

AN ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN VERB PHRASE STRUCTURE ON SELECTED RADIO PROGRAMMES IN LAGOS AND OGUN STATES, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The verb phrase is an obligatory element of the Nigerian Pidgin sentence structure. However, its different constituents and their functions have either not been fully studied or reported in available literature. This paper presents an analysis of verb usage in the Lagos and Ogun states variety of Nigerian Pidgin. The study sample was taken from selected radio programmes aired on four popular radio stations in Lagos and Ogun States, Nigeria. The verb phrase elements in different clausal and sentence constructions were identified, transcribed and analysed, using the traditional grammar conceptual framework based on their forms and functions. The findings show that the Nigerian Pidgin verb phrase structure, although reflects some features of English language and those of the Kwa language family such as Yoruba, is distinct from those of its superstrate and substrate languages. One of its features is that it has five modal auxiliary verbs. Another is that some of its lexical verbs express synonymy, while some others express polysemy. The paper concludes that considering the absence of a national language in Nigeria, the logical generalisation on the usage of verbs among NP speakers in Lagos and Ogun states in particular and the southern part of Nigeria in general would bring about Language of Wilder Communication (LWC).

Key words: Nigerian Pidgin, Verb Phrase, Auxiliary Verbs, Lexical Verbs, Radio Programmes.

1. Introduction

Nigerian Pidgin (hereafter referred to as NP) is an English-based pidgin which is widely spoken across all the 36 states of Nigeria, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. It is especially spoken in major cities and towns; in the police and military formations in particular. This correlates with Goglia's (2017) claim that "the use of Nigerian Pidgin English is strictly linked to the urbanization process." As far back as 2001 it was estimated that between 40 and 75 million people across the country speak the language ((Egbokhare, 2001). Although it is not officially recognised in the country, NP performs the role of an unofficial lingua franca. Faraclas (2004) notes that NP is spoken by over half of the population of Nigeria. Nigeria's population is currently estimated above 200 million. By virtue of its number of speakers, it is the most widely spoken language in the country, followed by English, the nation's official language. Moreover, it serves as the primary language of over 10 million people in the highly multilingual Niger-Delta region of the country (Ihemere, 2006).

It is generally assumed that the Niger-Delta region is the home of NP. However, the south-west states of Lagos and Ogun with a combine population of about 30 million people (NPC (web), 2020, NBS (web), 2020) also have a high number of NP speakers. Communities such as Ajegunle, Makoko, Bariga, Ijora, Aguda, Mushin, Oshodi, Obalende, Orile-Iganmu, Mile 2, Festac Town, Okokomaiko and other low-classed communities in the states have a predominance of NP speakers (Osoba, 2014). Radio broadcast is a major medium of disseminating information, providing entertainment as well as educating the people. Such broadcast contents include products/services advertisement, sports shows, social commentaries, news programmes, phone-in sessions and drama. A large percentage of radio audience in the two states usually tune in to fully NP stations (such as Wazobia FM and Lasgidi FM) and NP programmes run on other stations that are not fully NP stations (such as SMA FM and OGBC FM). The verb may be regarded as the most important lexical category in NP syntactic structure, as it is an obligatory

element of the sentence. Sometimes it serves as the only overt element in the sentence, especially imperative sentences; for example: *Kom.* (come)

Wàká. (go)

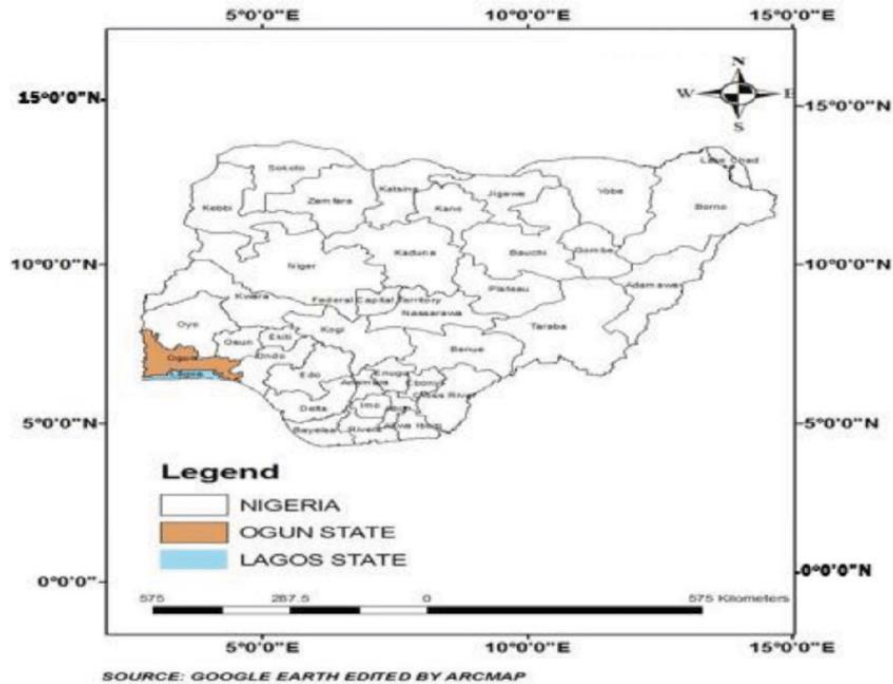
Consequently, it is a worthwhile venture to investigate the usage of verbs in selected radio programmes within the given airspace. This will also serve as the basis of a logical generalisation on the usage of verbs among NP speakers in Lagos and Ogun states of Nigeria. The aim of the study is to have a formalised structure of the syntactic usage of NP verbs among Nigerians generally, since the population of the study can serve as a representation of NP speakers in the country as a whole. Bearing in mind that Lagos especially is a melting pot of all ethnic groups in the country and that people constantly move in and out of the state (and Ogun state too, since Lagos is becoming congested and increasingly expensive to live in, compared to other states; consequently, people migrate to the neighbouring Ogun state communities.) for economic reasons. One may want to ask if there are rules guiding the usage of verbs in NP. Assuming the answer is positive, the next logical question to ask is, ‘What are the rules?’ Providing an answer to this question, as well as related ones is the main goal of this paper. It is from the foregoing that the paper examines the structure of the verb (or the verb phrase, as the case may be) of the NP based on its usage in the data analysed in the selected radio programmes.

Literature Review

Historical Survey of Nigerian Pidgin

The origin of NP is historically linked to the Niger Delta (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991; Elugbe, 1995; Egbokhare, 2001; Esizimotor, 2002; Adegbija, 2003) and it dates back to 1469 (Ryder, 1969) when the first set of European traders, the Portuguese, stepped on the Nigerian soil through the Atlantic Ocean. For ease of communication, it was speculated that some form of trade jargons evolved between the Portuguese and their Nigerian trading partners. However, the Portuguese were soon displaced by the Dutch by 1593 and not too long after, by the early 17th century, the English had taken over the trading partnership with the Nigerians (Burns, 1972; Awonusi, 1993, Esizimotor, 2009). During the early period trade was facilitated by each trader learning names of items to be traded in the other’s language. According to Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p.9) “in this kind of situation, verbal auxiliaries, prepositions and such other categories, are replaced by verbal signals.” Additionally, this initial stage of pidginization was characterised by direct syntactic transfer from the substrate languages (the Niger-Congo family of languages) to the superstrate language (English). The slave trade, the British colonization and amalgamation of Nigeria, the repatriation of West African slaves to Nigeria and neighbouring countries, as well as the continuous use of the language in different social contexts in the country, all contributed to the evolution, consolidation and creolisation (in some parts of the Niger-Delta and Ajegunle in Lagos) of NP in the country.

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the location of Lagos and Ogun States.



Background and Use of NP in Nigerian Radio Broadcast

NP was first used on radio by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in 1959. The programme was a popular comedy series titled *Save Journey* (Ladele, Adefela & Lasekan, 1979). In 1966 the then newly created Midwestern region adopted the language in its radio station situated in Benin for commercial purposes (Ladele, Adefela & Lasekan, 1979). The 1970s' witnessed the proliferation of more radio drama produced in NP. By the 1980s, state government-owned stations in the Niger Delta such as Radio Rivers and Bendel state Broadcasting Service had started broadcasting more programmes in NP. (Agheyisi, 1971; Marchese & Schnukal 1982). In Lagos state today, there are two Radio stations which fully broadcast in NP. These are Wazobia 95.1 FM and Lasgidi 90.1 FM and the two commands large following in term of listenership. Prior to year 2020 when Lasgidi started (Lasgidi FM started in March, 2020), Wazobia was the undisputed leader of the airwave in terms of listenership. According to Durodola (2013) about three million listeners tune in to Wazobia FM from ten military formations across the city of Lagos. These are multi-ethnic communities, which are "traditionally associated with NigP" (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991, p. 140-141). Also, a DAILY TRUST report of 31 March 2013 written by Ismail Adebayo and Haruna Gimba Yaya says:

Within the short time of its take-off, Wazobia FM appears to have dominated the air waves in the states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja where it operates. Everywhere, in shops, restaurants, beer parlours, motor parks, public and private offices, in vehicles, clinics/hospitals, homes and other establishments in the country the pidgin English FM now seems to be the preferred station of radio listeners.

Many of its listeners are addicted to its programmes to the extent that they tune to the station throughout the day. Interestingly, the story of its soaring popularity in Abuja is the same in Kano, Lagos and Port-Harcourt where it is being tuned to every day.

The above claim is further buttressed by a report published by Julia Stole on January 13, 2021. The report shows that the three leading radio stations in Nigeria as of the fourth quarter in 2017 were Wazobia FM, Ray Power FM, and Cool FM, with an eight percent audience share each. The rest of the stations in the entire country share the rest of the percentage. The narrative in terms of audience share size is however beginning to change as the newest addition to the family of radio stations in Lagos is trying to capture a sizeable portion of the population solely controlled by Wazobia hitherto. Part of the reason is that like Wazobia, Lasgidi is also a 24-hour NP station. Moreover, it started off by using one of the most popular OAP (on-air personality) of Wazobia, Omotunde Adebowale a.k.a. Lolo 1, as its General Manager. In Lagos alone, there are 32 stations and in Ogun, there are 14. This study used the only two NP stations in Lagos (Wazobia FM and Lasgidi FM) and two leading stations in Ogun state which also devote a sizeable portion of its broadcast time to NP programmes (OGBC FM and SMA FM).

NP Verb System

A verb is a word that expresses an action or a state of being. It usually functions as the predicator in a clause or a sentence. The verb can be a single word or a string of words (phrase). When it is a phrase, it consists of one or more auxiliary verbs plus a lexical verb within a simple sentence. Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 89) define the verb phrase as “any word or group of words which can function as the predicate of a sentence.”

The NP verb system is divided into two: (i) auxiliary verbs and (ii) lexical verbs.

Auxiliary verbs

The auxiliary verbs are of two kinds: (a) modal auxiliary verbs and (b) primary auxiliary verbs. Modal auxiliary verbs are five in number - *go, fo, fit, mọs to, and sọpos*.

Primary auxiliary verbs have only two members: *de* and *dọn*.

Lexical verbs

Three kinds of lexical verbs are identifiable in NP: transitive, intransitive and neutral (i.e. neutral with regards to transitivity). Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 99) observe that a transitive verb is that which is always followed by a direct object. For example: *Jọn kil di gel*. “John killed the girl.”

An intransitive verb does not take a direct object. For example:

Awa wọta bin doti “Our water is dirty.”

Di gel bọbi don fol “The girl’s breasts have fallen.”

The neutral verbs with regards to transitivity may or may not attract a direct object. Examples of such verbs are *chọp* ‘eat’, *sabi* ‘know’, *trowe* ‘spill’ e.t.c.

For example: *Dẹm dọn chop* → intransitive

“They have eaten”

We chop yam → transitive

“We ate yam”

In the first example, *chọp* is intransitive, while in the second sentence, it is transitive.

Moreover, NP lexical verb sub-system distinguishes between stative and dynamic verbs. Dynamic verbs usually contract a relationship with the progressive aspect marker *de*. Examples of dynamic verbs are *chọp, kọm, bit, tọk, go, shit, krai*. For example:

A de *kòm* "I am coming"
I de *tòk wen A kòm insaid* "He was talking when I came in"

Whereas, stative verbs such as *laik, wònt, sabi, bilif, lof, het*, e.t.c. do not usually contract such a relationship with *de*. For instance:

¹*A de *sabi am.* "I am knowing it"
*I de *lof am.* "She is loving him"
**Dèm de wònt dèm mọ̀ni.* "They are wanting their money"
*A de *bilif Jisọ̀s.* "I am believing Jesus"

Methodology

The data for analysis in this study were collected through medis monitoring of live and recorded NP broadcasts on four radio stations situated in Lagos and Ogun states, Nigeria. The stations are Lasgidi 90.1 FM Victoria Island Lagos, WAZOBIA 95.1 FM Victoria Island Lagos, OGBC 90.5 FM, Abeokuta, Ogun state and SMA 104.9 FM, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun state. The data were gathered over a period of 18 years between 2005 and 2023. For example, we obtained six recorded episodes (30 minutes for each) of the drama series *Angelina* which was broadcast on OGBC in the early 2000's from the producer in 2005. Other data were got through random monitoring of products/services advertisement, sports shows, social commentaries, news programmes and audience participation sessions on the other three stations. The relevant aspects of verb usage were transcribed and subjected to syntactic analysis, using the traditional grammar conceptual framework. The sample data extracted from both recorded and monitored programmes are considered adequate for the analysis in the study.

¹ The asterisk against each of the sentences indicates that such sentences are not grammatically correct in the context of NP. Rather, they could be correctly reconstructed by removing the progressive aspect marker:

A *sabi am.* "I know it"
I *lof am.* "She loves him"

Data Presentation

The following 40 sample data were extracted for analysis in this paper:

- i. *Dat wọ̀n go bi fọ̀ insaid wọ̀l tori.*
(That one will be PARTICLE inside world news)
That will be during world news session.
- ii. *Yu bi mai padi.*
You are my friend.
- iii. *No bi so.*
It is not so.
- iv. *7 'O clock dọ̀n nak.*
(7 'O clock has clocked)
The time is 7 'O clock.
- v. *Januari dọ̀n waka.*
(January has taken a walk.)
January has gone.
- vi. *A de trowe salut.*
(I am throwing you salutation.)
I am greeting you (sg).
- vii. *A de grit una.*
I am greeting you (pl).

- viii. Plenty pipu *de trowe deti fo dat kona*.
(Many people are throwing dirt at that corner.)
Many people are disposing waste at that corridor.
- ix. *Di agensi tok se na onli fo pipu dai*.
The agency says only four people died.
- x. *Twenti pipu don kpai*.
Twenty people have died.
- xi. *Polis don arest sitti criminal dem fo Oshodi*.
The police have arrested sixty criminals at Oshodi.
- xii. *Foma vais preşido tok am fo won infomet wey im kari giv awa ripota*.
The former Vice President said it in one news report which he gave to our reporter.
- xiii. *Pipu wey get Korona vairoş don de plenty fo Naijiria*.
(People who have corona virus are becoming plenty in Nigeria.)
People who have contracted corona virus are increasing in Nigeria.
- xiv. *From dia, wi go kari waka wol tori*.
(From there we will carry walk to world story.)
From there we will move on to world news.
- xv. *Australian Open sopos stat next mont*.
Australian Open is supposed to start next month
- xvi. *I don stat*.
It has started.
- xvii. *If you go allow up to 30,000 pipu*.
If you will allow up to 30,000 people.
- xviii. *Liverpool nak dem fo kondo*.
Liverpool beat them four-zero.
- xix. *No bi laik dat*.
It is not like that.
- xx. *Yu de shaut tu mosh*.
You are shouting too much.
- xxi. *Mek A shuk maut fo di mata*.
(Let me put mouth in the matter)
Let me contribute to the discussion.
- xxii. *I shuk am wit bairo*.
He stabbed him with a pen
- xxiii. *I shuk am fo bairo*. (Hausa speaker's variant of xxii)
- xxiv. *Di boy no sabi ple futbol*
(The boy NEG know how to play football)
The boy does not know how to play football
- xxv. *A sabi di boy*.
I recognize the boy.
- xxvi. *Messi no fit do enitin fo dat mash*.
(Messi NEG do anything in that match)
Messi could not do anything in that match)
- xxvii. *Na mi go bi di fos pesin we go bild haus on top of ba bish*.
I will be the first man to build a house on the Bar Beach.
- xxviii. *Wota go kari di haus*.
(Water will carry the house)
Water will destroy the house.
- xxix. *Di tin we A fit tel yu na di tin we A fit do*.
What I can tell you is what I can do.

- xxx. *A fit go tɛl yɔ mama.*
(I can go tell your mother)
I can go and report you to your mother.
- xxxix. *Di man fɔ kari am go polis.*
(The man should carry him to police)
The man should have taken him to the police.
- xxxvii. *Yu fɔ kɔm kɔl mi.*
You should have come to call me
- xxxviii. *Yu mɔs to tek pamisɔn frɔm mi.*
You must take permission from me.
- xxxiv. *Di draiva dem sɔpos kari di trela kɔmɔt fɔ rod.*
The drivers ought to move the trailer off the road.
- xxxv. *Yu don kɔm bak nau nau?*
You have come back so soon?
- xxxvi. *A de kɔm.*
I am coming.
- xxxvii. *Yu no hia mi?*
You NEG hear me?
- xxxviii. *A hia.*
I heard.
- xxxix. *Wai yu no ansa?*
(Why you NEG answer?)
Why did you not respond?
- xl. *If A hia, A go ansa yu.*
If I heard, I would have responded to you.
- xli. *LASMA don kash one Okada man fɔ Ikeja Along.*
LASMA officials have arrested one Okada (motor bike) rider at Ikeja Along.
- xlii. *From dia, wi go enta sɔpɔt tori.*
From there we will move on to sport news.
- xliii. *Di useless man go nak ashawo.*
The useless went to patronise a prostitute.

Data Analysis

The data show three types of verbs in NP: auxiliary verbs, the copula and lexical verbs.

Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs are of two types in NP. These are modal auxiliary verbs and primary auxiliary verbs.

Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Five types of modal auxiliary verbs were identified, based on the data: *go* 'will', *fit* 'can', *fɔ* 'should have', *mɔs to* 'must', and *sɔpos* 'ought to'. For example:

- i. *Na mi go bi di fɔs pɛsin we go bild haus on tɔp of ba bish.* (xxvii)
- ii. *Dat wɔn go bi fɔ insaid wɔl tori.* (i)
- i. *A fit go tɛl yɔ mama.* (xxx)

ii. *Messi no fıt do enitin fə dat mash.* (xxvi)

‘fə’

i. *Yu fə kəm kəl mi.* (xxxii)

ii. *Di man fə kari am go polis.* (xxxix)

‘məs to’

i. *Yu mos to tek pamışon frəm mi.* (xxxiii)

‘səpos’

i. *Di draiva dem səpos kari di trela kəmət fə rod.* (xxxiv)

Primary Auxiliary Verbs

The data reveal only two types of primary auxiliary verbs in NP: *dən* ‘have’ and *de* ‘be’.

‘dən’

i. *Yu dən kəm bak nau nau?* (xxxv)

ii. *Januari dən waka.* (v)

‘de’

i. *A de kəm.* (xxxvi)

ii. *Plenty pipu de trowe deti fə dat kəna.* (viii)

Copula

The copula in NP is ‘bi’. It is neither an auxiliary nor a lexical verb. It only serves as a linking verb in the sentence. It is similar to the English language ‘be’ and its variants when it functions as a linking verb but it is different from it, in the sense that it does not function as a helping verb in NP sentences. For example:

i. *Dat wən go bi fə insaid wəl tori.* (i)

ii. *Yu bi mai padi.* (ii)

iii. *No bi so.* (iii)

Lexical Verbs

Lexical verbs are single-word verbs which function as the main verb in NP sentences. They also function as the head of verb phrases. Three types are attested to in the data with regards to transitivity: transitive verbs, non-transitive verbs and neutral-in-transitive verbs.

Transitive Verbs

i. *Vais presido tok am.* (xii)

S V O

ii. *A go təl yo mama.* (xxx)

S V O

In the examples provided, *tok* and *təl* both received objects. Hence they are transitive verbs.

Non-Transitive Verbs

Such verbs as *waka*, *listin*, *go*, *kəm*, *shaut*, *krai* and *stat* are examples of non-transitive verbs; they do not receive direct object in sentences. For example:

i. *Januari dən waka.* (v)

S V

ii. *I dən stat.* (xvi)

- iii. S V
 Yu de shaut tu mosh. (xx)
 S V A

Neutral-in-Transitive Verbs

Neutral-in-transitive verbs are also accounted for in our data. These include: *hia*, *ansa*, *kuk*, *wosh*, *ple*, *luk*. For example:

- i. *Yu no hia mi?* (xxxvii)
- ii. *A hia.* (xxxviii)
- iii. *Wai yu no ansa?* (xxxix)
- iv. *If A hia, A go ansa yu.* (xl)

It is observable that *hia* as used in (i) is transitive, while the same *hia* as used in (ii) is non-transitive. The same fact applies to *ansa* as it is used in (iii) and (iv).

Verbs Expressing Synonymy

Synonymy is a semantic relation in which different words or phrases express similarity in meaning. The data shows that some pairs of words or phrases in NP express synonymy. For example: *dai* and *kpai*, *trowe salut* and *grit*, *aręst* and *kash*, *kari waka* and *enta*.

dai and *kpai*

- i. *Di agency tok se na onli fọ pipu dai.* (ix)
- ii. *Twenti pipu don kpai.* (x)

trowe salut and *grit*

- iii. *A de trowe salut.* (vi)
- iv. *A de grit una.* (vii)

aręst and *kash*

- v. *Polis don aręst sixti criminal dem fọ Oshodi.* (xi)
- vi. *LASMA don kash one Okada man fọ Ikeja Along.* (xli)

kari waka and *enta*

- vii. *From dia, wi go kari waka wọl tori.* (xiv)
- viii. *From dia, wi go enta spọt tori.* (xlii)

Members of each of the four pairs above express synonymy relationship within the pair as one is used to express similar meaning with the other in different sentential contexts.

Verbs Expressing Polysemy

- i. Polysemy refers to a situation in which a word expresses more than one sense or meaning. There are a number of instances of such in the NP verbs analysed in the data. For example: *trowe*, *nak*, *shuk* and *sabi*.
 - i. *Plenty pipu de trowe deti fọ dat kọna.* (viii)
 - ii. *A de trowe salut.* (vi)
 - iii. *7 'O clock don nak.* (iv)
 - ix. *Di useless man go nak ashawo.* (xliii)
 - iv. *Mek A shuk maut fọ di mata.* (xxi)
 - v. *I shuk am wit bairo.* (xxii)
 - vi. *Di bọi no sabi ple futbọl* (xxiv)
 - vii. *A sabi di bọi.* (xxv)

Trowe in sentence (i) has the sense of physically disposing off (throwing away) something; in the second sentence it has an idiomatic sense of ‘giving out (throwing away) salutation’. *Nak* in sentence (iii) gives a sense of clocking or timing, while in sentence (iv) it suggests having a sexual affair. *Shuk* in sentence (v) has the sense of ‘contributing to a discussion’, while in sentence (vi) it has the sense of ‘stabbing with a sharp object’. Also, *sabi* in sentence (vii) has the sense of ‘knowing how to or having the ability to do something’, while in sentence (viii) it suggests the sense of ‘recognition, i.e. being able to identify a thing or person’.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the usage of verbs in NP and came out with a number of findings. One of them is that there are three types of verbs in NP: auxiliary verbs, the copula and lexical verbs. The auxiliary verbs are of two types; each of which has different members. Lexical verbs also have three types with respect to transitivity. Some lexical verbs express synonymy, while some others express polysemy. The paper also demonstrates that the usage of NP verbs in radio programmes in Lagos and Ogun states is to a large extent different from that of English, despite the fact that it is the lexifying language of NP. The paper concludes that considering the absence of a national language in Nigeria, the logical generalisation on the usage of verbs among NP speakers in Lagos and Ogun states in particular and the southern part of Nigeria in general would bring about Language of Wilder Communication (LWC).

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