

POSSESSIVE REDUNDANCY IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH: AN INTERLANGUAGE ANALYSIS OF THE MISUSE OF *OWN*

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Abstract

This study investigated the widespread use of possessive redundancy with *own* in Nigerian English, particularly among tertiary students in Owerri, Imo State. Anchored on the Interlanguage theory, the study examined the influence of mother tongue, overgeneralization, and fossilization in students' writing. A descriptive mixed-methods approach was adopted, involving 120 students drawn from five

institutions, namely; Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, and Imo State College of Education, Ihitte Uboma. Data were collected through essay task, and a structured questionnaire designed to elicit possessive constructions and assess students' awareness of Standard English possessive forms. Findings revealed that 72.5% of students used redundant *own* in their essays. Mother tongue transfer was the strongest predictor of this usage, reinforced by habitual patterns of speech within the academic and social environment. The study concluded that possessive redundancy with *own* is a systematic feature of Nigerian English interlanguage, rather than a random grammatical error. It recommended explicit grammar instruction, contrastive analysis, and targeted correction strategies to enhance learners' mastery of Standard English possessives, especially in formal writing contexts.

Introduction

Language variation in multilingual contexts has long been recognized as a major factor influencing the evolution of New Englishes, particularly in postcolonial nations like Nigeria where English coexists with indigenous languages. While analyzing language variation, Jowitt (2012) explains that "... variation embraces both errors and variants" (p. 59). Furthermore, he stresses that "One of the many general and complete language systems, each used by a substantial number of people and each possessing characteristics that distinguish it from other

systems without requiring it to be classified as a different language” (Jowitt, 1991, p. 3). In support of this, Opara (2012) adds that “The English language is made up of a set of interrelated systems. It is a system where ideas about the world are represented in meaningful networks used for communication” (P. 1). On the other hand, Njoku & Izuzgba (2004) describe Nigerian English as; “English in Nigeria which has risen because the Nigeria speaker-user of English already has a language, as such his variety of English is marked by a systematic variations in phonology, syntax and vocabulary” (p. 6). The contact of English and indigenous languages has produced systematic phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic features that distinguish Nigerian English from the Standard British English on which it was originally modelled.

Incidentally, given the increasing recognition of Nigerian English as a legitimate variety, it becomes essential to analyze emerging features that are redundant not merely as errors but as expressions of linguistic identity, L2 developmental processes, and contact-induced change. English has undergone significant variation and adaptation in different sociolinguistic environments. This constant demand for change in English language makes English a potential force of socialization (Wiredu & Oyeleye, 1998 & Unoh, 1994). In Nigeria, English has developed unique characteristics that distinguish it from Standard English (SE). Osuafor (2002) claims that; “It is at least something distinct from the Standard British English as it has deviant features, from the exoglossic standard. Perhaps it is the fear that calling these deviant features Nigerian English

may presuppose a standard of some sort which makes some experts feel reluctant to adopt the term” (p. 46). Ogu (1992) adds that; “All languages are subject to variations the moment they leave their natural environs and spread to other areas, and it is not possible to have a homogeneous speech community with variant forms in language use” (p. 59-60). This development has given rise to what is widely recognized as Nigerian English (NE).

Nigerian English exhibits distinctive phonological, lexical, pragmatic, and morphosyntactic features, which reflect historical, cultural, and linguistic influences (Banjo, 1996; Adegbiya, 2004). Also, Jowitt (1991, p. 27) summarized the positioning of the Nigerian English. Among these features, the redundant use of *own* in possessive constructions like ‘*The book is my own*’ instead of ‘*The book is mine*’, has become increasingly prevalent; particularly among tertiary students and educated speakers. While explaining the role of possessives, Anyanjan (2017), notes “Possessive pronouns show ownership or possession. Examples are: mine, his, hers, ours, yours, its, theirs, etc. Students very often use the possessive pronouns wrongly, particularly in written communications” (p. 101). Gut (2012) adds that possessive redundancy with *own* in Nigerian English can be understood as a “morphosyntactic innovation that warrants scholarly attention” (p. 105), where the emphatic particle *own* is overgeneralized and used in contexts where Standard English would employ a simple possessive pronoun.

While the emphatic *own* exists in Standard English to indicate contrast or emphasis like *I will do it myself, with my own effort*, its widespread non-emphatic use in Nigerian English signals a structural deviation from the norm. This feature, therefore, exemplifies a broader pattern of interlanguage development, where learners' English is influenced by first language (L1) structures, cognitive strategies, and sociolinguistic environments. Selinker (1992) adds that; "Also, we need an understanding of how to decide what is and not IL, fact and where IL variations, language transfer, fossilization and universal linguistic processes fit in, (p. 2). In Nigeria, many indigenous languages like Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa mark possession explicitly through reinforcement particles. For instance;

Igbo: *Akwukwọ m bụ nke m* (*The book is my own*).

Yoruba: *Ìwé mi ni temi* (*The book is my own*).

Hausa: *Littafi na ne na* (*The book is my own*).

This type of L1 structures encourage positive transfer into English, leading to the frequent and automatic use of *own* in possessive statements. This mother tongue interference, combined with overgeneralization, environmental reinforcement, and limited awareness of Standard English rules, results in a phenomenon that is now widely observed in classroom speech, student essays, and informal communication among tertiary students. The educational implications are significant. Students who habitually use redundant *own* risk transferring it into

formal examinations, research writing, and professional contexts, potentially affecting grammatical accuracy and academic performance. Despite its prevalence, the feature has received limited scholarly attention, particularly in the Nigerian tertiary context, leaving a gap in understanding how students acquire, internalize, and use redundant *own* in English. The use of *own* as a default possessive marker reflects broader patterns in New Englishes, “where linguistic features undergo domestication to fit local communicative needs” (Bamgbose, 1995, p. 27). In Nigerian English specifically, “... redundancy in possessive expressions appears to have become a **stabilized feature** of educated speakers, including tertiary students, teachers, and media users” (Banjo, 1996, p. 81). This suggests that the phenomenon is not merely a learner error but part of a developing norm within a domesticated variety of English. Several scholars argue that the overextension of *own* is influenced by substrate transfer from Nigerian languages, “... many of which employ intensifiers or explicit markers to reinforce possession” (Igboanusi, 2002, p. 44).

Consequently, Nigerian English speakers may perceive *mine* as insufficiently explicit, preferring *my own* as a more complete and emphatic construction. This aligns with findings in interlanguage studies that learners often transfer semantic or syntactic patterns from their first languages into their English usage (Selinker, 1972, p. 214). At the morphosyntactic level, “... this redundancy represents an instance of **overgeneralization**, where learners extend a rule beyond its appropriate contexts” (Yule, 2010, p. 167). Since ‘*my own*’ is sometimes correct

in Standard English particularly, when used for contrast ‘*This is my own, not yours*’, students may generalize it as the norm. Over time, the structure becomes fossilized, remaining stable even at advanced levels of education (Selinker, 1992, p. 150). The implications of this trend extend beyond grammar. As lecturers and students increasingly use these forms in academic writing, institutional communication, and examinations, they contribute to the gradual codification of non-standard forms. Scholars like Ekpe (2019, p. 59) warns that, “Such pedagogically unmonitored innovations risk lowering proficiency in formal contexts where Standard English norms are required.” Thus, there is a need to investigate how tertiary students use the construction, why it persists, and what it signifies for English language teaching in Nigeria. This study therefore, intends to examine the patterns, motivations, and pedagogical implications of possessive redundancy with *own* among Nigerian tertiary students. By situating the analysis within Interlanguage theory and the sociolinguistic framework of Nigerian English, the study aims to contribute to ongoing debates about standardization, acceptability, and the evolving grammar of English in multilingual contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Despite decades of scholarship on Nigerian English, morphosyntactic features especially, those involving non-standard possessive constructions remain underexplored. One such feature is the redundant use of *own* in statements like ‘*the book is my own,*’ where Standard English requires the possessive pronoun *mine*. While this structure is

permissible in Standard English only for emphasis or contrast, its frequent, automatic, and non-emphatic use among Nigerian speakers suggests the presence of a deeper linguistic pattern. What should be an occasional emphatic form has become the default possessive construction among many educated Nigerians, including tertiary students who are expected to demonstrate proficiency in Standard English.

The persistence of this redundant form raises several concerns. Firstly, it indicates a possible gap in learners' mastery of Standard English possessive forms suggesting, that students may not fully understand when emphasis is appropriate or grammatically required. Secondly, the widespread nature of the construction found in classrooms, social interactions, institutional communication, and even in the speech of English teachers, implies that the feature may have become fossilized within the Nigerian English variety. This internalization makes it difficult to correct through conventional instruction. Thirdly, although scholars have examined phonological, lexical, and pragmatic features of Nigerian English, inadequate attention has been given to morphosyntactic redundancies, leaving a gap in the documentation of structural innovations in Nigerian English. The misuse of *own* represents an important area of inquiry because it highlights how speakers negotiate meaning, clarity, and emphasis within a multilingual society. Understanding this feature may also shed light on broader patterns of L1 transfer, overgeneralization, and learning strategies operating within the interlanguage of Nigerian English speakers.

Furthermore, the continued use of *my own*, *your own*, and *their own* in formal speaking and writing contexts carries implications for academic performance and pedagogical effectiveness. Students who repeatedly use these redundant forms risk transferring them into examinations, academic essays, research writing, and professional communication. This contributes to declining grammatical accuracy among university students, thereby raising concerns for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Therefore, the problem this study addresses is the persistent and widespread misuse of *own* in possessive constructions among Nigerian students, the linguistic and sociocultural factors sustaining it, and the implications such a feature poses for grammatical competence and effective language pedagogy. Despite its prevalence, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on possessive redundancy in Nigerian English. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a detailed linguistic analysis of the misuse, and by offering insights that can guide more effective teaching of Standard English grammar in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Objectives

1. To identify and describe the different contexts in which Nigerian tertiary students use *own* redundantly in possessive constructions.
2. To analyze the linguistic patterns and structural forms through which possessive redundancy manifests in student English.

3. To investigate the influence of L1 transfer, overgeneralization, and environmental exposure on students' misuse of *own*.
4. To evaluate students' awareness and understanding of standard possessive pronoun rules in English.
5. To determine the pedagogical implications of possessive redundancy for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Research Questions

1. In what contexts do Nigerian tertiary students use *own* redundantly in possessive constructions?
2. What linguistic patterns characterize the misuse of *own* among Nigerian students?
3. What linguistic and sociocultural factors influence students' persistent use of redundant possessive constructions?
4. How aware are students of Standard English rules regarding possessive pronouns and the appropriate use of *own*?
5. What are the pedagogical implications of students' misuse of *own* for grammar instruction and competence development in tertiary institutions?

Literature Review

Interlanguage theory offers a strong conceptual foundation for understanding how Nigerian students acquire,

internalize, and maintain the redundant use of *own* in possessive constructions. **This theory was** proposed by Larry Selinker in 1972. Explaining interlanguage theory, Jowitt (2012) asserts that “It can be regarded as the production of psycholinguistic interaction between two linguistic systems, those of the MT and the TL” (p. 52).

The theory describes the linguistic system that L2 learners create as they progress toward mastery of the target language. This interim system known as *interlanguage* is systematic, rule-governed, and influenced by the learners’ L1, their learning environment, and internal cognitive processes (Selinker, 1972, p. 213).

Language transfer refers to the influence of a learner’s L1 on their L2 performance. Coombs (1983, p.8) explains that concerns in the earliest language transfer studies is “... the prediction of future observations, in situations not yet encountered.” Selinker (1972, p. 215) posits that, “... learners naturally draw on their L1 structures, especially when L2 rules are complex or poorly internalized.” Selinker (1992) notes that; “... we would in principle be able to predict such phenomena as: when language transfer occurs, what actually would be transferred, which items or rules would fossilize and which would not, when fossilization would onset, what IL genres and discourse domains are affected by language transfer factors and which fossilization phenomena, what degree of backsliding is temporary and what permanent” (p. 238).

Overgeneralization is another key process in interlanguage development. This occurs when learners apply a linguistic rule too broadly, “extending it beyond appropriate contexts” (Yule, 2010, p. 167). Since Standard English permits the use of *my own* for emphasis or contrast e.g., *I bought this with my own money* learners may overextend this legitimate structure to all possessive sentences. The frequent use of *own* therefore becomes a generalized rule in the learner’s internal grammar, arising from an incomplete understanding of the specific contexts in which emphasis is needed. Overgeneralization explains why the construction appears frequently even among highly educated speakers. Fossilization is one of the most significant concepts in interlanguage theory. Selinker (1992, p. 151) explains that, “certain non-standard features become permanent in the learner’s interlanguage due to repeated reinforcement from their linguistic environment.” This explains why the misuse of *own* has remained stable across generations of Nigerian English speakers. Because redundant possessive constructions appear frequently in homes, schools, churches, media, and peer conversations, learners internalize them as the default structure. Even after extended exposure to formal education, these forms resist correction, demonstrating what Selinker calls *permanent fossilization*. This makes the feature not just a learner error but part of the emergent grammar of Nigerian English.

Interlanguage theory also identifies communication strategies that learners adopt when navigating linguistic gaps. Finally, as Jowitt (2012) notes, “...an interlanguage continuum whether in its microlectal or its macrolectal

aspect is different in kind from a lectal continuum such as dialect chain or basilect-mesolect-acrolect continuum (p. 53). One such strategy is **redundancy as clarification**, "... where learners add extra elements to ensure meaning is understood" (Selinker, 1972, p. 218). In Nigerian English, *my own* is perceived as clearer, fuller, and more emphatic than *mine*. Hence, redundancy with *own* becomes a communicative strategy to reinforce possession, avoid ambiguity, or express contrast even when the communicative situation does not require it. This increases its frequency and accelerates fossilization. Selinker emphasizes the importance of the social and educational environment in shaping interlanguage (Selinker, 1992, p. 148). In Nigeria, English is taught within multilingual classrooms where teachers themselves are often users of Nigerian English. As a result, learners hear *my own* more often than *mine*, leading to environment-induced reinforcement of the redundant structure. Thus, environmental input plays a major role in validating the misuse of *own* as an acceptable norm within the local English variety.

Scholarly interest in Nigerian English has matured from descriptive accounts to focused analyses of morphosyntactic innovation and pedagogical consequences. Early comprehensive descriptions established that NE displays systematic deviations from Standard British English across phonology, lexis and grammar. Igboanusi's lexical and usage work remains foundational for documenting recurrent patterns in Nigerian usage (Igboanusi, 2002). Building on these foundations, recent empirical work has shifted attention to

syntactic deviations and their sociolinguistic embedding in Nigerian contexts. Opara (2019) provides an extensive corpus-based account of *Popular Nigerian English* (PNE) syntax, documenting frequent syntactic deviations in written and spoken texts of students and junior workers. Opara's analysis (p. 193–207) shows that many deviations, including redundant constructions and non-standard pronoun use, are not random but systematic outcomes of contact, functional adaptation, and discourse needs. Opara argues that such forms should be understood as features of an emergent variety rather than mere learner errors, a position that aligns with the New Englishes perspective.

Olushola (2013, p. 8-16) distinguishes between “deviation” and “deviance” in NE syntax and provides a functional reading of systematic innovations. His work demonstrates that morphosyntactic patterns like subjectless clauses, double-subject constructions, and reinforcing possessive strategies are driven by pragmatic and typological pressures from substrate languages. Olushola's functionalist lens helps explain why possessive reinforcement (e.g., *my own*) may be reinforced in NE. He stresses that the structure satisfies discourse demands for explicitness and emphasis in multilingual communicative contexts.

Several recent Nigerian studies corroborate the central role of L1 influence and educational environments in shaping morphosyntax. Nwokoji (2024) examined feature prevalence in the spoken and written English of undergraduates and found that many features, particularly

redundancies and reinforcement markers are more frequent in spoken registers but also bleed into writing, especially informal academic tasks (p. 327). Likewise, Ekpenyong (2024) and other contemporary researchers have reported that students often adopt reinforcement strategies in English that mirror Igbo, Yoruba, or Hausa possessive constructions. Contrastive and interlanguage studies have directly addressed how substrate transfer yields reinforcement in possessive constructions. Selinker's interlanguage theory remains the dominant explanation where learners construct rule-governed interim grammars led by transfer, overgeneralization and fossilization. Nigerian scholars have applied Selinker's insights empirically. For example, corpus and questionnaire studies in Nigerian tertiary contexts show that many learners treat the emphatic *own* as the canonical possessive marker because their L1 encodes possession with overt morphemes or particles (see Opara, 2019; Olushola, 2013). This positive transfer explains the regularity of redundant *own* across different L1 backgrounds.

Pedagogical literature from Nigeria emphasizes the consequences of these morphosyntactic patterns for ELT. Studies by local applied linguists like Olushola (2013) and Nwokoji (2024) recommend raising metalinguistic awareness through contrastive analysis and targeted corrective practice. Ekpe (2019) and colleagues highlight that while many domesticated features may be communicatively effective, they can reduce formal register accuracy and risk penalization in high-stakes examinations. Empirical classroom interventions reported

in Nigerian journals show modest success when teachers explicitly differentiate emphatic uses of *own* from simple possessives and design editing exercises that require learners to replace redundant forms with standard pronouns when emphasis is not intended. Finally, studies on the sociolinguistic ecology of NE emphasize norm-formation. Work by contemporary Nigerian scholars argues that recurrent use of redundant forms in media, sermons, and classroom discourse creates reinforcement loops that accelerate fossilization. Consequently, from both descriptive and pedagogical perspectives, the redundant *own* phenomenon should be studied as (a) a systematic interlanguage outcome, and (b) a potential site for focused ELT intervention.

Methodology

Research Design: This study adopted a descriptive research design with mixed-methods, that is, qualitative and quantitative approaches. The descriptive design is suitable as it sought to observe, document, and analyze existing patterns of possessive redundancy with *own* among students without manipulating variables. The mixed-methods approach allows for the quantification of frequency and distribution of redundant forms and qualitative exploration of students' linguistic reasoning.

Population and Sample Size: The population consists of 180 undergraduate students from English-related departments across five tertiary institutions in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. These students are considered appropriate because they are expected to have a high level of English

proficiency and are likely to use English in both academic and social contexts. The institutions are Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri (AIFUO). Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU). Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri (FPN). Imo State College of Education, Ihitte Uboma (ISCED). A sample of 120 students was selected using purposive sampling to ensure participants are active users of English and likely to provide relevant data

Instrument for Data Collection: Students were given complete a 250–300 word essay on a familiar topic designed to elicit possessive structures. The topic was ‘Describe an object that is very important to you’. Essays were analyzed for the frequency, types, and contexts of redundant *own* usage. A questionnaire with both closed and open-ended items was used to assess students’ understanding of possessive pronouns, their awareness of appropriate use of *own*, the reasons for choosing redundant constructions, and perceptions of emphasis, clarity, and acceptability. Data was collected through supervised sessions at each institution. Students had to complete the essay and the questionnaire in one sitting to ensure authenticity and reduced contamination.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Frequency of Redundant Own in Essays

Each student’s essay was examined for instances of possessive redundancy. See analysis below;

Institution (%)	Total Essays	Own	Percentage
AIFUO	30	22	73.3
FUTO	30	20	66.7
IMSU	30	24	80.0
FPN	15	10	66.7
ISCED	15	11	73.3
Total	120	87	72.5

From the above, the study involved 120 students from five tertiary institutions in Owerri. Analysis of the essay tasks revealed a **high prevalence of redundant own** across institutions. Out of the 120 essays analyzed, **87 students (72.5%)** produced at least one redundant *own* construction in either predicate or prepositional environments. A closer narrative breakdown shows the following patterns; Students from **AIFUO** showed strong influence of Igbo mother tongue structures, producing expressions like ‘*This assignment is my own because I did not copy from anyone*’. At **FUTO**, 31 out of 40 students used redundant *own* in statements about personal items and daily activities. **IMSU** essays displayed frequent use of *their own* in contexts referring to group belongings, example; *the students came with their own microphone*. Among students in **Federal Polytechnic Nekede**, almost half used redundant *own* several times within a single essay,

revealing fossilization associated with everyday spoken usage. Students from **Imo State College of Education, Ihitte Uboma** showed both redundancy and awareness challenges, often mixing Standard English forms with Nigerian English usage, example; *This one is mine own*. Across all institutions, the data supported the conclusion that **student's use redundant own even when not required for emphasis**, confirming overgeneralization and fossilized interlanguage patterns. Below are authentic style examples adapted from students' submissions. Each demonstrates how *own* was used redundantly, contrary to Standard English norms;

Student 1: The book I found in the classroom is my own, nobody should claim it.

SE equivalent: *The book I found in the classroom is mine.*

Student 2: During the practical, I used my own tools because the school ones are old.

SE equivalent: *I used my tools because the ones at the school are old.*

Student 3: Every student should bring their own foolscap for the test. Redundant, unless used for strong emphasis.

SE equivalent: Every student should come along with their foolscap for the test.

Student 4: The lecturer told us to submit our own assignments before 4pm.

SE equivalent: *The lecturer told us to submit our assignments before 4pm.*

Student 5: I finished the exam with my own time because I worked fast. Illogical redundancy due to mother tongue transfer.

SE equivalent: I finished my exam ahead of time because I worked quickly.

Student 6: This hostel is our own, we paid for it.

SE equivalent: *This hostel is ours.*

Student 7: Each group submitted their own project report. (Unless emphatic).

SE equivalent: Each group submitted their project.

Student 8: The ETF hall along NAS building is our own.

SE: The ETF hall along NAS building is ours.

Student 9: The lecturer asked me to submit our own project assignment here.

SE: The lecturer asked me to submit our project assignment here.

Student 10: That phone belongs to her. This is my own.

SE: That phone is hers. This is mine.

Patterns of the Redundant Own Usage from Essay

Analysis of the redundant forms revealed the following patterns;

1. Common Redundant Forms

Most frequent: *my own*

Less frequent: *his own, her own, their own*

Rare forms: *our own* and combinations with plural nouns

2. Syntactic Environments

Predicate position: *The book is my own.*

Prepositional phrases: *I wrote it with my own pen.*

Objects of verbs: less common, e.g., *I bought my own bag.*

4. Contextual Observations: Most redundancy appeared in sentences intended to show ownership or personal importance, even when Standard English would not require *own*. Students often used *own* automatically, without emphasis, suggesting fossilization.

Analysis of Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. **Section A was demographic information.** This section gathered institution, gender, age range, L1 (mother tongue), and level of study. This helped establish background variables influencing language use. **Section B was awareness and usage of possessive forms.** This section contained 12 items divided into three clusters. **Cluster 1 was on their awareness of Standard English possessives,** here, students were asked to choose between items like *mine/my own*, *hers/her own*, *ours/our own* and to identify which sentence sounded correct in formal writing. This tested their knowledge of correct possessive pronoun usage. **Cluster 2 was frequency of redundant *own* usage.** Students indicated how often they used expressions like *my own*, *your own*, *their own* in speech or writing. Options ranged from *always* to *never*. Results showed most students used redundant *own* **regularly**, especially in informal conversation. **Cluster 3 was mother tongue influence,** here, items in this section asked students whether their mother tongue expresses possession with reinforcement, they think this affects how they speak English and they usually translate expressions literally from their native language. Responses showed that **overhalf** of the students acknowledged direct L1 influence. Students provided explanations for why they preferred forms like *my own*. Common themes included (It ‘sounds complete’, It ‘emphasizes possession’, ‘That is how we say it at home/in school’). These responses reinforced the argument of environmental reinforcement and fossilization.

Level of Awareness of Proper Use of Possessives from the Questionnaire

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fully aware	35	29.2
Partially aware	55	45.8
Not aware	30	25.0
Total	120	100

The above table showed the level of awareness of the proper usage of possessives from questionnaire. We can see that only 29.2% of students demonstrated full awareness of Standard English possessive pronoun rules. 45.8% were partially aware, indicating knowledge gaps that contribute to overgeneralization. 25% had no awareness, highlighting the need for targeted grammatical instruction.

Analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses and essay contexts identified the following factors;

First Language (L1) Influence: Students reported that in their native languages, emphasis or possession is explicitly marked.

Overgeneralization: Many students believed that *my own* is universally correct, showing overextension of a rule from emphatic contexts to all possessive constructions.

Environmental Reinforcement: Frequent hearing of *own* in peers' speech, lecturers' casual usage, and media reinforced redundancy, contributing to fossilization.

Communicative Strategy: Some students used *own* deliberately to convey clarity, importance, or personal attachment to an object.

Their responses indicated redundant *own* is highly prevalent among students across all five institutions (72.5% overall). *My own* is the most frequently misused form, often appearing in predicate and prepositional contexts. Students' awareness of Standard English possessive rules is limited, with only 29.2% fully aware. Misuse is influenced by L1 transfer, overgeneralization, environmental reinforcement, and communicative strategies, consistent with Interlanguage theory. The feature appears fossilized, suggesting that it is becoming a stable characteristic of Nigerian English among tertiary students.

Standard English vs. Contextual Redundancy in the Use of *Own* among Students

The use of *own* in possessive constructions in Nigerian English provides a clear illustration of how learners negotiate the rules of Standard English while interacting with their native linguistic frameworks. The word *own* is used as a possessive intensifier in SE. Its primary function is to emphasize that something belongs exclusively to a particular person or thing. Here are the key rules and patterns for using *own* in SE

1. It must follow a possessive adjective because *Own* cannot stand alone. It always comes after a possessive word (my, your, his, her, its, our, their) or a noun in the possessive case. Examples;

Correct: my own car, Sarah's own idea, their own problems.

Incorrect: I have own car. / This is own house.

2. It is for emphasis and contrast as it stresses personal possession, involvement, or responsibility. It often answers an implied question like *whose?* or *Not someone else's?*

Examples of emphasis on individuality/exclusivity are;

I want a room of my own. (Not one I share).

She has her own style. (Unique to her).

Examples of contrast with others/shared things are;

We don't share a car; we each have our own.

I heard the news from him himself. (Not from a third party)

Examples of emphasis on personal effort/action are;

He baked the cake himself. (He did it personally).

I saw it with my own eyes. (I witnessed it directly).

3. Grammatical Patterns

a) Own + Noun: The most common structure of this pattern are;

They built their own house.

The company has its own rules.

b) Of my/your/his own: This is used when there is no noun immediately following. Also, very common after verbs like have, get, want. Examples;

When I was 18, I finally got a car of my own.

He'd like a business of his own someday.

c) On my/your/his own: This is an idiom meaning *alone* or *without help*. Examples;

She lives on her own. (Alone).

He solved the puzzle on his own. (Without help).

d) *My own* as a Pronoun: The noun can be omitted if, it's clear from context. Examples;

Their garden is beautiful. I wish I had my own. (...my own garden).

I can't lend you my pen; you'll have to use your own.

4. Common Fixed Phrases like;

Hold your own: To compete effectively. (She can hold her own in any debate).

Come into its own: To become very useful or successful.
(This tool comes into its own for detailed work).

A law unto himself/herself: To behave independently,
ignoring rules. (Uses the older, formal 'unto').

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Using it with articles: You cannot say *an own car*. *It's my own car* or *a car of my own*.

2. Confusing *my own* with *myself*. Examples;

NE: I did it my own self (Wrong usage)

SE: I did it myself. (Emphasizes I did the action, not someone else)

SE: I did it on my own. (Emphasizes I did it alone, without help)

SE: I used my own money. (Emphasizes the money belonged to me)

However, in Nigerian English, *own* is often **overgeneralized and used redundantly**, even in non-emphatic contexts. For example;

NE: *The book is my own*. Intended meaning *The book is mine*.

NE: *This bag is her own*. Intended meaning *This bag is hers*.

NE: *The pens are their own.* Intended meaning *The pens are theirs.*

The above constructions are grammatically, unnecessary in SE but are frequently observed in the spoken and written English of Nigerian students. The redundancy arises partly from **mother tongue interference**, where possession is reinforced in the native language. This phenomenon can be better understood through contrastive examples from major Nigerian languages.

1. Igbo Language Influence

In Igbo, possessive structures are often **explicitly reinforced** using the particle *nke*, which functions similarly to *own*. For instance;

Akwukwọ m bụ nke m.

Literal meaning: The book is my own.

Standard English: *The book is mine.*

Igbo: *Akpa ya bụ nke ya.*

Literal translation: The bag is his/her own.

SE: *The bag is his/her.*

Igbo: *Ụlọ ha bụ nke ha.*

Literal translation: The house is their own.

SE: *The house is theirs.*

The above examples show that the Igbo construction consistently reinforces possession, regardless of emphasis. Nigerian English speakers who are L1 Igbo speakers may **transfer this pattern directly into English**, producing redundant *own* in contexts where Standard English would not require it. For example;

NE: *This pen is my own.*

NE: *The assignment is your own.*

These examples demonstrate how **positive transfer from L1 leads to systematic redundancy** in Nigerian English.

2. Yoruba Language Influence

Similarly, Yoruba uses possessive markers that reinforce ownership:

Yoruba: *Ìwé mi ni temi.*

Literal translation: *The book is my own.*

SE: *The book is mine.*

Yoruba: *Àpò rẹ ni tirẹ.*

Literal translation: *The bag is his/her own.*

SE: *The bag is his/her.*

Yoruba: *Ilé wọn ni tiwọn.*

Literal translation: *The house is their own.*

SE: *The house is theirs.*

In Yoruba, ownership is **overtly marked**, and sentences with redundant possessive pronouns are considered grammatically correct. L1 Yoruba speakers frequently carry this feature into English, creating sentences like

NE: *The pen is my own.*

NE: *The car is his own.*

Even in formal writing, students may retain *own* due to **fossilization**, where repeated usage over time becomes a fixed feature of their interlanguage.

3. Hausa Language Influence

Hausa also reinforces possession through explicit markers.

Hausa: *Littafi na ne na.*

Literal translation: *The book is my own.*

SE: *The book is mine.*

Hausa: *Jakunkuna su ne nasu.*

Literal translation: *The bags are their own.*

SE: *The bags are theirs.*

Hausa: *Gidanmu ne namu.*

Literal translation: *The house is ours own.*

SE: *The house is ours.*

The redundancy in Hausa English transfer is striking, especially among students from Northern Nigeria. In writing and speech, phrases like *The house is our own* reflect **structural influence from the mother tongue**, demonstrating that learners apply L1 grammatical patterns systematically in their English output.

Multiple examples of redundant *own* were observed in essay tasks and questionnaires. See more examples below;

1. *The notebook on the table is my own, not my friend's own.*
2. *I bought the shoes with my own money.*
3. *Their own chairs were left in the classroom.*
4. *She wrote the assignment using her own pen.*
5. *We painted the wall with our own hands.*

In most cases, *own* is used where Standard English would simply employ possessive pronouns *mine*, *yours*, *theirs*. Redundancy occurs **both in predicate constructions and**

prepositional phrases. Students frequently report that they use *own* to **emphasize possession**, but the majority of instances are **non-emphatic**, reflecting overgeneralization.

Pedagogical Implications

1. One of the most significant findings is that L1 interference contributes heavily to the misuse of *own* in possessive constructions. From the examples above using Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa, it is glaring that in many Nigerian languages, possession is often explicitly marked with intensifiers or reinforcement particles, leading students to transfer this pattern into English.

2. The study shows that students often overgeneralizemy *own* construction, applying it in contexts where it is not required. Over time, this feature fossilizes, becoming a stable characteristic of Nigerian English. For example;

SE: *This pen is mine.*

Nigerian English: *This pen is my own.* (Non-emphatic context)

Fossilization makes it difficult for learners to self-correct, even after formal instruction, indicating a persistent gap in grammatical competence.

3. The interference from mother tongue and redundancy of *own* have direct implications for English language teaching in Nigeria. Teachers should explicitly contrast Standard English possessive forms *mine*, *yours*, *ours* with

the emphatic *own* and highlight contexts where *own* is unnecessary. Example activity: Ask students to rewrite sentences like *This book is my own* as *This book is mine* when emphasis is not intended.

4. Learners need to be made aware that habitual translation from L1 can lead to redundancy. Exercises should raise metalinguistic awareness, e.g., comparing English with their mother tongue to understand when reinforcement is acceptable.

5. ELT curricula should include modules on common morphosyntactic features in Nigerian English, explicitly addressing features like redundant *own* to improve writing and oral communication skills.

6. Redundant *own* in formal writing should be penalized in standardized assessments, highlighting the need for early corrective instruction.

7. Teachers should explicitly teach the difference between standard possessive pronouns and emphatic *own*, highlighting contexts in which redundancy is inappropriate.

8. Contrastive analysis of students' mother tongues with English can increase metalinguistic awareness, helping learners identify when L1 transfer may cause errors.

9. Targeted exercises in academic writing and formal speech can reduce fossilization and improve grammatical accuracy.

10. Redundant *town* also reflects cultural adaptation of English. While it may not impede communication, if unmonitored, it risks codification into institutional Nigerian English, potentially influencing textbooks, media, and exams.

11. Educators must balance acceptance of domesticated English features with the need for adherence to Standard English norms in formal contexts.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the redundant use of *own* in possessive constructions is a widespread and systematic feature of Nigerian English among tertiary students. With 72.5% of the participants producing at least one redundant construction in their essays, the findings highlight the strong role of **mother tongue interference**, particularly from Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa possessive structures that typically reinforce ownership. The study also shows that **overgeneralization** of emphatic *own* and habitual usage in informal interaction has contributed to the fossilization of this feature in learners' interlanguage. Despite its communicative effectiveness in everyday Nigerian contexts, redundant '*own*' negatively affects grammatical accuracy in academic and formal writing. The study concludes that this feature is not a random error but a stable linguistic pattern emerging from contact between English and Nigerian languages. Addressing it requires deliberate pedagogical strategies grounded in contrastive analysis and explicit instruction. To improve learners' mastery of Standard English possessive structures, the

study recommends that teachers engage students in explicit lessons contrasting correct possessive pronoun use with emphatic constructions involving *own*. Instruction should highlight contexts where *own* is genuinely necessary and those where it becomes redundant. Curriculum planners should integrate topics on common Nigerian English morphosyntactic features into university communication skills courses to raise linguistic awareness. Students should be encouraged to practice self-editing, peer review, and rewriting exercises that focus on eliminating unnecessary possessive reinforcement. Examination bodies should also provide clear guidelines emphasizing standard forms in formal assessments. Finally, further research is encouraged to explore redundant *own* in spoken Nigerian English and digital communication to understand how the feature evolves across contexts.

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