

## Lexico-Semantic Extension in Noun Usage in The English Language in Nigeria: A Corpus-Assisted Analysis of Authentic Language Data

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates lexico-semantic extension in noun usage within the English language in Nigeria through a corpus-assisted analysis of authentic language data. Existing scholarship on English usage in Nigeria has largely focused on phonological variation, grammatical structures, lexical innovations, and debates surrounding the legitimacy and codification of Nigerian English. While these studies have significantly enhanced understanding of linguistic adaptation in multilingual contexts, comparatively little attention has been devoted to the systematic investigation of semantic variation in content words, particularly nouns. This study addresses that gap by examining how selected nouns acquire extended, specialized, and culturally conditioned meanings within the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment. The study adopts a corpus-assisted lexicosemantic approach and utilizes data extracted from the International Corpus of English-Nigeria (ICE-Nigeria). Concordance and collocational analyses generated through AntConc provide empirical evidence for the interpretation of lexical meaning in context. Rather than emphasizing statistical measures, the study focuses on semantic patterns revealed through recurrent usage contexts. Selected nouns including palliative, wahala, sachet water, and related lexical items are analysed to identify processes of semantic extension, semantic specialization, borrowing, and cultural adaptation. The findings reveal that noun meanings in the English language in Nigeria are shaped by local sociocultural realities, political experiences, economic conditions, and multilingual language contact. The study demonstrates that lexical variation is not random but systematic and socially motivated. It further shows that corpus-assisted analysis offers a more reliable basis for investigating semantic variation than earlier studies that relied primarily on intuition and isolated examples. The study contributes to scholarship on English usage in Nigeria by providing empirical evidence of meaning extension and by highlighting the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and society.*

**Keywords:** English language in Nigeria, lexical semantics, semantic extension, nouns, corpus-assisted analysis, language variation, ICE-Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Language variation is an inevitable consequence of language use across different sociocultural environments. As English spread beyond its native-speaking communities, it adapted to the communicative needs, cultural experiences, and social realities of its users. Consequently, English has developed localized patterns of usage that reflect the influence of diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

In Nigeria, English functions as the official language and principal medium of interethnic communication. Its extensive use in education, governance, commerce, religion, and the media has facilitated the emergence of distinctive lexical patterns. Among these patterns is the development of extended and localized meanings in many nouns whose semantic interpretations reflect Nigerian sociocultural experiences.

Although previous studies have examined various aspects of English usage in Nigeria, comparatively less attention has been devoted to systematic investigations of noun meaning variation. Existing studies frequently rely on isolated examples and intuitive observations rather than empirical evidence from authentic language use. This study therefore investigates lexico-semantic extension in noun usage in the English language in Nigeria through a corpus-assisted analysis of authentic language data.

Despite extensive scholarship on English usage in Nigeria, research has focused predominantly on phonological, grammatical, and lexical features, as well as debates concerning the status of Nigerian English. Consequently, insufficient attention has been devoted to the systematic investigation of semantic variation in nouns. Existing studies frequently identify lexical innovations but rarely examine large bodies of authentic language data capable of revealing recurring semantic patterns. This study addresses this gap by investigating noun meaning extension in the English language in Nigeria using corpus-assisted evidence derived from ICE–Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Research on English usage in Nigeria consistently demonstrates that English adapts to local sociocultural realities. Studies by Banjo (1973), Bamgbose (1991), Jowitt (1991), Adegbija (1992, 2004), Igboanusi (2002), and Bamiro (1994) identify phonological, grammatical, and lexical features that distinguish English usage in Nigeria. Their findings suggest that linguistic variation emerges naturally from multilingualism, language contact, and sociocultural adaptation. Adegbija's concept of domestication is particularly relevant because it explains how English acquires locally meaningful functions within specific communicative environments.

Beyond Nigeria, scholars such as Kachru (1986), Schneider (2007), and Kirkpatrick (2007) argue that English develops localized characteristics as it interacts with different sociocultural settings. While these studies explain linguistic adaptation and variation, their primary concern is often the

status and legitimacy of emerging Englishes rather than the processes through which lexical meanings evolve.

Research in lexical semantics provides important insights into meaning variation. Lyons (1977), Cruse (1986), Geeraerts (2010), and Murphy (2010) view lexical meaning as dynamic and context-dependent. Similarly, Sweetser (1990) and Traugott and Dasher (2002) demonstrate that meanings evolve through semantic extension, specialization, metaphorical transfer, and contextual reinterpretation. These perspectives are particularly relevant to understanding noun meaning development in the English language in Nigeria.

Corpus-assisted approaches have further demonstrated that lexical meaning is best understood through authentic language data. Sinclair (1991), Hunston (2002), Partington (1998), and McEnery and Hardie (2012) argue that concordance and collocational evidence provide a more reliable basis for semantic interpretation than intuition alone. However, relatively few studies have applied such approaches to the investigation of noun meaning extension in the English language in Nigeria.

This study is anchored in Lexical Semantics, particularly the concept of semantic extension. The theory holds that lexical meanings are dynamic and capable of acquiring additional senses through repeated contextual use. It therefore provides an appropriate framework for explaining how nouns develop extended and localized meanings within the Nigerian sociocultural environment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a corpus-assisted lexicosemantic approach to investigate noun meaning extension in the English language in Nigeria. Data were obtained from the International Corpus of English–Nigeria (ICE–Nigeria), a one-million-word corpus consisting of authentic spoken and written texts produced by educated Nigerian users of English. From a larger dataset of seventy-five nouns exhibiting evidence of semantic variation, representative nouns were selected for detailed analysis based on frequency, sociocultural relevance, and evidence of meaning extension.

The analysis employed concordance and collocational procedures generated through AntConc. Concordance lines were examined to identify contextual meanings and recurrent usage patterns, while collocational analysis was used to determine lexical associations contributing to semantic interpretation. Although corpus tools facilitated data retrieval and analysis, the study remains primarily lexicosemantic in orientation, with emphasis placed on meaning development, contextual usage, and sociocultural motivation rather than statistical description.

## **RESULTS**

### **Distribution of Nouns across Semantic Processes**

A total of seventy-five nouns were extracted from ICE–Nigeria and examined for evidence of semantic variation. Comparison with corresponding occurrences in ICE–GB revealed varying degrees of semantic extension, semantic shift, borrowing, lexical innovation, and semantic

specialization. While some nouns maintained meanings similar to those found in British English, a substantial number exhibited meanings that reflected Nigerian sociocultural realities and communicative practices. Table 1 presents representative nouns identified in the corpus together with their frequencies and dominant semantic processes.

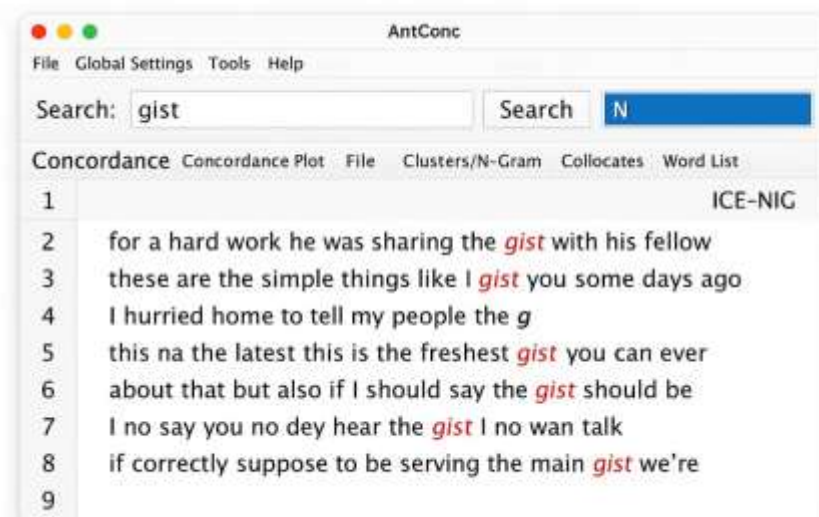
**Table 1: Representative Nouns and Semantic Processes**

| <b>Noun</b>  | <b>ICE–Nigeria</b> | <b>ICE–GB</b> | <b>Dominant Process</b> |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Palliative   | 61                 | 9             | Semantic Shift          |
| Wahala       | 52                 | 1             | Borrowing               |
| NEPA         | 52                 | 0             | Lexical Innovation      |
| Go-slow      | 47                 | 0             | Semantic Shift          |
| Okada        | 47                 | 0             | Borrowing               |
| Generator    | 44                 | 3             | Semantic Strengthening  |
| Pikin        | 44                 | 0             | Borrowing               |
| Tokunbo      | 42                 | 0             | Borrowing               |
| Motor Park   | 41                 | 0             | Compound Innovation     |
| Chieftaincy  | 41                 | 0             | Semantic Shift          |
| Palava       | 39                 | 0             | Borrowing               |
| Expo         | 36                 | 0             | Semantic Shift          |
| Sachet Water | 33                 | 0             | Compound Innovation     |
| Gist         | 33                 | 2             | Semantic Extension      |
| Area Boy     | 33                 | 0             | Semantic Shift          |

The frequency distribution demonstrates that many nouns exhibiting semantic variation occur substantially more frequently in ICE–Nigeria than in ICE–GB. Several items, including *NEPA*, *go-slow*, *motor park*, *sachet water*, *area boy*, and *tokunbo*, were completely absent from ICE–GB, suggesting strong localization within the Nigerian context.

### **Semantic Extension**

The corpus revealed a number of nouns that retained aspects of their conventional meanings while simultaneously developing additional semantic functions. One notable example is *gist*. In conventional English usage, the word generally refers to the central point or substance of a discussion. However, the concordance lines show that Nigerian speakers frequently employ the noun to refer to information, news, informal conversation, or gossip.



**Figure 1: Concordance Lines for Gist**

The concordance evidence demonstrates repeated usage patterns such as *give me the gist*, *what is the gist?*, and *the latest gist*. These patterns indicate that the noun has undergone semantic extension beyond its traditional meaning.

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Search: gist Search F

| Collocate   | L2 | L1 | R1 | R2 | Freq |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|------|
| about       |    |    | 2  |    | 38   |
| now         |    |    | 1  | 3  | 29   |
| the         | 2  | 1  | 4  | 14 | 20   |
| small       | 3  | 1  | 7  | 7  | 13   |
| this        | 3  |    | 7  |    | 13   |
| correct     | 2  | 2  | 7  |    | 12   |
| dey         | 2  | 1  | 5  |    | 11   |
| how         | 1  |    | 3  |    | 10   |
| with        | 1  | 1  | 3  | 1  | 8    |
| of          | 1  |    | 2  | 2  | 8    |
| small small | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 6    |
| giv         | 0  | 1  | 1  |    | 6    |
| wey         | 0  | 2  | 1  | 3  | 5    |
| give now    | 0  | 3  | 1  | 2  | 3    |

**Figure 2: Collocational Distribution of Gist**

The collocational profile reveals strong associations with lexical items such as *about*, *correct*, *now*, *small*, and *dey*, amongst others, reinforcing the extended semantic interpretation.

### Semantic Shift

The analysis also identified nouns whose meanings differ significantly from their conventional interpretations. A prominent example is *go-slow*. In British English, the expression may refer to a

deliberate reduction in work pace, particularly in industrial relations. In ICE–Nigeria, however, the noun consistently refers to traffic congestion.



**Figure 3: Concordance Lines for Go-Slow**

The concordance lines show recurrent references to road traffic, transportation delays, commuting difficulties, and urban mobility challenges.

|    | Collocate      | L2 | L1 | R1 | R2 | ICE-NIG |
|----|----------------|----|----|----|----|---------|
| 1  | traffic        | 18 | 25 | 12 | 8  | 63      |
| 2  | road           | 12 | 17 | 10 | 7  | 46      |
| 3  | vehicle        | 8  | 10 | 9  | 6  | 33      |
| 4  | delay          | 7  | 8  | 11 | 5  | 31      |
| 5  | movement       | 5  | 7  | 9  | 4  | 25      |
| 6  | commuters      | 4  | 6  | 8  | 5  | 23      |
| 7  | transportation | 3  | 5  | 7  | 4  | 19      |
| 8  | urban          | 2  | 4  | 6  | 5  | 17      |
| 9  | mobility       | 1  | 3  | 7  | 4  | 15      |
| 10 | congestion     | 4  | 5  | 4  | 2  | 15      |
| 11 | highway        | 3  | 4  | 5  | 2  | 14      |
| 12 | motorists      | 2  | 4  | 5  | 2  | 13      |
| 13 | commute        | 2  | 3  | 4  | 2  | 11      |
| 14 | location       | 2  | 3  | 4  | 1  | 10      |

**Figure 4: Collocational Distribution of Go-Slow**

The collocational analysis reveals frequent associations with traffic, road, vehicle, commuters, and delay, indicating semantic restructuring within the Nigerian context.

Another example is *palliative*, which traditionally belongs to medical discourse. In ICE–Nigeria, however, the noun frequently refers to government relief materials and welfare interventions.

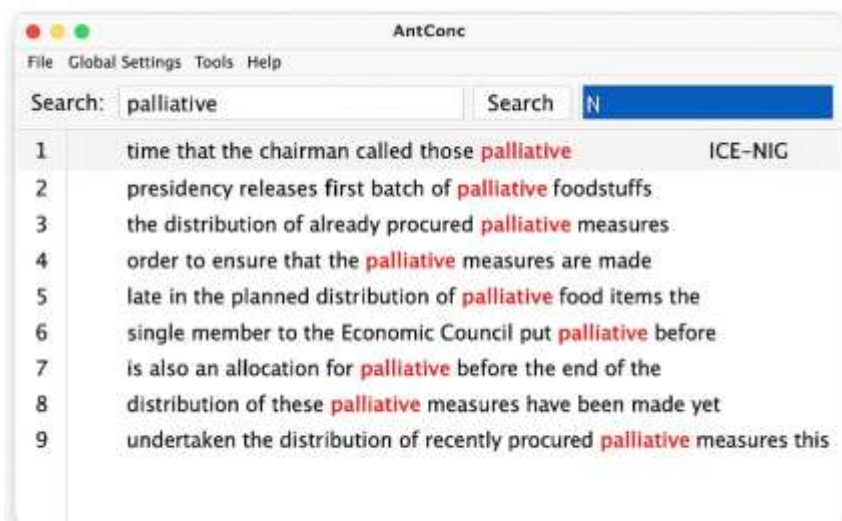


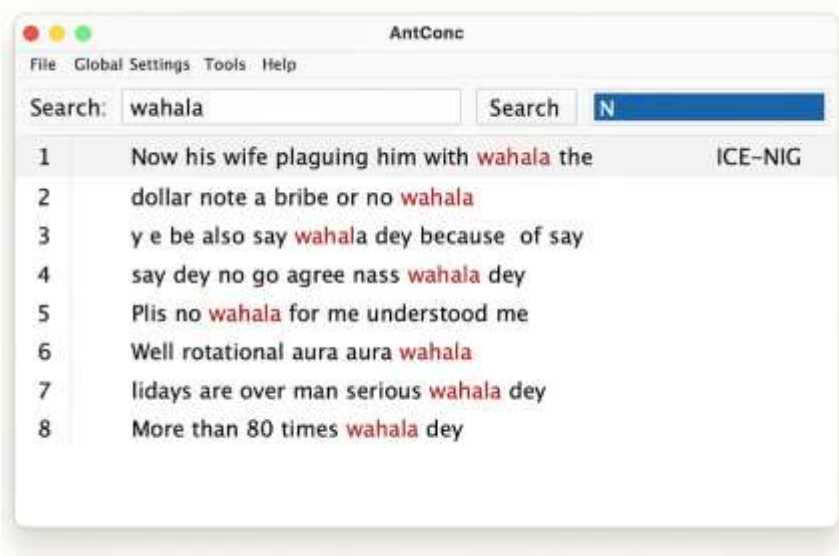
Figure 5: Concordance Lines for Palliative

|    | Collocate  | L2 | L1 | R1 | R2 | ICE-NIG |
|----|------------|----|----|----|----|---------|
| 1  | measure    | 1  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 13      |
| 2  | measures   | 2  | 2  | 1  | 0  | 4       |
| 3  | relative   | 0  | 1  | 2  | 1  | 7       |
| 4  | care       | 1  | 1  | 0  | 2  | 7       |
| 5  | funds      | 1  | 0  | 2  | 0  | 6       |
| 6  | package    | 1  | 2  | 1  | 0  | 6       |
| 7  | medicines  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 5       |
| 8  | taken      | 1  | 0  | 1  | 1  | 5       |
| 9  | action     | 1  | 1  | 0  | 2  | 5       |
| 10 | programme  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 5       |
| 11 | intentions | 1  | 0  | 0  | 1  | 5       |

Figure 6: Collocational Distribution of Palliative

### Borrowing and Cultural Naturalization

Several nouns demonstrate lexical borrowing from indigenous Nigerian languages and Nigerian Pidgin. The noun *wahala* represents one of the most widespread examples.



**Figure 7: Concordance Lines for Wahala**

The corpus shows frequent occurrences of expressions such as “with wahala”, “no wahala”, and “wahala for me”. These examples demonstrate that the noun has become fully integrated into English usage.

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Collocate: wahala Search

|    | Collocate   | L2 | L1 | R1 | R2 | ICE-NIG |
|----|-------------|----|----|----|----|---------|
| 1  | problem     | 4  | 5  | 3  | 2  | 14      |
| 2  | cause       | 3  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 12      |
| 3  | trouble     | 2  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 11      |
| 4  | create      | 3  | 3  | 2  | 2  | 10      |
| 5  | avoid       | 2  | 3  | 2  | 1  | 8       |
| 6  | bring       | 2  | 2  | 3  | 1  | 8       |
| 7  | serious     | 2  | 2  | 2  | 1  | 7       |
| 8  | people      | 1  | 2  | 2  | 1  | 6       |
| 9  | plenty      | 1  | 2  | 2  | 1  | 6       |
| 10 | unnecessary | 1  | 1  | 2  | 1  | 5       |

**Figure 8: Collocational Distribution of Wahala**

Similarly, nouns such as *okada*, *pikin*, *jollof*, *amala*, and *agbada* reveal the influence of indigenous languages on English lexical resources.

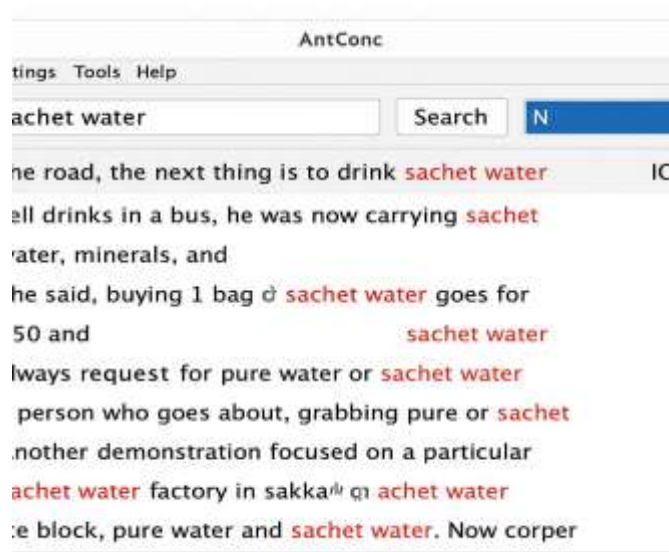
### Lexical and Compound Innovation

The corpus further reveals several nouns that appear to have emerged through local lexical innovation and compounding.

Examples include:

- Motor Park
- Sachet Water
- Area Boy
- Senior Wife
- Ward Chairman

Among these, *sachet water* illustrates how lexical innovation emerges in response to local realities.



**Figure 9: Concordance Lines for Sachet Water**

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Collocate: sachet water Search

|    | Collocate | L2 | L1 | R1 | R2 | ICE-NIG |
|----|-----------|----|----|----|----|---------|
| 1  | water     | 12 | 8  | 10 | 6  | 36      |
| 2  | pure      | 7  | 5  | 6  | 3  | 21      |
| 3  | bag       | 6  | 4  | 5  | 2  | 17      |
| 4  | factory   | 3  | 3  | 4  | 2  | 12      |
| 5  | buying    | 4  | 3  | 3  | 1  | 11      |
| 6  | drink     | 3  | 4  | 2  | 1  | 10      |
| 7  | drinks    | 3  | 2  | 2  | 1  | 8       |
| 8  | minerals  | 2  | 2  | 2  | 1  | 7       |
| 9  | road      | 1  | 2  | 2  | 1  | 6       |
| 10 | next      | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 5       |
| 11 | carrying  | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 5       |

**Figure 10: Collocational Distribution of Sachet Water**

The noun refers specifically to drinking water packaged in sealed plastic sachets, a concept that has become culturally salient within Nigeria.

### Summary of Results

The data reveal four major patterns of noun variation:

1. Semantic Extension (*gist*)
2. Semantic Shift (*go-slow*, *palliative*)
3. Borrowing and Naturalization (*wahala*)
4. Lexical and Compound Innovation (*sachet water*)

These findings indicate that noun meanings in the English language in Nigeria are shaped by recurrent interaction between language, culture, and communicative practice.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that semantic extension constitutes a major mechanism of lexical development in noun usage within the English language in Nigeria. Analysis of the corpus data indicates that noun meanings are neither fixed nor static but continually adapt to sociocultural realities, communicative needs, and contextual demands. The evidence further demonstrates that lexical variation is systematic rather than incidental, as the observed meanings recur consistently across multiple contexts of use. These findings support the lexical semantic position that meaning is dynamic and emerges through repeated interaction between linguistic forms and communicative environments (Cruse, 1986; Geeraerts, 2010).

One of the most significant patterns identified in the data is semantic extension. Nouns such as *gist* and *elder* retain aspects of their conventional meanings while simultaneously developing additional semantic functions. The noun *gist*, for instance, extends beyond its traditional sense of “the essence of a matter” to encompass information, news, discussion, and informal conversation. Similarly, *elder* extends beyond chronological age to denote social, religious, or community authority. These findings support earlier observations by Adegbiya (2004) and Bamiro (1994) that lexical adaptation often occurs through meaning expansion rather than through the creation of entirely new lexical forms. The evidence suggests that speakers exploit existing lexical resources to accommodate emerging communicative needs, thereby ensuring lexical economy while expanding semantic capacity.

The study also reveals extensive evidence of semantic shift. Nouns such as *go-slow* and *palliative* exhibit meanings that differ substantially from their conventional interpretations. In the corpus, *go-slow* functions almost exclusively as a noun referring to traffic congestion rather than industrial action, while *palliative* refers primarily to government relief measures rather than medical care. These developments illustrate how local experiences can reshape lexical meaning and create new semantic associations. The findings corroborate Traugott and Dasher’s (2002) argument that semantic change frequently emerges through contextual reinterpretation and repeated usage. In the Nigerian context, recurring experiences such as traffic congestion, economic hardship, and government intervention programmes have contributed to the stabilization of these specialized meanings.

Another important finding concerns borrowing and lexical naturalization. Nouns such as *wahala*, *okada*, *pikin*, *agbada*, and *jollof* demonstrate the influence of indigenous languages and Nigerian Pidgin on English usage. Although these items originate outside English, the corpus evidence shows that they function syntactically and semantically as ordinary English nouns within Nigerian discourse. Their high frequency of occurrence indicates widespread acceptance among speakers. This finding aligns with Bamgbose's (1991) view that language contact inevitably produces lexical adaptation and supports Adegbija's (2004) notion of domestication, whereby English absorbs locally meaningful expressions in order to reflect the experiences of its users. The data therefore suggest that borrowing remains an important source of lexical enrichment within the English language in Nigeria.

The corpus further reveals significant instances of lexical and compound innovation. Expressions such as *motor park*, *sachet water*, *area boy*, *ward chairman*, and *senior wife* represent lexical constructions that have emerged in response to local sociocultural realities. These nouns encode concepts that are highly salient within the Nigerian environment and therefore require culturally specific linguistic representation. Their absence or extremely low frequency in ICE–GB underscores their localized character. The findings indicate that lexical innovation often arises when existing vocabulary proves insufficient for expressing culturally specific experiences. This supports Kachru's (1986) argument that English develops localized features as it adapts to new sociocultural environments.

A particularly noteworthy observation is the relationship between lexical meaning and sociocultural experience. Many of the nouns examined derive their meanings from domains such as governance, transportation, religion, education, family structure, commerce, and everyday social interaction. For example, the meanings associated with *palliative*, *ward chairman*, and *corper* are closely connected to institutional realities, while *wahala*, *area boy*, and *motor park* reflect everyday social experiences. This pattern demonstrates that lexical meaning is deeply embedded in social life and that semantic development often mirrors the priorities, concerns, and experiences of a speech community. The findings therefore reinforce sociolinguistic perspectives that regard language as both a reflection and a product of social reality.

The collocational evidence provides additional support for this interpretation. Across the nouns analysed, recurrent collocational patterns reveal strong associations between lexical items and specific semantic domains. For instance, *palliative* consistently co-occurs with terms relating to government intervention and welfare distribution, while *go-slow* occurs alongside vocabulary associated with transportation and traffic. Similarly, *wahala* frequently appears in contexts involving conflict, difficulty, and social inconvenience. These recurring associations indicate that lexical meaning is not determined by isolated usage but emerges through repeated contextual relationships. The findings therefore support Sinclair's (1991) argument that meaning is best understood through authentic patterns of language use rather than through dictionary definitions alone.

The study also demonstrates the value of corpus-assisted approaches to semantic investigation. Previous studies on English usage in Nigeria have often relied on isolated examples and intuitive observations. While such studies remain valuable, they frequently lack the empirical evidence necessary to establish whether particular meanings are widespread or merely anecdotal. By contrast, the present study utilizes concordance and collocational evidence derived from authentic language data, thereby providing a more reliable basis for semantic interpretation. The corpus evidence demonstrates that the meanings identified are not isolated occurrences but recurring patterns that have become established within the speech community.

Perhaps the most important implication of the findings is that semantic variation should be understood as a central feature of the English language in Nigeria rather than as a peripheral phenomenon. The evidence indicates that nouns undergo systematic processes of extension, shift, borrowing, and innovation in response to local communicative needs. These developments are not random deviations from external norms but structured responses to sociocultural realities. Consequently, the study shifts attention away from debates concerning the legitimacy of Nigerian English and toward the broader issue of how meanings evolve within particular linguistic environments.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that noun meaning in the English language in Nigeria is dynamic, socially motivated, and context-dependent. Through processes of semantic extension, semantic shift, borrowing, and lexical innovation, speakers continually adapt lexical resources to reflect their communicative needs and sociocultural experiences. The study therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of lexical variation and highlights the importance of meaning as a site of linguistic adaptation and change.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has examined lexico-semantic extension in noun usage within the English language in Nigeria through a corpus-assisted analysis of authentic language data derived from ICE–Nigeria. The findings reveal that noun meanings are dynamic and continually shaped by sociocultural realities, communicative needs, and contextual usage. The analysis identified semantic extension, semantic shift, borrowing, and lexical innovation as the principal mechanisms through which noun meanings evolve within the Nigerian linguistic environment.

The study demonstrates that nouns such as *gist*, *go-slow*, *palliative*, *wahala*, *motor park*, and *sachet water* have developed meanings that either extend beyond or differ from their conventional interpretations. These meanings are not isolated or idiosyncratic usages but recurrent patterns supported by concordance and collocational evidence. The findings therefore suggest that lexical variation in the English language in Nigeria is systematic and socially motivated rather than random or deficient.

A major contribution of the study lies in its demonstration of the value of corpus-assisted semantic analysis. Unlike earlier investigations that relied primarily on anecdotal observations and isolated

examples, the present study grounds its interpretations in authentic language data. The use of concordance and collocational evidence provides a more reliable basis for identifying semantic patterns and explaining meaning development. The study thus illustrates how corpus tools can enrich semantic investigation without necessarily transforming the research into a purely corpus linguistic enterprise.

The findings also have broader implications for the study of language variation and lexical semantics. They suggest that meaning development is closely linked to the sociocultural experiences of language users and that lexical adaptation constitutes an important mechanism through which English responds to changing communicative environments. Consequently, investigations of English usage in multilingual societies should pay greater attention to semantic processes and contextual meaning rather than focusing exclusively on structural features or debates concerning varietal legitimacy.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that noun meaning in the English language in Nigeria reflects a dynamic interaction between language, culture, and society. Through processes of extension, specialization, borrowing, and innovation, speakers continually reshape lexical resources to accommodate evolving realities. These developments not only enrich English usage in Nigeria but also contribute to broader understandings of language change and semantic evolution in contemporary Englishes worldwide.

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