Spelling and Syntactic Variation in Three Varieties of English: A Corpus-based Approach

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Abstract

This exploratory study investigated spelling and syntactic variation in three varieties of English, namely Nigerian English (NE), British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). The data for the study were drawn from Global Web-based English (GloWbE), a corpus which consists of 1.9 billion words from twenty different countries. The present research was motivated by our observation that, though NE has a close historical association with BrE, AmE has been exacting great influence on NE. The spelling styles and some syntactic differences were compared in the three varieties with a view to determining which of BrE and AmE has an edge over the other in NE. The study demonstrated that the AmE spelling convention has an edge over BrE spelling in NE. It was also discovered that NE is tilting rapidly towards AmE in spelling. With respect to grammatical variation, it was shown that the preference for either regular or irregular verb forms after HAVE seems to be verb-dependent in NE. Finally, it was revealed that the structural pattern and the actual usage of simple perfect aspect are similar across NE, BrE and AmE.

Keywords: Variation, British English, American English, Nigerian English, Spelling and syntax, corpus linguistics

1.0 Introduction

Several models have been proposed to describe the spread of English from England to different parts of the world (McArthur 1998; Kachru 1982). Kachru's (1982) classic model describes the spread of English in terms of three concentric circles: (1) the Inner Circle, which is norm-generating and comprises countries like Great Britain, Ireland, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand where English is the ancestral language of the majority of people; (2) the Outer Circle, where, though English is not a major ancestral language, it has been institutionalized as an official language; this is the case in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Malaysia, Botswana, and India; and, finally, (3) the Expanding Circle, which represents countries where English is a foreign language in places like Japan, Indonesia, Korea, Togo, Niger Republic, and France. However, it must be pointed out, as Moag (1982) does, that the differences among the circles are not sharp and clear-cut. For a critique of Kachru's model, see Akande (2008). Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model, developed primarily for postcolonial Englishes but later extended to non-postcolonial Englishes, underscores the inevitable links between the adoption of innovations as a mark of identity construction and the endonormative attitude of speakers in non-native environments of English. In this model, he provides five stages of development as follows:

1. the transportation of English to a new setting;
2. the stabilization of the linguistic exonormative norm of the colonialists;
3. the indigenization of the imported English, which consists of the accommodation of local features;
4. the stabilization of local characteristics of English as the norm; and
5. the emergence of regional varieties within a particular postcolonial English

Nigerian English falls within Kachru's outer circle as well as within the postcolonial English framework of Schneider. Varieties such as this have been extensively discussed in the literature (see Alo and Mesthrie, 2004; Moag, 1982; Pride, 1982). Just like any other outer circle variety, Nigerian English (i.e., NE) is already developing its own endonormative standard (see Okunrinmeta 2014; Jowitt 2019). However, several scholars have attempted to classify NE into different varieties based on such classifications as the level of education, the intensity of the interference of the mother tongue of users of English in their spoken and written English, and ethnicity (Bamgbose, 1982; Banjo, 1979; Jowitt, 1991; Udofot, 2004). One of the varieties identified by most of these

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scholars is standard Nigerian English, which is largely associated with the variety being used by educated speakers, though it cannot be assumed that everything an educated user says or writes is standard (Akande 2008). Jowitt (2007) remarks that there is no agreement among scholars as to how to establish what is and what is not standard in Nigeria so as to determine what the specific features of standard Nigerian English (i.e., SNE) are that might distinguish it from the Standard English (StdE) of other regions of the world. For Banjo (1996), the two parameters that can be used to identify standard Nigerian English are social acceptability and international intelligibility. What this means is that it must not sound phony to the local audience and must be meaningful to the international audience.

Most varieties of English around the world are modeled on and greatly influenced by two of the inner circle varieties that are recognized as national standards: British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). These two varieties of English are the two major centers towards which other varieties gravitate (Algeo, 1991). Graddol (1997:9) points out that "the position of England in the world today is the joint outcome of Britain's colonial expansion and the more recent activity of the US". Similarly, Svartvik and Leech (2006:150) provide three major reasons why British English and American English are two reference varieties. They remark that, first, the two varieties constitute 83% of all native speakers of English across the world; second, they are historically considered to be the origin of all other varieties of English; and, third, these two varieties "provided the chief native-speaker models that non-native-speaking teachers of English aimed to instill" (Svartvik and Leech, 2006:150). Apart from these two models, there are, of course, new epicenters that influence other varieties of English in their respective regions. As Hundt (2001:737) has noted, Australian English is capable of becoming an epicenter for varieties of English in the Pacific region.

According to Clyne (1995:22), there are three types of centers: full centers (British English and American English), nearly full centers (Australian English), and semi-centers (New Zealand English). In most cases, what determines the epicenter a variety gravitates towards is mainly colonial history and proximity to a particular epicenter. However, in the last couple of decades, the diffusion of American English to different parts of the world has been the consequence of the media (both print and digital) and an unprecedented technological revolution, which have tremendously contributed to the Americanization of many varieties of English (Najmiddinov, 2015). As a matter of fact, Najmiddinov (2015:75) remarks that 'American English is accepted for the power and superiority that the USA has acquired in the areas of science, technology, commerce, military affairs, and politics. It has now become the center of Western political, economic, and technological innovations and activities'. Jowitt (2019) also supports this view by noting that, in the case of Nigeria, the influence of American English on Nigerian English is attributed to such factors as the model used by American teachers of English in the past and the fact that many Nigerians, especially the educated ones, have spent long periods in North America.

Nigeria was colonized by the British for several decades until 1960, when the country became politically, albeit not economically, independent. This long history of British colonization has multifarious implications for Nigerian cultures and languages. It reflects in the way we dress, the names we bear, and even our religions. In relation to language, especially English, and its teaching and learning, British English was (and largely is still perceived to be) the model in Nigeria. In the Nigerian classroom generally, students were taught to model their English on British English. Most elites in Nigeria had easy access to Great Britain, either to study there or even live there. There were many Britons in Nigeria engaging in different enterprises, although many of them were teachers in secondary schools and tertiary institutions. All of these have enormous impacts on the variety of English that has been the teaching model in Nigeria. However, our observation in the last few years has shown that, given the technological advancement and the digital revolution closely associated with America, what we have within Nigerian English now is a mixture of British English (BrE) and American English (AmE), with Nigerian English (NE) gradually tilting towards American English.

The present study is exploratory research that attempts to verify the observation above by focusing on two areas of language: spelling and syntax. In most schools and institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, students are advised to make use of the BrE spelling style, although this advice is sometimes completely ignored or partly adhered to. By paying attention to the spelling style in NE, the paper hopes to find out which of the BrE and AmE spelling styles is more common in NE. In other words, the paper will, by relying on data from a corpus (see Section 3 below), determine which of these two varieties has an edge in NE. The second aspect of the paper is aimed at comparing BrE, AmE, and NE with respect to the frequency of finite simple perfect aspect verbal constructions like *has gone, have broken,* and *had won*. The major concern here is to find out which of the regular or irregular past participle forms is more common after HAVE across the three varieties of English under study.

In other words, the study seeks to find out which of HAVE + past participle or HAVE + past tense has an edge in Nigerian English. Given this second aim therefore, the study is restricted in scope to only lexical verbs whose past participle forms can be formed through the addition of any of *-ed, -en,* or *–t* as in *has learned/has learnt*; *has proved/has proved;* and *has spoiled/has spoilt.*

2.0 Spelling and Grammatical Differences between British and American English

The first area examined in this paper is spelling. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1972) explain that there is a remarkable uniformity in the spelling and punctuation systems across the world. However, they note that the uniform spelling system has two minor sub-systems: British spelling and American spelling. They say as follows:

Although printing houses in all English-speaking countries retain a tiny element of individual decision (*realize, -ise; judg(e)ment; etc*), there is basically a single, graphological spelling and punctuation system throughout, with two minor subsystems. The first one is the subsystem with British orientation (used in all English-speaking countries except the United States) with distinctive forms in only a small class of words: color, colour, centre, levelled, etc. The other is the American subsystem: color, center, level, etc. (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik, 1972: 16). They further point out that while in some countries some publishers stick strictly to either of these two subsystems, in others a mixture of the two is used. Our observation has also shown that while British publishers sometimes tolerate American spelling styles, American publishers rarely tolerate British spelling (Modiano, 1996:207).

Modiano (1996) examines the influence of AmE on BrE and argues that since AmE has had so much influence on BrE, there is a need to drop the BrE standard and adopt a Mid-Atlantic norm. Modiano (1996:207) points out that evidence abounds that 'people in Britain are borrowing American lexical items *as well as adopting AmE spelling conventions* (italics mine). Davies (2005), while remarking on the spelling differences between BrE and AmE, points out that the majority of words ending in *–our* or *-re* in BrE spelling end in *-or-er* in AmE spelling. This means that while we have *behaviour, colour, honour* or *centre* and *litre* in British English, there are *behavior, color, honor, center,* and *liter* in American English. He also remarks that some spelling differences between these two major varieties of English are a result of the addition of a letter, and such an addition often leads to differences in pronunciation. He cites the examples of BrE*aluminium, mum, saleroom* and *greenkeeper* as opposed to AmE *aluminum, mom, salesroom,* and *greenkeeper.*

Kongsuwannakul (2011) also explores spelling differences between AmE and BrE with a view to finding out whether or not spelling can pose serious challenges to or have any remarkable impacts on global issues. By carrying out a survey that focuses, among other things, on the implications of spelling differences on social networks, curriculum design, education, and advertisement with 160 students, the study demonstrates that differences in spelling have far-reaching effects and are related to ideology, national pride, and identity. The author concludes by arguing for 'American spelling preference by non-native speakers of English in particular, with the aid of new media and emerging social networking supplying the diffusion of thought and, of course, the spelling' (p. 199). Ngula (2011) reports that spelling pronunciation is prevalent in the English of educated Ghanaians, and he attributes the pervasiveness to the mismatch between English orthography and sound as well as the influence of their first languages. In another study, Ngula (2014) examines lexical hybridization in the English of educated Ghanaians. Relying on 77 examples of hybridized lexical innovations, the study demonstrates that the hybrid lexical forms can be grouped into social domains, cultural domains, finance domains, health domains, and political domains. It concludes by emphasizing the need to develop Ghanaian English.

Sometimes, BrE makes use of one letter while AmE uses two. This is evident in BrE words like *fulfill, fulfillment,* and *skillful,* as opposed to AmE*fulfill,fulfillment,* and *skillful.* This is, however, not to downplay the fact that AmE often employs several simplification strategies. Such strategies include letter dropping as demonstrated in the spelling of BrE*aneamia, diarrhoea* and *anaesthesia* as *anemia, diarrhea,* and *anesthesia* in AmE.

Also, in order to ensure that there is correspondence between pronunciation and spelling, AmE does make use of the letter *–f* where BrE will make use of *-ph* letters. Examples of such are BrE *Sulphur, sulphate* and *sulpha* which are spelt in AmE as *sulfur, sulfate* and *sulfa* (Janicki 1977:52).

Apart from spelling, this paper also focuses on the regular and irregular participle forms by examining the simple perfect aspect in Nigerian English as evident in Global Web-based English (GloWbE). GloWbE is a corpus that contains roughly 1.9 billion words of texts from twenty different countries. The corpus makes it possible for researchers to compare two or more varieties of English. By simple perfect aspect, it means a two-word perfect aspect with the structure HAVE plus a lexical verb in its past participle form.

This means that non-standard forms such as *has breaking* were excluded, although they are attested to in the data under study. Also, perfect aspects in which the verb strings are discontinued by adverbials, as in *has just met* and *has also paid,* as well as those in which HAVE variants are contracted, as in *'ve met* and *'d gone,* were also excluded. The lexical verb that appears immediately after HAVE is a past participle that may end in *-ed* as in *has showed* or end in *-en* as in *has shown*. With regard to the formation of past participle forms of lexical verbs, the following categories can be identified:

1. Lexical verbs that always end in *-ed* in their past participle forms (e.g., killed, danced, called, robbed)
2. Lexical verbs that always end in *-en* in their past participle forms (e.g., taken, broken, gone)
3. Lexical verbs that take a zero morpheme in their past participle forms (e.g., cut, hit, come)
4. Lexical verbs that take either *-ed* or *-t* in their past participle forms (e.g., spoiled/spoilt; dreamed/dreamt)
5. Lexical verbs that can take *-ed* or *-en* in their past participle forms (e.g., showed/shown; proved/proven)
6. Lexical verbs whose past participle formation involves other processes such as vowel change (e.g., bought, forgot, forgotten, sold)

Buregeya (2001) describes the grammatical features of Kenyan English and observes that it is characterized by several grammatical features, which include the omission of articles, the absence of concord, as well as the reversal in the order of complements as in *. *Please type for me this letter.* The paper concludes that the grammatical forms and features identified are a result of imperfect learning (see also Schmied, 2004) on the grammatical features of East African English. Huber and Dako (2004) report, among others, the occasional use of the underlying nominal of the relative clause as a resumptive pronoun, as in *The book **that** I read* (p. 858), and the deletion of the definite article in post-modified head noun phrases, as in *He called for the abolition of the death penalty* (p. 858), as some of the syntactic features of Ghanaian English. Most of these features are, however, not unique to the varieties studied, as they can be found in almost all outer circle varieties with variation in terms of frequency.

As Zhang and Jiang (2008) have reported, there are subtle grammatical differences between BrE and AmE. Some of the differences observed include the use of *got* in BrE, where AmE will use *gotten* (Zhang & Jiang, 2008:72). Zhang also notes that there are cases where BrE will not use articles a, at, and in at the *university* and in the *hospital,* but AmE will as in *at the university* and *in the hospital* (p. 72). Janicki (1977) also observes many syntactic differences between AmE and BrE. Some of these differences are found in the use of the infinitive *to*. While the use of the infinitive without *to* is common in AmE, as in *Let's go see him*, BrE often uses the infinitive with *to,* as in *Let's go see him* (p. 89). Another syntactic difference noted is the use of the subjunctive in the two varieties of English. Whereas in AmE, the subjunctive is formed by the base form of the verb, as in *I suggest that you go*, in BrE it is formed by a combination of the modal *should* and the infinitive, as in *I suggest that you should go* (Janicki, 1977: 90).

Jowitt (1991) points out that some syntactic features that are very rare in other standard varieties of English are common in popular Nigerian English. He shows that some uncountable nouns, such as *furniture, equipment, behavior,* and *advice,* are sometimes treated as countable. Also, according to him (Jowitt, 1991:112), some adjectives are used as verbs, as in *He had dead* and *He naked himself,* just as nouns are used as verbs, as in *Horn before overtaking* and *It doesn't worth the money.* Other features identified by Jowitt include the occurrence of prepositions such as *for* in advocate, demand, or request *for* and *about* in *discuss about,* as well as the omission of prepositions where they are required, as in *reply* and *dispose* instead of *reply to* and *dispose of,* respectively (Jowiit, 1991: 116). However, most of the examples given by Jowitt (1991) are non-standard and cannot be used as yardsticks for standard Nigerian English. He uses the term popular Nigerian English to show that, although the majority of the expressions are common in the English usage of many Nigerians (whether less educated or highly educated), they are not necessarily standard English expressions.

Akande (2004) attempts to verify the claim that Nigerian secondary school students make more errors when they use the post-modified head type nominal group structure (the hq type) than when they use any other structure, including the pre- and post-modified head type nominal groups (the mhq type). Using the written English compositions of selected secondary school students in Osun State as data, the study confirms that the *hq* type, which is structurally less complex than the *mhq type*, is actually more difficult to acquire by these students. The study uncovers the structures of the nominal group competence of Nigerian students and makes useful recommendations on the sequencing of nominal group structures in English language teaching in Nigerian schools. While characterizing the morphological and syntactic features of Nigerian English, Alo and Mesthrie (2004: 814–825) identify such features as the use of unmarked verb forms for present and simple past, double marking of past tense (e.g., He did not went), lack of distinction between stative and dynamic verbs, and the use of the honorific *they*.

The focus of Gut and Fuchs (2013) is on progressive aspect marking in the English of some educated Nigerians. They draw on data consisting of 4,813 progressive constructions from ICE-Nigeria and compare these constructions with similar ones in ICE-Great Britain. The study shows that the commonest form of progressive construction in NE is a present tense form of BE + present participle in the active voice, as it accounts for 72.3% of all the progressive constructions identified. It further demonstrates, among others, that complex progressives as well as verbs marked for both passive and progressive are also very rare in NE. The study concludes, inter alia, that there are overwhelming similarities between NE and BrE in the use of the progressive aspect system. ICE-GB, which is the British component of *The International Corpus of English,* comprises 500 texts (300 spoken and 200 written texts), each of which has about 2000 words. This corpus, compiled between 1990 and 1993 and released in 1998, was designed primarily for syntactic studies at the University College of London. Taking a cue from this, ICE-Nigeria, a Nigerian component of *the International Corpus of English,* was compiled by Gut and her team. The corpus consists of one million words of both spoken and written texts, designed to enable researchers to compare Nigerian English with other varieties of English.

By drawing data from the Nigerian component of the International Corpus of English (ICE), Akinlotan's (2016a) study has shown that in Nigerian English, the incidence of grammatical number agreement is much higher (i.e., 98%) than that of grammatical number disagreement (i.e., 2%). It is also shown that structural complexity and proficiency are variables that often influence disagreement. In another study, Akinlotan (2016b) investigates structural simplification in relation to the determiner system in Nigerian English. The major concern of the study is to determine the extent to which new Englishes, especially those springing up in multilingual contexts, manifest unique and peculiar features that mark them out as different from the established native varieties of English, such as British or American English. The study demonstrates that one-word form determiner structures are more prominent than the two- or three-word pattern of determiner structures in NE. The study concludes that 'cognitive processes engaged with the construction of determination in Nigerian English strongly reflect influences of cross-linguistic phenomena from local languages operating a syntactically unique determiner system from that of English' (p. 84). In another study, Akinlotan, showing evidence from the ICE-Nigerian corpus, notes that there are different degrees of variability in the use of the definite articles in NE (see Akinlotan, 2017; 2018).

2.0 Methodology

The data used for this work were drawn from Global Web-based English (GloWbE), a corpus that can enable one to investigate variation within a variety as well as across different varieties of English. GloWbE comprises about 1.9 billion words from 20 different countries. Such countries include the United States of America, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria. With the large number of words the corpus has, it is possible for one to have many types of searches, and one can also download full-text data from this corpus (http://corpus.byu.edu/glowbe).

In order to find variation within spelling, the study focuses on 15 lexical items, each of which is spelled in two different ways: American and British spelling systems. The fifteen words were chosen because their spellings are more common in different genres and have different constructions. A cursory look at the words shows that they are uneven in terms of the parts of speech they belong to. While there are two pairs of verbs (i.e., *organise/organize* and *plough/plow*) and two pairs of adjectives (*orthopaedic/orthopedic* and *grey/gray*), there are eleven pairs of nouns such as *theatre/theater, traveller/traveler* and *tonnes/tons.* The unequal choice of words is a result of the fact that spelling variation seems to be more common in nouns than in other parts of speech. We then determine which of these two spelling conventions is more prominent in Nigerian English by examining their absolute frequency of occurrence.

The three varieties of English (AmE, BrE, and NE) are compared by examining the normalized frequencies of the target words or structures with a view to finding out which of the national varieties NE is titling towards.

The paper concentrates on perfective constructions such as *have shown* and *has learnt.* The analysis is narrowed down to particular verb forms, mainly because this is an exploratory study. The narrowing down is also occasioned by our desire to remove all non-standard constructions such as *has showing and **have learning.* Our observation, especially with Nigerian users of English, has indicated that people often choose between two possible alternative forms of past participle forms of irregular verbs. Thus, while some speakers do use expressions like *have spelled* or *have burned,* some often go for *have spelt* or *has burnt.* The social or linguistic factors responsible for the choice of either of these two possible forms, though not the focus of the present study, can be carried out in the future.

3.0 Data Analysis and Discussion

This section focuses on the analysis of data by relying on figures provided in GloWbE. The first sub-section deals with spelling variation in NE by comparing it with AmE and BrE, while the second sub-section concentrates on an aspect of syntax in NE, BrE, and AmE.

3.1 Spelling Variations in Nigerian English

In this sub-section, we present differences in the spelling of fifteen lexical items that are spelled in either American or British style in Nigerian English. Since our first concern is to show variation within Nigerian English, the raw frequency counts of the fifteen words in the table below as they appear under NE in GloWbE are enough to determine which of the conventions is more common in NE.

S/N	Variety	Word	Frequency	Percentage
Table 1: Absolute Frequency of the Target Words in NE: GloWbE				
1	**British**	Theatre	992	77.02%
	American	Theater	296	22.98%
2	**British**	behaviour	1284	48.47%
	American	behavior	1365	51.53%
3	**British**	organise	348	34.90%
	American	organize	649	65.10%
4	**British**	traveller	80	50.96%
	American	traveler	77	49.04%
5	**British**	enrolment	160	54.98%
	American	enrollment	131	45.02%
6	**British**	arguement	70	2.80%
	American	argument	2432	97.20%
7	**British**	faeces	71	69.61%
	American	feces	31	30.39%
8	**British**	tonnes	370	36.71%
	American	tons	638	63.29%
9	**British**	yoghurt	72	44.44%
	American	yogurt	90	55.56%
10	**British**	pyjama	14	82.35%
	American	pajama	3	17.65%
11	**British**	sulphate	15	36.59%
	American	sulfate	26	63.41%
12	**British**	plough	51	72.86%
	American	plow	19	27.14%
13	**British**	orthopaedic	31	53.45%
	American	orthopedic	27	46.55%
14	**British**	grey	410	67.43
	American	gray	198	32.57
15	**British**	programmes	2793	47.86%
	American	programs	3043	52.14%

As can be seen from the table, within NE, the spelling of some words favors AmE while some favourBrE. For instance, the spellings of BEHAVIOUR, ORGANISE, ARGUEMENT, TONNES and YOGHURT as *behavior, organize, argument, tons* and *yogurt* occurred 51.53%, 65.10%, 97.20%, 63.29% and 55.56% respectively. This means that as far as these words are concerned, AmE has an edge over BrE in NE. Similarly, AmE has an edge over BrE in the spelling of SULPHATE and PROGRAMMES as *sulfate* (63.41%) and *programs* (52.14%) respectively. However, BrE takes the lead in the spelling of THEATRE, FAECES, PYJAMA, PLOUGH, ORTHOPAEDIC and GREY as *theatre* (77.02%), *faeces* (69.61%), *pyjama* (82.35%), plough (72.86%), *orthopaedic* (53.45%) and *grey* (67.43%). The table thus presents clear evidence that NE is undergoing some kind of Americanization in the area of spelling. This is contrary to what one would naturally expect. Given Nigeria's colonial history, its prolonged social and business contact with the British, and the consequent exposure to the British version of western education, one would expect that NE would be dominated by the British style of spelling.

Table 2: Overview of the Occurrences of BrE and AmE Spellings in NE: GloWbE Corpus		
Varieties	**Frequency of all the 15 Words in NE**	**Percentages**
British	6761	42.83%
American	9025	57.17%
Total	15786	100%

In relation to the fifteen lexical items under study, when we compare all the instances of BrE and AmE spellings in NE in the corpus, instances of AmE amount to 9025 (57.17%), while those of BrE account for 6761 (42.83%). This shows that the AmE spelling convention is more common than the BrE in NE, as evident in GloWbE. However, absolute numbers or raw frequencies, though they can determine which of the two national standards' spelling conventions is predominant within a particular variety, cannot determine which of the two Englishes (i.e., British English and American English) a particular variety gravitates towards. In order to determine which variety of English NE gravitates to, it is important to compare BrE, AmE, and NE by examining the normalized frequencies of the target words in the three varieties.

Table three below provides a combination of absolute and normalized frequencies. Normalized frequencies, as presented below, enable us to compare NE to BrE with respect to the occurrences of the American words in the table. All the words appear in AmE spelling because it is the variety that the raw frequencies in Tables 1 and 2 have shown to be more common in NE.

Table 3: Normalized Frequencies of the Target Words						
Words	**Nigerian English**		**British English**		**American English**	
	Absolute Frequency	**pmw**	**Absolute Frequency**	**pmw**	**Absolute Frequency**	**Pmw**
theater	296	6.94	1701	4.39	11772	30.43
behavior	1365	32.01	7572	19.53	37791	97.70
organize	649	15.22	1854	4.78	5652	14.61
traveler	77	1.81	789	2.04	2184	5.65
enrollment	131	3.07	247	0.64	2635	6.81
argument	2432	57.03	36266	93.56	48315	124.91
feces	31	0.73	119	0.31	716	1.85
tons	638	14.96	4420	11.42	9337	24.14
yogurt	90	2.11	616	1.59	1402	3.62
pajama	3	0.07	50	0.13	164	0.42
sulfate	26	0.61	79	0.20	261	0.67
plow	19	0.45	128	0.33	633	1.64
orthopedic	27	0.63	93	0.24	335	0.87
gray	198	4.64	4392	11.33	7840	20.27
programs	3043	71.35	11000	28.38	47621	123.11

As can be seen from Table 3, when we compare the occurrences of the target words per million words (pmw), it is clear that NE is shifting towards AmE in terms of spelling more than it is towards BrE. Out of the 15 words in the table, the table shows that if we compare NE and BrE, NE records greater occurrences pmw in 11 words, while there are just four words (i.e., *traveler, argument, pajamas,* and *gray*) in which BrE records greater occurrences pmw. For instance, for the word *programs*, out of every million words, NE records an average of 71 occurrences, AmE an average of 123 occurrences while in BrE, there is an average of just 28 occurrences. The table further indicates that the normalized frequency for *organize* is an average of 15 words pmw in each of NE and AmE and an average of 5 words pmw in BrE, while for *enrollment*, an average of 4 words pmw is recorded in NE, 7 words pmw in AmE and an average of one (1) word pmw in BrE. Similarly, for the word *tons*, there are 15, 11, and 24 words pmw on average in NE, BrE and AmE respectively, while for *behavior*, an average of 32 is recorded for NE, 20 for BrE, and 98 words pmw for AmE. Out of all the fifteen target words, there are just two where the differences in the occurrences are observably high: the words are *argument* and *gray*. The normalized frequencies for these words show that the numbers of AmE spellings pmw in BrE are much greater than what are recorded in NE. For instance, while BrE records an average of 94 words pmw for *argument*, NE has an average of 57. Overall, therefore, the general picture that Table 3 shows when we compare the three varieties is that, as far as

spelling is concerned, NE is shifting more and more towards AmE than it is towards BrE, which has always been the acclaimed 'model' for teaching in Nigerian schools.

Another area that can be examined to determine whether or not NE is being Americanized is syntax, especially the simple perfect aspects such as *has gone, have gone,* and *had gone.* Table 4 below presents the absolute frequencies with respect to the simple perfect aspect verb phrases under consideration.

Table 4: Absolute frequencies of regular and irregular verb forms in Nigerian English				
Irregular −*en*/-*t* form	**Frequency**	**Regular −*ed* form**	**Frequency**	**TOTAL**
Has proven	222 (8.8%)	Has proved	273 (29.5%)	495
Have proven	132 (5.2%)	Have proved	163 (17.6%)	295
Had proven	10 (0.4%)	Had proved	39 (4.2%)	49
Has shown	814 (32.1%)	Has showed	17 (1.8%)	831
Have shown	651 (25.7%)	Have showed	32 (3.5%)	683
Had shown	119 (4.7%)	Had showed	10 (1.1%)	129
Has learnt	80 (3.2%)	Has learned	63 (22.2%)	143
Have learnt	452 (17.9%)	Have learned	284 (30.7%)	736
Had learnt	53 (2.1%)	Had learned	45 (4.9%)	98
TOTAL	**2533 (73.2%)**	**TOTAL**	**926 (26.8%)**	**3459**

Table 4 shows the absolute frequencies of regular and irregular forms HAVE + PROVE, HAVE + SHOW and HAVE + LEARN in NE. Out of 3459 instances of all the variants of these verbs, the irregular forms account for 2533 (73.2%), while the occurrences of the regular forms constitute 926 (26.8%). Generally speaking, therefore, one may be tempted to conclude that the irregular forms are more common in NE than the regular forms. For instance, the irregular forms of the verb *show* in NE account for 1584 (96.4%) instances, while the regular forms account for just 59 (3.4%) instances. This pattern is also applicable to the verb *learn,* whose irregular forms amount to 585 (59.9%) occurrences while the regular-ed forms total 392 (40.1%) instances. However, as we can see from the table above, the occurrences of *HAVE + PROVE* have shown that such a conclusion may not be correct. Out of the 839 total number of both the regular and irregular forms of HAVE + PROVE, the irregular form variants (i.e., *has proven, have proven,* and *had proven*) amount to 364 (43.4%), while the regular form variants (i.e., *has proved, have proved,* and *had proved*) are 475 (56.6%). This then suggests that while irregular forms are generally preferred in NE, there are some verbs, such as *prove,* in which the regular form is preferred to the irregular form. Further research needs to be carried out in this area. One cannot say precisely at this stage that, as far as morphological variation with respect to the regular and irregular forms is concerned, NE is modeled after BrE or AmE since the morphological forms of verbs observed are shared by both BrE and AmE. As noted above, one thing that is clear from the table above is that the preference for either regular or irregular verbs in NE is verb-dependent.

In order to compare the three varieties of English, we present below tables showing the normalized frequencies of each of the *HAVE + PROVE, HAVE + SHOW,* and *HAVE + LEARN variants.* The variants of each of these are discussed separately.

Table 5: Absolute and Normalized Frequencies of *HAVE + Prove*								
Token	**Nigerian English**			**British English**			**American English**		
	pmw	**Abs. No.**	**%**	**pmw**	**Abs. No.**	**%**	**pmw**	**Abs. No.**	**%**
Has proven	5.21	222	26.5	3.68	1427	21.5	5.71	2207	42.4
Have proven	3.10	132	15.7	2.24	868	13.1	3.52	1363	26.2
Had proven	0.23	10	1.2	0.23	91	1.4	0.32	123	2.4
Has proved	6.40	273	32.5	6.26	2425	36.5	2.03	785	15.1
Have proved	3.82	163	19.4	3.79	1470	22.1	1.50	582	11.2
Had proved	0.91	39	4.7	0.92	358	5.4	0.37	142	2.7
		839	100		6639	100		5202	100

As shown in the table above (Table 5), British English has the highest absolute number of instances of all the variants of HAVE + PROVE (i.e., 6639, accounting for 52.3% of the instances observed for the construction in the corpus); American English has 5202 (41.1%) instances, while 839 (6.6%) were recorded for NE. However, the three varieties are similar in terms of the least used structure. The least used structure across all three varieties,

as indicated in the table above, is *had proven* which has 1.2%, 1.4%, and 2.4% in NE, BrE, and AmE, respectively. With respect to the normalized frequencies of *HAVE + PROVE*, the story is a bit different. For instance, *has proven* has an average of five (5), four (4), and six (6) words in NE, BrE, and AmE, respectively, and this provides some evidence that NE has overtaken BrE and is gradually shifting towards AmE.

However, the occurrences of *PMW* in NE and BrE are very close (an average of 6 instances of PMW) and much greater than the 2 words pmw recorded in AmE. The instances that *have proven* show that NE and AmE are close, while those that *have proved* indicate that NE and BrE are substantially close. For instance, as we *have proved*, there were an average of 4 instances of PMW in each of NE and BrE, while there were just 2 instances of PMW in AmE. With *had proven* and *had proved*, there is no variety in which we recorded up to one (1) word PMW, and this implies that the two expressions are rarely used in the three varieties.

Table 6: Absolute and Normalized Frequencies of *HAVE + Show*								
Token	Nigerian English			British English			American English		
	pmw	Abs. No.	%	pmw	Abs. No.	%	pmw	Abs. No.	%
Has shown	19.09	814	49.5	14.54	5634	46.5	11.60	4486	46.1
Have shown	15.27	651	39.6	13.47	5221	43.1	11.33	4381	45
Had shown	2.79	119	7.2	2.29	887	7.3	1.45	559	5.7
Has showed	0.40	17	1	0.37	143	1.2	0.23	89	0.9
Have showed	0.75	32	2.0	0.39	152	1.3	0.40	156	1.6
Had showed	0.23	10	0.7	0.21	83	0.7	0.17	64	0.7
		1,643	100		12,120	100		9,735	100

Contrary to the pattern observed in Table 5, *HAVE+Show* variants are much more common than *HAVE+Prove* variants across the three varieties of English. Out of 23,498 instances of the six variants of *HAVE + show* in the table above, HAVE + shown (i.e., *has shown, have shown,* and *had shown*) comprise 22,952 (97.7%) instances, while *HAVE + showed* variants altogether consist of 746 (3.2%) occurrences. In relation to absolute frequency, BrE has the highest occurrences, while NE has the lowest. Out of the six variants in the table, the structure with the highest absolute frequencies across the variety is *has shown* which has 49.5%, 46.5%, and 46.1% in NE, BrE, and AmE, respectively, while the structure with the least raw frequencies is *had showed* (see Table 6).

The variants of *HAVE+ shown* have demonstrated that NE has overtaken both BrE and AmE. The normalized frequencies for *has shown* in the three varieties are 19.09, 14.54, and 11.60 in NE, BrE, and AmE, respectively, while those of *have shown* are 15.27, 13.47, and 11.33 in the varieties being studied.

It is clear from the table that *HAVE + showed* (i.e., *has showed, have showed* and *had showed*) have low occurrences, with none of these having up to one occurrence pmw. The variant *had shown* also demonstrates that NE and BrE have close affinity in terms of normalized frequencies, while a lower normalized frequency was recorded for AmE.

Table 7: Absolute and Normalised Frequencies of *HAVE + Learn*								
	Nigerian English			British English			American English		
Token	pmw	Abs. No.	%	pmw	Abs. No.	%	pmw	Abs. No.	%
Has learnt	1.88	80	8.2%	1.14	443	6.2%	0.10	40	0.5
Have learnt	10.60	452	46.3%	4.55	1763	24.6%	0.82	317	4.1%
Had learnt	1.24	53	5.4%	0.83	321	4.5%	0.12	48	0.6%
Has learned	1.48	63	6.5%	2.16	836	11.7%	3.35	1295	16.6%
Have learned	6.66	284	29.1%	8.05	3120	43.6%	13.54	5239	67%
Had learned	1.06	45	4.6%	1.73	672	9.4%	2.27	879	11.2%
		977	100%		7155	100%		7818	100%

As we can see from Table 7, while *have learnt* is the most common in NE (accounting for 46.3%), BrE and AmE favor *have learned* as the occurrences of this structure account for 43.6% and 67%, respectively, in the two varieties. Obviously, AmE favors the use of *have learned* more than the other two varieties. Given the prevalence of *have learnt* in NE, one might be tempted to think that the prevalence will extend to *has learnt*; however, this is not the case as only 80 (8.2%) instances were recorded for this structure. On the one hand, the normalized frequencies in the table show that *has learnt, have learnt* and *had learnt* have 1.88, 10.60, and 1.24 pmw in NE, respectively.

However, the normalized frequencies in BrE and AmE for these three structures are not as high as the ones recorded for NE. On the other hand, *has learned, have learned* and *had learned* had 1.48, 8.66, and 1.06 pmw in NE, and these figures are comparatively low compared to what were recorded for the same structures in either BrE or AmE. Thus, it can be deduced that *HAVE +* the regular forms of *learn* are less popular in NE and are more popular in BrE and AmE.

While there are differences in terms of frequencies (whether absolute or normalized) in the use of *HAVE + PROVE, HAVE + SHOW,* and *HAVE + LEARN*, there are no observable structural differences across all three varieties in the actual use of these constructions. Here we focus on the HAVE + PROVE variants in order to illustrate that there is syntactic uniformity across the three varieties in the corpus.

- Ini Edo **has proven** to be one of the most popular and talented actresses in Nollywood (NE).
- However, adding the cups I mentioned above **has proven** to be difficult (GB).
- This research **has proven** that we are woefully inadequate as intuitive statisticians (AmE).
- I think the result of the election **has proved** that those who raised Mimiko's hand are highly politically erudite and relevant (NE).
- She only took on the role this year but **has proved** herself to be an amazing boss, and we all love her! (BrE)
- He **has proved** he hates Jews (AmE).
- When it comes to education, Nigerians are the best, and we **have proven** it all around the world! (NE)
- Every time, I **have proven** inconsistencies, bias, and contradictions in his' theory (BrE).
- These animations **have proven** very unreliable (AmE).
- At the end of 2011, OPEC **had proven** oil reserves of 1,199,707 million barrels of crude oil (NE).
- Now he **had proven** that he was, indeed, a fool (BrE).
- He **had proven** completely useless in that fight and had come as close to death as possible (AmE).
- Not by a long shot, because Awolowo **had proved** his mettle in the Western Region and... .(NE)
- Within weeks, he **had proved** himself to be a humble, prayerful, pastoral man who works tirelessly for the... .(BrE)
- Both efforts addressed major problems that **had proved** resistant to reform for many years. (AmE)

As examples 1 to 15 above show, there are no syntactic differences in the use of simple perfect aspect across the varieties being studied. This structural syntactic similarity corroborates the findings of Akande and Okanlawon (2011), who remark that the distribution and actual use of the verb phrase in Nigerian English are quite similar to what occurs in other standard varieties of English.

Conclusion

The present study focused on spelling and an area of grammar with a view to examining how these two areas demonstrate variation within NE and also with a view to finding out which variety of English NE is titling towards. The analysis of the data on spelling indicates that the AmE spelling convention has an edge over the BrE spelling in Nigerian English. By comparing the three varieties of English through normalized frequencies, it was revealed that NE is gravitating rapidly towards AmE in spelling. The study also revealed that the preference for either regular or irregular verbs in NE is verb-dependent, as while for some verbs, NE prefers the irregular forms, for other verbs, the regular forms are preferred. Finally, it was shown that the structural pattern and the actual usage of the simple perfect aspect are similar across NE, BrE, and AmE.

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