

The English Nominal Group and Shop-naming in a Nigerian University Community

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The aim of this study was to examine the usage of English in a Nigerian university community, particularly through identification of the types of nominal group used in naming shops as well as the linguistic resources used in their creation. The data used for the study were fifty shop-names, which are all English nominal groups. Analysis of data showed that the mh type of nominal group was most prevalent while the hq type was not attested. Analysis of experiential metafunctions showed that the Classifier elements were the most frequent modification elements. Analysis further showed observable intrusion of indigenous language and culture to nominal group formation in English. In addition, analysis of the data has revealed a special register of shop-naming which shares affinities with the language of advertising.

Keywords: English nominal group, shop-names, Nigeria, indigenous language

1. Introduction

This work is an exploratory study which sought to examine the usage of the English nominal group in an outer circle English university community, particularly as it relates to shop-naming in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Obafemi Awolowo University is a community of over 20,000 students and about 5,000 members of staff who are from different ethnic groups and different cultural backgrounds.

A university setting such as this is a suitable place for examining the type of English that is evolving in Nigeria. Being a member of staff at the Obafemi Awolowo University for many years and having visited many other university campuses in the country, I have observed that the pattern of shop-naming in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife is similar to what obtains in most of the other university campuses. A study such as this can assist in providing more understanding about the use of English in a multilingual/multicultural environment like Nigeria. English has become a world language, one of the most widely spoken languages in the world with many varieties in different countries and social contexts. It is against this background that Kachru (1992: 356) divides World Englishes into three concentric circles, the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle: these three circles represent “the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts.” Jenkins (2003: 8) on cross-currents about English as a world language further contends that

these Englishes have much in common, through their shared history and their affinity with either British or American English. But there is also much that is unique to each variety, particularly in terms of their accents, but also in their idiomatic uses of vocabulary, their grammars and their discourse strategies.

Within the dialectal variety of English of this study the data can be situated within a particular register by virtue of the use of distinctive lexical choices which reveal the linguistic features as being closely related to the language of advertisement. The shop-names can be seen as sharing affinities with the language of advertisement because as Wright (2000: 4) puts it, “many different tools exist to achieve different objectives as the advertiser attempts to move the customer through the communication process from a state of unawareness to one of awareness, interest, desire and eventual purchase.” The shop names are used to draw the attention of the public to the availability of goods and services and so they all generally adopt a persuasive orientation in their use of language.

The model that is used as the theoretical framework for this study is systemic linguistics. One major distinguishing feature of systemic linguistics is the high priority given to sociological aspects of language. Systemic linguistics is concerned largely with the social functions of language and how they are fulfilled by the resources of the language. In this connection Berry (1975: 23) posits that

when describing languages or varieties of languages, systemic linguists use a model which they think will best enable them to discover how the forms of a language or variety of a language can be related to its social functions.

2. Language Situation in an ESL University Community

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, (OAU) is located in the heartland of the Yoruba nation, Yoruba being one of the three main language groups in Nigeria. On the language situation in Nigeria, Barber (2000: 230) states that

in Nigeria, the most populous of Black African countries, there are three main languages (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa), and over four hundred local ones but English is also an official language and plays a major role in government and administration. It is also used as a language of wider communication, at any rate among the higher socio-economic groups.

The language situation on the university campus is, however, dominated by English and indigenous languages, particularly Yoruba. The English that is used in this community can rightly be described as a dialect of English. In this connection, Afolayan (1977: 20) contends that:

from the lexical point of view the features of a Nigerian dialect of English are obvious to any observer of the Nigerian scene. This is not surprising since the area of vocabulary is where the contact of a language with another culture and geographical environment is recorded.

In OAU, there are small shops which have arisen as a result of the peculiar economic and social circumstances of the community. Most of these shops are named in English and it is these

shop-names, and the linguistic resources used in their creation that constitute the major thrust of this paper.

3. The English Nominal Group

The nominal group is “typically a group with a noun (or pronoun) as its head, and that noun may be modified but it does not have to be modified in order to constitute a group in this technical sense” (Bloor & Bloor 2004: 31). The nominal group can function as subject and complement in a clause and can also function as the complement of a preposition in a prepositional phrase.

In systemic theory (Halliday 1994), three functional components or metafunctions are realized in language. In the English clause a combination of three different structures derives from the three distinct functional components. On the grammar of the group, however, Halliday (1994: 158) asserts that “although we can still recognize the same three components, they are not represented in the form of separate whole structures but rather as partial contributions to a single structural line.” Group structure is, therefore, interpreted in terms of the ideational metafunctions.

The ideational component in group structure is split into two: experiential and logical. The logical component defines the logical-semantic relations in the group, and the relationship in the nominal group is that of modification. The element preceding the head is called the *premodifier* and that which follows the head the *postmodifier*. On the logical component three positions can then be identified: premodifier, head and postmodifier. In a similar vein, Muir (1972: 26) identifies the element of structure of the nominal group as modifier, head and qualifier (*m,h,q*):

Since *h* is an obligatory element but *m* and *q* are optional and dependent one may list the primary elements of structure of the nominal groups as

$$\xrightarrow{\hspace{1.5cm}}$$
 (m), h, (q)

where, as previously, the arrow indicates that sequence is invariable, the brackets indicate optional elements and the commas indicate that this is a list of elements of structure, not a structure.

The data for this study are all nominal groups and they are examined on the basis of four structure types of nominal group:

- h* nominal group with head only e.g. NG24-*Fingerlicks*
- mh* nominal group with head and preceding modification e.g. NG23-*Emerald Salon*
- mhq* nominal group with head with pre-and post-modification e.g. NG49-*Shalom Home of Wears*
- hq* nominal group with head and post modification of head e.g. *Language in action*

In addition to the logical sub-function this paper also examines the experiential function in the nominal group. Bloor & Bloor (2004) identified six experiential functions in a nominal group and these are: Deictic, Numerative, Epithet, Classifier, Thing and Qualifier. The elements

which realize the premodifier on the logical sub-function are divided on the basis of their experiential roles into Deictic, Numerative, Epithet and Classifier.

Deictic has a pointing function and is usually realized by a determiner, a possessive noun or a possessive pronoun. The Deictic element also indicates whether the subject of the Thing is specific or not specific. The Numerative function can be realized by the word class *numeral* which includes cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers and quantitative words such as *many*, *few*, and *several*. According to Halliday (1994: 163), “The Numerative element indicates some numerical feature of the subset: either quantity or order, either exact or inexact.” However, out of the six experiential functions of the nominal group only the Numerative function is not realized in the data analysed in this study.

The third experiential function is the Epithet. The Epithet indicates the features or characteristics of the modified item and is typically realized by the adjective. Halliday (1994) distinguishes two types of Epithet: those that are experiential in function in that they provide what may be an objective property of the Thing and interpersonal epithets which may express the speaker’s subjective attitude. The principal difference between the two according to Halliday (1994: 163) is that “experiential epithets are potentially defining, whereas interpersonal ones are not”.

The Classifier has the function of sub classifying the modified item into a subclass of such an item. On Epithet and Classifier functions, Bloor & Bloor (2004: 141-2) state that “out of context, many expressions are ambiguous with this functional distinction between Classifier and Epithet” and they go on to say that “The context usually provides sufficient information to make it clear what is intended.” Halliday (1994: 185) also notes that the same word may function as Epithet or as Classifier but there are significant differences between them “Classifiers do not accept degrees of comparison or intensity... and they tend to be organized in mutually exclusive and exhaustive sets.”

Following Deictic, Numerative, Epithet and Classifier, Thing is the fifth experiential function and it conflates with Head. Thing is usually realized by a noun, pronoun or a deverbal nominal item. Thing, according to Bloor & Bloor (2004: 142), may be “a material inanimate thing, an animal, a person, a substance or even an abstract concept.” The sixth function is Qualifier, and it conflates with postmodifier. The qualifier follows the Thing and is usually realized by prepositional phrases and embedded clauses.

This study analyzes the usage of the nominal group for both logical and experiential functions.

4. Data and Data Analysis

The shop-names investigated in this study are taken from Akintola Hall shopping area. Akintola Hall is a major student hostel and it is strategically located near the Students’ Union Building and the University Sports Centre. This hall has an adjoining open-area that has been converted into shops which respond to the needs of staff and students. All the shops are privately owned and they all have names which confer unique identity on each of them. There are fifty shops in the shopping area and all these shop-names are in English (cf. Appendix) and are nominal groups

by form and function. It is these fifty nominal groups that constitute the data for this study. The shop-names can therefore all be primarily accounted for by the (m) h (q) structure of the English nominal group.

An analysis of the fifty nominal groups on the basis of the logical component of the ideational metafunctions revealed the following Head-modification relationship:

	No of Nominal Groups
headword only (<i>h</i>)	03
premodifier plus headword (<i>mh</i>)	46
headword plus postmodifier (<i>hq</i>)	00
headword plus pre and postmodifier (<i>mhq</i>)	01
Total	50

Table 1 *Head-modification analysis of Nominal Groups*

Before examining these various subtypes, I first of all wish to make a comment on the headword in these nominal groups. As mentioned earlier, Thing is usually realized by a noun, pronoun or a deverbal nominal item. In my data, all the headwords are realized by nouns. Out of the fifty nominal groups, there are three nominal groups which have compound items realizing Thing e.g. NG 01 – *Stores and Supermarket*; NG 11 – *Club and Studio*; and NG 36 – *Computers and Technologies*. The headword and the Classifier are both expounded by nouns and both may have compound items; instances of compound items realizing Classifier will be provided shortly.

4.1 *Analysis of the Shop – names*

4.1.1 *h-type*

As indicated above, there were only three occurrences of this nominal group type in the data i.e. NG 24 – *Fingerlicks*; NG 31 – *K – Mart*; and NG 50 - *In Thing*. An analysis of these occurrences shows that *Fingerlicks* is a headword that is morphologically speaking a compound word while *K – Mart* is also a form of compounding. NG 50 - *In Thing* can only be analyzed as *h – type* with the two items taken together because *In*, a preposition, cannot be analyzed as a modifier element to *In Thing* because a preposition does not normally belong to the word classes that occupy premodifier position in the English nominal group and *In thing* is a well-established expression with and without a hyphen.

4.1.2 *mh – type*

Forty-six of the nominal groups have premodifier-headword relationship. Comments have been made on the headword of the nominal groups in Section 4 above while the modifier elements will be examined below in terms of their experiential metafunctions in the nominal group

4.1.3 *hq-type*

No single occurrence of nominal group with headword and postmodifier was found in the data. It is interesting to observe that there may be a link between language acquisition and usage.

Akande (2002:244) in a study of the acquisition of nominal group types by secondary

school students in Nigeria came to the conclusion that the *hq* type is more difficult to acquire than the other nominal groups types. On the acquisition of the *hq* type he asserts that “the *hq* type is the most difficult to master by our subjects. In the first place, it is the least used of the four types. Secondly, it is the only structure in which we recorded the highest percentage of errors.” One can, therefore, postulate that part of the reason why the *hq* type is not used at all can be traced to difficulties which the users of English as a second language have with the acquisition of this nominal group type.

4.1.4 *mhq* type

Only one nominal group has both pre and post modification realization, i.e. NG49 *Shalom Home of Wears* where the qualifier is realized by a prepositional phrase. The preponderance of modification elements in the nominal group types has, therefore, occurred at the premodification.

4.2 *Experiential metafunctions in the Nominal Groups*

The metafunctions realized in the modifier are Deictic, Numerative, Epithet and Classifier. A Head-modification analysis presented above showed that forty- seven of the nominal groups have premodification elements. Table 2 presents an analysis of the realization of experiential functions and their sequential ordering in the premodifier of the nominal groups.

	No. of Nominal Groups
Deictic only	01
Epithet only	03
Classifier only	30
Deictic + Classifier	05
Epithet + Classifier	03
*Classifier + Epithet	02
*Classifier + Epithet + Classifier	02
*Deictic + Classifier + Epithet + Classifier	<u>01</u>
Total	<u>47</u>

Table 2 *Experiential structure of the Nominal Groups from Deictic to Classifier*

As seen above, the numerative function is not realized in our data. Before discussing the experiential functions, we want to make a comment about the last three entries in Table 2 above. The sequences observed here with NG 03, NG 08, NG 14; NG 17 and NG 45 respectively would be regarded as unusual following mother tongue English norms. Such usages are, however, common-place in Nigerian English. Osinubi (1984), in his study of the language of Nigerian newspaper advertisements as a variety of written English in Nigeria, found that advertisement language frequently revealed errors with preposition usage, concord and punctuation among others and concluded that such errors “suggest the absence of a native speaker’s intuition and also points to the fact that because English is a second language in Nigeria the varying degrees of proficiency can normally be expected from its Nigerian users.” (Osinubi 1984: 191). However,

the linguistic features discussed above function successfully in the linguistic context of the study and are not regarded as deviant forms.

4.2.1 *Deictic*

The Deictic elements have the function of identifying the subset of the Thing in the nominal group, indicating whether the subset of the Thing is specific or non-specific. In this data, only seven items are used as deictic elements and these are - *the* (02), *God's* (03), *his* (01) and *whatelse* (01). All the seven items are specific deictics. On *the*, Halliday (1992: 161) notes that “The word *the* is a specific determinative Deictic of a peculiar kind: it means ‘the subset in question is identifiable; but this will not tell you how to identify it – the information is somewhere around where you can recover it.’” *The* in our data has the function of specifying the Thing but the two instances are cataphoric because the specific information in each case is provided in the text following it. On the other hand, *God's* and *his* specify the Thing by possession and *whatelse* has its deictic feature specified by an interrogative. The deictic elements in our data are all specific because our data is about naming, and it is, therefore, understandable why no non-specific deictics are used.

4.2.2 *Epithet*

The Epithet indicates some quality of the Thing. Eleven items are used to realize epithet function in the data and ten of these are adjectives while one verb *turning* NG 43 also functions as epithet. Although no clear-cut distinction can be made between epithets that are experiential and those that are attitudinal in function, many of the epithets used are attitudinal in function e.g. NG 02 - *marvelous*, NG 03 - *modern* and NG 04 *divine*. The use of epithets with interpersonal function rather than those with experiential function is understandable in the linguistic context. The epithets are not used to convey objective features of the Thing in the nominal group but rather to express subjective views about the shops and services being offered. Hayakawa (1974), in this connection, suggests that commercial advertising has propagandist tendencies and that such tendencies aim to promote intentional orientation of readers towards specific products or services. Comparing advertising to poetry, he asserts that both have much in common as

they both use words chosen for their affective and connotative values rather than for their denotative content” and “Whatever the object for sale is, the copywriter, like the poet must invest it with significance so that it becomes symbolic of something beyond itself...whether he writes about toothpaste or tires, convertibles or colas, the task on the copywriter is the poeticizing of consumer goods. (Hayakawa 1974: 219)

The linguistic resources used in the shop-names under investigation are not in any way different in this respect. Among the adjectives used, there also is an adjective compound, NG 42 - *wear-wise* which consists of two elements, the first a noun and the second an adjective. In NG 14 - *tastee* is apparently a coinage from *tasty* while *int'l* in NG 08 is an abbreviation.

4.2.3 *Classifier*

Bloor & Bloor (2004: 142) assert that “the adjective versus noun distinction does not correspond to that of Epithet versus Classifier” as adjectives too can function as Classifier. Classifier

function in the data is, however, realized mainly by nouns. Many of the items are names of individuals e.g. NG 20 – *Badejoko*, NG 21 – *Amaka*, and NG 33 – *Ogo-Oluwa*. Some of the nouns are acronyms e.g. NG 11 – T.S.P, NG 27 – D & Y and NG 34 – S.A.P. and these acronyms are composed of the initials of the shop owners. There is also clipping used as a word formation source to create some Classifiers e.g. NG 07 – *Manco* and NG 13 – *Jemisco*. In addition, there are three nominal groups which have their Classifier function realized by compound noun structures e.g. NG 26 – *Snacks and Varieties*, NG 35 – *Centre and Variety*, and NG 47 – *Stationery and Gift Shop*. We also have an instance NG 18 – *God is Love* where the Classifier function is realized by an embedded clause. The Classifier function is also realized by other devices. Borrowing into English is presented in NG 10 – *Suya*. *Suya* is described by Jowitt (1991: 135) as having Hausa source and referring to ‘strips of cow meats grilled over open fires on skewers.’ An important indigenous cultural input to the usage of English, taken from the Yoruba language can be found in NG 29 – *Mama Tee-Kay Salon*. In Yoruba language, an acceptable form of identification is to be called ‘father of...’, or ‘mother of...’ In the example above, we have in translation, ‘mother of *Tee-Kay*’ used as Classifier to submodify *Salon*. *Mama* is the Yoruba word for mother while *Tee Kay* are coined English forms to stand for *Taiwo* and *Kehinde*, Yoruba names for Twin One and Twin Two respectively. Osinubi (1984:172) on the use of indigenous language items in advertisements, also suggests that “the items are planted into ads in their untranslated forms so as to preserve whatever cultural connotations they possess.” He goes further on to assert that “the end-product is not just any particular kind of English but an amorphous variety having numerous linguistic and extra-linguistic features.”(Osinubi 1984: 192-193). Another interesting example indicative of the multilingual, multicultural situation is the Classifier *Alpha* in NG 48. The shop owner is popularly called *Alfa*, a title for a knowledgeable individual in Islam, and regarding *alfa* and *alpha* as homophones he opts to name his shop *Alpha Stitches/Stores*. In NG 46 – *Affordables* realizes Classifier function, but the word *affordable*, an adjective has been turned into a plural count noun. In the same vein, we have uncountable nouns such as *stationery* and *variety* used as countable nouns resulting in NG 20 – *stationeries* and NG 21 – *varieties store*. The Classifier is where we have the richest experiential function exhibited in the nominal groups investigated.

4.2.4 *Thing*

As mentioned earlier, *Thing* is the key experiential item in a nominal group and it conflates with *Head*. In this data, only three nominal groups have no modification elements with *Thing*. *Thing* is realized in all the nominal groups by nouns. Items used to realize *Thing* are, however, exaggerations in many cases e.g. NG 01 - *Supermarket* used for a small shop, NG 03 - *Stores* used for a small shop where only a few items are available for sale, and NG 19 - *Clinic* to refer to a small beauty salon. All these reflect interpersonal meanings that are used to colour the usage of the nominal groups and to glamorize the shop-names and the services offered in ways similar to the specialized register of advertising.

4.2.5 *Qualifier*

The *Qualifier*, the experiential label for the postmodifier, is the element that follows the *Thing* and it also has the function of characterizing the *Thing*. Halliday (1994: 166) notes that “unlike

the elements that precede the Thing, which are words..., what follows the Thing is either a phrase or a clause. With only rare exceptions, all Qualifiers are EMBEDDED.” Only one nominal group NG 49 - *Shalom Home of Wears* has a Qualifier. In this nominal group *Home* is the Thing which is followed by *of Wears*, which is an embedded prepositional phrase.

5. Shop-names and English Language use in an ESL community

Cassirer (1971: 114) in a consideration of names and their significance in language made the following incisive comments:

The very act of denominations depends on a process of classification. To give a name to an object or action is to subsume it under a certain class concept...They are determined rather by human interests and human purposes. But these interests are not fixed and invariable. Nor are the classifications to be found in human speech made at random; they are based on certain constant and recurring elements in our sense experience.

It is obvious that the shop – names under investigation are based on the sense experience and recurrent elements in the community in which these names have been given, and these experiences differ from what obtains in inner circle Englishes. There are many instances of shop names which are drawn from religious contexts in the data. The following nominal groups have overt religious sources, most especially in the modification elements: NG 4 - *Divine Grace*, NG 9 - *God's Support*; NG 12 - *Thy will*; NG 18 - *God is love*; NG 38 - *God's Time*; NG 39 - *Covenant*; NG 41 - *God's Blessing*; NG 45 - *His Grace*; and NG 49 - *Shalom*. Religion plays an active role in both individual and societal interactions in the community. Shop-owners, therefore, choose to exploit the vocabulary and symbolism of religious English for commercial purposes.

6. Conclusion

This is a descriptive study of an aspect of the usage of English in Nigeria and we have examined the English nominal group and how the dynamics of the community has affected its various realizations for shop-naming purposes at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. We have found instances where the nominal groups have not conformed to the established structure of the English nominal group and other colourations that do not occur frequently in an Inner Circle English situation. We also have been able to identify what we can call a special register of shop-naming which share many features with the language of advertising. This study can, therefore, confirm Halliday's (1970: 142) contention that “the particular form taken by the grammatical system of language is closely related to the social and personal-needs that language is required to serve.”

It is obvious that a new dialect of English is growing out of the inevitable adaptation that English faces while trying to meet new local challenges, and this is reflected in not only vocabulary items but innovative morphological and syntactic considerations.

Appendix: List of Shop – Names

NG 01:	Dafes Stores and Supermarket
NG 02:	Marvellous Ventures
NG 03:	City Modern Stores
NG 04:	Divine Grace Variety Stores
NG 05:	D and Y Connection
NG 06:	Tee – Mart Super Store
NG 07:	Manco Electronics and Electrical Stores
NG 08:	Femo Int'l Shoe Works
NG 09:	God's Support
NG 10:	Suya Spot
NG 11:	TSP Video Club and Studio
NG 12:	Thywill Mini Mart
NG 13:	Jemisco Medicine Shop
NG 14:	M & T Tastee Fries
NG 15:	Crown Ventures
NG 16:	Good Health Medicine Supermarket
NG 17:	Ogo Oluwa Electrical Store and General Merchant
NG 18:	God is love Shop
NG 19:	Family Millionaire Beauty Clinic
NG 20:	Badejoko Stationeries Shop
NG 21:	Amaka Varieties Store
NG 22:	Success Variety Goods
NG 23:	Emerald Salon
NG 24:	Fingerlicks
NG 25:	Flourish Boutique
NG 26:	Victory Snacks and Variety Stores
NG 27:	D and Y Gift Shop
NG 28:	Peacock Salon
NG 29:	Mama Tee-Kay Salon
NG 30:	Shammah Health Care and Supermarket
NG 31:	K – Mart
NG 32:	The Bees Salon
NG 33:	Ogo Oluwa Fashion Centre
NG 34:	SAP Printers
NG 35:	Samo Fashion Centre and Variety Goods
NG 36:	Samiestob Computers and Technologies
NG 37:	Whatelse Variety Store
NG 38:	God's Time Food Stuffs
NG 39:	Covenant Store

NG 40:	Ellaik Business Centre
NG 41:	God's Blessing Hair Clinic
NG 42:	Wear – Wise Boutique
NG 43:	Turning Point
NG 44:	The Pen Pushers Salon
NG 45:	His Grace Frozen Foods and Variety Stores
NG 46:	Affordables Boutique
NG 47:	Payless Stationeries and Gift Shop
NG 48:	Alpha Stitches / Stores
NG 49:	Shalom Home of Wears
NG 50:	In Thing

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In *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics* [online]. 2007, vol. 4, no. 2 [cit. 2007-06-14]. Available on web page <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTL09/pdf_doc/3.pdf>. ISSN 1338-782X.