

Substrate Influence and Syntactic Calquing in Gendered Nigerian English Pragmatics

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Abstract: This study examined how substrate influence manifests as syntactic calquing in Nigerian English and how such calques function as pragmatic resources for expressing gendered identities rooted in indigenous sociocultural norms. Anchored in Schneider's Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes, Thomason and Kaufman's Contact Linguistics theory, and Holmes' Social Constructionist theory of Gender and Language, the study adopted a qualitative discourse pragmatic design. Data were drawn from recorded conversations, semi structured interviews, and written texts produced by 80 bilingual Nigerian English users (40 males and 40 females) in semi-formal academic and social settings in Owerri, Imo State. Analysis identified recurrent syntactic calques, including topic fronting, serial verb constructions, reduplication, interrogative requests, mitigated imperatives, and tag like confirmations. These structures were traced to indigenous syntactic patterns and interpreted as pragmatic strategies for politeness, deference, solidarity, emotional expression, and authority management. The findings showed clear gender tendencies in that female participants more frequently employed calqued structures associated with indirectness, relational harmony, and politeness, while male participants used similar structures primarily to soften authority or encourage cooperation. The study demonstrated that syntactic calquing in Nigerian English is not merely a result of bilingual interference but a culturally meaningful adaptation that enables English to encode indigenous gender norms. It concluded that Nigerian English grammar carries sociocultural meaning and should be interpreted within its local pragmatic ecology rather than measured solely against inner circle standards. The study recommended culturally responsive approaches to ELT, greater socio-pragmatic awareness in scholarship, and further empirical study on sociocultural variables in Nigerian English.

Keywords: Nigerian English, Syntactic Calquing, Substrate Influence, Gender Pragmatics, World Englishes.

INTRODUCTION

English in Nigeria has developed into a distinct and dynamic variety shaped by the country's multilingual and multicultural context. Njoku and Izuagba (2004) state that, "English in Nigeria which has arisen because the Nigeria speaker- user of English already has a language, as such his variety of English is marked by a systematic variations in phonology, syntax and vocabulary", (p. 6). As the official language of education, government, and interethnic communication, English in Nigeria mediates social relations across diverse indigenous language groups, yet it does not function independently of these languages. Instead, "structural and pragmatic features from indigenous languages have influenced the way English is used, leading to localized forms that are often recognizable in both spoken and written discourse" (Westphal, 2022, p. 1). This variety commonly referred to as Nigerian English (NE), "is part of the broader category of World Englishes, a field of study that recognizes the systematic internal variation exhibited by Englishes outside traditional Inner-Circle norms" (Kachru, 1992, pp. 1–15). Jowit (2012) adds that "... on what may be called the horizontal dimension of New English, i.e. its geographical spread. The same is true of vertical dimension of New English, i.e. the incidence of New English among educational an

occupational groups within a country” (p. 3). Within this framework, Nigerian English is understood not as a deficient imitation of Standard British English but as a functional and meaningful variety in its own right, with features arising from extended language contact.

One significant manifestation of this contact is syntactic calquing, “structural transfer from indigenous languages into English, where speakers adopt sentence patterns that reflect local linguistic logic even while the lexical choices remain English” (Akanbi & Popoola, 2024, p. 3). Within Nigerian English, syntactic calquing is evident in constructions like topic fronting, serial verb constructions, reduplication for emphasis, and culturally motivated question forms. These forms, while deviating from Inner Circle English norms, are not errors but patterned features reflecting indigenous linguistic logic (Banjo, 1996; Udofot, 2010). Importantly, these syntactic transfers are not neutral. They often carry pragmatic functions tied to politeness, respect, authority, solidarity, and crucially, gender roles embedded within Nigerian sociocultural systems. Mey (2006) stresses that, “pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society” (p. 6). Pragmatics, the study of language use in context, “offers a critical lens for examining how these calqued structures function beyond grammar to encode social meaning” (Levinson, 1983, p. 11).

In Nigerian communities, linguistic choices are deeply intertwined with cultural expectations regarding age, hierarchy, kinship, and gender. Gender, in particular, shapes communicative behavior, dictating who speaks, how they speak, when they speak, and what forms are considered appropriate (Holmes, 2013). Therefore, when syntactic patterns from indigenous languages are transferred into English, they often bring with them gendered pragmatic norms. “The pragmatics of gender concerns how language both reflects and constructs gendered identities and social relations” (Coates, 2015, p. 26). In many Nigerian cultures, women’s speech is traditionally associated with politeness, indirectness, deference, and relational harmony, while men’s speech is linked to assertiveness, authority, and directness. According to Yule (2010), “...there can be differences between the words used by men and women in a variety of languages” (p. 275). These norms are encoded in indigenous languages and inevitably transferred into English through syntactic calquing. For example, indirect request forms, honorific constructions, tag-like confirmations, and deferential question patterns frequently observed in Nigerian English may be traced to substrate pragmatic systems shaped by gender expectations. The relationship between gender and language use has been extensively studied in sociolinguistics, particularly through the work of Lakoff (1975), Tannen (1990), and Holmes (2013), who argue that linguistic differences between men and women arise from sociocultural conditioning rather than biological determinism.

Another crucial yet under explored dimension is how gendered sociocultural norms interact with these syntactic and pragmatic patterns. Gender influences language use across contexts, shaping how speakers request, assert, or negotiate meaning in interaction. In Nigeria, ‘cultural expectations often associate female speech with politeness and indirectness, and male speech with authority and assertiveness. Research on politeness and hedging strategies among Igbo speakers of English shows that women are more likely to employ politeness forms and hedging than men, indicating a gendered conversational style that aligns with sociocultural norms” (Dozie and Otagburuagu, 2020, p. 57). Despite these insights, existing studies on gender and English in Nigeria typically analyze lexical politeness features rather than the deeper syntactic structures that also serve pragmatic functions. For example, Dozie, Chinedu-Okon, Anyanwu, Ojilere, Ihejirika, & Otagburuagu, (2020, p. 59) focus on features like “hedging devices in Igbo English conversation but do not extend this to structural patterns like cumulative tense constructions or clause ordering, which may equally reflect gendered communicative preferences”.

The intersection of substrate influence, syntactic calquing, and gender pragmatics also has implications for ELT in Nigeria. Teachers often correct students’ nonstandard syntactic patterns without recognizing their cultural grounding. “A deeper understanding of these patterns can foster more culturally responsive pedagogy that acknowledges the

legitimacy of Nigerian English while teaching awareness of global norms” (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004, p. 72). The concept of substrate influence refers to the structural and functional impact that previously existing languages exert on a newly adopted language within a speech community (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988). In multilingual nations like Nigeria, substrate influence is not incidental but systemic. Speakers often carry over syntactic patterns, discourse strategies, and pragmatic norms from their first languages into English usage. These transferred patterns frequently appear as syntactic calques, where the structural frame of an indigenous expression is mapped onto English lexical material (Bamgbose, 1995; Schneider, 2007). Unlike borrowing, which affects vocabulary, calquing operates at deeper grammatical and discourse levels, shaping how meaning is organized and conveyed. In addition, this inquiry contributes to broader discussions in contact linguistics about how grammatical structures carry sociocultural meanings across languages. It demonstrates that syntactic transfer is not purely structural but also ideological, embedding cultural values like respect, hierarchy, and gender roles into English usage.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nigerian English has attained recognition as a legitimate variety within the global family of World Englishes. Its phonological, lexical, semantic, and syntactic features have been widely documented by scholars who acknowledge the inevitable impact of multilingualism and cultural context on English usage in Nigeria. Despite this recognition, much of the scholarly attention devoted to Nigerian English remains largely descriptive. This focuses on cataloguing its deviations from Standard British or American English norms. While these descriptions are valuable, they often stop short of interrogating the deeper sociocultural motivations that sustain these structural patterns in everyday communication. One significant but insufficiently explored dimension is how substrate induced syntactic structures in Nigerian English function pragmatically to express gendered identities and roles inherited from indigenous linguistic traditions.

In many Nigerian cultures, communication is strongly shaped by gendered expectations. Women are traditionally socialized to speak in ways that reflect politeness, deference, indirectness, and relational harmony, while men are often encouraged to communicate with authority, directness, and assertiveness. These communicative norms are encoded in indigenous languages through specific syntactic patterns, discourse strategies, and pragmatic conventions. When English is used, speakers often reproduce these norms through syntactic adjustments that resemble calques from their first languages. However, existing scholarship has not sufficiently explored how these syntactic transfers serve as pragmatic tools for performing gender in Nigerian English. Most studies on Nigerian English syntax emphasize features like topic fronting, serial verb constructions, reduplication, unconventional interrogatives, and non-standard imperative forms. These features are frequently described in structural terms, without probing the cultural logic behind their usage. At the same time, gender studies in Nigerian sociolinguistics tend to focus on lexical choices, politeness markers, forms of address, and discourse participation, neglecting the syntactic dimension through which gendered meanings may be expressed. This separation of syntactic analysis from socio-pragmatic interpretation creates a gap in understanding how grammar itself becomes a vehicle for encoding gendered identities in Nigerian English.

Furthermore, research on gender and language has been dominated by Western sociolinguistic traditions that do not adequately account for the realities of postcolonial, multilingual societies. Theories of gendered communication developed in Western contexts often assume monolingual settings and fail to consider how contact between languages influences the expression of gender in speech. Applying such frameworks to Nigerian English without modification risks overlooking the unique role of indigenous linguistic substrates in shaping English usage. Consequently, there is a pressing need for context-sensitive research that situates gendered communication within Nigeria’s multilingual and postcolonial linguistic ecology.

Another dimension of the problem lies in ELT practices in Nigeria. Teachers often

treat substrate-influenced syntactic patterns as errors to be corrected rather than as culturally meaningful forms of expression. Students are encouraged to abandon these structures in favor of Standard English norms without understanding why they persist in everyday communication. This approach not only undermines learners' linguistic identities but also ignores the socio-pragmatic functions these structures serve, particularly in expressing respect, politeness, and gendered social roles. Without a proper understanding of the pragmatic motivations behind syntactic calquing, pedagogical practices risk misrepresenting Nigerian English as deficient rather than adaptive.

More so, the increasing dominance of English in formal and informal domains in Nigeria has not led to the disappearance of substrate influence. Instead, many syntactic calques remain stable features of Nigerian English because they fulfill communicative needs that Standard English structures do not easily accommodate. For instance, indirect request forms, mitigated commands, and topic prominent constructions often serve politeness functions aligned with gender expectations in indigenous cultures. The persistence of these patterns suggests that they are not transitional errors but pragmatic necessities. However, this persistence has not been adequately theorized in relation to gender. There is also a broader theoretical problem concerning how contact linguistics conceptualizes syntactic transfer. Much of the literature treats syntactic calquing as a structural phenomenon resulting from bilingual interference or transfer. While this explanation accounts for how calques arise, it does not explain why certain calques are retained over time. The retention of these structures may be better understood through a socio-pragmatic lens that considers the cultural meanings they carry, including gendered expectations. Without incorporating pragmatics into the study of syntactic calquing, explanations remain incomplete.

Moreover, the role of gender in shaping Nigerian English usage has implications for identity construction. Language is a key resource for performing identity, and gender is one of the most salient aspects of social identity. When speakers use syntactic patterns that reflect indigenous gender norms, they are not simply transferring grammar; they are enacting culturally defined identities through English. This dimension of identity performance has received little attention in Nigerian English studies, leaving a gap in understanding how English functions as a medium for expressing African sociocultural realities. The absence of integrated studies that connect substrate influence, syntactic calquing, pragmatics, and gender leads to several unresolved questions. Why do certain syntactic patterns appear more frequently in the speech of women than men? How do these patterns function pragmatically to signal politeness, deference, authority, or solidarity? To what extent are these patterns traceable to indigenous linguistic structures shaped by gender roles? And how do these patterns challenge existing notions of correctness in English usage? Without addressing these questions, scholarship on Nigerian English remains fragmented.

Additionally, the global recognition of World Englishes calls for deeper analyses that move beyond structural description to sociocultural interpretation. Nigerian English is often cited as an example of successful nativization, yet the sociocultural mechanisms driving this nativization are not fully explored. Gendered pragmatics offers a promising avenue for understanding how English has been localized in ways that reflect indigenous values. Ignoring this dimension risks presenting an incomplete picture of how Nigerian English operates in real communicative contexts. This problem is further compounded by the scarcity of empirical studies that analyze authentic language data to demonstrate how syntactic calques function in gendered communication. Much of the discussion remains theoretical or based on isolated examples. There is a need for systematic analysis of spoken and written Nigerian English to reveal patterns that connect syntax with gendered pragmatic functions. Such evidence would strengthen arguments about the sociocultural grounding of syntactic calquing.

Finally, addressing this problem is important not only for linguistic theory but also for practical applications in education, communication, and intercultural understanding. Recognizing the gendered pragmatic functions of syntactic calques can inform more culturally sensitive teaching approaches, improve communication across gender lines, and

contribute to a more nuanced appreciation of Nigerian English as a legitimate and expressive variety. The central problem this study addresses is the lack of scholarly attention to how substrate-induced syntactic calques in Nigerian English function as pragmatic resources for expressing gendered identities rooted in indigenous sociocultural norms. Existing studies either focus on syntactic description without sociocultural interpretation or examine gendered communication without considering syntactic transfer. This gap results in an incomplete understanding of Nigerian English and perpetuates deficit views of its structures.

Objectives of this Study

To identify and describe instances of substrate-induced syntactic calquing in Nigerian English.

To examine the pragmatic functions performed by syntactic calques in Nigerian English communication.

To analyze how gendered sociocultural expectations from indigenous languages are encoded through syntactic calques in Nigerian English.

To determine the implications of gender-related syntactic calquing for the study and pedagogy of Nigerian English.

Research Questions

How does substrate influence manifest as syntactic calquing in Nigerian English usage?

In what ways do syntactic calques in Nigerian English function as pragmatic strategies in communication?

How are gendered sociocultural norms from indigenous languages reflected through syntactic calquing in Nigerian English?

What implications do gender-based syntactic calques have for the understanding and teaching of Nigerian English?

Theoretical Frameworks

This study's theoretical model is anchored primarily on Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes, supported by Thomason and Kaufman's (1988) Contact Linguistics theory and Holmes' (2013) Social Constructionist theory of Gender and Language. These frameworks are integrated to account for how English becomes localized in postcolonial settings, how indigenous linguistic structures are transferred into English, and how such structures function pragmatically to construct gendered identities in communication.

Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model provides the macro-sociolinguistic explanation for the evolution of Nigerian English. The model outlines five developmental phases. They are "Foundation, Exonormative Stabilization, Nativization, Endonormative Stabilization, and Differentiation through which postcolonial English varieties pass. Nigerian English is widely situated within the stages of nativization and endonormative stabilization, where indigenous linguistic and cultural features reshape English usage" (Schneider, 2007, p. 36). The phase of nativization is particularly crucial for this study. At this stage, speakers begin to adapt English to reflect local sociocultural realities, leading to structural innovations influenced by indigenous languages. He notes that "substrate languages significantly affect grammar, syntax, discourse, and pragmatics during this period" (2007, p. 76). This explains why syntactic calques, structural transfers from indigenous languages become established features of Nigerian English rather than random deviations. Furthermore, he emphasizes that English in postcolonial contexts becomes a carrier of indigenous cultural norms, encoding values such as respect, hierarchy, solidarity, and gender roles (Schneider, 2007, pp. 54–56). This insight is central to the present study, as it supports the argument that syntactic calques in Nigerian English are not merely structural artifacts but socio-culturally meaningful patterns through which gendered expectations are expressed.

While Schneider's model explains the sociolinguistic environment in which Nigerian English evolves, Thomason and Kaufman (1988) provide the linguistic mechanism for

understanding how substrate influence occurs. Their Contact Linguistics theory explains how languages in contact influence each other through borrowing, interference, and structural transfer. Of particular relevance is the concept of calquing, where speakers replicate the structural patterns of their first language using the vocabulary of a second language (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988, pp. 37–40). They argue that intense bilingualism leads to deep grammatical transfer, especially when speakers rely on familiar cognitive structures from their native languages while using a dominant language such as English (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988, pp. 95–99). In Nigeria’s multilingual environment, this process is inevitable. Speakers often construct English sentences according to indigenous syntactic patterns, resulting in topic-fronting, serial verb constructions, reduplication, and unconventional interrogatives. Importantly, the theory also notes that structural transfers persist when they fulfill communicative needs within the speech community (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988, pp. 52–54). This persistence is key to linking syntactic calquing with pragmatics. The continued use of these structures suggests that they carry sociocultural meanings, including gendered expectations embedded in indigenous communication norms.

To interpret how syntactic calques function pragmatically to express gendered identities, this study draws on Holmes’ (2013) Social Constructionist theory. Holmes argues that gender is socially constructed and performed through linguistic choices shaped by cultural expectations (Holmes, 2013, pp. 160–164). Language becomes a resource for enacting identities associated with masculinity and femininity. He shows that women’s speech is often associated with politeness, indirectness, and relational orientation, while men’s speech is associated with directness and authority (Holmes, 2013, pp. 174–177). These patterns are culturally specific and must be interpreted within their sociocultural contexts. In many Nigerian cultures, women are expected to communicate respectfully and indirectly, avoiding confrontation. These norms are transferred into English through syntactic calques like mitigated imperatives, interrogative requests, and topic prominent constructions that soften assertions. Holmes’ theory enables this study to interpret such syntactic patterns as pragmatic tools for performing gender rather than as grammatical deviations.

The integration of these three frameworks provides a comprehensive lens for the study. Schneider’s model explains why Nigerian English undergoes structural change through nativization (Schneider, 2007, pp. 33–36). Thomason and Kaufman explain how indigenous structures are transferred into English through calquing (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988, pp. 37–40). Holmes explains what these structures mean in terms of gendered pragmatic performance (Holmes, 2013, pp. 160–177). Together, they show that syntactic calques in Nigerian English are outcomes of postcolonial linguistic evolution, products of bilingual structural transfer, and pragmatic resources for expressing culturally grounded gender identities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative sociolinguistic research design with elements of discourse pragmatic analysis to investigate how substrate influence manifests as syntactic calquing in Nigerian English and how such calques function as pragmatic resources for expressing gendered identities. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate because the study seeks to interpret meanings embedded in language use rather than measure frequency alone.

Population of the Study

The population comprised adult Nigerian English users in academic and semi-formal settings, including university students, lecturers, and nonacademic staff who use English as a L2 in daily communication. These participants are bilingual or multilingual speakers whose indigenous languages influence their English usage.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 80 participants to ensure

adequate representation and richer data for gender based comparison. The sample consisted of 40 male participants and 40 female participants. Participants were selected based on the following criteria; (i) Proficiency in English as a language of daily communication. (ii) Indigenous language background (primarily Igbo, with some Yoruba and Hausa representation). (iii) Willingness to participate in recorded conversations and interviews.

Method Data Collection

Data for the study were drawn from three main sources: (i) Recorded natural conversations among participants in semi-formal settings like staff rooms, lecture halls, and social gatherings. (ii) Semi-structured interviews designed to elicit spontaneous English expressions in everyday contexts. (iii) Written texts, including WhatsApp chats, informal emails, and classroom interactions, where Nigerian English structures are evident. Data collection was carried out over a period of six weeks. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and consent was obtained before recording conversations. Natural interactions were recorded without interrupting participants' speech patterns. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually, allowing participants to narrate experiences, give instructions, make requests, and engage in conversational exchanges that revealed syntactic patterns. Written texts were collected with participants' permission and anonymized to protect privacy.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was obtained before data collection. Participants were informed about the study's objectives and assured of confidentiality. Consent was obtained for recording conversations and collecting written texts. Names and identifying details were removed during transcription and analysis to ensure anonymity.

Presentation and Analysis

Topic Fronting (Topicalization)

Extracts (F stands for female participant while M represents male participant).

F12: This book, I have read it.

F27: That food, I don't like it.

M09: This issue, we will discuss it tomorrow.

The object in the three structures above (This book, that food, and this issue) is fronted before the subject and resumed with a pronoun. This mirrors topic prominent constructions common in Igbo and Yoruba discourse patterns. In many indigenous languages, topicalization is achieved by placing the topic at the beginning of the clause for emphasis and discourse prominence. The structures above foreground shared knowledge and reduces confrontational tone. They signal politeness and conversational alignment rather than assertion. This feature appeared more frequently in female speech (65%) than male speech (35%). Female participants used topic-fronting particularly when expressing opinions or mild disagreement. This indicates women's preference for less confrontational, rapport oriented speech is realized through this calqued structure. The calque functions as a pragmatic softener.

Serial Verb Construction

Extracts

M14: Come and take your book.

F03: Go and bring the file.

M22: Try and understand what I'm saying.

We can observe here that two verbs occur sequentially without conjunction reduction, reflecting indigenous serial verb usage. Serial verb constructions are prominent in Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa. These constructions mitigate the force of commands and present them as cooperative actions rather than directives. This was observed in both genders but more frequent in female speech when making requests and in male speech when giving instructions. The structure functions as a politeness strategy for women and an authority

softening device for men.

Reduplication for Emphasis

Extracts

F18: Small small, you will understand.

F33: Sorry sorry for coming late.

M05: Quick quick, let's go.

It was observed that the reason for the lexical reduplication was for emphasis. Reduplication is a common emphatic strategy in many Nigerian languages. It was also observed that the reason for reduplication was to express emotional tone, persuasion, and empathy. 70% of occurrences were in female speech, especially in apologetic and explanatory contexts. This aligns with Holmes' (2013) view of women's expressive and affective speech styles. The calque encodes emotional engagement.

Interrogative Request (Indirect Commands)

Extracts

F21: You can help me with this?

F30: You will close the door?

M11: You are coming? (Meaning invitation)

It was observed that declarative structures are always rendered as a question to perform a request. This stems from indirect request forms in indigenous languages used for politeness. The pragmatic function was to mitigate imposition and show respect. This is also highly frequent in female speech (75% of examples). This is a strong marker of gendered politeness transferred through syntactic calquing.

Mitigated Imperatives

Extracts

F07: You will try and submit it today.

F29: You will help me check it.

M31: You go and sit down.

Here, structural observation showed future tense used in place of direct imperative. Substrate source showed politeness encoded through softened commands in indigenous languages. The pragmatic function reduces authority and expresses relational respect. The gender pattern is more frequent in female to male and female to female interactions. This means that the structure performs deference and relational harmony.

Tag-like Confirmations

Extracts

F10: You are going, abi?

M16: We will meet tomorrow, isn't it?

Here, it was observed that participants use of invariant tags influenced by indigenous discourse markers. The pragmatic function is to seek solidarity and confirmation. This is common in both genders but used by females to maintain conversational rapport. From all the examples above, the data reveal that syntactic calques in Nigerian English are not random grammatical transfers but pragmatic tools deeply rooted in indigenous sociocultural norms. These structures persist because they perform communicative functions aligned with gender expectations in Nigerian society. Women consistently used calqued structures associated with politeness, indirectness, empathy, and relational harmony. Men used similar structures primarily when softening authority or seeking cooperation. This confirms Holmes' (2013) assertion that gendered communication is socially constructed and culturally mediated. The findings also validate Schneider's (2007) claim that postcolonial English varieties encode indigenous cultural norms during nativization. Thomason and Kaufman's (1988) theory explains how these structures are transferred, while the pragmatic analysis shows why they remain functional. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that grammar in Nigerian English carries sociocultural meaning, and syntactic calquing is a key medium through which gendered identities are enacted in English communication.

Implications of this Study

This study strengthens the argument that postcolonial English varieties should be examined within their sociocultural contexts rather than judged by Inner Circle standards. The evidence that syntactic calques encode gendered meanings supports Schneider's Dynamic Model by showing that nativization involves not only structural adaptation but also the embedding of cultural values into English. Nigerian English emerges as a variety where grammar reflects indigenous norms of politeness, hierarchy, and gender relations. This calls for deeper sociopragmatic analyses in World Englishes research rather than purely structural descriptions.

The study extends Thomason and Kaufman's theory by showing that syntactic transfer persists not merely because of bilingual interference but because the transferred structures fulfill pragmatic and cultural functions. This suggests that contact linguistics should incorporate sociopragmatic motivations when explaining the stability of calqued structures in contact varieties. Structural transfer is sustained when it carries cultural meaning, including gender expectations.

The findings contribute to pragmatic theory by demonstrating that syntactic structures themselves can function as pragmatic markers. In Nigerian English, politeness, deference, authority, and solidarity are often achieved not only through lexical choices but through sentence structure shaped by indigenous languages. This broadens the scope of pragmatics to include substrate-influenced syntax as a carrier of social meaning.

Most gender and language studies are based on Western monolingual contexts. This study shows that in multilingual postcolonial settings, gendered communication is deeply influenced by indigenous linguistic systems. It highlights the need for gender studies to consider language contact situations where gender norms are transferred across languages through syntax. Nigerian English provides evidence that gendered identities are performed through calqued grammatical patterns, not only through vocabulary or discourse style.

One of the most practical implications of this study concerns ELT practices. Teachers often correct students' substrate-influenced syntactic patterns without recognizing their cultural grounding. The study suggests that these structures should not be dismissed as mere errors but understood as meaningful features of Nigerian English. ELT practitioners should adopt a bidialectal approach that teaches Standard English norms while acknowledging the legitimacy and communicative value of Nigerian English structures. This approach can improve learners' confidence and linguistic identity.

Curriculum designers and textbook writers should incorporate examples of Nigerian English usage and explain their sociocultural significance. Teaching materials can include discussions of how indigenous linguistic norms shape English usage, particularly in relation to politeness and gender. This will promote culturally responsive language education.

Understanding that certain syntactic patterns function as politeness and gender markers can improve communication across gender lines and social hierarchies. Misinterpretation of these patterns as incorrect or rude may be reduced when their pragmatic functions are recognized. This is especially relevant in academic, professional, and intercultural settings where Nigerian English speakers interact with speakers of other English varieties.

The study opens avenues for further research into other sociocultural dimensions encoded through syntactic calquing in Nigerian English, such as age, status, and ethnicity. Future studies may also adopt quantitative approaches to measure the frequency of these patterns across larger populations or compare Nigerian English with other African English varieties.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how substrate influence manifests as syntactic calquing in Nigerian English and how these calques function as pragmatic resources for expressing gendered identities rooted in indigenous sociocultural norms. Drawing on Schneider's Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes, Thomason and Kaufman's Contact

Linguistics theory, and Holmes' Social Constructionist theory of Gender and Language, the study demonstrated that syntactic patterns commonly observed in Nigerian English are not random deviations from Standard English but meaningful structural adaptations shaped by multilingual contact and cultural expectations. The analysis of data from 80 participants revealed recurrent syntactic calques like topic fronting, serial verb constructions, reduplication, interrogative requests, mitigated imperatives, and tag-like confirmations. These structures were traced to indigenous linguistic patterns and shown to perform important pragmatic functions including politeness, deference, solidarity, emotional expression, and authority management. More importantly, the study established that these pragmatic functions are often gendered. Female participants used many of these calqued structures more frequently in contexts requiring politeness, indirectness, and relational harmony, while male participants used them mainly when softening authority or fostering cooperation. The findings affirm that Nigerian English is deeply embedded with indigenous sociocultural logic, where grammar serves as a vehicle for performing gendered identities. Syntactic calquing, therefore, is not merely a product of bilingual interference but a pragmatic necessity that enables English to express culturally grounded norms of communication. This insight challenges deficit perspectives that label such structures as incorrect and instead positions them as legitimate features of a localized English variety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Scholars should move beyond describing Nigerian English structures as deviations and begin to interpret them within their sociocultural and pragmatic contexts, especially in relation to gender.

ELT practitioners in Nigeria should adopt a bidialectal approach that acknowledges the legitimacy of Nigerian English while teaching Standard English norms. Teachers should explain the cultural and pragmatic motivations behind substrate-influenced syntactic patterns. Curriculum planners and textbook writers should include examples of Nigerian English usage and discussions of how indigenous linguistic norms shape English communication, particularly regarding politeness and gender.

Teacher education programs should include modules on World Englishes and sociopragmatics to help teachers understand the cultural grounding of Nigerian English structures.

Future studies should explore other sociocultural variables such as age, status, and ethnicity in relation to syntactic calquing. Comparative studies with other African English varieties are also encouraged.

Awareness of the pragmatic and gendered functions of syntactic calques can improve interpersonal communication and reduce misinterpretation of Nigerian English structures in formal and intercultural settings.

Linguists and language bodies should work towards documenting and codifying recurrent syntactic features of Nigerian English as part of its standard descriptive grammar.

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