

*Original Article*

# Choice of Transaction Language among Sellers and Buyers in Igbudu Market, Warri, Nigeria: Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) Option

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**Abstract** - Effective communication is crucial for fostering peaceful coexistence and societal development. However, the choice of language plays a pivotal role in determining communication effectiveness, especially in business transactions where both the sender and receiver must understand each other. This study focused on investigating the predominant language used by buyers and sellers at the Igbudu market in Warri, Delta State, Nigeria, drawing insights from Noam Chomsky's language acquisition theory. Data were collected from various sources, including primary, secondary, and library materials, utilizing questionnaires and question guides as data collection instruments. A sample of 92 buyers and sellers at the market was randomly selected using stratification sampling techniques. The research aimed to identify the most commonly used language for transactions in the market, understand the reasons behind this language choice and determine if respondents believed this chosen language should become the lingua franca for open markets in Nigeria. The findings indicated that a majority of buyers and sellers preferred Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) for their transactions, citing its ability to facilitate smooth and efficient communication. Impressively, 76.06% of the respondents expressed agreement with the idea of adopting NPE as the lingua franca for open markets across Nigeria. As a recommendation, it is suggested that NPE be formally codified and included in the educational curriculum, similar to how the English language is taught in schools. This approach would help standardize and enhance the use of NPE in various sectors, including open markets, promoting effective communication and business transactions.

**Keywords** - Buyers, Language, Market, Pidgin English, Sellers, Transaction.

## 1. Introduction

Communication is very essential in every social milieu, especially in a transactional interaction (business environment) where a lot of haggling takes place before a compromise is reached between buyers and sellers or between service providers and their beneficiaries. This is where a language commonly understood by the vast majority of people in a given community or location, be it a school, market, etc., becomes very germane. While citing Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), Boras (2006) emphasises that Speech Act Theory, which sees communication as an action between (two) individuals, is one of the origins of Business Action Theory (BAT). Another is the Theory of Communicative Action, which places action in a social context according to Habermas (1984, as cited in Boras, 2006). BAT claims that there are two main parties in every business interaction: the supplier (seller) and the



client (customer, buyer), where the former sells to the latter. Ayoola (2009, as cited in Asuzu, 2020) observes that the buyer, the bargain hunter, is constantly in diametric opposition to the vendor, who is out to make a profit. The former comes prepared to negotiate, knowing that the latter would set a high price on items because they anticipate a deal. Through negotiation, suppliers and potential customers can come to a “convenient agreement” on the price at which to sell or purchase things. Different languages and linguistic behaviours are involved in this process. In the transactions between buyers and sellers or between traders and their customers, there is always a close relationship, which may be explained by using a language, which may be Pidgin English or any informal language which engenders generally talking to each other as equals. In other words, transactions are done in a language that is more similar to an informal conversation about a product or service than to an event taking place somewhere else. Hence, this study examined the language that sellers and buyers at the Igbudu market in Warri, Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, communicate with among themselves. The market is one of Delta State’s oldest, largest and busiest that has existed for decades. It provides a unique kaleidoscope of tastes and cultures. The market is a shopping street nestled in the heart of Warri.

There are a variety of goods on offer, ranging from fruits and vegetables to African clothing materials, arts and crafts. It has independent shops, pubs, restaurants, cafes and stalls offering amazing fresh produce and authentic street food. Warri is a cosmopolitan city inhabited by people from different parts of Nigeria and the world, but the indigenous people are mainly the Ijaws, Urhobos, and Itsekiris, and these three languages are spoken in the city. The purpose of this research is to explore and analyse the most common language used by traders and customers in the Igbudu market and find out why the language was chosen. The hope is that information gleaned from this study can lead to the chosen language being adopted as the lingua franca for open markets in Nigeria. There are bound to be cases of misunderstanding, disagreements, and conflicts anywhere, be it in the school, office, market, etc., as long as human relationships are concerned. These may happen where there is no effective communication due to a lack of understanding of the language being used to communicate. For communication to be effective, the speaker and the hearer must clearly understand the words, especially in a place like a market with a heterogeneous population.

The importance of the language used in communication in open markets patronised by all segments of society is a scarcely studied area. Although there has been considerable research on the issue of language, such as *Language and Literature in Classroom Discourse* (Ernest-Samuel, 2019), *Linguistic Cultural Heritage of Politeness Strategies...* (Bwetenga & Nhatuve, 2021), *Language and Ideology* (Asuzu, 2022), and others, but these were still not extended to studying informal language being used for transactions in open markets. This study was warranted because language misunderstanding can easily result in hot arguments or quarrels between buyers and sellers if they do not understand each other’s languages well during business transactions. This is coupled with the fact that while the use of language in different spheres of human life has been deeply investigated, critical attention has not been paid to the acceptable language of the transaction between buyers and sellers in open markets. The issue of concern is that there may be the possibility of the emergence of an unofficial acceptable lingua franca for Nigeria’s open markets. The study aimed to: i. Identify the common language buyers and sellers use most for transactions in the Igbudu market, Warri; ii. Ascertain the reasons for choosing the chosen language, and iii. Confirm if respondents agree that the chosen language should be the lingua franca for open markets in Nigeria.

## **2. Theoretical Parameter**

The Noam Chomsky Theory of Language Acquisition served as the foundation for this investigation. Born in the United States, Noam Chomsky is a linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, social critic, and political activist. As the “founder of modern linguistics,” Chomsky is a significant person in philosophy (Baxter, Clause & Chapel, 2022; Google, 2016). Chomsky is one of the pioneers of cognitive science. He developed the theory of transformational grammar while continuing his studies at the University of Pennsylvania and doing post-graduate work at the Harvard Society of Fellows, leading to his doctorate in 1955 (Baxter, Clause & Chapel, 2022).

Chomsky presented his theory of language acquisition in 1977. According to this hypothesis, learning a language is a physiologically controlled process that makes use of neural networks in the brain that have developed to store linguistic information. Chomsky concluded that infants require an innate ability known as the “language acquisition device” to acquire language skills. In other words, people are endowed from birth with a “device” for learning any human language. Chomsky’s linguistic theory is based on biolinguistics, which holds that language structure principles are physiologically determined in the human mind and genetically transmitted (Google Sites, 2016). He contends that everyone has the same basic linguistic structure regardless of social differences. By taking this stance, Chomsky criticizes B.F. Skinner’s radical behaviourist psychology considers language a taught behaviour and views the mind as a tabula rasa (or “blank slate”).

Chomsky, thus, proposed his theory because “all children share the same internal constraints which characterise narrowly the grammar they are going to construct” (p.2). Additionally, he thinks that language development can occur up to a certain age, just as there are stages of development for other bodily components. According to Chomsky, when people acquire a new language, their brains subconsciously store information that can later be used for various written and verbal forms of communication (Baxter, Clause, & Chapel, 202). This study is a good fit for Noam Chomsky’s theory of language acquisition since it supports Chomsky’s idea that the brain is designed for language. Therefore, regardless of whether they have acquired any language abilities or not, anyone may readily learn the NPE by observing and taking notes from others in their area. The general public may easily acquire and speak NPE because this theory contends that human brain architecture inherently supports the ability to learn and use languages.

### ***2.1. Language as a Vehicle of Communication in All Spheres of Life***

One of the functional criteria for determining a people’s culture is their language. It fosters ties between people. The man may communicate and exchange ideas with one another through language about a variety of topics related to human welfare. Depending on how it is applied, it can either serve as a unifying factor for harmonious coexistence or a dividing force. Those who understand its significance not only speak their original tongue with pride and enjoyment wherever they are but also guide it with jealousy. All living organisms communicate and do it in various ways, but only humans have mastered cognitive verbal communication. Language is so important that it plays a big role in global geopolitics. For instance, Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, who is a fluent speaker of both German and English, rarely uses any other language while speaking in public. Even though he can easily understand world leaders, he occasionally asks for an interpreter when conversing with them (Williams, 2022).

When it also comes to commerce, economy, or business discourses, language also plays a significant role. According to Boras (2006), the literature on communicative action offers a wide range of frameworks to describe commercial transaction processes. The order phase, which is an actagenic or action-generating dialogue; the execution phase, which is an essential action, and the result phase (factagenic or fact-generating conversation) are the three stages that The Dynamic Essential Modeling of Organizations (DEMO) (Dietz & Habing, 2004; Liu, Sun, Barjis & Dietz, 2003) introduces. The action workflow, on the other hand, contains 4 phases: Preparation, Negotiation, Performance, and Acceptance (Kethers & Schoop, 2000). The most thorough set of phases is provided by the Business Action Theory (BAT) (Goldkuhl & Lind, 2004), which includes the following: Business Prerequisites Phase, Exposure and Contact Search Phase, Contact Establishment and Proposal Phase, Contractual or Commitment Phase, Fulfillment Phase, and Completion or Assessment Phase.

Goldkuhl (1996, as cited in Boras, 2006) also identifies a number of generic business actions that constitute the phases on the respective side of the transaction (i.e. supplier or customer) as identified by BAT; thus: i. Prerequisites phase: Supplier- Product/offer development; Customer- Identifying problems/needs. ii. Exposure and contact search phase: Supplier- Offer exposure; Customer- Contact search. iii Proposal phase: Supplier- Offer;

Customer Inquiry. iv Commitment phase: Supplier- Order confirmation; Customer- Order. v. Fulfilment phase: Supplier- Delivery, Invoice, Receipt of payment; Customer- Receipt of delivery, Payment. vi. Assessment phase: Supplier- Acceptance, Claim; Customer- Acceptance, Claim. Language helps sell what has been created or a service (s) to be rendered. Hence, it is very useful in the market where buying and selling takes place. The BAT theory works in a typical business scenario, and all the stages of transactions mentioned above must be carried out in a language that both the seller (supplier) and buyer (customer) understand before the right business deal must be reached.

### **3. Empirical Review of Literature**

According to Asuzu (2022), who addresses the topic “Language and ideology are interwoven: A focus on Pidgin English,” people’s beliefs are typically transmitted through their language. Her descriptive-analytical study makes the case that gender-based expressions infringe on women’s rights and reinforce men’s egotistical superiority. The paper identifies and analyzes a few constructions that encourage male egoism and makes an effort to explain them in the context of their use. Users of the Nigeria Pidgin (N.P.) language in Warri, a major city in Delta State, Nigeria, were interviewed informally to gather data for the study.

Expressions in Nigerian Pidgin (N.P.) were gathered and subjected to analysis as the study’s starting point for critical discourse analysis. Their ramifications, as well as their literal and historical significance, were given. The study demonstrates how language has been used to foster and spread stereotypes of women, even when those stereotypes harm men in the long run. According to the study’s findings, to lessen gender disparity, it is important to confront and change expressions that degrade women’s human dignity. In a mixed-methods case study, Ramish, Asghari, and Zawuli (2022) examine how Rahim Shah acquired English and Persian fluency well beyond that of his mother tongue (Pashto). The study examines various facets of the subject to look for patterns and causes of behaviour, including his personality, language learning style, language learning history, and oral and writing language skills.

The report makes an effort to shed light on his exposure to three languages: his native Pashto, Persian, and English (foreign). The findings revealed that he speaks Persian far more fluently than his native tongue, likely as a result of his parent’s relocation to a Persian-speaking area when he was just three years old. This demonstrates how non-native speakers apply their language skills through social engagement. The findings also demonstrate that he was mostly organically driven to study English since he was aware of the advantages of acquiring it over his native tongue. He was highly motivated, and throughout the three years he spent with Americans, he continually paid attention to native speakers. As a result, this case study covers almost every facet of Rahim Shah’s ability to speak English and Persian and his struggles with his home tongue.

Nwaukoni and Ifechukwude Omilo (2022) add that it is impossible to overstate the value of language as a tool for communication. They view language as a unique gift from God to man and a characteristic that sets humans apart from other creatures. Their study looks at the contribution of the French to long-term national development. It also proves that speaking the language is essential for effective nation-building and will contribute favourably to sustainable national development. The gap in the reviewed works above is that none addressed the issue of the language used in business transactions between buyers and sellers in the marketplace. Knowing more about the language and its effectiveness in the communication between buyers and sellers in markets would be useful.

### **4. Methodology**

This study adopted the descriptive research design in the form of an ex-post-facto because it allows for an objective, unbiased description of the phenomenon under study. Igbudu market welcomes an average of hundreds of potential buyers daily. It has a fluid population at every point in time because buyers and sellers move into and out of the market constantly; however, some sellers own permanent stalls, points of sale, shops and specific places

for transacting their businesses. The market is run under an umbrella body known as the Igbudu Market Association. This association is made up of sub-market unions and associations like sellers of raw foodstuff (pepper, garri, tomatoes, shoes, onions, plantain, yam, etc.), provisions/beverages, fashion accessories (clothes, bags, shoes, jewelleries), household goods, poultry accessories, fruit vendors etc. A stratification sampling technique was used. From each of these six groups, 10 sellers were randomly selected, giving a total of 60. From the market, 60 buyers were also randomly selected. This gives 120 as the population.

The sample size of the study (92) was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table. The table states that when a given population is between 111 and 120, the corresponding sample size will be 92. From this sample size of 92, four respondents were selected for oral, in-depth interviews. Two (2) were selected from the buyers and two from the sellers, while copies of the questionnaire were administered to the remaining 88 respondents. Out of these copies, only 71 (80.68%) were returned for analysis. Questionnaires and structured interview schedules were used to obtain information from the respondents. The quantitative analysis was done with tables and simple percentages, while the qualitative analysis was done according to Yin's (2014) explanation-building method.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1. Respondents' choice of communication language in the Igbudu market

Responses	Frequency	%
English Language	5	7.04
Ijaw Language	4	5.63
Nigerian Pidgin English	54	76.07
Urhobo Language	4	5.63
Itsekiri Language	4	5.63
Total	71	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Data in Table 1 revealed that Nigerian Pidgin English is the most common language being used by buyers and sellers in their transactions in the Igbudu market.

Table 2. Respondents' reason(s) for choice of language

Responses	Frequency	%
Simple to Understand	14	19.72
Easy to Speak	21	29.59
It is Indigenous	10	14.08
No Ambiguity	6	8.45
Easy for Interaction	20	28.16
Total	71	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Data as presented in Table 2 showed that Nigerian Pidgin English is chosen as the major language of communication in the market principally because it is easy and simple to speak, understand, and interact with. It implies that the language can be spoken without undergoing any formal education to learn it.

**Table 3. Respondents' views on Nigerian Pidgin English becoming open markets' lingua franca in Nigeria**

Responses	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	29	40.85
Agree	25	35.21
Undecided	2	2.82
Disagree	8	11.26
Strongly Disagree	7	9.86
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2022*

Likert - type five points rating scale and dichotomous were used: 5 = Strongly Agree (S.A.), 4 = Agree (A), 3 = Undecided (U), 2 = Strongly Disagree (S.D.), and 1 = Disagree (D) responses as well as open-ended questions. The data in Table 3 implies that Nigerian Pidgin English is being advocated as the lingua franca for open markets in Nigeria.

## 6. Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study revealed that NPE is the most used language by buyers and sellers in the Igbudu market, Warri. This finding tallies with the claim of Asuzu (2022) that "In multilingual and multiethnic Warri, N.P. is the common language of informal communication" (p. 39). She further asserts that:

Functionally, N.P. is a unifying language for people of different ethnic groups. Also, it is used in informal conversations. Sometimes, it is spoken in formal situations where participants find it convenient. It permits communicative flexibility by accommodating lexemes from any native language in addition to its own basic lexemes. Speakers can insert words and experiences from their indigenous language into pidgin communication. Pidgin has a huge communicative importance. It is widely used in Nigeria, mostly in Warri and its environs (pp. 39 & 40).

This finding may also be due to the fact that it facilitates smooth business transactions. Guanah (2019) describes Pidgin English expression as the use of Nigerian highbred, popularly called "broken English". NPE is a miscellany of English language and "broken English" with some native and slang commonly used by speakers of the language. Language is so essential that Ekwueme and Governor (2019) define it as a communication system used by a particular group, community, or nation. It is a set of principles that facilitates communication by integrating sound structures and meaning. This finding shows that the Nigerian Pidgin English language has taken an acceptable status in facilitating communications among buyers and sellers in markets. In negotiation and haggling, the Nigeria Pidgin English language plays a prominent role, and the markets provide the most viable formal settings in which it could be used to communicate. NPE is a simple conversational language that both the buyer and seller understand, and this adds value to their discussions and clearly explains what each of them means. It puts sellers and buyers in the same frame of reference.

Pidgin English has the capacity to express emotions or experiences in ways that English and other languages do not. Even the more educated and literate buyers and sellers can switch between Standard English and Pidgin English in a natural, fluid manner since it is so simple to speak. Clear and concise communication is possible using NPE. People feel more at ease and may express themselves freely. It is the language that gets the business done swiftly. The reasons the respondents gave for their choice of Pidgin English as the language of communication in the market include NPE being simple to understand, easy to speak, indigenous, not ambiguous, and the fact that it is easy to interact with. This discovery provides evidence supporting Noam Chomsky's assertion that language represents a distinct evolutionary advancement exclusive to humans, distinguishing it from the communication methods employed by other animal species. According to Google Sites (2016), Chomsky's linguistic perspective, known as "nativist" and internalist, contrasts with the anti-nativist and externalist viewpoint on language. The latter aligns with the philosophical framework of "empiricism" and is consistent with the philosophical school of "rationalism."

Unlike the ritual of taking down notes while learning English language because, according to Ramish, Asghari and Zawuli (2022), "note-taking helps students to learn English or any other language better and to remember everything about the lesson" (p. 102), learning Pidgin English is less laborious. During an in-depth oral interview with Solomon Ajekuko, he said Pidgin English is simple to learn and that you do not need to be in a classroom to be able to speak it. He opines that a learner of NPE can "simply mix up with those speaking it, and before you know it, you are also speaking it. Initially, you may not be able to speak it fluently, but as time passes, you will be able to communicate with it properly." According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), "many errors can be explained better in terms of learner's developing knowledge of the structure of the target language" (p. 79). However, that is not the case with NPE; in NPE, the receiver of the message will have an idea of what the sender is saying. Suppose he/she is not clear about it. In that case, he asks for further explanation from the encoder, who will eventually explain himself more clearly for his hearer to understand what he meant to communicate.

With NPE, problems faced during the language learning process can be easily dealt with because, unlike regular Queens English, which is guided by grammatical rules, NPE has no formal learning styles or learning preferences, either oral or written skills. The weaknesses of new speakers of NPE can easily be overlooked because no matter how the sentences are constructed in spoken form, the hearer has the tendency to decode the message being passed across easily. Nigerian Pidgin English has easier words to pronounce among non-English-speaking people. Wafi (Warri) and Safi (Sapele) brands of the NPE are widely spoken language in the markets in most parts of the Niger Delta. The vast vocabulary of NPE appears to be fueled by the fact that most words were imaginatively created to correspond with events and situations in the environment. Market dialogue is connected to language's transactional and interpersonal functions, as Asuzu (2020) correctly points out. Social actors in a sociolinguistic situation negotiate and co-construct meanings, which are then interpreted in their actions and words. That is why every buyer and seller knows that NPE words like "jaara", "fisi", or "muni" mean adding a little more to the product being purchased, especially food stuff.

On whether Pidgin English should be adopted as the lingua franca for open markets in Nigeria, the respondents overwhelmingly (76.06%) agreed with the proposal. This finding supports the assertion that NPE is widely considered to represent the pinnacle of Nigeria's lingua franca because it is a language understood and spoken by all segments of the society, among the rich and the poor, and among the literate and illiterate. As proof of NPE's acceptance, the Christ Embassy Church has launched its Pidgin English version of the Holy Bible to further propagate the words of God (Bankole, 2019). Also, in 2020, the Oxford English Dictionary added 29 Nigerian words and expressions (some are borrowed words while others are coinages) in the January 2020 updates to the dictionary (Oyeleke, 2020). Though not all of them are NPE words, it can be said that it is in recognition of NPE as Nigerian's informal "indigenous lingua franca" that made Oxford English dictionary to do the addition because some of the added words like "chop", "gist", "k-leg", and "mama put" have their roots in NPE.

NPE is a language a first-time-speaker may not master, but through which he/she can communicate with most people in Nigeria since no language is a determinant of growth or development anywhere around the world as long as those who communicate with them understand themselves. For instance, you cannot say a society is not developing because the English language is not being used to teach students in their schools. There are developed nations like China and Russia where the English language is not the major language being used to teach in their schools. The importance of a language like NPE cannot be overemphasised, especially considering its use in commerce. With NPE, citizens are better equipped to interact, work and intersect in each other's lives more effectively than ever. NPE, which is most times used as Internet slang/meta-English, is "being written by Twitter and WhatsApp users, by particularly young people" (Abati, 2016, p. 1).

Although the English language is the general language being used to communicate in Nigeria, groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses adopted NPE as a formal language of worship in 2015. One of the Jehovah's Witnesses convention coordinators in Ota, Jonathan Diyaolu (as cited in Guanah, 2019), said it is all about communication, reaching the heart. Whatever language communicates best to those we are speaking to is the language that should be used (Vanguard, 2018). During an oral in-depth interview with Amafini Okosowei, he said inter alia: I see it as an ethical choice to speak NPE and to advocate for its adoption as the lingua franca for Nigeria's open markets; maybe from there, it will evolve to be the nation's lingua franca. I do not see Nigeria adopting any of its indigenous languages as a lingua franca. It will be difficult to be generally accepted because most people will wonder if it will take them years to learn a new language outside their native mother tongue. However, if it is NPE, it is very easy to learn and speak. "Abi no bi so?" (Is it not so?), he asks this researcher.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has contributed to the discourse on language variation and choice in Nigerian service encounters. It revealed that Pidgin English is the most used language for communication in markets in Nigeria, especially in the Igbudu market, Warri, Delta State, Nigeria. It showed that the language is easy to learn, understand and speak. It supports the idea that it should be adopted as the lingua franca for the open markets in Nigeria. These outcomes call for the usage of the language that both the buyers and the sellers understand, be they literate or illiterate. NPE is seen as a unifying language. It is indigenous in nature and commonly used in market transactions. It is mutually intelligible to both old and young, educated and non-educated, and even the rich and the poor of society.

### 7.1. Recommendations

1. NPE should be added to the list of Nigeria's policy of language education that has English and some Nigerian languages enjoying the status of national and official languages.
2. Due to its importance and relevance to the nation's economic development, NPE should be properly codified and structured by the Ministry of Education and taught as a subject in schools the way the English language is being taught.
3. Linguists in Nigeria's tertiary institutions should embark on more research on NPE and come out with textbooks that will serve as teaching manuals. Some could even be in audio form. This will give more people the opportunity to learn as well as speak the NPE fluently.

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