Progressive Aspect in Nigerian English
ISLE 2011

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1 Previous Research
   - New Englishes
   - Empirical Studies
   - Aspect in Nigerian Languages

2 The Study
   - Method
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   - Nigerian English
   - Other New Englishes
   - Explanations
Usage of progressive with stative verbs typical of many new Englishes (Platt 1984: 72–3; Trudgill 2008: 107,130,137)
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- Suggested as universal structure shared by all New Englishes (Kortmann et al. 2004: 1189; Meshtrie 2008b: 626)
Empirical Studies

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- Extension in IndE to non-delimited habituals and stative verbs
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- Specific substrate-superstrate interplay: In Hindi all clauses must be marked overtly as either perfective or imperfective.
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- Specific substrate-superstrate interplay: In Hindi all clauses must be marked overtly as either perfective or imperfective.
- In Chinese dialects many imperfective and progressive senses are unmarked.
Languages in Nigeria

Major languages: Yorùbá, Igbo and Hausa

Aspect in Yorùbá and Igbo

- Aspect more prominent than tense
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- Considerable dialectal variation, but all dialects mark imperfective dynamic verb different from stative verbs.
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- Considerable dialectal variation, but all dialects mark imperfective dynamic verb different from stative verbs.
- Some dialects have an imperfective marker, others have separate markers for progressive and habitual.
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- For comparison, the ICE-GB corpus was queried using IceCup 3.1.
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Comparison with grammaticality judgments
1,994 progressive forms analysed: overall frequency of 3,835 pmw in ICE-Nig
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- 71% present, 17% past, 7% perfect, 5% auxiliaries
- Fewer past progressives in ICE-Nig (620 pmw) than in ICE-GB (1,288 pmw)
- Present perfect progressive twice as frequent in ICE-NIG (218 pmw) as in ICE-GB (113 pmw)
Progressive Aspect in Nigerian English

Stylistic variation

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Extended meanings

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  - "we are collectively finding solution to the problems"
Stylistic variation of extended meanings

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Progressive Aspect in Nigerian English
Having and knowing

- In IndE, these two account for the majority of extended uses of the progressive (Balasubramanian 2009).
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ICE-India</th>
<th></th>
<th>ICE-Nigeria</th>
<th></th>
<th>ICE-Singapore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stand.</td>
<td>non-stand.</td>
<td>stand.</td>
<td>non-stand.</td>
<td>stand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE+having</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE+knowing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that ICE-Nig, at the time, had about half the size as the other two corpora.
Grammaticality Judgments

- Questionnaire consisting of 23 utterances from ICE-Nig + 1 constructed item
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- Different usages: unbounded habitual, mental state, recipient stative, punctual verb, dynamic verb
- 20 distractors
- Instruction: "Please correct all errors (if there are any) in the student writings below."
Participants

- Questionnaire split into two parts
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- November 2010, during a national conference of Nigerian English teachers and lecturers held at Covenant University, Ota
- 52 Nigerians: 28 English teachers & lecturers, 24 students
- First language: 33 Yorùbá, 10 Igbo, 9 other
Five standard English progressives were changed in 6% of all cases into non-progressive:
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- Recipient stative (32%) and stative mental state (27%) showed highest rate of change into non-progressive.
- Recipient stative: "Are you smelling this?" (change rate 60%)
- Stative mental state: "Why are you not understanding this already?" (change rate 65%)
Unbounded habitual changed 19% of the time
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"Make sure that your food is giving you the nutrients that you need."
Unbounded habitual changed 19% of the time

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Highly significant difference between correction rate of standard usage and extended usage
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- E.g. unbounded habitual *reside* occurs with the progressive 25% of the time and was accepted by 88% of informants.

- Verbs that rarely occur with the progressive in ICE-Nigeria sometimes show high acceptability, sometimes low acceptability in extended usage.
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Extended usage of the progressive: unbounded habitual activities, stative verbs denoting a mental state and recipient statives, and punctual verbs.
Stylistic distribution

- Stylistic variability and frequency distribution very similar in NigE and BrE
- In NigE more present perfect progressive and less past progressive forms than in BrE
- Extended usage of the progressive: unbounded habitual activities, stative verbs denoting a mental state and recipient statives, and punctual verbs
- Extended usage mainly in present tense and informal text types
Extended use of the progressive

- A 'typical' or 'characteristic' feature of New Englishes?
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- Not quite, only 5.3% of all cases of the progressive
- Below 15% -> Incipient language change (Nevalainen 2003: 55)
Comparison to other New Englishes

In Nigerian English we found...

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Nigerian English

Other New Englishes

Explanations

Comparison to other New Englishes

In Nigerian English we found...

- Overextension like in basilectal IndE (Sharma 2009)
- More overextension than in SingE (Sharma 2009)
- Less overextension than in essays written by Black South African students (van Rooy 2005)
L1 influence?

- L1 influence claimed to be responsible for overextension in IndE (Sharma 2009), Setswana English (van Rooy 2005) and NigE (Ajani 2001)
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- Cf. the presence of *still* in some cases: "I am still trusting God concerning the postdoc offer."
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- Punctual verbs in Igbo do not take progressive
  -> also rarely found in NigE.
Stative progressives had lower acceptance rate than unbounded habituals.
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Syntactic behaviour of stative verbs can easily be taught in schools.
Additional explanations

- Stative progressives had lower acceptance rate than unbounded habituals.
- Syntactic behaviour of stative verbs can easily be taught in schools.
- Non-realisation of the habitual aspect in Yorùbá and Igbo as an English progressive might be more difficult to explain in class.
Mismatch between frequency and acceptability

- Usage-based theories of language hold that the perceived acceptability of a structure is strongly tied to its frequency of usage. 
  - not supported by our results.
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- Results support previous findings by Bader et al. (submitted) that low acceptability implies low frequency, and high frequency high acceptability (but not vice versa).
Bader, Markus and Jana Häussler (submitted). “The primacy of grammaticality”. In: University of Constance.

