

## **INTRUSIVE 'AS IN' IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH: SYNTACTIC FEATURES AND SEMANTIC IMPLICATIONS AMONG STUDENTS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

**BY**

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**The Intrusive 'as in' in Nigerian English: Syntactic Features and Semantic Implications among Students of Tertiary Institutions**

### **ABSTRACT**

*Colloquialism and mannerism are regular features of conversational language. They both defy standard norms of grammaticality and universal intelligibility but are nonetheless functional for interpersonal communication and meaningful within the geographical and social milieu of usage. This study drew attention to the existence of the intrusive phrase 'as in' and investigated the pattern of its use among Nigerian students in tertiary institutions. The data for the study were drawn with an observational schedule conducted in informal gatherings of students and a questionnaire administered to 200 respondents. Results showed that most of the students were already aware of the existence of the intrusive expression and many of them were in fact using it. Though it is intrusive, the study revealed that the phrase follows observable syntactic patterns, serves some grammatical functions, and conveys contextual meanings in its use. It was, therefore, concluded that as a colloquial expression that it is, the intrusive phrase should not be considered aberrant or as a mannerism but it should be tolerated. The study, however, recommended that every necessary effort should be made and firm steps taken to ensure that the use of the intrusive phrase is discouraged in formal linguistic contexts and serious written discourses.*

### **Introduction**

The English language, according to Oyedola (1998:17-18), is one of the major legacies of colonialism in Africa which has been cultivated, re-domesticated and indigenized to accommodate the cultures and traditions of the people in the host countries. In Nigeria, like in other countries of the world, the English language has a number of varieties occasioned by differences in regions and educational standard. In subscribing to the existence of what is referred to as Nigerian English (NE), Bamgbose (1995:9) describes it as the product of the contact between English language and indigenous languages in the socio-cultural and political situation. He identifies three types of NE as Contact English, Victorian English and School English. To him, it is from these three that Standard Nigerian English (SNE) evolved. In his own study, Ayoola (2006:188) divides NE into three main sub-varieties namely pidgin,

interference, and standard.

Balogun (1998:31) submits that NE is not a myth but a reality as the English Language has generated some features which can be termed 'Nigerian'. The English language has been domesticated and spiced with the flavour of Nigerianism for use in the Nigerian linguistic environment. Those features of NE identified by Bamgbose (1995) include lexeme coinages, linguistic nativization, pragmatic nativization, and creative nativization. Oyedola (1998:18), explains that such distinguishing features of Nigerianism manifest at the lexicogrammatical, phonological, and discourse levels. Such features lead to loan words, coinages, category shifts and meaning broadening, local idioms, and characteristic breaches of the code (Okoro 1986 & 2004). Of the varieties that arise from the above features are slang, colloquialism, and mannerism which evolve respectively due to differences in linguistic setting and individual fluency.

Slang and colloquial expressions are more common in informal linguistic setting while mannerisms occur due to individual differences. Slang is an informal and transient lexical item used by a certain social group. Its usage is restricted to a group of people and it is informal as its meaning may not be known to native speakers as well as people who are outside of the group that uses it. Colloquialism is an expression employed in conversational or informal language but not in formal speech. To some extent, one could see "as in" as a colloquialism because it features mostly in conversational discourse.

The Free Online Dictionary defines mannerism as a distinctive behavioural trait or an idiosyncrasy. It is a common feature in conversational language although it is not mostly welcome it is not totally unavoidable in informal discourse. Ojo (2006:101) points out that it is not a strange phenomenon to have people introduce some lexically vacant expressions into their speeches. Such expressions include *em, um, I mean, you know, you see, hope you grab it*. He, however, submits that "speakers who are in the habit of using lexically vacant words ... are in the danger of derailing their own presentations."

The reality, however, is that as long as it is in a relaxed informal context, everyone, irrespective of their level of linguistic competence and social pedestal allow themselves a measure of freedom to speak naturally without the usual affectation that characterize the formal, official context. This freedom is absent otherwise.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

For some time now, it is not unusual to pick the expression "as in" in the speeches of Nigerian speakers of English, especially students. They constantly punctuate their speeches with this intrusive expression and the use of this expression has now become so prevalent because of its frequency of use and currency in informal gatherings. This study was conducted to determine whether "as in" is slang, a colloquialism, or a mannerism; to determine the pattern of usage – initial, medial or final – in a sentence; and to determine the syntactic positions and contextual meaning/semantic implications of "as in" in sentences.

Four research questions were asked as follows:

RQ 1: Are the students aware of the existence of intrusive 'as in' in informal conversations?

RQ 2: Is the intrusive 'as in' used by a majority of the students in the institutions?

RQ 3: In what pattern do the students use the intrusive “as in’ in their conversational language?

RQ 4: What are the syntactic positions and semantic implications of the intrusive ‘as in’ in conversational language?

**Methodology**

Two research instruments namely a questionnaire and observation schedule were used to collect data for this study. The observational schedule was designed to capture the occurrence, structural pattern of use of ‘as in’ among student groups in conversational activities within a non-formal setting like sports field, eatery, relaxation centres, motion ground etc, paying particular attention to the syntactic features and contextual meanings. The researcher went with research assistants who mingled with the students to listen to and surreptitiously record their conversations and take down their ‘as in’ statements. The statements were thereafter subjected to analysis.

The questionnaire titled ‘*Intrusive ‘As In’ Questionnaire*’ contained items which requested the students to confirm their awareness of the use of the expression, their use of the phrase, when, where and how they use the expression, and possible meanings they had in mind each time they used it. The questionnaire was administered to 200 randomly selected students of two tertiary institutions - a polytechnic and a college of education. The students were randomly selected across departments and 193 of the questionnaires were recovered. Respondents were also requested to determine the status of the expression whether slang, colloquialism, or mannerism. A frequency count of the respondents was conducted to determine their response.

**Presentation of Data, Analysis, and Discussion**

**RQ 1: Are the students aware of the intrusive ‘as in’ in informal conversations?**

Table 1: Awareness of the Use of “as in” among students

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	193	100
No	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100</b>

All the 193 respondents claimed to be aware of the use of the intrusive “as in” by students in the institutions. So, it can be concluded that the preponderant use of the intrusive phrase is not strange to the students and among them

**RQ 2: Is the intrusive ‘as in’ used by a majority of the students in the institutions?**

Table 2: Distribution on Actual Use of the Expression “As in”

<b>Usage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	86	45%
No	107	55%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100</b>

86(45%) of the respondents claimed to use the expression “as in”, while 55% claimed not to use it in their informal conversations. The implication is that a number, not far from half of the students of tertiary institutions did engage in the use of the intrusive expression. 86 out of the 193 is not anything near ‘low’ on the comparative scale. The appropriate quantifier is ‘many’. 107 or 55% of the students restrained themselves from using the expression even though they were aware of its existence. The percentage is not enough to be classified as ‘high’. From the statistics, it cannot be said that most of the students are not involved in the use of the expression.

**RQ 3: In what pattern do the students use the intrusive “as in” in their conversational language?**

Table 3: Pattern of Usage of “as in” among Students

Usage	Yes	%	No	%
Slang	18	9%	175	91%
Colloquialism	181	94%	12	6%
Mannerism	167	87%	26	13%

Only 18 (9%) of the students agreed that the expression is a slang. This figure is quite insignificant indicating that the expression is not tied to any social, cultural, traditional, or cultic group. However, a significant percentage of the respondents classified the phrase as a colloquial expression implying that it is more commonly used in conversational expressions but rarely used in written discourse. In the same vein, a significant percentage of the respondents also agreed that the phrase is used more as a mannerism by many. Those that used the phrase did so as a matter of linguistic habit they had cultivated.

**RQ 4: What are the syntactic positions and semantic implications of the intrusive ‘as in’ in conversational language?**

To answer Research Question 4, the following sentences collected with the observational schedule were analyzed. Many of the collated sentences contained pidgin expressions and high incidences of code mixing. Only those sentences that were free of pidgin and mixed codes were selected for analysis.

1. Do you understand me, as in what I am saying?
2. As in try and understand what I am trying to say.
3. I saw him, as in on my way coming back home.
4. As in she can't construct error-free statements.
5. I came there, as in I had been there before.
6. As in my brother is coming to Eba-Oke.
7. She is the most brilliant in the school, as in she is the youngest and most brilliant student in the class.
8. Nigeria won the latest edition of African Cup of Nations, as in we defeated Burkina Faso.
9. You didn't give me the money, as in the #20,000.00 from Uncle Kola.
10. He didn't come, as in during the teaching practice.

11. When you get home, cook some rice, as in jollof rice.
12. I don't like her at all, as in she's too proud.
13. She doesn't understand, as in how to answer questions.
14. I want to go to Lagos tomorrow, as in to buy some electronics.

#### Analysis

**Statement 1:** *Do you understand me, as in what I am saying?*

Looking at the above statement, one would see that it is in the interrogative mood. The expression shows a medial use of "as in" which can be said to have been used for emphasis.

**Statement 2:** *As in try and understand what I am trying to say.*

This expression is an imperative sentence with as in at the initial position. And it is used to convince or persuade the listener to share the same view as the speaker.

**Statement 3:** *I saw him, as in on my way coming back home*

As in has a medial occurrence in this statement. The expression as in could be said to offer more explanation about the first clause in the statement. The expression comes between the complement (him) and the adjunct 'on my way...home'

**Statement 4:** *As in she can't construct error free statements.*

The statement shows an initial use of as in as a marker or expression of surprise. It serves as a conjunction of anaphoric reference to a previous clause.

**Statement 5:** *I came there, as in I had been there before.*

Statement 5 shows a medial use of as in as a connector linking two clauses, the second being a recast of the first. It is an adjunct functioning as a subordinator and it means 'in fact' in this context. There are supposed to be two main clauses in what is presented as a sentence here (i.e. 'I came there' and 'I had been there before'). The meaning of the sentence is affected by the use of as in which has the meaning of 'that is to say' in the context of its usage in the statement.

**Statement 6:** *As in my brother is coming to Esa-Oke.*

"As in" appears at the initial position of the statement. The expression is used in this statement to show emphasis on what is to come after it. It can also be seen as a response to emphasize what has been said earlier by one of the interlocutors. It is used as a marker of assurance.

**Statement 7:** *She is the most brilliant in the school, as in she is the youngest and most brilliant student in the class.*

In this statement as in may mean that is or even though as used in the example. The expression has a medial occurrence and it is used as a subordinator in the context of the statement. The expression as a subordinator may mean even though/although.

**Statement 8:** *Nigeria won the latest edition of African Cup of Nations, as in we defeated Burkina Faso.*

There are two clauses in this statement with the second clause that begins with the intrusive expression as in offering a further explanation about the first. The semantic significance of the expression in this statement is that it is used to have the meaning which that is may mean

in some other context. The expression can also be seen as a subordinator connecting the two clauses. For instance, the subordinating conjunction because can be used in its place for us to have an understanding of its meaning in context. As in has a medial occurrence in this statement.

**Statement 9:** *You didn't give me the money, as in the #20,000 from Uncle Kola.'*

As in is used in this statement to precede the noun phrase "the #20,000 from Uncle Kola." It has a medial occurrence in the statement and what it does is to emphasize 'the money' which is also a noun phrase that has been mentioned in the preceding clause.

**Statement 10:** *He didn't come, as in during the teaching practice.*

The intrusive as in appears in the middle of this expression to precede a prepositional phrase making reference to the time of the action the subject did not perform in the preceding clause.

**Statement 11:** *When you get home, cook some rice, as in jollof rice.*

The use of the expression in this statement is clearly for the purpose apposition joining two co-referential nouns. The speaker wanted to drive his point home so that the listener would not go ahead to prepare some other kind of food. It has a medial occurrence in the statement.

**Statement 12:** *I don't like her at all, as in she is too proud.*

As in has a medial occurrence in this statement and it has been used as a subordinating conjunction in the place of one word subordinator such as because. What should have been a compound sentence is changed to complex.

**Statement 13:** *She doesn't understand, as in how to answer questions.*

The expression has a medial occurrence in this statement. It intrudes between the verb (doesn't understand) and the complement of the sentence (how to answer questions). The function here is to amplify the direct object of the verb 'understand'

**Statement 14:** *I want to go to Lagos tomorrow, as in to buy some electronics.*

In this statement, as in, which has a medial occurrence means in order to as used in the sentence. It precedes the to-infinitive clause 'to buy some electronics' and it may also have the meaning of the adverbial 'just' in this context.

#### Discussion

It could be seen from the analyses that depending on the function and intended meaning, the intrusive phrase occurs mostly at the initial and medial positions, rarely at the final position. Where it occurs, it performs any of the following functions with specific contextual meanings. 'As in' is used:

- i. to lay emphasis.
- ii. to convince or persuade
- iii. to offer more explanation
- iv. to express surprise or disappointment
- v. to act as a connector linking two clauses to mean 'in fact' or 'that is to say'
- vi. to place cataphoric emphasis on what is to come after the verb
- vii. to place anaphoric emphasis on what has been said earlier by one of the interlocutors.
- viii. to act as a marker of assurance.
- ix. to express reflexive meaning in replacing phrases like that is/even though/although.

- x. to make anaphoric reference to a past time
- xi. to act as conjunction to appositive nouns
- xii. to amplify the direct object

Today's generation of English users, especially students and other young people, have successfully invented and are using the expression *as in* in their informal conversations. As found in this study, the expression which can be rightly classified as colloquialism and mannerism really has a way of contributing to the meanings expressed by the interlocutors in their speeches if properly understood

Though the intrusive expression *as in* as used in Nigerian English does not reflect much of international standard and intelligibility, it can be said with a measure of certainty that it is not totally meaningless among the generation of its users – especially students of tertiary institutions that constituted the study population. The lack of grammaticality and the intrusive nature in its pattern of usage are, in fact, its strong points if the phrase is accepted as colloquialism and mannerism prevalent in conversational expressions. The incompleteness of some of the sentences and occasional ellipses are all features of conversational language.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The intrusive *as in* is already a common and popular feature of conversational language among students. It is a fact that the expression will be in use for as long as the generation of its users decide to keep it. The expression has no pejorative connection as it is not linked to any group or clique with negative inclinations and activities. To the extent that its use as colloquial expression is limited to an informal conversational setting and as individual mannerism, it should not be dismissed as abhorrent or aberrant or the users castigated.

However, even though the use of the intrusive expression *as in* could not be said to be totally condemnable, everything necessary should be done and every possible step taken to discourage its users from crossing the boundary of informality. Lecturers should take it as their responsibility to educate the students on the context of usage – for instance, while students can use it freely among their peers in a relaxed conversational atmosphere, it should not come up in formal contexts. Users that express deep-seated mannerism for the phrase must be called to caution and consciousness to avoid it in official and other contexts of formal nature. In the same vein, students who take the use of the phrase to the written medium especially outside of the informal subtype should be warned of the dire consequences and discouraged from engaging in its use.

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