

Trends in Nigerian Pidgin orthography on digital platforms

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Abstract

Nigerian Pidgin (NP) is a dynamic contact language with an English-based vocabulary and influences from various Nigerian languages. Although primarily oral, the emergence of NP on digital platforms has led to new spelling conventions, punctuation practices, and the incorporation of loanwords. This paper adopts Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT) to investigate changes in NP orthography by examining trends in its structure and function. Through a qualitative analysis of a corpus of NP texts sourced from Facebook and Instagram, the study highlights the challenges involved in attempting to standardize the orthography of this multilingual and fluid language. The findings reveal that while digital communication has increased the visibility of NP, it has also complicated efforts to formalize its writing system. This has significant implications for lexicographers, linguists, and scholars seeking to document or study Nigerian Pidgin for academic, literary, or media purposes.

Keywords: Basic Linguistic Theory, digital communication, Nigerian Pidgin, orthography, social media, standardisation

1.0 Introduction

Historically, Nigerian Pidgin has been an oral lingua franca for a large number of Nigerians across multiple ethnic and geographical backgrounds. Though it is used extensively by different social groups, NP never had any officially prescribed written form, which has led to variations in the way it is represented in writing (Deuber, 2002; Osoba, 2015; Ekundayo, 2022). The social media, and other digital communication platforms, were written spaces for NP when the members adapted the language to the limitations and creative possibilities of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Kelly-Holmes, 2019; Han, 2024). This increased visibility has reignited debates about the orthographic representation and standardization of NP (Romaine, 2005; Heyd, 2016). As NP moves toward a written form, the problems related to spelling, punctuation, and grammar have emerged, making standardization of its orthography very tricky (Babalola, 2021; Mensah et al., 2021). This paper is going to look at how the orthography of NP has changed in a digital setting through contemporary written texts from social media. It traces the historical development of NP in its written form, examines the challenges of standardization in a flexible and diverse language, and discusses the prospects for its formalization.

The study takes a close look at what these developments mean for linguists, lexicographers, and educators as NP is established as an increasingly accepted written medium for both formal and informal purposes.

1.1 Research objectives

The study seeks the following:

1. To investigate the orthography of NP develop in digital platforms.
2. To identify the evolving trends in its written form.

1.2 Research questions

The study provides answers to the following:

1. How does the orthography of NP develop in digital platforms?
2. What are the evolving trends in its written form?

1.3 Statement of the problem

The pragmatism of NP on digital platforms has changed due to the impact of sociocultural influence and language innovation. Its errant written form presents, however, a challenge for linguists, educators, and users in seeking formal recognition, pedagogy, and understanding.

Given the dearth of research on NP's orthography in digital platforms, this paper takes an attempt to analyse the digital orthographic development of NP with a focus on phonetic simplification, sociolinguistic diversity, and shortening tactics typical of its current written form.

This research tries to understand how digital contexts influence emerging tendencies in NP orthography, in addition to contributing to the current debate on linguistic variation and standardization in the digital era.

1.4 Research gaps filled by the study

This study will attempt to address some of the significant research gaps noted in the NP literature:

1. **Written form of Nigerian Pidgin:** This study addresses a research gap on the phonological and sociolinguistic characteristics of NP by examining how it is represented in writing, especially in digital communication.
2. **Evolution of orthographic conventions:** With an emphasis on how users modify conventional spellings and produce novel orthographic forms in real-time

communication, this article investigates the development of orthographic conventions in NP in digital environments.

3. **Digital communication tools:** In order to better understand how digital sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter affect language evolution, this research looks into how they affect the orthography of NP's language.

2.0 Literature review

The emergence of NP is essentially linked to the dynamics of trade and linguistic contact, especially between English and several indigenous languages. Ewata (2015) notes that the origin of NP in Nigeria is shrouded in mystery due to the lack of fossilized evidence. According to him, NP has always existed in the multilingual setting of Nigeria and played an important role in intergroup communication. However, other scholars cautioned against viewing NP merely as a vernacular (Mufwene, 2024). Rather, they view it as a colonial communication medium that evolved from initial contact between English speakers and the indigenous population, resulting in a complex linguistic system (Afeadie, 2017). The vocabulary of NP is predominantly English, though significant contributions come from indigenous languages such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, illustrating Osoba's (2014b) argument regarding its mixed linguistic influences. The interaction between English and local languages has led to creative lexical innovations in NP, often achieved through metonymy, thereby enhancing its functionality and vocabulary (Kosecki, 2023).

As a lingua franca frequently used across ethnic boundaries, NP serves to bridge the communication gap in a linguistically fragmented society, such as Nigeria (Njemanze, 2014; Adebayo, 2022; Affia, 2023; Usoro & Nsit, 2024). In spite of this seemingly increasing popularity, NP's status is precarious and largely ensnared by Standard English (Ojo & Taiye, 2020; Agantiem & Alagbe 2023). This therefore suggests a continued negotiation of language and identity in the heterogeneous environment of Nigeria. NP not only signifies sociolinguistic importance but also embodies a rich oral heritage that reflects local flora,

fauna, and cultural practices. It has the potential to unify diverse ethnic groups and foster national cohesion if strategically utilised (Ajibade et al., 2012; Time & Pryce, 2021).

Historically viewed as a language of the uneducated, NP has emerged as a prominent medium in media, education, and politics, promoting inclusivity and cultural expression (Ehondor, 2020; Affia, 2023). It enriches narratives in Nigerian hip-hop and serves as a vehicle for character expression in literature, thereby acting as a cultural heritage for Nigerians in the diaspora (Ewata, 2025 [forthcoming]). Nevertheless, there is a growth in innovative ideologies that support the inclusion of NP in educational policies despite its ongoing stigmatization (Ajayi & Kilani, 2024). However, the absence of orthographic standardization creates difficulties in NLP, hence the various ways of spelling and grammatical forms of the language (Lin et al., 2023). Current NLP models, mainly trained on the English language, are performing badly for the sentiment analysis of NP, thus compelling the need to develop different methodology for its context-specific meanings (Oyewusi et al., 2020).

The Pidgin's oral status and the absence of a widely recognized writing system significantly hinder efforts toward standardizing its orthography (Ekundayo, 2022; Afolabi et al., 2023). This orthographic diversity complicates applications in fields such as advertising and NLP, exacerbating dataset noise and negatively affecting tasks like sentiment analysis and machine translation (Lin et al., 2023; 2024). A large number of Nigerians view NP as "degenerate" English, use it as a low status language, and hence injurious to its acceptability and standardization process (Igboanusi, 2008). Therein lays the stigma on NP's use in formal contexts of interaction, given that inconsistent practice would almost definitely lead to ambiguity and miscommunication (Endong, 2015; Osoba, 2014a). Consequently, the effectiveness of NP in advertising is diminished by the absence of standardized orthography, as messages may be viewed as grammatically incorrect or low-class, thus limiting their appeal across diverse audiences (Ngulube, 2022). Nevertheless, increasing recognition of NP's cultural significance suggests that standardization efforts could enhance its validity and utility in both regional and global contexts.

Digital media has profoundly influenced language evolution, reshaping communication norms and practices. NP showcases linguistic diversity in online conversations, which can enhance vocabulary and reading comprehension. However, informal online communication may lead to shorter attention spans and superficial language use (Li et al., 2021; Adebayo, 2023b; Aldahhan & Razak, 2023). While the incorporation of NP into social media allows the achievement of linguistic diversity, the culture can be preserved. The challenges of standardisation and effective analysis remain, which calls for further research and innovations in this domain.

3.0 Some previous studies on Nigerian Pidgin orthography on digital platforms

This section examines past research into the orthography of Nigerian Pidgin, focusing on those studies concerned specifically with the linguistic and computational problems of representing NP in writing, especially through digital means. The review places the present work within the wider scholarly landscape of research into NP orthography.

Honkanen (2023) looks into the role of orthography in sociolinguistics. For him, spelling is a crucial linguistic tool in delineating languages, distinguishing speaker groups, and building social identities. Honkanen puts forth that orthography itself has played an important role in such social identity-building processes. Indeed, written forms in digital communication reflect sociocultural issues of language use, underscoring the dynamic nature of NP orthography in online environments.

Lin et al. (2024) takes a computational approach by proposing a phonetic-theoretic word editing system using variants of Nigerian Pidgin as the foundation for addressing the widespread orthographic variations in existing Pidgin datasets. The authors show that these variations impact the basic performance on typical natural language processing tasks, such as machine translation and sentiment analysis. The authors prove that having the different

orthographic forms in the training data leads to improvements in the NLP performance of models that often suffer from a deficit of standardization in writing Pidgins.

Akinlotan (2022), within a construction grammar framework, explores variation underlying the copula "dey" in Nigerian Pidgin English, NPE. It highlights various forms of "dey," like "deh" and "de," and explores how their usage varies along lines of formality and text type. Though Akinlotan's focus is essentially on grammar, his findings on the variability of NP forms are crucial for understanding how orthographic choices are informed by context. These differences are most clearly seen in digital texts, where the flexible use of grammatical forms such as "dey" challenges the process of standardizing orthographies.

Honkanen (2022) focuses on pragmatic markers in Nigerian computer-mediated communication. Based on a large corpus of online discussions in Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English, the study investigates the functions of interjections and other pragmatic markers in online interaction. Honkanen claims that it is because of this fluidity that these markers can enact a range of discourse functions in various contexts and, in turn, help shape NP orthography online. This study highlights that it is not only grammatical structures but also socio-pragmatic aspects of NP orthography that need consideration in digital ecologies.

Saeed et al. (2024) discusses the challenges of developing NLP resources for Nigerian Pidgin, a resource-scarce language with a dearth of corpora and language resources. Their study places in comparison the different methods aimed at improving document recognition and discourse classification in NP, focusing on IDR and discourse relation classification. These findings indicate that the use of a "native" NP classifier outperforms baseline models and further emphasizes the need for more targeted resources and training data in effective NLP system development for low-resource languages such as Nigerian Pidgin.

Lin et al. (2023) extends solutions towards low-resource languages by proposing a large-scale parallel English-Pidgin corpus that improves text classification and translation models. The authors have shown that English pre-trained language models are better compared to multilingual models on the tasks of English-Pidgin. This work highlights the potential for

cross-lingual adaptive training and integration of orthographic variations to improve machine learning model performance in Nigerian Pidgin NLP tasks.

4.0 Methodology

This qualitative research design draws on Basic Linguistic Theory and explores how the orthography of Nigerian Pidgin is developing within digital communication. BLT therefore provides the necessary framework for understanding the syntactic, morphological, and phonological features that are inherent in NP, especially as the language continues to evolve from a basically oral to written forms through digital platforms. From this theoretical approach, it would be possible to determine how such structural features are then deployed into the orthography of NP in informal online communication.

Data for this study were sourced from Facebook and Instagram, the two most commonly used social media sites by NP speakers. These platforms show a rich variety of current usage of NP in informal contexts. A total of 36 sentences have been randomly selected from posts and comments on these sites over six months (January-June 2024), to ensure that the sample is representative of current NP orthographic trends. These sentences were specifically chosen for their demonstration of emerging orthographic practices.

The analysis was conducted from three perspectives:

1. **Syntactic analysis:** Sentence structures were examined to understand how NP syntax operates in written forms, focusing on word order, clause types, and sentence complexity.
2. **Morphological analysis:** the study investigated the interaction of loanwords and morphological markers, such as plural markers, tense markers, to see how these factors impact orthographic representation. Loanwords from both English and indigenous Nigerian languages were classified based on how they relate to NP orthography.

3. **Phonological analysis:** The pronunciation-spelling relation was analyzed, more precisely how the phonetic realities of NP are set out in written forms. This included analyses of the orthographic representation of both NP vowel and consonant systems, focusing on how the sounds relate to written forms.

Data sources for this research include social media interactions – posts and comments published -and digital, like blogs, which reflect the informal nature of NP. Whereas the 36 sentences allow a glimpse into the emerging orthographic trends, future studies based on larger corpora can give far more substantial insight into the written form of NP.

It is a broad-based approach to tracing the evolution of NP orthography and its resultant problems, as well as its possibilities of standardization. Based on this analysis, the study wishes to give valuable insight into the formalization of NP orthography for educational and communicative purposes.

5.0 Theoretical framework

The study of Nigerian Pidgin's orthography on digital platforms uses Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT), a theoretical framework developed by Dixon (2009), to analyse the language's structural aspects, particularly its transition from oral to written forms, particularly as it transitions from oral to digital media.

Syntactic and morphological features of NP

BLT emphasizes morphological and syntactic features in understanding written forms' development trends, with Nigerian Pidgin's flexible syntax, such as the SVO word order, is influenced by English and other Nigerian languages (Bamgbose, 1991). Therefore, BLT helps consider the fact that in writing, especially in digital contexts, NP might also alter syntactic forms; Meyers et al. (2013) present an argument in support of this.

Apart from syntax, BLT also focuses on the role of morphology in the structure of a language (Dryer, 2005). The study of NP involves the integration of loanwords, compound formations,

and affixes like plural and tense markers. The combination of English grammatical words with indigenous Nigerian languages has created a unique morphological system, often reflected in online spelling variations. Thus, certain words, such as "go"-to go-and "dey"-is/are-take on other forms in written NP, depending on the spoken dialect of influence. The analysis of variations in NP orthography using BLT can provide insight into the influence of the language's phonological system and syntactic construction (Ojarikre, 2013, Mensah et al., 2021).

Phonological considerations and digital orthography

BLT helps researchers understand NP phonology, influenced by other languages, and its impact on digital orthographies and spelling conventions over time.

Studies show (Mensah, 2011; Bigi et al., 2020; Mensah et al., 2021; Adebayo, 2023a) that Nigerian Pidgin (NP) orthography often follows phonological logics in online texts as well as, maintaining phonological integrity. Digital communication amplifies this pattern, making NP the only reliable language in Nigeria's digital landscape, despite its liberal identity (Egbokhare, 2021).

6.0 Data presentation

This section provides the sentences collected from the two social media sites:

Table 1: Sentences with orthographic examples on digital platforms

S/N	Sentences
1.	E sure don say I no fit wear earring, nose ring with dread pass police without harassment, not to talk of standing in their midst, but on God.
2.	So anybody wey dey with police now, nah arrest? Make unah leave this guy and rest biko.

3.	Let him fight Tinubu for us if Im really dey fight for the masses or making business himself.
4.	You no small to fight.
5.	E let you do dat 1 for us, na man you be.
6.	By the time, he get concrete evidence, you go see by that time na international body go help us judge the matter.
7.	Make he help us fight Dino. Formal state governor... the guy own too much.. u loot kogi treasury walking free with so much arrogant.
8.	VDM please we need evidence in Mohbad death and how everything happens please put body for imole case so he will get justice please god bless you.
9.	Why him no fight for us, that are feeling pains in this economy.
10.	How I wish our lecturers dey teach us like dis guy, everybody for dey graduate with first class.
11.	Ha... You study am well. E be like course wey we dey study...but you are truly completely right.
12.	Oga, you have done your best for people, thanks.
13.	Anytime way you won dey speak English I no dey take you serious cos I no say at the end you no go talk anything.
14.	Come and enter heaven make I see you. Me that aproko spirit in me don already dey at alert.
15.	I just called you werey in my mind immediately you wanted to dive.
16.	Me that I know you don't have anything to say but I go still watch the video to the end. I still dey gather money for 1 pac T-shirt sha.
17.	Haaaa see how serious I am. I don ready to dey listen Amebo don finish me.
18.	Walahi, if I catch this bro ehnnnnnnn, u just crack my ribs with laughter. ...God bless you more man.
19.	I been wan ask say which day you start to dey put mouth for oroloro?

20.	Which kind things be this now, me wey I don quickly find a place to seat.
21.	As I look the time of video, na im I don know say u won play us go. Thank God say my lawyer's number no go, I for sue u today.
22.	Even me self, I just started doing my own oo. Even though, I don't have enough followers but I still believe I will have one day.
23.	Brain jotter na small God for comedy industry; It was really nice working with him. Still your celebrity bouncer.
24.	Who else noticed say anty Ramota no dey angry like before?
25.	But wait o. Why oyinbo no dey get scholarship to come study for Nigeria.
26.	Sister Ramota don enjoy life pass other people.
27.	Very dark man say make I tell una him go service him car change engine oil make una no panic.
28.	Did Bob kill somebody ni? Why people dey always happy for downfall why? If im person is in trouble won't u look for help and connections?
29.	Chai see how Bobrisky use Cho Cho Cho kona Idris now.
30.	Bob go dey regret why he turn to she.
31.	Nawa oooo even the lawyers wey help Bobrisky go dey regret now. Chai Bobrisky don put all of them for trouble. This life no be everybody dem dey help. Especially those that talk too much, avoid them.
32.	Bobrisky don buy market
33.	Bobrisky dey apartment dey chill some citizens still contribute 30 million give am
34.	All the truth deh here; Bob your cho cho cho don land you for this wahala;
35.	Make una leave bob ooo, he is not the economy problem
36.	Bob was bragging and nothing dey for this case with a good lawyer

7.0 Data analysis

The study investigates the evolution of NP orthography on digital platforms, revealing the following:

The orthographic representation of NP on digital platforms has evolved significantly due to emerging trends in informal internet-based communication. The data (see table 1, above) demonstrates how NP is creatively adapted for digital communication. The text highlights key features such as phonetic spelling, lexical innovations, and syntactic flexibility. Below is an analysis of these emerging trends based on our data.

7.1 General trends in NP orthography on social media

1. Phonetic spelling and simplified orthography

NP's distinctive feature in digital spaces is its use of phonetic spelling, where words are often spelled as they are pronounced. Thus, simplifying English orthography to reflect NP's distinct sounds. Examples from the data include:

Table 2: Phonetic spelling and simplified orthographic examples

S/N	Sentence	Phonetic spelling of ...	Analysis
a)	"E sure don say"	"It's sure that"	[simplified "E" for "it" and "don" for "has"]
b)	"I no fit"	"I cannot"	[simplified "no" for "cannot" and "fit" for "be able to"]
c)	"wey dey"	"Who is"	[simplified "wey" for "who" and "dey" for "is"]
d)	"im really dey"	"He is really"	[simplified "im" for "he" and "dey" for "is"]

e)	"nah arrest"	"Is it an arrest?"	[shortened: "nah" for "is it"]
f)	"make unah"	"You all should"	[shortened: "unah" for "you all"]
g)	"You no small"	"You are not small"	[shortened: "no" for "not"]
h)	"na man you be"	"You are a man"	[shortened: "na" for "you are"]
i)	"Go see by that time"	"You will see by that time"	[shortened: "go" for "will"]
j)	"You no go talk anything"	"You will not say anything"	[simplified as "no go" for "will not"]
k)	"me self"	"even myself" or rather, I myself	[simplified as "self" for "myself"]
l)	"aproko spirit"	Phonetic spelling for "busybody spirit"	[simplified as "aproko" for a meddlesome person]
m)	"wey I don"	"When I have"	[simplified as "wey" for "when" and "don" for "have"]
n)	"imole"	a proper name or simply light	[but phonetic spelling because this is an informal context]
o)	"him go"	"he will" or he shall	[simplified: "go" for "will/shall"]
p)	"una"	"you (all)"	[simplified: "una" for "you all"]

These examples give us an idea of how NP is adapted phonetically for the ease and speed of digital communication because in this communication, the essence is on how words sound rather than their actual conventional orthography in English.

At the same time, these examples reflect a trend where words are written to match their spoken forms in NP. The phonetic spelling enhances accessibility, making the language more relatable and easier to use in informal, quick communication.

2. Code-switching/mixing and lexical innovations

Code-switching and code-mixing are common language occurrences, particularly in multilingual language contact situations like Nigeria. These behaviours include switching between languages or combining linguistic components in conversations (Thomason, 2001; Pituxcoosuvam et al., 2023; Barus et al., 2024). The phenomenon refers to the process by which speakers switch or mix two or more languages or varieties within a conversation. In our case, speakers switch/mix between Pidgin and Standard English within the same sentence or conversation (Adebayo, 2023b).

The data showcases frequent code-switching/mixing between NP and English which reflects a blending of languages typical in multilingual and multicultural societies like Nigeria.

- i. **"walahi"** – There is code-switching from NP to Hausa/Arabic – an expression meaning "I swear" in Hausa/Arab as seen in sentence 18: "Walahi, if I catch this bro ehnnnnnnn, u just crack my ribs with laughter". This is also a reflection of the religious orientation of the speaker as it indicates that the speaker is a Muslim and not necessarily because the speaker is from the northern Nigeria. If it was a sentence by a Christian faithful, the sentence would have been "I swear to God". This further proves Nigerian multi-ethnic, culture and religious society status.
- ii. **"biko"** – There is code-switching from Nigerian Pidgin to Igbo, meaning "please" in Igbo as seen in sentence 2: "Make unah leave this guy and rest biko". Unlike the sentence in **1)** above, where the religious orientation of the speaker is portrayed rather than the ethnic orientation, this shows that the tribal orientation of the speaker as it indicates the Igbo tribe or someone who speaks the language which call up the code-mixing instance. We could also say this is possibly a case of a typical Nigerian who is a multilingual (could be sequential/simultaneous/coordinate) just using the expression that comes to mind when interacting with people of other tribes as most if not all Nigerians would understand the expression *biko* irrespective of the tribe or the language they use since the interaction is an informal one).

- iii. **"amebo"** – There is code-switching from NP into a borrowed term from Yoruba, which means "gossip," as seen in sentence 17: "I don ready to dey listen Amebo don finish me". Though written in initial capital letter, we must not confuse it for a proper noun (as obtained in English) as the expression is a common noun even in the Yoruba language which is the source.
- iv. **"oyinbo"** – There is code-switching, borrowing from Yoruba (refers to a white person or foreigner in a broader sense), the term *oyinbo* has become a Nigerian one as every Nigerian, irrespective of tribe uses it to describe a non-black person, as seen in sentence 25: "But wait o. Why oyinbo no dey get scholarship to come study for Nigeria?"

3. Lexical innovations

Lexical innovations involve the invention of new words or the use of already existing words in a new meaning in some new contexts.

Examples from our data include the following:

- i. **"aproko spirit"** – Innovating from the Igbo word, "aproko", a nosy person, and adding "spirit" to make it sound funny, describing the tendency or spirit of nosiness. Sentence 14: "Me that aproko spirit in me don already dey at alert".
- ii. **"werey"** – A Yoruba-derived word, which correct spelling in Yoruba is *wèrè* that means "crazy" or "mad person," and is used humorously or as an insult. Sentence 15: "I just called you *werey* in my mind immediately you wanted to dive."
- iii. "na man you be" – An idiomatic expression referring to somebody's strength or prowess, thus the use of the phrase as an appraisal or challenge. Sentence 5: "E let you do dat 1 for us, na man you be".
- iv. "imole" – Used here as a name but it also means "light" in Yoruba. Innovatively used to connote positiveness or righteousness. Sentence 7: "Please put body for imole case so he will get justice". In normal written English, there would have been the need for a possessive comma after imole: ... put body for **imole's** case ... we notice this is not

the case here because of the informality and the nature of online communication that requires speed as well as to get more messages out within a short time so as to capture the attention of other participants and the vast amount of information available at the same time that is involved in online communication.

All these examples demonstrate how Nigerian Pidgin integrates local languages through code-switching/mixing and creates new expressions or adapts existing ones in a creative way to fit digital communication.

- v. "on God" - A successful phrase combining English and religious etymology, often used in both Pidgin and social media contexts to show utter truth or reliance on divine power. This also shows the religiosity of the Nigerian society. Like the "**walahi**" example discussed above under code-switch/mixing, this, "on God", also shows the Christianity orientation, of the speaker. If it were a Muslim, it would have been something like *inshallah (if Allah wills – God willing – to Muslim)*, or other such expressions to express the same message/meaning. Sentence 1: "E sure don say I no fit wear earring, nose ring with dread pass police without harassment, not to talk of standing in their midst, **but on God**".
- vi. "**He get concrete evidence**" is the epitome of a mixture of Pidgin and English with lexical innovation. The word "get" as used here is common in NP to indicate possession. The expression "concrete evidence" is, however, a direct borrowing into the Pidgin from Legal English, but fitted into the grammatical structure of Pidgin. Sentence 6: "By the time he get concrete evidence, you go see by that time na international body go help us judge the matter."

Both phrases illustrate a situation where Nigerian Pidgin has borrowed directly from English, but the language creatively adapted those expressions within its linguistic framework in digital discourse.

4. Use of shortened forms and abbreviations

NP on digital platforms often uses shortened forms for quicker communication, especially in informal settings like social media. Below are some abbreviations and short forms used in the data provided:

- a) "nah" – An abbreviation for "is it". Generally adopted in Pidgin to emphasise a question. This is observed in Sentence 2: "So anybody wey dey with police now, nah arrest?"
- b) "VDM" – This is an abbreviation of a name or an online popular figure, used in digital space. It means Verydarkman. It is seen in Sentence 7: "VDM please we need evidence in Mohbad death".
- c) "im" – A short form for "him/his", in Nigerian Pidgin. In Sentence 28: "... If *im* person is in trouble won't u look for help and connections?"
- d) "u" – Generally used to abbreviate "you"; very common in text messaging and informal digital communication. In Sentence 28: "... If *im* person is in trouble won't *u* look for help and connections?"
- e) "e" – This is a common abbreviation for "he" or "it" in NP. In Standard British English, this would translate to: *he, it, or it's*. In Sentence 1: "E sure don say ...["It's sure that"...]
- f) "dey" – NP abbreviation for "they" or "is/are". This is found in Sentence 2: "So anybody wey dey with police now..." it is also found in Sentence 3: "if im really dey fight for the mass...". The item is also present in sentences: 10, 11, 13, 14, 16,17, 24, 25, 28,30, 31, 33 and 36.

These examples give an indication of how frequent the use of shortened forms and abbreviations is in Nigerian Pidgin, especially when it occurs in informal and digital contexts. As we stated above, because of the informality and the nature of online communication that requires speed as well as to get more messages out within a short time so as to capture the attention of other participants and the vast amount of information that is

involved in online communication. Those abbreviations and shortcuts reflect an adaptation of the norms to a preference for speed and brevity in the online text-based communication.

5. Emerging orthographic variations

The examples in the illustrations above show that NP does not have a standardised orthographic practice; spellings differ between speakers.

For example:

- a) "Wey" (who), "dey" (is/are), and "go" (will) are written with phonetic spelling. The same word could be represented otherwise in other contexts and with other speakers.
- b) "Bob go dey regret" and "Bobrisky don buy market" are just examples of the fluid, adaptive uses of pidginised grammar that may change with the speaker or writer. A unified writing system in this respect may be challenging for consistency; however, it further speaks to the adaptability and creativity of NP.

6. Cultural and social commentary

Digital NP shows a good deal of cultural and social commentary, and adaptability as exemplified by expressions such as "Bobrisky don buy market" (Bobrisky is in trouble). These are commonly known in the meaning of idiomatic practices. NP is a vector of humour, critique, and introspection on life that allows users to act out a uniquely Nigerian digital practice. At the same time, NP is a veritable ground for cultural and linguistic merging as shown in the code switching/mixing instances found in the corpus of the data. NP is also ground for exhibition of faith or religiosity as shown in the data. "Walahi, if I catch this bro ehnnnnnnn ..." is an indication of the religious orientation of the speaker as it indicates that the speaker is a Muslim and not necessarily because the speaker is from the northern Nigeria (or ... but on God) which further proves Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, culture and religious society.

7. Digital media and the orthography of NP

Digital media, especially social network sites, have introduced new forms to NP orthography. While in some instances, numeric insertions ("1 pac T-shirt") seem to be gaining validity. The abbreviation of longer phrases ("thanx") responds to the need for concision in communications across the world within digital frames. This is where informality and quickness take precedence over the conventions of writing. Diachronic developments like these yield an orthography that is innovative, though the more conventional standards of writing counts as less before the dire need to clearly relate what one wants to say.

7.2 Emerging trends in the written NP

1. **Informal, conversational tone:** Relaxed orthography norms underline casualness, an informal conversational code expressed in the NP digital platforms. Phrases such as "Me that aproko spirit..." and "I for sue u today..." are truly reflective of the informality of relating to quickness in expression rather than grammatical correctness. Digital platforms thus avail themselves to a style that is conversational and accessible to a broad audience.
2. **Orthographic fluidity and variability:** Since NP does not have a formal standardised orthography, the spelling varies. Words such as "fit" (can) and "e" (he/she) "im" (he, him, it, its) have different alternative spellings at the choices of the speakers or the speaking contexts. These orthographic flows reflect the larger sociolinguistic situation in NP where the subjects belong to different linguistic stock which have bases for producing variation in orthography.
3. **Influence of English on NP:** The influence of English on NP is still very strong, especially online. A good example is observed in the use of "evidence" and "arrest" in their Standard forms of English, reflecting the lexical importation of NP into the third language without adaptation in many cases. The presence of both English and NP on the digital space indicates a dynamic hybrid linguistic space.

In digital spaces, NP is spelled orthographically, and there is a trend for phonetic spelling, abbreviations, and informal tone. All these sites encourage the creation of NP and spelling and conversational style differences. As NP gains greater presence and importance in online discourse, we would expect much further developments in its written form since it will surely take characteristics from its spoken forms and the need for brevity with communicative ease of digital media. Lack of standard orthography allows creative freedom but at the same time poses challenges for formalizing NP in written contexts.

8.0 Discussion

The orthographic development of NP on digital platforms reflects the basic principles of Basic Linguistic Theory concerning the interrelationship among phonetics, syntax, and sociolinguistics in nature. This could be what may be described as its elasticity through the medium it has found itself in the digital era. At the same time, revealing an orthodox propensity in trends and patterns the orthography is taking. Another striking feature in the digital expression of NP is phonetic spelling. Basic Linguistic Theory lays great emphasis on the surface forms that underlie linguistic structure. In NP, speakers use phonetic spelling as a way of fairly accurately representing pronunciation, like in the phrase "E sure don say" for "It is sure that.". This simplification allows NP speakers to remain proximate to spoken forms, which creates accessibility and better relatability in digital discourse on social media sites.

The orthography of NP on digital platforms demonstrates a kind of sociolinguistic influence that is usually hidden in the practices of language use. Basic Linguistic Theory provides background on how language varies with or according to social contexts. This flexibility in spelling, such as using "e" for *he/she/it/its* or "fit" for *can*, points toward some users' navigational strategies between NP and Standard English. Code-switching/mixing reveals variable linguistic registers that dominate informal digital communication where NP is mostly foregrounded. The interplay between NP and Standard English is manifested in

lexical innovation and code-switching/mixing. Examples such as the use of Standard English phrases like "on God" or "concrete evidence" show that lexical borrowing is a dynamic process in human language. Basic Linguistic Theory signals language contact as one of the motors of innovation, while digital platforms are an arena of easy fluidity between languages. Abbreviations and shortened forms, such as "nah" for "is it that" and "don" for "it has/has done," are all symptomatic of linguistic economy. This saves time in high-frequency digital communication. This, in turn, corroborates Grice's Maxims of communication – particularly the Maxim of Quantity-that speakers prefer to be brief but informative, as far as possible, in informal conversations (Grice, 1975). One of the most important features of the development of NP in recent times is its orthography, which is not standardised. Grapholinguistics can explain such a phenomenon because languages usually have a tendency to be standardised when they are employed in a more official context. However, informal communication on the Internet remains the main domain of NP. This is one of the reasons it is still fluid and not standardised. More so, the attention this unique writing characteristics of online communication and social media are getting that draws the interest of academics and media analysts have roots in earlier language use, pre-computer interactions, informal writing before computers, and some are extremely old (Crystal, 2008). The bottom line is that this is actually how NP, a dynamic, contact variety should be, since it is continuously changing according to the needs and wills of the users.

9.0 Conclusions and implications

It follows from the orthographic presentation of the NP online that phonetic reduction, sociolinguistic variation, and code-switching/mixing are common. These trends are consistent with the principles of BLT, which allows for the adaptation of language given social and technological contexts. The flexibility and informality of NP indicate, however, that its orthography is developing but remains a fluid system both shaped by spoken norms and contact with English. It is in this dynamic setting that linguistic innovation has been

occurring, and NP is surely one of the most adaptable languages in the digital world, though it currently lacks a unified written standard. The written form of NP will continue to evolve with increased visibility online amidst increased discussions of standardisation and formalisation in wider linguistic debates. This study further reiterates previous studies on Nigerian Pidgin English as it tallies with Akinlotan's (2022) study (discussed in the previous studies section) as the finding in this study agrees with that study in the use of *dey*. According to Akinlotan's study, formality or text type have an impact on the usage of "dey" variations (deh and de), we see this in the use of **unah** and **una** but language complexity has no bearing on them. This study shows that gradually an orthography of the NP is evolving and becoming. It also shows how stable as in all the examples found in this study, the *corpula dey* are spelt the way irrespective of the tribe of the speakers. This is really a positive sign for the growth and development of the NP.

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