

'Mehn! This wins the award'

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The discourse-pragmatic functions of *mehn* in Nigerian English

1. Introduction

Nigerian English (NigE) is a second language (L2) variety of English which has been domesticated, acculturated, and indigenised (Taiwo, 2009: 7; Jowitt, 2019: 26), due to its co-existence with about five hundred indigenous Nigerian languages (see Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2019). It is the language of education, governance, law, the media, and formal financial transactions in Nigeria. Based on Schneider's (2003: 271) Dynamic Model of the evolution of the New Englishes, NigE can be located at the late stage of nativisation, while recent studies show that it is on the verge of entering endonormative stabilisation (Gut, 2012: 3; Unuabonah & Gut, 2018: 210). Although NigE is an L2, there is a growing number of young people who speak it as a first language (L1; see Jowitt, 2019: 16; Onabamiro & Oladipupo, 2019). NigE includes sub-varieties which are classified based on different factors such as region/ethnicity, and educational attainment (Banjo, 1971; Jibril, 1986; Udofot, 2003). Although Udofot (2003: 204) suggests that the sub-variety used by Nigerians who have been educated in tertiary institutions should be taken as the standard variety, Jowitt (1991: 47) opines 'that the usage of every Nigerian user is a mixture of Standard forms' and non-standard forms. The data used in this paper are a mix of both standard and non-standard forms.

Previous studies have discussed the features of NigE at different linguistic levels, including the phonological (e.g. Jamakovic & Fuchs, 2019; Akinola & Oladipupo, 2021), lexico-semantic (e.g. Owolabi, 2012; Umar, 2018), morphosyntactic (e.g. Werner & Fuchs, 2017; Akinlotan & Akande, 2020), and discourse-pragmatic (e.g. Fuchs, Gut & Soneye, 2013; Unuabonah, 2019). At the discourse-pragmatic plane, scholars have examined pragmatic

markers (Gut, Fuchs & Soneye, 2013; Oladipupo & Unuabonah, 2020), stance markers (e.g. Gut & Unuabonah, 2019), and interjections (e.g. Unuabonah, 2020; Unuabonah & Daniel, 2020), from a corpus-linguistic perspective. This study extends the scholarship on discourse-pragmatic features of NigE by examining an emotive interjection, *mehn*, which has not received scholarly attention in NigE studies. *Mehn* appears to be an adaptation of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) pronunciation of *man* as an interjection. Although *man* can be used as an interjection (see Norrick, 2015: 260), a random sampling of 100 tokens of *man* in the Nigerian component of the Global Web-based English corpus (henceforth, GloWbE-Nig) did not yield the use of *man* as an interjection. In AAVE, the <a> in *man* is pronounced as /æ/ but this sounds like /e/ to the NigE user. Hence, a number of NigE speakers appropriate the sound as /e/ and pronounce the word as /men/. This



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