

SOUL LANGUAGE: THE AESTHETIC AND MORAL DIMENSIONS OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN IN CULTURAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This paper investigates the aesthetic and moral significance of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) by analyzing eight culturally resonant expressions that embody philosophical and ethical depth. Using frameworks from ethnolinguistics, stylistics, and critical discourse analysis, the study shows that NPE is a robust, culturally embedded language capable of profound meaning-making. The expressions are viewed as philosophical texts conveying communal values, humour, moral instruction, and social critique. Thematic analysis reveals how metaphors, euphemisms, paradoxes, and bodily imagery communicate, teach, caution, and provoke reflection. These linguistic constructs reflect Nigeria's socio-cultural realities and insights into disobedience, humility, morality, gender, fate, and human limitation. The research engages contemporary translation studies and hermeneutics, emphasizing the implications of culturally dense language in global contexts. It advocates for NPE's elevation as a legitimate medium of moral and aesthetic expression, proposing its greater inclusion in educational and communicative domains. Ultimately, the study portrays Nigerian Pidgin as a "soul language" that captures the complexities and wisdom of Nigerian life

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin English, Figurative Language, Moral Discourse, Stylistics, Cultural Linguistics, Philosophical, Expression.

Introduction

Language is more than a tool for communication; it embodies thought, values, emotion, and cultural memory. In Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) functions not only as a linguistic bridge across ethnic and social groups but also as a rich expressive medium that captures everyday life's realities, wisdom, and moral ethos. While often dismissed as a "non-standard" or "broken" form of English, scholars increasingly recognize the unique communicative, stylistic, and cultural power of NPE. Akande (2010) asserts that Nigerian Pidgin possesses its grammatical system, syntactic logic, and pragmatic versatility, making it a distinct language in its own right. He argues that its structure and semantics should not be compared pejoratively with Standard English but rather understood in its linguistic terms. Pidgin's emotional and

philosophical impact is evident in its everyday expressions, proverbs, and figurative constructions. These are not merely casual sayings but serve as moral instructions, cultural reflections, and effective communication tools. Motanya (2017) emphasizes the developmental role of Pidgin, noting that it is not only a vehicle for informal dialogue but also a powerful language of human connection in music, drama, and oral performance. Similarly, Ofoegbu (2024) contends that NPE has moved beyond its colonial function as a contact language. It now plays a crucial role in the creolization of Nigerian identity, offering a voice to those excluded from elite discourses.

Pidgin expressions, often brief and metaphorical, resonate more powerfully with their audience than their Standard English equivalents. As Osoba (2014) shows in her analysis of Nigerian Pidgin in media advertisements, the language's appeal lies in its immediacy, simplicity, and capacity to communicate layered meaning through pragmatic devices such as presupposition and implication. These features make it suitable for conveying emotion, humor, and moral judgment. Braimoh (2022), focusing on Nigerian stand-up comedy, explores how comedians use Pidgin to engage the audience emotionally, employing figurative language, cultural allusions, and irony to build a connection and convey more profound truths. The Pidgin statements examined in this study exemplify how NPE functions as a moral and aesthetic expression language. These texts, when spoken, often carry a weight of meaning, rhythm, and feeling that is difficult to replicate in formal English. They are understood cognitively and felt intuitively, forming what could be described as a spiritual or emotional connection between speaker and listener. Queen Albert et al. (2020) observe that Nigerian Pidgin fosters a sense of communal identity and belonging, making it more than a mere language but a medium through which social and emotional realities are reflected and shaped. Therefore, this paper examines how Nigerian Pidgin operates as a “soul language”, a stylistic and moral vehicle for expressing communal values, life lessons, and aesthetic insight. Through a close analysis of eight carefully selected Pidgin expressions, the study investigates how language becomes not just a medium of information but a lived experience embedded in Nigerian society's moral and cultural consciousness.

Objectives of the Research

1. To examine the aesthetic and moral significance of selected Nigerian Pidgin texts.
2. To explore how NPE conveys figurative meaning and moral insight through its distinctive style.
3. To situate NPE within the broader discourse of linguistic identity and cultural philosophy.

Theoretical framework

This study draws on four major theoretical approaches to analyze how Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) functions as a language of aesthetics, morality, and cultural philosophy. These are ethnolinguistics, stylistics, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and incongruity theory. Each framework contributes a particular lens for interpreting the selected Pidgin expressions as linguistic artefacts and texts deeply embedded in Nigeria's social, historical, and emotional landscape. The frameworks are applied to the Pidgin expressions provided in the study, which act as cultural texts laden with figurative meaning, moral instruction, and affective depth.

The ethnolinguistic framework examines how NPE reflects and sustains Nigerian cultural values, norms, and worldviews. Ethnolinguistics focuses on the relationship between language and culture, particularly how language symbolizes shared experiences and knowledge systems. Nigerian Pidgin, a contact language that has evolved into a robust vehicle of identity, is a powerful ethnolinguistic tool. It captures the ethos of Nigerian life in its idioms, metaphors, and proverbs, and encodes collective wisdom in memorable, emotionally resonant phrases. The Pidgin expression "Fly wey nor dey hear word, e go follow dead body enter grave" illustrates how language encodes a communal view of disobedience and consequence. The image of a fly stubbornly following a corpse into the grave is culturally rich and would be intuitively understood by anyone grounded in local moral expectations. Ethnolinguistically, this reflects how community values are passed through language as internalized behavioral guides.

In support of this perspective, Ofoegbu (2024) emphasizes that Nigerian Pidgin plays a vital role in constructing a national linguistic identity. He argues that NPE encapsulates a lived history of colonization, resistance, and adaptation, and its growth into a creolized form reflects a conscious cultural evolution toward inclusivity. Ofoegbu maintains that the moral clarity often conveyed through Pidgin speech is not accidental but stems from a long-standing cultural practice of using language to transmit ethical codes and life lessons. This aligns with the ethnolinguistic assertion that language is a cultural artifact that reflects the values and aspirations of the people who use it. Queen Albert et al. (2020) further reinforce this by documenting how Pidgin functions as a communal code in Port Harcourt, enabling speakers to convey social messages that transcend ethnic boundaries and establish mutual understanding.

Stylistics forms the second core of the theoretical framework. Stylistics studies language style, particularly how linguistic choices create meaning, tone, and effect. It focuses on language's literary and rhetorical features, including metaphor, irony, euphemism, rhythm, and lexical variation. The selected Pidgin texts in this study are stylistically potent. For instance, the expression "E don tear the girl leaf with him wood" employs metaphor and euphemism to refer to a sexual act. The stylistic substitution of "leaf" for vagina and "wood" for penis is both humorous and oblique, allowing speakers to address taboo topics indirectly while still preserving

social boundaries. Similarly, the phrase “Common sense nor common” uses paradox as a stylistic strategy to critique irrational behavior and to highlight the tension between expectation and reality in moral reasoning.

Braimoh (2022) explores the stylistic dimension of Nigerian Pidgin in stand-up comedy, demonstrating how comedians use metaphor, irony, and wordplay to express social critiques and cultural truths. He explains that Pidgin enables performers to bypass formal constraints and connect directly with their audience through shared idioms and rhythmic phrasing. Braimoh argues that stylistic devices in Pidgin, such as exaggeration and incongruity, serve as both entertainment and rhetorical tools for moral commentary. The stylistic features identified by Braimoh support this study’s analysis of Pidgin as a language rich in figurative and ethical resonance. Motanya (2017) also affirms that NPE thrives in expressive domains such as drama and oral storytelling, where its stylistic flexibility enables speakers to navigate humor, irony, and social satire effectively.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) forms the third theoretical pillar. CDA examines how language is used to construct social meanings, exercise power, and maintain ideological positions. It is particularly interested in how everyday language reinforces or challenges societal norms. In the context of Nigerian Pidgin, CDA allows us to explore how the language operates within power dynamics, social hierarchies, and moral structures. For example, the Pidgin expression “The same moto wey kpai John na him carry him brother go Sapele” conveys ambiguity and duality in human experience. Through CDA, this statement can be interpreted as a critique of moral absolutism. It questions the assumption that a tool or person is inherently good or bad by presenting a scenario where the same object is destructive and beneficial. This linguistic ambiguity reveals the speaker’s awareness of moral complexity, challenging simplistic judgments and encouraging critical thought.

Osoba (2014) applies CDA to media advertisements in Nigerian Pidgin and finds that the language is a powerful tool for shaping public attitudes and behaviors. She notes that Pidgin’s directness and familiarity make it suitable for conveying persuasive messages, particularly in contexts that require emotional appeal or moral reasoning. Osoba’s work demonstrates how Pidgin expressions in media do not merely inform but subtly instruct, often embedding ethical positions within everyday speech. Akande (2010) also acknowledges the discursive role of NPE in shaping social reality, arguing that the language has become a site for ideological negotiation, where speakers assert identity and agency in opposition to elite linguistic norms.

The final framework employed is incongruity theory, especially in its application to humor, contradiction, and surprise in language. Incongruity theory posits that humor arises when there is a mismatch between expectation and outcome, logic and absurdity, or formality and informality. Nigerian Pidgin often thrives on this tension, creating humor not just for entertainment but as a

vehicle for moral insight. For instance, the expression “Person wey chit strong chit go still chit otoro” plays on the bodily contrast between hard and watery excreta to illustrate the unpredictability of fortune. The humorous image is incongruous, yet it conveys a profound message: even the seemingly strong can become weak. This humor resembles Pidgin’s ability to mix levity with ethical reflection. Braimoh (2022) supports the application of incongruity theory to Pidgin discourse, explaining that comedians use this mismatch between image and meaning to highlight moral contradictions in Nigerian society. The humor that emerges from these contradictions is not merely for laughter but is a cognitive tool for confronting uncomfortable truths. This aligns with the current study’s use of incongruity to analyze expressions like “No follow person drag generator if your own na ‘I pass my neighbour’,” which humorously critiques social comparison and performative competition through a witty contrast in imagery.

In addition to secondary scholarship, the selected Pidgin texts themselves serve as the basis for conceptual engagement. These texts function as linguistic artifacts that embody moral, cultural, and emotional insight. They are not presented as data to be quantified but as texts to be interpreted and appreciated. For instance, the phrase “Na where we pass come but nor fit pass am go back” uses anatomical metaphor to reflect on the human condition and mortality. The imagery is powerful, humorous, and deeply philosophical. It captures the irreversible nature of time and the limits of human experience, inviting reflection through familiar language. Another illustrative example is “Wetin you dey find for Sokoto, dey your Shokoto,” which functions as wordplay and social commentary. The proximity of “Sokoto” (a city in Northern Nigeria) and “Shokoto” (trousers) creates a humorous phonetic parallel while conveying a moral lesson about self-awareness and misdirected effort. Such expressions are rich in both stylistic ingenuity and ethical weight. They exemplify how NPE is not just a mode of informal speech but a structured system for conveying complex human truths. These four frameworks offer a comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding Nigerian Pidgin English’s stylistic and moral dimensions. Ethnolinguistics situates the language within cultural practice, stylistics analyzes its figurative forms, CDA explores its ideological functions, and incongruity theory reveals its cognitive impact through humor and contradiction. Each framework is applied separately and distinctly, supported by texts that stand independently as units of cultural meaning and scholarly insight.

Literature review

The literature on Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) has grown steadily in recent years, driven by increased recognition of its expressive, cultural, and social functions in formal and informal discourse. Scholars have explored NPE in diverse domains such as media, performance, advertising, identity formation, and national integration. This literature review examines six key works forming the foundation of this study and draws upon the secondary sources they reference

to expand the intellectual scope of the discussion. Each work is treated as a distinct contribution to the academic understanding of NPE, and the review is organized around thematic focuses emerging from these texts. Akande (2010), in his critical article *Is Nigerian Pidgin English English?*, challenges dominant attitudes that marginalize NPE as a corrupt or degraded version of Standard English. He argues that NPE exhibits syntactic, semantic, and lexical rules that qualify it as a fully formed language system. Akande situates NPE within the framework of sociolinguistics, noting that its usage is not limited to the uneducated or lower-class populations but spans across class, ethnic, and generational divides. This work is foundational in establishing the linguistic legitimacy of NPE and dismantling the notion that it is merely substandard English. Akande also references foundational work by Elugbe and Omamor (1991), who describe NPE as a neutral language capable of bridging ethnic divisions in Nigeria. Elugbe and Omamor argue that its evolution has followed a creolization pathway, reinforcing its potential for national adoption. Their work contributes to the ideological positioning of NPE as not just functionally relevant but symbolically unifying.

Osoba (2014), in her study on Nigerian Pidgin in advertising, draws attention to the pragmatic mechanisms that make NPE effective for persuasive communication. She analyzes examples from contemporary advertisements and finds that NPEs' directness, informal tone, and metaphorical density enhance message retention and emotional impact. Osoba's research is critical for understanding the stylistic economy of Pidgin. She references the work of Adegbija (1994), who explores language attitudes in Nigeria and notes the pragmatic vitality of NPE in grassroots communication. Adegbija argues that language use in Nigeria is characterized by high levels of multilingualism and code-switching, with NPE as a flexible informal authority instrument. This framework supports Osoba's contention that Pidgin is uniquely equipped to handle emotionally and ideologically charged content in a way that Standard English often cannot. Motanya (2017) presents an interdisciplinary perspective on NPE by examining its role in the entertainment industry and broader human development. She contends that Pidgin enables artists to express identity, critique injustice, and articulate communal suffering, particularly in music and comedy. Drawing from performance studies, Motanya emphasizes that the aesthetic richness of Pidgin is deeply connected to its oral and performative traditions. Her analysis echoes that of Obafemi (2008), who argues that Nigerian drama and oral performance thrive on linguistic hybridity, particularly the incorporation of Pidgin to reach a wider audience. Obafemi's work is significant because it highlights how language choices in performance carry moral and political weight. He suggests that by using NPE, performers entertain and enact resistance against elitist norms of speech.

Braimoh (2022), in his analysis of Nigerian stand-up comedy, focuses specifically on the stylistic dimensions of NPE. He finds that comedians rely heavily on metaphor, irony, and incongruity to deliver punchlines that resonate intellectually and emotionally with their audience. In this setting,

Pidgin serves as both a communicative tool and a cultural mirror. Braimoh cites Attardo (1994), whose theory of incongruity explains how humor emerges from the violation of expected norms. Attardo's incongruity theory is beneficial for analyzing expressions like "Person wey chit strong chit go still chit otoro," where the surprise twist in imagery generates humor with an embedded moral lesson. Additionally, Braimoh references Chioma (2010), who examines how Nigerian comedians use Pidgin not only for accessibility but as a means of expressing complex social and political commentary. Chioma argues that humor in Pidgin is rarely superficial and often critiques systemic inequality, corruption, and everyday contradictions.

Ofoegbu (2024), writing on creolization and national identity, places NPE at the center of Nigeria's evolving linguistic landscape. He traces its historical emergence and increasing institutional use, arguing that its potential for national adoption lies in its emotional resonance and democratic accessibility. Ofoegbu references the work of Bamgbose (1971), one of Nigeria's foremost linguists, who called for promoting indigenous languages and decolonizing linguistic ideology. Bamgbose warned against the continued privileging of English and argued for language policies that reflect Nigeria's multilingual and multicultural realities. Ofoegbu also draws on Ugot (2009), who studied the role of NPE in political campaigns, concluding that politicians often turn to Pidgin during critical moments in their speeches to establish rapport and emotional connection with grassroots audiences. These secondary references underscore the political and symbolic capital of NPE, positioning it as more than a street language but a tool of national cohesion.

Queen Albert et al. (2020) provide an empirical account of NPE usage in Port Harcourt and its function as a code of identity. Qualitative interviews and discourse analysis show that Pidgin facilitates mutual understanding in a linguistically diverse region and is often used to establish camaraderie, assert authenticity, and reduce social distance. They reference the work of Essien (1990), who documented regional variations in Pidgin across Nigeria, noting that while the core features remain consistent, lexical and phonological variations reflect local influence. Essien's findings reinforce Queen Albert et al.'s conclusion that NPE is both a standardized code and a localizing medium. In addition, they cite Deuber (2005), who argues for the legitimacy of creoles and Pidgin languages in academic and official domains, noting that linguistic legitimacy must be judged by communicative effectiveness, not by colonial standards of grammatical purity. These six core texts and their associated secondary sources form a comprehensive scholarly context for analyzing the selected Pidgin expressions in this study. The literature makes it clear that NPE occupies a complex space: it is informal but profound, humorous yet serious, linguistically hybrid yet internally coherent. Scholars like Akande (2010) and Elugbe and Omamor (1991) help us appreciate its linguistic structure, while authors such as Braimoh (2022) and Attardo (1994) provide tools to unpack its stylistic devices. Researchers like Ofoegbu (2024) and Bamgbose (1971) offer frameworks for understanding its sociopolitical role, and studies by Osoba (2014)

and Adegbija (1994) reveal its pragmatic effectiveness in everyday communication. The aesthetic, cultural, and moral functions of NPE are thus well supported by a diverse body of scholarship, though significant gaps remain.

One such gap is the limited attention paid to individual Pidgin expressions' specific emotional and moral content. Much of the scholarship has focused on structure, identity, or media use, but relatively few studies have analyzed how these expressions function as philosophical texts. This study addresses that gap by interpreting eight Pidgin phrases as both stylistic speech and moral and aesthetic acts. It extends Obafemi's (2008) and Chioma's (2010) arguments by treating everyday Pidgin utterances as oral literature, deserving the same level of critical engagement as more formal forms of expression. Moreover, while studies by Ugot (2009) and Queen Albert et al. (2020) have examined NPE's role in politics and community identity, the literature has yet to deeply consider how such expressions act as ethical instructions and cultural philosophies. For instance, phrases such as "Wetin you dey find for Sokoto, dey your Shokoto" are humorous and philosophically rich, conveying lessons about misplaced ambition, self-awareness, and inner reflection. These expressions carry meaning that surpasses their face value, inviting an interpretive analysis grounded in both stylistic and ethnolinguistic theory.

The literature establishes that Nigerian Pidgin English is a legitimate, dynamic, and culturally embedded language system. Its capacity for metaphor, humor, critique, and moral instruction has been explored across different domains. Still, there remains room for more focused analysis of individual expressions as texts of aesthetic and ethical significance. By building upon and expanding the insights of both the core and secondary sources discussed, this study seeks to contribute a fresh perspective to the ongoing scholarly conversation on Nigerian Pidgin and its central place in Nigerian cultural discourse.

Critical interpretation of Nigerian pidgin expressions

This section provides a thematic and critical interpretation of eight Nigerian Pidgin expressions, treating them as rich texts infused with aesthetic form, cultural insight, and moral messaging. Each phrase is unpacked for its figurative structure and discursive function within Nigerian society. Drawing on stylistics, ethnolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, and incongruity theory, this analysis aims to uncover how these linguistic artifacts embody everyday Nigerian life's philosophical, humorous, and ethical dimensions. Numerous scholars have highlighted Nigerian Pidgin expressions' figurative and moral potency, particularly in proverbs, oral performance, and everyday communication (Igboanusi, 2002; Adejunmobi, 2004; Akindele & Adegbite, 2005). The discussion is divided into four thematic domains, each addressing two expressions corresponding to the sociolinguistic and cultural issues they foreground.

A. Disobedience and Consequence

The first thematic domain explores expressions that foreground the moral consequences of disobedience and rash behavior. These expressions are especially didactic, reflecting communal values and social discipline.

Fly wey nor dey hear word, e go follow dead body enter grave.

This expression serves as a cautionary proverb with a highly visual metaphor. It compares a stubborn individual to a fly that refuses to heed warnings, ultimately sealing its fate by following a corpse into the grave. Using both hyperbole and allegory, this construction is a classic form of what Orji (2011) calls "moral compression" in African proverbs, where complex ethical principles are condensed into memorable metaphors. Using a fly and a dead body situates this expression in a moral universe shaped by communal discipline and the weight of consequence. The phrase operates as an indirect scolding and preventive moral tool, particularly in parenting or mentorship contexts. This aligns with Bamiro's (1994) view of African Pidgin as a "didactic vehicle" that enforces social order through figurative speech. In his exploration of Ghanaian and Nigerian Pidgin forms, Bamiro suggests that metaphors in Pidgin are not ornamental but utilitarian, designed to enforce norms without overt aggression.

Forget, that one don enter omila moto.

This statement reflects resignation in the face of irreversible events. The phrase draws on the image of an "omila moto," a metaphorical fast-moving or uncontrollable bus, to represent situations that are beyond retrieval. While humorous, the phrase carries undertones of fatalism and emotional detachment, often used when someone has made a poor decision or when an outcome is no longer within human control. The figurative power of vehicle metaphors in Nigerian Pidgin has been discussed by Egbokhare (2001), who argues that transportation metaphors in Pidgin and indigenous languages often carry dual meanings of journey and destiny. In this phrase, the loss of agency is represented in the irreversible momentum of the "omila moto," thereby capturing a communal philosophy that accepts the limits of human intervention in fate.

B. Judgment, Change, and Humility

The second thematic cluster addresses moral relativism, status instability, and humility's ethical imperative.

Person wey chit strong chit go still chit otoro.

A starkly metaphorical expression, this phrase employs scatological imagery to emphasize that those currently strong or dominant may one day falter. "Chit strong chit" refers to hard excreta, symbolizing current strength or confidence, while "otoro" (watery excreta) suggests weakness or

loss. The metaphor taps into bodily functions to communicate the inevitability of reversal and the unpredictability of fortune. This is a classic instance of what Onwuejeogwu (1995) describes as "existential metaphor" in Nigerian orature, using the inescapable realities of the human body to anchor philosophical reflection. Incongruity theory is particularly relevant here, as the humor and discomfort elicited by the expression heighten its cognitive and moral impact. Attardo (1994) maintains that the clash between expected decorum and actual imagery forces reflection through surprise. The use of bodily metaphor makes the moral lesson unforgettable, a technique also noted by Chioma (2010) in her study on Pidgin's comedic and pedagogic use in performance spaces.

Common sense nor common.

This paradoxical statement is one of Nigerian discourse's most popular and widely used phrases. It critiques the assumption that basic reasoning is universally shared. The phrase employs a tautological structure to expose contradiction. As Nwachukwu-Agbada (1993) observes, this paradox functions as a "conceptual trap," luring the listener into a familiar thought only to challenge it. The expression critiques irrationality and the failure of social reasoning, often directed at political figures, stubborn individuals, or reckless youths. Osoba (2014) highlights this phrase in her analysis of Pidgin in advertising, where it functions as a strategic rhetorical device for moral persuasion. She shows how the phrase implies responsibility while avoiding direct accusation, thereby maintaining the speaker's moral authority without confrontation.

C. Experience, Context, and Empathy

These expressions emphasize the value of lived experience and contextual understanding, challenging superficial judgment and promoting compassion.

Who nor go, nor know.

A minimalist but profound declaration, this phrase affirms the primacy of personal experience in acquiring proper knowledge. It encapsulates the Yoruba concept of "iriri" (experience as wisdom), but rephrased in Pidgin for universal accessibility. As Oha (1998) notes in his study on proverbs in African speech, brevity often enhances the authority of a statement. This expression functions almost like an epistemological axiom, invoking the authority of direct contact over abstract understanding. Queen Albert et al. (2020) observed similar linguistic constructions in their Port Harcourt fieldwork, where Pidgin speakers deployed short, experiential proverbs to challenge outsiders' opinions. The expression reflects a distrust of theoretical knowledge in favor of grounded understanding, a view reinforced by Adegbija (1987), who found that experiential authority was a central feature in Nigerian oral reasoning.

The same moto wey kpai John na him carry him brother go Sapele.

This expression embodies moral ambiguity and situational ethics. While it acknowledges the destructive potential of the car (which killed John), it also affirms its usefulness (as it takes his brother to Sapele). This double-edged metaphor challenges binary moral judgments and reflects what Achebe (1975) described as “a second story underneath the first”—a narrative strategy in Igbo and Nigerian storytelling where contradiction deepens meaning. This aligns with what Emenyonu (2007) identified as moral layering in oral traditions, where one object can symbolize danger and necessity. In Pidgin, this layering occurs within tight semantic and syntactic frames, allowing the speaker to evoke deep complexity with linguistic economy.

D. Taboo, Sexuality, and Social Commentary

These final expressions address issues of sexuality and shame, utilizing euphemism, humor, and symbolic abstraction to navigate taboo topics.

Na where we pass come but nor fit pass am go back.

This metaphor is both anatomical and philosophical. Referring to the birth canal, it reflects on the irreversibility of time and experience. While seemingly vulgar, the expression functions as a coded form of existential wisdom. It also aligns with the African narrative convention of treating birth and death as boundary events with shared symbolic meaning. Akindele and Adegbite (2005) note that African languages frequently use anatomical metaphors to address transitions and transformations in life. They argue that euphemism allows complex topics to be discussed in culturally appropriate ways. The humor in the expression does not diminish its depth; rather, it enhances reflection through comfort and accessibility.

E don tear the girl leaf with him wood.

This highly metaphorical phrase is a euphemism for sexual penetration. "Leaf" and "wood" symbolize the vagina and penis respectively, creating an earthy yet imaginative visual. This metaphor supports what Essien (1990) described as “semantic substitution for modesty” in African linguistic traditions. Such expressions maintain communal decorum while allowing conversation about private matters. The metaphor also carries implications of agency, consent, and gender roles, depending on context. Deuber (2005) observed that creole and pidgin languages often develop euphemisms not only to avoid taboo but also to regulate sexual discourse within culturally accepted boundaries. The phrase can thus be interpreted as both a linguistic innovation and a social commentary.

Synthesis

Across these thematic clusters, a consistent feature of Nigerian Pidgin expressions is their capacity to blend moral clarity with aesthetic form. The figurative tools of metaphor,

euphemism, paradox, and allegory transform simple phrases into vessels of ethical instruction. In most cases, humor serves not to trivialize but to amplify reflection, working through incongruity to challenge, provoke, and teach. This stylistic economy is critical to the oral nature of Pidgin expression, where brevity, rhythm, and memorability are essential. As Ogu (1992) argues, Pidgin's performative and pragmatic strength lies in its ability to condense communal wisdom into formulaic utterances. The expressions analyzed in this study support this view, demonstrating how NPE carries cultural and moral insight that resonates more powerfully than equivalent expressions in Standard English. These expressions also offer resistance to elitist language norms. By prioritizing local idioms and philosophical realism, Pidgin becomes a tool for reclaiming cultural identity. This aligns with Bamgbose's (1971) call for linguistic decolonization, where indigenous expressions of meaning are affirmed as intellectually and morally valid.

Findings

Analyzing the eight selected Nigerian Pidgin expressions has yielded several significant findings that underscore the linguistic richness, cultural depth, and ethical utility of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) as a communicative and philosophical medium. The study reveals that far from being a rudimentary or informal language, NPE functions as a sophisticated system of meaning-making, capable of expressing complex moral, emotional, and social realities with precision and nuance.

First, the findings demonstrate that Nigerian Pidgin operates as a reservoir of collective wisdom, where everyday expressions function as oral literature. Each phrase analyzed in this study serves as a compressed form of cultural knowledge, drawing on shared metaphors, rhythms, and idioms that are contextually rich and aesthetically compelling. The linguistic economy observed in expressions such as "Who nor go, nor know" and "Common sense nor common" exemplifies the Pidgin speaker's ability to distill profound truths into short, memorable utterances. This aligns with observations by scholars such as Orji (2011) and Adegbija (1994), who have noted that African languages' poetic and philosophical dimensions are embedded in their use of proverbs and proverbial speech. The use of metaphor and allegory across these expressions also supports the claim that NPE has a distinct stylistic system that rivals formal literary forms in its capacity to encode meaning.

Second, the findings establish that Nigerian Pidgin is a language deeply grounded in morality. Many of the expressions analyzed serve explicitly didactic purposes. They function as instruction, correction, and reflection tools, often addressing themes such as humility, consequence, disobedience, experience, and fate. The language does not merely reflect culture; it actively participates in shaping behavioral norms and societal values. For instance, the expression "Fly wey nor dey hear word, e go follow dead body enter grave" is more than a

warning; it is a pedagogical device meant to internalize the consequences of defiance. These texts reflect what Bamiro (1994) and Emenyonu (2007) describe as the moral architecture of African oral traditions, in which speech acts are as much about social guidance as they are about information exchange.

Third, the analysis highlights the strategic use of figurative language in conveying moral and cultural insight. Metaphor, euphemism, paradox, and irony are employed not simply for decoration but for functional and cognitive purposes. These devices allow speakers to discuss sensitive topics, such as sexuality or failure, without resorting to explicit or confrontational language. The expression “E don tear the girl leaf with him wood,” for example, makes use of vivid natural imagery to approach a sexual topic while maintaining a layer of social discretion. This finding confirms assertions by Essien (1990) and Akindele and Adegbite (2005), who argue that euphemism in African languages is not merely about modesty but also about managing social relationships and maintaining communal harmony.

A further finding is that humor in NPE is often inseparable from critique. The incongruity found in expressions like “Person wey chit strong chit go still chit otoro” provokes laughter while simultaneously delivering a warning about the fragility of status and the inevitability of human vulnerability. This dual function of humor, as both cognitive dissonance and moral strategy, affirms the claims of Attardo (1994) and Braimoh (2022), who maintain that incongruity in humor is especially effective in delivering social and ethical commentary. By embedding critique within laughter, Nigerian Pidgin achieves what Standard English often cannot: a mode of critique that is accessible, engaging, and reflective rather than confrontational.

The study also finds that NPE’s emotional and cultural resonance arises from its embeddedness in lived experience. Expressions such as “Na where we pass come but nor fit pass am go back” are grounded in human anatomy and universal truths, drawing on bodily metaphors that resonate with all speakers regardless of educational or linguistic background. The power of such expressions lies in their ability to be both specific and universal, both local and deeply human. As noted by Ofoegbu (2024) and Queen Albert et al. (2020), this emotional resonance is one of the reasons why NPE has gained such widespread cultural legitimacy and remains a vital language of identity, especially in urban and multicultural spaces.

Finally, the findings confirm that Nigerian Pidgin is not merely a communicative tool but a cultural philosophy. It articulates a worldview in which knowledge is experiential, truth is layered, and morality is taught through metaphor. The expressions discussed are not random colloquialisms but structured linguistic texts that convey a distinctly Nigerian way of understanding the world. This repositions Nigerian Pidgin from the margins of language use to the center of cultural expression and philosophical thought. It challenges colonial language legitimacy hierarchies and affirms indigenous linguistic systems' intellectual and ethical depth.

The findings reinforce the central argument of this study: that Nigerian Pidgin English is a “soul language,” capable of articulating the deepest fears, hopes, lessons, and contradictions of Nigerian life through its aesthetic, moral, and figurative features. These findings call for reconsidering Pidgin not as a linguistic compromise but as a sophisticated, culturally saturated mode of human expression.

Contribution to research

This study makes several significant contributions to the growing body of research on Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), particularly in stylistics, cultural linguistics, and discourse studies. It positions NPE not merely as a linguistic variety or communication tool but as a reservoir of moral reasoning, aesthetic performance, and cultural philosophy. By examining selected Pidgin expressions as culturally significant texts rather than informal speech acts, the study pushes the boundaries of how NPE is typically theorized and represented in academic discourse.

One of the core contributions of this research is its reframing of NPE expressions as philosophical and stylistic texts. While prior studies have investigated Pidgin's communicative and pragmatic functions in domains such as media, entertainment, and politics, relatively few have treated individual Pidgin phrases as units of moral and aesthetic meaning. This study fills that gap by offering a thematic and stylistic analysis of eight expressions that capture a wide spectrum of Nigerian experiences, ranging from social critique and parental guidance to moral ambiguity and cultural taboos. By focusing on the internal structure of these expressions, their metaphors, euphemisms, paradoxes, and allegories, this study contributes to stylistic linguistics by showing that NPE has its literary forms, parallel to those found in classical proverbs or written literature.

In doing so, the study challenges dominant linguistic ideologies that view Pidgin as an inferior or corrupted form of English. Instead, it supports the view advanced by Akande (2010) and Ofoegbu (2024) that Pidgin is a legitimate language system with its own rules, aesthetics, and expressive depth. This contribution is significant in a context where language hierarchy is still strongly influenced by colonial epistemologies that privilege Standard English as the default mode of rational and intellectual discourse. By illustrating how Pidgin can be used to deliver moral instruction, express emotional nuance, and address complex philosophical ideas, this research strengthens the case for recognizing NPE as an intellectual and cultural resource in its own right.

Furthermore, this study contributes to theorizing African languages as ethical systems. Using a combination of ethnolinguistics, stylistics, discourse analysis, and incongruity theory, the paper demonstrates how Nigerian Pidgin acts not only as a communicative code but also as a moral register. The expressions analyzed are not simply descriptive; they are normative, designed to guide behavior, regulate social interactions, and provoke reflection. In doing so, the study builds

upon the insights of scholars like Orji (2011), Bamgbose (1971), and Adegbija (1994). Still, it extends their work by offering detailed textual analysis of specific expressions and interpreting them as microcosms of cultural logic and ethical reasoning. The research also adds to the understanding of humor as a medium of critical pedagogy in Nigerian society. By showing how laughter and discomfort generated through metaphor and incongruity function as tools of social education, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between language, cognition, and moral development. This directly expands on the theories of Attardo (1994) and Chioma (2010), who have argued that humor in Pidgin is often laced with social critique. The analysis affirms that expressions such as “Person wey chit strong chit go still chit otoro” or “No follow person drag generator if your own na ‘I pass my neighbour’” do more than entertain; they teach, question, and satirize.

This work also advances scholarship on linguistic identity and postcolonial language practices by emphasizing the role of NPE in articulating a distinctively Nigerian worldview. The expressions studied are steeped in local history, embodied experience, and communal reasoning. In treating them as legitimate texts of cultural memory and social knowledge, this study contributes to decolonizing language study by centering indigenous modes of expression as vehicles of thought, not just vernacular communication. This supports the claims of Elugbe and Omamor (1991) and Queen Albert et al. (2020) that Nigerian Pidgin serves not only as a lingua franca but also as a symbol of collective identity and social cohesion. In practical terms, this study has implications for language policy, curriculum design, and civic education. The moral and stylistic value of NPE expressions suggests that they can be integrated into school curricula, public campaigns, and creative industries to enhance engagement and cultural authenticity. By recognizing and utilizing the aesthetic and moral depth of NPE, educators and policymakers can develop more inclusive and culturally relevant approaches to instruction, particularly in civic and ethical education. In this way, the study contributes to academic theory and broader conversations about language, identity, and development in multilingual societies.

Finally, the research contributes to interdisciplinary methodologies in African linguistics and cultural studies. Drawing on tools from stylistics, ethnography, philosophy of language, and humor theory, it models a holistic approach to analyzing African languages sensitive to form, function, emotion, and ethics. The thematic organization of the analysis offers a replicable structure for future research into the poetic and moral power of other indigenous languages and registers. This study contributes to research by elevating Nigerian Pidgin from the margins of linguistic scholarship to the center of philosophical, moral, and stylistic inquiry. It reclaims everyday expressions as texts of cultural knowledge, reframes humor as ethical engagement, and affirms the capacity of Pidgin to carry the soul of a people, morally, aesthetically, and intellectually.

Future research

The conclusions reached in this study present fertile grounds for extended academic inquiry, particularly across intercultural communication, translation studies, and theological hermeneutics. While this paper has focused on the aesthetic and moral significance of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) expressions, future studies can broaden the scope to include how figurative, ethical, and context-bound expressions function in multilingual or interculturally sensitive environments. One promising direction lies in the intersection of cultural translation and moral narrative framing, especially when African expressions are rendered into or interpreted within Western linguistic frameworks. The study by Onomejoh et al. (2024) on *Navigating Cultural Sensitivity in Translation* highlights the importance of interpersonal and cultural competence in translating emotionally and morally charged narratives. The authors suggest that translators need more than lexical equivalence; they must demonstrate empathy, awareness of socio-historical context, and the ability to manage interpersonal dynamics embedded within texts. Therefore, Future research might examine how specific Nigerian Pidgin expressions, such as those dealing with taboo, shame, or philosophical reflection, are retained or distorted when translated across cultures. It also opens space for further empirical exploration of ethical training for translators working with culturally loaded materials.

Likewise, Ehigie (2025), in *Negligence of Exegesis and Embracing Eisegesis*, raises concerns about the increasing tendency within African hermeneutical spaces to approach sacred texts through the lens of personal opinion rather than contextual or historically grounded interpretation. His reflections provide a strong impetus for further research into how African cultural expressions, including idioms, proverbs, and metaphors from Pidgin, inform or distort theological understanding. Future studies might explore the implications of such figurative expressions in homiletics or religious pedagogy, especially how scripture is reinterpreted for modern audiences in African congregational contexts. Another avenue for investigation is the role of intercultural pragmatics in literary texts, especially in comparative studies between African Pidgin and other contact languages. Building on the insights of scholars like Ehigie and Onomejoh et al., future researchers could explore how figurative speech rooted in African ontologies is interpreted, received, or misinterpreted in multicultural literary settings. For example, one could examine how expressions such as “Fly wey nor dey hear word...” are understood by second-language users of English or adapted in diasporic African literature.

Furthermore, there is scope for pedagogical research into how these moral and aesthetic Pidgin expressions can be integrated into educational curricula at various levels. Civic education, ethics, and literature classes could benefit from structured engagement with these expressions for linguistic enrichment and their cultural and philosophical content. Such integration would help formalize what is often left in the domain of informal knowledge, thereby reinforcing cultural continuity and self-awareness among younger Nigerians. Future research should continue to

explore the ethical, interpretive, and translational implications of Nigerian Pidgin as a culturally saturated language. It should also take the challenge of navigating figurative and moral content across languages, disciplines, and interpretive frameworks, drawing from works such as Onomejoh et al. (2024) and Ehigie (2025) as foundational lenses.

Conclusion

This study has explored the aesthetic and moral dimensions of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) by analyzing eight culturally rich expressions that function as linguistic vessels of ethical instruction, humour, and social commentary. Grounded in ethnolinguistic, stylistic, critical discourse, and incongruity theories, the research has shown that these expressions are not mere colloquialisms but complex cultural texts that reflect Nigeria's moral fabric, communal values, and philosophical orientation. Each phrase examined in the analysis reveals the layered meaning and figurative sophistication that Nigerian Pidgin affords, demonstrating its capacity to articulate profound truths in accessible, emotionally resonant, and stylistically inventive ways. The findings affirm that NPE serves multiple roles: it is a didactic tool, a medium of communal critique, a vehicle for emotional expression, and a conduit of cultural continuity. Its metaphors, proverbs, and euphemisms allow speakers to address sensitive, personal, and even spiritual topics in culturally appropriate and rhetorically effective ways. Far from being a degraded form of English, as it has often been mischaracterized, Nigerian Pidgin emerges from this study as a language of substance, capable of philosophical thought, moral reasoning, and artistic expression.

By positioning these expressions as philosophical texts, the study contributes to existing literature on African linguistics, oral tradition, and stylistic analysis, while challenging the ideological hierarchies that have historically marginalized indigenous linguistic forms. It also opens up new conversations in translation ethics, intercultural pragmatics, and hermeneutics, inviting scholars to consider how languages like NPE can inform or reshape global understandings of morality, aesthetics, and communication. Ultimately, this work affirms that Nigerian Pidgin is more than a practical lingua franca; it is a soul language, deeply embedded in the lived experience of its speakers, rich with metaphor, humor, and wisdom. As such, it deserves greater scholarly attention, institutional recognition, and cultural celebration, not only for what it communicates but for how it embodies the Nigerian people's spirit, struggle, and creativity.

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