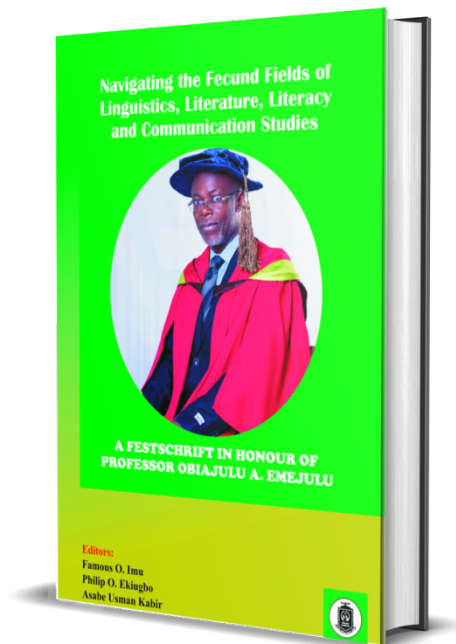


Navigating the Fecund Fields of Linguistics, Literature, Literacy and Communication Studies: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Obiajulu A. Emejulu



Editors:

Famous O. Imu, Philip O. Ekiugbo and Asabe Usman Kabir

Copyright Information

© National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba, Nigeria; 2024

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-0-99-702549-1 hardback

ISBN 978-0-99-702549-1



Web access and citation information

The festschrift can be viewed on the web at:

<https://sonofudin.github.io/emejulufestschrift.html>

<https://zenodo.org/communities/emejulufestschrift/records>

This paper can be cited as:

Joseph, John & Clementina Ukamaka Onyeka (2024). A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Selected Nigerian English Terms. In F. O. Imu, P. O. Ekiugbo and A. U. Kabir (eds.), *Navigating the Fecund Fields of Linguistics, Literature, Literacy and Communication Studies: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Obiajulu A. Emejulu*, Pp. 170 - 182. Aba: National Institute for Nigerian Languages.

Chapter Thirteen

A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Selected Nigerian English Terms

John Joseph¹ & Clementina Ukamaka Onyeka²

¹Department of Early Childhood Education, National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba

²Department of English, National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba

¹johnnyphotos643@gmail.com, ²

Abstract: This study presents a lexico-semantic analysis of selected lexical items of Nigerian English. The terms were drawn mainly from broadcast and social media platforms. The study aims to explore the meanings, usage patterns and cultural associations of these lexical items to gain insights into their semantic properties and their contribution to the Nigerian English lexicon. The study seeks to shed light on their meanings, usage patterns and cultural associations across different media platforms. The study seeks to add to the growing body of knowledge on how language is used in different contexts and further show how it can vary based on social factors such as region, gender and socio-economic status. Thus, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of some features as well as variations in Nigerian English. While existing research provides valuable insights into various aspects of Nigerian English, there remains a need for an understanding of its intricate meanings and nuanced variations. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is conceptual semantics.

Keywords: Lexico-semantics, Variation, Culture, Conceptual semantics, Metaphor theory

Background to the Study

The history of the English Language in Nigeria has no specific date. While some claim that the English Language came into Nigeria in the 16th century, others state that it began to play a significant role in Nigeria in the 19th century when European merchants and missionaries settled on the shores of Nigeria. It is important to add here that the implantation of English in Nigeria followed three channels: commerce, missionary activities and colonial rule. The development of the English Language could be traced to the activities of the colonial masters who imposed it on Nigerians for administration, governance, missionary activities and commerce in the aspect of

the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The expression 'Nigerian English' can be understood in a narrow sense to refer to the phonological, grammatical and lexical properties which distinguish the English used in Nigeria from varieties of English elsewhere. The broader meaning of 'Nigerian English' is 'English as used by Nigerians'. According to Okunrinmeta (2013, p. 30), 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 a former colony of Britain, Nigeria, just like many other countries in the Commonwealth, has adopted British English for all official purposes, including educational instruction and evaluation. This implies that all local Nigerian influences reflected in the English of Nigerians have to be treated as errors since they differ from what is obtained in British English, which is widely considered the “standard” that must be followed even in the Nigerian multilingual socio-cultural context where English is used as a second language (Okunrinmeta, 2013a: p.31). As Banjo (1975, p. 42) observed, “it is out of the question to import a standard from outside” since the standard of English as a “living language is to be found within the social context within which it is used for communication”.

Various sources recognize Nigerian English as a distinct and dynamic variety of the English language. According to a paper published in the Journal of English Linguistics, Nigerian English is "a vibrant linguistic phenomenon which reflects Nigeria's linguistic and cultural diversity" (Awonusi, 2004). This paper further notes that English serves as a lingua franca in Nigeria and Nigerian English has developed as a result of the language's usage across ethnic groups and regions in the country. The lexical items in Nigerian English reflect the country's unique socio-cultural context, with words and phrases borrowed from local languages and adapted to fit English grammar and syntax.

The concept of New Englishes came into existence many decades ago but when Gergeous Abbott (1978) referred to this concept in 1981, he thought about the varieties of language which develop in countries where English is a second language. By implication, India, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda and Nigeria have developed varieties that are part of the New Englishes. The need for territorial expansion and the demands of International Politics, Trade, Science and Technology have established English as a world language. Nigeria, like many other nations of the world, is part of the global network of information and communication technology. Nigeria, with its estimated population of over 200 million people and more than 500 ethnic groups, is a

melting pot of languages and cultures.

Consequently, Nigerian English has developed as a vibrant and evolving linguistic variety, heavily influenced by the local languages and cultures present within the country. According to Onuigbo and Eyisi (2008), English remains the most popular language for this kind of intercommunication and interaction. For this reason, English is not just a second language in Nigeria but one that is crucial for the survival of Nigeria as a nation and also for the maintenance of the Nigerian balance in the world economic order. No wonder much has been invested in the stabilization and standardization of English language education and usage in Nigeria. It is for this reason that Oluikpe (1997) and others are committed to the existence of a standard of English usage which is characteristically Nigerian.

It is a well-known sociolinguistic fact that when two or more languages and cultures come into contact, different types of sociolinguistic chemistry take place. According to Sebba (1997), sometimes a diglossic situation may result. Language shift, attrition or even language death may be seen. In some other instances, it can lead to the formation of a Pidgin, a Creole or even the birth of a new language altogether. Instances of these various possibilities can be found in different contact situations around the globe.

The development of Nigerian English has been shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including the country's colonial history, indigenous languages and cultural practices. As a result, Nigerian English has a lexicon that is enriched with unique semantic nuances. Nigerian English has gained recognition as a distinct and dynamic variety of the English language, reflecting Nigeria's linguistic and cultural diversity. With over 500 languages spoken in Nigeria, English serves as a lingua franca and a medium of communication across ethnic groups and regions. The lexicon of Nigerian English is enriched with unique semantic nuances, reflecting the country's colonial history, indigenous languages and cultural practices.

From the foregoing, it is understood that Nigerian English is one of the instances of New Englishes mushrooming all over the globe. Much has been written about its identifiable features. However, attention has not been paid to its semantic deviation from Standard British English. The present study, therefore, examines the lexico-semantic variations in the meanings of some lexical items as used in the Nigerian environment in broadcasting and media platforms.

Conceptual Review

The semantic study of lexical items in Nigerian English involves investigating the meanings, usage patterns and cultural associations of selected words and phrases within the Nigerian context. This conceptual review provides an overview of relevant concepts and theories that underpin the semantic analysis of lexical items in Nigerian English, highlighting the significance of cultural context and language variation. It draws upon existing literature and theoretical frameworks to establish a foundation for the subsequent empirical investigation. This conceptual review highlights the foundational concepts and theories relevant to the semantic study of lexical items in Nigerian English. It emphasizes the importance of cultural semantics, sociolinguistics, language contact and metaphor theory in understanding the semantic properties and variations of these words. By incorporating these concepts into the empirical investigation, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the unique semantic dimensions of Nigerian English lexical items. Therefore, a few concepts which are related to the title have been reviewed. These include semantic analysis, cultural semantics, sociolinguistics, language contact and borrowing as well as metaphor theory.

Semantic Analysis

Semantic analysis is a branch of linguistics concerned with studying the meanings and relationships between words and how they contribute to the overall understanding of language. In the context of Nigerian English, semantic analysis helps to uncover the distinct semantic properties and cultural connotations embedded within the selected lexical items. The study explores the core meanings, semantic extensions and metaphorical usage of these words as well as their pragmatic implications and contextual variations.

Cultural Semantics

Cultural semantics examines how language reflects and shapes cultural concepts and values. In the context of Nigerian English, cultural semantics play a crucial role in understanding the semantic nuances of lexical items. Words and phrases often acquire culturally specific connotations and associations, reflecting Nigerian customs, traditions and social practices. By analyzing the cultural semantics of lexical items, researchers gain insights into the socio-cultural significance and communicative functions of these words in Nigerian English.

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics investigates the relationship between language and society, considering how language varies across different social groups and contexts. In the semantic study of Nigerian English lexical items, sociolinguistic factors such as age, region, education level and social class influence the meanings and usage patterns of these words. The analysis explores sociolinguistic variation to understand how specific lexical items may be used differently in different social or regional contexts within Nigeria.

Language Contact and Borrowing

Nigerian English is influenced by language contact and borrowing from indigenous Nigerian languages, Nigerian Pidgin English and other Nigerian ethnic languages. The semantic study of lexical items takes into account the impact of language contact and borrowing on the meanings and usage patterns of these words. It explores how Nigerian English integrates and adapts words from other languages, resulting in unique semantic nuances not found in Standard English.

Metaphor Theory

Metaphor theory suggests that metaphorical language plays a significant role in human communication and understanding. In the study of Nigerian English lexical items, metaphorical usage and conceptual mappings contribute to the semantic extensions and creative meanings of these words. This analysis examines the metaphorical dimensions of lexical items to uncover the underlying conceptual mappings and cultural associations.

Empirical Review

According to Akujobi and Umoh (2022), the varieties of Nigerian English encompass Basic, Standard, Near Native, and Ambi-lingual varieties, which emerge from language contact and interaction with local languages. These variations in Nigerian English entail sociolinguistic implications, such as communication barriers attributed to differences in grammar, phonology, and vocabulary, influenced by factors such as education, social dynamics and religious influences. These authors also advocate for the standardization and institutionalization of this variety to enhance effective communication and the cultivation of Nigerian English features to foster both national and international identity.

Salami and Olabiyi (2019) analyzed lexical choices in Nigerian English

newspaper reportage. They examined how selected lexical items were employed in Journalistic discourse and highlighted the semantic implications they carried. Their findings shed light on the intricate relationship between lexical choices and the construction of meaning in Nigerian English media.

Owólabí and Dasylyva (2004) discuss the forms and functions of English and indigenous languages in Nigeria, with a particular focus on delineating the status and functions of English within the country. Their work examines various classifications of English in Nigeria, advocates for learning-centred bilingual approaches to foster communicative competence and underscores the significance of characterizing Nigerian English through research on sub-varieties and data collection methodologies. Additionally, the study addresses societal bilingualism in Nigeria and its implications for national development and unity.

Adegbija, E. (1989) wrote on the Language attitudes in Nigeria. This study examined language attitudes towards Nigerian English and its lexical items, providing insights into how these words are perceived and evaluated by Nigerians. In addition, Adegbija (2004) argues that this domesticated variety of English in Nigeria is inevitable since there is no way Nigerians can use English effectively within the Nigerian linguistic and socio-cultural setting without, first of all, blending it with the Nigerian languages and culture which provide the contexts within which the language is used, interpreted and understood. The result of this linguistic and cultural blending is, therefore, the emergence of the Nigerian variety of English whose model is recommended for teaching and evaluation in Nigerian schools instead of British English.

This paper aims to conduct a comprehensive lexico-semantic study of selected lexical items in Nigerian English in the broadcast and media platforms. Nigerian English is a unique variety of English spoken in Nigeria which is influenced by the country's diverse linguistic and cultural heritage. This study will explore the meanings, usage patterns and cultural associations of these lexical items to gain insights into their semantic properties and the way they contribute to the Nigerian English lexicon. The findings will contribute to our understanding of the distinct features and dynamics of Nigerian English as a vibrant and evolving linguistic variety. It also aims to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive semantic analysis of selected lexical items in Nigerian English, shedding light on their meanings, usage patterns and cultural associations.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the theory of Conceptual Semantics in the analysis of Nigerian English lexical items. Conceptual Semantics focuses on the relationship between language and cognition, emphasizing the role of mental representations in shaping meaning. It investigates how cultural concepts and experiences shape the semantic dimensions of lexical items and contribute to their cultural connotations. Within the context of Nigerian English lexical items, conceptual semantics can be employed in analyzing the conceptual structures, metaphorical extensions and cultural connotations associated with specific words. This theory also provides the foundation for the systematic investigation of semantic properties and variations of lexical items in Nigerian English. It explores the key concepts and frameworks which inform the semantic analysis of selected words and phrases in Nigerian English. It draws information from relevant theoretical perspectives to develop a framework for understanding the meanings, usage patterns and cultural associations of lexical items within the Nigerian context.

In addition, this linguistic theory provides the theoretical framework and concepts which inform the investigation of semantic properties and variations of lexical items in Nigerian English. It offers tools for analyzing the meanings, conceptual structures, cultural associations and communicative functions of specific words within the Nigerian English lexicon. By applying this theory, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the semantic dimensions of lexical items and their role in Nigerian English communication.

Methodology

This study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The study will focus on analyzing the usage of selected lexical items in Nigerian English across different broadcast and social media platforms, such as news websites, blogs, Twitter, and Facebook. A qualitative analysis of the semantic dimensions of the selected lexical items will be conducted. The study will also employ quantitative methods such as frequency analysis and collocation analysis to identify patterns of usage and semantic associations of the selected lexical items.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data analysis for Nigerian English lexical items on broadcast and social media platforms involves exploring the semantic properties and cultural associations of

selected words. By applying Conceptual Semantics, the study delves into the meanings, usage patterns, and metaphorical extensions of these lexical items. It aims to uncover the nuances of storytelling, interpersonal relationships, and social bonding reflected in the usage of words like "gist" within Nigerian English. The analysis also considers the impact of language contact, borrowing, and metaphor theory on the semantic variations and cultural connotations of these lexical items.

In the semantic study of Nigerian English, several lexical items have been identified as significant for analysis and exploration. These selected lexical items provide insights into the unique linguistic features, cultural expressions and communicative nuances within Nigerian English. They are also analyzed using the theory of conceptual semantics. Here are some notable examples:

- 1) Gist: This is a Nigerian English term used to describe informal conversations or gossip. It means to chat and tell someone the news or the gossip. Investigating the semantic properties of "gist" in Nigerian English unveils the significance of storytelling, interpersonal relationships and social bonding within Nigerian culture. It explores the nuances of sharing information, exchanging stories and engaging in lively conversations.
- 2) Slump: This is a Nigerian English term used to describe the act of physical fall. It also means to fall as a result of losing consciousness.
- 3) Working Class: This in Nigerian English refers to anybody who is in regular, paid employment, especially in an office. That is a white-collar job.
- 4) Four-one-nine ('419'): This is a Nigerian English term used to describe any kind of fraudster or fraudulent activities.
- 5) Colonial Masters: This Nigerian English, is a kind of euphemism used to refer to the British in their pre-1960's role as the sovereign power in Nigeria.
- 6) Bag a degree: This is a Nigerian English term used to describe the act of obtaining something in the register of sport. It is regularly collocated with "degree" in Nigerian English and is otherwise seldom used.
- 7) Rig out: This is Nigerian English which means to use dubious means to eliminate an opponent from an electoral contest.
- 8) Whisk away: This is a Nigerian English which is used automatically to refer to the action of someone being forcefully taken away by the police.
- 9) Wash: This is Nigerian English which means to celebrate the acquisition of something new, such as a car.
- 10) Proffer: This Nigerian English is widely used in formal writing to mean "suggest" and "propose", and it is often collocated with solutions.

- 11) Lack home training: In Nigerian English, this is a popular way of saying what in other varieties might be expressed as someone who has not been well brought up.
- 12) Devoted: Nigerian English frequently uses this word whereas other varieties of English would use devout as in 'a devout Christian', 'a devout Muslim'.
- 13) Dubious character: These two words are commonly collocated in Nigerian English to refer to someone with a doubtful character or who acts in a suspicious manner.
- 14) Go-slow: This is a Nigerian English term used to describe a “traffic jam”, “hold up” or even “gridlock”.
- 15) Condemned: This is a Nigerian English term which is often used adjectivally to mean “utterly beyond repair”.
- 16) Academics: In Nigerian English, this refers to “academic matters”, which is in contrast to the “academic persons” of British English.
- 17) Woman wrapper: This term refers to a man who is subservient to or is easily manipulated by a woman, especially his wife.
- 18) Roam the streets: This Nigerian English term refers to “wander about” and “hang around”, and this is suggestive of joblessness or idleness.
- 19) Motor Park: This is a Nigerian English which refers to an area situated within or on the outskirts of a large town, where long-distance taxis and buses pick up passengers intending to travel to other towns.
- 20) Ghana-must-go: This term in Nigerian English refers to a large canvas bag. It dates from the early 1980s when Nigeria began deporting the large members of Ghanaians who had come to Nigeria in search of jobs.
- 21) Been-to: This term in Nigerian English refers to someone who has travelled overseas.
- 22) Corper: This is a Nigerian English term which refers to “a member of the National Youth Service Corps”. It means a graduate of a higher institution undergoing one year of national service.
- 23) Cultism- This is a Nigerian English term which refers to the practices of secret societies in Higher Institutions which centre on a cult and are often violent.
- 24) Followership: This is a Nigerian English term which is coined as an obvious counterpart to “leadership”, whereas other varieties would use “following”.
- 25) Practicalize: This is a Nigerian English which means “put into practice”.
- 26) Send-Forth: This is a Nigerian English term which refers to an occasion

when people come together to say goodbye to someone who is leaving. In Nigerian English, it commonly occurs in the expression “send-off party”, which is often held in honour of someone who is leaving one job to take up a new one somewhere else.

These selected lexical items represent just a fraction of the rich and diverse vocabulary found within Nigerian English on broadcast and social media platforms. By delving into their semantic properties, variations and cultural connotations, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the unique linguistic and cultural landscape of Nigerian English, contributing to the broader field of sociolinguistics and the study of World Englishes.

Summary of Findings

The semantic study of some lexical items in Nigerian English has yielded several significant findings. This study found that there is a rich array of semantic variations within Nigerian English. The findings emphasize the cultural significance embedded in lexical items, highlighting the role of language in expressing traditions, social norms and specific Nigerian experiences. The findings highlight the complex meanings, cultural expressions and communicative nuances within the selected lexical items, shedding light on the intricate linguistic and cultural landscape of Nigerian English. Overall, this semantic study contributes to the understanding of Nigerian English as a dynamic and culturally rich linguistic variety.

In addition, through systematic investigation and analysis, researchers have uncovered the nuanced meanings, semantic properties and cultural associations of selected lexical items. Here is a summary of the key findings:

1. **Semantic Variation:** The study revealed that lexical items in Nigerian English exhibit a wide range of semantic variations. These variations are influenced by factors such as regional dialects, cultural diversity and language contact. Researchers identified multiple senses, connotations and pragmatic uses of lexical items, highlighting the dynamic nature of semantic meanings within Nigerian English.
2. **Cultural Significance:** The findings emphasized the cultural significance embedded in lexical items of Nigerian English. Many words carry cultural associations, reflecting traditions, social norms and specific Nigerian experiences. Lexical items related to actions, activities, social relationships and cultural practices showcased the rich cultural heritage and diversity

within the Nigerian society.

3. **Language Contact and Borrowing:** The study revealed the impact of language contact and borrowing on the semantic properties of lexical items in Nigerian English. Nigerian English incorporates elements from local Nigerian languages, pidgin and foreign languages, resulting in a unique linguistic blend. Lexical items that have been borrowed or adapted from other languages demonstrated the cross-cultural influences and linguistic hybridity present in Nigerian English.
4. **Cultural Expressions:** The semantic study sheds light on how lexical items in Nigerian English express cultural concepts, values and beliefs. Words related to kinship, spirituality and social customs demonstrated the cultural expressions and underlying cultural systems within Nigerian society. The findings highlighted the role of language in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the semantic study of lexical items in Nigerian English on broadcast and social media platforms has provided valuable insights into the intricate meanings, variations and cultural significance within this unique linguistic variety. Through systematic investigation and analysis, researchers have uncovered the semantic properties and cultural associations of selected lexical items. The findings of the study have revealed the dynamic nature of semantic meanings in Nigerian English, showcasing the wide range of variations influenced by regional dialects, cultural diversity and language contact. This variation adds richness and complexity to the lexicon, reflecting the diverse linguistic landscape of Nigeria.

Moreover, the study has highlighted the cultural significance embedded in lexical items of Nigerian English. Many words carry cultural associations, reflecting traditions, social norms and specific Nigerian experiences. This emphasizes the important role of language in preserving and expressing cultural knowledge and identity. Furthermore, the study has revealed the impact of language contact and borrowing on the semantic properties of lexical items in broadcasting and social media platforms. Nigerian English incorporates elements from local Nigerian languages, pidgin and foreign languages, showcasing the linguistic hybridity and cross-cultural influences present in the variety. The findings of the semantic study provide a foundation for further research in sociolinguistics, World Englishes and cross-cultural communication. They contribute to a deeper understanding of

Nigerian English as a dynamic and culturally rich linguistic system, highlighting the importance of considering the socio-cultural context in the study of language and meaning.

Overall, the semantic study of lexical items in Nigerian English has enriched our understanding of this vibrant variety, showcasing its linguistic complexities, cultural expressions and communicative nuances. It underscores the need for continued research in exploring the semantic dimensions of Nigerian English and its role in shaping identity, communication and cultural practices in Nigeria. This gap in research is the focus of the current study, which aims to conduct a comprehensive semantic analysis of selected lexical items in Nigerian English on broadcast and social media platforms. By examining the meanings, usage patterns, and cultural associations of these words, this study seeks to shed light on the linguistic and cultural dynamics of Nigerian English. By filling this gap in research, this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique features and variations of Nigerian English, as well as its role in shaping Nigeria's linguistic and cultural identity.

References

- Adegbija, E. (1989). "*Lexico-Semantic Variation in Nigerian English*", World Englishes. Vol.8, No. 2, pp.165-177.
- Akujobi, O.S. & Umoh, G.I. (2022). Varieties of Nigerian English: Influences and Implications on Communication. *International Journal of Arts, Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies (JOLLS)*, 11(2), 88-95.
- Banjo, A. (1995). On Codifying Nigerian English: Research so far. In A. Bamgbose, A. Banjo, & a. Thomas (Eds), *New Englishes: A West African Perspective* (pp.203-231). Ibadan: Monsuro.
- Gregorious, Abbot & McCann, W. J. (1978). *Gregorius's Interview with the Abbot: A Comparative Study*. *The Modern Language Review*, 73 (1), 82.
- Labaree, R. (2009). *Research guides: organizing your social science research paper*. The research problem/question. University of Southern California.
- Obi, E. I. (2014). *Language Attitude and Nigerian Pidgin*. *AFREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 3(4), 34-46.
- Oluikpe, E. (1997). *Semantic Study of Some Lexical Items in Nigerian English*. Elite Project. <https://eliteproject.com.ng/semantic-study-of-some-lexical-items-in-nigerian-english>.
- Owólabí, K., & Dasylyva, A. O. (Eds.). (2004). *Forms and Functions of English and Indigenous Languages in Nigeria: A Festschrift in Honour of Ayo*

Banjō. Group Publishers

Onuigbo, S & Eyesi, J. (2008). *English Language in Nigeria: Issues and Development*. Nsukka: Global Publishers.

Salami, A., Zakariyya, O., Amuda, S., Sadiq, B., & Olaniyan, A. (2019). *Performance Review of Selected Topology-Aware Routing Strategies for Clustering Sensor Networks*. *Nigerian Journal of Technological Development*, 16(4), 176.

Sebba, M. (1997). *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles*. New York: St. Martin's Press.