



Haba! Bilingual interjections in Nigerian English: A corpus-based study



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores five emotive bilingual interjections: *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, *chai*, and *mtchew* in Nigerian English, using the theory of pragmatic borrowing from a postcolonial corpus pragmatic perspective. The data, which were extracted from the Nigerian component of the Global Web-based English corpus, were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The results show that *haba* and *kai* are borrowed from Hausa, *chei* and *chai* are loaned from Igbo while *mtchew* is an onomatopoeic interjection peculiar to many Nigerian indigenous cultures. The results also indicate that *haba* signals surprise, shock, anger, disapproval, disgust, distress, despair, disbelief, disappointment, and disagreement, *kai*, *chai*, and *chei* express feelings of surprise, sympathy, sadness, anger, pain, disapproval, and shock, while *mtchew* shows anger, utter disgust, derision, disinterest and sadness. The study concludes that these emotive bilingual interjections further add to the distinctiveness of Nigerian English.

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1. Introduction

Nigerian English (NigEng) is a second language variety of English which has been nativised and acculturated in the Nigerian environment, due to contact between English and indigenous Nigerian languages (INL), during trade in the 16th century, and later, through colonialism in the 19th century (Gut, 2017). NigEng is used today as the language of administration, education, law, and the media amongst other functions in the country (Taiwo, 2009). There are about five hundred indigenous languages in Nigeria (Eberhard et al., 2019), which serve as first languages (L1s) for most Nigerians, while there is also a growing number of children in Nigeria who now use English as an L1 (see Jowitt, 2019). These INL include Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, which are chiefly used in the northern, south eastern and south western geo-political zones of the country, respectively. Thus, a good number of Nigerians are bilinguals who are competent in English and at least one INL (Jowitt, 2019).

Previous studies have indicated that there are different sub-varieties of NigEng which are usually determined through factors such as social perspective, region/ethnicity and educational status (Banjo, 1971; Jibril, 1986; Udofot, 2003). Along this line, Jowitt (1991) advocates Popular Nigerian English (PNE) as a cover term for all the varieties of English earlier identified in Nigeria. It is predicated upon the notion that, regardless of the varieties, the English usage of 'every Nigerian is a mixture of Standard forms and Popular Nigerian English forms, which are in turn composed of errors and variants' (Jowitt, 1991:47). It is believed that as the level of educational attainment or exposure of speakers increases, the rate of errors is reduced while legitimate variants are established as non-random indexical features which define the distinctiveness of the NigEng variety

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and culminate in Near-Standard NigEng. In this paper, we regard the variety used in our data as PNE since the data were retrieved from online platforms which comprise standard forms, variants and errors, necessitated also by internet language, which naturally contains misspellings, typographical errors, and abbreviations amongst others (see Crystal, 2004).

There are several studies that describe the phonological (e.g. Oladipupo, 2015; Gut and Fuchs, 2017; Dyrenko and Fuchs, 2018); lexico-semantic (e.g. Bamiro, 1994; Alabi, 2000; Owolabi, 2012); morphosyntactic (e.g. Akinlotan and Housen, 2017; Werner and Fuchs, 2017; Umar, 2018), and discourse-pragmatic (e.g. Fuchs et al., 2013; Unuabonah and Gut, 2018; Gut and Unuabonah, 2019; Unuabonah, 2019) attributes of NigEng. A number of these studies reveal the influence of INL on NigEng at different linguistic levels. For example, at the discourse-pragmatic level, very few scholars have pointed to the borrowing of pragmatic markers (PMs; see *o*, *sha* and *abi* in Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2018; Jowitt, 2019) from INL into NigEng, without paying full attention to other kinds of discourse-pragmatic features such as interjections, tags and expletives which are also borrowed from these languages into NigEng. In this paper, therefore, we focus on bilingual interjections (BIs), borrowed from INL into NigEng.

Interjections such as *oh* and *wow* are exclamations through which language users express their emotional and mental attitudes in a given context (see Norrick, 2015; Stange, 2016). They are culture specific and speakers select the appropriate interjection for different communicative situations (Aijmer, 2004; Ameka, 2006). They have been found to perform various discourse-pragmatic functions such as introducing turns and signaling attention (Norrick, 2015). Extant studies on BIs have focused on the borrowing of English interjections in the Croatian speech of Croatian-Australians (Hlavac, 2003) or Kanuri and Hausa interjections in Nigerian (Shuwa) Arabic (Hassan, 2016), without addressing BIs which are borrowed from INL into NigEng. Although Kperogi (2015) and Jowitt (2019) identify a number of interjections that are borrowed from INL into NigEng, they only list, explain their meanings and give one example each, and that for only some of these interjections. Thus, there is limited knowledge of the forms and functions of these Nigerian BIs in NigEng. As Norrick (2015) opines, interjections differ based on national and regional varieties. For example, interjections used in NigEng may differ from those used in Ghanaian English or British English. Thus, it is expected that apart from English interjections which would readily occur in NigEng, there are other interjections which are peculiar to INL and which have been included in NigEng.

Therefore, in this paper, we examine five emotive BIs: *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, *chai*, and *mtchew*, with a view to investigating their origins, meanings, frequencies, spellings, positions, collocational patterns and functions in NigEng. Examples of these interjections in the International Corpus of English–Nigeria (ICE-Nig) and the Global Web-based English (GloWbE) corpus (see Davies and Fuchs, 2015) are presented in (1)–(5):

- (1) Now candidates pay N1,000 to JAMB to print the result themselves. **Haba**. There should be some decency and fairness in "revenue generation". (ICE-Nig bl_23.txt)
- (2) Speaker 1: go on a strike
Speaker 2: it's not funny you know
Speaker 1: it's not funny at all
Speaker 2: **kai** no they are really treating us bad because outside you have to copy for five naira (ICE-Nig con_21.txt)
- (3) 'You can't do f--up', I said. It was high time, I thought, to call Akpan's bluff. **Chei**, the crowd shrieked in shock and bewilderment. (ICE-Nig nov_08.txt)
- (4) Speaker 2: forest is Bassa
Speaker 1: huh
Speaker 1: **chai** is too much
Speaker 2: is not much
Speaker 1: is too big ...
Speaker 2: no Bassa is big (ICE-Nig con_60.txt)
- (5) I hope he will eat and regret his words! **Mtchew**!!! (GloWbE 23)

In this section, we have addressed the background to this study. In Sections 2 and 3, we pay attention to the theoretical basis for the study, and describe our methodology, respectively. In Section 4, we present our results, and discuss them in Section 5. Finally, we conclude in Section 6.

2. Theoretical background

This study examines interjections using the theory of pragmatic borrowing from a postcolonial corpus pragmatic perspective. Postcolonial corpus pragmatics is a combination of postcolonial pragmatics and corpus pragmatics. On the one hand, postcolonial pragmatics examines pragmatic concepts in postcolonial speech communities, such as speech acts and politeness, which are influenced by the transfer of indigenous cultures and languages to the European language used and vice versa, due to the colonial histories of these communities (Anchimbe and Janney, 2011). On the other hand, corpus pragmatics deals with the investigation of different pragmatic phenomena such as speech acts and PMs using computer corpora, and which involves both horizontal (qualitative) and vertical (quantitative) analysis (Rühlemann and Aijmer, 2015). Thus, postcolonial corpus pragmatics deals with the investigation of pragmatic phenomena in computer-based corpora obtained from postcolonial speech communities, which show the transfer of indigenous cultures and languages to the European language used and vice versa.

Andersen's (2014) concept of pragmatic borrowing deals with the process and results of including discourse-pragmatic features such as interjections, PMs, expletives and tags from a source language into a recipient language. This concept pays attention to the spelling adaptation, scope, collocations, positions, distribution, semantic stability and pragmatic multifunctionality of these discourse-pragmatic features (Balteiro, 2018). The theory is useful to the present study as it places emphasis on the forms and functions of borrowed pragmatic items such as BIs.

Interjections are viewed from different perspectives; however, two key views emerge: those of the formalists and the conceptualists (Wharton, 2003). The formalists (e.g. Quirk et al., 1985; Crystal, 1995) describe interjections as non-linguistic items which basically express emotions and do not enter into syntactic structures at all. On the other hand, the conceptualists (e.g. Ameka, 1992a; Wilkins, 1992) see interjections as purely linguistic items through which language users express their feelings and thoughts in relation to the situation they find themselves in (see also Stange, 2016). Despite conceptualists' similar views on the nature of interjections, they seem to disagree on what interjections really are (see Wharton, 2003; Stange, 2016). However, certain claims are common to them: an interjection is capable of constituting an utterance by itself; and it expresses emotional or mental attitudes (Wharton, 2003). For the purpose of this paper, a functional/pragmatic view of the concept is adopted. We define interjections as syntactically independent, context-bound and meaningful semi-automatic exclamations which provide insight into a speaker's emotional and mental state (see Stange, 2016).

Generally, interjections are categorised based on their forms and functions. Based on form, they are classified into primary and secondary interjections, and based on function, they are grouped into emotive, cognitive, conative and phatic interjections (see Stange, 2009; Stange, 2016). Primary interjections are words such as *oops* and *oh* whose basic function is to serve as interjections (Norrick, 2015). Secondary interjections are interjections which primarily belong to other word classes such as verbs and adjectives, but which may also be used to indicate the emotional and mental state of the user when they "occur by themselves non-elliptically as one-word utterances" (see Ameka, 1992a: 105). They include nouns such as *boy!* and verbs such as *help!*

Emotive interjections such as *wow* and *ugh* indicate the emotional state of the user while cognitive interjections project the speaker's state of knowledge and thought at the time of utterance, for instance, *ah* and *oh* (see Ameka, 1992a; Stange, 2016). Conative interjections such as *shh* and *psst* are those that are aimed at getting someone's attention or demanding a response from someone; they may also have some emotive component (Stange, 2016). Phatic interjections such as *mhm* and *uh-huh* serve to establish and maintain contact in communication. Usually, they do not have emotive components but they play major roles in ongoing discourses with respect to backchannels and feedbacks (Ameka, 1992b; Stange, 2016). Scholars have noted that some interjections may serve dual purposes depending on the context (Ameka, 1992b; Stange, 2016); for instance, phatic interjections could also be cognitive.

Stange (2016) suggests that the functional spectrum of interjections can be divided into two broad categories: standard and non-standard uses or functions. The standard function includes both the basic and the extended functions. The basic function is the 'most common function that users associate with a given interjection' and which is egocentric, i.e., it focuses on the speaker, while the extended use or function involves interjections which are used to refer to the interlocutor's pain, mishap or surprise. On the other hand, the non-standard function deals with the production of interjections in 'contexts where the central concepts have vanished' (Stange, 2016:51). This might include cases where *ow* and *ouch* are used to get the attention of the listener or express frustration. While this paper recognises the standard and non-standard functions suggested by Stange (2016), we do not apply the basic and extended function dichotomy of standard functions to our study for two reasons. In Nigerian speech communities, like in other African and Asian cultures, the focus is on both the community and the individual (see for example the notion of face in Nwoye, 1992; Anchimbe and Janney, 2011). Thus, emotions such as pain, surprise, and anger which affect others in a speech community are treated almost equally as the ones that affect the individual. In addition, the topics that are treated and commented on via the internet are issues that affect the general populace. Thus, feelings of surprise or anger are shared by members of the community, which implies that individual emotions are as important as the emotions of other community members.

3. Methodology

The data for this paper include five emotive Nigerian BIs: *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, *chai* and *mtchew*, which were extracted from the Nigerian component of the GloWbE corpus. The BIs were chosen based on their identification by previous scholars (e.g. Kperogi, 2015; Jowitt, 2019) as BIs used by NigEng speakers. The Nigerian component of the GloWbE corpus was selected because the ICE-Nig corpus contained very few instances of the interjections examined in this paper, possibly due to its size of a million words and also because it contained about 20% of informal dialogues or interactions where interjections would likely occur more (see Wunder et al., 2010). In fact, *mtchew* was not found at all in ICE-Nig, possibly due to its restrictive socio-cultural nature as explained later in Section 4.4. The Nigerian component of the GloWbE corpus contains 42,646,098 words obtained from different Nigerian websites and pages such as discussion forums, blogs, and online newspapers (Davies and Fuchs, 2015). Although there have been concerns that nationals from other countries may comment on websites that belong to a different country (see Mukherjee, 2015; Nelson, 2015), we believe it will be difficult for non-Nigerians to use these BIs, at least for now, since they are borrowed from INL. An examination of the frequency of these selected interjections across the different components of GloWbE will reveal this.

Moreover, we find the GloWbE corpus suitable for the analysis of BIs because it contains 60% of informal blogs which are contexts in which BIs will likely appear. As noted elsewhere, bilingual PMs (which extend also to BIs) appear in informal contexts where users do not need to exert maximum mental effort (see Matras, 2000; Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2018). As noted also by Norrick (2015), interjections appear mainly in dialogues, and these informal blogs and newspaper commentaries provide platforms for online users to make comments. Such comments usually end up in dialogues or polylogues among co-bloggers or co-commentators where they often use address terms, argue, and sometimes insult one another or

third parties that are referred to in a blog or news post (see also [Taiwo, 2014](#); [Bondi, 2018](#)). In addition, these informal blogs provide platforms for users to express their emotions, and thus, yield more tokens of BIs.

GloWbE was searched using the analysis software on its website (<https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>). The retrieved data were manually searched in order to eliminate cases in which the BIs were found in utterances made in Nigerian Pidgin (NigP) as shown in (6), INL as depicted in (7), and repetition of posts due to either the copying of posts by other users or repetition of the same interjection by the same writer as presented in (8):

- (6) u will say da same thing over n over again. u keep repeating urselves **haba** we don tire # laughiiiiiiiiiiig. (GloWbE 54)
 (7) and her hubby (if he still is) resides in Abuja (**Chai**, nnukwu obodo), she slept with his husband's partner (GloWbE 8)
 (8) Full story Comments (1 posted) # **Chei, chei, chei**, Nigeria ntoo, even common Botswana is trying to prove to u that u (GloWbE 11)

Other cases where the interjections were not used as interjections were also removed. These included contexts in which they referred to names of things as shown in (9), names of people as exemplified in (10), names of towns as shown in (11), acronyms of organisations as cited in (12), and where the interjections appeared as nouns or had metalinguistic functions as indicated in (13).

- (9) # I also have my own brand of **Chai** Latte, T-Kup **Chai** Latte, so I also have to find time to make the **chai**. (GloWbE 100)
 (10) These problematic views are supported by the predilection of authors such as Gisela Nauck, **Kai** Fagaschinski, and Thomas Millroth (GloWbE 63)
 (11) 12 villages: Maseh, Ninchah, Kakkuruk, Kuzen, Negon, Pwabiduk, **Kai**, Ngyo, Kura Falls, Dogo, Kufang, and Ruk. (GloWbE 62)
 (12) the state Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA), Kick Against Indiscipline (**KAI**) and Lagos Police Command were all involved. (GloWbE 6)
 (13) No wonder the only logical response I can give to your comment(s) is a "**Mschew**" with the surname **Mschewwwwwwwwwww!!!**... (GloWbE 14)

The sources of the examples were numbered based on their numbering in the GloWbE corpus for each interjection.

4. Results

All the interjections examined in this paper *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, *chai* and *mtchew* are emotive interjections (see [Stange, 2016](#)). Although *mtchew* occurs more than other BIs in this study, it is the last BI studied since its origin is slightly different from the first four. For the purpose of analysis, we have delineated the different functions; however, there are cases where multiple functions are performed by a single interjection as will be seen in some examples. The terms 'prospective' and 'retrospective' are used instead of utterance-initial or utterance-final to describe the position of the interjections because they are free standing and are far more detached from the utterances than PMs. A BI is prospective, if it acts on an upcoming utterance, or retrospective, if it acts on a preceding utterance.

4.1. Haba in NigEng

Haba is an interjection from Hausa, one of Nigeria's three major languages, which expresses strong surprise and could be interpreted as "No way", "You can't be serious", or "Seriously" (see also [Jowitt, 2019](#)). [Kperogi \(2015\)](#) also suggests that it is an exclamation of astonishment or disappointment. In the GloWbE corpus, *haba* occurs 248 times with a relative frequency of 5.8 (pmw). Very few spelling variants were found apart from *haba* (N = 239). These include *habba* (N = 4), *habaa* (N = 3), *haaba* (N = 1) and *haabaa* (N = 1). This shows that *haba* is the preferred spelling in NigEng, and this is to be expected since *haba* is the correct spelling in Hausa. Although *haba* is free standing as an interjection, it can be both prospective (N = 167; 67.3%) and retrospective (N = 81; 32.7%) as shown in (14) and (15), respectively, which shows that it prefers the prospective position:

- (14) Nija women, wake up pleaaaaaaase and stand up for yourselves. **Haba**, marriage should be about coming together to become one. (GloWbE 48)
 (15) Over 80 percent of Islamic scholars in Maiduguri were killed by this same people. **Haba**. Therefore Christians and Muslims should unite and assist the security agencies with information (GloWbE 37)

In (14), *haba* indicates strong surprise linked with disbelief on the part of the writer that some women appear not to understand what marriage is all about, and is now laying emphasis on what they should take marriage to be, while in (15), *haba* signals shock over the proposition in the preceding clause that some people who were involved in the killing of Christians were also responsible for the death of some Islamic scholars.

Haba, on very few occasions, collocates with PMs such as *but* and address terms such as personal names (*Jade*) as shown in (16) and (17), respectively:

- (16) You can say whatever you like..... but **haba**!! For all those who say 1 Timothy 5:8 refers to spiritual provision alone (GloWbE 114)
 (17) because he feels the same way and that life is so unfair " **Haba** Jade, you are a smart woman. He says YOU can do it? (GloWbE 103)

Basically, *haba* is mostly used to express strong surprise which is sometimes mixed with disbelief as indicated in (14). However, on few occasions, it can be used to convey positive surprise, and pity mixed with surprise. These are cited in (18) and (19), respectively:

- (18) those are probably my ancestors. Wow. # They tried now! **Haba!** Nigeria is a football/soccer nation. Basketball as a professional sport is relatively new (GloWbE 117)
- (19) # wooww wat a parthetic story i feel so bad **haba** why u see some ladies jst miss use opportunity (GloWbE 8)

In (18), *haba* emphasises positive surprise about Nigeria's position as a soccer nation due to the exploits of the Nigerian football team. In (19), *haba* expresses feelings of strong surprise and pity for the man who bears the brunt of actions of ladies that do not handle their love relationships well.

Haba also conveys strong negative emotions including disapproval, distress, and shock as exemplified in (20), (21), and (22), respectively:

- (20) post is rather out of the world... As in.... too much information... **haba**..... Im sure NO INTERESTED MAN would want their potential woman to share this with (GloWbE 13)
- (21) Its only God dat cld 4give them. Cos I'm so upset **haba!** Must people make money in such pity, terrible and sad situation like tht (GloWbE 27)
- (22) Lagosian with 120 and Hausa boy with 62 score is in the merit list, **haba**, lets divide this country now, Biafra for ever. (GloWbE 85)

The writer in (20) uses *haba* to emphasise his/her disapproval and surprise at the volume of information shared by the writer in question. In (21), *haba* is used to express the writer's anger and distress at the inhuman acts of movie producers and their insatiable quest for gains at all costs. It is an indication of the writer's disapproval of the actions of the producers who would stop at nothing to make some money. In (22), the writer is bewildered at the level of prejudice in Nigeria and uses *haba* to express his/her shock over the matter. In (23) and (24), *haba* is used to signal feelings of disagreement and disgust, respectively:

- (23) Take heart dear and move if possible. # **Haba** SD, I completely disagree with your comment that our healthcare system is crap. (GloWbE 79)
- (24) week after bomb disaster, Change of name when UINLAG is burying his Vice-Chancellor? **Haba**, where is your human feeling. (GloWbE 109)

Haba, together with an address term (SD), prefaces an upcoming comment in (23) to mark the writer's surprise and disagreement with the position of the addressee on the state of the healthcare system in Nigeria. In (24), *haba* expresses the writer's disgust and disapproval of the inhuman act of a former President who made a move to change the name of a grieving institution on the day the Vice-chancellor was being buried. In (25) and (26), *haba* is used to convey feelings of despair and disappointment, respectively:

- (25) pipelines in Lagos was functioning, yet people take subsidy of about N300 billion. **Haba** Nigerians! Where are we going? And we are still shouting subsidy (GloWbE 38)
- (26) why didn't he say it when Awo was alive. 42 years after the war? **Haba**, Achebe. You are supposed to be an elder statesman. (GloWbE 258)

In (25), the writer employs *haba* to express feelings of despair and strong surprise at the fuel situation in the country, where Nigerians were still requesting subsidy when a refinery was working, and s/he felt there was no need for subsidy. In (26), *haba* points to the writer's disappointment at a comment made by a respected statesman, since the comment was made forty-two years after the Nigerian civil war.

4.2. *Kai* in NigEng

Kai is also borrowed from Hausa, and [Hassan \(2016\)](#) opines that it indicates feelings of amusement, amazement and disapproval. [Jowitt \(2019\)](#) also suggests that it indicates strong surprise. Indeed in our data, *kai* does not depict as many negative emotions as *haba*. *Kai* has 102 tokens with a relative frequency of 2.4 (pmw). *Kai* can either be prospective (N = 76; 74.5%) or retrospective (N = 26; 25.5%) as shown in (27) and (28), respectively, which shows that *kai* prefers the prospective position:

- (27) shouldn't have done THAT! Oya, spill... 34 comments: # **Kai**, these things can be very embarrassing to share o. ok, let me share (GloWbE 80)
- (28) Ignored it and wasted money on this shit..... My heart bleeds for Naija... **Kai** # Why would one come to smeone's blog jst tu display his ignorance (GloWbE 74)

In (27), the writer employs *kai* to signal feelings of strong surprise of having to share the embarrassing information that is indicated in the upcoming utterance, while in (28), *kai* is used to express feelings of emotional pain, and sadness that is indicated in the preceding utterance, *My heart bleeds for Naija*.

Kai, on a few occasions, collocates with other interjections such as *lol* (see [Norricks, 2015](#)), PMs such as *but*, and address terms such as *dear* in (29), (30), and (31), respectively. Altogether, it collocated eight times with these items in the GloWbE corpus:

- (29) Burj al Arab or in front of me and my pots and yam oh.. **Kai**.. LOL but I will pass on that please.. (GloWbE 79)
- (30) remember giving a wad of cash to this dude I had a crush on. **kai** but if I want to think of it deeply am still doing stupid things (GloWbE 82)
- (31) you are overweight and unhealthy. If people say you have a pretty face... **Kai** dear you are FAT! (GloWbE 51)

The basic function of *kai* is to express emotions of strong surprise as illustrated in (29) and (30). However, *kai* can also be used to convey feelings of pity, sadness and emotional pain as shown in (32), (33), and (34), respectively:

- (32) I know the situation very well and I feel so sorry for you. **Kai!** # I Will Mary Uche In A New York Seconds. (GloWbE 118)
 (33) so unfair i feel irritated and i hate this site. mtcheeeeeewwwwww nonsense, # **kai** this is so so sad, I agree that what she did is wrong (GloWbE 84)
 (34) court? In this country that anything goes, yes to all. Mscheww. **Kai!** I'm so pained! God would help us all. (GloWbE 59)

In (32), the writer uses *kai* to express pity or sympathy for a lady who was abandoned by her male partner, while in (33), the writer employs *kai* to express his or her feelings of sadness mixed with surprise for the man who reacted negatively to his wife's infidelity in a post. In (34), the writer uses *kai* to show the writer's emotional pain at the failure of both the medical practitioner and the parents of a child who failed to do the right thing in taking care of a sick child.

On rare occasions, *kai* can also be utilised to express mockery, shock and disapproval as exemplified in (35), (36), and (37), respectively:

- (35) it wont surprise no one if she end up with that father of five[...] So just shurrup! Ediotic ediot!! # See pains, **kai**. God has put you and your cohorts to shame and confusion, (GloWbE 129)
 (36) # Hmmm! The gun men attacked and escaped in abuja! **Kai!** There's more to this o! Jonahan! Jonathan! Jonathan! (GloWbE 178)
 (37) blaming Nigeria's problem on others and fix the damn problem from within. # **Kai**, this is a bit one-sided. The Chinese did not take over these markets (GloWbE 56)

In (35), *kai* is used to mock the pains or anger felt by the previous writer who was upset over the rumoured proposed wedding of an actress. In (36), *kai* is used to show the writer's shock and disbelief at a reported attack in Abuja. He challenges the competence of the former president who was the incumbent then. In (37), the writer employs *kai* to express his/her disapproval of what s/he calls a one-sided opinion on the business clash between Nigerians and the Chinese.

Kai may also be utilised deliberately in order to create sensationalism and attract readers to a programme that was being advertised as shown in (38), which can be termed as a non-standard use of *kai*:

- (38) blocked tubes will pop open, low spe.rm count will vanish, hormonal imbalance will normalize. **Kai!!!** Tonight is OZIGIZAGA!!! (GloWbE 105)

4.3. *Chei* and *Chai*¹ in NigEng

Chei and *chai* are borrowed from Igbo, one of the three major indigenous languages in Nigeria, which indicate a number of emotions including surprise, pain and shock as exemplified in (3) and (4). Kperogi (2015) also suggests that *chei* expresses disbelief or deep admiration tempered with a dose of disbelief which may share some meanings with the native English "Oh my God!" Both occurred 53 times in NigEng utterances in GloWbE with a relative frequency of 1.2 (pmw). *Chei* and *chai* have equal rates of occurrence at prospective (39; 73.6%) or retrospective (14; 26.4%) positions as exemplified in (39) and (40), respectively, which shows that they prefer the prospective position:

- (39) # O God have mercy # The Enforcer 4/21/2012 4:21:57 AM # **Chai**, I read this story yesterday on LIB and felt really emotional without seeing pictures (GloWbE 14)
 (40) some tweeps' tweet on Twitter (Lol.. has a nice ring to it **chei**). President Goodluck has a way with people tho, controversy trails him always (GloWbE 1)

Chei was also found to be repeated which indicates the level of emotion experienced by the writer as shown in (41):

- (41) PS: Gaining weight is still not a death sentence: -) # **chei chei chei!** why now? why Laide? GloWbE (81)

Chei and *chai* collocate with address terms such as personal names and kinship terms (e.g. *Sister Yemmie*), and community-based names (e.g. *Africans*) as cited in (42) and (43), respectively:

- (42) # **Chei** Sister Yemmie... follow peace with all men!!! *adjusts halo*... (GloWbE 32)
 (43) doing jobs most oyibos will not even touch with a 10 foot pole. **Chai** Africans, awake from thy slumber. (GloWbE 50)

They also collocate with PMs such as *and*, and with interjections such as *hmmm* as illustrated in (44) and (45), respectively:

- (44) the one that so far has been taking the bulk of her wahala. And **chei!** My Momsie can complain.....! If it is not one thing today, (GloWbE 58)
 (45) I was just joking with these guys on twitter and it went wide. **Chai!** Hmmm, that little joke has gone wild (GloWbE 19)

In few instances, writers in the GloWbE corpus use them to indicate positive surprise as shown in (46) or happiness as shown in (47):

- (46) you know like donjazzy used to do to sweeten the song, **chai**, they were a good partnership. any ways nothing last forever.(GloWbE 92)
 (47) as the boy lives his mother's grip, his first thanksgiving will be' **chei!** thank God I can finally sleep on sunday mornings' # (GloWbE 86)

¹ Both variants are used in Igbo, and L1 speakers of Igbo explain that there is no dialectal difference between them. However, one of the informants suggested that *chei* might express deeper emotional pain than *chai*. This functional difference was, however, not found in GloWbE. Thus, the two BIs are discussed together in this paper.

In (46), the writer employs *chai* to show surprise at the kind of partnership that existed between Don jazzy, a musician and another musician, while in (47), *chei* expresses happiness and relief that the person in question will experience after gaining freedom from his mother's religious confinement.

Both are also used to express neutral surprise² (see Stange, 2016), and pity mixed with surprise as cited in (48) and (49), respectively:

(48) He calms me down and says " relax we just enjoy each other's company ". **Chei**, men are not putting in too much effort these days. (GloWbE 20)

(49) No wonder the palestinian issue is so knotty. **Chai** I feel for poor palestinians. (GloWbE 48)

In (48), the writer employs *chei* to express her surprise at men's attitudes in relationships due to a comment earlier made by another writer. In (49), the writer uses *chai* to indicate sympathy mixed with surprise towards Palestinians, which is indicated in the clause *I feel for poor palestinians*.

Both items are also used to express feelings of negative surprise, pain and disapproval as shown in (50), (51), and (52), respectively:

(50) Shame on all of you o. The Lord is watching all of you. **Chei**. It is situations like this, that we Nigerians really show ourself. (GloWbE 22)

(51) momsy had to apply palm oil on the spots that were swollen on my face- **chei!** it was an experience. (GloWbE 48)

(52) I particularly detest are Shuku, Koroba and the Kiko (with thread).. **chei!** Even that puff puff sef. They are not in anyway attractive (GloWbE 75)

In (50), *chei* shows the writer's negative surprise at the rate of decadence and the citizens' attitude to it in the country, while in (51), *chei* expresses the awful cooking experience of the writer. In (52), *chei* signals the writer's dislike for or disapproval of hair styles in Nigerian schools, and particularly identifies them in order to show how much she detests them.

The use of *chai* became even more popular in Nigeria after the kidnapping of the Chibok girls by Boko Haram in 2014, when the then First Lady of Nigeria while on television cried, '*chai chai...*', which shows a combination of great sympathy, sadness, shock and bewilderment as exemplified also in (53):

(53) That someone is laughing doesn't mean they are happy ooo.... **Chai!**, It is well # Suicide is such a horrible thing. (GloWbE 109)

In (53), the writer is shocked at the fact that someone committed suicide. S/he is bewildered at the fact that the late person did not appear to be someone sad or depressed and therefore, the writer least expected that the person would commit suicide.

4.4. *Mtchew* in NigEng

Mtchew is used to represent a sound employed in Nigerian culture to express feelings of anger, utter disgust, disapproval, and derision (see Jowitt, 1991; Kperogi, 2015). Its use is spread across different Nigerian ethnic groups. It is termed as *saki* in Hausa, *i ma usụ* in Igbo, *oşe* in Yoruba, *kpesonha* in Ishan, *opirre* in Idoma, and *u sandom ju* in Tiv amongst others. *Mtchew* represents the oral gesture referred to as *suck-teeth* or *kiss-teeth* which is widespread in some parts of Africa as well as in the Caribbean (see Rickford and Rickford, 1976; Patrick and Figueroa, 2002). It is produced by protruding the lips and drawing air inwards noisily, which Jowitt (1991: 193) terms as 'chissing'. NigEng users appropriate this sound lexically as 'hissing' (see 54; see also Jowitt, 1991), but this is different from the native English 'hissing', which is a sibilant sound produced by forcing air through the teeth (see Kperogi, 2015). In the Nigerian context, the British English type of hissing is used to attract someone's attention from a distance (see Kperogi, 2015). *Mtchew* can be compared with Ghanaian *tweaa* which is also an interjection employed to express contempt (Thompson, 2019). Thompson (2019) also suggests that *mtchew* is found in Ghanaian English as evident in the Corpus of GhanaWeb Comments on Ghana's Election 2016; it is also found in the Ghanaian component of GloWbE.

(54) Next time she sees u, she gon be hissing " **mtcheew** " and probably wishing she can just kick his butt. (GloWbE 6)

While it is a taboo for young persons or social inferiors to produce *mtchew* in the presence of older persons or social superiors, the latter can produce *mtchew* in the presence of the former. It can also be produced in the presence of friends and occurs only in informal interactions. This may indicate why it occurs often in the GloWbE corpus which is an online context where users do not have knowledge of the age or identity of their interlocutors and where the anonymity of users gives them the platform to use language differently from face-to-face interactions (see also Christopherson, 2007). In speech, the sound could be lengthened (see also Stange, 2016 on *ow*, and Thompson, 2019 on *tweaa*), depending on the level of disgust or anger felt by the speaker, and this is also depicted in the different spellings of *mtchew* in the GloWbE corpus as cited in (55):

(55) to hear my long hiss after later finding out that this news was fake, **mtcheeeew!** How did FRSC gets this fake info sef³? (GloWbE 2)

Due to the fact that the word does not have an established spelling, NigEng users have tried to represent the sound orthographically using different spellings. The most prominent is *mtchew* (N = 59), followed by *mschew* (N = 27), *mtcheew* (N = 11), *mtcheww* (N = 11) and *mtchewwww* (N = 11). Other variants occur between one and ten times. Altogether, there are

² Stange (2016:68) describes neutral surprise as the kind of surprise that occurs in a situation that is not "particularly negative or positive."

³ *Sef* is a NigP emphasis PM formed from the English emphatic ending '-self' which shares similarly meanings with English PMs such as *really* (see also Faraclas, 1996).

250 instances (5.9 pmw) of *mtchew* in the GloWbE corpus, from a range of 76 spelling variants of *mtchew*. These figures exclude other very rare variants that may appear as coincidence.⁴ In fact, four major spellings are detected *mtchew*, *mschew*, *mtschew* and *mstcheew*. Other variants are sub-variants of these four which are produced by multiplying the 'e' and/or 'w' in each of the four major variants. Few examples are listed in (56) and (57):

- (56) then you are an hypocrite and insincere fellow, or even a fool. **Mtscheeeew!!!** # Mojeed, your take on this issue just exposed you (GloWbE 1)
 (57) Most of us do not just know what christianity is all about. **Mstcheew.** # Most of u guys here have said my mind. (GloWbE 1)

In a particular variant, the 'e' was repeated seven times while the 'w' was repeated five times as illustrated in (58):

- (58) this is so unfair i feel irritated and i hate this site. **mtcheeeeeeewwwww** nonsense, (GloWbE 1)

In (58), the writer lengthens *mtchew* by multiplying the 'e' and 'w' due to a high level of disgust shown through the use of three words that indicate negative evaluation: *unfair*, *irritated* and *hate*. In some variants, the 'e' was absent (see 59).

Mtchew is usually retrospective (N = 236; 94.4%) but it can, on few occasions, be prospective (N = 13, 5.2%), as shown in (59) where it is used to introduce a turn:

- (59) u will singing' forgive me the KOKO!!! waste.... Mtchew!!! # **Mtchwwwwwwwwww** this low life b***h called Susan peters cant just rest (GloWbE 43)

On one occasion (0.4%), it formed an utterance as shown in 60:

- (60) So that I will now be owing them marks abi? # **Mscheww.** # You know that feeling when you know all hope is lost (GloWbE 6)

Mtchew sometimes collocates with other discourse-pragmatic features that are loosely attached to a syntactic structure. These include expletives such as *nonsense* in (58), and bilingual PMs such as *o* as exemplified in (61):

- (61) Don't let that her ugly pounded yam looking face deceive you o! **Mtchew!** # anna remove wat is in your eyes b4 you do to others (GloWbE 18)

Mtchew is usually used to express feelings of anger, utter disgust and derision as indicated in (59), (62), and (63), respectively:

In (62), *mtchew* shows the writer's utter disgust at the comments of people on two Nollywood actresses, while in (63), the writer uses *mtchew* to deride a lady who was displaying her engagement ring, when others were displaying their male partners, *bobbo*.

- (62) here defending the old cargo like they are suffering from terrible dsyentry writing nonsense! **Mtchew!** # (GloWbE 37)
 (63) I guess she got married to a metal, d ring she's flaunting, **mtchewww!** Babes are busy flaunting their correct bobbo, u re here flaunting common ring (GloWbE 8)

Mtchew is also used to indicate that a writer is unimpressed or uninterested in a matter, and sadness mixed with anger as shown in (64) and (65) respectively:

- (64) and Me rolls eyes and say what else is new.. **mtcheew..** kmt.. unto the next news please!!! (GloWbE 14)
 (65) they don't properly service their planes. What a very sad time for the families. **Mtchew.** Rip sha. Instead of attending weddings and giving ridiculous awards the government should sort this out! # (GloWbE 32)

In (64), the writer is unimpressed by the actions of a lady reported in a blog, indicated through the non-verbal act of rolling her eyes, and uses *mtchew* to further foreground her disinterest in the lady's activities. In (65), the writer employs *mtchew* in order to express sadness at the incident of a plane crash which claimed many lives, and anger at the same time at the negligence of the government on important matters as aviation.

5. Discussion

In this study, we set out to investigate the sources, meanings, frequencies, positions, spellings, collocational patterns and functions of five emotive BIs in NigEng: *haba*, *kai*, *chai*, *chei* and *mtchew*. Table 1 contains a summary of these findings. In the following sub-sections, we discuss the implications of the findings for NigEng.

5.1. BIs in NigEng: sources, meanings and frequencies

Part of the objectives of the study was to examine the origins or sources, meanings and frequencies of the BIs in NigEng. The results indicate that four of the BIs are loaned from two of the major indigenous languages in Nigeria. While *haba* and *kai* are borrowed from Hausa, *chai* and *chei* are loaned from Igbo, which, of course, may be as a result of the fact that there is a higher population of people who speak these languages than other minority languages in Nigeria (see Jowitt, 2019; see also

⁴ Based on different spellings of *mtchew* found in the corpus, the initial part of four spelling variants with an asterisk (*mtch**, *msch**, *mtsc*, *mstc**) was used to search for all possible variants of the word. This might exclude any other variant that did not follow this search routine.

Table 1

Origins, meanings, frequencies, spelling variants, positions, collocations and pragmatic functions of the BIs.

BI	Origin	Meaning (similar to)	Frequency	Spelling variants	Position	Collocation	Pragmatic Function
Haba	Hausa	'You can't be serious'	5.8 pmw	haba, habba, habaa, haaba, haabaa	mainly prospective	PMs, address terms	expresses surprise, shock, anger, disapproval, disgust, disbelief, disappointment, and disagreement
Kai	Hausa	'Oh my God'	2.4 pmw	Kai	mainly prospective	interjections, PMs, address terms	expresses feelings of surprise, sympathy, anger, pain, sadness, disapproval, and shock
Chai/ Chei	Igbo	'Oh my God'	1.2 pmw each	chai/chei	mainly prospective	interjections, PMs, address terms	express feelings of surprise, sympathy, anger, pain, sadness, disapproval, and shock
Mtchew	Different Nigerian cultures	Suck-teeth/kiss-teeth	5.9 pmw	mtchew, mschew, mtschew, mstcheew, etc	mainly retrospective	expletives, PMs	expresses sadness, anger, utter disgust, despair, derision, and disinterest.

Unuabonah, 2020). This contrasts with the case of PMs, where Yoruba PMs seem to dominate (see *abi*, *jare*, *jor*, and *sha* in Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2018; Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2020) in NigEng. The source of *mtchew* is different: while *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, and *chai* may have entered into NigEng as loan interjections, *mtchew* is not only a loan but an onomatopoeic interjection (see Stange, 2016). As mentioned earlier, *mtchew* is taken from a sound produced by different ethnic groups in Nigeria. It is an oral gesture in different Nigerian cultures as it has different names in the different cultures. Thus, it may be said that culturally, *mtchew* is a loan interjection but linguistically, it is an onomatopoeic interjection coined by Nigerians in order to represent their emotions in English-based written texts. In relation to meaning, the results show that it is difficult to find English interjections which share close meanings with the BIs except in the case of *mtchew* which has similar meanings with the phenomenon of *kiss-teeth* or *suck-teeth* that is shared by other African and Caribbean communities. This may be due to the multifunctional roles played by the BIs, which are later discussed in 5.2.

With regard to frequency, the results indicate that *mtchew*, *haba* and *kai* are somewhat infrequent while *chai* and *chei* are extremely rare. The relatively high frequency of *mtchew* in relation to other BIs examined in this paper may be due to its presence in different Nigerian cultures. The high frequency of *haba* and *kai* compared to *chei* and *chai* shows their spread among other NigEng users who have different INL as their L1 (see also Kperogi, 2015). Such a spread may be expected considering that there are many informal situations where Nigerian citizens meet, which would make them borrow interjections from other languages. A case in point is the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a compulsory one year national service for all new graduates from all tertiary institutions in Nigeria created in 1973 (see NYSC, 2017). During this period, graduates are posted from one state or region of the country to another and spend a year at such places where different L1s are spoken. At such points, these young graduates interact with the indigenes at markets and schools, and these are points where they easily absorb these linguistic items. These graduates are the ones who would most likely use the interjections on social media, and since these are informal sites, it would be easy to include them in their utterances. This might indicate why *haba*, which is the second highest ranking BI studied in this paper, appeared only twice in Hausa utterances. Although *haba* is clearly a Hausa word, it is interesting that it was in fact found in a Yoruba utterance as shown in (71), which further shows that it is used by people of different L1s.

(66) I will advise Femi; softly o! " Oni ijo, ola ariya, **haba** o duro nle ko t'aju aya, ko t'aju omo'. (GloWbE 220)

In general, very few of the tokens of BI were found within INL, instead they were found in NigP utterances. In the case of *chei* and *chai* in GloWbE, these occurred in NigEng utterances half as often as they occurred in NigP utterances (N = 30 and 31, respectively). However, what is quite interesting is that *haba* did not occur often in NigP utterances in the GloWbE corpus, which may show its increased acceptability by NigEng users (N = 59). The case of *kai* was slightly different as it did not occur in a number of instances as a BI (see the examples in Section 3). Only 31 occurred in NigP utterances. Thus, it appears then that the spread of BIs in NigEng may also be associated with the use of these items in NigP. For example, Faraclas (1996) reports the use of interjections such as *chay* (*chai*), *cheyi* (*chei*) and *kai* in NigP, although he did not provide their meanings, sources or uses. As noted also in examples (1)–(4), *haba*, *kai*, *chei* and *chai* are used in ICE-Nig, which fully captures Standard Nigerian English (see Udofot, 2003; Wunder et al., 2010). Faraclas (1996) also notes that there is a widespread use of NigP among the Nigerian youth and these are the same youth (these would have also grown considering that the data used for this study were collected in the early 2010s) who would most likely use different social media such as blogs and online newspaper commentaries.

In general, a number of reasons may account for the frequency of the BIs in NigEng. Matras (2000) posits that linguistic items that deal with the management of discourse such as PMs are prone to borrowing since borrowing helps to reduce the mental processing effort which may occur when dealing with a pragmatically dominant language, in this case English, especially in informal contexts such as blogs and online commentaries. This may also extend to interjections since interjections have communicative functions which help in the management of discourse (Norrick, 2015; Stange, 2016). This may

indicate why they are easily borrowed from indigenous languages into English by NigEng users. In addition, Stange (2016) opines that it is rather difficult to change the interjections that a foreign language learner or bilingual speaker would use in a given context of pain or surprise. She suggests that interjections appear to be deeply entrenched in a speaker's linguistic system and that native interjections will likely appear since they are spontaneous. Although the BIs studied in this paper are infrequent based on their relative frequencies, they occur more than other kinds of English emotive interjections such as *aw* and *duh*⁵ which are used to express negative feelings such as anger and contempt. In addition, the spread of these BIs in NigEng may depend on factors such as contamination and repetition (see Sauciuc, 2006). Sauciuc (2006) suggests that interjections can easily be adopted by a speaker within a short period of time; thus, it is expected that continuous and repetitive use of these BIs will further lead to wider use in NigEng.

5.2. BIs in NigEng: spellings, positions, collocational patterns and functions

In the remaining parts of the objectives, we sought to investigate the spelling stability, positions, collocational patterns, and functions of the BIs in NigEng. As regards spelling, *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, and *chai* are orthographically stable. There were no examples of the spellings *chay* and *cheyi* written by Faraclas (1996) in the GloWbE corpus. Only four other spelling variants were found for *haba*, and these had very few tokens. It is only *mtchew* that is still unstable orthographically. This, of course, is due to the lengthening of the sound which is reflected in the multiplication of 'e' and/or 'w' in different variants of *mtchew*. This lengthening may indicate that the semi-automatic nature of *mtchew* may not always be as high as the other four interjections, and in some cases may be used deliberately. The lengthening of the sound is based on the level of anger or disgust felt by the writer (see also Stange, 2016).

In relation to position, the BIs favoured the prospective position except *mtchew* which largely occurs retrospectively. The preference for the prospective position by most of the BIs aligns with other interjections which prefer the utterance-initial (prospective) position (see Stange, 2016). The fact that *mtchew* prefers to be retrospective might also foreground the suggestion that it is not always as semi-automatic as others. In line with other interjections discussed elsewhere, these Nigerian BIs are largely free-standing but are connected to their linguistic context. Their free-standing nature is reflected in the frequent use of the initial capital letter, as well as separation from the preceding or succeeding clauses through the use of the comma, exclamation mark, full stop, and ellipsis marker. In some cases, these features were not used. For example, the frequency of most of the BIs which start with the capital letter is relatively high; their percentages are as follows: *haba* (82.3%), *kai* (68.6%), *chei* (64.2%), and *mtchew* (67.6%), except in the case of *chai* with 49%.

In relation to collocational patterns, we find that the BIs studied in this paper collocate with other discourse-pragmatic features such as other interjections, expletives, address terms and PMs, though this is not very often. Although Norrick (2015) reported the combination of interjections in American English utterances, he did not indicate if there were combinations with other discourse-pragmatic features such as PMs and address terms. The combinations of interjections with other discourse-pragmatic features further foreground their communicative functions in NigEng.

One thing that the five emotive interjections have in common is that they all express strong negative emotions, especially *haba* and *mtchew*. In fact, *mtchew* is never used to express any positive or neutral emotion. Also, while *haba*, *kai*, *chai* and *chai* all have the basic function of expressing strong surprise, *mtchew* has the basic function of expressing anger, utter disgust and derision. One thing that is clear is that the BIs studied are polyfunctional as they can be used to express different emotions such as pain and anger at the same time. Thus, NigEng users may find it easier to use these BIs in place of English interjections since the BIs might be more economical in expressing different emotions at the same time (see also Hlavac, 2003). In addition, all the BIs studied can be used to introduce turns.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored five emotive BIs: *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, *chai*, and *mtchew* in NigEng, and has shown that *haba* and *kai* are borrowed from Hausa, *chei* and *chai* are taken from Igbo while *mtchew* is an onomatopoeic interjection peculiar to many Nigerian indigenous cultures. It is also indicated that *kai*, *chai*, and *chei* express feelings of surprise, sympathy, sadness, anger, pain, disapproval, and shock, *haba* is used to indicate surprise, shock, anger, disapproval, disgust, disbelief, disappointment, and disagreement while *mtchew* is used to show sadness, anger, utter disgust, despair, derision, and disinterest. It is believed that the continuous use of these BIs on Nigerian online platforms will lead to a wider spread and become more entrenched in the repertoire of NigEng users, and may possibly extend to other West African Englishes, especially due to the influence of the Nigerian film industry, *Nollywood*, whose films are shown on the internet and across Africa through Multichoice, an international cable television provider. In future studies, it will be interesting to explore the use of these interjections in the language of L1 speakers of NigEng, in order to investigate how deeply these BIs are entrenched in their repertoire.

⁵ The tokens of a list of 26 English interjections: *aah*, *argh*, *aww*, *aw*, *bah*, *boo*, *boo-hoo*, *do'h*, *eww*, *duh*, *fuff*, *gah*, *grr*, *humph*, *ick*, *nuh-uh*, *ouch*, *oww*, *oy*, *pew*, *oy vay*, *pfj*, *sheesh*, *tsk-tsk*, *yikes*, *yuck* which show contempt, pain, disapproval, dislike, disgust, shock and other negative emotions were checked in the NigEng component of GloWbE (without removing cases were they might occur in NigP or INL), and only one occurred more than *kai* while two occurred more than *chai* and *chei*: *boo* (N = 156) and *aw* (N = 62). Both *boo* and *aw* did not occur more than *haba* or *mtchew*.

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