

Izon Influences in Nigerian English Syntax

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Abstract

This study explores Izon influences in Nigerian English syntax, tests their acceptability in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated speakers in the Izon (Nigerian) setting and uses this as a basis to make a distinction between the influences that are permanent and those that are temporary. The study data, collected from 150 Izon-English bilinguals through observation and structured interview, were derived from examination scripts, recorded informal discussions and a 40-item questionnaire, among others. The study reveals that Nigerian English syntax manifests some fascinating Izon influences, especially in terms of the pluralization of non-count nouns, the occurrence of the first person before the third person in a compound subject-NP, the omission of “a”/“an” before singular count nouns and before “little” and “few”, and the co-occurrence of possessive and demonstrative determiners, among several others presented as features 1–7. The study concludes that those influences presented as features 1, 2 and 3 whose average percentage of acceptability is above 50% are, because of their appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated speakers in the Nigerian setting, permanent influences since their manifestation is seen even in the English of the most educated Nigerian English speaker in spite of his/her high level of exposure. However, those presented as features 4, 5, 6 and 7 whose average percentage of acceptability is less than 50% are temporary because their manifestation in the English of Nigerians decreases or totally disappears as their level of exposure to good English usage increases.

Keywords: Izon, influences, Nigerian, English, syntax

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multilingual nation where English and over 250 Nigerian languages are spoken. In this language contact situation, English assumes a dominant position as it functions as Nigeria’s official language. It is the principal medium of instruction and evaluation in Nigeria’s educational system, the dominant language of government, politics and the law, the language of the mass media, science and technology and international relations. It is the principal medium of inter-ethnic communication and, thus, acts as a vital weapon through which national unity, national consciousness and cultural awareness have been achieved (Adekunle, 1995; Jowitt, 1995; Awonusi, 2004a and Owolabi, 2007). The variety of English that performs these tremendous official functions in the Nigerian environment is what is now popularly referred to as “Nigerian English”.

Nigerian English is a regional variety of English spoken by Nigerians and it has identifiable features which distinguish it from other regional varieties of English, especially in terms of pronunciation, syntax and lexico-semantics. As Okoro (2004: 169) observes, these local Nigerian influences, which result in standard and non-standard usages, vary in their relative frequency of occurrence in the English of every Nigerian speaker according to his/her level of competence in the language. Okunrinmeta (2011: 1) summarizes the phonetic/phonological and lexico-semantic features of Nigerian English thus:

In terms of phonetic and phonological features...Nigerian English has, because of the influence of the Nigerian languages, been given a local Nigerian touch which results in a reduced vowel system of seven simple vowels and six diphthongs, consonant substitution including the replacement of /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/ and /d/...complete devoicing of /z/ in inter- and post-vocalic positions...voicing of the alveolar stop when it occurs after voiceless sounds...deviant stress...a reduced intonation system with an inclination towards using the unidirectional tones (the falling and the rising tones) and non-differentiation in the length of vowels...In terms of lexico-semantics...English...especially in the area of semantic shift, coinages and idiomatic usage...has, because

of the quest for communicative appropriateness, been domesticated in the Nigerian setting so as to appropriately reflect and express the Nigerian socio-cultural experience...branch, okay, bride price, sorry, welldone, thanks for yesterday, go-slow, long-leg, co-wife, senior brother, owner's corner, been-to-ness, supervisee, big madam, share (a husband), take in, put to bed, open the floor, send forth and many others have been convincingly linked to the demands of the Nigerian socio-cultural setting¹.

In terms of syntax, the features of Nigerian English include the pluralization of non-count nouns, using stative verbs as dynamic verbs, substituting certain prepositions for others, using some prepositional verbs as non-prepositional verbs and vice versa, occurrence of the first person before the third person in a compound subject-NP, omission of the indefinite article, co-occurrence of possessives and demonstratives as pre-modifiers and redundant copying, among others (Adekunle, 1979; Kujore, 1985; Jowitt, 1991 and Okoro, 2004).

In the Nigerian setting, where the majority of Nigerians acquire a Nigerian language as first language before going to school to learn English between the ages of four and six, English is bound to show this distinctive local coloration particularly because, according to Adegbija (2004) and Wiltshire and Harnsberger (2006), the first language of a bilingual has strong influence on his/her performance in the second language. Since Nigerians use both the Nigerian languages and English alternately in the Nigerian environment and since the Nigerian languages were acquired at an earlier age and with far greater thoroughness than English which is usually learnt later in life, it is, therefore, expected that certain aspects of the Nigerian languages influence corresponding aspects of their English. It is, therefore, not surprising that English in Nigeria reflects the influences of the Nigerian languages with which it co-exists in the Nigerian multilingual setting.

Studies in Nigerian English have widely acknowledged that the distinctive local Nigerian colour that English wears in the Nigerian environment is more reflected at the phonological, lexical and semantic levels than at the syntactic level. This is so because it is claimed that the syntax of Standard Nigerian English is not expected to differ from that of Standard English anywhere in the world (Adekunle, 1979 and Bamgbose, 1995). As Bamgbose (1995: 25) observes, "this is largely predictable as English will cease to be English if its syntax is radically altered as a result of the influence of the Nigerian languages." Thus, all the local influences in Nigerian English syntax have often been treated as errors arising from classification, inflexion, selection, copying, ordering and restriction, among others (Jowitt, 1991:111 – 124 and Banjo, 1995: 218 – 219), simply because they differ from what obtains especially in British English, which is widely considered as the "standard" that must be followed even in the Nigerian multilingual socio-cultural context where English is used as a second language. My own interpretation of Bamgbose's view is slightly different from that of those Nigerians who erroneously believe that all local Nigerian influences in Nigerian English syntax should be treated as errors. What Bamgbose means by "radically altered" should, in my opinion, be interpreted to mean radical alterations, especially in terms of word order, which can result in gross ungrammaticality, and not in terms of the treatment of stative verbs as dynamic verbs or the pluralization of some non-count nouns, for example, which are matters of preference and should, therefore, be treated as permissible local variations (Okunrinmeta, 2011). This position finds support in the views of Finegan (2008: 16) on what should be considered as ungrammatical:

We limit the term "ungrammatical" to an utterance like Book that reading am I right now (compare I am reading that book right now) because it does not occur in the speech of those who know English (except as an example of an ill-formed sentence for use in textbooks...). We do not regard an expression such as just between you and I as "ungrammatical."

Thus, the idea of treating all Nigerian influences in Nigerian English syntax as "ungrammatical", based on the erroneous interpretation of Bamgbose's opinion that the structure of English should not be "radically altered", does not reflect the dynamic nature of the English language which is capable of adapting to various situations in both native and non-native contexts so as to function effectively as a medium of communication all over the world. If all local influences in Nigerian English syntax are treated as ungrammatical merely because they "deviate" from the rules of British English syntax, then there won't be any basis to have any other variety of English in the world, except British English, since it means that all other varieties, including American English where similar variations occur, are all ungrammatical and, therefore, non-standard. Thus, as Okoro (2004) and Okunrinmeta (2011) have argued, it is wrong and misleading to lump together all the local Nigerian influences manifested in the syntax of Nigerian English as errors since the syntax of English as a world language, which, in a bid to survive, must diversify by adapting to local circumstances and cultures (Algeo, 2010: 199), is bound to show permissible local variation in use. Thus, some of the local influences in Nigerian English syntax are, despite the fact that they differ from British English, qualified to be treated as acceptable standard usage within the Nigerian context because of their appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated speakers in the Nigerian setting. This is so because, as Algeo (2010: 195) argues, "standard

English is not a homogeneous thing.” Finegan (2008:14-16) also notes that:

No single variety of English can be called the standard...The simple fact is that many varieties of standard English exist...One way in which varieties of English differ is in their rules, and different rules lead to different structures. It isn't reasonable to judge the sentences permitted by the rules of one variety as ungrammatical simply because they don't follow the rules of another variety...Because languages rely essentially on arbitrary signs to accomplish their work, there is no justification for claiming there is only one right way of saying something.

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2011: 441) also support this view thus:

... dialects represent different set of rules or lexical items represented in the minds of its speakers. Any judgments, therefore, as to the superiority or inferiority of a particular dialect or language are social judgments, which have no linguistic or scientific basis.

Thus, as Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2008: 283) argue, the idea of saying that one variety (that is, British English in this context) is the only correct form of the English language and, therefore, all other varieties must conform to the rules of British English is a “language prejudice...that is just as irrational as social prejudices involving race and gender.”

The present study has two major tasks to accomplish. The first is to trace the local Nigerian influences in Nigerian English syntax to the Izon² language. This is necessary because, although it has often been strongly argued that the syntactic peculiarities in Nigerian English are caused by the influence of the Nigerian languages, very little has been done to compare these features with similar structures in the syntax of any particular Nigerian language. The present study therefore traces certain features of Nigerian English syntax to the Izon language with reference to noun phrase structure. The second task is to test the acceptability of each of the Izon influences manifested in Nigerian English syntax in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated speakers in the Nigerian setting and use this as a basis to make a distinction between the influences that are permanent and those that are temporary. The acceptability test conducted in this study is similar to the one adopted in Okunrinmeta (2011). Thus, the acceptability of any syntactic variation is determined through its ability to satisfy the following requirements: (i) It must enjoy widespread usage among educated Izon (Nigerian) speakers; (ii) It must be appropriate in the sense that it is traceable to the Izon (Nigerian) culture or that it is a creative reflection of the preferred structural pattern in the Izon language and that it is similar to some structures that are accepted as standard usage especially in American English; (iii) It must be grammatical to a reasonable extent in the sense that it does not violate any “serious” syntactic rule in English but merely reflects a departure from the preferences that some native English speakers, especially British English speakers, have for some structures in English and; (iv) It must be intelligible. Any syntactic feature tested becomes acceptable only if it records an average percentage of over 50% of acceptability in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated Izon (Nigerian) speakers. It therefore becomes a permissible local variation and, thus, a permanent influence. On the contrary, if the average percentage of acceptability is less than 50%, it is rejected as a variation and, thus, it is an error that must be corrected. It is, therefore, a temporary influence.

2. Procedure for Data Collection

The study used 150 Izon-English bilinguals between the ages of 16 and 68, who have lived within the Izon cultural setting for at least five years, randomly selected from the Arogbo-Izon community of Ondo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the sample was composed of 50 SSS3 students and 100 university graduates out of whom were 18 local government workers, 18 politicians, 24 retired civil servants and 40 secondary school teachers. Out of the 100 university graduates used for the study, 46 are graduates of English or Linguistics: 21 teachers (that is, 9 English Language teachers and 12 Yoruba teachers), 8 local government workers, 9 politicians and 8 retired civil servants. However, the remaining 54 graduates, comprising 10 local government workers, 9 politicians, 16 retired civil servants³ and 19 teachers, read other courses and not English or Linguistics.

The data used for the study, which comprised a variety of spoken and written texts collected from real life communicative situations mainly through observation and structured interview, were derived from four major sources: examination scripts, recorded informal discussions, written responses on “The Socio-cultural Life of the IZONS” and a 40-item questionnaire. Specifically, observation was employed to confirm the presence of Izon influences in English with reference to the sampled students’ Mock Examination scripts in English Language, the written responses of the sampled graduates on “The Socio-cultural Life of the IZONS” and the recorded informal discussions of the sampled teachers and students in the staff common room and in the classroom respectively. However, a 40-item questionnaire, which was designed to ascertain the extent to which these Izon

influences have been induced by the bilinguals' linguistic and cultural background as well as their appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and frequency of use within the Izon socio-cultural context, was administered on the 100 graduates used for the study,

3. The Izon Noun Phrase and Its Influences in Nigerian English Syntax

In the structure of an Izon noun phrase, the head, which is usually a noun or a pronoun, may be premodified by adjectives, demonstratives or possessives:

1. Adjectives as premodifiers e.g.

- (1) *Kẹ̀nì ịgịtị dirimọ owei* obiri warị mị sụwọ tẹj.
 One small black male dog house DEF ART [NEUTER SG] enter PERF ASP NONPAST.
 One *small black male* dog has entered the house.

- (2) *Kẹ̀nì ebi iyọrọ tọbọu zuru* mị ọ pẹrẹi timi.
 One beautiful female child room DEF ART [NEUTER SG] in sit PROG ASP PAST.
 One *beautiful* girl was sitting in the room.

2. Possessives and demonstratives⁴ as premodifiers e.g.

- (3) *Ẹ daụ mọ Kọrịmịnị* yin mọ warị mu tẹj.
 My father CONJ Kọrịmịnị mother CONJ home go PERF ASP NONPAST.
 My father and *Kọrịmịnị's* mother have gone home.

- (4) *Inị bei* timimọ wei bei ẹ dįsẹ gha.
 Your DEM [MASC SG.] teacher MASC SG DEM [MASC SG.] I like NEG.
 I don't like *your this* teacher.

(Definite) articles and relative clauses may function as postmodifiers to the headword in the structure of an Izon noun phrase:

3. (Definite) articles as postmodifiers: *bei* (masc. /sg.), *ma* (fem. /sg.), *mị* (neuter/sg.) and *ma* (masc./fem./neuter/pl.) e.g.

- (5) *Tọbọu bei* bo tẹj.
 Child DEF ART [MASC SG] come PERF ASP NONPAST.
The boy has come.

- (6) *Iyọrọ araụ ma* a zeị tarị emi.
 Female (woman) FEM SG DEF ART [FEM SG] her husband love NONPAST.
The woman loves her husband.

- (7) *U fẹrẹ mị* baa mịnị.
 He plate DEF ART [NEUTER SG] break MOD AUX NONPAST.
 He will break *the* plate.

- (8) *Owei ọwọụ ma* bo tẹj.
 Male child PL DEF ART [MASC PL] come PERF ASP NONPAST.
The boys have come.

- (9) *Iyọrọ abụ ma* ọ zeị abụ tarị emi.
 Female (woman) PL DEF ART [FEM PL] their husband PL love NONPAST.
The women love their husbands.

- (10) *U fẹrẹ ma* baa mịnị.
 He plate DEF ART [NEUTER PL] break MOD AUX NONPAST.
 He will break *the* plates.

4. Relative clauses as postmodifiers e.g._

- (11) Iyoro araṣ ma ni ẹ gba timi araṣ
 Female (woman) FEM SG DEF ART [FEM SG] REL I tell PROG ASP PAST FEM SG
 ma bo teji.
 DEF ART [FEM SG] come PERF ASP NONPAST.

The woman whom I was talking about has come.

- (12) Toṣoṣu bei ni yin ma abubaṣ erin fi wei
 Child DEF ART [MASC SG] REL mother DEF ART [FEM SG] yesterday die MASC SG
 bei you miṣi.
 DEF ART [MASC SG] cry PROG ASP NONPAST.

The boy *whose mother died yesterday* is crying.

It is important to comment on the order of the compound subject-NP in Izon especially when it consists of a third and first person. In Izon, when a compound subject-NP consists of a third and first person, the first person usually precedes the third person e.g.

- (13) E mo e dau mo epele tin miṣi.
 I CONJ my father CONJ draught play PROG ASP NONPAST.

I and my father are playing draught.

- (14) E mo eni ere mo mu teji.
 I CONJ my wife CONJ go PERF ASP NONPAST.

I and my wife have gone.

The Izon noun phrase manifests tremendous influences in the syntax of the English of Izon-English bilinguals. These influences, which constitute an integral part of the distinguishing features of the syntax of Nigerian English occurring recurrently in the English of all Nigerians as attested to in various studies in Nigerian English right from the 70s to date⁵, are presented and analyzed with reference to the Izon language as follows:

Feature 1: The pluralization of some non-count nouns.

Feature 2: The occurrence of the first person before the third person in the structure of a compound subject-NP.

Feature 3: The replacement of the indefinite article with the cardinal numeral “one”, especially when it occurs before singular count nouns.

Feature 4: The omission of the indefinite article before singular count nouns.

Feature 5: The omission of the indefinite article before “little” and “few”, especially when they are used to mean “a little” and “a few” respectively.

Feature 6: The co-occurrence of possessive and demonstrative determiners in the structure of a noun phrase.

Feature 7: The use of “which” in contexts where “who” would have been preferred.

One of the Izon influences manifested in the English of Izon (Nigerian) speakers is the pluralization of some non-count nouns, which is presented as feature 1 in this study. Izon-English bilinguals do use such non-count nouns as “behaviour”, “information”, “hair” and “dress” in the same way they use count nouns. This is reflected in (15) – (18) below:

- (15) These *behaviours* are not good.
 (16) The Okparans know all the *informations* about the Egbesu.
 (17) They don’t allow the *kulikuliweis* to comb their *hairs*.
 (18) There are many types of dresses in Izon.

The treatment of such non-count nouns as “behaviour”, “information”, “hair” and “dress” as count nouns in the English of Izon-English bilinguals can be traced to the Izon language that permits the pluralization of these nouns as illustrated below.

- (19) Ma aga ma ebi gha.
 DEM [NEUTER PL] behaviour DEM [NEUTER PL] good NEG.

These *behaviours* are not good.

- (20) Ọkparan abụ ma Egbesu mi ọ *egberi*
 Ọkparan PL DEF ART [MASC PL] Egbesu DEF ART [NEUTER SG] about information
 ma se nimi emi.
 DEF ART [NEUTER PL.] all know NONPAST.

The Okparans know all the *informations* about the Egbesu.

- (21) Ọni kùlìkùlìwei oni ma pebi ọni *adumẹ*
 They kùlìkùlìwei PL DEF ART [MASC PL] allow their PL-hair
 ma zala gha.
 DEF ART [NEUTER PL] comb NEG.

They don't allow the kùlìkùlìweis to comb their *hairs*.

- (22) Buhin *abìdẹ* akuna ke Izon ọ emi.
 Many PL-dress PL-type that Izon in [BE] NONPAST.

There are many types of dresses in Izon.

As Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (2003: 252) observed, some nouns (e.g. “equipment”, “behaviour” etc.) which are non-count in English may correspond to count nouns in some other languages. Izon is one of the languages in which such non-count nouns in English as “behaviour”, “information”, “hair” and “dress” correspond to count nouns and, thus, they exhibit all the distinguishing features of count nouns in the language. In (15), for example, the pluralization of “aga” (behaviour) has been indicated through demonstrative agreement where the plural demonstrative “ma” (these) is used with “aga” (behaviours) thereby giving it a sense of plurality. In (16), there is (definite) article agreement in “egberi ma se” (all the informations) where the plural form of the definite article “ma” (the) is used instead of the singular form “mi”. In (17) and (18), the pluralization of “dumẹ” (hair) and “bìdẹ” (dress) is reflected through the prefixation of the “a-” plurality marker thereby creating the plural forms “adumẹ” (hairs) and “abìdẹ” (dresses) respectively. The pluralization of such non-count English nouns as “behaviour”, “information”, “hair” and “dress” in the English of Izon speakers, which reflects the preferences which Izon speakers have for similar structures in the Izon language, is, therefore, traceable to the influence of the Izon language where these nouns are actually classified and treated as count nouns. Thus, feature 1, the pluralization of some non-count nouns as reflected in (15) – (18), is considered appropriate within the Izon (Nigerian) context by the majority of the subjects used for the study because, apart from the fact that it reflects the preferences which Izon speakers have for similar structures in the Izon language, it is also similar to some American English variations, (e.g. accommodation), which are accepted as standard usage both within and outside the American setting. Specifically, 68 of the respondents admitted that the pluralization of the non-count nouns in (15) – (18) is appropriate not only because it reflects the preferred pattern in the Izon language, but also because it is similar to what occurs in American English. However, the remaining 32 respondents observed that it is inappropriate because it is not used in line with the dictionary. With reference to grammaticality, the pluralization of “behaviour”, “information”, “hair” and “dress” in (15) – (18) was accepted as grammatical by 68 of the respondents because it does not violate any “serious” syntactic rule in English but merely reflects a departure from the preferred form especially in British English and because it is similar to some variations that are accepted as grammatical in American English. On the contrary, 32 respondents claimed that the pluralization of non-count nouns is ungrammatical because it violates the rules of English syntax. On the intelligibility of feature 1, 72 of the respondents admitted that the pluralization of “behaviour”, “information”, “hair” and “dress” in (15) – (18) is intelligible because the meanings of the structures are not seriously affected by the pluralization involved in them. However, the remaining 28 respondents observed that, though the pluralized forms in (15) – (18) may be intelligible within the Nigerian context, it is doubtful if they will be totally intelligible to all non-Nigerians. Finally, in terms of widespread usage, 64 respondents confirmed that feature 1 occurs in their English because of its appropriateness, grammaticality and intelligibility especially within the Izon (Nigerian) setting. However, the remaining 36 respondents claimed that the feature does not occur in their English partly because of the fear of being stigmatized (8 respondents) and partly because it is sub-standard (28 respondents). The percentage of acceptability for feature 1 in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated Izon (Nigerian) speakers is, therefore, 68%, 68%, 72% and 64% respectively. Thus, the average percentage of acceptability recorded for feature 1 is 68%.

Another interesting Izon influence in Nigerian English syntax is found in the order of the compound subject-NP especially when it comprises a third and first person. In English, the preferred order is that the third person precedes the first person as shown in (23) and (24):

(23) *My father and I* played draught yesterday.

(24) *My wife and I* have gone.

This preferred order, as Quirk et al. (2003: 338) suggest, is borne out of the desire to obey the rule of politeness in English which stipulates that first person pronouns should occur at the end of a coordinate construction.

But in Izon, the first person usually occurs before the third person:

(25) *È mọ ẹ dau mọ* abụbaị erin epele tin timi.
I CONJ my father CONJ yesterday draught play PROG ASP PAST.

I and my father were playing draught yesterday.

(26) *È mọ ẹnị ere mọ* mu tẹj.
I CONJ my wife CONJ go PERF ASP NONPAST.

I and my wife have gone.

Thus, Izon-English bilinguals do allow the first person to precede the third person in their English usage as illustrated in (27) and (28):

(27) For example, if I like the girl and want to marry her, *I and my father* will go to her parents and pay the *ikọ*. This is an amount of money that the husband pays on the head of his wife.

(28) When we were younger, *we and our friends* usually went to the Egbesu shrine to partake in the *gudugudubẹlẹ* meal.

The occurrence of the first person before the third person in the structure of a compound subject-NP, which is presented as feature 2 in this study, is considered acceptable within the Izon (Nigerian) context because it is appropriate, grammatical, intelligible and frequently used by educated speakers in the Izon (Nigerian) setting. In terms of appropriateness, 73 of the graduates used for the study acknowledged that the feature is traceable to the Izon language and is, therefore, appropriate because it reflects the preferences which Izon speakers have for similar structures in the Izon language. However, the remaining 27 respondents opined that the feature is inappropriate because it is not used in line with the rules of English syntax which require that the first person should come last in a coordinate construction. Similarly, in terms of grammaticality, the occurrence of the first person before the third person in the structure of a compound subject-NP, as reflected in (27) and (28), was accepted as grammatical by 73 respondents because it does not violate any syntactic rule in English but merely reflects a departure from the preferences given to certain structures in some native-English contexts. This is, therefore, in line with the position of Adekunle (1979: 33) who strongly argued that such an MT-induced structure as “I and my brother will come”, (which is often condemned as an error simply because it is different from the British English form, “My brother and I will come”), should be accepted as a permissible local variation because, though the structure is unconventional, it is not ungrammatical but merely reflects the favourite pattern in the Nigerian languages. However, 27 respondents claimed that feature 2, as illustrated in (27) and (28), is ungrammatical because it obviously violates the rules of English syntax by allowing the first person to occur before the third person. With reference to intelligibility, feature 2 was found by 73 respondents to be intelligible both nationally and internationally, while the remaining 27 strongly argued that it may not be totally intelligible, especially at the international level, because it suggests, rather wrongly, that the speaker is impolite, which is, in fact, not a part of the intentions of the speaker. Finally, in terms of widespread usage, 73 respondents confirmed that they use feature 2 frequently in their English because it is grammatical, intelligible and effective in capturing the Izon (Nigerian) socio-cultural experience. However, the remaining 27 respondents claimed that they prefer the British variant, (“My father and I...”) because, despite the fact that the Nigerian form, (“I and my father...”), is traceable to the Izon language, it sounds “uneducated”. The percentage of acceptability of feature 2 in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated Izon (Nigerian) speakers is, therefore, 73%, 73%, 73% and 73% respectively, thereby producing an average of 73%.

The Izon language also influences the use (or, rather, non-use) of the indefinite article in the English of Izon (Nigerian) speakers. According to Tallerman (2005: 40), languages differ in terms of the occurrence or non-occurrence of the definite and indefinite articles. English, for example, has both the definite and indefinite articles as shown in (29) and (30):

(29) I have seen *the* boy who beat Aina yesterday.

(30) Each student has *a* pen / *an* umbrella.

Chinese has no definite article or indefinite article (that is, a word for “the” or “a”/“an”) and, therefore, uses other means to distinguish definite and indefinite noun phrases. One of the ways through which Chinese is able to show whether a noun phrase is definite or indefinite is the use of word order and “the closed class ASPECT word” (“le”), which indicates that the event happened in the past. Thus, in (31) where “mai” (“buy”) precedes “pingguo le” (“apple ASPECT”), the word order indicates an indefinite noun phrase (“an apple”), while that in (32), where “pingguo” (“apple”) precedes “mai” (“buy”) thereby making “mai” to precede the ASPECT word “le” directly, shows that the noun phrase is definite (“the apple”).

(31) Ta mai pingguo le.

He buy apple ASPECT.

He bought *an* apple.

(32) Ta pingguo mai le.

He apple buy ASPECT.

He bought *the* apple.

Unlike English (which has both the definite article “the” and the indefinite article “a”/“an”) and Chinese (which does not have a word for the definite article “the” or the indefinite article “a”/“an”), the Izon language has the definite article alone. It does not have the indefinite article. The only determiner in Izon which is close to the English indefinite article “a”/“an” in terms of function is the numeral “keni” (“one”) as in:

(33) U keni ege fi tei.

He one egg eat PERF ASP NONPAST.

He has eaten *one* egg.

(34) E keni obiri eri miji.

I one dog see PROG ASP NONPAST.

I am seeing *one* dog.

However, there are up to four determiners in Izon which correspond to the definite article (the) in English: “bei” (masc./sg.), “ma” (fem./sg.), “mi” (neuter/sg.) and “ma” (masc./fem./neuter/pl.) e.g.

Singular

Plural

(35) *zei bei* (the husband) *zei abu/oni ma* (the husbands)

(36) *iyoro arau ma* (the woman) *iyoro abu ma* (the women)

(37) *fere mi* (the plate) *fere ma* (the plates)

Since there is no indefinite article in Izon as it is in English, Izon speakers of English do replace the indefinite article with the numeral “one”, especially when it occurs before singular count nouns. This is reflected in (38) and (39):

(38) Before you can consult Binikurukuru, you must first of all bring *one* egg to the shrine.

(39) As the kulikuliwei moves round the town, he usually holds *one* cutlass in his right hand and he raises it whenever he shouts.

The replacement of the indefinite article (“a”/“an”) with the numeral “one”, which is presented as feature 3 in this study, is traceable to the Izon language where the indefinite article is non-existent and, thus, Izon speakers have to replace it with the numeral “keni” (“one”), which is the only determiner in Izon that is close to the English indefinite article “a”/“an” in terms of function. Thus, in terms of appropriateness, 72 respondents acknowledged that feature 3, the replacement of the indefinite article “a”/“an” with the numeral “one” especially when it occurs before singular count nouns as reflected in (38) and (39) above, is appropriate because, apart from the fact that it is not ungrammatical, it reflects what happens in the Izon language where the indefinite article is non-existent and is, therefore, replaced with the numeral “one” in this context. The remaining 28 respondents, however, opined that, though the replacement may be appropriate in the context of (38) and (39) and some other similar contexts, it is doubtful if this can work in all contexts since the numeral “one” cannot be said to be synonymous to the indefinite article “a”/“an” in all contexts. In terms of grammaticality, all the 100 respondents

confirmed that feature 3, as demonstrated in (38) and (39) where “one” occurs before the singular count nouns “egg” and “cutlass” respectively, is grammatical. This is in line with the views of Quirk et al. (2003: 261) who observed that, since “one” may be regarded in many contexts as a stressed form of the indefinite article and may, therefore, replace it, it is quite grammatical to have “I would like *one photocopy* of this article” and “I would like *a photocopy* of this article” respectively. In terms of intelligibility, 60 respondents claimed that feature 3, as exemplified in (38) and (39), is intelligible since the replacement does not seriously alter the original meaning of the utterance. However, the remaining 40 respondents opined that, though the basic meaning of the utterances in (38) and (39) is still understood even when “a” has been replaced by the numeral “one”, there may be a distortion of the original intended meaning since the strong form of “a” /eɪ/ or “an” /ɒn/, (which is the equivalent of the numeral “one” in this context), does not express exactly the same meaning as the weak form /ə/ or /ən/. Finally, in terms of widespread usage among educated speakers, 60 respondents acknowledged that feature 3 occurs in their English. However, the remaining 40 respondents claimed that, in most cases, they use “one” and “a”/“an” interchangeably depending on the context and, therefore, they use “one” only when the context requires its use. The percentage of acceptability of feature 3 in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated Izon (Nigerian) speakers is, therefore, 72%, 100%, 60% and 60% respectively. Thus, the average percentage of acceptability recorded for feature 3 is 73%.

Some Izon speakers of English also drop the indefinite article before singular count nouns in such contexts where it is required especially in British English. This omission is reflected in (40) and (41):

(40) Our teacher gave us assignment.

(41) Let me know if you want to ask question.

This omission, which is presented as feature 4 in this study, is traceable to the Izon language where the indefinite article is, because of its non-existence in Izon, either omitted or replaced with the numeral “one” in similar contexts as illustrated in the code-mixed structures in (42) and (43) respectively.

(42) Ē lecture nana emi.

I lecture have NONPAST.

I have lecture.

(43) Ē *kəni* lecture nana wəri.

I one lecture have PAST.

I had *one* lecture.

Thus, in terms of appropriateness, 49 respondents confirmed that feature 4, as exemplified in (40) and (41), is appropriate since it reflects what happens in the Izon language and is also similar to some structures which are considered appropriate in English. For example, there are some instances in English, such as “her duties as (a) hostess”, “my appointment as (a) lecturer” and “Jung as (a) thinker”, where the occurrence of the indefinite article before singular count nouns is optional, especially when the indefinite article is non-referring (Quirk et al., 2003: 273). However, the remaining 51 respondents opined that the omission of the indefinite article, which is, in the context of (40) and (41), required for specific reference, is inappropriate in English because it does not portray the way the English language should be used appropriately. Similarly, in terms of grammaticality, 49 respondents acknowledged that feature 4, as illustrated in (40) and (41), is grammatical because it does not violate any “serious” rule of syntax in English but merely differs from the preferred form, especially in British English where it is required that the indefinite article occur before singular count nouns. Apart from that, there are some contexts in which the indefinite article is not required before singular count nouns (e.g. “hostess”, “lecturer” and “thinker” cited above). If such instances are accepted as grammatical, then, the omission of the indefinite article in (40) and (41) should also be accepted and treated as grammatical. However, 51 respondents argued that feature 4 is ungrammatical because it has, as demonstrated in (40) and (41), violated a basic rule in the syntax of English. As Quirk et al. (2003: 61 & 272) suggest, the indefinite article is obligatory before singular count nouns, especially where it is used, as it is in (40) and (41), for specific indefinite reference. This explains why the omission of the indefinite article “a”/“an” before the singular count nouns “assignment” and “question” in (40) and (41) was considered ungrammatical by 51 of the respondents. With reference to intelligibility, 49 of the respondents acknowledged that, though the indefinite article is omitted before the singular count nouns “assignment” and “question” in (40) and (41), this does not affect seriously the meaning of the utterances involved and, thus, feature 4, as exemplified in (40) and (41), does not hinder intelligibility. The remaining 51 respondents, however, asserted that feature 4 cannot be totally intelligible both nationally and internationally because it can lead to the distortion of the intended meaning of a message since it leaves out,

through the omission of the indefinite article, much of the information that guides the hearer to interpret and comprehend the actual meaning of utterances. For example, the statement “I saw a man in your room” suggests that the man in question is unfamiliar to the speaker. It is through the occurrence of the indefinite article that we are able to interpret and comprehend this hidden meaning. If, on the other hand, the indefinite article “a” is removed and we have “I saw man in your room”, it then suggests that “man” is familiar to the speaker and the hearer; whereas, what was originally intended in this context was “a man” unknown or unfamiliar to the speaker. Thus, the original meaning has been distorted because of the omission of the indefinite article. Finally, in terms of widespread usage, 21 respondents confirmed that they do omit the indefinite article before singular count nouns in the context of (40) and (41). However, the remaining 79 claimed that this omission does not occur in their English partly because of the fear of being stigmatized (28 respondents) and partly because it is inappropriate, ungrammatical, unintelligible and, therefore, uneducated (51 respondents). This therefore leaves the percentage of acceptability of feature 4 in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated Izon (Nigerian) speakers at 49%, 49%, 49% and 21% respectively. The average percentage of acceptability recorded for feature 4 is, therefore, 42%.

Similarly, some Izon-English bilinguals drop the indefinite article before such determiners as “little” and “few” especially when they mean to say “a little” or “a few”. This is presented as feature 5 in this study and it is reflected in (44) and (45) below:

(44) I have few oranges; take some of them.

(45) There is *little water* in the clay pot; go and take your bath.

This is perhaps because the noun phrases “few oranges” (“kala oğun eri”) and “little water” (“igiti bini zu”) do not take the indefinite article in Izon obviously because it is non-existent:

(46) E kala oğun eri nana emi; o zuwa kon.

I few orange PL have NONPAST; them some take.

I have few oranges; take some of them.

(47) Igitì bini zu ekpe mi o emi; mu biri.

Little water clay pot DEF ART [NEUTER SG] in [BE] NONPAST.; go bath.

There is little water in the clay pot; go and take your bath.

Thus, in terms of appropriateness, 30 respondents claimed that feature 5, the omission of the indefinite article before “few” and “little” as exemplified in (44) and (45), is appropriate, especially within the Izon (Nigerian) context, because it reflects what happens in the Izon language where the noun phrases “few oranges” (“kala oğun eri”) and “little water” (“igiti bini zu”) do not take the indefinite article. However, the remaining 70 respondents opined that the omission is inappropriate because the indefinite article is required in this context to reflect the meaning conveyed in the latter parts of (44) and (45) respectively. Similarly, in terms of grammaticality, 30 respondents acknowledged that feature 5, as illustrated in (44) and (45), is grammatical because it does not violate any “serious” rule of syntax in English. However, the remaining 70 respondents strongly argued that the omission in (44) and (45) is ungrammatical since the indefinite article is required to convey the meaning that is intended in this context. With reference to intelligibility, 12 respondents admitted that, despite the fact that the indefinite article is omitted in (44) and (45), it is still intelligible especially within the Izon (Nigerian) setting and, thus, the omission does not seriously impair intelligibility. However, the remaining respondents (88 of them) strongly felt that the omission of the indefinite article before “few” and “little” in the context of (44) and (45) is not intelligible both nationally and internationally because “few” and “a few”, and “little” and “a little” do not mean the same thing. As suggested by Quirk et al. (2003: 263), “(a) few” (“a small number”) and “(a) little” (“a small quantity”) make positive / negative contrast according to whether the indefinite article is used or not. When the indefinite article is omitted, “few” and “little” become stressed thereby conveying a shade of meaning different from the one that is conveyed when they are unstressed as shown in (48) – (51) below:

(48) I have *a few 'books* (meaning, “some”, “several”).

(49) I have *'few books* (meaning, “not many”).

(50) I have *a little 'oil* (meaning, “some”).

(51) I have *'little oil* (meaning, “not much”).

Thus, what is implied in (44) and (45) is that “the oranges are not many” and “the water is not much”. To reflect the meaning that “there are enough oranges and so take some of them” and “the water in the water pot is enough

for you to have your bath” respectively, the indefinite article should be inserted before “few” and “little” in (44) and (45) respectively. This is illustrated in (52) and (53) below:

(52) I have *a few oranges*; take some of them.

(53) There is *a little water* in the clay pot; go and take your bath.

In terms of widespread usage, 12 respondents confirmed that they do use “few” and “little” in the context exemplified in (44) and (45). However, the majority of the respondents, (88 of them), confirmed that the omission of the indefinite article in the context of (44) and (45) does not occur in their English. While 18 of these 88 respondents explained that, despite the fact that the omission of the indefinite article in the context of (44) and (45) reflects the structural patterns of Izon, where the noun phrases “few oranges” (“kala oḡun eri”) and “little water” (“iḡiṭi bini zu”) do not take the indefinite article, and that it is appropriate and grammatical especially within the Izon (Nigerian) context, it does not occur in their English because it is unintelligible, the remaining 70 maintained that it is inappropriate, ungrammatical, unintelligible and, therefore, sub-standard. The percentage of acceptability of feature 5 in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated Izon (Nigerian) speakers is, therefore, 30%, 30%, 12% and 12% respectively. The average percentage of acceptability recorded for feature 5 is, therefore, 21%.

There is also the co-occurrence of possessive and demonstrative determiners in the structure of a noun phrase. As Akere (2001: 73) observed, English does not permit the co-occurrence of demonstratives and possessives in such a manner that they follow each other in a noun phrase because both of them are central determiners and, thus, according to Quirk et al. (2003: 254), they are “mutually exclusive”. But in Izon, the co-occurrence of possessive and demonstrative determiners is allowed and, thus, it is possible to have the following sentences:

(54) *Inj bei zowei bei adị ebi emi.*

Your DEM [MASC SG] friend DEM [MASC SG] handsome [BE] NONPAST.

Your this friend is handsome.

(55) *Wonị u ma abịraụ ma bira ḡba emi.*

Our DEM [FEM SG] sister DEM [FEM SG] stingy [BE] NONPAST.

Our that sister is stingy.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Izon-English bilinguals make such sentences as (56) and (57) in which possessive and demonstrative determiners co-occur:

(56) Whenever the father agrees with you, you can take *his that daughter* home.

(57) *These our gods* do not disappoint. Any time we call them, they answer.

In terms of appropriateness, the co-occurrence of possessive and demonstrative determiners in the structure of a noun phrase, which is presented as feature 6 in this study and illustrated in (56) and (57) above, was considered appropriate by 18 respondents because it reflects the preferred structural form in the Izon language where possessive determiners are permitted to co-occur with demonstrative determiners in the structure of the Izon noun phrase. The remaining 82 respondents, however, observed that the co-occurrence of the possessive and demonstrative determiners in (56) and (57) is inappropriate in English because it is not in line with the rules of English syntax which disallows the co-occurrence of two or more central determiners in the structure of a noun phrase. With reference to grammaticality, 10 respondents claimed that feature 6, as exemplified in (56) and (57), is grammatical because, despite the fact that native English usage does not permit this co-occurrence, it is allowed by the rules of the syntax of the Izon language, which is expected to provide the bulk of the linguistic contexts within which the English language should be used, interpreted and understood within the Izon socio-cultural setting where it is used as a second language. Thus, they argued that, since varieties of English are expected to differ in their rules thereby leading to different structures in different varieties, it is not fair to condemn the co-occurrence of possessive and demonstrative determiners in (56) and (57) as ungrammatical merely because it does not follow the rules of native English usage. However, the remaining 90 respondents opined that feature 6 is ungrammatical because possessive determiners and demonstrative determiners, which are both central determiners, are not permitted to occur together in the structure of an English noun phrase. They therefore maintained that (56) and (57), where possessive and demonstrative determiners are allowed to co-occur, should be seen and treated as errors that must be corrected. In terms of intelligibility, all the 100 respondents used for the study confirmed that feature 6 as it is illustrated in (56) and (57) is intelligible since it does not distort the meaning of the structures in which it occurs. Finally, in terms of widespread usage among educated speakers, 10 respondents admitted that feature 6 occurs frequently in their English usage, especially for the

purpose of emphasis, while the remaining 90 claimed that the feature does not occur in their English because it is inappropriate, ungrammatical and, therefore, non-standard. Thus, the percentage of acceptability of feature 6 in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated speakers is 18%, 10%, 100% and 10% respectively, thereby producing an average percentage of acceptability of 34.5%.

Finally, there is the use of “which” in contexts where “who” would have been preferred in relative clauses and this is traceable to the influence of the Izon language. In Izon, there is no distinction between the uses of “who” and “which” as it is in English. While English uses “who” for humans and “which” for non-humans, Izon has only one relative pronoun “nị” and this is used for all purposes whether human or non-human e.g.

(58) Iyọrọ araụ ma nị ẹ gba timi araụ
Female (woman) FEM SG DEF ART [FEM SG] REL I tell PROG ASP PAST FEM SG
ma bo teị.

DEF ART [FEM SG] come PERF ASP NONPAST.

The woman whom I was talking about has come.

(59) Agadagba bei nị Arogbo pẹẹ bei Ibe
Agadagba DEF ART [MASC SG] REL Arogbo king DEF ART [MASC SG] kingdom
mị se di mịnị.

DEF ART [NEUTER SG] whole oversee PROG ASP NONPAST.

The Agadagba, who is the king of Arogbo, is overseeing the whole kingdom.

(60) Bo kasị mị nị i seimọ wẹrị ye
Come chair DEF ART [NEUTER SG] REL you spoil PAST NEUTER SG
mị gbẹ.

DEF ART [NEUTER SG] pay.

Come and pay (for) the chair which you spoilt.

(61) Wọ ọnana bei nị agbogbo mị sụwọ wẹrị
We sheep DEF ART [MASC SG] REL garden DEF ART [NEUTER SG] enter PAST
wei bei kaka teị.

MASC SG DEF ART [MASC SG] tie PERF ASP NONPAST.

We have tied the sheep which entered the garden.

In (58) – (61), the relative pronoun “nị” has been used for “iyọrọ araụ ma” (“the woman”) and “Agadagba bei” (“the Agadagba”) who are human beings, and for “kasị mị” (“the chair”) and “ọnana bei” (“the sheep”) which are non-human. Thus, owing to the fact that there is no distinction between the uses of “who” and “which” in Izon as it is in English, some Izon-English bilinguals do use “which” in contexts where “who” or “whom” would have been preferred. This influence, which is presented as feature 7 in this study, is reflected in (62) and (63) below:

(62) The Agadagba *which* is responsible for administrating the kingdom have chiefs under him.

(63) The girl *which* I was talking about have come.

On the acceptability of feature 7, as it is exemplified in (62) and (63), all the 100 respondents used for the study confirmed that, though the feature reflects the structural patterns of the Izon language; it is unacceptable even within the Izon socio-cultural setting because it is inappropriate, ungrammatical, unintelligible and, therefore, does not occur in their English usage. It should, therefore, be treated as an error that must be corrected because of its gross violation of the rules of Standard English syntax. Thus, the (average) percentage of acceptability of feature 7 in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated speakers is 0%.

The average percentage of acceptability / unacceptability recorded for features 1 - 7 in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage is presented on table 1 below:

Table 1. The average percentage of acceptability / unacceptability of features 1 - 7

Degree of acceptability/ unacceptability	Average percentage of features						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Acceptable	68%	73%	73%	42%	21%	34.5%	0%
Not acceptable	32%	27%	27%	58%	79%	65.5%	100%

As the table shows, the Izon influences presented as features 1, 2 and 3 recorded an average percentage of acceptability of 68%, 73% and 73% respectively. Thus, they can be considered as permanent influences since their manifestation is seen even in the English of the most educated Izon-English bilingual, in spite of his/her high level of exposure to good English usage, obviously because of their appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and high frequency of use within the Izon setting. However, the influences presented as features 4, 5, 6 and 7 had an average percentage of acceptability of 42%, 21%, 34.5% and 0% respectively. Thus, they are, in spite of their ability to reflect the structural patterns of the Izon language, considered as temporary influences since their manifestation in the English of Izon-English bilinguals decreases or totally disappears as the bilingual's level of exposure to good English usage increases.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the influence of Izon on the syntax of Nigerian English and makes a distinction between permanent and temporary influences on the basis of their appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and frequency of occurrence in the English of educated speakers. The study reveals that the syntax of Izon has tremendous influence on the syntax of Nigerian English, and that the manifestation of this influence is clearly reflected in the pluralization of some non-count nouns, the occurrence of the first person before the third person in the structure of a compound subject-NP, the replacement of the indefinite article with the cardinal numeral "one", especially when it occurs before singular count nouns, the omission of the indefinite article before singular count nouns, the omission of the indefinite article before "little" and "few", especially when they are used to mean "a little" and "a few" respectively, the co-occurrence of possessive and demonstrative determiners and the use of "which" in contexts where "who" would have been preferred, which represent features 1 - 7 respectively. While some of the resultant structures, especially those that recorded an average percentage of over 50% of acceptability in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage, can be considered as permanent influences, some, (that is, those whose average percentage of acceptability is less than 50%), are seen as temporary influences. Specifically, features 1, 2 and 3 are considered acceptable within the Izon (Nigerian) context on the basis of their appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated speakers in the Nigerian setting and can, therefore, be treated as permanent influences because they are able to, despite the educated speakers' level of exposure, survive through the GNE level to the SNE level. However, features 4, 5, 6 and 7, whose average percentage of acceptability in terms of appropriateness, grammaticality, intelligibility and widespread usage among educated speakers is less than 50%, are treated as temporary influences since their occurrence decreases or totally disappears as the speakers' level of exposure to good English usage increases.

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Notes

1. See Jibril (1979), Kujore (1985), Adegbija (1989), Jowitt (1991), Awonusi (2004b) and Udofot (2004) for details on the phonetic/phonological and lexico-semantic features of Nigerian English.
2. Izon is one of the seven languages that form the language-cluster called Ijo or Ijaw. Izon is spoken in Ondo, Edo, Delta and Bayelsa States of the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It can be sub-classified into South western (including Arogbu), North western (including Mein), South central (including Bumo) and North central (including Kolokuma) (see Williamson, 1968 and Jenewari, 1989). The Arogbu dialect of Izon is what is used in this study.
3. The remaining 16 of the 24 retired civil servants did not read English or Linguistics but had their primary, secondary and tertiary education, in reputable educational institutions both within and outside Nigeria, in the 50s, 60s and early 70s when the standard was high and are, thus, assumed to have been exposed to good models of English.
4. Though demonstratives function as premodifiers in the structure of an Izon noun phrase, they are often repeated after the head to indicate demonstrative agreement.
5. See Adekunle (1979); Kujore (1985); Jowitt (1991) and Okoro (2004), among others, for examples of these distinguishing syntactic features drawn from the speech and writings of Nigerians.