

1 An Analysis of the Syntactic Features of Jenifa's Diary English
2 and its Implications on the Standard English usage of Nigerian
3 Students

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6

7 **Abstract**

8 Jenifa's Diary, a popular TV show which gained much attention, has no doubt influenced the
9 language use of teeming fans across the country. English usage of the protagonist of the TV
10 show -Jenifa is armed with horrendous grammar and poor expression and after watching the
11 film show, viewers have been inspired to speak like Jenifa. It is for this reason that this study
12 analyzed the syntactic features of English usage of Jenifa and its implications on the English
13 usage of students. Seven selected series of Jenifa's Diary was observed with the aim of
14 identifying the features of Jenifa's English usage, after which its implications on students' use
15 of English were elicited. The features of Jenifa's English as revealed by findings include
16 semantic misapplication, malapropism, deviant use of verbs, code-mixing, literary transfer and
17 many more. Even though, the English usage of Jenifa is ungrammatical and unacceptable to
18 the norms of Standard English, a large population of students is emulating such language use.
19 Students are seen saying ?how is you? in place of ?how are you?, I is fine? in place of ?I am
20 fine? ?Yaun!? to mean ?yes or yes?? ?my friendship/friended? to mean ?my friend? ?lafia? in
21 place of ?leave here? and many more.

22

23 **Index terms**— syntactic features, english usage, implications, standard english, students.

24 **1 Introduction**

25 In Nigeria today, a lot of our Nollywood stars have become most of our role models. Though, we are all aware
26 that drama is unrealistic unless they are based on a true story; what the protagonist does or says can give us
27 ideas which sometimes are not the best ideas. Oftentimes, if a favorite character tends to use a word or sentence
28 contrarily to its actual meaning to tease people in a particular movie, it might instigate viewers to do the same by
29 automatically adopting such word or sentence to tease. The implication of this is that movies have the potential
30 not only to affect our thoughts but also influence our lifestyle and communicative abilities. Being obsessed with
31 a fictional character can influence students or anyone generally, to want to look like, talk, act or become someone
32 else.

33 Adeniyi and Bello (2006) contends that man, through the media, can get what language form, fashion, music
34 and so on that are in vogue. In little or no time, through our listening to the radio set or watching the television
35 set, we could get to do what others are doing. The media, therefore, become a fast means through which we
36 could get anything promoted. As a result of the fact that youths get what language form, fashion, music etc that
37 is in vogue through movies, Nollywood stars appear to have encapsulated the life of the average urban youths
38 (Omojola, 2006) and increasingly also the lives of rural youths across the country with the various language used
39 in their movies. As these fans consume the content of the movie, they also flow with the language used.

40 Most of the language style, slangs and catchy phrases that Nollywood stars deliberately use in their movies
41 to increase the rate of acceptability of such movie and also for them to create a landmark worth discussing even
42 while the movie is no longer in vogue are now popular almost on every street in Nigeria (Liadi, 2012). Because
43 Nollywood movies are highly accessible and quickly incorporative through various forms of media, most of these

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44 slangs and catchy phrases tend to affect the way students communicate on daily basis. This emanates from the
45 usual habits of students' imitation of the Nollywood stars and an attempt to want to speak like them. Students
46 who are fans of the Nollywood stars have always attempted to mimic their utterances, grammar and style of
47 pronunciation in movies. Resultantly, the widespread popularity of the Nollywood language has a significant
48 impact on the English language that is used by today's students.

49 Jenifa's Diary, one of the popular film show which has gained the attention of fans in and out the country, has
50 no doubt played a key role in determining the language use of teeming fans across the country. Many lovers of
51 the TV show would rather set aside all they are doing to watch the show (Akham, 2019), and the bastardized use
52 of English in the movie series is now the trending language among the vast majority of youths who are students
53 of primary, secondary and tertiary institution. Jenifa's Diary, which is a dramatic show by the ace actress; Funke
54 Akindele, is a long-running TV episode series that is attracting greater attention, most probably because the
55 characters therein spoke the English language as opposed to the formal way of using it (Oriloye, 2018) which now
56 trend among students and general public.

57 The use of English of the protagonist of the TV show, Jenifa; is armed with horrendous grammar, poor
58 expression, bastardized intonation and arbitral codemixing and code-switching of English and Yoruba dialect
59 and after watching the popular film show, viewers have not only attempted to mimic the protagonist of the
60 play but also have been inspired to speak like Jenifa. Viewers, in which students constitute majorities not only
61 attempt to mimic the lifestyle of Jenifa, they also inculcate the habit of speaking ungrammatical English the
62 way she used them. Jenifa's use of several incorrect words in place of words with similar sounds, resulting most
63 times in humorous utterances have become the usual way students talk nowadays. The type of language and the
64 accent used is very inappropriate and students are acquiring it at a dangerous level.

65 This film might inevitably bring a certain frustration to language learners who have not achieved a high
66 proficiency level. Against this background, this study attempts to analyze the syntactic features of English usage
67 of Jenifa in Jenifa's Diary in order to expose its implications on the English usage of Nigerian students.

68 2 II.

69 3 The Observed Problem

70 It is a point of note that bad English is what motivates people to watch the movie. However, the problem arises
71 when the trending comic relief sitcom has an adverse effect on poor Nigerian students. In vogue, grammatical
72 expression as pleasantries amidst Nigerian students in recent times has been "how is you" and "my friendship"
73 and the usual reply is "I is fine" and "Yaun" bastardized with bad accent and intonation.

74 Recently, I overheard a little girl speaking exactly like Jenifa. She was telling another kid, "Joe, ava?" and
75 he replied, "I is fine". Then, I wondered the damage it will cause to their English speaking ability in the long
76 run. My point is, people who already know the right grammar to use may not be a victim of this. However,
77 people especially students who are still learning the English language or with low proficiency in the language
78 can be confused and misled. Hence, there is a need to analyze Jenifa's use of English in Jenifa's Diary from the
79 syntactic level of linguistic analysis in order to find out how such a widely acclaimed movie series can influence
80 the language situation of the viewers-positively or otherwise. Therefore, this study attempts to linguistically
81 analyze the English of Jenifa in Jenifa's Diary with a view to expose its implications on the English usage of
82 students.

83 4 III.

84 5 Purpose of the Study

85 The purpose of this study is to: i. Identify and describe the syntactic features of Jenifa's English in Jenifa's
86 Diary.

87 ii. Investigate the impact of these features on the English usage of Nigerian students.

88 IV. In Jenifa's Diary, as explained by Oriloye (2018), the story revolves around the same humorous and
89 eponymous character; Sulia turned Jenifa, (played by Funke Akindele), a village school drop-out who is obsessed
90 with living the campus life and becoming a big girl in the city. She deployed crooked means in the bid to leave
91 Ayétòrò, her village, for the city and Toyosi; an undergraduate she had once helped had to put up with her.
92 Suliat expresses her comic character by her loose attitude, hasty comments, the spirit of adventure and most
93 especially, poor English expressions and Yorùbá dialect. Armed with her horrendous grammar, quick wit and
94 beloved diary, she battles her way through whatever obstacle the city hurls at her. Funny enough, the least one
95 would have expected from such a character is a diary where she records her day-to-day experiences and thoughts
96 in soliloquies! With themes bordering on love, friendship, family and selfactualization, "Jenifa's Diary" is indeed
97 a viewer's delight.

98 6 Literature Review

99 However, while many people have praised the T.V show for the elated humour in the series, other people have
100 zero tolerance for it sight on their TV screens as they termed the show a waste of time with no solid lesson gained.

101 Uzoma Ihejirika, a writer in times he laughed out loud at Jenifa's confident massacre of the English language.
102 He noted that despite Akindele's use of "corrupt English", the programme was still entertaining. He added that
103 the entertainment industry needed to produce movies and series as 'Jenifa's Diary' (Bakwamagazine.com, 2016).
104 Also, another viewer of the programme, Miss Ifeyinwa Ohanwe, a public servant described the programme as
105 hilarious. She commented that she enjoyed watching the programme because it is hilarious, entertaining and
106 keeps her wanting to see more (The Vanguard Newspaper, 2016). As argued by some commenters in the article
107 "Grammatical Intelligence: Jenifa's Diary Not For Kids" posted on Nairaland Forum in 2019, Jenifa's Diary show
108 passes information to the public. Beyond her accent are some information and valuable lessons of life which she
109 was able to pass across to the audience through her unique accents.

110 On the other hand, others condemned the use of language in the movie series. Ohanwe, noted that she would
111 not recommend the programme for children, adding that if they watched it overtime, it might corrupt their use
112 of English. He added that Jenifa's Diary is not for school children because kids learn things fast and if they
113 know it, it is hard for them to forget it. Another commenter advised that people especially children who are still
114 learning the English language should not view that movie because it might instigate them to form a habit that
115 will negatively hamper their language development (The Vanguard Newspaper, 2016).

116 Ritonga and Sofyani (2018) opine that there are several important things in the process of language
117 development of children such as physical preparation, mental readiness, the existence of a good model to be
118 imitated, the opportunity to practice, as well as motivation and guidance. Television is one of the most effective
119 media in delivering its message. As asserted by Guru, Nabi and Raslana (2013), the eye is one of the most
120 powerful sensory organs and two-thirds of learning come through the sense of sight much more than what people
121 learn through the sense of sound. Guru et al. (2013) note further that audio-visual information lasts long
122 in one's memory. The presence of color enables one to show things in natural colours enhancing the level of
123 communications and the motion gives one more dynamism to the process of communication. Thus, the presence
124 of these rich characteristics of theatre in television makes the communication process more effective and helps
125 the viewers in the perception of information and poor language television models can affect children's language
126 development. Robin (2004) contends that a child's age and linguistic maturity, the suitability of the content for
127 his or her age group, the quality of the content viewed, the amount of television viewed, and the involvement
128 of parents during viewing all inform the likelihood of language learning from television. To Robin (2004), the
129 correlation between high quantity of general television viewing and poor language ability may be attributable to
130 the quality of content viewed and/or the time spent viewing. Evidence suggests that children who are frequently
131 exposed to inappropriate television tend to have a lower vocabulary and poorer expressive language which are
132 attributable to both the quality of the content on offer and the quantity of exposure to television more generally.

133 Research finds that children who have language delay tended to watch television too early. Children who are
134 less than twelve months and watch more than two hours a day of television are six times more likely to develop
135 language delay (Essay, 2018). This means that age-appropriate educational television programs can teach new
136 vocabulary to children even in the absence of accompanying adults and children with high television exposure
137 and inappropriate content may have low expressive language skills and the possibility of speaking disorders.

138 V.

139 **7 Theoretical Framework: Observational Learning Theory**

140 The theory that is employed in this study is Observational Learning Theory. The Observational Learning Theory
141 is the theory that behavior can be learned through observation of others. Also known as the Social Learning
142 Theory. The simple process of observing someone else's activity is enough for one to learn targeted behavior.
143 This theory was created by Behaviorist Albert Bandura, who supported his ideas with thorough experimentation.
144 This theory and its creator are part of the Behaviorist School of Thought in Psychology. It is a precursor to the
145 Social Cognitive Theory, which involves the idea that people learn and construct thought processes from their
146 experiences within social settings. Bandura believed that the mind, behavior, and environment all play a vital
147 role in the learning process (Stone, 2019).

148 In Observational Learning Theory, one person's behavior (the model) is witnessed by a second person (the
149 observer). Observational learning has occurred when some aspect of the model's behavior controls a related aspect
150 of the second person's behavior. The observer's behavior may match An Analysis of the Syntactic Features of
151 Jenifa's Diary English and its Implications on the Standard English usage of Nigerian Students strong points of
152 the movie series. He noted that many All the assertions discussed above show that television contents have a great
153 impact on the language development of students. While appropriate content at appropriate times will enhance
154 vocabulary and language use of students, inappropriate language contents can also negatively affect the language
155 acquisition of students, especially those who are yet to form accepted language habits. Thus, the bastardized use
156 of language in the TV show-Jenifa's Diary will definitely affect students' use of English. the model's along the
157 dimensions of topography, function, or discriminative context (Bandura, 1977). A topographical relation involves
158 similarity of form. For example, a mother might say to her child, "You are incorrigible today' and the child
159 replies, "I'm'corrigible." Matching along the functional dimension involves the similarity between the outcome of
160 the model's and observer's behavior. For example, a child might see people on a television commercial drinking
161 bottles of soda; the child may then hurry into the kitchen to get a cup of juice. An example of observational
162 learning of discriminative context (and topography) may be seen when a child can correctly name a real helicopter

15 F) REDUNDANT USE OF MODIFIERS, ADJECTIVE AND ADJUNCTS FOR EMPHASIS

163 after having been exposed to pictures of helicopters and the word helicopter during picture-book reading with
164 parents.

165 The relevance of this theory to language learning is that observing television models can affect language
166 behavior in many ways, with both positive and negative consequences. It can teach completely new language
167 skills and at the same time, it can also increase or decrease the frequency of rules of a language that have previously
168 been learned. Learning by observation and imitation of other people's behavior is an everyday affair for most
169 children and a central process in acquiring a wide variety of new behaviors. Extensive research has shown that
170 modeling is an effective way for children to acquire, strengthen, and weaken behaviors. Since Nollywood stars are
171 often seen as role models, students often attempt to mimic their utterances, grammar and style of pronunciation
172 in movies. This means that through observation of the television models, the widespread popularity of the
173 Nollywood language has a significant impact upon the English language that is used by today's students.

174 8 VI.

175 9 Research Method

176 A survey research design was utilized in this study. Description and analyses of the language use of Jenifa
177 provided data for the study. All Jenifa's Diary movie series constituted the overall population of the study.
178 However, due to time limitations and constraints, a representative number of seven episodes were randomly
179 selected for analysis. Content Analysis was used to analyze the collected data. This includes a content analysis
180 of Jenifa's Diary English to explore the features and errors of Jenifa's English. Notable features and errors of
181 Jenifa's English were recorded and its implications on students' usage of English were drawn afterward.

182 10 a) Presentation and Analysis of Data

183 The description of the syntactic features of Jenifa's English is given below.

184 11 b) Deviant Use of Verbs

185 One of the features of Jenifa's English is the deviant use of verbs. The deviant use of the verb is seen in
186 mis-selection of verb forms and distortion of verb tense.

187 12 c) Mis-selection of verbs

188 In the mis-selection of verbs, Jenifa showed confusion in the use of verbs. Jenifa failed to select the appropriate
189 verb to form correct sentences to express herself in certain contexts. The following extracts from the English of
190 Jenifa analyzed may therefore appear deviant to Standard English. ???Nobody

191 13 d) Distorted use of verb tense

192 Tense is usually defined as relating to the time of an action, event or state. It is needed in forming sentences
193 and commonly expressed by the verb. The tense form of a verb indicates distinctions in time. The correct use of
194 tense enhances meaning and fluency which facilitates comprehension and effective communication. Jenifa seems
195 not to understand the functions of English tenses as she could not apply them correctly in the right contexts.
196 Consequently, Jenifa used her discretion to choose tenses and invariably switch tenses haphazardly. On most
197 occasions, she either misselect or distort the verb tense in her utterances.

198 14 e) The Omission of Function Words

199 This has to do with the omission of grammatical elements that do not contribute to the meaning of the utterance.
200 This omission occurs with function words such as conjunctions, prepositions, articles, etc and content words such
201 as verbs, adverbs, etc. Some of these elements may have no meanings of their own, but they are necessary and
202 important to ensure that the sentence is grammatical, complete and meaningful.

203 Jenifa wrongly uses the articles or at times, omit them where they are to be used, as in the following extracts:
204 *You are feri feri carin poson o (You are a very caring person) ???consumers hurry go (The consumer left in a
205 hurry) Though, these are distorted sentence on its own with misspelling and redundant use of the adjunct "very",
206 but the definite article 'a' has been omitted rendering the sentence ungrammatical.

207 15 f) Redundant Use of Modifiers, adjective and adjuncts for 208 Emphasis

209 ???This my friend is not serious o (This friend of mine is not serious at all) *Please, do sharp sharp .
210 (quickly) ???Toyo always like wearing small small clothes. (jumper) ???I will be there now now. (that is
211 right now/immediately) g) Code-mixing Code-mixing is a means of communication which involves a speaker
212 mixing two languages within the elements of a sentence structure (in this case, English and Yoruba). The use
213 of code-mixing of English and Yoruba is prevalent in Jenifa's utterances. Here are some extracts in English and
214 Yoruba languages: ???Igba ti won mi ni fisa ni (it was when I was denied visa) *wey Kokoro? (where is the Key?)

215 *why water plenty like this inside jollof rice? Rice that suppose to do woroworo come out singular (why is water
216 much in the jollof rice? Its supposed to stand in grains) *why you are oledo like this, Segun? (why are you this
217 dumb Segun) ???you be my aburo (you are my younger brother or sister) ???Mo try lati write story kan about
218 the man's ordeal in the police station. (I tried to write a story about the man's ordeals in the police station)

219 **16 h) Literary Transfer**

220 Literary transfer here can also be regarded as a direct translation. It involves the transfer of direct or exact
221 meaning of a word from the native language into the target language regardless of the context or colinguistics of
222 the utterance, *Do small small there o. (be careful with your steps there) *Come down at lekki, take Uber from
223 there *Their house beautiful pass all the houses. *E scatter in my brain (I got confused)

224 In examples above, jenifa employed a direct translation of her MT pattern by using the words 'small small'
225 to mean 'be careful' and 'come down' instead of 'alight'. The fourth example which is * E scatter in my brain (I
226 got confused)' is a direct translation from the Yoruba dialect "o sapamilori"

227 **17 i) Malapropism as a Result of Mispronunciation**

228 Malapropism refers to an amusing mistake somebody makes when he uses a word that sounds similar to the word
229 he wanted to use. Malapropism in the context of jenifa's English could be regarded as a mispronunciation. She
230 mispronounced many words that only sound like the real words but are actually wrong.

231 **18 j) Semantic Misapplication and Wrong Lexical Choices**

232 Semantic is connected with the meaning of words and sentences. Semantic misapplication then occurs according
233 to (Adebileje and Akinwale, 2017), when meaning of a word has been misapplied in a sentence. That means the
234 word is being used in a wrong context (different from how it ought to be used and when it ought to be used).
235 Semantic misapplication sometimes leads to the wrong lexical choice. Wrong lexical choice, as the name implies,
236 involves using the wrong word in a sentence. Jenifa's English was mostly filed with semantic misapplication
237 and wrong lexical choices which made her utterances ungrammatical. Her choices of words are wrongly fitted
238 using words that do not collocate in the English language, impose the word order of her dialect and misapplying
239 meanings. *I pride in you (i am so proud of you) *You want to make your head? (Would you like to plait our
240 hair?) *You go school? (Are you literate?) *Is me that they are found (They are my guests) *Toyosi, I no hungry,
241 I tire (Toyosi, I am not hungry. I'm tired) *No ma, I no sleep (No ma, I am not sleeping) *Make I come and
242 die? (I don't want to die) *Who is swrong in you (What is the problem?) *We cannot be friendship (We cannot
243 be friends) *Come and sat (Please, have a seat) *Why water plenty like this in jollof rice? (How come the jollof
244 rice is watery)*I no angry (i am not upset) k) The Extent to which these Errors Affect the Standard English
245 usage of Nigerian students One of the ways students, both at the secondary and tertiary level get to know the
246 latest in vogue is through movie stars. They have always constituted models for many youths who are their fans.
247 The language used in each Nigeria movie, whether Yoruba or English has the potential to attract the youth of
248 different races, classes, ethnic backgrounds and beliefs. Hence, it's no doubt that the language use of jenifa in
249 Jenifa's Diary appears to have encapsulated the life of the average urban students and increasingly also the lives
250 of rural students across the country. Despite the ungrammaticality that characterized Jenifa's English, a large
251 population of students imbibed the act of emulating such language use. Today, the presence of Jenifa's English
252 is heard in English usage of students of all educational levels. Students are seen saying "How is you" in place of
253 'how are you', I is fine" in place of 'I am fine' "Yaun" to mean "yes or yes?" "my friendship/friended" to mean 'my
254 friend' "lifia" in place of "leave here" "what is stwrong in you" to ask what the problem is, "I want to suggestion
255 something" and many more. This means that the widespread popularity of Jenifa's English has a significant
256 impact on the English language that is used by today's students. Nowadays, students are getting addicted and
257 their English intonation is gradually getting reshaped to jenifa's. The researcher observed that watching the
258 movie change students' language knowledge unconsciously in their attempt to imitate Jenifa. Though, students
259 are not seen to speak such English at formal setting but they are often thrilled when there is someone to speak
260 Jenifa's English to and if care is not taken, they won't be able to differentiate between Jenifa's English and
261 Standard English.

262 **19 VII.**

263 **20 Conclusion**

264 Video material is an effective tool in language teaching and learning but not all video materials impact students'
265 language knowledge positively. Jenifa's Diary is a comedy movie series meant to entertain. Still, at the same
266 time, the ungrammaticality in the language use is at the detriment of students with low language proficiency.
267 The way language was used in the movie series not only by Jenifa but other casts could mislead and confuse
268 the students, especially those who are still learning the English language or with low proficiency in language
269 use. Hence, students should desist from imitating the erroneous use of Jenifa's English. This will prevent the
270 movie series from uttering their language knowledge. Students must also minimize the time they spend watching
271 Jenifa's Diary or related movies to avoid forming an unconscious habit of ungrammatical English which will

272 adversely affect their linguistic knowledge. Using Jenifa's English should be avoided in formal writings and there
273 should be a total adherence to the standard rules of English usage. Students should prevent the use of Jenifa's
274 English in written discourse especially in online chatting on social media. Students should cultivate the habit
275 of writing words correctly even during chats as this too can become a habit for them overtime. Furthermore,
276 most of the parents who rely on TV for their child so that they could finish their work or relax a bit need to
277 discourage their children from watching TV programmes that could adversely affect their linguistic knowledge.
278 Parents need to understand that learning takes place through modeling and imitation and when students imitate
279 wrongly, it has a negative effect. Thus, parents need to regulate what their children watch on the television so
as not to corrupt their thinking, intelligence and language behavior.

- a) Jenifa's Diary as a TV show and Language
Development of Students
Akindele Olufunke Ayotunde (popularly known
as FunkeAkindele) is a Nigerian actress and producer.
According to Wikipedia (2019), Funke starred in the
sitcom I Need to Know from 1998 to 2002, and in 2009,
she won the Africa Movie Academy Award for Best
Actress in a Leading Role. She plays the lead character
in the show Jenifa's Diary, for which she was named
Best Actress in a Comedy at the 2016 Africa Magic
Viewer's Choice Awards. Funke has over 100 movies to
her credit as an actress, writer, and producer
(Chidumga, 2017).
Jenifa's Diary, an award-winning comedy movie
series is a combination of funny characters which has
got thousands of people thrilled and thus gained a lot of
fans.

Figure 1:

???I am understanding you. (can understand)
You are saw her? You see her?
What are you cook? (cooking)
I want to suggestion something (suggest)

*[Note: *I is fine (am)???NEPA has take light. NEPA has interrupted electricity supply. * Segun, why are you
woke me up now? Woh is it? (Segun, why did you wake me up? What is it?) ???Our leaders have eaten our
money. (embezzled)]*

Figure 2:

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