

## Variations in English Usage Across Former British Colonies: A Selective Semantic Comparison of Nigeria and India

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### Abstract

Travelling to a foreign country for study or leisure is an exhilarating yet challenging experience, often accompanied by what is commonly known as 'culture shock.' Apart from adjusting to a new environment, individuals may encounter an additional layer of difficulty – English language usage shock. This paper delves into the nuances of English language usage in Nigeria and India, specifically focusing on words, phrases, and clauses that may have distinct meanings or interpretations in these two countries. Nigeria and India boast large populations of English speakers, with the language playing a pivotal role in various aspects of daily life. Despite both countries adopting British English during colonial periods, this study unveils intriguing semantic differences in the use of English. The research draws attention to the fact that seemingly similar words or expressions may hold divergent meanings in the linguistic landscapes of Nigeria and India. The status of English in these nations is discussed, emphasizing its prevalence as a second language in Nigeria and its dual role as an administrative tool and language of wider communication in India. The historical ties to British rule have left a lasting impact on language usage in both countries, sparking an exploration into the semantic variations that have evolved. The methodology involves an empirical study conducted by the researcher. Real-life experiences serve as the basis for data, allowing for an analysis of semantic disparities. The study focuses on four key fields – education, transportation, food/agriculture, and commerce – areas considered particularly relevant to students and visitors from Nigeria to India. This paper contributes to the understanding of linguistic dynamics in diverse English-speaking communities, shedding light on how shared language roots can give rise to distinct semantic interpretations. The findings aim to enhance cultural and linguistic awareness, providing valuable insights for individuals navigating the linguistic landscape of these two vibrant nations.

**Keywords:** Indian and Nigerian English, English Language Usage Shock, Semantic Comparisons

### Introduction

Travelling to study, or just a short or long visit, in a different country, is usually a very exciting experience and one which students and visitors find very rewarding. However, it can also be quite challenging during the first few days, weeks, or months. The range of emotions one experiences when he moves from a familiar to an unfamiliar environment is commonly referred to as 'culture shock'. Culture shock is a very normal experience; and even if one comes to a country with a way of life similar to that of the host country, he may still find that there are small differences which might have an impact on his daily life. In addition to

studying and living in a whole new environment, the fact that one is away from his loved ones and friends who would normally support him through new and difficult situations can be an added strain.

Well, these are not the only challenges being faced in this circumstance. There is a tendency for the individual staying or visiting such foreign countries to encounter what may be called English language usage shock. This is because some English words can mean something else in another country, or an entirely different word meaning something else in the country of departure or residence.

This paper highlights such differences in the use of some identified words, phrases and clauses that are used in different ways to mean the same in Nigeria and India. The differences are limited to the Indian and Nigerian English usage of such expressions only. Thus, the Indian usage of the identified lexical items may be the same in other countries other than Nigeria.

### **The Status of English in Nigeria and India**

There is no doubt that English is one of the most popular and important languages in the world. There is a very big speech community of native speakers of English around the world – from anglophone Canada to the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand (core anglosphere), to other countries where it has a substantial number of such native speakers and, of course, those who use it as a second language. When these native and non-native speakers are combined, English is the most widely spoken language worldwide (Crystal, 2008).

Nigeria and India are among the countries with a very large number of English speakers. Crystal (2008) estimated that, worldwide, the non-native speakers outnumbered the native speakers. As of 2005, India was estimated to have become the country with the world's second-largest English-speaking population, after the United States. This number is expected to rapidly rise over the years, with prospects of positioning it at number one (Times of India, 2005).

The same is true in Nigeria where, according to Kingsley Ugwuanyi (2022), an estimated 53% of Nigerians (out of the population of nearly 220 million people in 2022) speak a form of English thus making Nigeria one of the largest English-speaking countries in the world. The statistics, from this estimate, indicate that more than 110 million people in Nigeria speak and use English in their day-to-day communication and other endeavours. This is not surprising because Nigeria is a former British colony until 1960, and it is one of the six countries that make up English-speaking West Africa (the others being Ghana, The Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and a part of Cameroon), (ibid).

*English is a co-official language in Nigeria, along with three other indigenous languages: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. In practice, however, English is used as the sole official language in almost all official contexts, including governance, education, mass media, law courts, and so on. Even though most English speakers in Nigeria speak it as a second language, there is a growing number of young Nigerians who speak Nigerian English as their first language (Kingsley, 2022).*

In addition, English is being taught in schools as a compulsory subject from nursery to secondary; and in tertiary institutions as a compulsory elective course for fresh students in mostly year one, and in some departments up to year two. It is also a prerequisite to have a

good grade in the English Language for prospective students to be accepted for studies in all Nigerian universities irrespective of course of study. It is equally the medium of instruction in all schools at all levels.

In the same vein, Kachru (1986) as cited in Annika (2003) explains that “English serves two purposes in India. First, it provides a linguistic tool for the administrative cohesiveness of the country, and second, it serves as a language of wider communication. English functions in the Indian socio-cultural context to perform roles relevant and appropriate to the social, educational, and administrative network of India”. The author summarily reiterated that English, in India, is used in both public and personal domains.

Just like Nigeria, India was also a colony under British rule for nearly two centuries until independence in August of 1947. “During their time in India, the British left a legacy. One of the most obvious examples of this is the English language, which today is widely spoken throughout India,” (<https://unacademy.com>).

The historical antecedents of the two countries under study and the status of English in both (as summarily presented above), make it an interesting discovery to find out that entirely different words or expressions of English can have the same semantic usage, even when the same British variety of English is used in both countries.

### Methodology

This is an empirical study of the differences in the use of certain English words and expressions in Nigeria and India, which, despite the difference, also at the same time share the same semantic implications in the contexts in which they are used in both countries. This research is based on the observation and measurement of phenomena, as directly experienced by the researcher. The data, thus, was gathered based on real-life experiences from both countries – the researcher being a Nigerian and currently a scholar in India.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The data is presented and analyzed based on the semantic differences, or interpretations, identified in some aspects of English usage in the two countries under study. The analysis is limited to such identified differences in four fields of human endeavour, considered by this study to have a prompt and direct bearing on the students and visitors coming to India from Nigeria. These are education, transportation, food/agriculture, and commerce.

Field of Endeavour	Nigeria	India	Remarks
Education (University)	Lecturer	Professor	
	Academic Staff	Faculty	In Nigeria, faculty is used in the sense of a group of departments concerned with a major division of knowledge, like the Faculty of Arts.
	Carryover	Backlog	
	Second sitting	Reexam	

	Continuous Assessment	Internal Assessment	
	Students' Affairs Office	Amenity	In Nigeria, Amenity is mostly used in healthcare facilities as a dedicated critical care unit.
	Exams and records	Exam Cell	
	Lecture/class	Teaching Session	
	Probation	Detained	
	Course of Study	Branch	
	Transcripts	Mark Sheet	
	Assistant Lecturer/Graduate Assistant	Assistant Professor	
	Bookshop	Stationery	
	Elective course	Open elective	
	Bursar	Finance Officer	
Transportation	Bus Stop	Bus Stand/Halt	
	Motor Park	Bus Station	
	Tricycle	Autorickshaw	
	Motorcycle	Two-wheeler	
	Filling Station	Petrol Pump	
	Roundabout	Traffic Circle	
Food	Okro	Ladyfingers	
	Eggplant	Brinjal	
	Yoghurt	Curd	
	Chips	French-fries	
	Pepper	Capsicum	
	Refreshment	High Tea	
	Groundnuts	Peanuts	
	Soup	Dal	In Indian cuisine, <i>dal</i> is a staple dish from lentils while in Nigeria 'soup' often refers to various traditional, thick, and nutritious stews.
	Spices	Masala	In India, 'masala' refers to a blend of spices, while in Nigeria, people may use the term spices or 'pepper' more broadly.
	Pear	Avocado	
	Cray Fish	Shrimps	

Counting	A Hundred Thousand	One Lakh	
	Ten Million	One Crore	
	One hundred Naira only	Rupees one hundred only	While writing an amount in words in Nigeria, the name of the currency 'Naira' comes after the figure wordings but in India 'Rupee(s)' comes at the beginning.
Facilities/Services	Toilet/Convenience	Washroom	
	Flat	BHK	1-, 2-, 3-, or 4-bedroom Flat is usually used in Nigeria to describe a house of the same rooms as classified, with a sitting room. In India, 1, 2, 3, or 4 BHK (Bedroom, Hall, and Kitchen) is used. So, 1 Bedroom Flat in Nigeria is 1 BHK in India.
	Kitchen	Pantry	
	Barbing Saloon	Hair Saloon	
	Cleaner	Housekeeper	
	Tissue Paper/Serviette	Paper Napkin	
Others	Canvas	Sports Shoes	
	Public Holiday	National or Bank Holiday	

### Conclusion:

This study has shed light on selective interesting semantic differences in English usage between Nigeria and India, two countries with significant English-speaking populations. The exploration of various fields of human endeavour, including education, transportation, food/agriculture, and commerce, has revealed some nuanced distinctions in interpreting common terms and expressions. Despite both nations sharing a historical connection through British colonization, the evolution of English in these diverse cultural contexts has given rise to distinctive meanings for certain words.

The research underscores the importance of recognizing these linguistic variations, particularly for students and visitors moving between these countries. The term 'English language usage shock' becomes apparent as individuals navigate these semantic differences.

Whether it is understanding academic terminology, navigating public transportation, exploring culinary preferences, or engaging in commercial transactions, awareness of these differences becomes crucial for effective communication and cultural adaptation.

The study reinforces the dynamic nature of language, demonstrating how a shared linguistic heritage can evolve into unique linguistic landscapes. The findings prompt reflection on the broader implications of language evolution in multicultural and multilingual societies. As English continues to be a vital global language, such investigations contribute to a deeper understanding of its fluidity and adaptability across diverse cultural settings.

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