

Digital Multilingualism, Identity Politics, and Language Accommodation in African Online Forums: A Sociolinguistic Study of Nairaland

David Opeyemi Adebayo¹, Okunade Abimbola Kehinde², Chinonso Faith Obumneke³, Monday Florence Anabel⁴, Iroagba Chioma³, Akhidenor Kismet Bassey⁵

¹ *Adekunle Ajasin University*

P. M. B. 01, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

² *Redeemer's University*

P. M. B. 230 Ede, Off Gbongan – Osogbo Rd., Akoda-Ede Junction, Osun State, Nigeria

³ *Federal University of Technology Owerri*

P. M. B, 1526 Owerri, Ihiagwa, Nigeria

⁴ *Akwa Ibom State University*

P. M. B. 1167 Uyo Ikot Akpad, 520221, Nigeria

⁵ *Ahmadu Bello University*

P. M. B. 1045, Zaria Nigeria

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Corresponding Author:

David Opeyemi Adebayo

David4life112@gmail.com

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Abstract. This study examines the intersection of language, identity, and politics in Nigerian online discussion through a sociolinguistic analysis of Nairaland, Nigeria's largest internet forum. Drawing on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and sociolinguistic theory, the research investigates how participants strategically use code-switching, Nigerian Pidgin, and local languages to negotiate identity, voice dissent, and establish community in politicised debates. Three selected threads, "Igbo Founded Ile-Ife," "Okrika Women Protest Unlawful Suspension of Fubara," and "Rivers Emergency Rule", serve as case studies for the analysis of how language works as a vehicle to convey ethnic pride, political grievance, and gendered opinion in online environments.

Participants are observed to employ convergence, divergence, and maintenance strategies to show group membership, claim differences, or refuse linguistic norms. Nairaland's language options are not arbitrary but serve affective, rhetorical, and ideological functions, permitting speakers to negotiate group membership or sociopolitical grievances. The study reveals how Pidgin English and blended varieties of language are employed to construct a collective sense of identity and solidarity, particularly in protest or satirical contexts. It also discloses the gendered politics of exclusion whereby women's political voices are diminished through sexist and class-based labelling, an outcome of more profound societal biases replicated within the virtual spaces.

The study contributes to the knowledge of digital multilingualism and bottom-up creativity in African online forums, highlighting the importance of ethical digital literacy and the moderation of inclusive discourses. By examining language use on Nairaland, the book enlightens readers on how Nigerians imaginatively appropriate linguistic material to shape power relations, assert their identities, and construct solidarity in the digital sphere. Relevant to scholars in sociolinguistics, digital humanities, and African studies, the book

presents a case study for examining political discourse and identity creation in multilingually complex cyberspaces.

Keywords: Code-switching; Identity; Multilingualism; Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT); Digital discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study. Language is crucial in communicating and organising identity and social relationships. In the virtual environment, language reconfigures communication patterns and social structuring. Online communities, especially in multilingual nations, show how language is utilised for information exchange, identity construction, and communal bonding [1]. In Nigeria, famous for its linguistic diversity, websites like Nairaland are perfect for analysing sociolinguistic trends. Observing language use within these spheres provides insight into social change, including power dynamics, inclusivity, and the impact of digital communication on language evolution.

Nairaland is Nigeria's largest online forum, where millions of individuals engage in diverse discussions. Seun was established in 2005 by Seun Osewa and reflects Nigeria's dynamic society and rich linguistic and cultural diversity. Language on Nairaland is a blend of formal and informal styles, reflecting the nation's multicultural society. Sites like Nairaland enable us to observe how language reacts to technological and societal development, say researchers [2].

Nigeria, with over 500 languages, is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. While the official language is English, Nigerian Pidgin and languages such as Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo are spoken daily. Nairaland reflects this diversity, and users often switch languages to communicate, build rapport, and negotiate cultural identities [3]. Code-switching between English and Pidgin is common and fosters a sense of belongingness. Studies suggest that such online linguistic behaviour attests to language's agility in adapting to changing cultural environments [4].

Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between society and language, including how linguistic choices convey social class, identity, and cultural affiliation. Online communication introduces new dimensions to sociolinguistic research by providing real-time interaction amidst diverse linguistic backgrounds. Sites like Nairaland provide valuable insights into how people negotiate

identities and social hierarchies through language; according to studies, ethnicity and social standing influence the utilisation of language in online interactions [5].

Communication is embedded in culture. As societies change, so do communication practices and language. Sociolinguistics accounts for these processes by studying language use in daily life. Language is a social phenomenon structured by cultural norms, social stratification, and technological advancement. The literature suggests that social structure has a significant influence on language choice, particularly in multilingual societies like Nigeria.

Internet forums, such as Nairaland, present both opportunities and dangers in language use. They permit cultural expression and linguistic creativity but also encourage negative tendencies such as internet insults and hate speech [6]. Literature suggests that aggressive language on the internet can have a psychological and social impact on internet users, particularly young people. Insults also embody underlying sociolinguistic issues related to ethnicity and politics. The internet environment can amplify language utterances that are uncommon in face-to-face communication.

On Nairaland, language choices are also determined by community norms. The members adapt their language to fit the community's expectations and are flexible in communication. Research on language usage in online communities involves examining linguistic, social, and psychological aspects, employing a combined approach to understanding how language evolves as society evolves.

Statement of the Problem. While digital communication is increasingly pertinent in our discussions, little has been studied on how people speak in Nigerian online forums. Nairaland, one of the biggest online discussion sites on the African continent, is a great place to study how language is used where many languages converge. In Nairaland, many people code-switch, use slang, and speak local languages. Still, we do not fully know what this choice of language means for society.

Some earlier studies, such as those by Okonkwo in 2024 [4] and Ezenwa in 2023 [2], examined global internet discourse. However, few have examined

how language variation on Nairaland illustrates issues of power, identity, and group membership. This research aims to fill the gap by examining how users on Nairaland employ multiple languages and the broader social implications of using these languages.

Research Questions

1. What are the dominant linguistic features observed in Nairaland discussions?
2. How do users employ code-switching and Pidgin English in their interactions?
3. In what ways does language use reflect users' social identities and affiliations?
4. How does the choice of language influence the tone and outcome of discussions on the platform?

Literature Review

This chapter focuses closely on research on our subject. It covers major ideas and results that enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. We start with sociolinguistics, which examines the connection between society and language. The chapter also briefly mentions digital communication, explaining how technology influences online language use.

One of the primary concerns in this chapter is the use of language in Nigerian online communities. The chapter explains how people communicate in online communities by employing tactics such as code-switching, Nigerian Pidgin, and language mixing to engage effectively in different online communities. The chapter further explains the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which outlines how people adjust their language behaviour in online communication.

By synthesising the existing studies, this chapter provides a strong foundation for our research, highlighting the gaps that need to be addressed. The findings from this synthesis are crucial in acquainting us with the sociolinguistic features of Nigerian online communities and their relationship to online communication.

The Concept of Sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is an evolving and dynamic research field that examines the intricate relationship between society and language. It attempts to understand how societies, cultures, and individual selves are constructed and constructed by language. Sociolinguistics, situated at the intersection of linguistics

and sociology, sheds light on how and why language serves as a social and communicative resource. Scholars in this field study how language varies in different social contexts and how it reflects broader societal patterns, including class distinctions, gender roles, ethnicity, and power dynamics [7].

Descriptions of sociolinguistics among various scholars illustrate its interdisciplinary nature. The author [7] provides a common and fundamental definition: sociolinguistics is "the study of language about society." The definition fittingly summarises the discipline's atmosphere, centring on how forms of language converge with social surroundings [7]. Similarly, authors [8] expand on this by defining sociolinguistics as "a branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and society." Their definition seems more expansive, placing sociolinguistics within linguistics proper, which explores language's structural and functional characteristics influenced by social factors [8].

Another thought-provoking perspective is that of [9], who writes, "All sociolinguistics is linguistics, and all linguistics is sociolinguistics." The assertion highlights that language cannot exist independently of its social environment; therefore, linguistic examination must consider the social variables that determine and constrain language use. This perspective aligns with [10]'s vision because she describes sociolinguistics as "the study of the relationship between language use and the structure of society" while considering several parameters that encompass social background, ethnicity, gender, and power in interaction.

Sociolinguistic research encompasses a range of broad areas, including bilingualism, diglossia, code-switching, and language variation. Sociolinguists in a multilingual community examine how one language or dialect serves various purposes, usually governed by social norms and institutional rules. For instance, code-switching, or alternating between two or more languages within one conversation, is investigated from both the viewpoint of grammatical constraints and social motivations. This verifies the assertion that sociolinguistics examines how individuals choose the forms of language they use in their social setting and for their communicative function [11].

Generally, sociolinguistics provides the necessary foundation for understanding the deep interconnection between society and language. From the starting point of the definition borrowed from [7]

to more integrated perspectives in [9, 10], sociolinguistics is acknowledged as a significant area of study that encompasses the spirit of the interlinked, dynamic relationship of language with society. The field of sociolinguistics not only enriches our understanding of linguistic variation but also sheds light on broader social organisation and cultural practices that condition human communication.

The Concept of Online Communication. Online communication has emerged as a dominant force in contemporary society, with far-reaching effects on social life, business practice, and media consumption. Traditional forms of communication, such as print and interpersonal communication, have been supplemented and, in some cases, replaced by online modes of communication. The rapid development of internet technology has introduced numerous internet-based communication tools, including email, social media, instant messaging, and video conferencing, that offer unprecedented speed and accessibility [12].

Online media is a special genre that meets the basic features of old media but adds additional ones, as [13] stated. Online communication is by its very nature public, with open access to information, and is technically broadcast to many people. It is also periodic and directly linked to real-world events. Online media also possesses some characteristics that differentiate it from print or broadcast media. It is multimedia, integrating text, sound, and images; it is digital, with content easily editable and transmissible; and interactive, with user feedback easily possible in real-time [14].

The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasised the importance of online communication, with digital media emerging as the primary medium of work, learning, and social interaction [15]. The reliance on online communication during this period demonstrated its ability to bridge geographical distances and facilitate seamless interaction. However, this shift also highlighted the problems of misinformation, the digital divide, and privacy. Thus, the necessity of digital literacy to communicate effectively online has increased significantly [16].

Scholars have studied the linguistic transformation introduced by online communication. The author [17] further states that online communication tends to blend written and spoken language, creating a hybrid communication model akin to bilingualism. One can witness this hybridisation

in social media posts, emails, and instant messages, where the tone is conversational and the syntax is informal. In addition, authors [18] posit that online communication differs from traditional written forms in that it is more impersonal, spontaneous, and grammatically less constrained.

Another key aspect of online communication is how it builds identity and self-presentation. The author [20] addresses the blending of public and private spheres in online communication, explaining how people, even public figures, curate their online selves on various platforms such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The flexibility of online communication enables communicators to project themselves to various audiences based on social norms and technological affordances [21].

In conclusion, online communication is a complex phenomenon that evolves in response to technological advancements. Online communication has transformed how people interact, exchange information, and construct social identities. For all its numerous benefits, including accessibility and interactivity, online communication also generates misinformation, privacy issues, and a need for digital literacy. As digital media continues to expand, research on its long-term societal impacts is necessary [22].

The Concept of Code-Switching. Code-switching (CS) is a feature of the worldwide bilingual and multilingual speech community. It refers to mixing two or more languages in a conversation, normally occurring without changing the topic or interlocutor. CS may occur at different levels, e.g., within a sentence, phrase, or even a single word. As authors [23] define, code-switching is "the alternating use of two languages in the same stretch of discourse by a bilingual speaker." It is a language contact phenomenon and a demonstration of a speaker's ability to switch seamlessly between two language systems. In the examined Nairaland thread, an instance of CS is presented in "Make una leave Buhari alone, him don do him own part comet. Focus on the Present." The speaker switches from Nigerian Pidgin to English, keeping the sentences together and still signals a tone appropriate for conversation.

Code-switching, intrasententially or within a single sentence, has been a major linguistic interest. The author [24] proposed that CS is constrained structurally in that while languages can mix, they do so in rule-governed ways. In the Nairaland thread, we can see examples of this occurring in

sentences such as "What make am funny dis News be when you think about dem get involved, you see say NA THEM THEM." In this example, the form switches between Standard English and Pidgin, where "you see say" (CS) corresponds to "you realise that," demonstrating that CS enables speakers to express stress and cultural referencing. This is a common trend in multilingual societies, where speakers use CS as a strategy for augmenting meaning.

Sociolinguistic studies of CS reveal that it is closely tied to social context and identity. Bilingual individuals prefer to switch codes to signal group membership, claim identity, or create social distance [25]. This can be seen in the Nairaland thread, where CS indicates one's position or establishes solidarity. In "E no go better for all of una," the shift to Pidgin emphasises the intensity of emotion and mutual grievance, a typical pattern in much online informal conversation. In this case, Pidgin serves as a resource for reaffirming in-group identity, a key feature of online Nigerian discourse.

The motivations for CS also include stylistic variation and functional application. The author [26] recognises speakers use CS to deal with formality, irony, or humour. In the above phrase, "Japa if you get money. Canada too sweet," we have an example of this, as the use of "Japa" (a Yoruba word meaning "escape/flee") alongside English conveys a non-formal, humorous statement that Nigerian migration is desirable. The strategic use of CS allows the speaker to communicate with the audience and advance their message. Online forums, such as Nairaland, enhance this practice by providing access to a broader linguistic spectrum.

Studies also reveal that online sites encourage written CS to reflect spoken bilingualism. The author [27] argues that texting, social media, and online discussion forums are contemporary locations to analyse written CS as they model true bilingual conversation in everyday life. The phrase "Tell Buhari to shut up, or we will remember" illustrates this point perfectly, putting an English order of command into practice alongside a locally created tag, thereby reinforcing the argument that digital communication mimics the habits of speech. Compared to traditional media, where language rules may be more rigid, the internet provides a freer space for spontaneous and creative language use.

Lastly, code-switching is a basic linguistic technique in bilingual and multilingual societies. It

serves various communicative functions, including social identification, emphasis, humour, and affirmation of identity. Examples in the Nairaland thread also reveal how actors blend Nigerian Pidgin and English easily to create engaging and vibrant discourse. As digital communication continues to evolve, CS remains a fundamental aspect of online conversation, which underscores the dynamism and robustness of bilingual speech communities [23].

Theoretical Framework

Communication is a fluid process consisting of accommodating speech style, linguistic choices, and nonverbal behaviour relative to social situations. Howard Giles developed the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). CAT presents an elaborate model that explains the why and the how of alterations in communication behaviour by individuals during interaction. The theory explains an individual's strategies for converging, diverging, or maintaining their communication style, as well as the reasons and implications of such changes. CAT has widely been applied in various communication contexts, such as interpersonal, intercultural, organisational, and online.

Key Principles of CAT

A) Convergence. Convergence is the process by which an individual alters his/her speech pattern to match that of his/her communication partner. This strategy is also employed to build rapport, establish a sense of social belongingness, and gain approbation from the audience. Research suggests that Convergence may take various forms, such as speech rate, accent, lexis, and syntax [28]. For example, in mediated communication, users on online sites tend to conform their language use to sound natural to the norms of the addressed group [29].

B) Divergence. Divergence, as opposed to Convergence, is the intentional maintenance or exaggeration of language distinctions to assert group identity or distinctness. This strategy is typically employed to reestablish social distance or convey power relations in an interaction. For instance, bilingual individuals may use Divergence to mark cultural identity and resist assimilation into a dominant language group [30]. Online forums, such as those found on Nairaland, reflect Divergence if users employ Nigerian Pidgin or Indige-

nous languages to assert local identity and differentiate themselves from speakers of Standard English.

C) Maintenance. Maintenance is when a speaker fails to accommodate communicative behaviour, even under social pressure. This strategy is often employed whenever individuals wish to preserve their cultural or individual linguistic form without converging or diverging. Research indicates that language maintenance is common among individuals who wish to preserve their linguistic heritage despite external influences [28].

Motivations Behind Communicative Adjustments

A) Social Identity and Group Belonging. A further key incentive for accommodation is the desire to form a social identity and feel a sense of belonging within a group. Social Identity Theory [31] indicates that individuals categorise themselves and others as in-groups and out-groups, defining their language. When communicating online, individuals often align their language with that of others to signal group membership [32].

For instance, in the Nairaland post, the user comments: "Make una leave Buhari alone; he does not do his part comet. Focus on the Present." Code-switching from Standard English to Nigerian Pidgin indexes an attempt to align to in-group standards and interact casually.

B) Power and Hierarchical Relations. CAT posits that power relations play a significant role in linguistic accommodation. Subordinates tend to converge to the speech forms of their superiors, seeking approval or promotion [33]. Divergence in political discourse in Nairaland is observed when speakers use informal or colloquial speech forms in an attempt to confront those in power.

As an example, one user submits: "What funny in this News be when u look into de people, den u just dey SAY NA THEM THEM THEM." The purposeful use of Pidgin captures the implication of affirming scepticism and refusal to embrace political elites.

C) Interpersonal Attraction and Affiliation. People will likely adjust communication tactics to build liking, trust, and interpersonal closeness [34]. Converging speakers who are successful are perceived as more likeable and trustworthy [35]. This is also the case with online communication, where users often adopt the same linguistic inclinations to encourage agreement and a sense of group membership.

Empirical Review

The era of digital communication has revolutionised how people communicate, and online forums have become a focal point for discussing socio-political and economic issues. In Nigeria, online forums such as Nairaland, Nigerian Village Square, and Sahara Reporters are leading platforms where Nigerians express their views, engage in debate, and share information [36]. These forums offer asynchronous communication, allowing users to post messages and replies at their convenience, making them suitable for a wide audience. This paper examines the distinctive linguistic characteristics of online forums in Nigeria, with a focus on code-switching, the use of Nigerian Pidgin (NP), and language mixing in online communication.

Online forums in Nigeria have undergone significant evolution over the past two decades. Nigerians first engaged in online discussions through Usenet groups and mailing lists in the early 1990s [37]. The introduction of Naijanet, the first Nigerian online discussion group, provided a platform for Nigerians in the diaspora to discuss political and social issues relating to the country. The advent of online forums in the early 2000s expanded the potential of online debate as more people engaged in conversation across geographic locales [38].

Online forums are a significant aspect of Nigeria's internet culture today, where issues related to governance, entertainment, and lifestyle are discussed. Nairaland, for instance, has become one of the largest online forums in Africa, with millions of registered users and a wide range of discussion topics [39]. Online forums enable multi-directional communication, where one interacts with multiple participants simultaneously, and the conversation evolves into a dynamic and complex exchange.

Linguistic Features of Nigerian Online Forums

A) Code-Switching in Online Discussions. One of the features of language use in Nigerian online forums is code-switching, where users alternate between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and local languages within a single discourse. Scholars contend that code-switching in online discourse is an attempt by a user to build social identity, proximity, and in-group solidarity [40].

For example, in a discussion on Nairaland, a user posts: "Make una leave Buhari alone; he dons do him own part comet. Focus on the Present."

This reaction is a blend of Nigerian Pidgin and English, illustrating how users can easily switch between linguistic codes for communicative efficiency. The code-switching from Standard English (Focus on the Present) to Nigerian Pidgin (Make una leave Buhari alone) suggests an effort by the writer to communicate on a more common and informal plane.

B) Nigerian Pidgin as a Lingua Franca. Nigerian Pidgin (NP) plays a very significant role in Internet communication, as it provides an informal yet widely understood method of communication for Nigerians of different linguistic backgrounds [41]. NP allows users to express humour, sarcasm, and emphasis without compromising comprehensibility.

A typical NP remark would be: "E no go better for all of una." (It will not be well with all of you.)

The use of NP in these utterances illustrates its usefulness in expressing strong emotions and reaffirming group solidarity. Compared to Standard English, NP is more expressive and flexible and is preferred in online disputes and informal discussions.

C) Language Mixing and Identity Expression. The multilingual nature of Nigeria encourages the mixing of languages in online communication. Users tend to mix English, NP, and indigenous languages to articulate their ethnic identity and cultural alignments [42]. This phenomenon is particularly evident in informal communication, where users strive to establish their local identity while conveying meaning to a broader audience.

For instance, a discussion participant may post: *"Buhari na wah o! This man no sabi wetin he dey do at all." (Buhari is something else! This man does not know what he is doing at all.)*

Here, a combination of English and NP creates an engaging and culturally meaningful message. Such linguistic choices reveal how social and cultural processes influence language use in Nigerian online forums.

The Role of Technology in Shaping Online Language Use

A) Influence of Mobile Technology. The expansion of smartphones and mobile internet has significantly influenced how Nigerians communicate online. Mobile phones, especially those used for

WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter, enhance traditional online forums with faster and more engaging discussions [43]. Online interaction in brief formats often encourages the use of abbreviations, acronyms, and relaxed spellings, which are now common in Nigerian online forums.

For example, phrases like:

"LOL, u sabi how dem dey do." (LOL, you know how they behave.)

"Na wa o! Tinubu matter tire me." (This is serious! I am exhausted by Tinubu's issue.)

The examples above illustrate the economy and brevity of online communication, whereby users employ shorthand writing and phonetic spelling to communicate quickly.

B) Online Forums as Spaces for Digital Activism. Nigerian online forums also became potent channels for political discourse and activism. During nationwide protests, such as the #EndSARS movement, sites like Nairaland and Sahara Reporters were heavily utilised to mobilise support, share updates, and debate government policies [44]. The language used in this type of discourse often carries political undertones, reflecting the grievances and resistance of society against oppression.

One of the comments that came up during the #EndSARS protests was:

"We no go gree! Dis government don do us bad!" (We will not agree! This government has treated us unfairly!)

Here, Nigerian Pidgin is being used as a tool of mass resistance; thus, the message is amplified and extended in its appeal.

Sociolinguistic studies of digital communication examine how language evolves in online spaces, focusing on how technology affects social identity, gender, class, and ethnicity. As social media, messaging apps, and online forums become central to everyday interaction, aspects of language such as abbreviations, emojis, and non-standard grammatical structures have taken centre stage [11]. These linguistic developments highlight the flexibility of language in the wake of technological transformation and the need for scholars to examine how online discourse organises social life.

Among the most significant shifts in language use in online communication is the development of informal, dynamic, and multimodal interaction. Digital media promote a blend of written and oral language characteristics, blurring traditional distinctions between written and oral discourse [27]. Research has shown that online communication often employs nonverbal characteristics, such as emojis and GIFs, to convey emotions, which serve as substitutes for traditional face-to-face communication cues [45]. Using online slang and neologisms also creates linguistic norms that redefine existing communication.

The democratisation of language use in the online space has also influenced literary studies and education. Virtual learning spaces and MOOCs have revolutionised literature teaching, making interactive and collaborative learning possible [46]. Additionally, access to digital archives and collaborative research initiatives has facilitated greater interdisciplinary engagement with literary research [47]. However, concerns around digital literacy and disparate access to digital resources persist in affecting educational and linguistic achievement [48].

Ethical concerns related to online communication have increased in prominence, particularly regarding privacy, intellectual property, and the fair use of online materials. As language evolves within online communities, researchers stress the importance of regulatory policies in protecting users' rights while fostering equitable access to digital linguistic resources [49]. Moreover, scholars have examined how power relations are articulated in online communication, with minoritised groups using online spaces for mobilisation and facing digital exclusion and algorithmic bias [50].

In conclusion, digital communication has also significantly transformed linguistic practice, pedagogical interaction, and social life. Ongoing sociolinguistic inquiry is crucial for understanding how digital technologies continue to influence language and society today. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of digital literacy, linguistic diversity, and technological advancements on global communication, as well as their impact on the world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The chapter presents and analyses data from selected Nairaland political forums, and the discus-

sions "Igbo Founded Ile-Ife," "Okrika Women Protest Unlawful Suspension of Fubara," and "Rivers Emergency Rule: SSA Temitope Ajayi Faults Jonathan, Soyinka." Analysis adheres to the qualitative outline provided under methodology and is grounded in the thematic sense-making of language patterns. The study employs Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and related sociolinguistic frameworks, specifically code-switching, language mixing, and identity, to examine the language and communication style choices of Nigerian internet forum speakers.

Description of the Context of the Data. Nairaland, the biggest online discussion forum in Nigeria, is a fertile ground for social and linguistic interaction between different groups of users. The selected data consists of comments on threads related to controversial political issues. The discussion is nearly real-time and focuses on national identity, ethnic relations, governance, and political grievances. The discussions are extremely emotionally charged, identity-signalling, satirical, and linguistically hybrid and are thus most suitable for a sociolinguistic study.

Comments in the three threads are classified under the following thematic categories:

1. Identity and Ethnic Assertion
2. Political Discontent and Resistance
3. Humor, Sarcasm, and Satirical Comment
4. Gendered Political Expression
5. Code-switching and Language Flexibility

Each is described in detail, with data exemplars used directly from the data to demonstrate the analysis.

Identity and Ethnic Assertion. A recurring and complex theme in the "Igbo Founded Ile-Ife" account is the negotiation, contestation, and, occasionally, confrontation of ethnic identity. The context of the debate is long-standing historical animosities and contemporary political rivalry between the Igbo and Yoruba. The string begins with an inciting post: "Igbo Founded Ile-Ife", a statement that many readers interpret as a challenge to the prevailing history and culture of Yoruba civilisation. This calls for a war of ideas and words, whereby users employ words as both an offensive and defensive tool.

The utterance "Igbos can steal anything... It is in them" (Factcheck0001) is a typical instance of language used for negative ethnic stereotyping. Such

accusations are a sign of Divergence, one of the basic assumptions of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), where speakers deliberately call attention to differences to create their group's uniqueness or superiority. Here, Divergence is formulated in terms of degrading labelling, which not only puts the speaker outside the Igbo group but also depersonalises him. Defensive Convergence is a rejoinder tactic used to regain group pride. For instance, user Mr Vitalis states: "Igbos are an ethnic nation of more than 65 million strong with more than 50 tribes..." This mixture of quantitative data and cultural pride is a sociolinguistic counterargument to justify Igbo identity and claims.

The ethnic assertion is also evident in lines like "Ile Ife is not your mate..." and "Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba man, wrote your Ibo Dictionary and Bible." These phrases attempt to claim historical priority and cultural superiority, reiterating Yoruba pride in civilisation. The phrase "You are mixing Ugbo with Igbo..." also alludes to a strategic use of linguistic explication, where histories are contested, and the language becomes a terrain of conflict.

Local idioms such as "na wah o!", "una dey craze," and "yeyenatu" play a significant role in the performance of group identity. These idioms, which Nigerian netizens are familiar with, signal in-group membership and cultural awareness. They invoke solidarity, reaffirm the same among some individuals, and implicitly reject or mock other people who don't share the same linguistic code or cultural assumption.

The thread reveals how the Nairaland language becomes a location for enacting ethnic identities, defending historical versions, and articulating group pride or grievance. CAT's approach recognises these strategies to manage intergroup and interpersonal relations, considering the messy nexus of language, power, and belonging in Nigerian digital culture.

Political Discontent and Resistance. The reactions to the suspension of Governor Fubara, his deputy, Ngozi Odu, and the declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State represent a tense political environment marked by public anger, ethnic distrust, and institutional distrust. The users' reactions in Nairaland to these actions demonstrate how the forum is utilised to express displeasure and opposition in a language frequently framed in emotive, sarcastic, or confrontational terms corresponding to more universal concerns regarding

the status of governance, democracy, and regional self-rule in Nigeria.

A particularly caustic comment reads, "They came to save their state and tribe from Yoruba Muslims like you," attributing blame to an imagined ethno-political coalition for domination. This language is typical of Divergence in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), a strategy by which users emphasise sociolinguistic and ethnic differences to decline alignment with hegemonic political forces. Such statements underscore regional and religious sensitivities, framing the political confrontation not merely as a power struggle but as an existential challenge to the Ijaw or South-South identity.

Another user laments, "This is like a coup on the people of the state," likening the federal intervention to military authoritarianism. This language is meant to be provocative and recourse to Nigeria's coup and democratic failure memory. It conveys a broader sense of disenfranchisement among citizens. It relates to statements like "Tinubu is just Wike's puppet" and "Na dem again, same old power brokers," as they criticise recycled leadership and perceived imposition of federal will over state sovereignty.

From a CAT perspective, Convergence is evident as multiple users align their articulations through a shared vocabulary of resistance. The pervasive Pidgin slogan "We no go gree!" reappears repeatedly throughout replies as a kind of linguistic cry to action that conveys communal defiance. Similarly, it turns like "Dis government don do us bad!"

" and "Country don spoil finish" convey emotive solidarity in common, comprehensible Pidgin turns. Such turns operate simultaneously to organise sentiment and to provide a sense of community among politically excluded users.

The report also reveals subliminal mentions of #EndSARS demonstrations, and others threaten wholesale revolt if political gamesmanship persists. As one particular user notes, "This is how #EndSARS starts. People don't tire," and this serves to demonstrate the hidden potential of virtual conversation to produce actualised action.

Together, these exhibitions of political protest on Nairaland demonstrate that virtual spaces serve as platforms for sociopolitical engagement. Discourse on such platforms is referential and performative, creating shared grievances and organising collective action against perceived repression.

Humour, Sarcasm, and Satirical Commentary. Humour, sarcasm, and satire are essential linguistic methods used by participants on Nairaland to manage highly politicised and ethnic controversies. Such approaches typically work to assuage tension, disguise hostility, and subvert common narratives at a price lower than outright attack. In the "Igbo Founded Ile-Ife" thread, humour is the tool that allows users to discuss controversial assertions over histories and ethnic pride. A good example is the hyperbolic declaration: "Of course, everyone knows this.". Obasanjo's ancestor founded Ife... he had to flee town because his relationship was considered an abomination," said a user in mockery of the original claim that the Igbo founded Ile-Ife.

The remark is a caricature of history with exaggeration, mocking the claim by linking it with imaginary personal impropriety and anachronistic humour.

Such commentary demonstrates what sociolinguists term pragmatic code-switching, where users deliberately shift between formal, informal, and culturally nuanced registers for comic effect.

Humour also occurs in the guise of sarcastic remarks like "The Igbo your fada wish he was from" or "These Dot-in-a-Circle people will not cease to amuse us," referring to ethnic stereotypes as well as to political neologisms that have surfaced in recent years. Such remarks offer incisive criticism in the guise of humour. The sarcasm offers users a face-saving mechanism, allowing them to express strong opinions without transgressing Nairaland's norms of informal communication. Indirectness also reduces backlash, giving users a shield of deniability.

Satire is applied in the same way in the Rivers State emergency thread. A user jokingly says, "Hope they took payment in full? Make Fubara pay o," regarding the protest by the Okrika women. This satirises the seriousness of the protest by asking if it was driven by payment. Rather than addressing the issue, the user trivialises the seriousness of the protest using sarcasm.

Another frequent approach is using Pidgin for punchlines, e.g., "E ti mu IGBO; they are developers, not founders," which utilises cultural stereotypes and phonological distortion for comedic effect. Mixing Standard English with Pidgin does not simply add to the message in a way that is more accessible but provides an extra local flavour with which a Nigerian audience can resonate.

From these examples, it is clear that humour and satire on Nairaland serve not only entertainment purposes but also as discursive weapons in ideological wars, offering subtle resistance, critique, and identity formation. In an environment where confrontation can result in digital vitriol, humour enables users to contest ideas creatively while maintaining community rapport.

Gendered Political Expression. The "Okrika Women Protest Unlawful Suspension of Fubara" thread provides a rich insight into the gendered dynamics of political discourse in Nigerian online forums. While the original post explains an intriguing act of political protest, in which hundreds of Okrika women dressed in black and demonstrated in the streets against the suspension of their governor, most responses on Nairaland minimise, mock, or trivialise the gravity of the protest in gendered and class-inflected terms.

Comments such as "Hope they got paid in full?" and "Them just dey do am for 5k each" reflect a prevalent online trend of delegitimising women's political agencies by interpreting their motives in terms of payment or manipulation. According to the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), these statements reflect oppositional communicative behaviour, whereby the respondents strive to align with the moral frame of the protest by describing the women as foolish, transactional actors who have no right to be in democratic governance.

The suggestion that women are protesting solely for money not only reduces the act to the trivial but also betrays internalised gender stereotypes. This is part of a wider societal trend in which women's participation in public political life is often viewed as suspect or reduced to being manipulated by male political agents. The sociolinguistic impact is significant; such language mirrors offline patriarchal norms in online spaces and hence limits women's visibility and perceived credibility in politics.

In another sarcastic tone, one commenter remarks: "They never start," implying the women's actions are futile or performative. Others resort to blunt or condescending language, such as "Na hunger make them come out," continuing the classist undertones that often tag along with gendered commentary within Nigerian political discussions.

Despite these negative representations, some users validate the protest's legitimacy. For instance,

one of the comments states: "These women came out to fight for justice. Rivers State deserves better." This is an example of positive Convergence, where the commenter is linguistically and ideologically aligned with the women's goals. While less common, such validation balances the discourse and asserts that digital spaces can also be utilised to give voice to marginalised groups.

Furthermore, the protest is a transgression of traditional gender roles, where women speak as vocal political subjects. Their attire, black clothing, is oppositional and a symbol of mourning, adding symbolic depth to the message. The public nature of the action is a challenge in and of itself to political injustice and gendered expectations of silence or inaction.

Overall, the gendered account in the thread effectively captures the nuanced politics of gender, power, and political legitimacy in Nigerian society, illustrating how websites like Nairaland serve as arenas for negotiating identity and agency.

Code-Switching and Language Mixing as Identity Tools. Throughout the selected Nairaland threads, language blending and code-switching are powerful sociolinguistic tools that users employ to convey their identity, attitude, and emotions. Users easily switch between Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin, and local languages such as Yoruba and Igbo. Such switches are often strategic and purposeful, allowing speakers to perform social alignments, resist power, or mark shared cultural membership. A particularly graphic example is the hybrid sentence: "Tell Buhari to shut up, or we will remember," where Standard English merges with a phonologically localised reading of "we." The implied switch cues in-group affiliation, likely from Nigerian youth culture and political satire. "Japa, if you get money. Canada too sweet" too is an intrasentential code-switching example.

"Japa," a Yoruba-derived slang word for "to escape," is inserted into an otherwise English-sentence environment.

Its usage gauges knowledge of Nigerian urban vocabulary and expresses a shared exasperation with the socio-political conditions driving emigration.

These patterns are based on the Markedness Model [25], in which users alternate between unmarked (neutral or default) forms of language, typically Standard English, and marked forms, such as Pidgin or vernacular words, in an attempt

to create layered social meaning. Marked language is employed to add an affective tone, promote ethnic or cultural identity, or add humour and sarcasm.

In the Rivers emergency thread, words like "Na dem dem again" capture the frustration with the recycling of leadership and cyclical politics. The word leverages reduplication and Pidgin rhythm to enhance memorability and common resonance. Similarly, "Yeyenatu," a Yoruba-derived pejorative term that translates as "nonsense" or "ridiculous," is used to mock hypocrisy or supposed foolishness among political elites. Such words are instances of culturally embedded critique anchored in local idioms that resonate strongly within specific ethnic or regional communities.

Even terms like "E don red," to say a thing is at the point of desperation, or "Wahala no dey finish," to mean ongoing crisis, are social abbreviations. Their brevity, rhythmicity, and familiarity with culture operate to build a linguistic in-group, an audience who "get it" without further explanation.

Furthermore, code-switching also occurs in satirical and ironic contexts, where it is used as a stylistic ornament or ironic overlay. For instance, a commentator teases, "Yoruba people go protest for small bread, Igbo go protest for murumuru," using stereotypes in a combined linguistic form that places humour over criticism. They are, ultimately, not arbitrary but highly meaningful. They indicate users' conscious negotiation of Nigeria's multilingual environment, using linguistic diversity to construct identity, produce resistance, and emotionally invest in national issues.

Application of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). The results determine that users of Nairaland utilise the three CAT strategies:

- Convergence: To show solidarity (e.g., use of Pidgin or protest slogans);
- Divergence: To announce ethnic or ideological resistance (e.g., ethnic abuse, regional pride);
- Maintenance: When users remain true to their language norms irrespective of group pressure (e.g., posting consistently in Standard English in a thread dominated by Pidgin).

Such tactics are context-dependent. For example, a reader in one of the Rivers State threads maintained grammatical English even in emotionally heated comments, as evidence of language resistance to online site informal norms.

Other individuals mirror the off-formal tone towards relational coalescence, such as responding with "na lie!" or "na dem."

The Role of Digital Media in Language Use. The informality and speed of Nairaland online communication form a hybrid linguistic terrain. Online users code-switch freely between Nigerian Pidgin, English, local expressions, and emojis, with their usage being interchangeable. Language becomes performative and symbolic, not merely to convey meaning but to create identity and challenge power relationships.

This is echoed by [27], who states that computer-mediated writing mirrors oral speech and allows for vernacular creativity. The struggle between oral convention and written language on Nairaland renders it a microcosm of Nigeria's multilingual society.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study reveal the complexity and dynamism of language practice in Nigerian cyberspace political discourse, particularly on the online forum Nairaland. Within Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and sociolinguistics, the analysis reveals some intertwined linguistic strategies and thematic concerns that define how participants negotiate identity, politics, and power in cyberspace.

1. *Online Forums as Sociolinguistic Sites of Sociopolitical Engagement and Identity Performance.* Most salient of the findings is that online sites like Nairaland are interactive sociolinguistic sites where political identity is constructed and performed, cultural affiliations are enacted, and users resist domination. In the analysis of the threads that follow, it became clear that language on Nairaland is more than just communication; it is a tool of identity performance and resistance. Through common slogans like "We no go gree" and "Na dem again," web users exercise e-activism through linguistic solidarity to voice political complaints and subvert hegemonic discourse. Such slogans serve as rallying cries and identity markers, facilitating the imagining of communities based on shared experiences, ethnic identity, and socio-political discontent.

This points to [49] understanding of vernacular creativity, wherein digital discourse imitates oral culture, is multilingual, and is performative. The

vernacularised, hybridised mode of communication signifies the democratisation of language, wherein the users bypass conventional norms to express sociopolitical demands. Nairaland is not just a platform for public opinion but a microcosm of Nigeria's ideological and linguistic pluralism – a space through which language is inseparably linked with power, resistance, and identity grouping.

2. *Ethnic Identity Assertion and Divergence in Internet Interaction.* The second central conclusion of this research is the use of language as a means of ethnic identity assertion and intergroup Divergence. The "Igbo Founded Ile-Ife" thread illustrates how online discussions serve as a platform for negotiating ethnic histories and competing for cultural legitimacy. Cyber individuals employ ethnic insults, cultural references, and local dialects to foster in-group cohesion and differentiate themselves from rival groups. This highlights CAT's policy of Divergence, in which language is used to explicitly avow difference, typically as a reaction to a perceived cultural or historical provocation.

These are both defensive and offensive, marking how language is embedded in concepts of heritage, pride, and belonging. This type of identity politics made possible by internet communication indexes broader sociolinguistic tensions in Nigeria's multicultural state.

3. *Code-switching and Language Mixing as Strategic Identity Markers.* Code-switching and language blending are also prominent communicative practices across the three threads. Participants often switch back and forth between Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin, and local languages (e.g., Yoruba, Igbo), even within a sentence or phrase. This is not random but signifies an emotional tone, solidifies in-group membership, and adds a rhetorical effect.

For example, expressions like "Japa if you get money" and "E don red" possess socio-political and cultural significance that Standard English cannot convey. These code-switching examples reflect the expressive as well as adaptive qualities of multilingual internet users. The Markedness Model [25] argues that such linguistic alternations are socially marked, referencing the speaker's alignment or resistance to groups or ideologies.

4. *Gendered Discourse and the Marginalization of Female Voices.* The study also reveals the struc-

tural silencing of women's voices in online political discourse. The responses to the Okrika women's protest are replete with class mockery, derogatory inferences, and a condescending tone. Statements such as "Them just dey do am for 5k each" or "Na hunger make dem come out" trivialised women's political agency, revealing how patriarchal inclinations persist on the internet.

Sociolinguistically, the trend shows how gendered identities are negotiated and subverted online. While there are participants who affirm the legitimacy of the protest, others use language to invalidate, sexualise, or disenfranchise women's participation in civic life. These processes highlight how online spaces, with all their democratic promise, often replicate offline social hierarchies and biases.

From this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. *Integrate Sociolinguistics in Digital Literacy Courses.* Language in forums influences opinion and identity. Issues on how people use language online and why it matters should be examined in digital skill courses in Nigeria. Understanding differences and prejudices in language can enhance people's ability to communicate effectively.

2. *Develop Inclusive Moderation Rules for Forums.* Forum administrators can establish guidelines to avoid offending words, like ethnic or sexist put-downs. Jokes are a part of internet culture, but guidelines should determine where fun ends and harm begins. Technology, like AI and community views, can aid in moderation.

3. *Support Research on Nigerian English Online.* Universities should conduct research into Nigerian English and blended language use online. It may contribute to compiling dictionaries and instructional materials, as well as informing language policies in the media and education.

4. *Support Gender Equality Online.* Female political voices are made a joke. Support groups should provide women with online education and motivation on effective language use and political participation.

5. *Make Use of Online Discussion Boards for Public Discussion.* With their active members, online forums can be critical arenas for debate. Government and civic groups must track these forums to understand public sentiments and develop responsive policies.

6. *Expand CAT Application to Other Nigerian Societies.* This research demonstrates that CAT can effectively account for online interactions. Researchers must investigate its application in Nigerian and African societies through platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

This study examines how Nigerians use online language to negotiate identity and politics. Using theories and sociolinguistic analysis reveals the complex ways Nigerians express ethnicity, subvert power, and show solidarity on the internet.

Nairaland users utilise language as a social tool by adapting languages and styles. Whether asserting ethnic identity or defying authority, their language reflects Nigeria's culture and history. The study reveals that communication in Nigeria is characterised as expressive, strategic, and ideological.

In addition, online platforms like Nairaland capture the Nigerian society in real tensions and dreams. In this location, language helps create togetherness, draws attention to individuality, and preserves culture. These communications illustrate how linguistic flexibility has played a part in accommodating dialogue in virtual Nigeria.

Lastly, research not only contributes to scholarly disputes but also to understanding how Nigerian individuals create communities and voice their opinions online.

Appendices

Appendix A: Igbo Founded Ile-Ife Thread

Source: "Igbo Founded Ile-Ife - Politics - Nigeria (Posted by Amibo1: 12:58 pm, March 9)"

User 1: This is rubbish. The Igbo people are often accused of trying to claim what is not theirs. Next thing they'll say, they found the moon.

User 2: Igbos can steal anything... It is in them.

User 3: Of course, everyone knows this. It was Obasanjo's great-grandfather who founded Ife. Obviously.

User 4: There is no tribe called Igbos... Igbos are an ethnic group of over 65 million people with more than 50 distinct tribes.

User 5: Na wah o! These people no dey tire?

User 6: You are mixing Ugbo with Igbo; they are not the same thing.

User 7: Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba man, wrote your Ibo Dictionary and Bible.

User 8: Una dey craze. The Igbo people are not even aware of their origin.

User 9: History is being twisted to prove a point.

User 10: Ile Ife is not your mate. Respect our tradition.

Appendix B: Okrika Women Protest Thread

Source: "Okrika Women Protest Unlawful Suspension Of Fubara, His Deputy, Ngozi In Black - Politics - Nigeria"

Headline: Hundreds of Okrika women dressed in black staged a protest in Rivers State.

User 1: Hope they collected payment in full?

User 2: Them just dey do am for 5k each.

User 3: This na audio protest. Na hunger dey drive dem.

User 4: These women came out to fight for justice. Let's not mock them.

User 5: Dem don start again. Make una rest small.

User 6: Wetin concern women with politics?

User 7: At least dem get mind pass some men.

User 8: Political theater as usual. Nothing go happen.

User 9: Where were they when their son was messing up?

User 10: Why always Okrika women? Every time issue happen, na dem dey come out.

Appendix C: Rivers Emergency Rule Thread

Source: "Rivers Emergency Rule: SSA Temitope Ajayi Faults Jonathan, Soyinka - Politics - Nigeria"

Headline: Presidency distances itself from reports suggesting a declaration of emergency rule in Rivers State.

User 1: This is like a coup on the people of the state.

User 2: Tinubu is just Wike's puppet.

User 3: We no go gree!

User 4: Na dem dem again. Same old story.

User 5: Dis government don do us bad!

User 6: This na how EndSARS start o. People don tire.

User 7: Yeyenatu. You talk one thing today, do another tomorrow.

User 8: If una no like am, make una japa.

User 9: Nigeria is truly a joke. Every day new drama.

User 10: This emergency rule na for pocket lining, not for peace.

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