

SOME NOTABLE LEXICO-SEMANTIC VARIATIONS IN IZON (NIGERIAN) SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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English has become a world language. Besides the nearly 300 million people in Britain, America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada who use English as their first language, English is also an additional language of hundreds of millions of people in many other countries of the world where it is used especially as a second language. This global status of English, therefore, demands that a vibrant international English to which both inner and outer circle Englishes have contributed be fashioned to carry out the global communicative functions which English must inescapably perform within both native and non-native contexts. There must be an urgent shift of emphasis, as it is currently reflected in the International Corpus of English (ICE) Project, to accommodate the outer circle Englishes whose rich and fascinating contributions to international English must be considered and appreciated, especially if English must function effectively as a global language that can cater to needs of all its speakers, native or non-native. Thus, as Banjo (2004: 11) suggests, emphasis has increasingly been placed on the linguistic behaviour of the bilingual, bidialectal and bicultural speaker of English as (s)he uses the language for communicative purposes especially in non-native contexts. This is so because the use of English as a world language has gone beyond the confines of the native English culture to accommodate various multilingual and multicultural contexts which are, as it should be expected, different from what obtains in the native-speaker environment and, thus, as Adegbija (2004) argues, English must be domesticated to suit the numerous conveniences, experiences, nuances and sensibilities of its speakers in any non-native socio-cultural environment.

In Nigeria's multilingual setting where English and over 250 Nigerian languages are in contact, for example, the linguistic and cultural influences which the Nigerian languages and the Nigerian culture have on English in Nigeria and the resultant departures they manifest in the English of Nigerians have been extensively explored thereby providing data for the description of the nature and character of Nigerian English (see Adetugbo, 2004; Awonusi, 1987; Bamgbose, 1982a and 1982b; Banjo, 1971, 1995; Igboanusi, 2001; Jowitt, 1991; Kujore, 1985; Okoro, 1986, 2004a and 2004b and Udofot, 2004). Despite the numerous vigorous research efforts made towards the description of the nature and character of Nigerian English especially from the perspective of the influences that the Nigerian languages and cultures have on it, very little has been done to reflect the rich linguistic and cultural influences that Izon speakers manifest in their English usage.

Izon is one of the seven languages that form the language-cluster called Ijo or Ijaw. Izon is spoken in Ondo, Edo, Delta and Bayelsa States of the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It can be sub-classified into South-western (including Arogbo), North-western (including Mein), South-central (including Bumo) and North-central (including

Kolokuma) (see Williamson, 1968 and Jenewari, 1989). The Arogbó dialect of Izon is what is used in this study.

So, this article, which explores the lexico-semantic variations manifested in the English of Izon-English bilinguals and traces them to the Izon culture so as to establish their appropriateness within the Izon socio-cultural context, provides an Izon perspective to the description of Nigerian English especially within the Izon socio-cultural context. The lexico-semantic data in this study proves that English usage in the Izon socio-cultural environment has been given a distinctive Izon flavor. The study therefore provides an Izon dimension to our understanding of the lexico-semantics of Nigerian English. The data serve as a rich supplement to the lexico-semantic data on Nigerian English earlier presented in Odumuh (1984a and 1984b), Kujore (1985), Adegbija (1989), Jowitt (1991), Bamiro (1994) and Igboanusi (2001). Secondly, this study provides useful data to support the existence of sub-varieties in Nigerian English. Considering the linguistic influence that Izon has on the English of Izon-English bilinguals and the various socio-cultural factors which provide the context within which the language is used and understood, English usage in the Izon socio-cultural setting is different from that of other socio-cultural settings in Nigeria. This, therefore, provides the basis for us to distinguish Izon English from all other sub-varieties of Nigerian English such as Hausa English, Igbo English, and Yoruba English. It is hoped that the linguistic and cultural influences presented in this study will contribute rich data to support the Nigerian component of the International Corpus of English (ICE) project especially from the Izon perspective.

Considering that the object of this study is a non-native variety of English which is used within a non-native culture and which, because of the demands for communicative appropriateness, has to reflect the influences that the Izon culture has on it, it is necessary to account for the various socio-cultural factors underlying the communicative appropriateness exhibited by Izon-English bilinguals in their English usage within the Izon socio-cultural setting. This is in line with the view of Weinreich (1963: 4) when he admits that “the linguist who makes theories about language influence but neglects to account for the socio-cultural setting of the language contact leaves his study suspended ... in mid-air.” To appropriately account for the linguistic influence inherent in the Izon-English contact situation and the various socio-cultural factors which provide the basis for the legitimacy and appropriateness of the variations manifested in the English of Izon-English bilinguals, therefore, we employ the cultural-conceptual approach to language study as it relates to the concept of communicative competence in bilingual / bicultural situations (see also Hymes, 1962, 1971, 1972; Adetugbo, 1979a and 1979b; Saville-Troke, 1989; Kovecses, 2005 and Sharifian, 2006). As Sharifian (2006: 11) explains,

The fundamental premise in this approach is that world Englishes should not be examined exclusively in terms of their linguistic features but rather as emergent systems that are largely adopted and explored to encode and express the *cultural conceptualisations* of their speakers.

Sharifian (2006: 14) goes on to assert that:

language is entrenched in conceptualisation, which is largely culturally constructed...language...largely communicates and embodies our construal and conceptualisation of various experiences, which...emerge from the interactions between members of various cultural groups.

The appropriateness of this approach to the present study lies in the premise that the contact between Izon and English in the Izon socio-cultural setting in Nigeria has resulted in the emergence of bilingual / bicultural individuals who have, in a bid to achieve communicative appropriateness, domesticated the English language to accommodate the non-native Izon culture which provides the context within which the language is used and understood. Thus there is a strong cultural force that underlies the linguistic influence manifested in the English of Izon-English bilinguals. It is, therefore, necessary to situate this linguistic influence within the strong cultural foundation which provides the basis for the legitimacy and appropriateness of the resultant variations in the English of Izon-English bilinguals. The cultural-conceptual approach as it relates to the concept of communicative competence in bilingual/bicultural situations is useful in this study because it provides a sound cultural background for the lexico-semantic variations manifested in the English of Izon-English bilinguals and, thus, providing the communicative contexts within which such variations can be appropriately used to reflect the Izon socio-cultural experience. Thus, through this approach we account not only for the linguistic influence that the Izon language has on the English of Izon-English bilinguals, but also for the various socio-cultural factors which provide the context within which the language is used and understood and which, by extension, provide the basis for the legitimacy and appropriateness of the lexico-semantic variations manifested in the English usage of Izon-English bilinguals.

Indisputably, there is a strong connection between language and culture: appropriate language use is culture-dependent. As Okunrinmeta (2008a: 106) observes, it is not surprising that Izon-English bilinguals have imaginatively manipulated the English language to blend with the Izon language and culture so as to reflect the Izon socio-cultural experience appropriately. Since there is no way appropriate English usage in the Izon socio-cultural environment can be completely divorced from the Izon culture, Izon-English bilinguals have domesticated the language to reflect and accommodate the various cultural contexts that the Izon culture has given to the English words and expressions that are used for communication and interaction within the Izon socio-cultural milieu. Though this cultural influence has resulted in variations especially from native English usage and may, therefore, not be seen as appropriate to the native speakers of English, these culturally-motivated variations in the English of Izon-English bilinguals should be seen as legitimate variants whose appropriateness is strongly founded on the fact that they are expressive of the cultural patterns of the IZONS and are hence in conformity with their worldview.

The lexico-semantic variations in the English of Izon-English bilinguals, which are analyzed in this study with reference to the influence of the Izon language and culture, are presented under semantic shift, coinages, idiomatic expressions and proverbs.

Semantic Shift

One of the manifestations of the influence of the Izon language and culture in the English of Izon-English bilinguals is the restriction or extension of the meanings of some English words and expressions so as to accommodate the contexts which the Izon culture gives to them in the Izon socio-cultural environment. Thus, the meanings of various English words and expressions have, because of the need for communicative appropriateness within the Izon socio-cultural context, been forced to undergo semantic changes so as to reflect the Izon socio-cultural experience. In this section, we shall examine the cultural meanings that have been given to such English words and expressions as *uncle*, *how are you? / how do you do?*, *lick an orange* and *share (a husband)* within the Izon socio-cultural context.

The meanings of some kinship terms have, within the Izon socio-cultural setting, been extended to reflect and accommodate the new contexts that the Izon culture has provided for them especially through the general brotherly feeling of Ijaw-ness prevalent among the Izens (regardless of the state of origin), age considerations and the extended family structure within the Izon culture. One of such kinship terms is *uncle*. (Such kinship terms as *brother*, *sister*, *father*, *mother*, *husband*, *wife*, *son*, *daughter*, *grandfather*, *grandmother*, *grandson* and *granddaughter* are not treated in this study because, despite the fact that reflect the Izon socio-cultural experience, the contexts in which they are used in the Izon setting also occur in other socio-cultural settings in Nigeria. Thus, they are not unique to Izon.)

Uncle, within the English culture, means *brother of one's father or mother, or husband of one's aunt*. But within the Izon culture, *uncle (yabi)* means *the brother of one's mother*. This is reflected in text 1:

He is my senior brother's son; so, he cannot call me *uncle*. It is only the son or daughter of my senior sister or junior sister that can call me *uncle*.

Thus, the Izon concept of *yabi* excludes the English cultural contexts of being the brother of one's father or the husband of one's aunt. This is so because the brother of one's father is, within the Izon cultural context, considered as one's father (*day*) and not one's uncle (*yabi*). Hence it is more appropriate for one to refer to one's father's brother as father especially when he is older than one. Similarly, it is more appropriate to refer to the husband of one's aunt as father than referring to him as uncle. This is because one's aunt is normally seen within the Izon cultural context as one's mother because she is the sister of one's father or mother. Thus, it is appropriate for an Izon man to refer to the husband of his aunt (his mother) as his father especially when the aunt's husband plays the role of a father in his life.

Uncle may also be used within the Izon cultural context to refer to any elderly man who could not, because of his age, be called by name. He is generally called *uncle* despite the fact that he is not one's blood relation and, thus, he becomes a *general yabi* (that is, general uncle).

In the Izon socio-cultural setting where English is used as a second language in line with the demands of the Izon culture, some greetings in English have been domesticated to accommodate the contexts which the Izon culture provides for them within the Izon socio-cultural environment. Within the English culture, *How are you?* or *How do you do?* may, for example, be used by any one regardless of his/her age. Thus, it is appropriate for a ten-year old boy to say *How are you?* or *How do you do?* to his father within the English cultural context. But within the Izon culture, the use of *How are you?* (*tebira ke i mo emi ghan?*) or *How do you do?* (*tebira ke i mo miyen emi ghan?*) is usually restricted by age considerations. (Both *tebira ke i mo emi ghan?* (How are you?) and *tebira ke i mo miyen emi ghan?* (How do you do?)) are usually shortened as *tebira?* *How are you?* or *How do you do?* can only be used when the person being addressed is younger than, or is within the same age grade as, the speaker. Thus, it is inappropriate within the Izon culture to use *How are you?* or *How do you do?* if the person being addressed is older than the speaker. This is seriously frowned at in the Izon socio-cultural setting because it connotes rudeness and falls short of the demands of the Izon culture which requires that elders be respected. This restrictive use of *How are you?* or *How do you do?* within the Izon cultural context is, therefore, a variation from the way it is used within the English culture where no provision is made for age considerations.

Similarly, the response to *How do you do?* has been modified within the Izon cultural context to satisfy the demands of the Izon culture as reflected in text 2:

Greeting: How do you do?

Response: Fine.

Within the Izon culture, *tebira* uttered especially by an elderly person normally elicits the response, *iyọ fa* or *ebi emi* (fine). This is so because the response connotes politeness within the Izon socio-cultural context, while the repetition of *tebira?* in response suggests rudeness. Thus, even if an Izon-English bilingual knows that the response to *How do you do?* within the English culture is *How do you do?*, he/she has to say *fine* within the Izon culture to satisfy the demands that the culture imposes on him/her. This is the cultural force that lies behind the appropriateness of *fine* as a response to *How do you do?* within the Izon socio-cultural setting. The appropriateness of *fine* as a response to *How do you do?* is, therefore, strongly founded on the Izon culture.

The expression, *lick an orange*, is derived from the Izon expression *ogun taba* and it is used by Izon-English bilinguals as a variant of the British *eat an orange* within the Izon socio-cultural setting as reflected in text 3:

Licking an orange before a meal is strange within the Izon socio-cultural setting; we don't even drink wine before eating.

Lick an orange is appropriate in this context because it captures what actually happens in the Izon socio-cultural setting where oranges are peeled and cut in half before their juice

is licked and sucked. This process is different from what happens in the English culture where oranges are cut and eaten. Within the English culture, it is appropriate for one to *eat* an orange. But within the Izon culture, it is inappropriate because oranges are never eaten; they are licked and sucked. This is the cultural background that makes *lick an orange* appropriate within the Izon socio-cultural context. It is hence not surprising that many educated Izon-English bilinguals say *I want to lick an orange*, rather than saying *I want to eat an orange*, within the Izon socio-cultural context.

Within the English culture where monogamy demands that a man marries only one wife, each woman has her husband to herself. It is impossible for a woman to *share her husband* with another. Thus, any man that allows another woman to share him with his wife is, within the English culture, guilty of bigamy and will have to face serious sanctions. The expression, *to share a husband*, is, therefore, inappropriate within the English culture.

But within the Izon socio-cultural setting where a man can, because of the polygamous nature of the Izon society, have more than one wife, it is permitted for two or more women to marry one husband. Thus, *to share a husband*, which is a translation of the Izon expression *zei diye nana*, is appropriate within this context because the women share the same husband in the sense that he marries all of them. In the Arogbo-Izon Ibe, for example, there is a man who marries sixty-eight wives and he services each of them on a weekly basis. Thus, when he spends a week with one woman, he will spend the following week with another, and this continues until he goes round all the sixty-eight wives. The week in which the man stays with one of the sixty-eight wives is hence automatically labeled as the week of that particular woman and, thus, no other wife is allowed to sleep with him. If it is the week of wife number one, for example, it is forbidden for the other wives, (2–68), to come to him. For this reason, it is the woman who owns the week that sleeps with him, cooks for him and takes care of all his needs for the week. If the woman who owns the week offends the husband during the week, he can punish her by cancelling her week. This is also applicable to all his remaining wives. Thus, the women share their husband among themselves. *To share a husband* is, therefore, appropriate in this context because it reflects the polygamous nature of the Izon society where one husband can be shared by two or more women whom he marries. This is what is reflected in text 4:

Within the Izon culture, when a man marries a new wife, the senior wife is expected to receive the junior wife and treat her as her sister because they *share the same husband*.

Coinages

Izon-English bilinguals have, because of the contact between English and the Izon language and culture in the Izon socio-cultural setting, manifested some interesting lexico-semantic variations in their English usage in terms of the coinage of words and expressions that reflect the Izon socio-cultural experience. Izon-English bilinguals have, for example, coined new items from the existing lexical stock in English to appropriately

reflect the Izon linguistic and socio-cultural situation so as to satisfy their quest for communicative appropriateness in English within the Izon socio-cultural context. These coinages are presented and analyzed as follows:

August break is coined to describe the period during the rainy season when the rain stops temporarily, perhaps for a month. This period of break (*fɛun tiyɛ*), which usually comes between early August and early September, is often characterized by a drizzly weather accompanied by heavy winds which dry the water up. The end of the *August break* (*fɛun vuin*) is usually signaled by thunderclaps either by 12 noon or by 12 midnight and a heavy downpour often follows almost immediately. The coinage *August break*, therefore, reflects what happens in the riverine Izon setting. The occurrence of *August break* in the English of Izon-English bilinguals is illustrated in text 5:

During the *August break*, the water in the bush dries up, and this causes untold hardship for fishermen, palm-wine tappers and timber dealers especially in the year when the break is prolonged.

Big-eyed, which is a translation of the Izon expression *toru opu ba* (eyes that always look for big things), is coined by Izon-English bilinguals to describe the person that is greedy and is, therefore, not contented with what (s)he has. Thus, a *big-eyed person* is the one who always looks for *big things* and does not feel satisfied with what (s)he has. *Big-eyed* is illustrated in text 6:

Many of the girls and women in the community are *big-eyed* and that is why they have become bunkerers [thieves].

Evil month is a translation of the Izon expression *sei ogonowe* which is coined to describe November as the month for the celebration of the festival of the spirits in the bush. It is believed in the Izon socio-cultural setting that it is on the third day of the moon (in November) that the spirits in the bush celebrate their *bou abu erin* (the day of the spirits in the bush). It is forbidden for the Izens to go into the bush on the third day of the moon in November. This is to prevent human beings from seeing the secrets of the *bou abu* (the spirits in the bush) as they celebrate their festival. It is strongly believed that the spirits will harm anyone who proves stubborn and goes into the bush on that day. This belief is reinforced by an Izon folktale where Gbaosei, a stubborn Izon woman who went into the bush with her daughter (Ebiri) on the day of the celebration, was killed by the spirits, while the daughter was struck deaf and dumb. Thus, even in these modern days, no Izon man or woman goes into the bush on the third day of the moon of November because it is forbidden for anyone to do so. Because of the belief that evil will befall anyone that goes into the bush on the third day of the moon, the month of November is labelled as *the evil month* (*sei ogonowe*). This is what is reflected in the English of Izon-English bilinguals as illustrated in text 7:

People usually cut the firewood they will use in the dry season before the beginning of the *evil month* when the water in the bush begins to dry up.

In the Izon socio-cultural setting, people, especially those who are married, usually build two houses. The first is called *opu wari* (the big house) where the members

of the family sleep. The second is *kala wari* (the small house) which is a hut that serves as kitchen for the wife. This is so because, in the Izon setting, the houses where people live and sleep are separated from those where they cook. Thus, where a man has only one wife, he has to build one *opu wari* for the family and a separate *kala wari* (kitchen) for his wife. Similarly, if he has three wives Izon culture demands that he build three separate *small houses* (kitchens) for them. It is this Izon concept of *opu wari* (*big house* where people sleep) and *kala wari* (*small house* where the wife or wives cook. Sometimes, some women prefer to sleep in their kitchens; it is only when it is their week that they go to the *opu wari* to sleep with the husband) that is reflected in the English of Izon-English bilinguals in text 8:

The *big house* is where all the members of the family sleep. It is called the *big house* because of its capacity to accommodate all in the family and this distinguishes it from the *small house* which serves as kitchen for the wife.

Resource control refers to the traditional Izon shirt called *amayanabo* which is designed in such a manner that a golden chain links the neck of the shirt to its breast pocket. The chain has a golden button inserted into the bottom hole on the neck of the shirt while the rest of the chain flows downwards into the breast pocket of the shirt in a *controlled manner*. This shirt, which is now worn generally by the people of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, is often labelled as *resource control* because of the leading role that the Ijaws and other Niger Deltans play in the resource control struggle where the Federal Government of Nigeria is, because of its criminal neglect of the region, told to allow the people of the Niger Delta to control their resources. The occurrence of *resource control* in the English of Izon-English bilinguals is reflected in text 9:

The second thing the Ijaw Nation demanded for was fresh fish and it was smartly given a snake. But to the amazement of the Nigerian State, the spokesman for the Ijaw Nation accepted the snake and expressed his profound appreciation for 60 minutes without swallowing saliva, and put it into one of the pockets in his *resource-control attire* without any danger.

Apart from the occurrence of new items coined from the existing lexical stock in English, the English of Izon-English bilinguals also manifest the occurrence of some items which are coined through the mixture of existing lexical stock in Izon and English. These hybridized lexical items are presented as follows:

Agadagba-elect. *Agadagba* is the title of the king of Arogbo-Izon Ibe and similar kingdoms such as Egbema, Gbaramatu and Gbaraun where kingship is linked to the Egbesu. *Agadagba-elect* is coined, through the combination of *Agadagba* (an Izon item) and *elect* (an English word), to describe a person who has already been chosen, from among other contestants, by the members of the royal family (*perewariabu*) but has not fully become the Agadagba because the rites have not been fully performed. Though he has been chosen or elected, he is not yet in office because he has not gone through the rites that the Agadagba is required by the Izon culture and so he is only an *Agadagba-elect* and not the real Agadagba. *Agadagba-elect* therefore follows the English word-formation process where *elect* is added to such words as bishop, governor, president etc.

to form bishop-elect, governor-elect, president-elect, etc. to express the sense that though the person has been chosen or elected, he or she is not yet in office. This sense of *Agadagba-elect* is reflected in text 10:

There are some rites the *Agadagba-elect* has to perform before he finally becomes the king.

Agadagbanship tussle. *Agadagbanship* is formed by adding the English suffix *-ship* to the Izon item, ***Agadagba***, thereby reflecting what happens in such English words as *kingship* and *leadership* which describe the state of being a king or the official position of a king and the state, position or qualities of being a leader. *Agadagbanship* describes the position of an *Agadagba* or anything that has to do with it. *Agadagbanship tussle* is coined by Izon-English bilinguals to describe the struggle among the contestants who aspire to occupy the position of the *Agadagba* as the king of the Ibe. This context is reflected in text 11:

After the death of Adariwei II in 1960, the Ibe had no *Agadagba* for 16 years because of the *Agadagbanship tussle* that engulfed the Ibe at the time.

Duburuku rite of passage. This describes the rite that a *duburuku corpse*, (the corpse of a traditional believer), must, as a necessary cultural condition, undergo before it is allowed passage to the realm of the ancestors. If this rite of passage is not performed for the corpse, it is believed within the Izon cultural setting that the spirit of the dead person will find it difficult to cross the wide, deep river, which separates the dead from the living, to get to the other side (***duweji ama***) where the ancestors and other dead live. It is, therefore, believed that the spirit of such a dead person will roam the bank of the river separating the living and the dead without any peace or rest because it is not allowed to get to the place meant for it. This is reflected in text 12:

When an old man or woman dies, he/she becomes a *duburuku corpse*. Until the *duburuku rite of passage* is performed, there is no way he/she can cross to the other side of the river where the dead live.

Egbesu Day. This refers to the 28th of September when the culture of the Izon people is celebrated yearly in Arogbo: the seat of the *Egbesu*. It is the day when the *Egbesu* and other aspects of the Izon culture are celebrated. The *Egbesu Day* is celebrated to ensure that no aspect of the rich culture of the Izon people is lost to modernization. Thus it is a festival of cultural revivalism. The occurrence of *Egbesu Day* in the English of Izon-English bilinguals is reflected in text 13:

We don't have to give a fire-brigade approach to things. If we want to celebrate *Egbesu Day* next year, it must be planned adequately.

Ijawness. *Ijawness*, coined from the combination of *Ijaw* and the English suffix *-ness*, describes the Ijo (Ijaw) blood that flows in the veins of every Ijaw man or woman which propels him/her to behave in line with the demands of the Ijo (Ijaw) culture. It is this Ijaw blood that makes every Ijaw man or woman to protect the Ijaw interest and

respect his/her fellow Ijaw men and women. This sense of *Ijawness* is reflected in text 14:

Odi was destroyed because some greedy Ijaw people sold the town out to the Nigerian State. They sold their essence, their *Ijawness*, because of the peanuts the Nigerian State offered them.

Okpolotan blood. **Okpolotan** is a tree in the Izon setting which, when it is cut, exudes a thick blood-like fluid. *Okpolotan blood* is, therefore, a direct translation of **okpolotan isonmoun** (the thick blood-like fluid in the **okpolotan** tree). Thus, *okpolotan blood* is used by Izon-English bilinguals to describe a person who has no shame because the blood in his/her body has become so thick that (s)he no longer has any feelings. This is reflected in text 15:

Many Izon women appear to have lost their shame. Because they have developed the *okpolotan blood* in their veins, they do many abominable things with these bunkerers.

Opu duweji house. **Opu duweji** refers to an ancestor who is worshipped as a spirit or god. It is believed within the Izon socio-cultural setting that the ancestors, though dead, live and that they protect the living and intervene in their lives whenever there is a problem. For this reason the ancestors are worshipped. Every year the descendants of each ancestor go to the tomb where he is buried, pour **ogogoro** (local gin) on it and make special prayers to the ancestor. To ensure that women who are *unclean* are prevented from getting to the tomb and contaminating the purity of the ancestor, a house is usually built over the tomb. (Women are considered *unclean* when they are in their menstrual period or when they, after sleeping with me, fail to take their bath.) This is what is called **opu duweji wari**.

Opu duweji wari is significant within the Izon socio-cultural setting in two respects. One, it is the holy place where the ancestors are worshipped. Two, it serves as a court where the descendants settle disputes. In this court no one is expected to tell lies because it is believed that the ancestors are there to intervene in the matter and if anyone lies that person will face the wrath of the ancestors. Thus, the **opu duweji wari** (the house of the ancestor) serves as a place of worship as well as a court where disputes are settled. It is this concept of **opu duweji wari** in Izon that is, therefore, reflected in the English of Izon-English bilinguals as *opu duweji house* (the house of the ancestor) in text 16:

On the third day, the *kulikuliwei* usually visits designated *opu duweji houses* in the town so as to greet them and seek their forgiveness.

Owugiri music. **Owugiri** is an Izon dance in which the dancer violently shakes every part of the body. *Owugiri music* refers to the music that is played for the people engaged in this traditional dance. Robert Ebizimor popularized the music in the early 1980's. *Owugiri music* is reflected in text 17:

During the last Egbesu Day Celebration, it was Robert Ebizimor, the King of *Owugiri music*, that played on the Kpokpotin arcade.

Umunu pepper soup. *Pepper soup* is derived from the translation of the Izon *ago* which is a kind of peppery soup prepared by the Izon with fish alone or with fish and yam or plantain. Depending on what is used to prepare it, we can have *buru ago* (pepper soup cooked with fish and yam) or *beriba ago* (pepper soup cooked with fish and plantain). We can also have *ago* prepared with fish alone without yam or plantain and, thus, it is named after the fish (e.g. *umunu*, *ekeu*, *odiya*, etc.) which is used to prepare it. Thus, *umunu pepper soup* is a peppery soup cooked with the *umunu fish* (cat fish). This is reflected in text 18:

We usually *drink umunu pepper soup* with boiled yam and palm oil.

The idea of *drinking pepper soup* itself is appropriate within the Izon cultural context because it is process-specific and reflects the culture of the Izon especially in terms of the process involved in the eating of specific meals.

Idiomatic Expressions

One of the most fascinating manifestations of the influence of the Izon language and culture on the English of Izon-English bilinguals is noticed in the area of idiomatic usage where authentic idiomatic expressions, sourced especially from Izon folklore, are translated into English to reflect the cultural contexts within which they are used, interpreted and understood in the Izon socio-cultural setting. These idiomatic expressions manifested in the English of Izon-English bilinguals, which are linked to one cultural belief or other and which attest to the strong influence that the Izon language and culture have on English usage in the Izon socio-cultural setting, are presented and analyzed as follows:

To cross to the other side of the river (to die) is a translation of the Izon idiom *una kiri bein*, is interpreted and understood within the context of the Izon belief that the living and the dead are separated by a wide, deep river. It is believed within the Izon socio-cultural setting that the living live on one side of the river while the dead live on the other side (*duweji ama*, that is, the dwelling-place of the dead). Thus, it is only when a person dies that (s)he can cross over to the other side. This serves as the cultural base on which the meaning of the expression to cross to the other side of the river rests. Thus, to cross to the other side of the river has, within the Izon socio-cultural context, become an acceptable, a preferred, variant of the English idiom “to kick the bucket,” which appears to be inappropriate and less preferred in the Izon socio-cultural setting because it has no socio-cultural relevance to the concept of death in Izon in the sense that there is nothing within the Izon culture that links it to the concept of death and, thus, even if somebody kicks the bucket two hundred million times, (s)he will not die. Thus, while *to kick the bucket* may be appropriate elsewhere, it is inappropriate in the Izon socio-cultural context. To cross to the other side of the river, which is strongly situated within the Izon cultural belief that the dead must cross the deep, wide river separating the living and the dead before (s)he can get to *duweji ama* (the dwelling place of the dead), is, therefore, considered more appropriate in the Izon context.

To cross to the other side of the river is reflected in text 12 cited under *duburuku rite of passage*.

To split open the crocodile's intestine (to reveal a secret) is a translation of the Izon idiom, *segi ufurou tu*, which is situated within a strong cultural belief in the Izon socio-cultural setting. The crocodile is a scarce amphibious carnivore which, as it is believed in the riverine Izon setting, is difficult to find and kill. It is strongly believed that whatever that is inside the crocodile's intestine is top secret since nobody knows what is there. The crocodile's intestine is a metaphor for secrecy. It is believed within the Izon cultural setting that the intestine of the crocodile, which is expected to contain many strange things including parts of the human body like the hair, teeth, finger-nails etc., should not be split open in public especially in the presence of children because no one knows what will be found there. *To split open the crocodile's intestine* is used in the Izon context to mean to reveal a secret and, thus, it is a variant of the English idiom, *to let the cat out of the bag*.

To let the cat out of the bag, just like *to kick the bucket*, has no socio-cultural relevance in the Izon cultural context because, in the Izon socio-cultural setting, cats are never put in bags. Cats when they are newly bought are put in an *ite* (a locally-made fish cage). The expression, *to let the cat out of the bag* is inappropriate within the Izon socio-cultural context because, despite the fact that it has no socio-cultural relevance in the Izon cultural setting since cats are not put in bags, the *ite* which, within the Izon setting, performs the function of the *bag* in the idiom *to let the cat out of the bag* has nothing secret in it since what is inside it is clearly seen by everyone. It is more appropriate for Izon-English bilinguals to use the idiom *to split open the crocodile's intestine* instead of the expression *to let the cat out of the bag* which is, in fact, contrary to the Izon worldview. The occurrence of *to split open the crocodiles intestine* is reflected in text 19:

The Okparans cannot disclose the secret of the Egbesu because it is a taboo to *split open the crocodile's intestine* in public.

To rehearse the cock's foolishness (to behave in such a way as to endanger one's life) is situated within the Izon folktale involving the cock (*owei ofini*) and the wildcat (*ewere*) which explains why the wildcat kills and eats the cock. The wildcat, as it is believed within the Izon socio-cultural setting, would have lived in mortal fear of the cock if the cock had not revealed the secret of the fire on its head to the wildcat. The wildcat dreaded the cock so much that it could not come close to it because the wildcat thought that the *kɔn* (the red comb) on the head was a fire. Whenever the wildcat saw the cock, it would run away because it did not want the fire on the cock's head to burn it to death. One day, when the cock noticed this strange behavior of the wildcat towards it, the cock called the wildcat and asked it why it was behaving that way. The wildcat revealed: *I don't want to be consumed by the fire on your head*. This sounded so funny that the cock had to explain to the wildcat that what was on the cock's head was not a fire and that the wildcat should not be frightened because the comb was not hot and could not burn the wildcat. The cock then persuaded the wildcat to come closer so as to feel what was on the cock's head. When the wildcat, after hesitating, came closer to the cock and touched the comb, the wildcat realized to its utter amazement that the comb, which was

thought to be a fire, was not dangerous. It was on that day that the wildcat stopped fearing the cock because it had discovered that what it had dreaded in the cock was harmless. From that day the wildcat began to kill and eat cocks because one cock was so foolish that it endangered its life by revealing the secret. This folktale provides the context within which the idiom, *to rehearse the cock's foolishness* (to behave in such a way as to endanger one's life), is used, interpreted and understood within the Izon socio-cultural setting. This sense of *to rehearse the cock's foolishness* is reflected in text 20:

There is no smoke without fire. They *rehearsed the cock's foolishness* and this gave the government an edge over the Ibe.

To have hooks in one's fingers and toes, which refers to the Izon expression ***kọbọ tųwa abịra mọ buwọ mọ*** (the fingers and toes that have hooks), is considered appropriate within the Izon socio-cultural context because it is in line with the worldview of the Izon people. *To have hooks in one's fingers and toes* (be clever at stealing or picking other people's belongings) reflects what happened in an Izon folktale where the cat visited its friends (the lion, the tiger and the squirrel) and used the hooks mysteriously fixed to its fingers and toes to *hook up* all the precious belongings of the animals it visited. Thus, whenever the clever cat put its fingers or toes on anything in the house of any of the animals visited, that thing was hooked up and it went along with the cat. This clever nature of the cat in stealing or picking the belongings of other animals provides the context within which the idiom *to have hooks in one's fingers and toes* is used, interpreted and understood within the Izon socio-cultural context to mean be clever at stealing or picking other people's belongings. *To have hooks in one's fingers and toes* has become a variant of the English idiom to be light-fingered.

To go on a dog's errand is derived from the direct translation of the Izon idiom, ***obiri ikọ wọnị***, which reflects what happened in an Izon folktale that explains the role the dog played in the contest between the ram and the he-goat. The contest between the ram and the he-goat was a fight for supremacy. It became so fierce that the horns on the heads of the two animals were broken. To ensure that the fight was won, the ram sent the dog to its (the ram's) house to bring an extra horn given to it by the Creator. The he-goat, on its part, sent the she-goat to do the same. Both the dog and the she-goat were seriously warned not to do any other thing until the extra horn was brought since this was very crucial to the determination of the winner in the contest. On its way to the ram's house, the dog was invited to eat faeces and, in disregard of the urgent mission on which it was sent, it entered without any hesitation and ate all that it was offered. Similarly, the she-goat was invited to eat plantain peelings but it declined firmly on the grounds that it was on an urgent mission. Thus the she-goat went straight to the place where the horn was kept and took it to the he-goat. With this, the he-goat became strengthened and began to hit the ram very hard. The helpless ram managed to endure the hard hits for a while. How the poor ram wished that the dog had brought the horn at the right time when it was badly needed. But all was in vain since the dog was busy eating faeces instead of doing what it was sent to do. In the end the he-goat used the horn that the she-goat brought to kill the ram.

This folktale provides the context within which the idiom *to go on a dog's errand*, is used within the Izon socio-cultural setting in the sense of doing something which is contrary to what one was sent to do. This is reflected in text 21:

Those we chose to represent us in the past *went on a dog's errand*. Instead of doing what we sent them to do, they did otherwise.

To hold the walking stick (to become very old) is a direct translation of the Izon idiom ***akolọ kọrị*** where ***akolọ*** means *a special type of walking stick held by old people to support themselves while walking*, while ***kọrị*** means hold. The ***akolọ*** is a metaphor for old age since it is known to be associated with the old people who hold it so as to support themselves while walking. *To hold the walking stick* means to become very *old* as reflected in text 22:

It is the responsibility of the *opu duweji* to protect the living. As part of this responsibility, each *opu duweji* in an Izon family ensures that the members of the family whom he has left behind do not die young but be old enough *to hold the walking stick*.

To be a mosquito in somebody's ears (to be a constant source of disturbance to somebody) can be traced to the love affair between the mosquito (***otungbolo***) and the ear (***beri***). According to an Izon folktale which explains why the mosquito disturbs the ear, the mosquito was in passionate love with the ear and, thus, it had to propose marriage to the ear. The ear, however, turned down the mosquito's offer on the grounds that the mosquito had an uncertain future in the sense that the mosquito could, because of its light nature, be blown away to the sea by the breeze and perish there. The mosquito begged the ear to consider the proposal but the ear maintained that it would not marry the mosquito. Thus, the mosquito had no other option than to leave the ear alone. But before it left the mosquito promised that whenever it came across the ear, it would remind the ear that it (the mosquito) was still alive. This is what the mosquito usually does whenever it comes close to the ear and so the mosquito serves as a source of disturbance to the ear. The mosquito has become a metaphor for any constant source of disturbance in the Izon socio-cultural context. This provides the context within which the idiom *to be a mosquito to somebody's ears*, is used and understood within the Izon setting to mean a constant source of disturbance to somebody. This is reflected in text 23:

The Ijaw Nation will continue *to be a mosquito to the ears* of Nigeria until our demands are met.

To be under the white cloth (***pina bide***) is believed within the Izon socio-cultural setting to be the symbol of the Egbesu, the god of war and peace. The *white cloth* represents the Egbesu and all that it stands for in the Izon setting: purity, justice, power, protection, etc. This perhaps explains why the youths who go to war, usually tie a piece of white cloth round the head because the white cloth signifies the presence of the Egbesu at the war and provides protection for them. The effect of this white cloth is most felt especially when the bullets that are shot at the youths are either diverted elsewhere or made ineffective as they are prevented from penetrating the bodies of the youths. The

youths are protected by the Egbesu because they are believed *to be under the white cloth*, which is the symbol of the Egbesu.

To be under the white cloth is used and understood within the Izon context in the sense of *being under the protection of the Egbesu*. This context is what is reflected in text 24:

The youths cannot be harmed because they are *under the white cloth*. It serves as bullet proof for them.

Proverbs

Another fascinating manifestation of the influence of the Izon language and culture on English usage in the Izon socio-cultural setting is the use of Izon proverbs which give distinctive Izon flavor to the English of Izon-English bilinguals. Various proverbs directly translated from the Izon language into English are used by Izon-English bilinguals in the Izon cultural context to warn, caution, admonish, console, encourage, and generally add color and vigor to what is being said. Some of these proverbs are presented and analyzed as follows:

The head of the family-head is a refuse dump ump is derived from the translation of the Izon proverb ***okosuwei tibi mi udusu*** which reflects the significant role that the head of the family plays in the Izon cultural setting and the sacrifices he is required to make in the course of carrying out his responsibilities as the eldest male in the family. In the Izon setting, though the family-head is highly respected and admired by all in the family, he is often held responsible for the misconduct of any member of the family. This is so because all the members of the family are recognized and treated as individuals under the name of the family head who is widely regarded as a role model that is expected to provide the right type of cultural training to each member of the family. So, if a man or woman from the family misbehaves it is assumed that the head of the family did not give the required cultural training to the person and so he is blamed for failing to perform his cultural duties. If, for example, a woman from the family gets married and behaves in an improper manner in her husband's house, it is the head of the family who will, in most cases, receive the blame for not giving her the correct cultural training required of a good Izon woman despite the fact that he is not her biological father.

Similarly, if any male member of the family takes a wife from another family, it is in the name of the family-head that the ***ikọ*** (*bride-price*) is arranged and if the woman has any problem in her matrimonial home and the members of her family want to talk to the husband, the message is usually conveyed through the head of the family, who receives all the insults, blame, attacks, etc. directed at the family because of the misconduct of individual members of the family. This is why the head of the eldest man in the family is described as a refuse dump in the Izon context. The *head of the family-head*, therefore, becomes a metaphor for anyone holding a leadership position. Thus the proverb serves as a form of encouragement to those in leadership positions to forge ahead despite the expected impediments that may come their way in the course of performing leadership responsibilities. This proverb also reminds every leader of the fact that the role (s)he

plays is that which requires selfless devotion and sacrifice and (s)he should be prepared to endure any misfortune that may be suffered in the course of performing this duty.

A finger cannot pick a louse from the head is derived from the Izon proverb **keni bira isolo nimi tibi o uku kon ghan**, which reflects the importance attached to unity, co-operation and peaceful co-existence in bringing about development and progress in the Izon socio-cultural setting. *A finger* is a metaphor for any isolated effort made by an individual which may not succeed in producing the desired result. Because it is impossible for a finger to take a louse from the head and other fingers are needed, it is also impossible, in most cases, for the isolated effort of an individual to produce the desired results especially in terms of rapid societal development. Therefore it is important for all in the society to co-operate and work hard to ensure that the common goal of the society is achieved. This proverb puts emphasis on unity, co-operation and peaceful co-existence for the development and progress of society.

Even if the bead is not long enough to go round the neck, it can still be used to tie the wrist is a translation of the Izon proverb, **pon la gha ibolo kpọ kọ bira kaka mini ye**, which underlies the high premium placed on prudent management of available resources in the Izon setting. The proverb *even if the bead is not long enough to go round the neck, it can still be used to tie the wrist* lauds prudent management of resources and discourages wastefulness in the sense that it teaches people to make good use of whatever they have no matter how small or little it is. It urges them to avoid wastefulness and extravagance. The strength of this proverb lies on its ability to teach people to be contented with whatever they have and to encourage them to use it to do exactly what it is most useful for.

He who closes the door does not close the ears is a translated version of the Izon proverb, **wari gban bo beri gban ghan**, often used at the end of a speech or announcement to draw attention to the importance and urgency attached to what has been said thereby jolting the hearer to respond immediately to it. It serves as a form of warning to all that hear the message. It urges each person to adhere strictly to it and do what it requires of that individual.

The sick is a slave to the medicine man, which is sourced from the Izon proverb **donwei burıwei omini**, is often used within the Izon setting as a form of consolation for those who are helpless and are at the mercy of other people who usually oppress or exploit them because of their condition.

Conclusion

This study explores the lexico-semantic variations manifested in the English of Izon-English bilinguals and reveals that the Izon language and culture have tremendous influence on the lexico-semantics of the English of Izon speakers. This influence is noticed in the way such words and expressions as *uncle, to lick an orange, to share a husband, how do you do?, how are you?, Ijawness, Agadagbanship tussle, duburuku rite of passage, to cross to the other side of the river, to split open the crocodile's intestine, the*

head of the family-head is a refuse dump and many others have been domesticated to reflect the Izon socio-cultural experience. It is also found that English usage in the Izon setting is closely linked to the Izon culture and shows that the Izon culture determines or influences appropriate English usage within the Izon socio-cultural context. The lexico-semantic influences presented and analyzed in this study are found to be appropriate within the Izon socio-cultural context because they are deeply rooted in the cultural practices and beliefs of the Izon people. They are accepted as permissible local variations within the Izon context. It is recommended that the permissible local variations whose appropriateness and legitimacy within the Izon context have been convincingly proved in this study should be included in the Nigerian component of the International Corpus of English (ICE) project so as to add an Izon dimension to the description of (Standard) Nigerian English. This is necessary because these permissible local variations, which reflect the Izon socio-cultural experience, are appropriate within the Izon socio-cultural context and so they constitute acceptable standard usage especially in the Izon socio-cultural setting. If the rich lexico-semantic variations explored in this study are incorporated into the ICE project, they will project not only the distinct Izon flavor given to English usage in the Izon socio-cultural context but will also put an end to the doubts that people, especially in the Izon setting, cast on the appropriateness of these variations and will enhance their acceptability and frequency of use both within and outside the Izon socio-cultural setting. Similarly, a massive awareness campaign concerning the relationship between language and culture should be launched in the Izon setting so as to call attention to the fact that the way English is used in the Izon (Nigerian) culture cannot be exactly the same as it is used especially in the native British contexts which are indicated in the dictionary. Even if an expression in the English of Izon-English bilinguals is not found in the dictionary, such an expression should not be condemned as an error but should be considered and accepted as a variant especially if it reflects the Izon socio-cultural experience and is therefore valued as appropriate within the Izon socio-cultural context by the majority of educated Izon speakers. Seminars and workshops should be organized regularly to enlighten people on the appropriateness of these Izon-induced lexico-semantic variations in the English of Izon speakers. That would stress the need to have a positive attitude towards them.

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