetheless consequential contours of Nigerian English.

Acknowledgments

This book is the product of a prolonged gestational intellection and of previous multiple incarnations in a variety of forms: newspaper columns, blog posts, Internet discussion boards, mailing list contributions, Facebook posts, and private email correspondences with a vast, curious, supportive fan base. A book with such variegated roots naturally owes debts to so many more people than there will ever be space to acknowledge. But the weight of the debt is no reason to refrain from mentioning a few people and institutions whose support was crucial to the materialization of this book.

First, I would like to thank the editors and management of *People's Daily* and *Sunday Trust* in Nigeria in whose papers several of the first versions of the chapters in this book first appeared as weekly newspaper columns. I particularly want to thank Hajia Zainab Suleiman-Okino, former editor of the *Weekly Trust*, who nudged me to start a weekly column more than a decade ago. The column helped to spark and crystallize my thoughts on English language, grammar, usage, style, and the place of Nigerian English in this mix. My friend and former classmate at Bayero University Kano, Abdulazeez Abdullahi, who is the immediate past General Manager of the Abuja-based *People's Daily*, encouraged me to start a column specifically on English grammar.

Professor Moses Ochonu, my best friend, former classmate, and confidant played more crucial roles in the conception, elaboration, and writing of this book

than I can persuade him to believe. Since my relocation to the United States over a decade ago, he has become an inextricable part of my personal and intellectual journeys, and his family has become an extension of mine in more ways than I can express.

My late wife, Zainab Musa Kperogi, who was a graduate of English and one of the finest grammarians I've ever known, provided unquantifiable inspiration to me throughout several stages of the conception of this book. The countless discussions and arguments we had about English grammar and usage sowed the seeds for several insights you will read here. For many years, she encouraged me to publish a book on comparative English grammar. Unfortunately, she died in a car crash on June 4, 2010, and hasn't lived to see the solid materialization of her hopes and dreams for me.

I want to thank my wonderful and amazing children—Sinani, Maryam, and Adam—whose infectious charm never fails to keep me in good cheer even in difficult moments. I will forever be grateful to them for their understanding and patience on those weekends when I was writing this book instead of playing hide and seek with them. Their intriguing transition from being Nigerian English speakers to native (American) English speakers also enriched the perspectives and thoughts in this book. In more ways than one, they embody the spirit of this book. I hope they grow up someday to read this book and be proud of how much they have contributed to shaping it.

My parents, Mallam Adamu Kperogi and Hajia Hauwa, have been my rock from the start. Without their guardianship, support, and the enormous confidence they invested in me at a time I had no awareness of my strengths, I would never be who I am today.

Several of my friends, readers, and fans also contributed, in more ways than they know, to the making of this book. Their questions, critiques, commendations and contestations helped to refine and shape this book. I particularly want to single out Dr. Abdulrahman Muhammad, Professor Pius Adesanmi, Professor Oyeronke Oyewumi, Alhaji Mannir Dan-Ali, Dr. Shola Adenekan, Muhsin Ibrahim, Dr. Nura Alkali, Dr. Raji Bello, Usman Zakari Ibrahim, Suraj Tunji Oyewale, Mohammed Dahiru Aminu, Kevin Ebele Adinnu, Dr. Aliyu Musa, Ibraheem Musa, Alhaji Ahmed Abdulkadir, Theophilus Abba, Adagbo Onoja, Dr. Michael Afolayan, Mallam Mohammed Haruna, Bishop Mathew Hassan Kukah, Dr. Matt Duffy, Dr. Jim Schiffman, Abdullahi Bego, Muhammad Shakir Balogun, Adie Vanessa Offiong, Dr. Joan Osa Oviawe, and Philip Adekunle whose friendship and intellectually enriching dialogic exchanges with me over the years contributed to the form and content of this book in both direct and indirect ways. I also thank the creator, admins, and members of the “Farooq Kperogi Fan Club” on Facebook, which I was initially too embarrassed to be a part of, for their support, feedback, thoughtful

questions, and discussions on many of the earlier incarnations of the chapters in this book.

I am really and truly grateful to Professor Kenneth Harrow, Distinguished Professor of English at Michigan State University, for writing such a delightfully compelling foreword to this book. I couldn't have hoped for a better person to write it.

This acknowledgement would be incomplete if I failed to thank my students and colleagues at Kennesaw State University—and my former teachers, colleagues, and students at Bayero University Kano, Nigeria, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and Georgia State University—for enriching my understanding of varieties of English in several different ways.

My thanks go to the editorial board and production staff at Peter Lang. I particularly want to thank my acquisition editor, Michelle Salyga, for her enthusiasm in this book from the start, Jackie Pavlovic for her patience and scrupulous attention to details in the production process. Professor Irmengard Rauch, editor of the Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics series, also deserves thanks for accepting this book for inclusion in her series.

Finally, my wife, Maureen Erinne Kperogi, who is completing her Ph.D. in International Conflict Management at Kennesaw State University, deserves my appreciation for the immeasurable support she gave me throughout the writing of this book. She not only took care of our three children with grace and sensitivity while I worked on this book, she stayed up late nights with me, and helped with compiling and formatting the bibliography that appears at the end of the book.

Foreword

Where does Nigerian English come from? Of what does it consist? What are its history and idiosyncrasies? How is it used today? If you want to read a completely pleasurable account by an ingenious linguistic scholar, you must pick up Farooq Kperogi's *Glocal English: The Changing Face and Forms of Nigerian English in a Global World*, and immerse yourself in the fascinating world of Nigerian English.

We learn, from the outset, that the global spread of English has resulted both in the deterritorializing of the foundational British source language, and a reterritorializing in the colonies and overseas territories. Eventually, as English spread beyond the borders of its native speakers, it became the most widely spoken second language on the planet, with estimates of one to two billion second language speakers, as opposed to fewer than 400 million native speakers. But of those native speakers, the original Brits now number many fewer than the Americans or Nigerians, not to mention Indian speakers, and as global flows reflect the power of societies and cultures to expand into new markets, it is American English that has been making its mark through rap, television, movies, and of course business contacts.

In the end, a medley of influences comes to account for how English is spoken in Nigeria—a medley that no doubt is replicated in different combinations throughout the world as various languages mutate and spread, or die.

According to Professor Kperogi, there are four basic factors that shaped Nigerian English:

the four main fountains of Nigerian English that I have identified [include] linguistic improvisation, old-fashioned British expressions, initial usage errors fossilized over time and incorporated into the Nigerian linguistic repertory, and a mishmash of British and American English.

What then follows is an exploration of the answers to the question, Who owns English—or, more basically, who owns any language, who polices its usage, who establishes its “proper” forms, or, ultimately, who determines what is “good” or “bad”?

Of course, if we are to study how people actually communicate, those questions become meaningless. The French Académie might fulminate all it wishes, but French people will continue to say “mail,” meaning “email,” rather than “courrier électronique.” And much as we might laugh over this, we will find the Canadians using an altogether different noun, “courriel,” despite their proximity to the big brother to the south.

What is wonderful about Professor Kperogi’s book is its erudition, its no-nonsense approach, and its familiar language. In other words, the reader is in for a treat. As an example, consider the range of references in the following passage dealing with idiosyncratic American usages, bringing us from Shakespearean English to contemporary Ebonics:

American past participles as “gotten” (as in: I have gotten my share of his troubles; British English: got), “proven” (as in: He has proven to be right; British English: proved), etc. are preserved from the “original.” Similarly, in Shakespearean times “don’t” used to be the contraction of “does not,” *not* “do not.” This practice stopped only in the early 20th century. This sense is preserved, interestingly, in African-American vernacular speech (now fashionably called Ebonics) and in informal southern U.S. English generally. When I first heard Michael Jackson sing, “it don’t matter if you’re black or white” in high school, it grated on my grammatical nerves, but that’s how people who spoke early modern English would have said it.

We are not only drawn, here, into the history of the language, its modifications over time, and its most contemporary vernacular forms, but especially Farooq Kperogi’s own personal engagement. Language is, in the end, the most intimate and fundamental way in which we express who we are, and how appropriate that the expert who explains its properties in his own home country does so by sending us this fascinating personal account in his own terms. This is

Farooq Kperogi's strategy, to personalize the descriptions, and thus, to draw on a broad range of scholarly as well as personal sources: "The book deploys news stories, Op-Ed articles, anecdotes, and personal recollections to illustrate several key features of Nigerian English." One such anecdote, used early in the book to demonstrate the contentiousness over the use of "proper" English, made me laugh. Professor Kperogi recalls, in his earlier days, being instructed to penalize students whose errors were attributable to their choice of speaking "Nigerian English," a language that the educated elite would have described as "bad English." Professor Kperogi then describes how a friend wanted to dismiss the usage "Nigerian English." After explaining that "Nigerian English is a legitimate national variety that has evolved, over several decades, out of Nigeria's unique experiences as a post-colonial, polyglot nation," Professor Kperogi recounts the following conversation

Take as an example one cocky friend of mine who is so self-assured of his English language proficiency that he dismissed my attempt at chronicling and systematizing Nigerian English usage as a glorification of "bad English." For him, there is no such thing as Nigerian English; there is only uneducated English, which overzealous, starry-eyed idealists like me want to intellectualize.

After he told me that, I asked him what he says to people when he meets them working. "I say 'well done' to them," he said. I told him "well done" as a form of greeting is uniquely Nigerian, as I have shown in subsequent chapters in this book. He was stunned, even embarrassed. But he needn't be.

In fact, we might well wish to describe Nigerian English, not as "broken" or "incorrect," but as indicative of the wonderful human qualities of poetical inventiveness as its usages not only syncretized with the Nigerian languages it encountered, but generated new linguistic beauties. (At one point he uses the term "alchemy" to describe how Pidgin English came about.) At times these reflect a certain familiarity, as in greetings cited above for people who are working, "well done"; or "quite an age" for "long time, no see," which phrase itself we learn was originally a Chinese English expression coming into mainstream usage via American English. Hilariously, Professor Kperogi informs us that as he was learning English in high school, that expression was cited by his teacher as an example of "semantic purism" that he insisted his students follow.

A language reflects its speakers' linguistic background, but also their culture and society, and as a result, new forms come to reflect social practices that might well be specific to their own particular conditions. Nigerian ingenuity in dealing with financial pressures along with the modernity brought by cell phones, resulted

in a neologism whose usage in Lagos would be radically different from that on an American college campus: “flashing.”

Perhaps the most contemporary example of Nigerian linguistic creativity is the appropriation and contortion of the word “flash”—and its inflections “flashing” and “flasher”—in the vocabulary of Nigerian mobile telephony. Neither American English nor British English—nor, for that matter, any other variety of English in the world—uses these words the way Nigerians do. The closest semantic equivalent in both British and American English to what Nigerians call “flashing” is “drop call.” To “flash” people in Nigerian English is to place a purposively momentary call to their cell phone as a way to tell them to call the number back because the callers have insufficient units in their cell phone to sustain a long call. (In Nigeria, cell phone users are not charged for receiving a call).

I admit that I am fascinated, amused, delighted, and intrigued by the endless ways in which the language I had thought to be “my own” is so very different, both in its own original “home country” and in the distant lands in Africa, where terms for the most intimate of practices (“farting” becoming “pollute” or “mess” or, best of all, “spoil the air”), for expressing that most “anthropologically” intriguing of relations, the “joking relations,” which must be explained patiently to students whose own societies might not have formalized the great skill of insulting in forms that actually convey closeness and warmth; for “send-forth parties” that are common in Nigeria, unknown in the United States, where globalization has had impacts that are radically opposed; and the use of terms like cousin, son, etc., which the lucky outsider comes to embrace after successfully entering into the spirit of family that Nigerians so gently use to welcome others.

For those curious as to how these changes came about, what linguistic forms they developed, what the logic of language entails, and ultimately how a people succeeded in making English their own language, this book will be a tremendous pleasure to read. Finally, learning a language entails learning a good deal more than a signifying system. It means learning about a people and a culture. In this case, for many of us who thought we knew what “English” meant, reading this book will teach us not only how language works and how English has changed, but about its speakers in Nigeria, their world and the world of how they talk to each other. The British and American reader should emerge somewhat humbled by this process, and the Nigerian reader perhaps very satisfied over what marvels have been created in his or her own homeland.

Lest we imagine that this is the end of the story, it would be more accurate to say, this story is just the beginning. Language will continue to change; differences of today will become melded into new samenesses; we will speak with each other