



THE MORPHOLOGICAL STUDY OF COLOUR TERMS IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT: *The paper investigates the nature of morphological processes of colour terms among the users of English in Nigeria and their syntactic usages using a multi-dimensional approach in data gathering. The data was drawn from one hundred subjects across ten ethnic groups, including Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as well as fifteen textual materials written in English by Nigerian scholars. The paper adopts a cognitive linguistic multidimensional framework. The paper reveals that the colour systems and usages among Nigerians contrast with the system within the native speakers of the language. For instance "fresh leave green", "pale blue", "blood red", "yolk yellow", "black black", "dark so and so", "charcoal", "flesh", , "dirty green", "dudu" and so on are formed through several morphological processes such as coining, clipping, blending, borrowing, compounding, reduplication and affixation as well as usage in various syntactic operations as in nominals and adjectives: "The shirt is dark so and so." and "The yellows ran out of the scorching sun." which serves as adjective and nominal plural respectively. Hence the paper concludes that morphology and syntax of most colours in Nigerian context have been influenced by many indigenous languages in the country. Hence, the hierarchy of the basic colours violates the Berlin and Kay's evolutionary sequence and Kay and Maffi's Trajectory model of Colour terms within the circle of the native speakers of English.*

KEYWORDS: Colour terms, Morpho-Syntax, English, Nigeria.



INTRODUCTION

The paper investigates the nature of morphological processes of English colour terms in the Nigerian context. Syntax and Morphology are closely related terms in linguistic study that have been given wide coverage. The colour lexicons vary across the languages of the world as observed by Luckiesh (1920), Durbin (1971), Zarru (1978), Bature (2005), Rabi (2009), Butari (2010) and Danladi (2010). As such, comparing the morphological nature of colour lexicons and their grammatical usage would no doubt fill the lacuna that lies between the native and non native speakers of English.

Nigeria being a multi-ethnic nation with deep cultural and linguistic diversity has not been able to use any of its indigenous languages as the official language of the country. This therefore resulted in the adoption of English to assume that role. Consequent upon its contact with more than four hundred (400) ethnic groups in the country, a new hybridised version of the language was born with several linguistic ferments. The English language spoken in Nigeria is different from the English spoken in many parts of Europe and of course Africa due to its domestication to suit the various cultures of the people and the Nigerian environment in particular. There have been a series of arguments as to the existence of Nigerian English and scholars have different opinions.

Thus the colour vocabularies in Nigerian English may seem to be more sophisticated than the colour vocabularies in other languages and of course the Standard English, as claimed by Lukiesh (1920) that the deeper the culture of the society the more sophisticated the colour terms in that linguistic environment. It is worth mentioning here that Rabi (2009) and Butari (2010) have conducted studies on colour terms in Nigerian English and Jukun languages respectively with emphasis on semantics. Thus this paper explores the morphological and syntactic aspect of colour terms in Nigerian English, an area hitherto not given much attention by scholars.

Colour Terms Studies across Cultures

The study of Berlin and Kay in 1969 underlines a new perspective to colour terms studies when they used the arrays of Munsell Colour Chips to find about the evolution of colour terms, the hierarchy of basic colours and the possible meaning colour terms convey across different cultures and social groups. As part of their findings, they produce evidence to show that the similarities and differences among languages in respect of the way in which they divide up colour spectrum are not as arbitrary as they had once been thought to be. Berlin and Kay further draw attention to the importance of focal meaning of a term, rather than its peripheral meaning. Their hypothesis has also aroused a good deal of controversy. First is the universal and non-universal substructure in the vocabulary of colour and second is on the saliency of some colour-foci and their universality. The Munsell colour chips are a broad-scale inventory of colour perceived by the eyes that exist in the natural world.

Berlin and Kay's (ibids) studies further reveal that colour terms are classified based on their prototypes which largely predict the colour terms of a language. According to them, there is little agreement between speakers of the same language as to where the colour term boundaries should be placed, but there is usually close agreement on the location of the prototype colours. Thus, they conclude that all languages appear to have between 2 and 11 basic colour terms. Naroll (1970), while supporting the position of Berlin and Kay on basic



colour terms, comments that the size of colour vocabulary is not determine arbitrary as there is a strong connection between the number of terms in a language and societal complexity of the community speaking that language. Hence, the sophistication of the culture of a society using a language calls for higher number of colour vocabulary in that language. Durbin (1971) on the other hand reported that the smaller the colour terms of a society, the older and more sophisticated their culture. This is because the richness of any language in terms of vocabulary depends on the nature of its cultural norms and values. These striking differences between colour terms of various languages prompted many researchers to conclude that each language has a unique system in a totally arbitrary way. However, later studies conducted by Heider (1972), Lucy (1992), Payne (2003), Bature (2005), Benjamin (2006) and Danladi (1998; 2010) have all shifted their thoughts from the earlier claim of Berlin and Kay to considering colour terms study tied to culture and largely the diversification of meaning across cultures.

It is obvious that colour vocabularies are present in all languages but their perception varies from one language to another. This made it impossible for a language to have and name all the colours in the world. If this is the case, we can rightly claim that the morphology of colour also is not unique. Several morphological processes could be used to form colour vocabulary as earlier noted by Danladi (1998; 2010) in his different studies on Hausa, Gbagyi and Sakkwatanci colour terms. In these works he observes that some colour vocabularies are formed with single words. For example "fari" or "hwari" (white), "ja" (red), "shu}i" (blue), in Hausa while in Gbagyi it is only "zyi" (black), "silver" and "zinari" (gold) that are formed with a single word.

Other colour names are formed through reduplication, ideophones and/or compounding as in "fari fat" (complete white), "fari-fari" (whitish), "jajir" (intensity red) and "shayi pmana" (orange), "elo-elo" (yellow), "beyi-beyi" (red). It has also been discovered that some colour names are gender sensitive which emerged as a result of a change in the last vowel as in "fari"- "fara", "ba}i"- "ba}a". The issue of gender variation in colour naming is a matter of choice by language users.

Zarru} (1978) illustrates that colour terms in Hausa language can be described by means of reduplication and compound constructions as demonstrated in the examples below:

Hausa	Glossary
karan dafi	purpled red
ruwan ganye	green
ruwan shuni	blue
miyon goro	orange
}asa-}asa	brownish
hoda-hoda	pinkish
fari-fari	whitish

He also observes that colour terms in Hausa can be used as noun/noun phrases, adjectives/adjectival phrases. For example:

Shu}i (blue) noun (N)

Shu}iyar riga (blue shirt) Adjectival phrase (Adj. P)



Similar studies in Maa language spoken by Masai people of Tanzania as reported by Payne (2003) revealed that some colour vocabularies in Masai are formed through derivation. For example "grey colour" (suyaana) is derived from a noun "wild dog or wolf" (osuyani), "yellow colour" (sikitoi) from "colostrum milk" (i-sikitok), "dark black" (kukuo) from "piece of charcoal" (en-kukuo). In a related development, Lu (1997) reports that Mandarin has single term for green which is "lu" and single term for blue which is "lan". But Japanese use two derivational names for green which are "midori" derived from "midoru" (to be in leaf, to flourish in reference to trees) and "guriin" derived from the English word "green".

As part of her findings, Rabi reported that verbalised colour words in Nigerian English may take suffixes such as "-en", "-ed", "-ing", "-ened" and "-ening" as in "whiten", "purpled", "browning", "blackened" and "reddening" respectively but did not discuss deeply the processes involved and the circumstances surrounding them. She however revealed that colour words can function as verbs and as adjectives.

Butari (2010) also conducted a study on lexico-semantic contrast in some Jukun and English Semantic fields using colour terms as terms of reference. He reported that the origin of colour in any given language can be influenced by the following factors:

- a) Colour is determined by some objective features such as "plants", "blood", "sky" and the natural system of the rainbow.
- b) Colour is determined by cultural needs. The cultural considerations certain colours enjoy make them distinctively important. For example "black" and "red" colours could symbolise different things in various languages.
- c) Colour is determined by some psychological foci. With regard to this, Lennerberg (1962) revealed that colour spectrum is an ideal aspect of the environment to study psycholinguistically because it is continuous in human experience, while colour terminologies are categorical.

Butari used Berlin and Kay criteria to come up with three basic colours in Jukun. These are "Ambumbu", "Apepe" and "Agbanshi" which corresponds to English "white", "black" and "red" respectively. The English colours "Blue" and "yellow" are adopted in Jukun as "buluu" and "yelo" respectively. However, the morphology of these colours according to him is fantastic as each begins with an "a" sound. Finally he confirms that colour in Jukun is seen in terms of its wetness rather than its lightness, darkness or dryness which could be the reason why colour is called "zape" meaning "water" in the language. Furthermore, Butari reveals that some English non-basic colour terms such as "beige", "bronze", "gold", "scarlet", and "silver", among others, have no equivalent in Jukun. These differences, according to him, exist only at the surface level. He therefore called for re-evaluation of colours across languages since languages differ widely and unpredictably in the way they divide the colour space.

In essence, both Rabi (2009) and Butari (2010) focus heavily on semantics of basic colour terms in their various studies using linguistic descriptive theory as a framework of analysis. While this work focuses on the semantic of non-basic colour terms of Nigerian English, the morphological processes of both basic and non-basic colour terms and how they are used in syntactic structures of Nigerian English.



Colour perception and vocabulary vary across languages which results in encapsulation of some colours into others in many languages. The position is held by Maiyanga (1987), Dogondaji (1998; 2010), Rabi (2009) and Butari (2010) in their various studies on colour terms in Igala, Gbagyi, Hausa, Kanuri, Idoma, Nigerian English and Jukun respectively. Black colour for example is "apepe" in Jukun, "ba}i" in Hausa, "zyi" in Gbagi, and "edudu" in Igala which symbolises failure, defeat, betrayal, poverty, wickedness, evil, dirt or uncleanliness, displeasure, grief, mourning, disappointment or horrible situation in these languages. One interesting thing about colour systems in languages is that they are all formed as single words. However the colour could be used with its various shades to denote special meanings. For example the figurative expression:

"Pere ni shi adi pepe."- "person this is a body black (transliteration); this impliedly means "This person is wicked."

"Pikina m pe kenra"- "heart my black terribly (transliteration)" this means "I am highly depressed."

Bastide (1958) further remarks that the problem of symbolism is not only of theoretical interest but also has practical implication. In ancient Egypt, for example, the classification of beings was reflected in the order of colours. Greeks and Christianity leave two extremes of "white" and "black" that represent "purity" and "evil". The association of "black" with hell, death, the shades of night, and sin inevitably influences the European view of Africans. For instance when a white man is talking of a Negro who he admires, he may say "though the person in question is Negro, he has the soul of a white man."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used in this paper is the cognitive linguistic theory and the Lucy's Characteristic Referential Range and Formal Distribution Potential. This is because the Berlin and Kay's use of hierarchy (scale of preference) to account for basic colour terms of a language lacks substantial evidence that can refute the doubts expressed by Lyons (1968) on the semantic relativity common to colour terms of all languages and Zarru (1978) and Danladi (1998; 2010) questioning the integrity of such theory to account for the morphological and syntax of colour terms across languages of the world. The theory was also unable to foresee Palmer's statement to the effect that the importance of contextual meanings cannot be compared among languages. Furthermore the theory was unable to invalidate the strong evidence of co-equality of illustrative competence inherent in the diversity of colour meaning, as demonstrated by Conklin (1955) and Heider (1972) in their studies of Hanunoo and Dani languages respectively. Since this work is a field study, the field theory of Ian Davies and Greville Corbett is used to collect data on one hand and Lucy's idea of "characteristic referential range" and "formal distributional potential" as methods of linguistic analysis on the other.



METHOD

This paper employs a qualitative inquiry on the morphological processes of colour terms to provide additional insights that reflect socio-cultural realities of colour terms in the Nigerian context. The data was obtained through an interview, questionnaire and the textual analysis of some written texts by Nigerian speakers of English. A survey of Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Jukun, Gbagyi, Igala, Kanuri, Idoma, Fula and C'lela speakers of English in Sokoto, Zamfara and Kebbi states was carried out. Ten speakers of English were selected from each of these languages and filled the questionnaire which requested them to provide the English names of the colours in Nigerian context. Interviews were equally conducted to forty of the samples in order to complement the questionnaire responses.

Furthermore, eight (8) written works of Nigerians in English that include three poems, two editions of Nigerian National dailies, and three collections of plays, novels and short stories were examined and the colour terms used in them were identified. The simple survey method of Gay (1981) that involves collecting data from the field, analysing the data, and answering the questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study and report the way things are was adopted. In fact, an integrated approach that allows the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of study was adopted.

DISCUSSION

The data obtained through the identified instruments in the study were collated, grouped, analysed and discussed. In the Nigerian context, colour terms can be formed through compounding -a morphological process in which individual words are joined together to form compound words as in 'red-hot', "sky-blue", "blackboard", "yellow-green". However, the hyphen may or may not be used on compound colour terms in Nigerian English expressions. In fact, compound colour names constitute the highest percentage in Nigerian English colour systems. Some of these colours are formed when a colour lexicon is modified by another colour term or an adjective or an adverb or a noun. Consider the following:

- a) A colour adjective modifies another colour adjective: This is when a compound adjective is formed using two colour adjective stems.

Colour Adj+colour

- i. blue green
- ii. yellow green
- iii. golden brown
- iv. reddish brown
- v. reddish yellow (yellow red)
- vi. golden yellow
- vii. dark grey
- viii. dark blue

The system is commonly used in Nigerian English expressions as in the following:

- i. The girl wore a beautiful *yellow green* gown.
- ii. Allow to get hot and start frying until *golden brown*. (see Rabi 2009)



Morphologically, the bold italic expression in roman (i) "yellow-green" is formed through the use of two basic colours of Nigerian English which are both adjectives. Here "yellow" modifies "green" to produce a compound adjective. In terms of its syntactic roles, the expression is embedded within the verb phrase node. "Yellow-green is used as a compound adjective that modifies the head noun "gown" in the sentence. In ii, "golden brown" is used as a compound noun. This is because "brown" is used as a noun in the sentence while "golden" is an adjective. Hence, Adj+N=Compound Noun.

b) Compound colour name formed with adjective word and a colour name (Adj +colour name= Compound Adj).

Adj. +colour

- i. Lush green
- ii. dirty brown
- iii. dirty red
- iv. dirty white
- v. light green
- vi. light blue
- vii. powdery white (white powder)
- viii. Shiny black

This system is found in the following expressions:

- i. "Where a silvery fence surrounds

A lush green meadow of breath taking beauty".

(From Zailani's poem titled Vision p.63).

- ii. "I looked up into the face of a dark-complexioned man in a dirty brown coat."Ekwensi's The Passport of Mallam Ilia, p.7

- iii. "He showed me a white powder" (Ekwensi's The Passport of Mallam Ilia, p.10

"Lush green" is used as an adjective in sentence (i) above. It modifies the noun "meadow" and both are preceded by indefinite article "a". The whole of the group belongs to a noun phrase

In sentence (ii), the expression "in a dirty brown coat" is embedded by a prepositional phrase and both are introduced by "into" and "in" respectively.

c) A colour name added to a noun to produce a compound colour term. In English grammar adjective words always come before a noun it modifies but is not the case with some colours in Nigerian English expressions. In fact it may sound odd to say "brown harmattan", "green army" or "yellow yolk" to mean compound colour adjectives.



Noun+Colour Name

- i. harmattan brown
- ii. lime green
- iii. army green
- iv. navy blue
- v. navy white
- vi. orange red
- vii. leaf green
- viii. yolk yellow
- ix. royal blue
- x. sky blue
- xi. cotton brown

Consider the following examples where some of the compound colour names are used in sentences:

- i. "Where earth is one compact

Of reddening powder daubed coquettishly

On the harmattan brown

Of trembling houses" (From Osundare's poem titled Meet me at Okeruku, 26)

- ii. "On bare feet with cotton brown from age and sweat" (Ojaide's Independence Day, 46)

- iii. He bought an army green car.

- iv. "When earth, yolk yellow, clamours" (Osundare's Waiting Laughters, 5)

The expression "harmattan brown" is embedded in the verb group of the sentence (i). It serves as an adjectival phrase having been embedded by a prepositional phrase as well as defined by a defining determiner "the".

From the second example, it could be seen that apart from nominal and compound usage of "cotton brown" in the sentence, it is also figuratively used to refer to grey hair that signifies old age.

In example (iii), the expression "an army green car" is used as a Noun Phrase where "army green" serves as compound adjective being preceded by an indefinite article "a" while the noun "car" heads the group.

d) Compound colour terms can be formed by using adverbs and colour names together. Consider the examples below:

- i. wholly green
- ii. starkly white

In both examples, an adverb modifies a colour adjective.



Reduplication Colour Terms

In Nigerian English expressions, colour terms are formed through reduplication to express saturation or tone of a hue instead of using a single name. Similarly it reduces the intensity of the hue when used, as influenced by the usage of most Nigerian languages. Such colours include:

- i. black-black
- ii. white-white
- iii. green-green
- iv. yellow-yellow

One striking thing about these colours is that they are always written with hyphen even though there is no established criterion for its usage. Note that the usage is restricted only to Basic colours.

Descriptive Colour terms

It has been discovered that some colours are descriptive in nature as they can be combined with adverb particles "so" and "too" to stress the intensity of the hue of a colour. Consider the following examples:

- i. brown so and so
- ii. dark so and so
- iii. too red
- iv. too white
- v. too green
- vi. too yellow

Colour Terms formed with affixation

Nigerian English, just like the Standard English, can form colour terms through a morphological process known as suffixation". In this case, a suffix is added to the word ending. Hence the following colour terms are formed by that process.

- i. greenish
- ii. reddish
- iii. whitish
- iv. bluish
- v. blackish
- vi. reddening
- vii. silvery
- viii. golden
- ix. greener
- x. milky
- xi. blacky



Single term colour

The following colours are formed with single word:

- i. black
- ii. red
- iii. white
- iv. blue
- v. green
- vi. yellow
- vii. brown
- viii. grey
- ix. purple
- x. pink
- xi. cream
- xii. ash
- xiii. scarlet
- xiv. maroon
- xv. chocolate
- xvi. peach
- xvii. dudu
- xviii. gold
- xix. silver
- xx. orange
- xxi. lemon
- xxii. milk

Other colour terms are used with plurals as in:

- i. blues
- ii. whites
- iii. greens
- iv. yellows
- v. blacks

Note that the above scheme of colour terms cut across all the listed languages where the samples were selected. They share a unique style of naming colour in Nigerian English, despite the differences in their culture. In terms of English, such distinction is not noticeable and hence, the uniformity in the colour terms.

CONCLUSION

On this note, it could be said that colour terms in Nigerian English exhibit several distinctive linguistic features which depict the environment, culture, perceptions and attitudes of the people in the country. Despite differences in the cultures of the selected languages, speakers of English in Nigeria irrespective of the ethnic group can use colour terms as nominals and adjectives. Hence, expressions like the following:

- i. The shirt is dark so and so. This indicates intensity of the colour and also is used as an adjective.



ii. The yellows have no strong immune system. (nominal and plural) yellows mean albinos.

iii. Army-green is the colour I like best. (nominal and compound)

The patterns of morphology of colour terms in Nigerian English is very rich as it allows formation of colours of this nature: "greenish", "brownish", "yellow""green", "sky blue", "yolk yellow", "dark", "blood red", etc. which are formed through several morphological processes such as coining, clipping, blending, borrowing, compounding, reduplication and affixation. This confirms Adebija (1989:174) view that "the necessity for accommodating new experiences, feelings, modes of life, culture, custom and thought patterns which the English language has encountered compelled the creation or invention of lexical items with nativised meanings".

On the issue of colour hierarchy in the Nigerian context, "white" is rated on stage I, then "black" and "red" are added as stage II. "Green" and "blue" both added as stage III, "orange" or "yellow added as stage IV, while "lemon", "brown" and "army green are added as stage V. By comparison, the colour scheme of Nigerian English as reflected in the poems studied and other data source in this research, are made up of five evolutionary stages contrary to the earlier model of Berlin and Kay (1965). Hence, a basic colour term of Nigerian English must conform to the following:

- It could be made up of a single term or compound word as in black or army green respectively.
- They are commonly used.
- Sometimes a colour may be contained within another colour.
- It may denote an entity as in lemon and orange.

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