

'Mehn! This wins the award'

FOLUKE OLAYINKA UNUABONAH¹ 

¹Redeemer's University, Nigeria

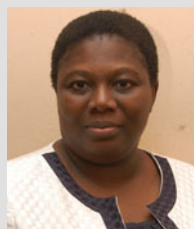
The discourse-pragmatic functions of *mehn* in Nigerian English

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



FOLUKE OLAYINKA UNUABONAH obtained her PhD from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and lectures at the Department of English, Redeemer's University, Nigeria. Her areas of research include (multimodal) discourse analysis, and (corpus)

pragmatics. She has published articles in *Discourse & Society*, *English Text Construction*, *Pragmatics & Society*, *Pragmatics, Text & Talk*, *Journal of Argumentation in Context*, and *Corpus Pragmatics*. Together with colleagues, she is compiling a historical corpus of English in Nigeria. Email: unuabonahf@run.edu.ng

pronunciation may have led NigE users, in written online texts, to change the spelling of *man* to *mehn* in order to differentiate it from *men*. An investigation of the frequency of this term in the Global Web-based English (GloWbE) corpus shows that out of 217 instances of *mehn* in GloWbE, 198 appear in GloWbE-Nig.¹ Two examples of the use of *mehn* in GloWbE-Nig are cited in (1) and (2):

- (1) I am old fashion/out of touch. I could care less!
Mehn! This wins the award for best article.
I've never had more fun (GloWbE 34)
- (2) do nt u fink 5 or 10 years will do? *Mehn!* This
is life imprisonment. . . (GloWbE 22)

Hence, this study examines *mehn* in NigE, from a discourse-pragmatic perspective, with a view to investigating its source, spelling adaptation, frequency, syntactic features, collocational patterns, and discourse-pragmatic functions.

2. Interjections: A discourse-pragmatic framework

Generally, interjections such as *ah* and *oh* are exclamations through which speakers and writers express their emotional and mental state of mind in interaction (see Norrick, 2015: 255; Stange, 2016). They are culture specific and are used to achieve diverse discourse-pragmatic functions such as expressing emotions and calling attention (Stange, 2016: 11). Interjections are largely viewed from two major perspectives, which include the views of formalists and conceptualists (Wharton, 2003:174; Unuabonah, 2020: 154). Formalists such as Quirk et al. (1985: 74) and Crystal (1995) opine that interjections are non-linguistic items that express emotions and are not part of syntactic structures at all. Conceptualists, such as Ameka (1992a) and Wilkins (1992), on the other hand, opine that interjections are purely linguistic items through which language users express their feelings and thoughts in relation to the situation in which they find themselves. In this paper, interjections are viewed from a functional/pragmatic perspective, and are defined as syntactically independent, context-bound, and meaningful semi-automatic exclamations which provide insight into a speaker's emotional and mental state, and assist in the management of discourse (see Norrick, 2015: 254–257; Stange, 2016: 20). Generally, interjections are classified based on both form and function. Based on form, they are grouped into primary and secondary interjections (see Norrick, 2015; Stange, 2016: 8–14). Primary interjections are

words such as *ah* and *ugh*, whose basic function is to serve as interjections (Norrick, 2015), while secondary interjections are interjections which primarily belong to other word classes such as nouns and verbs, but which may also be used to express the emotional and mental state of the user when they occur alone (see Ameka, 1992a). Examples of such interjections include examples such as *boy*, *hell*, and *man*.

Based on function, interjections are grouped into emotive, cognitive, conative, and phatic interjections. Emotive interjections (e.g. *ouch* and *yuck*) indicate the emotional state of the user while cognitive interjections (e.g. *ah* and *oh*) project the speaker's state of knowledge and thought at the time of utterance (see Ameka, 1992a; Stange, 2016). Conative interjections (e.g. *shh* and *psst*), which may sometimes express emotions, are used to get someone's attention or demand a response from someone (Stange, 2016: 11). Phatic interjections (e.g. *mhm* and *eh*) are employed to establish and maintain contact in communication by providing backchannels and feedbacks in ongoing discourses (Ameka, 1992b: 245; Stange, 2016). Scholars have noted that some interjections may serve dual purposes depending on the context (Ameka, 1992b; Stange, 2016). For instance, phatic interjections can also be emotive or cognitive. In addition, some interjections such as *eh* can also function as pragmatic markers (PMs) (see Montes, 1999: 1289).

Previous accounts have investigated interjections in different varieties of English. For example, working on American English (AmE), Norrick (2015: 257) investigates the most frequent interjections in the Longman Spoken and Written English corpus and reports that *yeah* is the most frequent interjection followed by *well* and *oh*, which are primary interjections. He also identifies *boy*, *God*, and *man* as the most frequent secondary interjections that have developed from other parts of speech. Stange (2016) explores interjections used in children-adult conversations in British English, using the Manchester Corpus and the British National Corpus, while Thompson (2019) investigates the use of *tweaa*, an Akan interjection in Ghanaian online political comments which are mainly written in English. In NigE, Olateju (2006) and Omotunde and Agbeleoba (2019) explore the frequencies and functions of interjections such as *oh* and *ah* in Nigerian literary texts. Furthermore, Unuabonah (2020) investigates different types of bilingual interjections such as *na wa*, *ehn*, *ehen*, and *shikena* in the GloWbE corpus while Unuabonah and Daniel (2020) examine five

emotive bilingual interjections: *haba*, *kai*, *chei*, *chai*, and *mtchew* which are borrowed from indigenous Nigerian languages into NigE. Although *mehn* appears in the sub-corpus of 50 U.S.-Nigerians in the Nairaland 2 corpus used by Honkanen (2020), she does not describe the interjection in her study. Hence, there is limited knowledge and understanding of the frequency, syntactic patterns, and functional usage of *mehn* in NigE. Thus, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the source, spelling adaptation, and frequency of *mehn* in NigE?
- (2) What are the syntactic features, collocational patterns and discourse-pragmatic functions of *mehn* in NigE?

3. Data and method

The data for this study were extracted from GloWbE-Nig, which contains 42,646,098 words, collected from different Nigerian websites and pages, such as discussion forums, blogs, and online newspaper reports (Davies & Fuchs, 2015). GloWbE itself contains about 1.9 billion words, comprising English language usage from 20 countries where English is used as an L1 or L2. This allows a researcher to compare the frequency of an item across the different national varieties. GloWbE (with each of its sub-components) comprises 60% of informal blogs and newspaper commentaries which are contexts in which interjections are likely to be used, and in which writers are likely to use words innovatively. As noted also by Norrick (2015: 249), interjections appear mainly in dialogues, and these informal blogs and newspaper commentaries provide platforms for online users to make comments which involve polylogues among different writers and bloggers (see Bondi, 2018). The remaining 40% generally contains formal texts such as newspaper reports, where the use of interjections will likely be limited. Although scholars have suggested that writers from other countries may post comments on websites that belong to a different country (see Nelson, 2015), the high concentration of the tokens of *mehn* in GloWbE-Nig indicates that it is largely used by Nigerians in online-based writing.

GloWbE was searched using the analysis software on its website (see Davies, 2013). The items, *mehn*, *menh*, and *mhen* were initially identified by the author, based on familiarity with these words in GloWbE-Nig. Based on this, the corpus was searched using *mehn**, *menh**, and *mhen**

in order to retrieve other spelling variants. This yielded variants in which the last letters <n> or <h> were replicated, as exemplified in (3) and (4), respectively, as well as cases in which there was no space between the full stop after *mehn* and the succeeding word, as cited in (5):

- (3) I don't kw but as for femi Adebayo's children, *mehnnnn* I salute d guy 4 dat (GloWbE 1)
- (4) two horns with 4 sons won this election., and become there president, *menhhhh*, (GloWbE 1)
- (5) U better think before u post comments *mehn*. I think ur the one who doesn't understand (GloWbE 1)

The retrieved data were manually searched in order to remove cases in which *mehn* appeared in utterances made in Nigerian Pidgin (NigP), as indicated in (6), indigenous Nigerian languages, as shown in (7), and repetition of posts due to the copying of posts by other users, as depicted in (8). Other cases where *mehn* was not used as interjections were also removed, such as when it referred to names of things, as exemplified in (9).

- (6) I cant wait to move home' bla bla.... but omo *mehn* plenty tins dey wen I go miss oo.... (GloWbE-Nig 61)
- (7) there is something wrong wit it period. # Nna *mehn*... egwu na atuzim badddd!!! (GloWbE-Nig 8)
- (8) Enjoy o November 28, 2012, 01:59:37 PM # Dr.MaxkDAVT: *Mhen*! Its been a long time I stepped into this hood... (GloWbE 10)
- (9) is Brian Merriman (1747 -- 1805) author of the frequently translated Cirt an *Mhen* Oche (Midnight court). (GloWbE 85)

The extracted data underwent both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

4. Results

As earlier indicated, *mehn* in NigE appears to be an adaptation of AAVE's pronunciation of *man* as an interjection. It is largely written as *mehn* (164 tokens), as cited in (1). On few occasions, it is written as *mhen* (10 tokens), *mehnn* (7 tokens), *mehnnn* (6 tokens) and *menh* (5 tokens). Other variants appear only once or twice, which indicates that *mehn* is the preferred spelling for *mehn*. Thus, altogether, there are 204 tokens of *mehn* in GloWbE-Nig. Its normalised frequency calculated at per million words (pmw) is displayed in Table 1. The syntactic features, collocational patterns, and discourse-pragmatic functions of *mehn* are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Table 1: Frequency and syntactic position of *mehn* in GloWbE-NigE

Item	Clause-initial	Clause-medial	Clause-final	Total	Frequency (pmw)
mehn	108	1	79	188 ²	4.4
mhen	7	-	3	10	0.2
menh	5	-	1	6	0.1
Total	120	1	83	204	4.8
Rate	58.8	0.5%	40.7%	100%	-

4.1 Grammatical features and collocation patterns of *mehn* in NigE

Mehn can appear at clause-initial, clause-medial and clause-final positions, as indicated in (10), (11), and (12), respectively. As shown in Table 1, *mehn* is most frequent at clause-initial position, followed by clause-final position, but rarely occurs at clause-medial position. This indicates that it prefers clause-initial position.

- (10) Enjoy o November 28, 2012, 01:59:37 PM # Dr.MaxkDAVT: *Mhen!* Its been a long time I stepped into this hood... (GloWbE 1)
- (11) "Whatever it's gon na take *mehn* to keep moving, we do it. That's what's up (GloWbE 161)
- (12) Abeg, the rest of the musicians are just as good *mehnn* and some are even better than Tuface (GloWbE 11)

In addition, *mehn* occurs with declaratives (N = 175), imperatives (N = 13), exclamatives (N = 9), and interrogatives (N = 7), as shown in (12), (13), (14), and (15), respectively. This indicates that it occurs more with declaratives than other clause types.

- (13) go out there represent this f*****g world *menh*, u fake guys should better wake up, (GloWbE 7)
- (14) doesn't agree with u is a fhoool a gay, an idiiot etc. *Mehn*, what a place to live in. Well mr no name, if u (GloWbE 139)
- (15) this one is just out there the biggest of them all.. *mehn* are you tone deaf or something tonto, (GloWbE 147)

As a discourse-pragmatic item, *mehn* collocates with other discourse-pragmatic features such as interjections (e.g. *lol* and *shit*), as seen in (16) and (17), and discourse markers (e.g. *and* and *but*), as shown in (18) and (19).

- (16) and sure nothing happened to them. But I'm yet to bell that cat *mehn*. Lol # (GloWbE 86)
- (17) Because I was still struggling. Still thinking: " Shit *mehn*, I'm an R &B; artiste, (GloWbE 153)

- (18) 'm disappointed in this guy, he's joined the band wagon. " And *mehn* we just kept pushing (GloWbE 154)
- (19) do nt want to sound self righteous o, because times have changed, but *mehn*, with this repairs of the 3rd mainland bridge, things will worsen. (GloWbE 70)

Mehn also co-occurs with address terms such as personal names, and kinship/solidarity terms such as *omo*, as depicted in (20) and (21), respectively. *Omo* is the Yoruba term for a 'child'; however, it is increasingly used as an address term to indicate solidarity among peers.

- (20) Ghana (well they are originally from Ghana.) # *mehn* Ginika, wtf did u jst type? did u X proof read b4 posting? (GloWbE 190)
- (21) the difference was so clear lyrically # Omo *mehnn*, this guys are trying it isn't easy (GloWbE 2)

4.2 Discourse-pragmatic functions of *mehn* in NigE

Mehn functions as a secondary emotive interjection (N = 112; 54.9%), and sometimes, it also performs emphatic functions (N = 92; 45.1%). As an emotive interjection, it is used to express surprise, admiration, pride, boredom, sympathy, pain, fear, sadness, disappointment, and shock. The distribution of these different emotions is presented in Table 2.

Mehn can be used to express feelings of surprise, which can be positive, negative or neutral (see Stange 2016: 68), as exemplified in (22), (23), and (24), respectively:

- (22) ...Im proud of them...They lost yh but *mehn!!!!* they did play good and US shld better be watchful (GloWbE 76)
- (23) the morning and taught of how to change the name of an institution...omo *mehn*.. that man has to be taken to a psychiatric hospital... Nigeria worst president (GloWbE 65)
- (24) and wants me pregnant ASAP? If possible b4 the wedding sef. *Mehn* see someone planning

Table 2: Distribution of emotions expressed by *mehn* in GloWbE-Nig

Emotions	Raw count	Percentage scores
negative surprise	36	32.1
positive surprise	13	11.6
admiration	12	10.7
neutral surprise	10	8.9
disapproval	8	7.1
shock	7	6.2
disappointment	6	5.4
sadness	4	3.6
pride	4	3.6
anger	3	2.7
sympathy	2	1.8
pain	2	1.8
dislike	1	0.9
boredom	1	0.9
happiness	1	0.9
fear	1	0.9
embarrassment	1	0.9
Total	112	100

your life for you, while you look like a spectator (GloWbE 88)

In (22), the writer uses *mehn* to indicate positive surprise at a football team that s/he was proud of, and that s/he believed had played a good game, even though the team had lost a game. In (23), the strong surprise expressed by the writer is negative as s/he opined that the President was the worst one ever because the President suddenly thought of changing the name of an institution (that is, the University of Lagos). In (24), the surprise expressed is neutral as the writer simply marvels at another netizen for making plans for the writer.

Mehn can also be used to indicate feelings of admiration, pride, and sadness, as exemplified in (25), (26), and (27), respectively.

(25) There were a few times that I had to blush because *mehn*... They were soo cute. Knowing how to dance is such a blessing. (GloWbE 100)

(26) The healing process had begun! # *Mehn*! Was I proud of myself! (GloWbE 2)

(27) # *Mehn* sometimes i feel bad becos of wat niger is turning into, bribery and (GloWbE 37)

In (25), *mehn* is used to express feelings of admiration that the writer feels towards some third parties, as they consider them to be very cute. In (26), the writer exclaims that s/he is proud of himself or herself and uses *mehn* to indicate the feeling of pride, while in (27), the writer employs *mehn* to indicate feelings of sadness, as s/he states that s/he feels bad about the situation of things in Nigeria.

Mehn can also be used to indicate feelings of disapproval, disappointment, and shock, as illustrated in (28), (29), and (30), respectively.

(28) Did you say Adam lived 930years. *Mehn*, you are worse than a slowpoke to believe such an exaggeration (GloWbE 107)

(29) # *Mehn*, dt bitch called Muna really dissatisfied me, I used to like dt bitch (GloWbE 40)

(30) u abandon such good man for a Married Man????? *Mehn*, words fails me! May God grant Emeka strength to go thru the heart-break (GloWbE 6)

In (28), *mehn* is used to express feelings of disapproval at the words of another person who stated that Adam had lived for 930 years, while in (29), *mehn* is used to convey disappointment, due to the actions of a friend. In (30), the writer is shocked at the actions of a lady who jilted a man, and uses *mehn* to express this shock.

In some cases, in addition to expressing emotion, *mehn* is used to emphasise the proposition contained in an utterance, and in this way, it shares similar meanings with emphasis PMs, such as *really* and *indeed*. The distribution of the propositions/speech acts emphasised by *mehn* is presented in Table 3. Some examples are also discussed.

Mehn can be used to emphasise assertion, evaluation, and advice, as cited in (31), (32), and (33), respectively:

(31) Like her or hate her woman is balling nd making money *mehn*, as for d one saying jamaica tiny rock? (GloWbE 16)

(32) Do you play chess? *Menh* work these days is hectic, how do you unwind? (GloWbE 4)

(33) date sumone better than him n don't hesitate to rob it on his face *mehn*. # Naaaaaah, Riri dnt hate, (GloWbE 21)

In (31), the writer uses *mehn* to emphasise his/her assertion that a particular woman is prospering financially. In (32), the writer utilises *mehn* to emphasise his/her evaluation of how hectic the days have

Table 3: Distribution of speech acts emphasised by *mehn* in GloWbE-Nig

Speech act	Raw count	Percentage scores
assertion	41	44.6
evaluation	26	28.3
advice	9	9.8
desire/wish	4	4.3
quotation	3	3.3
intention	1	1.1
request	1	1.1
promise	1	1.1
warning	1	1.1
complaint	1	1.1
suggestion	1	1.1
need	1	1.1
question	1	1.1
support	1	1.1
Total	92	100

become, while in (33), the writer employs *mehn* to emphasise the advice s/he is offering.

Mehn can also be used to emphasise desire/wishes and quotations, as exemplified in (34), and (35) respectively:

- (34) God shuld just help us *mehn* that every1's prayer for this Nigeria (GloWbE 189)
- (35) And I was like *mehn*, " I can't imagine a professor in my state, Imo state worrying (GloWbE 113)

In 34, the writer employs *mehn* in order to emphasise his/her desire or wishes that God would help Nigeria, which s/he believes is the prayer or desire of every Nigerian. In (35), the writer uses *mehn* to emphasise the upcoming quotation. In all three examples where *mehn* is used to emphasise quotations, *mehn* is preceded by the new quotative, *be like* (see Ogoanah & Adeyanju, 2013: 49).

5. Discussion

This paper set out to explore the source, spelling stability, frequency, position, collocational patterns as well as discourse-pragmatic functions of *mehn* in NigE. In relation to its source, the adaptation of AAVE's use of *man* as an interjection may be due to the influence of popular culture as

Nigerians watch a lot of American films, and some model the accent or speech styles of some American actors (see Igboanusi, 2003: 601). In a number of cases, such speech styles are used in Nigerian movies to model Americans or Nigerians who have lived abroad for a very long time, and who might have just returned to the country, a situation which occurs in the Nigerian socio-cultural context, where a number of Nigerians travel to the United States, in order to seek greener pastures. Some return to the country to stay or visit their families. In a number of cases, the speech styles of such Nigerians do change, and these often influence the speech styles of their interactants, especially the young ones who admire these returnees. As Sauciuc (2006: 269) notes, interjections are easily adopted by speakers in a short period of time, and young Nigerians, in particular, would have adopted the AAVE's use of *man* as an interjection. This further confirms the influence of general AmE and AAVE on NigE (Awonusi, 1994; Igboanusi, 2003; Honkanen, 2020; Akinola & Oladipupo, 2021). As Igboanusi (2003: 603) opines, Nigerians have a positive attitude towards Americanisms, as there is 'the rising popularity of AmE accents and usages' in NigE. In addition, other kinds of words from AAVE occur in NigE, such as *beef* (a conflict) and *homeboy* (a friend), (see Honkanen, 2020: 178).

In relation to spelling stability and adaptation, the spelling reflects the NigE distinctive pronunciation of AAVE *man*. As it has been noted, the internet provides the space for innovative use of language (Honkanen, 2020: 267), and one of the techniques of Nigerian internet users is to write words as they are pronounced. The insertion of <h> in *men* might be an extension of one of the processes of anglicisation in NigE, where young people, in particular, insert <h> in Nigerian names (see Faleye & Adegoju, 2012: 15). Although the word *men* is already an English word, writers may have adopted this process in order to create a new spelling for the interjection, which will distinguish it from *men*. This is a situation that also affects interjections that are borrowed from indigenous Nigerian languages into NigE, as some of the interjections are anglicised by adding <h> to the interjections, as seen in bilingual interjections such as *ehn*, *shikenah*, and *na wah* (see Unuabonah, 2020: 172). Also, the orthography of *mehn* may have been influenced by internet sites where users have the freedom to spell words in new ways without correction. Such spelling variants may become fossilised at some points. In addition, the *mehn* spelling is fairly stable since only a few tokens are spelt as

mhen or *menh*. Moreover, the innovative respelling of words to capture phonological changes peculiar to NigE adds to the credence that NigE is on the verge of entering the stage of endonormative stabilisation (Schneider, 2007; Gut, 2012: 3).

Based on the frequencies of *mehn* both in GloWbE and in GloWbE-Nig, it is evident that the use of *mehn* as an interjection is peculiar to NigE. However, with a few scattered tokens in other varieties in GloWbE, especially in the Ghanaian component of GloWbE, there might be a gradual increase in the use of *mehn* in other varieties, especially Ghanaian English, which shares close social ties with NigE. Although the frequency of *mehn* is quite low compared to other high frequency interjections such as *oh* or *ah* in GloWbE-Nig, *mehn* occurs more than a number of interjections such as *aw* or *ow* which share relatively similar functions with *mehn* in NigE. *Mehn* also occurs more than several bilingual interjections earlier studied except *mtchew* and *haba* (see Unuabonah & Daniel, 2020: 69). This might also be the case as *mehn* expresses negative, neutral and positive emotions. The frequency and peculiarity of *mehn* to NigE has implications for the codification and standardisation processes of NigE, as such a word may be included in NigE dictionaries.

In relation to syntactic features, *mehn*'s preference for clause-initial position is largely linked to its exclamatory (semi-automatic) function (see Stange, 2016: 20), while *mehn*'s occurrence at clause-final position is largely linked to its emphatic function. As it has been noted elsewhere, the clause-final position is the preferred position for other NigE emphatic PMs such as *o*, *jare* and *fa* (Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2018, 2020). In addition, *mehn* occurs with all clause types, and its co-occurrence with exclamations foregrounds its exclamatory functions.

As regards collocational patterns, *mehn* co-occurs with a wide range of other discourse pragmatic features, such as discourse markers, interjections, and address terms, and this is largely linked, not only to its function as an emotive interjection, but to its preference for clause-initial position. It is noted that *mehn* rarely collocates with other discourse-pragmatic features at clause-final position. This confirms the findings of Unuabonah (2020: 172) that function and syntactic positioning influence collocational patterns of NigE interjections.

With regard to discourse-pragmatic functions, it is evident that *mehn* is quite multifunctional as it can be used to express different kinds of emotions such as surprise, pride, sadness, sympathy, pain and shock. Thus, it is unlike a number of NigE

interjections that only express positive or only negative emotions. Apart from expressing emotions, it performs emphatic functions like emphasis PMs, such as *really* or *indeed*. As noted by Montes (1999: 1289), interjections can also function as PMs, and this is also evident in some NigE interjections, such as *ehn* and *ehen* (see Unuabonah, 2020). One interesting function is the use of *mehn* to emphasise quotations, as shown in (35). In this case, *mehn* behaves like some discourse-pragmatic features, such as *oh* and *look*, which are used to introduce and emphasise quotations, and which 'anchor the utterance to the original situation' (Holt, 1996: 237; Brinton, 2008). *Mehn*'s multifunctional roles foreground the meaning potential of discourse-pragmatic features, indicated by Aijmer (2013) and Norrick (2015).

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the source, spelling adaptation, frequency, syntactic features, collocational patterns, and discourse-pragmatic functions of *mehn* in NigE. The results show that *mehn* is a secondary emotive interjection, which may have developed from the use of *man* as an interjection, especially in AAVE. The results, thus, foreground the continuous influence of AmE (in this case, AAVE) on NigE, as well as the influence of the internet on language usage. *Mehn* largely occurs in informal texts such as online commentaries which mirror spoken dialogues. The results also show that *mehn* expresses negative, positive, and neutral emotions, such as surprise, admiration, sympathy, pain, and shock; *mehn* also performs emphatic roles. In all, this study has contributed to the discourse-pragmatic features of NigE, an area that has been largely neglected by NigE scholars (see Jowitt, 2019: 107). Scholars have noted that NigE may influence other varieties, especially other West African varieties of English, due to a number of reasons including the influence of the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, whose films are shown on the internet and across Africa through cable television (see Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2020: 14). Future studies may, thus, address other discourse-pragmatic items that have developed in NigE or the possible spread of *mehn* to other second language varieties of English.

Notes

1 The remaining tokens appear in the following components of GloWbE: Ghana (ten tokens), USA (three

tokens), UK (two tokens), South Africa (one token), India (one token), and Kenya (one token). 2 This includes 24 tokens from other variants retrieved through the search item *mehn**. No other variant was obtained through *mhen** while only one token from one other variant (*menhhhh* in [4]) was obtained through *menh**.

Acknowledgements

The author appreciates the insightful comments of the journal editor and two anonymous reviewers. The author also appreciates the critical comments of Dr Rotimi Oladipupo of Redeemer's University as well as colleagues who were present during the presentation of parts of this paper at the 1st African Pragmatics Conference, held at the University of Ghana, Legon, in February, 2020.

References

- Aijmer, K. 2013. *Understanding Pragmatic Markers: A Variational Pragmatic Approach*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Akinlotan, M. & Akande, A. 2020. 'Dative alternation in Nigerian English: A corpus-based approach.' *Glottology*, 10(1–2), 103–125.
- Akinola A., & Oladipupo, R. 2021. 'A corpus-based study of word stress free variation in Nigerian English.' *English Today* (First View). doi: 10.1017/S026607842100002X.
- Ameka, F. 1992a. 'Interjections: The universal yet neglected part of speech.' *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18, 101–118.
- Ameka, F. 1992b. 'The meaning of phatic and conative interjections.' *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18, 245–271.
- Awonusi, V. O. 1994. 'The Americanization of Nigerian English.' *World Englishes*, 13(1), 75–82.
- Banjo, A. 1971. 'Towards a definition of Standard Nigerian Spoken English.' *Actes du 8th Congress de la Societé Linguiste de l'Afrique Occidentale*, 165–175.
- Bondi, M. 2018. 'Blogs as interwoven polylogues: The dialogic action game.' *Language and Dialogue*, 8(1), 43–65.
- Brinton, L. J. 2008. *Comment Clauses in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. 1995. *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, M. 2013. Corpus of Global Web-Based English. Online at <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/> (Accessed August 15, 2018).
- Davies, M. & Fuchs, R. 2015. 'Expanding horizons in the study of World Englishes with the 1.9 billion word Global Web-based English Corpus (GloWbE).' *English World-Wide*, 36(1), 1–28.
- Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G. F. & Fennig, C. D. (eds.) 2019. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (22nd edn.). Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online at <<http://www.ethnologue.com>> (Accessed June 21, 2019).
- Faleye, O. & Adegoju, A. 2012. 'A sociolinguistic study of deviant orthographic representation of graduating students' names in a Nigerian University.' *Linguistik Online*, 53(3), 11–22.
- Fuchs, R., Gut, U. & Soneye, T. 2013. "'We just don't even know": The usage of the pragmatic focus particles *even* and *still* in Nigerian English.' *English World-Wide*, 34(2), 123–145.
- Gut, U. 2012. 'Towards a codification of Nigerian English – The ICE-Nigeria project.' *Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association*, 15(1), 1–13.
- Gut, U. & Unuabonah, F. O. 2019. 'The use of stance markers in West African Englishes.' In A. U. Esimaje, U. Gut & B. E. Antia (eds), *Corpus Linguistics and African Englishes*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 206–229.
- Holt, E. 1996. 'Reporting on talk: The use of direct reported speech in conversation.' *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 29(3), 219–245.
- Honkanen, M. 2020. *World Englishes on the Web: The Nigerian Diaspora in the United States*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Igboanusi, H. 2003. 'Knowledge, use, and attitudes towards Americanisms in Nigerian English.' *World Englishes*, 22(4), 599–604.
- Jamakovic, N. & Fuchs, R. 2019. 'The monophthongs of formal Nigerian English: An Acoustic Analysis.' *Proceedings of Interspeech 2019*, 1711–1715. Online at https://www.isca-speech.org/archive/Interspeech_2019/abstracts/2866.html (Accessed July 2, 2019).
- Jibril, M. 1986. 'Sociolinguistic variation in Nigerian English.' *English World-Wide*, 7(1), 47–74.
- Jowitt, D. 1991. *Nigerian English Usage: An Introduction*. Ikeja: Longman.
- Jowitt, D. 2019. *Nigerian English*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Montes, R. G. 1999. 'The development of discourse markers in Spanish: Interjections.' *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31(10), 1289–1319.
- Nelson, G. 2015. 'Response to Davies and Fuchs.' *English World-Wide*, 36(1), 38–40.
- Norrick, N. 2015. 'Interjections.' In K. Aijmer & C. Ruhlemann (eds.), *Corpus Pragmatics: A Handbook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–28.
- Ogoanah, F. N. 2011. 'The pragmatic roles of *as* in in Nigerian English usage.' *World Englishes*, 30, 200–210.
- Ogoanah, F. N. & Adeyanju, D. S. 2013. 'The contextual implications of *like* and *as* in as pragmatic markers in Nigerian English usage.' *Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association*, 16(1), 41–57.
- Oladipupo, R. O. & Unuabonah, F. O. 2020. 'Extended discourse-pragmatic usage of *now* in Nigerian English.' *World Englishes*, 1–19 <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12492>
- Olateju, M. 2006. "'Oh!' As a marker of information management in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*.' *Ibadan Journal of English Studies*, 3, 54–64.
- Omotunde, S. A. & Agbeleoba, S. O. 2019. 'Types and functions of interjections in Wole Soyinka's *Alápàtá Àpàtá* and Yoruba speech community.' *Journal of Language and Literature*, 19(1), 79–89.
- Onabamiro, T. & Oladipupo, R. 2019. 'Forms and patterns of epenthesis of New English native speakers in Nigeria.' Paper presented at the conference of the English Scholars' Association of Nigeria, University of Abuja, Nigeria.
- Owolabi, D. 2012. 'Potential words in English: Examples from morphological processes in Nigerian English.' *English Today*, 28(2), 47–50.

- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G. & Svartvik, J. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.
- Sauciuc, G. 2006. 'Borrowings – A source of innovation in the class of interjections.' *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique*, 11(2), 267–300.
- Schneider, E. 2003. 'The dynamics of New Englishes: From identity construction to dialect birth.' *Language*, 79, 233–281.
- Schneider, E. W. 2007. *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stange, U. 2016. *Emotive Interjections in British English: A Corpus-Based Study on Variation in Acquisition, Function and Usage*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Taiwo, R. 2009. 'The functions of English in Nigeria from the earliest times to the present day.' *English Today*, 25(2), 3–10.
- Thompson, R. 2019. 'Tweaa! – A Ghanaian interjection of "contempt" in online political comments.' *Ampersand*, 6. (Accessed 15 August 2019). DOI: 10.1016/j.amper.2019.100047
- Udofot, I. 2003. 'Stress and rhythm in the Nigerian Accent of English.' *English World-Wide*, 24(2), 201–220.
- Umar, A. 2018. 'The structure of idioms in Nigerian English.' *English Today*, 35(3), 29–34.
- Unuabonah, F. O. 2020. "'So you know ehn...'" The use of bilingual interjections in Nigerian English.' *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 17 (2), 151–176.
- Unuabonah, F. O. & Daniel, F. O. 2020. 'Haba! Bilingual interjections in Nigerian English.' *Journal of Pragmatics*, 163, 66–77.
- Unuabonah, F. O. & Gut, U. 2018. 'Commentary pragmatic markers in Nigerian English.' *English World-Wide*, 39 (2), 193–213.
- Unuabonah, F. O. & Oladipupo, R. O. 2018. "'You're not staying in Island sha o'": *O, sha* and *abi* as pragmatic markers in Nigerian English.' *Journal of Pragmatics*, 135, 8–23.
- Unuabonah, F. O. & Oladipupo, R. O. 2020. 'Bilingual pragmatic markers in Nigerian English.' *World Englishes*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12453>
- Werner, V. & Fuchs, R. 2017. 'The present perfect in Nigerian English.' *English Language & Linguistics*, 21(1), 129–153.
- Wharton, T. 2003. 'Interjections, language and the showing-saying continuum.' *Pragmatics and Cognition*, 11(1), 39–91.
- Wilkins, D. P. 1992. 'Interjections as deictics.' *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18, 119–158.