

## Double Consciousness: Migrants' Experiences in Divergent Cultural Spaces

By

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### Abstract

Migration and its consequences for individuals and societies remain a dominant thematic concern in contemporary African creative writing, as seen in the works of Tanure Ojaide, Isidore Okpewho, Chris Abani, Nnedi Okorafor, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Chika Unigwe, among others. While earlier studies have examined migration in relation to identity crisis and cultural integration, limited attention has been given to the lived reality of double consciousness among African migrants. This paper, therefore, investigates the concept of double consciousness in Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and Unigwe's *Better Never than Late*, with particular emphasis on the struggles African migrants encounter within divergent cultural spaces. Guided by an interpretive design and grounded in W.E.B. Du Bois' conceptualisation of double consciousness, the selected texts were subjected to critical analysis. Findings reveal that African migrants in the diaspora wrestle with fragmented identities and a persistent sense of *twoness*, consistent with postcolonial discourses on "otherness" and "hybridity". These struggles manifest across intersections of gender, race, and class, and are further complicated by issues of belonging, stereotyping, social exclusion, racial discrimination, and class disparity. The study concludes that contemporary literary works serve as crucial platforms for foregrounding migrants' psychological and social experiences, illuminating the profound impact of transnational movement on the individual and the cultural contexts they inhabit.

**Keywords:** Migration, double consciousness, twoness, post colonialism

### Introduction

Migration is far more than a physical relocation from one geographical area to another; it is a profound psychological, cultural, and existential journey that frequently disrupts and reshapes an individual's sense of self. For many migrants, especially those navigating Western societies, the encounter with new cultural expectations, social hierarchies, and racialised structures generates complex internal negotiations of identity. This experience often aligns with what has been described as a "divided self", a condition closely associated with W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness. Du Bois uses

the term to describe the tension of perceiving oneself simultaneously through one's own cultural lens and through the gaze of a dominant, often oppressive, external world. For migrants, this duality becomes a lived reality—a continual balancing act between preserving one's cultural heritage and adapting to the demands and perceptions of the host society.

African migrants in particular face this tension in acute ways. They depart their homelands with deeply ingrained histories, languages, values, and social structures, yet upon arrival in the West, they are confronted with new cultural norms and racial ideologies that frequently redefine or diminish their identity. These encounters can lead to internal conflict, cultural displacement, and a heightened awareness of how they are perceived by others. The need to conform to dominant cultural expectations—whether for social acceptance, economic survival, or upward mobility—often pressures migrants to negotiate, suppress, or modify aspects of their authentic selves. This constant oscillation between identities captures the essence of double consciousness: the struggle to reconcile one's original cultural grounding with the imposed identity shaped by the host society.

Contemporary African writers have increasingly used fiction to document and interrogate these migrant realities. Through their narratives, authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Chika Unigwe illuminate the psychological burdens, social struggles, and silent negotiations that define the diasporic condition. Although numerous scholarly works have explored migration, identity crisis, and cultural integration, very few have approached these narratives explicitly through Du Bois' framework of double consciousness. This paper, therefore, examines Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and Unigwe's *Better Never than Late*, analysing how both texts portray migrants' experiences of *twoness* and the broader implications of navigating divergent cultural spaces. By doing so, the study offers a deeper understanding of how contemporary African literature articulates the complexities of identity, belonging, and self-perception in an increasingly transnational world.

## **Literature Review**

Double consciousness is a concept in social philosophy referring to 'twoness', originally referring to African Americans because of their experiences of racial oppression and identity disorder in a racially dominated society. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, a notable scholar, pioneered the term double consciousness when he used it in his work, *The Soul of the Black Folk* (1903). He describes double consciousness as follows:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a particular sensation, this double

consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder ( p. 215).

This excerpt reveals the complexity of the concept. Double-consciousness is identified as a peculiar sensation, a consciousness of one's self, but which fails to meet up to a unified, true self-consciousness. Du Bois' theory of Double consciousness shares almost the same similarity with African American Studies. As stated by *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2016):

Its source has been traced back from there, by recent commentators, to the development of clinical psychology in the nineteenth-century North Atlantic, and to trends in idealist philosophies of self – the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is thus indirectly related to other nineteenth- and twentieth-century riffs on Hegelian themes, such as false consciousness and bad faith. In our day it continues to be used by numerous commentators on racialized cultures, societies, and literatures; by cultural and literary theorists; and by students and researchers of Africana Philosophy. Recent philosophical debates center on the significance of the concept for Du Bois's thought overall, its theoretical coherence, and its relevance given current social conditions (p. 1)

Du Bois suggests that the explanation for black people's understanding of their identity—double consciousness—depends on how they believe white people view them. The basic premise of Du Bois' theory is crucial to understanding how the theory affects the main female characters' perceptions of themselves and others in Adichie (2009) and Unigwes' (2019) short fiction. Du Bois' theory applies to many situations outside the obvious perception of racial identity. This dissertation explores how W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness affects the female protagonist, and the experiences of Africans in diaspora and how double consciousness helps to construct the short story's analysis of the theme of existential disorder and the quest to infuse or acculturate in a racial environment.

The term "African American" implies an identity split between that of an African and that of an American because white people, or simply "Americans," will not allow black people to be just Americans; instead, they must identify as African Americans. Du Bois is not the only academic to have thought about this dual identity of African Americans. Frantz Fanon touched upon the term of double consciousness in his time. Fanon describes the dual consciousness that African Americans

experience and its origins in his first work, *Black Skin, White Mask*, where he also voiced his dissatisfaction at being neither white nor black. He asserts that:

The cultural and social confusions of African Americans were caused by European culture. He gave examples of things that he has encountered that demonstrate the double consciousness. He talks about people who preach about completely conforming to being white and says that they are wrong. He also says that the people who believe that complete rejection of whites are also wrong (p. 58)

He then goes on to discuss why it is that black people embrace civilizations that seem so foreign to them. He describes how Black Caribbean people speak a distinct language when they return after their travels in Europe. He also discusses the fears many Africans, particularly the wealthiest among them, have about not being European enough just because they are African. Purchasing European clothing and furniture is one way that this shows up. Furthermore, he discusses how white men's interactions with African Americans exacerbate the issue of double awareness. According to him, when a white man converses with an African American man, he is adopting a vocabulary comparable to that of a stereotypical black man. He says that this angers the African American because he feels as though he has been categorized and imprisoned into a box from which he cannot escape due to this judgment. He gives an example of a film where this stereotype is portrayed and then talks about how African Americans need to be educated not to follow the stereotypes displayed by white culture. To illustrate the concept of Double consciousness further, Tyson (2006) while exploring Homi Bhabha's concept of "Unhomeliness, describes it as the experience of being trapped between cultures, belonging to neither group, and feeling like a psychological refugee. This concept highlights the complexities of identity, culture, and belonging in postcolonial contexts." By examining this view, we are exposed to how intricate its purpose is. Double-consciousness is defined as having a "double vision," or a consciousness of oneself that is divided between the cultures of the colonised and the colonisers, two opposing groups. Baldwin agrees with Du Bois and tackles related topics in his 1951 essay "Stranger in the Village," which assesses:

How and why black racial identity (and identity as a whole) is split in two. Baldwin asserts that slavery stripped away black identity because when slaves were taken from Africa, the whites who enslaved them denied blacks their cultural history (p.169).

Stated differently, black people who were brought to the United States lost a portion of their cultural customs, history, and beliefs. Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier states that they had no choice but to create a "motive for living under American culture or die" (qtd. in Baldwin 170). Du Bois posits a second identity that resulted from this forced absorption into the American identity. Because of this,

Black Americans were compelled to measure themselves not by their own standards but by those of White Americans; to thrive in American culture, Black Americans had to live up to White expectations and see themselves through the prism of the dominant race. Since its coinage, double consciousness has received quite a lot of criticism both for and against. These critiques have emphasised different issues in diverse ways in attempting to interpret the notion of double consciousness and its consequences for black people in America. In his writing about this dual identity, Du Bois emphasises that an African-American wants to be accepted as both an American and an African, not lose any of the two. He states that his goal is to make it possible for men to be both Black and American without facing discrimination or having their doors to opportunity slammed in their faces (p. 5).

African-Americans have made economic contributions to the United States and fought for their country, only to face discrimination and be denied access to jobs and education. In his explanation of what it means to be both African American and Black, Moore claims that being a Black, African American, or colored person or belonging to a cultural lineage originating in Africa defines one as a Negro. Being black with skin pigmentation and having a mental affinity for white people and European culture is what it means to be American (2005, p. 752). Although Gilroy (1993) focuses on the British environment, which is comparable to that of America, he also discusses double consciousness in *The Black Atlantic*.

Like Dubois, Gilroy encourages being both an African and an American. He does concede that to be accepted as both requires a lot of effort and commitment, as he claims that, “Striving to be both European and black requires some specific form of double consciousness” (p. 1). Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993) can also be a useful theoretical text for any work that deals with double consciousness. Evans (2009) concurs that:

Gilroy’s comparative reading of black British and African American cultural production brings into his argument another kind of duality, presenting just one example of a theoretical framework structured around the idea of —double consciousness (p.255-256).

Gilroy’s comparison of both black British and African American situations as Evans has indicated, can be substantiated by similar experiences of black people in both America and Europe, which can be attributed to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, slavery, and racial segregation to which black people were subjected. Also in both scenarios, double consciousness causes white people to perceive black people as subhuman, inferior, and insignificant. Related to the latter, according to Dubois, there is something unusual in having a double consciousness, constantly viewing oneself through the eyes of others, and gauging one’s soul against the standards of a world that observes with mocking disdain and sympathy (p. 5). In addition to highlighting the alienation that Black Americans experience, my research exposes the conflicting ways in which Black creative writers have portrayed Black cultural resistance. How black people are looked at and negatively remarked upon does make

black people believe that what white people say and see is true. It also leads African-Americans into being segregated racially by white people whose hatred for black people started years immemorial. Voicing his dislike for the above, Moore(2005) avers that:

It is not psychologically healthy to measure your worth through the eyes of others. Moreover, it is not psychologically healthy to be denied full expression of your blackness or manhood in a white dominated society (p.753).

Black Americans who were segregated based on their race in America suffer from morbid illnesses. Beyond his earlier remarks, Du Bois offers a more cogent explanation of double consciousness:

Work, culture, liberty, all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster that swims before the Negro people, the idea of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of a race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American soil two world's races may give each to each those characteristics both sadly lack (p. 11).

While the above quote emphasises freedom from racial segregation, it also stresses the significance of unity among both black and white people. It also implores the African-Americans and Americans not to focus on their racial differences and hatred, but to use their talents in growing the American economy, political stability, social stability and equality for all. Dubois' explanation of double consciousness underscores the notion of brotherhood and oneness for the benefit of American society without losing black identities. Brotherhood suggests a feeling of camaraderie and unity for a common purpose, while oneness implies sameness of political aspirations among blacks. This study seeks to explore the ways African-Americans have moved beyond the entrapment in the duality of identities of being black and American. Also, it argues that there are other identities based on class, sexism, and the acquisition of education which the idea of double consciousness is inadequate to represent. In relation to the above, this study agrees with Neal (2000) who says that, "The problem of living in racist society, therefore, is something that lurks on the immediate horizon, but which cannot be dealt with until certain political, social and spiritual truths are understood by the oppressed themselves inwardly understood" (p. 75).

Neal meant to tell that racism will not just disappear, but African-Americans must fight in different ways to end their marginalisation in America. He says African-Americans should accept and know that they were taken from Africa and made slaves. That they are black and live in a white dominated society where a black person is seen as sub-human and insignificant. And that black people need to

believe in themselves, accept who they are, and be ready to liberate and fight racism in American society.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the complexities of double consciousness in the migrant experience, as conceptualized by W.E.B. Du Bois. The study engaged a literary analysis applied to selected short stories from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and Chika Unigwe's *Better Never Than Late* (2019).

The selection of these literary works is purposeful. Adichie and Unigwe are both acclaimed Nigerian diasporic authors whose narratives frequently engage with themes of migration, identity, and the psychological impact of displacement. This method of analysis is used to deconstruct and interpret how the concept of double consciousness that is, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others is represented in the characters' thoughts and actions.

### **Double consciousness in Adichie and Unigwe's Short Fiction**

Unigwe's *Better Never than Late* reveals several conditions or elements that interrogate the legacies of colonialism and explore the complexities of identity and cultural hybridity. Unigwe examines the persistence of colonial power dynamics in contemporary Nigerian society, particularly through the character of Gbolahan, who struggles with the expectations placed upon him as a Nigerian immigrant in Belgium. Gbolahan, Agu, Prosperous face discrimination, language barriers that reflect the enduring influence of colonial hierarchies and prejudices. The complexities of cultural identity and the experiences of living between two cultural worlds are also explored through the characters Agu and Prosperous and their other Nigerian friends. They often grapple with the tensions between their Nigerian heritage and their integration into Belgian society.

The story also touches upon the intersections of gender and postcolonial dynamics. Unigwe portrays the challenges faced by women, particularly Nigerian women, in upholding cultural traditions while navigating the expectations and pressures of Western societies. This examination highlights how postcolonial systems perpetuate gender inequalities and shape the experiences of immigrant women. Unigwe uses language as a tool to explore power dynamics and as a means of resistance against the legacies of colonialism. Agu and Prosperous are not only unable to use their Nigerian-earned qualifications in Belgium, but the language barrier also forces them to take jobs that are beneath them, as revealed:

Prosperous laughs when she recounts – as she often does to her friends – the heady expectations of their early days. I thought they'd take one look at our degrees and offer us jobs on the spot. Company cars, a company house with a massive lawn, a butler and a chef. Agu never

talks of those days. It is as if the weight of remembering is too much for him to bear, but Prosperous doesn't want to forget. Remembering keeps her on her toes. (p.23)

*Better Never than Late* also delves into themes of homecoming and diaspora, which explains the issues of identity crisis and cultural integration. The desire of Nigerian immigrants to reconnect with their homeland and the complexities they face when navigating their dual identities. Unigwe highlights the tension between the desire for familiarity and the realities of a changed home country, shedding light on the impact of colonial legacies on the idea of "home" as recounted thus:

On the day of Jordi's funeral, a woman she knew from church had actually told her, I know how you feel. No, you don't, Oge had snapped, turning her back on the woman. Sometimes at night, she wished for the comfort of something familiar, her old bed in Enugu, her mother's jollof rice, her father's hand in hers. One morning, she got up, dressed and walked to the travel agency on Gasthuisstraat and bought a ticket to Nigeria before she could change her mind. (p. 19)

Double consciousness, or the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois 3), is an explanation for the black perception of identity, which Du Bois argues is dependent on how black citizens think whites perceive them. Du Bois' theory applies to many situations outside the obvious perception of racial identity, and its basic assertion plays a critical role in Unigwe's *Never than Late* (2019) short stories through its effects on the main female character's perception of herself and others.

W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness affects protagonist Prosperous' perception of her own identity as well as her perception of her husband's, Agu's identity. It also highlights how double consciousness helps to construct the short stories' commentary on the issues of identity crisis. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness is deeply rooted in the experiences of black citizens in a country dominated by whites. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois originally sought to answer the question of how it feels to "be a problem" (p.2), as Du Bois believes blacks are viewed as a problem in a society dominated by whites. Du Bois concludes that because blacks are so disdained, they are "gifted with a second-sight in this American world, — a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (p.3). This "second-sight"—double consciousness—comes from white society forcing blacks to judge blacks using white standards that view blacks with "contempt and pity" (p. 3)

In *Cleared for Take-off*, the crisis begins with Gbolahan's daughter's perception of her own racial identity and her identity as a whole.

When I grow up, I'm going to be a teacher, Papa,' Bola told me as I walked her to school. 'But first, I have to be white, right?' The world



stopped. She sounded so proud of herself that it broke my heart. 'Sweetie, you don't have to be white to be anything,' I said. Where was this coming from? She put her arms on her waist and said earnestly, 'Of course you have to be white, Papa. Have you ever seen a black teacher?' (p. 63)

Although Bola desires to be a teacher but she feels that she must first become white before she can become a teacher. This is because the general notion in Turnhout is that it is usually very difficult to see a black migrant secure standard jobs there as they are mostly seen doing other substandard jobs.

Prosperous prides herself in the kind of life she had lived back in her home country, which is in total contrast to that of Belgium. She suffers an internal crisis as she watches her marriage gradually deteriorating and her husband's inability to perceive the decline in love and commitment of her once gladsome marriage. Despite this internal conflict, her husband Agu continues to act like a stereotypical black man whose mentality is that the woman's place is in the kitchen, unfortunately, is not the case before migrating to Belgium, as revealed in the lines:

In the old days, they would have been doing this together: the cooking and the dancing and the kissing in between. Now, even when she asks, he says he's too tired to help. (p.22)

Du Bois' theory of double consciousness affects Prosperous' perception of herself through its effect on her racial identity. Prosperous knows that European Americans consider her to be black based on her racial heritage, and so Prosperous does not attempt to go against this label. She had high expectations, which were soon dashed on arrival at Belgium. This is partly about the overall negative perception that whites have of blacks, as seen in the following lines:

-the heady expectations of their early days. I thought they'd take one look at our degrees and offer us jobs on the spot. Company cars, a company house with a massive lawn, a butler and a chef. Agu never talks of those days. It is as if the weight of remembering is too much for him to bear, but Prosperous doesn't want to forget. Remembering keeps her on her toes. (p.22)

Although Prosperous may once in a while pass into the white world, where she can exercise the rights of European Americans, like attending some social functions such as the marriage between Tine and Godwin, she, however, stays within the black community because she knows that passing is dangerous. Equally as Prosperous perception of her identity is the character of Gwachi and Godwin's perception of their acceptance into the social and economic system of the whites through the medium of paper marriages. They believe the more convenient way of integrating into the white man's land is by getting married to white ladies. And so, their perceived acceptance into the system is through the marriage for paper's sake.

W.E.B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, famously articulated the concept of double consciousness as “this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” While originally applied to the African American experience, this profound psychological phenomenon resonates powerfully with the lives of migrants navigating divergent cultural spaces. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*, illustrates this entanglement through the characters of Ofodile, Chinaza, and Akunna. Each character's journey into America, initially sought for a “better living situation,” paradoxically ensnares them in the profound psychological duality of a diasporic identity, forcing a perpetual negotiation between their Nigerian selves and the new, often conflicting, American gaze.

Ofodile, in “The Arrangers of Marriage,” strives to erase his Nigerian identity for American acceptance, exemplified by his name change to “Dave Bell” and his attempts to control his wife Chinaza's cultural expressions, revealing his internal conflict and the emptiness of his performative assimilation. This external transformation reflects a deep-seated internalised gaze, where he has absorbed the perceived American standard of success and belonging, viewing his Nigerian self as an impediment. His relentless efforts to control his wife, Chinaza's speech and cultural practices—insisting she abandon Igbo and embrace American idioms and cuisine—are not merely about cultural adjustment but betray his own intense struggle with double consciousness. Through this act of policing Chinaza, he attempts to solidify his new, singular American identity, suppressing the “other” within himself. This performative assimilation, however, creates a hollow existence, a constant act of looking at himself through the eyes of an imagined, judgmental American audience, forever denying the richness and complexity of his original heritage.

In contrast, Chinaza's entanglement with double consciousness is characterised by a tenacious, albeit often painful, resistance to forced assimilation. Unlike Ofodile, who eagerly sheds his past, Chinaza struggles fiercely to retain her Nigerian identity amidst the overwhelming pressures of her new environment and her husband's demands. Her act of secretly speaking Igbo to herself while cooking is a poignant demonstration of her internal “two-ness”—a private rebellion against the erosion of her cultural self, even as she outwardly conforms to her husband's directives. Her profound discomfort with American food, customs, and the perceived superficiality of American life highlights her constant negotiation between two worlds. She is perpetually measuring her Nigerian essence against the American ideal presented to her, experiencing a deep sense of dislocation and invisibility because her authentic self is neither fully recognized nor appreciated in her new surroundings. The ongoing internal conflict between her true self and societal expectations embodies Du Bois's concept of “unreconciled strivings.”

Akunna, the protagonist of the title story, exemplifies double consciousness through her experience of isolation and the burden of the external gaze. Arriving in America as a visa lottery winner, her dreams of a better life quickly collide with a reality of loneliness, economic struggle, and pervasive

misunderstanding. Americans she encounters, including her boyfriend, often reduce her to a simplistic, exoticised “African,” eager to learn about her “real Africa” but dismissive of her individual experiences and complex identity. This constant “othering” forces Akunna to perpetually see herself through their narrow, often stereotypical lens. The metaphorical “thing around her neck” symbolises the unspoken weight of her double consciousness—the suffocating burden of being constantly defined by a foreign perception, coupled with the immense pressure from her family back home, who view her as a beacon of success. She is caught between the image she must project to her family and the alienating reality of her life in America, a profound loneliness born from the inability to authentically express her fragmented self.

In conclusion, Adichie’s characters in *The Thing Around Your Neck* vividly portray the multifaceted ways in which migrants are entangled in double consciousness. Ofodile’s self-erasing assimilation, Chinaza’s quiet resistance, and Akunna’s isolating experience of the external gaze all underscore the profound psychological impact of navigating divergent cultural landscapes. For these characters, migration, while holding the promise of material improvement, often comes at the cost of a fragmented self, forcing them into a perpetual state of “two-ness” where their innate identities are constantly measured against, and often distorted by, the dominant culture’s perception. The stories serve as a powerful testament to the enduring relevance of Du Bois’s concept in understanding the complex psychological realities of contemporary diasporic lives.

Adichie shows how women are victimised by imposing others’ decisions even in lifelong matters. Agatha Okafor, an orphan girl who is reared by her uncle and aunt, is married to a diasporic Nigerian in America. Ofodile Udenwa, Chinaza Okafor, Udenwa Akunna, Akunna’s Uncle, are the representatives of the subversion of Western culture because they appear to be unable to follow the dimensions of each aspect of it completely. Akunna’s uncle’s wife drives over an hour in America before she can find a salon that makes black hair.

## **Conclusion**

Through the application of W.E.B. Du Bois’ Concept of Double consciousness, we can properly situate the focal points of our study. The emigrants are entangled in the ‘twoness’ of identity. Once they are settled in the new country, they decide to integrate into the society by imitating their behavior, learn their language, and engaging in paper marriages; however, after some time, they sense their lifeless situation because they are not truly from that place. Contemporary Nigerian migration short fiction, therefore, provides a window into the complex experiences of African migrants as they navigate identity crises and strive for cultural integration. The research has also explored how migrants negotiate and construct their identities in these intercultural contexts, considering factors such as language and ceremonies. Migrants develop multiple identities as a result of migration. For example, they maintain a strong connection to their original culture while also embracing aspects of the host culture. This process of identity negotiation varies among individuals and is influenced by various

factors, such as personal experiences, social networks, and discrimination. We also discovered challenges faced by migrants during their identity crisis and the process of cultural integration. These challenges include feelings of displacement, loss, alienation, and disconnection from both their original culture and the new host culture and the importance of support systems. This study discovered the issues are termed twoness, a concept that allows migrants to see themselves the way whites see them.

Literature has played a crucial role in portraying the experiences of migrants and contributing to knowledge on identity crisis and cultural integration. Contemporary migration stories in literature offer diverse perspectives on migration, providing insights into both the struggles and positive aspects of the integration process. This work has explored the twin issues of identity crisis and cultural integration, which have further enhanced our understanding of the topic.

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**The Ika Language: A Microcosm of Language Endangerment in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

Language endangerment is a growing concern for linguists and policymakers across Africa. In Nigeria—a nation of over 400 ethnic groups and approximately 525 languages (Ethnologue, 2023)—pressure from dominant languages, especially English, is accelerating intergenerational language shift. This paper uses the Ika language (spoken in parts of Delta and Edo states) as a case study to examine how such shifts undermine transmission and vitality. Employing a quantitative design, an online questionnaire based on UNESCO’s nine guidelines for assessing language vitality was completed by 108 respondents from Nigeria and the diaspora. Results indicate a troubling pattern: many parents who are competent in Ika do not use it when speaking with their children—an acid test of endangered status. Based on these findings, the study recommends leveraging Nigeria’s new language policy (which empowers teachers and learners to use indigenous languages), promoting Ika through the entertainment industry, and engaging linguists to work toward standardisation. These targeted revitalisation strategies aim to halt language erosion among Ika speakers and offer a model adaptable to other Nigerian language communities.

**Keywords:** endangered language, Ika, revitalisation, culture, Agbor

**Introduction**

Language is the central medium through which humans share ideas, feelings, and knowledge; it underpins social development and cultural continuity. Preserving a language—even one spoken by a minority—is therefore vital because language embodies cultural identity (Crystal, 2000) and serves as the principal vehicle for transmitting norms, values, beliefs, and historical memory across generations (Fishman, 2001). The lexical choices and idioms of a language reflect the cultural contexts in which they arise (Kramsch, 1998).

A people’s language reveals their worldview. Lardi (1973) argues that cultural manifestations are communicative acts assumed by particular speech communities; as children acquire their community’s language, they also internalise its culture and develop cognitive frameworks. Sapir (1929) similarly

contends that no two languages represent the same social reality, implying that each language encodes unique cultural knowledge. Thus, when a language declines, the distinctive concepts it carries—such as local cosmologies, ritual practices, and social roles—are at risk. Harrison (2007) warns that language loss entails the disappearance of irreplaceable perspectives and knowledge.

Languages also encode material culture and locally specific objects and practices. For example, the Nzu (local white chalk), common in southern Nigeria, is not merely a marking substance but has medicinal associations and spiritual connotations of purity and innocence within Igbo cultural practice. Such culturally embedded meanings are often untranslatable and may be lost when a language fades. This paper examines the Ika language of Delta and Edo states as a microcosm of Nigeria's broader language endangerment problem, analysing current vitality and proposing context-sensitive revitalisation measures.

### **Language Endangerment And Its Rise in Nigeria**

Guerin and Yourupi (2017) consider a language as endangered when it is no longer being transmitted to a younger generation. The Linguistic Society of America (2023) defines an endangered language as one at risk of disappearing as its speakers die out or shift to other languages. Hornberg (1996) states that there were at least 7000 languages in the world in 1500 AD, when European nations began the era of colonial expansion, and today there are about 6000 languages. In recent decades, the rate of extinction has accelerated. Hundreds of languages have disappeared (their last speakers having died), and many more are on the verge of extinction (their last speakers being old and having no children learning the language).

The loss of any language impacts the global community, as each language offers a lens through which we understand social affairs, human relationships, and our place in the universe. Peter and Julia (2011) identified factors that can be responsible for this, which are globalisation, mass migration, culture replacement, and neo-colonialism. Sasse (1992) points out that the reasons why parents stop their children from speaking their native languages are almost always economic and social, to 'blend' instead of maintaining bilingualism. Guerin and Yourupi (2017) also hold this view, stating that economic pressures can foster negative attitudes towards the local language and the associated cultural heritage. In Nigeria, many do not see the relevance of their native language in the global space, causing indigenous languages to shrink in value, economically and socially.

In addition to this, another factor that can negatively impact the vitality of a language is politics. This normally takes place when language policies are not implemented because of a lack of sheer political will and funding for indigenous languages.

In Nigeria, the primary cause of language endangerment is imperialism. For example, under British colonial rule, English became the language of administration, social interaction, and instruction in schools. This was emboldened by the fact that there are over 200 languages in Nigeria that do not

allow for a national language because of the ethnic diversity. These indigenous languages were referred to as vernacular, which in Nigeria is a derogatory word for low-level social language. English became an official language in Nigeria, discouraging the use of local languages in public spaces.

Another major cause is migration from rural communities to urban areas. The quest for better education and white collar jobs brought together people from different ethnic groups, and the convenient language for communication became English. With time, parents did not see the need to have their children speak their native languages. The English language soon became the First language or mother tongue of these urban children.

Because English ranks high as the preferred language for administration and social interactions, it has assumed a prestige that no indigenous language can attain for now. For example, all major examinations in Nigeria require at least a credit pass in English to access higher education. This explains the reason parents in Nigeria prioritize learning and speaking English because they see it as a passport to a better future. Another cause of language endangerment in Nigeria is intermarriage. In modern times, the case of intermarriage has increased because of migration and globalization. There is now less emphasis among parents on marrying from the same ethnic nationality. In Nigeria, most of such families adopt English as their major language of communication to avoid mistrust among the couple and their extended family.

Presently, there is a disturbing trend where parents only speak English to their children. This is considered fashionable, especially in the southern part of the country. Many children can no longer speak indigenous languages except English. You rarely hear local languages being spoken by youths, especially among children from middle or upper-class families. To worsen the already existing crisis, texts written in local languages have been grossly neglected in schools because the study of local languages is not a priority in the Nigerian educational system.

Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) explains this situation this way, 'Often education is only available in the more dominant language of a region. Parents may begin to use only the more dominant language with their children to help them learn the language of education to succeed in school (SIL, 2023).

UNESCO tagged 2019 the year of indigenous languages (IY2019) emphasising the critical need to promote and protect linguistic diversity. With approximately 6500 to 7000 languages spoken worldwide, nearly 2700 are at risk of disappearing completely as their last speakers pass away.

### **Ika Socio-Linguistic Background**

The Ika-speaking people are mainly found in Ika North East, and Ika South Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria. Speakers are also found in Orhionmwon Local Government Area in Edo State.

The Ika language belongs to the Niger Igbo cluster of dialects (Ikekeonwu, 1986) spoken in areas bordering the west of the River Niger; Nwaozuzu (2008) refers to these dialects as the West Niger



group of dialects. Linguistically, they are bounded in the West by Bini speakers (Edoid), north by Aniocha speakers (Igboid), South by Ukwani speakers (Igboid), and North by Ishan speakers (Edoid)

There are different schools of thought regarding their origin. For example, Jacob Egharevba in his work, *A Short History of Benin* (1979), states that the early people of Ika migrated from Benin wave by wave. He asserts that the founder who headed the first wave was known as Eka. Oral traditions would claim Bini origins, but many are beginning to question such claims, as linguistically, Ika is classed as an Igboid language, and there is no mutual intelligibility between the Ika language and the Bini language. Few of their lexicons have Bini vocabulary, but it is believed to have been caused by their proximity to the Edo people.

The Ika language is not only spoken by the natives living within the two LGAs, but also in Edo state in villages like Igbanke, Ota, and Olijie. They are believed to have been founded by Agbor migrant farmers who found arable farmland in the Edo areas. The two local governments in Delta State play host to a State University and a budding radio station.

Now, most of the research being conducted on the Ika language has been on its origin and comparative study with the Igbo and Bini languages. Till today, there is still a raging controversy on where the Ika-speaking people originated from.

As a point of note, for this research, the use of the Ika comprises all communities and kingdoms within the two local Government Areas, which include the Agbor Kingdom, Owa Kingdom, and Abavo Kingdom.

### **Linguistic Signs of Language Endangerment**

Guerin and Yourupi (2017) identify knowledge erosion as a linguistic sign of endangerment. This can be attributed to displacement, war, the adoption of a new religion or political organisation, or bans on customary practices. Soon, the language associated with the former will most likely be lost. In Nigeria, the adoption of foreign religions like Islam and Christianity greatly affected certain terms or registers used in African Traditional Religion, which was preserved in rituals, chants, proverbs, etc.

### **Measuring Endangerment**

Language endangerment occurs when an indigenous language faces decline in usage, speakers and intergenerational transmission (Eze, 2025). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2003) uses four levels of measuring endangerment.

- vulnerable (not spoken by children outside the home)
- endangered (children not speaking the language)
- severely endangered (only spoken by the older generation)
- critically endangered (spoken by few members of the older generation)

Going further, UNESCO gives nine factors for determining language vitality.

- F1 intergenerational language transmission
- F2 absolute number of speakers
- F3 proportion of speakers existing within the total population
- F4 language use within existing contexts and domains
- F5 response to language use in new domains
- F6 availability of materials for language education and literacy
- F7 government and institutional language policy
- F8 community attitude towards their language
- F9 amount and quality of documentation.

The questionnaire's data design for this paper is developed based on the aforementioned measures to assess language vitality.

## **Methodology**

This study uses a quantitative research method. An online questionnaire was designed based on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and distributed online to individuals and Ika social media groups, both in Nigeria and the Diaspora. It was to measure the current viability of the Ika language in the wake of the growing fear of language loss in Nigeria. The choice of an online questionnaire is to create easy access for Ika-speaking people not resident in Delta State. Feedback was received from 108 persons, which served as data for analysis. Respondents were drawn from adolescents, teenagers, and adults. However, it should be noted that being an online questionnaire, it was accessed by the highly educated, 84% of the respondents had tertiary education, and most could afford good phones and data. The adolescents and teenagers made use of their parents' phones to respond to the questionnaire.

## **Data Analysis of the Survey of Ika Language Use**

Data results are examined with the UNESCO measurement of language viability.

### **F1 Intergenerational language transmission**

Of the 108 respondents, 56 are parents and 30% admit that their children do not understand Ika language while 38% of the children do not understand it fully. This is the most important factor, and

this percentage shows that the rate of transmission to the next generation is below average. This would also imply that 68% of the next generation is on their way to losing the language.

### **F2 Absolute Number of Speakers**

67% of our respondents could speak Ika, and only 14% could not speak the language.

### **F3 proportion of speakers existing within the total population**

Of the 108 respondents, 67% could speak the Ika language.

### **F4 language use within existing contexts and domains**

Only 40% of our respondents speak Ika at home. 25% do not speak it at all at home.

### **F5 response to language use in new domains**

84% of the respondents are comfortable speaking the Ika language.

### **F6 Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy**

Only 35% of respondents have seen texts written in the Ika language, and 19% own such a text. 35% can read a text written in Ika.

### **F7 Government and Institutional Language Policy**

Despite the Government policy on language that says that pupils in primary schools should be taught in the language of the locality (Mohammed, 2018), it has not been effective in the field because 62% of respondents who had elementary education in Ika-speaking areas were taught in English. The fact that 60% of respondents have not seen a text written in the language is proof that not much has been done on the part of the government to promote literacy in local languages in Nigeria.

### **F8 Community Attitude Towards Their Language**

Despite the seeming part of failure of the government in enforcing policies, 99% of respondents express interest in their children speaking the language. 89% want the language of instruction in schools to be Agbor. 81% want Ika to be spoken freely in schools.

**F9 Amount and Quality of Documentation.** The fact that only 19% of respondents have texts written in Ika, and only 49% have seen such a text, goes to show the poor level of documentation and available materials of the language.

For Intergenerational language transmission, 66% of the respondents can understand Ika. However, only 30% of the children of the respondents can speak the language. This is the most important factor, and this percentage shows that the rate of transmission to the next generation is below average. The absolute number of speakers from the respondents makes up 48%. For language use within existing contexts and domains, only 34% speak the Ika language in their homes. Ika is not used as a language

of instruction in schools in Ika South and North East local Governments. This is a setback for the promotion of vernacular in public spaces. All the respondents wanted the Ika language to be taught in schools, but 6% didn't want it to be spoken freely in schools. These are critical domains for language learning.

For the availability of materials for language education and literacy, 48% have seen a text written in the Ika language, but only 22% of respondents could read it. This shows a low literacy rate among Ika language speakers. As a result, 82% of the respondents did not own any text written in the Ika language. For the amount and quality of documentation, from those who received their elementary education in Ika local governments, 53% were taught purely in the English language. This implies that there was no form of text written in Ika being studied in schools. 48% of respondents have never seen a text in the Ika language, and only 22% of those who have can even read it. Only 18% of those who have seen such texts own them.

With the new language policy in Nigeria, where pupils from Primary 1 to 6 would be taught in the mother tongue of the locality, all respondents assented to the Ika language being taught in schools. This will be a catalyst for the revitalisation of the language.

Even though many of the respondents could not understand or speak Ika, they all want their offspring to speak the language. This shows they are well disposed to their language being spoken.

From this data analysis, it is safe to say, firstly, that there is poor transmission of the Ika language from the older generation to the younger, especially for families living outside Ika-speaking areas. Using the UNESCO 2009 yardstick measurement for language endangerment will place the Ika language as endangered because most of the children below 20 years old do not speak the language. There is a gradual language shift to the English language for the present generation because of the dominance of English. This is enabled by poor language policy implementation in Nigeria, the priority given to the English language in certificate examinations, the non standardisation of indigenous languages, the absence of a national language as a result of the multilingual nature of the country, the rise of social media that promotes Nigerian Pidgin and the Nigerian English, the migration of youths to foreign lands where they have to acquire new languages, and several other factors.

Using the UNESCO measurement for language endangerment, the Ika language can be placed as endangered because of the low transmission of the language to the younger generation.

### **Recommendations**

An endangered language does not have to go extinct if the right measures are taken towards its revitalisation. The Ika language has great possibilities for revitalisation through various instruments of promotion. Firstly, the university located in the land can establish a language centre for the promotion of indigenous languages with a focus on the Ika language. Research into developing and standardising the language would greatly promote literature to be written in Ika. Languages that have

a rich collection of written texts are more difficult to erase than languages that are only orally transmitted.

Social media skit makers, movie or music makers using the Ika language in their works should be encouraged by natives, making sure their works go viral. Presently, there has been an increase in the use of the Ika language on social media. Skit maker, De Anointed Sarah, King Agren, a pop singer and YouTube channels promoting the language in their works should be encouraged and also given recognition awards to motivate the younger generation towards creating local content on social media.

### **Conclusion**

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a repository of culture. By preserving languages, we enrich our collective understanding, respect diverse perspectives, and ensure that no culture is lost in the tracks of time. This work has shown that low transmission of our indigenous languages to the younger generation is a major cause of loss of language vitality. However, the endangerment of a language always ends in its death. Parents, traditional rulers, policymakers and the executive arm of the Government all have critical roles to play in stemming the tide of language shift leading to the eventual loss of the mother tongue.

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**“Japa” Syndrome in Nigeria: The Theatre Intervention**

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**Abstract**

The term “Japa,” a Yoruba slang meaning migration or leaving one’s country in search of greener pastures, has become a rapidly growing phenomenon among Nigerian youths and middle-aged individuals. In contemporary Nigeria, migration functions as a coping strategy for the effects of bad governance, political instability, economic hardship, and unemployment. This paper investigates the underlying factors motivating the Japa syndrome and evaluates the effectiveness of theatre as a tool for educating and enlightening the populace on its implications. Theatre, as an intervention platform, exposes audiences to the consequences of unplanned migration, thereby helping to curb the rising trend of young people embarking on dangerous journeys due to persuasive influences and limited awareness of the risks involved. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology, drawing on primary and secondary data. Questionnaires, play productions, and post-performance discussions served as interactive platforms to sensitise the public to the complexities surrounding Japa migration. Anchored on Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist theory, the findings reveal that theatre, through its multidimensional appeal to sight, emotion, and psychology, serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness, engaging youths, influencing attitudes, and encouraging critical reflection. The study concludes that theatre is an effective medium for reshaping perceptions and reducing uninformed migration by fostering informed decision-making among young Nigerians.

**Keywords:** Japa, Syndrome, Youth, Theatre, Intervention

## **Introduction**

Youth migration, popularly referred to in Nigeria as the “Japa Syndrome,” has evolved into a significant socio-cultural and developmental concern in recent years. The term “Japa” originates from the Yoruba language, one of the major indigenous languages spoken in southwestern Nigeria. It is derived from two syllables—*ja* meaning “to break” and *pa* meaning “to go away”—which together signify “to break away” or “to escape.” Although initially used informally and humorously to describe creative ways of fleeing difficult circumstances, the word became widely popular after the release of Naira Marley’s 2020 song titled *Japa*. Since then, it has transcended its slang origins to become a commonly used expression across all social groups in Nigeria and within the Nigerian diaspora. Today, “Japa” features prominently in musical expressions, films, theatre, social media discourse, and everyday linguistic interactions (Okunade & Awosusi, 1).

The widespread adoption of the term reflects a deeper and more troubling national reality: the accelerating rate at which young Nigerians are leaving the country in search of better prospects abroad. The Japa movement is largely driven by persistent socio-economic challenges, including rising unemployment, inadequate educational and professional opportunities, insecurity, economic instability, and widespread dissatisfaction with governance. For many youths, migration has become synonymous with hope, survival, and the pursuit of a more stable and dignified life. However, the mass departure of skilled, talented, and energetic young people poses significant threats to Nigeria’s human capital base, undermining national productivity, innovation, and long-term development. As more individuals seek opportunities abroad, the country grapples with a diminishing workforce and the growing concern of “brain drain,” further constraining socio-economic progress.

Against this backdrop, theatre emerges as a powerful and versatile tool for intervention. Historically, theatre in Africa has served not only as entertainment but also as a medium for education, sensitisation, and community engagement. Its ability to capture lived experiences, provoke critical thinking, and stimulate emotional resonance positions it as an effective platform for addressing social issues such as youth migration. Through storytelling, dramatization, participatory performances, and post-performance discussions, theatre creates spaces for reflection, dialogue, and behavioural change. In the context of the Japa Syndrome, theatre can illuminate the socio-economic factors influencing migration, demystify the often romanticised idea of life abroad, caution youths about the risks of irregular migration, and inspire constructive alternatives within the local environment.

This study therefore, investigates the role of theatre as an intervention mechanism in responding to the Japa phenomenon. By examining how theatrical productions, questionnaires, and audience-engagement sessions raise awareness about the implications and complexities of youth migration, the research highlights the transformative potential of creative approaches in promoting national



development. Anchored on Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist theory—which emphasises individual freedom, choice, and responsibility—the study interrogates how theatre can empower youths to reflect critically on their decisions, reassess their motivations for migration, and envision viable pathways within Nigeria. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that theatre functions not only as a mirror of societal realities but also as a catalyst for attitudinal change, offering a meaningful avenue for mitigating uninformed migration and fostering sustainable youth development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this research work was based on Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy. Sartre was a French philosopher who propagated the existentialism theory; which was built on the tripod of personal freedom, individual responsibility and deliberate choice, which he claimed were determined by how people viewed life. As an influential philosophy, existentialism emphasised the importance of individual freedom and taking responsibility as well as the role of choice and action in shaping one's life and creating identity. (Reynolds and Renaudie 54)

### **Conceptual Review**

**The Japa Syndrome:**—The Japa Syndrome is a term coined in Nigeria to describe the phenomenon of Nigerian youth seeking opportunities abroad, particularly in developed countries, and choosing to leave their home country permanently or for an extended period. The term "Japa" is derived from the Nigerian Yoruba language, meaning "to escape" or "to run away." The Japa Syndrome reflects the aspirations of young Nigerians to pursue better prospects outside the country due to factors such as limited opportunities, unemployment, political instability, and the desire for higher standards of living (Waezel-3). Japa is a Yoruba locution which means to leave for greener pastures. This phenomenon has been particularly prevalent in recent years, with many young professionals, entrepreneurs, and students opting to migrate to countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and other European countries (Williamson et al 2-4). Thus, the study showed that Nigerian youth migrants are counted in millions outside the shores of the country, and that most developing countries lost their highly skilled professionals to most developed countries in search of greener pastures. Thus, the socio-economic stand of many Nigerians coupled with the inability of Nigerian government to provide basic infrastructures such as electricity, coupled with high unemployment rates and lack of job opportunities for graduates, poor working conditions, low salaries, and limited career advancement prospects, political instability, corruption, and insecurity has caused pressure for many young Nigerians and triggered the Japa movement (Nwoke 42-54). Consequently, one of the main effects of the movement is that it has led to brain drain, with many of the country's brightest and most talented individuals leaving the country. Nigeria lost a lot of skilled workers to the labour markets of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands and Australia. Many professionals, especially medical practitioners, bankers, academics and technology experts, are daily leaving the shores of the country for greener pastures abroad. Another negative effect is that the Japa syndrome cripples

industrial growth. Many key industries in Nigeria have shortage of adequate manpower. An estimated 70,000 skilled professionals emigrate from Africa each year, and Nigeria lost over 9000 medical doctors to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the U.S.A between 2016-2018. With this depleting number of medical doctors, Nigerians spend between \$1.2 billion and \$1.6 billion on medical tourism abroad annually (Olumoyo and Abiri 91-95). In spite of the negative narrations of Japa movement, it can be beneficial or detrimental to the individuals as well as the society. According to the study, some youth meet with good luck, while some are greeted with misfortune. Those young people who met good fortune may come back home to alleviate problems in their homes, families, communities, towns and country. Though it was seen as a loss of manpower as well as that of qualified personnel, but if they come back to open new avenues, inventions and innovations, they contribute to the new frontiers of human and infrastructural development, it becomes a gain. The study concluded that before youths take to migration or Japa, they should weigh the rigours involved and properly prepare to manage the psychosocial outcomes of their decision.

**Youth Migration** :-Youth migration refers to the movement of young and middle-aged individuals, typically between the ages of 15 and 50, from one location to another within or across national borders. It involves the relocation of young people seeking better opportunities, including education, employment, economic prospects, or improved living conditions. Youth migration can have significant social, economic, and cultural implications for both the sending and receiving communities. Youth migration is a global phenomenon that has been on the rise in recent decades. It was gathered that human migration is the movement of people from one geo-political region to another, or the movement of people from one country to another. Migration is a fundamental part of human nature, which can be temporary or permanent relocation of a person from his or her place of primary abode to another place, in search of better living conditions, family reunification. Further studies showed two types of migration, which are internal and external or international migration. The internal migration could mean leaving one's geographical location for another one within the same country or leaving one's homestead and settling in another location within the same geophysical location or geo-political region. While the external or international migration means leaving one's country for another country. Young people make up about a quarter of migrants worldwide. Those involved are in the age bracket of 15-29 years with a mean age of 22 years. The study gathered that youths are increasingly leaving their home countries in search of better economic opportunities, education, or a change in lifestyle and that as many as 740 million people migrated to different countries, and among these young people are in the majority (Anyanwu, & Erhijakpor 51-60). Further studies revealed that there are many reasons why people migrate from one place to another. Thus, listed four common reasons why people move to other countries Economic Migrants: Economic migrants are migrants who are attracted to another country because of the greater economic opportunities. People moved from less economically developed countries to more economically developed countries in search of jobs and a comfortable life. Educational Migrants are people that move to other countries to acquire an education. Also war/civil unrest or state policies which discriminate against a particular group of citizens or people

forced many to migrate. The crisis going on in many places today has made many run to countries they never wished or dreamt to go as refugees. Lastly, family reunions has also been a cause of relocation of people from one country to another. In this situation, friends, relatives, partners, spouses, children or parents move to meet one of their own who is resident in another country. The impact of youth migration can be both positive and negative for both the sending and receiving countries. On the positive side, youth migration can lead to the transfer of skills and knowledge, remittances that support families back home, and cultural exchange. However, it can also result in brain drain, labour shortages, and social challenges such as integration and xenophobia (Iwuh 1-5).

**Theatre Intervention:-** Theatre intervention refers to the use of theatrical techniques, performances, and creative practices as a means to address social issues, raise awareness, and promote positive change in society. In the context of youth migration and the Japa Syndrome in Nigeria, theatre intervention involves utilising theatre as a medium to explore and communicate the socio-economic factors driving youth migration. Also, to engage and empower young individuals, and to foster dialogue as alternative pathways for youth empowerment and national development. It may include theatrical productions, workshops, community-based performances, and interactive interventions designed to provoke critical thinking, promote informed decision-making, and inspire social action. Theatre has long been recognised as a powerful tool for intervention, with its ability to raise awareness, challenge norms, and inspire action. Hence, playwrights, directors, and actors used the stage to address pressing social issues, from racism and sexism to political oppression and environmental degradation. Furthermore, one of the key ways in which theatre can contribute to intervention is by giving a voice to marginalised groups and telling stories that are often overlooked or misrepresented in the mainstream media. For the theatre to initiate change, it must produce theatrical performances that can challenge stereotypes, humanise the experiences of others, and foster empathy and understanding among audiences. In essence, theatre can be a powerful tool for community engagement and activism; if theatre companies and artists work directly with communities to create plays that address local issues and mobilise people to take action. This can take the form of street theatre, community-based workshops, or interactive performances that encourage audience participation. Thus, community theatre educates the populace in its pursuit of intervention by building on the skills the people have. Furthermore, theatre can be a viable medium for community education, conscientize the audience and mobilise marginalised groups in society who have been deprived of access to the more conventional forms of media (*Akashoro Ganiyu and Shaibu 110*).

(Akpodiete 1-5) reaffirmed that theatrical productions help reinforce critical thinking capabilities and enable participants especially children, to change bad perceptions and imbibe good ideas. Theatre possesses the ability to drive intervention through the power of storytelling. By crafting compelling narratives that resonate with audiences on an emotional level. Playwrights and performers can create a space for reflection, dialogue, and transformation. Further, theatre stories have the power to

challenge dominant narratives, expose hidden truths, and imagine alternative futures. They can also create a sense of shared experience and collective identity, which can be a powerful catalyst for intervention. Theatre's ability to transform individuals and communities can not be overemphasised; thus, by engaging audiences in a live performance, shared experience, theatre can create a sense of connection and belonging that is difficult to replicate in other media. This sense of community can be particularly powerful in times of social upheaval and change, as people come together to process their experiences and imagine new possibilities. The theatre is a powerful tool for personal transformation. This can be achieved by immersing make-believe stories in the lives and experiences of others, therefore enabling audience to gain new perspectives, challenge their own assumptions, and develop a greater sense of empathy and understanding of life and society at large (Akand and Palasz 6). Therefore, theatre remains a powerful tool for intervention by giving voice to the voiceless, challenging dominant narratives, and inspiring action, theatre has the potential to transform individuals, communities, and societies.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed the qualitative research method. Unstructured questionnaires were administered on one hundred and twenty (120) respondents of which were forty (40) diaspora respondents and eighty (80) youths within the ages of 15-50 years. Play production and group discussion after each production were employed as an intervention methods to achieve the purpose of the research work. Three (3) States were visited with the play production, namely, Abraka Delta State, Benin in Edo State, and Lagos State Ipaja. After every performance, there were focused group discussions that elicited worthwhile information from the respondents.

**The population of the study:** - The study focused on a total of 120 youths, 40 from the diaspora (online) and 80 from among youths within Nigeria. The respondents were between the ages of 15-50.

**The Questionnaire:** - A total number of 120 questionnaires were distributed to 120 respondents in this order – 40 for those in the diaspora which was done online and 80 for youths within Nigeria, of which some were already considering migration.

### **Data presentation**

#### **Section a: socio-demographic data of respondents**

**Question 1 Age and gender of the respondents?** A total of 120 respondents were involved in the questionnaires, play production and group discussions. They were youths between the ages of 15-50. Between 15-26 40 persons, 27-38 40 persons and 39-50 were 40 persons. The respondents were 60 males and 60 females respondents. This implies that both sexes were fully represented.

**Question 2 Educational qualification of respondents?** In this, respondents' qualifications cut across those with Primary Six certificates as their highest educational qualifications, Secondary school

certificates, higher education degrees- College of Education, Polytechnic degrees, and University degrees as their highest educational qualification, some were postgraduate students, others undergraduates students. While some respondents were unskilled workers without educational qualifications. This shows that the issues of the Japa syndrome has nothing to do with being educated or not.

**Question 3: Employment status of respondents?** Question 3 survey result indicated that out of the 120 respondents, 50 respondents were unemployed graduates, 30 respondents were self-employed, 20 respondents were students. while 20 respondents were employed youths and middle aged persons. This implies that the notion of “Japa” is being envisaged by all classes of youths, the employed, unemployed, self employed and students as well.

## **Section B: Attitude Towards Migration and Japa Syndrome**

**Question 4: Have you ever considered migrating out of Nigeria?** 50 out of the 80 youth respondents staying in Nigeria agreed that they had considered migrating out of Nigeria before now, but could not achieve it. For some, it was financial limitation, while the 40 diaspora respondents had already migrated out of Nigeria.

**Question 5: If yes, what is your primary reason for considering migration?** The responses show that out of the 40 diaspora respondents that were interviewed 15 of the respondents picked economic opportunities as their primary reason for considering migration, 10 respondents picked education, 10 respondents picked security reasons, while 5 respondents picked family reunification as their primary reason for considering migration. This shows that more youths migrated to seek for greener pastures and for a better living condition than for other reasons.

**Question 6 Are you aware of the term "Japa Syndrome" and what it really mean?** All the respondents were aware of the term “Japa”. They also know that it is a term among young people that implies migration. This is a term that cut across State, and culture, is a national language among youths not minding the origin and tribe they belong to.

**Question 7: To what extent do you believe the socio-economic conditions in Nigeria influence youth migration?** It was gathered that 60 respondents believed very strongly that the socio-economic conditions in Nigeria influence youth migration, 12 strongly believed that the socio-economic conditions in Nigeria influence youth migration, 4 respondents don't know if socio-economic conditions in Nigeria influence youth migration, and 4 respondents do not believe that the socio-economic conditions in Nigeria influence youth migration. The 40 diaspora respondents agreed that the economic and political situation in the country encourages migration.

**Question 8: Do you think the current government policies address the root causes of youth migration?** The responses showed that 65 respondents agreed that the current government policies

do not in any way address the root causes of youth migration, 10 respondents did not think so, and 5 respondents were not sure of what the answer should be.

**Question 9: How would you rate the impact of "Japa Syndrome" on Nigerian society.** The responses gathered showed that 90 respondents rated the impact of Japa syndrome on Nigerian society as very negative, 10 respondents rated it as negative, while 20 respondents see it as not youths-friendly. Thus, it encourages the migration of capable, versatile and productive youths out of the country which has negative influence on the nation.

**Question 10: Do you believe that migration is the only way to achieve personal success and security?** It was gathered that 20 respondents did not believe that migration is the only way to achieve personal success, but they claimed that it is the easiest and most common way for young people to gainful employment. 95 respondents agreed that it is the only way, while 5 respondents were not sure. Many of the respondents see it as the only way for the low-income earners' children to get their parents out of poverty.

### **Section C: Realities of the Japa Migration**

**Question 11 : is the "Japa" migration as easy as it is made to look?** From the 40 diaspora respondents, it was gathered that the realities faced by these youths as migrants were not what they expected. They agreed that it is not as easy as it is made to look, especially for youths without a sound educational background, no handwork and no relatives to put up with. The journey can be a stressful one. They had to do all manner of jobs to enable them to pay bills and care for themselves. Many of the online respondents claimed migrants find life difficult because many of the beautiful promises envisaged that spur them to embark on the journey were mirages. Hence they faced economic problems which deterred them from integrating into the system and prevented able from accessing some basic needs. Some migrants find it difficult to adapt to the new culture, cuisine, and weather conditions and to make friends, so they struggle to meet up with the new environment. In addition, some experience colour discrimination and xenophobia, which resulted in the hiding of identity.

### **Section D: Perceptions of Theatre As An Intervention**

**Question 12: Have you ever participated in a theatre programme or watched a performance that addresses social issues?** Almost all the respondents have watched performances or productions that address social issues, but none have watched a performance that focuses mainly on migration issues.

**Question 13: Do you think theatre can effectively raise awareness about the socio-economic factors driving youth migration?** All the respondents agreed that theatre can effectively raise awareness about the socio-economic factors driving youth migration because of the unique qualities

it possesses. Through the use of storytelling method, theatre productions can create life experiences and challenges faced by migrants to the understanding of the audience understand and invoke empathy from them.

**Question 14: Would you be willing to participate in a theatre programme that is focused on migration issues?** The information gathered indicated that 60 respondents would be willing to participate in a theatre programme focused on migration issues, 20 respondents were not willing, the 40 online respondents were willing if they had the opportunity. To them, it will be very impactful in changing perceptions about migration because people practice more of what they see than what they hear.

**Question 15: Would participation in a theatre programme that addresses migration issues make you reconsider your decision to migrate?** 80 respondents believed that participating/viewing regular theatrical performances that address youth migration can make many youths reconsider migrating. 25 respondents did not believe that theatrical performance can make youths reverse their decision to migrate. While 15 respondents were unsure if participating in a theatre programme can make youths rethink their decision to migrate

**Question 16: Do you think theatre performances should be developed specifically to address the "Japa Syndrome"?** Many of the youths agreed that artistic performances should be developed specifically to address the Japa syndrome because it is a movement that is in vogue among youths and young people...

**Question 17: How important is it to have more discussions about migration and "Japa Syndrome" within the rural and urban communities?** Most of the young adult respondents indicated that having regular teachings, debates and discussions about migration and Japa syndrome within the urban and rural areas will not only reduce the desire to travel in an illegal manner. But it will also educate young people on the danger of such a journey,

### **The Theatre: Intervention Performance**

#### **Synopsis: "Look Inward and Not Outward"**

A drama titled "*Look inward and not outward*" was created and enacted as an intervention performance to address the issues of youth migration. The storyline was on youths who migrated, some without complete documents, who became fugitives in a foreign land.

"Look Inward and Not Outward" is a drama that showcases the lives of 12 young people whose decisions to migrate took them through different life journeys. The play delved into the consequences of both legal and illegal migrations, and the prospects available to those young people who choose to stay and build their lives at home.

The story highlighted the plight of youths who migrated without proper documents. Influenced by false promises from friends with a sense of desperation, they abandon their education and careers, selling everything they own and leaving the country. They arrived in their foreign destination only to become fugitives, struggling to make ends meet and finding no support. Some were forced to drop out of school, while others, in the attempt to make ends meet, fell into a life of crime and became drug dealers.

In contrast, the play also showcased the success stories of two other groups. The first were the youths who chose to stay and "weather the storm" in their own country. Through hard work and resilience, they became captains of industry and gained international recognition. The second group were those who migrated legally. They have all the rights and privileges of their new country, allowing them to work, earn a living, prosper, and even become financial backers for significant projects back in their home communities.

The production showcased the negative and positive aspects and gave a balanced view of migration, and inspired young people to consider the potential for success at home. It also emphasises the importance of legal migration for those who choose to leave.

### **Performance and Impact**

Following its performances in three states, the play was presented in various schools and institutions in collaboration with an NGO focused on youth involvement. Each performance was followed by a discussion, and within three months of this initiative, ten young men who had dropped out of school with the intent to migrate openly acknowledged their plans and returned to their studies.

As part of this project, selected youths were also given creative training in short story writing, skit production, and cartoon story development. These workshops were designed to help them discover their innate skills and learn how to use them to earn an income in the digital age, as a further encouragement for them to stay and thrive at home.

**Discussion of Findings:-** The study explores the potential of theatre as a powerful tool to address youth migration in Nigeria, particularly the phenomenon known as the "Japa Syndrome," where Nigerian youths increasingly seek opportunities abroad due to the challenges of the socio-economic conditions at home. Through the use of questionnaires, discussions and performance, the findings shed light on the complex factors driving migration and the role of theatre in offering alternative pathways for youth empowerment and national development. The impact of the "Japa Syndrome" on Nigerian society was viewed negatively by most respondents. Many participants recognised the challenges associated with migration, such as the potential for brain drain and the loss of human capital, which could further exacerbate Nigeria's socio-economic problems. Interestingly, while some respondents



did not believe that migration was the only path to success, a considerable number still perceived it as a viable option, underscoring the desperation and lack of confidence in local opportunities.

Among the respondents, none has participated in/ watched a theatre performance that addresses youth migration as a social issue. Despite this, many believed that theatre could be an effective medium for raising awareness about migration issues. A good number of participants expressed a willingness to engage in theatre interventions, reflecting an openness to alternative forms of education and dialogue. Additionally, there was strong support for the development of theatre programmes specifically designed to address the "Japa Syndrome," with many emphasising the importance of discussing migration and its implications within their communities. This suggests that theatre has the potential to become a significant tool in changing perceptions about migration and encouraging youths to consider alternatives.

The study also suggests that involving the community in the creative process of theatre productions can enhance their effectiveness. By engaging the target audience, particularly youths, in the development and performance of theatrical presentations, the messages are more likely to resonate and lead to meaningful action. This approach is supported by the survey respondents, who believe that community involvement is crucial for the success of theatre interventions. In the long term, theatre interventions have the potential to make a significant impact on the socio-economic well-being of Nigerian youths. By raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and providing education and skills training; the theatre can empower youths to make informed migration decisions and contribute to national development. Integrating theatre-based programmes with skill development can further enhance youth effectiveness by providing practical alternatives to migration. By leveraging the power of the theatre; there is an opportunity to create positive change and provide Nigerian youths with the tools and opportunities they need to build a better future at home. The Jean-Paul Sartre existentialist philosophy, which is the theoretical framework on which this work was based, was built on the tripod of personal freedom, individual responsibility and deliberate choice, which were a reflection of how individuals perceive life. As an influential existentialist, Sartre emphasised the importance of individual freedom and the ability to take responsibility as well as the role of choice and action in shaping one's life and creating individual identity (Senejani 15). It is in this light that the theatre intervention programme is meaningful and relevant to addressing youth migration.

Exposing youths to various intervention performances will enhance their ability to make the right choices and change their perception of life and life issues. It will build a strong inner resistance to negative peer influence, knowing full well that the choices they make today may lead to freedom or confinement tomorrow, for which they will take personal responsibility.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that Theatre, with its ability to engage audiences emotionally and intellectually, offers a promising avenue for addressing the issues of the Japa/Youth migration. By incorporating authentic and relatable stories, theatre can resonate with the youth and inspire them to make the right decision and contribute to national development. Thus, storyline, dance drama, and all arts of the theatre can be employed to address all social issues that concern youth migration.

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**Literary Evaluation of Urhobo Vanishing Cultural Identity through the  
Prism of *Arigo Again!***

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**Abstract**

This study focuses on the Urhobo vanishing cultural identity, using the Prism of *Arigo Again!* Urhobo culture is vanishing without efforts by scholars to prevent its further erosion. The objective of the study is to investigate the effects of social change on Urhobo vanishing cultural heritage. The study hinged on the possible world theory (PWT). Numerous social changes of the Urhobo are mirrored through the PWT and textually analyzed methodically. From the results of the textual analysis, it was discovered that the family and Urhobo traditional religion are some of the social structures that have changed in recent times as a result of social change; the belief system of the modern Urhobo people towards several held traditions has been altered in recent times due to social change; family bonding which was encouraged by interaction among neighbours and communal life have been battered due to the influence of social change. These changes have brought a shift in cultural identity, belief and value system of the Urhobo in this modern time. The paper concludes that the Urhobo cultural identity has been enormously diluted by social change. Therefore, it is recommended that Urhobo scholars, leaders and parents should promote their cultural heritage, teach the upcoming generation to value the Urhobo culture and discourage excessive Western influence.

**Keywords:** Urhobo vanishing cultural identity, *Arigo Again!* Possible world theory (PWT), textual analysis, social change.

## **Introduction**

Urhobo cultural heritage is gradually vanishing. This is because most modern Urhobo people seems to prefer western lifestyle to the tradition held, belief and practice. Every culture is unique and has to be promoted through identifying with the customs, values and practices. Urhobo is one of the ethnic groups in Delta State. The Urhobo of Delta State occupy eight local government council areas in Delta Central Senatorial District and part of Warri South, Patani local government areas respectively and in the Ogoni area of Bayelsa state. The Urhobo language has about eighteen dialects spread across twenty-four kingdoms in Delta State. Urhobo has a rich culture, and from time immemorial they cherish their cultural heritage as shown in their dress code, marriage pattern, child naming, funeral performances, respect for elders, hospitality, economic life, religious beliefs, kingship, kinship, worldview, norms and values held as a way of their identity. Some aspects of the Urhobo cultural heritage are captured, preserved and transmitted through the oral and written literature of the Urhobo people. It is a major characteristic of the indigenous literature of all societies and nations that literature reflects the totality of the life of the people for whom the literature is written and spoken. Literature portrays man in his natural and supernatural environment through artistically created stories and songs, written or unwritten. Such stories and songs are a reflection of the cultures, traditions and values of the people for whom they are written. This assertion agrees with Obitaba (2019:2) who stated that, "By literature, we mean the sum total of works, product of imaginary writings treating particular problems of a given milieu... More importantly, we mean its essence, its primordial callings to domesticate the human minds among others". Thus, all literary texts are subject to reality and are meant to provide solutions to societal problems and also for pedagogical purposes.

Urhobo has twenty-four kingdoms that spread across the following local government areas: Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Patani, Sapele, Udu, Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Uvwie, Warri South and the Ogoni in Bayelsa state (Ivworin, 2012; Ifesieh and Ejobee 2013). Urhobo has experienced revolutionary occurrences in her cultural identity. Some of these revolutionary experiences are repulsive, and others are tolerable or accepted by the people. The major cause of the revolutionary experiences can be attributed to social change. Social change in this study is defined as the alteration of the cultural practices and behavioural patterns of people who have lived together over time. Such changes manifest as a result of new ideas and value systems derived from westernization, migration and modernization. Social change manifests as a result of modifications of cultural institutions and social structures through human mobility and relationships. Culture, according to Egonwa (2010:1), "is the complex totality of values, attributes, skills, and other capacities acquired by man as a member of society". In essence, culture becomes the foundation upon which civilization is built. It includes the beliefs, practices, language, arts, norms and values that define a group of people. To understand culture and its dynamics, one must appreciate the nature of human life concerning the society he belong and the changes that occur from time to time in that society.

Cultural identity occupies an important place among the Urhobo people, and this is demonstrated by the slogan “*Urhobo ɔvuɔvo*”, meaning Urhobo is one (united). This is probably because of the role of culture in influencing the various aspects of behaviour, beliefs, and attitudes of the Urhobo people towards life. The researchers have observed from personal experience that there are significant changes in many aspects of Urhobo cultural practices, such as in burial, where, in the past, wake-keeping was observed but is presently prohibited for security reasons. Westernization and the untimely death of elders who could not pass the various processes of Urhobo traditional funeral rites also affected the Urhobo burial practice. The culture of widow inheritance is no longer practiced by many families, because most men nowadays are not ready to accept the wife of a late relative as an inherited wife. These issues are brought about due to social change in the various Urhobo communities. In those days, marrying more than one wife is a symbol of greatness. This is affirmed by Okumagba (1982:88) who maintained that, “In the olden days, the Urhobo man regarded his wife as his property and the wealth of a man was often determined by the number of wives he had”. Social change brought about by western civilization has promoted monogamy to the extent that an Urhobo man who marries more than one wife is seen as a transgressor and is criticized by those inclined to monogamy. There is, therefore, a strong relationship between man, culture and society. Literature functions as a form of cultural discourse, a medium that can be used to explain and analyze the cultural changes that occur within specific societies and across societies. The major assumption of this paper is that social change has played an important role in regulating the various sociocultural processes and behavioural patterns among the twenty-four Urhobo kingdoms, and has affected the cultural identity of the people within their environment. Ojaruega (2017), in her work titled “Songs only women sing: Females struggle with identities and role in traditional and modern Urhobo poetry” reveals how Urhobo women’s voice uses their songs to voice out their struggles and roles in the society. In present-day Urhobo, such songs have gone into extinction as they are no longer heard in the gathering of Urhobo women. These songs were used in those days to teach the younger ones their roles and position in the family and in their marriage, but are no longer performed as a result of social change.

Idogho and Osuya (2020) conducted a study on “Issues and content in African drama: A diagnostic study of African dramatic content of Agbarho Ibi festival” The findings of this study reveal that the dramatic elements identified by Aristotle are found in *Agbarho Ibi* festival and that the festival does not lack dramatic culture. Although the study investigates an Urhobo cultural festival, it does not provide an evaluation of how social change has affected the festival. These studies reviewed have helped to document aspects of Urhobo cultural evolution, religion, poetry and oral literature, but studies based on the evaluation of Urhobo vanishing cultural identity and Urhobo people’s cultural temperament in written literary works have not received reasonable attention of literary critics. This constitutes the gap and motivation for this study.

This paper explores the themes of culture and the cultural temperance of Urhobo people and provides an evaluation of how social change has affected Urhobo cultural identity and heritage as evidenced in Maduku's *Arigo Again!* (2014) literature text.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The major objective of the study is to investigate the effects of social change on Urhobo cultural heritage through the Prism of *Arigo Again!* The text above was constantly referenced. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- i. Discuss the influence of social change on Urhobo social structures.
- ii. Evaluate how social change has altered some of the belief systems of the Urhobo people;
- iii. examine the cultural temperament of the Urhobo on Urhobo thought and identity, and
- iv. Appraise the effects of social interaction on various social groups of Urhobo

### **Methodology**

This study adopts the textual analysis method. This method, according to (<https://www.scribbr.com>) is used to systematically examine and interpret the content, underlying meaning and purpose of texts. The method is essentially about understanding how people make sense of the world through various forms of communication, including written, spoken and visual texts. This method is suitable for this study because it enables the researchers to uncover underlying themes, patterns and messages within the text under consideration and also to connect such themes to the Urhobo sociocultural context.

### **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the possible world's theory (PWT). This theory was developed by the Anglo-Saxon school of analytical philosophy as a means to solve problems in formal semantics. Kripke, (1972), Lewis, (1973), Plantinga, (1979), and Rescher, (1979) were major defenders of this theory. The possible worlds' theory (PWT) was adapted to literary criticism in the late seventies by critics such as, Thomas Pavel, Lubomir, Dolezel and Umberto (Ryan (1991). An important tenet of this theory lies in the way the various worlds are accessed. For a world to be considered possible, it needs to show a certain degree of accessibility measured against the principle of minimal departure. According to this principle, unless otherwise stated, the physical and logical principles that govern our actual world are still in place in any of the actual possible worlds (APWs) evoked in a text. Hence, it is assumed that whatever characters that exist in the textual world belong to the same biological category as those we have in the actual world (AW). The conditions for accessibility, as adapted from Ryan (1991:558-9), make this framework appropriate for analyzing the text *Arigo Again!* They are:

- i. Identity of properties. Textual actual world (TAW) is accessible from the Actual world (AW) if the objects common to TAW and AW have the same properties.
- ii. Identity of inventory. Textual actual world (TAW) is accessible from the Actual world (AW) if TAW and AW are furnished by the same objects.
- iii. Compatibility of inventory. Textual actual world (TAW) is accessible from the Actual world (AW) if TAW's inventory includes all the members of AW as well as some native members.
- iv. Chronological compatibility. TAW is accessible from AW if it takes no temporal relocation for a member of AW to contemplate the entire history of TAW.
- v. Physical compatibility. TAW is accessible from AW if they share natural laws.
- vi. Taxonomic compatibility. TAW is accessible from AW if both worlds contain the same species and the species are characterized by the same properties.
- vii. Analytical compatibility. TAW is accessible from AW if they share analytic truths, i.e. if objects designated by the same words have the same essential properties.
- viii. Linguistics compatibility. TAW is accessible from AW if the language by which TAW is described can be understood in AW.

So, the more compatible a Textual actual world (TAW) is with the Actual world (AW) the more accessible it becomes. (Norgaard, Montoro, and Busse, 2010)

### ***Arigo Again! Textual Analysis***

The text under consideration reveals themes of sociocultural values that are real and are either rejected or whose practice is declining among the Urhobo people today. The major characters in the text are the young Arigo, Mr Okiti, his wife, Mrs Okiti and their children Jete and Ejiro. Other characters include Blakie, Maria, an Urhobo lady who, on migrating to the North changed her identity by converting to Islam and changed her name to Mariam Hajiya, Mr. and Mrs. Dayo, Okiti's neighbours, Maigemu, Okiti's driver, Mrs Umukoro, Arigo's mother, Dibi and Okiti's elder brother. The characters are created by Richard Maduku to achieve his purpose as a creative writer. He sets his narrative in Urotor (Ephron-Otor, his home town) an Urhobo community in the southern part of Nigeria and gradually moves to Kadugeri (Kaduna) in the northern part of Nigeria where he captures some Urhobo people living there and their neighbors with the view of creating a cultural contrast of how various individuals respond to the Urhobo culture. The Urhobo ethnic group like every other Nigerian ethnic group, brims with diverse kinds of cultural manifestations and strong traditions that they inherited from their progenitors. Unfortunately, there have been a very sharp decline or absolute rejection of these sociocultural norms and values in recent times by some Urhobo people.



### **Influence of Social Change on Urhobo Social Structures**

Social structure is a term that refers to all interconnected relationships of various social groups and institutions created by man for the benefit of the people living together as a community or nationality. Social structures help people create harmonious relationships by providing opportunities to bond, grow and express themselves. Social structure defines how people interact and behave within the family and by extension the society. There is usually a strong bond among extended family members in Urhobo communities. This bond is strengthened through extended family meetings, contributions, widow inheritance marriage, caring for children of siblings and family members coming home during important festivals such as Christmas and burials. This family bonding is captured in the text thus: “A couple of Okiti’s relations, mainly the women, from other towns and villages had also come with their children, as was the custom during Christmas and traditional festivals, pp. 126” This family bonding has been negatively affected by the influence of social change resulting from the Nigerian economy, migration and urbanization. Those who have migrated to cities such as Maria in the text have changed her identity and no longer identify with their culture group living in the same city. She now lives as a concubine to an Alhaji, a Permanent Secretary in the State’s ministry of Education, without proper observance of the traditional marriage rite of the Urhobo. This relationship forced her to convert to Islam and embrace their culture to be accepted in a marriage relationship, pp. 45.

The Urhobo practice their traditional religion where the supreme God, referred to as *Oghene* is worshipped through the ancestors ‘*Erivwin*’ and community/personal deities. The believe in ‘*Erivwin*’ is the force that bonds members of the Urhobo family together, whose fear enables members of the family to live righteously in accordance with the cultural norms. The family and the African traditional religion are structures that are greatly influenced by social change. The manipulative teachings of some Christian sects and Islam have done so much harm than good to the extent of making the native Urhobo to change their traditional birth name and spiritual orientations in the guise of religion. In the same vein, the Muslim sees non-Muslims as infidels thus disrupting the Urhobo communal life and by extension, African communalism. Thus, an Urhobo woman married or in a relationship with a Muslim is forced into embracing Islam and the Northern culture. Maria was captured as one who practised dual religion, as captured in the text. “Her dual religion and change to the Northern women dress style was done to please her man... pp. 45” While in the North, she is a Muslim and when she visits her home town (Urhobo) she pretends to be a Christian. The social structures discussed above are common to the textual actual world (TAW) and the actual world (AW) of the Urhobo people; thus (TAW) is accessible from (AW) as evidenced in the text. The influence of Western education, Christianity and Islam has brought significant changes in the orientation and lifestyle of many Urhobo people who no longer believe in the power of ‘*Erivwin*’ and the extended family

bonding. It is very rare today for a man to either release their children to stay with their relatives or accept their relatives' children to stay with them. The family structure among the modern Urhobo is more or less that of nuclear because the trust and love that exists in the family structure has faded away. Another issue is the problem that religion has brought into Urhobo land. The unity and synergy that exist in Urhobo communal life have faded. In the text, it was observed that when the wife of Mr. Okiti left the house in annoyance because her husband refused to send Arigo out of the house, the neighbours' wives went immediately to the motor park to bring her back home and also settle the matter.

“...Mrs Dayo and two other women from the neighbourhood had got a hint of the situation. They had made straight for the motor park. ... After much persuasion, by the trio, she reluctantly got off the long-distance commercial car pp106”

This kind of relationship described in the text, which existed then, is very rare today. The doctrine of being your neighbour's keeper no longer exists among most Urhobo people. They no longer have time for communal meetings and visiting home for traditional festivals and other important ceremonies.

### **The Influence of Social Change on the Belief System of the Urhobo People**

A belief system commonly refers to a set of ideologies or a set of principles that helps to interpret the everyday reality of any social group of people or an ethnic group. Belief systems are structured sets of principles or tenets held to be true by individuals and larger groups. The Urhobo people from time believed in reincarnation and dreams. When Arigo was born, the family believed that he was the reincarnation of their late father, and a fulfilment of the dreams some of them had previously.

He appeared to many of us in dreams”, replied Okiti's half-brother, “and in all these dreams, he told us that he will be coming back to life in the family again. Not long after, the boy was born and everybody who saw him exclaimed that our grandfather has fulfilled his promise. For the little boy was an exact replica (p14.).

The belief in the ancestors by the Urhobo people was also captured in the text: “The woman concludes by adding that it was not herself that willed it but Okiti's great ancestors. pp17”. It has been observed in this study that the belief in reincarnation and the control of the ancestors, “*Erivwin*” no longer holds sway among many Urhobo people today as they have been influenced by Christianity. The ancestors are no longer venerated by the modern Urhobo.

### **The Influence of Social Change on Urhobo Language and Urhobo Naming Pattern**

One major way in which social change has affected the Urhobo sociocultural domain is the outright neglect of the Urhobo language in favour of English and the Pidgin languages. The Urhobo people in olden days believed so much in the use of their language. In the text, it is evident that Okiti wants to ensure that his children are able to understand and communicate in Urhobo language, a vision he could not achieve at the end, and even himself was a victim of same because the influence of social change made him to drop his traditional Urhobo name for an English name: “He (Okiti) dropped his traditional birth name (Ochuko) for Henry when he was to be baptized as a Christian” (p44). People and things are known and distinguished by the name they bear. Humans are denominated and designated by name. Thus, people can be identified as related to an ethnic nationality in Nigeria by the name they bear. In the same vein, people who bear names from the same language see or identify themselves as related. Today the influence of Christian baptismal names, Islamic and Western culture names has affected the naming pattern of Urhobo. Just as Okiti dropped his traditional name, Maria an Urhobo lady changed her name to Hajiya Mariam (p44). There are people like Maria who choose to change their identity when they sojourn in a foreign land in order to have a sense of belonging and blend with the indigenes, while others see bearing Anglicized or religious names as a show of civilization. They refer to such foreign names as ‘*Oyibo names*’ or ‘baptismal/ Islamic names’.

“Arigo was also of cultural importance to Okiti. Since he was brought to live with them, Okiti was glad to note that his daughter was picking up many Urhobo words” p. 60. Before the coming of Arigo to Okiti’s house, Okiti’s daughter was very fluent in Hausa to the detriment of Urhobo, her mother tongue. This phenomenon is a major problem for cultural identity; hence it gave Mr Okiti a great concern. Most Urhobo children today in places like Warri and other Urhobo townships such as Abraka, Agbarho, Effurun and Ughelli cannot communicate fluently in Urhobo let alone those in the North, West and Eastern parts of Nigeria. Social change has so much affected the speaking and love for the Urhobo language to the extent that a child speaking Urhobo is seen as antisocial or *Ogburhobo* (Ifesieh & Aleh, (2013). This was many years ago when the researchers were in primary school, our teacher forbids us from speaking vernacular (our indigenous language) in class, the teachers thought they were doing us good then, following the trend of civilization at that time. Thus, the upcoming generation was discouraged from communicating in their mother tongue. Nevertheless, the importance of the mother tongue to the development of the child cannot be overemphasize, hence the celebration of World Mother Tongue Day every February 21<sup>st</sup> worldwide as enacted by UNESCO. Even with the effort of UNESCO in this regard, children born to Urhobo parents and some parents who cannot speak the Urhobo language today, thus the language may go into extinction if it is not salvaged.

### **Urhobo Marriage Practice**

The Urhobo people are known for polygamous marriage practices; they also practice the widow inheritance type of marriage. The author captured the desire of Urhobo for many wives in the text and how social change has affected the marriage practice of the Urhobo people. “No matter the education or whatever religion they professed, the bug to marry many wives was very strong among the men of this area. Only abject poverty could deter them from marrying more than one wife (p12)”. Social change has affected the marriage institution of the Urhobo people. The Urhobo see marriage as the beginning of family life and the conjugal relationship of a man and woman in society. By nature, the Urhobo man was a polygamist, and any man of average means had two or more wives.

Okumagba (182: 88) revealed that “No Urhobo man was happy and content with one wife or having children with one woman”. This revelation is further confirmed by Ilega (2003) that polygamy is central in the Urhobo marriage system. The reverse is the case with the modern Urhobo of today, majority of them like Okiti are averse to polygamy: “Though he was averse to polygamy, Okiti had never stopped to wonder if the bug for marrying many wives would bite him later in the future (p. 12)”. Apart from Christianity and modernity, the society has changed due to issues of birth control campaigns and the present Nigerian economy; even the wealthy among the Urhobo now stick to one wife. Polygamy and rearing many children is now old-fashioned and is frowned upon and detested among the Urhobo. This is contrary to the old tradition and philosophy of the Urhobo founding fathers, who believed in having large families.

Widow inheritance type of marriage is another sociocultural tradition that is very significant to the Urhobo culture. Mr. Okiti’s hatred for the practice of widow inheritance is revealed in the text: “Okiti could not fathom what made his elder brother think that he was so tied to their culture as to inherit a late relation’s wife. This was one of the aspects of their culture which he had sworn never to observe”. (p 129). Apart from polygamy, there are other important issues relating to Urhobo marriage practice that have been overtaken by events and modernity. Most important to this discourse is widow inheritance type of marriage, which has been a healthy and acceptable practice handed over by their progenitors. When an Urhobo married man dies, the widow must be allocated to one of his junior brothers or a very close kinsman. If she refused to remarry, which is not common in those days except for elderly widow, she could choose to remain in the family to take care of her children as long as she remains unmarried or she have to return to her family and her family will return the bride wealth paid on her to the late husband’s family while the children given birth to in the marriage remains as members of the late husband’s family.

Thus, when Umukoro, the father of Arigo died, Okiti’s elder brother did everything possible to see that Okiti accept the late brother’s wife in marriage “I have done the necessary groundwork

and I am sure nobody will protest if mama Arigo is given to you”. Okiti bluntly refused the proposal because he has sworn never to observe this aspect of the Urhobo culture as evidenced in the study text (p129) Urhobo view marriage as a social contract between two families. The wife must see herself as a wife to the family and must join the meeting of the family wives. It is the custom that the wife must address both male and female in the family she is married into as husbands. She is expected to genuflect and respect members of her husband’s family, irrespective of their sex or age. The text captures this phenomenon as it were, but the modern Urhobo wives do not observe this tradition any more. In the text, Mrs. Okiti refers to Arigo as her little husband. “He is not my son... he is bigger than me... he is my little husband...” (p 99). Even though Arigo is just a little older than her daughter, she is expected to respect him being her brother-in-law. This tradition has been overtaken in modern times to an extent that Urhobo wives no longer genuflect or have respect for their husbands’ relatives, especially those who are junior to them.

In recent times, most Urhobo women do not allow their husbands' siblings or family members to visit or stay with them. The extended family relationship is gradually giving way to the nuclear type, where parents' and family members’ opinions do not count in decision-making in the Urhobo marriage institution. Women now see such intrusion into their home as a threat to their relationship with their husbands, they no longer see themselves as visitors in their matrimonial family. Mrs. Okiti became repugnant to the culture of seeing herself as a visitor in a house and family she struggled to build with her husband, and decided to fight for her rights as a modern wife. In her mind she reasoned that “Wives may be visitors, but some visitors are more powerful than some hosts” (p106). So, she insists that Arigo must go back to the village. Such authoritative ideology stems from the feminist reasoning that has infiltrated the Urhobo society.

The influence of social change on Mrs. Okiti enables her to stand her ground that Arigo must return back to the village or she will pack out of the house, “Take Arigo back immediately or else...” (p103). Most Urhobo wives today are seen by the older folks as controlling their husbands. This phenomenon has made most mother in-laws uncomfortable staying or visiting their sons. It was the belief in the culture of Mr. and Mrs. Okiti that a wife in her matrimonial family is a visitor because when she dies, her remains must be taken back to her family. Her opinion is irrelevant when family issues are treated and decisions are taken. The Urhobo woman of today has fought against this belief; it has almost become nonexistent as a result of the feminist struggle in modern times. It was a real struggle for Mr. Okiti to oblige his wife’s order “he began to ponder on his wife’s order: “Take Arigo back immediately or else...” (p 104). Despite the fact that Okiti saw that it was very wrong of his wife to have asked him to send Arigo back, which is against their culture where a wife was perpetually regarded as a visitor (p 104), Mr. Okiti has to return Arigo back home in order to save his marriage.

Most Urhobo women today are said to be controlling their husband using different kinds of threats on the husband who wants to avoid making trouble with his wife. This phenomenon has caused serious strain in marriages and family relationships. Some cases result in divorce when the husband chooses to stand his ground as the head whose decision is final. Public opinion from my recent field work (2024) in Delta Central Senatorial District reveals that one of the reasons why some modern Urhobo men go into polygamy and having concubines today is as a result of their wives' un-submissive attitude.

#### **v. Influence of Social Change on Child Care and Discipline**

Urhobo people believe so much in child education, care and discipline. They do all within their power to see that children do not grow up to become a disgrace or liability to the family. It is on record that the Urhobo are the first to raise funds to build a school of their own and also send one of theirs abroad to study in order to become the principal of that school. This was how prestigious Urhobo College in Effurun was established. Ekeh (2005: V), cited in Ivworin (2012:47) captured these efforts. It was not until the 1940s, during the difficult years of World War II that Urhobo cultural leaders mounted a major campaign for mass education for the youth at any cost. They built the famous Urhobo College, a Secondary School that was devoted to the education of Urhobo young men. The above efforts of the Urhobo leaders are the same spirit with which Mr. Okiti and Arigo's mother to garner everything within their ability to see Arigo to school. The Urhobo in those days saw education as the best way to greatness and to rank high among other nations. The quest of the Urhobo people for discipline and education in retrospect is captured in the words of Arigo's mother in the study text. "Arigo ... could be beaten like any other child when he misbehaved, but should never be hit on the head with either hand or stick (P. 17)". Mr. Okiti as a caring Uncle. He wants to give the best education to Arigo as seen in the text: "After fattening Arigo up with city food and ensuring that he took his morning and evening bath for a couple of days, Okiti decided that he was presentable enough for school" (P. 38).

In the present day, Urhobo as it is in most parts of Nigeria, child discipline both at home and in the school is a thing of the past. Children of today are no longer interested in education; they are uncontrollable and most parents are doing nothing to stop this trend. There are some parents who even go to their children's school to warn teachers who want to instill discipline in the children. They pay people to write examinations for their wards, thus encouraging them to grow up as cheats and fraudsters. This growing tendency in recent times has led to the development of the so-called yahoo boys, which is trending presently and has made many parents and their children to see education as a scam.

#### **vi. Urhobo Thoughts and Identity**

One of the functions of literature is to use language to communicate a message in a precise and effective way. The researcher observed that the language of thought in the text can be assessed and decoded in the Urhobo actual world (UAW) as a finger-print of the Urhobo culture and worldview. Richard Maduku portrays the sociocultural temperance of Urhobo people on reincarnation through the protagonist to reveal Urhobo thought and belief in reincarnation. The central character, Arigo is said to be his grandfather reincarnate. He was therefore named Arigo, the name of his grandfather. This thought is further exhibited in the way the child was treated and accorded the respect due to a grandfather. Such naming, belief and thought no longer reign among the Urhobo of today as they have been erased by the influence of social change (Nabofa, 2005).

Urhobo thought and identity is also exhibited through the use of special chants, which is a common phenomenon among the Urhobo. Chants are used by native doctors as well as other competent native speakers to express their belief and surprise emotions, praise, thanks, or as a way of averting evil with the consciousness that there is a spiritual force that helps or saves. Urhobo thought, taboo and identity are embedded in such chants and pithy sayings. Chants are also used to transmit Urhobo indigenous knowledge. They are very important aspects of the Urhobo folklore that are used to preserve the Urhobo language and cultural heritage. Darah, Ivworin and Agbogun, (2024) assert that efforts should be made by the Urhobo people to save Urhobo language and culture from the pangs of extinction by all concerned stakeholders. According to them, while language reveals what is important in a culture, the former shapes the latter. In the study text, Papa Ejiro in one of his chants, expresses the importance of chants as embellishment:

It will never happen,  
It has never been heard of before  
that while in a foreign land  
One of us got missing  
And was not found  
again Our gods are not  
asleep,  
Our ancestors never sleep... (p. 96)

In response to the above chant, Mrs. Okiti asked: “What about our sons who never returned from the civil war?” Papa Ejiro replied to her that those who died in the war misbehaved, that “they broke many of our taboos”. This shows that lack of knowledge and non-observance of taboo have their gross consequences. It is evident among the Urhobo, as it is in most African

ethnic groups, that lack of indigenous knowledge and observance of cultural taboos has gross consequences on those who default. It is evident from the Urhobo actual world AW today that most Urhobo have lost grip of these cultural thoughts that have helped to shape the thought pattern, belief and identity of Urhobo people. Thus, there is so much betrayal and misbehavior which have led to the untimely death of many youth and great Urhobo personalities in their prime.

#### **vii. Urhobo Sociocultural Heritage**

Although the author's reason is that "Strict righteous training or not, children who would be bad would always be bad p63". The researchers have observed that the society then and the society now are significantly different because of the emerging social changes. The society then was positively instructive to the extent that children competed to do what was right. They influence one another both at school and at home through traditional games and stories. The negative use of social media and peer group influence on the society today can be adjudged inimical to the proper upbringing of children. Peer pressure and influence can result in pre-teens and teenagers to act in certain ways or making certain decisions, as stated in (gchildren.net.au), such as: a. Choosing the same clothes, hairstyle or jewellery as their friends, b. Listening to the same music or watching the same television show as their friends, c. changing the way they talk or the words they use, d. doing risky things or breaking rules, e. working hard at school or not working as hard, f. dating or taking part in sexual activities, g. vaping, smoking or using alcohol or other drugs.

A critical reading of the text under review reveals that Arigo's behaviour is being influenced by peer group activities and the city life he has been exposed to, in contradistinction to his village experiences. Thus, Arigo was described as a little boy, full of innocent curiosity and who acts on impulse, experimenting with all the various things he encounters in the city.

#### **viii. Discussion of Findings**

The text under review conveys the sociocultural temperament of Urhobo people diachronically as a response to some definite cultural experiences that are being attacked or influenced by social change. As participant observers assessing the textual actual world (TAW) from the Urhobo actual world (UAW), the researchers observe that some cultural features by which the Urhobo are identified have changed with modernity, which is a major element of social change. For instance, widow inheritance and polygamy have become old-fashioned. The modern Urhobo man frowns at such practices. These changes have been attributed to the influence of Western education, Christianity and the nature of the Nigerian socioeconomic situation. The change is shown in the text thus:



Okiti could not fathom what made his elder brother to think that he was so tied to their culture as to inherit a late relation's wife. This was one of the aspects of their culture which he had sworn never to observe. (P. 129).

The reaction of Okiti suggests that most of the cultural norms and practices have changed. The situation is heightened by urbanization. Urban dwellers think differently from their rural counterparts in terms of the cultural beliefs and practices. Apart from urbanization, religion and Western education have also contributed to changing the psyche of many modern Urhobo.

There is vivid evidence of social changes between the upbringing of children in the cities and those in the villages. Social change is a dominant feature in *Arigo Again!* The arrival of Arigo into Okiti's family made Mr. Okiti to take a more careful look at these sociocultural changes. According to the observation by Okiti, "children brought up in the traditional way had what could be termed unlimited freedom when compared with the so-called civilized method of the urban dwellers". The differences in the life of the urban and rural Urhobo are occasioned by the influence of modern life as against what exists in the rural areas. Thus, children in the urban are alienated from the cultural norms, thereby making it difficult to introduce them to their cultural heritage. The above phenomenon is further revealed in the peer group pressure and influence that took its toll on the protagonist of the novel- Arigo. The behaviour and actions of Arigo portray a curiosity that can only be exhibited by a child who is moved from the cultural setting of his childhood experience to another. Such also is the case of the adult Maria, an Urhobo lady, who on relocating to the north, dropped her Urhobo culture in preference for northern culture and she is now being addressed as "Hajiya Mariam" an attitude that shows that "*Igari re Urhobo vwerhe Urhoboo*" (Urhobo garri never tastes sweet to the Urhobo). She is said to have cut the picture of a typical northern lady. "As she opened her mouth in greeting, Okiti discovered that she had a golden tooth commonly worn by men and women who had gone to the holy land of the Muslims as pilgrims". Richard Maduku is able to relate to his readers the cultural conflicts that manifest when two cultures come into contact. The result of such cultural conflict is cultural change. The dominant culture subdues the other. This is evident today to the extent that the Urhobo culture is presently being subdued by Western cultures. This phenomenon is captured in the text: "I have a few points to settle in my house too", Okiti thought in reference to Arigo and the conflict of the culture that his arrival had aggravated in his home".

Richard Maduku's *Arigo Again!* as examined in this study, shows how social change influences the cultural beliefs and social identity of Urhobo people in the past and present, as evidenced in the link between literature and society. The research shows that social change influences the

attitudes and belief system of most Urhobo in their actual world (UAW) today, contrary to what was handed down by their progenitors. Social change alters the lifestyle, beliefs and cultural orientation of the Urhobo people as evidenced in their use of the Urhobo language, belief in reincarnation, naming pattern, religion and marriage institutions, child upbringing, widow inheritance, marital rites and wives' attitude toward husband's relatives in the Urhobo world view.

#### **ix. Conclusion**

This study x-rays how social change influences Urhobo cultural identity through the prism of Maduku (2014)'s *Arigo Again!* The findings of the study reveal how social change, manifesting through migration, religion, western civilization, feminism, peer group pressure and peer influence affect the identity of the Urhobo people. Most important aspects of Urhobo worldview and their cultural practices as seen in their actual world (AW) mentioned above are clearly documented in and communicated through *Arigo Again!* Through the use of language, themes, plot and character creation, the author reveals how social change affects the sociocultural life and belief system of the Urhobo society. The text leaves several strong impressions on a wide array of issues relating to Urhobo cultural heritage that are being eroded through social change occasioned by the instrument of Western civilization and urbanisation. The paper therefore, concludes that the Urhobo cultural identity has been grossly affected because of social change.

#### **x. Recommendations**

The study recommends, among other things, that:

- a. Urhobo scholars, leaders and parents should promote their cultural heritage by teaching the upcoming generation to value the Urhobo culture and discourage unnecessary Western influence.
- b. Parents who are able to speak the Urhobo language should train their children in the basic elements of the language and culture. This will encourage the children to use the language as a medium of expression at home and project the identity of Urhobo in a world of cultural conflict and competition.

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**The "Wafer" and the Wine: A Case for the Indigenizing the Elements of the Holy Eucharist  
in Modern African Churches**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the theological, cultural, and historical dimensions of the Holy Eucharist, with particular attention to the symbolism and adaptability of its elements—bread and wine—within Christian worship. Drawing on Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11:23–34, the Eucharist is presented as a sacred act that unites believers with the body and blood of Christ, commemorating His sacrifice and affirming the new covenant. The research traces the evolution of Eucharistic practice from its origins in the Passover meal to its central role in Christian liturgy across various traditions. As Christianity expanded globally, diverse cultural contexts reshaped its expression, prompting the African Church to explore ways of indigenizing the Eucharist for greater cultural relevance. Using a hermeneutical research method, the study interprets historical and theological perspectives that support contextual adaptation of the rite. It argues for the legitimacy of substituting the traditional bread and wine with culturally meaningful elements such as palm wine, Izobo, Kunu, Okpa, and Imidazole, provided that such elements uphold the theological symbolism of Christ's body and blood. The study concludes that indigenization enriches African Christian worship by fostering a deeper connection between faith and cultural identity. Furthermore, it suggests that embracing cultural diversity within Eucharistic practice strengthens the global Church's unity and inclusivity, offering a more authentic and resonant expression of Christian faith.

**Keywords:** Eucharist, Indigenization, Cultural adaptation, African theology, Communion.

## **1. Introduction.**

African theology seeks to reinterpret and express the Christian faith through African cultural lenses, thereby aligning it more closely with African traditions and worldviews (Fasholé-Luke, 1976). Early African theologians such as Harry Sawyerr, Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, Samuel Eriwwo, and others lamented the manner in which Western missionaries dismissed African religious and cultural practices, often branding them with pejorative terms such as *fetishism*, *paganism*, and *idolatry*. This posture, they argued, privileged Western cultural forms while undermining the dignity, complexity, and spiritual value of African heritage.

Echoing Immanuel Kant's assertion that humanity must eventually "come of age," African theologians contend that African Christianity has reached a stage where it must be articulated in ways that resonate with African believers. James Johnson of Sierra Leone was among the earliest advocates for liturgical reform that incorporates African indigenous traditions, thereby affirming African identity within Christian worship. Fuller (2017) similarly argues that religion should function as an integral component of ethnic identity, cautioning that its absence may lead to identity fragmentation, cultural dislocation, and alienation from one's history and customs.

Using the Holy Communion—a central sacrament rooted in both Old and New Testament traditions—as its point of focus, this study seeks to promote African Christian identity through contextual liturgical expression. By adopting a revolutionary yet theologically grounded approach, the research aims to deepen African Christians' sense of belonging and cultural connection whenever they gather around the Lord's Table. Through participation in the Eucharist, believers affirm their union with Christ and partake in the nourishment that leads to everlasting life.

## **2. Conceptual Issues**

### *The Concept of the Holy Communion*

Among both the Israelites and Gentiles, sacrificial meals often followed religious ceremonies, including the Lord's Supper. Within the Church, the Holy Communion is also referred to as the Eucharist, Mass, Lord's Supper, or Holy Meal (Kearney, 2024). The Synoptic Gospels mention this incident as taking place in an upstairs apartment that may have belonged to Mary, John Mark's mother, on the same day as the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread. The term "unleavened" originates from the Hebrew word *matstsah* and the Greek *azymos*, meaning "sweet." The Last Supper, which coincided with Jesus' crucifixion, symbolically depicted Him as the Paschal Lamb, delivering humanity from sin and death (Cline, 2019). The Jewish Passover meal foreshadowed the New Testament Holy Communion, with the lamb representing Christ, who became the perfect, sinless substitute for humanity. The unleavened bread here represents the preparedness of believers to commit themselves to Christ and their independence from sin and

corruption. Therefore, partaking in Holy Communion denotes connection with and involvement in the death of Christ.

### **The Institution and Theology of the Holy Eucharist**

On Maundy Thursday, the day Jesus bathed His disciples' feet, the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist was established. This incident emphasises how Christ is the perfect Paschal Lamb, atoning for all of humanity's sins (GotQuestions.org, 2022). The Anglican Communion Catechism explains that the Eucharistic elements strengthen and renew the soul, akin to how bread sustains the physical body (Compass, 2024). Jesus used bread that was produced nearby for the Last Supper and held it up for everyone to see. The prayer of consecration during today's Eucharistic liturgy is a reflection of this act (Juris, 2024). The consecration of Eucharistic components prior to their distribution to communicants is a reflection of Jesus' practice of blessing the bread to set it apart. The act of breaking bread, especially the host, represents Christ's body being broken for humanity, much like a father would break bread for his family. Importantly, He referred to it as His body (touto), not merely bread (artos) (Mark 14:12-25 (CEV), n.d.). The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, where the consecrated bread becomes the actual body of Christ (Davenport, 2023). Christ's blood is symbolised by the wine in the Eucharist (Waite, 2024). As Jesus handed the cup to His followers during the Passover dinner, He expressed gratitude and declared, "This is my blood of the New Testament." MackArthur (1997) emphasizes that Jesus transformed the Last Passover into the first Holy Eucharist, making Himself not only central to the ceremony but also the symbolic Paschal Lamb. While the disciples likely understood the elements metaphorically rather than literally, MackArthur notes that this reflects the Hebraic tradition of symbolic language. From the liturgy, no evidence suggests the concept of transubstantiation, nor does it imply the disciples misunderstood the elements to be Christ's actual body. In essence, the Holy Communion encapsulates profound theological truths, inviting believers to participate in the mystery of Christ's sacrifice.

### **Apostle Paul's Theology of the Eucharist**

One of the most important early Church leaders, Paul of Tarsus, wrote a great deal about the Holy Eucharist. According to Thompson (2019), Paul's influence on Christianity is ranked second only to Jesus'. Paul, who was greatly impacted by his experience in Damascus and his belief in the resurrected Lord, created the fundamental ideas of Christian theology. Paul described this transformative encounter as the revelation of the Son of God, the crucified Lord, and the Lord of glory, which shaped his post-Pentecost theology (Taber, 2024). One of Paul's significant theological contributions is his teaching on the Holy Eucharist, found in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. Though a beautiful narrative, Paul presents it amidst a stern rebuke of the Corinthian Christians for their selfish and carnal behaviour. Before addressing the Eucharist, Paul critiques the early Church's misuse of the Agape feast, a communal meal borrowed from the ancient world, where

participants shared food in fellowship. Ascough (2008) explains how this feast became corrupted by social divisions within the Corinthian Church, reintroducing the very distinctions the Church sought to abolish. Paul condemned this practice, stating that what they were eating was not the Lord's Supper but merely a selfish banquet. Barclay provides insight into the meals of the ancient Graeco-Roman world, which the Church adopted. This included breakfast, a midday meal, and the deipnon the main evening meal. The Agape feast often concluded with the observance of the Eucharist. However, as MackArthur notes, this sacred meal had degenerated into gluttonous revelry, where the wealthy brought lavish food for themselves, leaving poorer Christians hungry. Paul lamented that this abuse dishonoured the Lord and stripped the meal of its legitimacy and spiritual essence.

### **Paul's Theology of the Eucharistic Elements.**

Paul presents his theology of the Holy Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:23–34. Based on what Christ said at the Last Supper, the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus offers a deep understanding of this holy act of devotion.

#### **The Bread.**

When Jesus said, "This is my body," He was still physically present, and there was no indication of a separation between the bread and His body. He did not say, "This bread stands for my body." Instead, the bread, though physically bread, was also called the body of Christ. Paul emphasizes that the broken bread of the sacrament goes beyond symbolism; it connects believers with the living Christ, the source of eternal life and communion with His presence.

#### **The Wine**

The liquid in the cup, though unspecified, represents Christ's blood, shed on the cross for humanity's salvation and as the foundation of the new covenant. Jesus inaugurated this new covenant with His blood, becoming its mediator. Rom-Shiloni (2012), links this covenant with the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, foretelling the reunification of Israel and Judah under obedience to Yahweh. Blood represented life in the Old Testament, and Jesus had to give His life in order to institute the new covenant. The sacrament's crimson wine represents Christ's life, without which the new covenant that unites people with God would not be possible.

### **Significance of the Elements**

When Jesus stated, "Eat this bread and drink this cup," He was urging His followers to acknowledge and accept the advantages of His atoning sacrifice. This deed maintains a strong bond with Christ and gives spiritual vitality. This raises the question of whether the grape juice in the cup was fermented or not. Biblical authors employed *genne* (fruit) and *ampelou* (vine), which denote purity, in place of the Greek term *oinos* (wine). Old Testament Passover laws prohibited yeast (a symbol of sin and corruption) during the feast, reinforcing the use of unfermented



elements. The Eucharist serves as a reminder to Christians of Christ's sacrifice and the expectation of His second coming, symbolising His death on the cross for the sins of humanity. It nurtures the soul, builds connection with Christ, and fortifies faith. The Old Testament holiday of Passover, which commemorates Israel's escape from Egypt, is compared to the Eucharist, which commemorates freedom from sin, in the Life Application Study Bible commentary.

### **Meals Connected to the Holy Eucharist**

#### **1. The Passover Meal**

This weeklong feast, known as Pesach, commemorates the birth of the Jewish community and their exodus from Egypt. Participants consume symbolic foods, including unleavened bread (matzot), bitter herbs (maror), and a mixture of apples, nuts, wine, and cinnamon (charoset). These elements recall the hardships and deliverance of the Hebrews. Unleavened bread symbolized the urgency of their departure from Egypt. Berkhof L. (2003) notes that the New Testament interprets the Passover meal as a sign of deliverance from sin through the Messiah.

#### **2. The Sabbath Meal**

The Sabbath dinner, which was practiced for at least a century prior to Christ, included the breaking of bread, the reading of blessings (berekah), and ritual handwashing. This ritual, likely observed by Jesus and His disciples, influenced the Church's tradition of "breaking bread." The blessings, rooted in thanksgiving and praise, reflect God's provision and His wonderful works (mirabilia Dei). The Eucharist remains a profound spiritual practice, connecting believers to Christ's sacrifice, sustaining their faith, and offering hope of eternal communion with God.

### **The Early Church and the Breaking of Bread**

When the Sabbath and Seder meals are closely examined, they bear a remarkable resemblance to both contemporary behaviours and the Eucharistic ceremonies of the early Church. Since the majority of the early Church was Jewish, it is probable that they used the same definition of "remembrance" in their own customs, which are still essential to our religion today (Sundberg, 1958). Dr. Luke provides insight into the early Church's community life in his writings from approximately AD 85 (Wilson, 2024). Prayer, companionship, the breaking of bread, and apostolic instruction were the hallmarks of this life. It was a New Testament technical word that especially referred to the Lord's Supper and the customary supper that the apostle Paul was used to when he spoke to the Christians at Corinth.

In the Greek, "the breaking of bread," the definite word "the," denotes a particular, unique feast. The Lord's Supper is referenced by the fact that it contains both unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. In a letter to Emperor Antoninus in 150 AD, St. Justin explained the Eucharistic feast in the early Church. According to him, believers gathered to listen to the memories of the

apostles, read the writings of the prophets, and receive admonition from the leader. This was followed by prayers, the exchange of a kiss, and the communion meal (bread, water, and wine) after prayers had been said over them. Clearly, the early Church had adopted the Sabbath and Seder meals, but unlike the Jewish tradition, they experienced the real presence of Christ in their rituals. Holy Communion was frequently associated with agape, or love feasts, during the Christian eras of the Apostolic, Reformation, and Post-Reformation. During these, individuals brought oblations, or essential food, to be blessed by the priest while offering prayers of gratitude. Over time, these foods were applied to the elements of the Holy Eucharist to be consecrated. Church fathers like Origen, Basil, Gregory, and Augustine, along with Reformers such as Zwingli, Calvin, and Luther, made significant contributions to the symbolism. The New Testament writers used different terminologies to describe the concept of the Holy Eucharist, including:

- ✓ The Lord's Supper ("Deipnon kuriakon," 1 Cor 11:20): This term is common among Protestants. Here, Paul distinguishes between the Agape feast, where wealthy Corinthians would invite the poor as guests and dishonor them, and the Lord's Supper, where Christ provides for all, regardless of social status.
- ✓ The Lord's Table ("Trapeza kuriou," 1 Cor 10:21): Paul contrasts the Lord's Table with pagan sacrificial meals, where participants commune with the devil.
- ✓ The phrase "Klass tou artou," which means "the breaking of bread," is used to describe both the Lord's Supper and the love feasts (Acts 2:42; 20:7).
- ✓ Gratitude ("Eucharistia," 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:24; Matthew 26:26,27): This was used to describe the blessings and gratitude given throughout the meal.

Before establishing the Holy Eucharist, Jesus did not finish the customary Jewish Passover dinner, according to Klein (2024). According to him, Jesus chose regular wine since it was the most widely consumed beverage in Palestine at the time and unleavened bread because it was readily accessible. The posture in which the disciples received the elements (reclining) does not preclude Christians from receiving the Eucharist today in any position (standing, sitting, or kneeling), according to Berkhof, who contends that leavened bread and any type of wine would have been acceptable.

### **Historical Perspective of the Holy Communion Elements**

In the Passover ceremonies, the third cup of wine which was given a new meaning was used to celebrate the Holy Eucharist (Reece, 2024). One of the main points of contention was whether or not the wine used in Holy Communion should be fermented or unfermented, or if it should be combined with water or substituted with other liquids like milk, honey, or water. A report from a committee set up by the Archbishop of Canterbury regarding the nature of Holy Communion wine, published in 1917, highlighted the following points:

- ✓ In the early Church, the fermented wine was always combined with water.

- ✓ Until recently, only fermented grape wine has been used for Communion in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions, with minor exceptions.

Their belief is summed up in a 1919 publication, "Unfermented v. Intoxicating Communion Wine," which states that intoxicating wine is unscriptural, while unfermented grape juice is the "wine of wisdom" found in the Scriptures. They also point to the wine miraculously made by Jesus at the Marriage Feast of Cana, claiming that it must have been unfermented, since God's Word condemns intoxicating wine. Historically, the Council of Dorin in Armenia (527) forbade the use of new wine, while the Fourth Council of Orleans (AD 541) ordered the use of only grape wine. Other councils, such as the Third Council of Braga (AD 675), prohibited the use of milk in place of wine. The Roman Catholic Church today uses fermented wine mixed with water in the chalice for Communion, while the use of freshly pressed grape juice is held to be valid but never licit. Many priests personally supervise the wine-making process to ensure that only naturally fermented wine is used for the Eucharist. In African churches, water is sometimes used instead of wine due to cultural considerations, such as the fear of women being associated with the scent of wine early in the morning. Milk was used in Communion in places where wine was in short supply, such as Galicia and Asturia. Despite ongoing controversy, most Christian denominations agree that the wine used in Holy Communion must be made from grapes, fermented, and combined with water in conformity with long-standing customs.

### ***Elements of the Holy Eucharist***

The elements used in the Holy Communion vary across Christian denominations.

- **Wine:** Some Christian traditions use red wine to symbolize the blood of Christ. This wine is often made from grapes and fermented, but with minimal alcoholic content.
- **Wafer:** **A wafer is a circular, thin bread baked with salt, water, and wheat flour. The wafer is produced from unleavened bread, which lacks yeast and does not rise like ordinary bread, in the Roman Catholic Church and several Orthodox churches (Church, 2022).** The bread is usually baked until it is crisp and dry, making it brittle and easy to break into pieces for Communion. Pentecostal churches often use crackers, which draw attention to the simplicity and humility of Christ's sacrifice. Some churches still use bread rolls or loaves, which are broken and shared with the congregation after the prayer of consecration. These open Communion services invite all believers, regardless of denomination, to participate, emphasizing the spiritual experience.

### ***The Rise of African Christian Identity***

African theology has long advocated for the indigenization of Christianity, tailoring the faith to suit African thought and cultural life (Agboada, 2023). In an effort to prove the superiority of European culture, early missionaries frequently disregarded African cultural traditions, calling them "fetishism," "paganism," and "idolatry." Rev. Canon Prof. Harry Sawyr, a theologian who

served as the first principal of Sierra Leone's Fourah Bay College, emphasised the need of presenting Christianity in a way that appeals to Africans. In his writings "Creative Evangelism" and "God, Creator and Ancestor," he made the case for establishing a connection between African culture and Christianity in order to more effectively spread the gospel. Idowu (1965) criticized the church in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, for adopting fabricated theology, liturgies, and European traditions that had little to no connection with the indigenous beliefs and culture of the people to whom the gospel was delivered. While acknowledging the efforts of early missionaries, Idowu called for the urgent need to indigenize theology to ensure the Church in Africa remains relevant to its people (Okegbile, 2023). Bishop William Vincent Lucas of Masasi, Ghana, also emphasized the importance of a strong link between the Church and African cultural life, without necessarily embracing what Christians term "paganism." He observed that Africa was losing its identity in favour of European cultural influences through Christian missions and colonialism. In other words, while building churches in Africa, missionaries also established Western civilization, ideologies, and culture, causing Africans to unknowingly lose their identity. This work aims to restore African identity by localizing the elements of the Eucharist, ensuring the faith is presented in a way that aligns with both African culture and Christian doctrine.

### **3. Case for localizing the elements of the Holy Communion.**

From the foregoing, it is clear that the elements of the Holy Communion vary both with time and among denominations. It is also observed that local foods have often been used to represent the body and blood of Christ. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer highlights this, emphasizing that the elements are works of human hands, items made by man that are used to symbolize Christ's body and blood. This reflects the understanding that the elements of Communion are simply human food that is safe for consumption within a given locality, and which the Church agrees upon for that time. These elements could also be subject to change as new discoveries and circumstances arise (Capriola, 2022). The rubrics of the Anglican BCP (number sixteen) state, "For avoidance of unnecessary superstition, the Eucharistic elements should be either wafer or bread and wine." What matters most, however, is the consecration prayer said over the elements and the faith with which members of a particular denomination receive them. Some possible alternatives to the current Eucharistic elements, especially in Nigeria, are as follows:

✓ **Palm Wine:** Palm wine is a fermented beverage made from the sap of palm trees and is consumed across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It typically contains 80-90% water, 5-15% sugar and carbohydrates, 2-6% alcohol, and small amounts of acid, proteins, and minerals. Palm wine is often used in cultural events like weddings, funerals, and social gatherings, which speaks to its health and economic benefits, as well as its safety (GreenViews, 2023). As a substitute for grape wine at the Holy Eucharist, palm wine is culturally and religiously significant (Richard, 2012). Its availability and familiarity make it a relatable choice, and its fermentation symbolizes the

transformative power of Christ's sacrifice. However, to ensure its safety for use in Communion, it must be prepared and handled hygienically.

✓ Izobo: The sap of the izobo palm tree (*Elaeis guineensis*) is used to make izobo, a traditional beverage in several African tribes, especially in Nigeria. Prior to ingestion, this juice is fermented and cooked for many days. It has a somewhat sweet and sour taste, a creamy texture, and an alcohol content of 2–6% on average. In addition to being a substitute for wine in the Eucharist, izobo is frequently utilised in rituals and social gatherings.

✓ Kunu: In West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, kunu is a traditional beverage that is widely consumed. It is prepared with millet or sorghum flour, water, sugar or honey, cow's milk or plant-based milk, and occasionally spices. Protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals are all abundant in kunu. Its use at festivals and social gatherings demonstrates its cultural value. Kunu can be used in place of Holy Communion wine, just like palm wine and Izobo.

✓ Tapioca: It has a mild flavor and a flat, thin texture that makes it easy to break, distribute, and store. In African communities, tapioca is widely accepted, making it a suitable substitute for the traditional wafer used in Holy Communion.

✓ Okpa: African beans or Bambara nuts are used to manufacture okpa, which can be used to make wafers or flatbread. A staple dish that is popular in Eastern Nigeria. Okpa is a culturally appropriate choice for Communion. African communicants are able to establish a connection with their cultural background and foster a sense of identity via the symbolic representation of Okpa as the body of Christ.

✓ Moi-moi: This protein-rich dish is widely consumed among the Yoruba people of South-West Nigeria. If Moi-moi were used as a substitute for the Holy Communion wafer, it would help Yoruba Christians feel more connected to their faith, creating a sense of cultural relevance within their spiritual practices.

These alternative elements not only reflect the local culture but also embody the call for indigenization in African theology, making Christianity more relatable and meaningful in African contexts.

#### **4. Findings.**

The study delves into the theological and cultural dimensions of the Holy Eucharist, focusing on its elements, significance, and the evolving practices surrounding it. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-34, Paul articulates a profound theology of the Eucharist that anchors the sacrament in the teachings of Christ during the Last Supper. The bread, which Jesus calls His body, transcends mere symbolism, forming a connection between believers and the living Christ. It is not merely a representation, but a medium that brings the faithful into communion with Christ, offering spiritual life and the sustenance of faith (Oluwaseun, 2023). Although it isn't mentioned specifically in the scripture, the wine symbolises the blood that Christ sacrificed in order to save humanity and create the new covenant. According to experts, this covenant is a transformational act of divine grace and

the fulfilment of Old Testament predictions. The new covenant would not exist without life, which is represented by the blood. The debate surrounding the type of wine used (fermented or unfermented) reflects concerns over purity and tradition, particularly given the symbolism of the Passover meal, which prohibited yeast. Some scholars argue that the use of unfermented elements aligns with Jewish purity laws and Christ's adherence to these rituals. The Eucharist is fundamentally about remembering Christ's sacrifice and embracing the hope of His return (Lumen, 2024). It nourishes the soul, strengthens faith, and fosters fellowship with the divine (Lawrence, 2024). The connections to the Passover and the Sabbath meals are evident in the ritual practices of the early Church, which adapted Jewish. Deeply ingrained in the early Christian community's conception of Christ's flesh and blood, the "breaking of bread" evolved into a crucial communal worship ritual.

Theological arguments and cultural factors have influenced the Eucharist's history, especially the composition of the bread and wine. Early Christian rituals preserved elements of the Passover feast, but over time, different Christian traditions have adapted these practices to their local contexts. African theologians have emphasized the importance of tailoring Christianity to resonate with local cultures and beliefs, ensuring that the faith remains relevant and meaningful to African Christians. The study suggests that local foods and drinks, such as palm wine, Izobo, and Kunu, could serve as culturally significant alternatives to the traditional Eucharistic elements. These substitutions not only reflect the cultural identity of African communities but also align with the theological understanding that the elements of the Eucharist are works of human hands and can be adapted to local contexts. By ensuring that African Christians can participate in the Eucharist in a way that links their religion to their cultural history, the indigenisation of the sacrament fosters a more genuine and significant Christian practice. The research emphasises the Eucharist's theological depth, historical development, and continuous discussion between tradition and cultural adaptation. In addition to serving as symbols of Christ's sacrifice, the bread and wine components of the Eucharist can also be interpreted to represent the many cultures and customs of the Christian community across the world.

## **5. Conclusion.**

In conclusion, this study has explored the theological, cultural, and historical aspects of the Holy Eucharist, providing a comprehensive understanding of its significance in the Christian faith. It has highlighted how the elements of bread and wine serve as profound symbols of Christ's body and blood, offering spiritual nourishment. The connection to Christ's sacrifice, as outlined in the New Testament, is central to the Eucharist, acting as both a memorial and a reminder of the hope of Christ's return. The study also emphasizes the dynamic nature of the Eucharist, noting how its practices have evolved over time, particularly within diverse cultural contexts. The early Christian Church's adaptation of Jewish rituals, such as the Passover and the Sabbath meals, showcases the deep roots of Eucharistic traditions in Jewish history, while also demonstrating the Church's

capacity to shape these practices in light of Christian beliefs. As the Church spread across the world, these traditions have continued to adapt, reflecting the cultural realities of the communities they serve. The exploration of African theological perspectives further enriches this discussion by highlighting the importance of indigenizing the Eucharist. The study advocates for the use of local foods and drinks, such as palm wine, Izobo, and Kunu, as alternatives to the traditional bread and wine. These elements resonate with the cultural identity of African Christians while also staying true to the core theological understanding of the Eucharist. By adapting the elements to local contexts, the Church can make the sacrament more relatable and meaningful, ensuring that it speaks to the spiritual and cultural needs of African communities.

The implications of this study are significant for the Church's ongoing journey of cultural engagement and theological reflection. The indigenization of the Eucharist is not merely a matter of adapting cultural practices but also a means of enriching the global Christian experience, ensuring that Christianity remains vibrant and relevant across diverse contexts. Theological discussions surrounding the Eucharist, particularly regarding the nature of the elements, should continue to be open to cultural diversity and local practices, as they offer new insights into the rich mystery of Christ's presence in the sacrament. This ongoing dialogue will strengthen the universal Church, enabling it to grow deeper in faith while remaining connected to the unique cultures of its members.

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**Music, Technology and Social Change: 2023 PDP Electioneering Campaigns in Delta State  
as Paradigms**

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**Abstract**

Music and technology have long served as powerful tools for driving social change and shaping sociopolitical landscapes. In Delta State, Nigeria, the interplay between music and technological advancements has played a pivotal role in influencing electioneering campaigns across different eras. This paper explores the current effect of these dynamics on the society, with a forward-looking perspective on the future. Its findings aim to inform policymakers, campaign strategists, and cultural practitioners on harnessing these tools for progressive governance and political transformation. The study employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, as the subject involves historical, sociocultural, and technological dimensions. Data collection was carried through interviews and structured questionnaires. This methodology ensures a comprehensive exploration of how music and technology have shaped electioneering campaigns in Delta State, offering insights into their sociopolitical implications and future potential.

**Key words:** Music, Technology, Social Change, Election and Campaign.

## **Introduction**

Advancements in digital technology have amplified the influence of music within political campaigns. Social media, streaming platforms, and digital production tools now enable political actors to reach wider and more technologically engaged audiences. The blending of Afrobeat, hip-hop, and indigenous musical styles has broadened the appeal of political messaging, allowing campaigns to resonate with diverse demographic groups. This evolution reflects the deepening synergy between music, technology, and political engagement. Scholars widely acknowledge music as essential to political branding and identity formation. Behr and Shively observe that music not only shapes public perception and mobilises citizens but also performs important cultural functions in Africa by preserving traditions and linking political narratives to everyday lived experiences (Behr 45; Shively 215).

This study explores the historical, contemporary, and potential future roles of music and technology in Delta State's electioneering environment. It analyses how these elements have influenced political mobilisation and public discourse, especially during the 2023 PDP campaigns, and examines music's communicative power in evoking emotions, unifying audiences, and shaping political opinion.

The research further considers emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality—that may transform campaign strategies by enhancing voter engagement and creating immersive musical experiences. However, challenges, including misinformation and digital inequality remain critical concerns.

By focusing on Delta State's ethnic diversity—Anioma, Urhobo, Itsekiri, and Isoko—the study offers a locally grounded yet broadly applicable perspective on the interplay between music, technology, and electoral outcomes.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a case study approach to examine how political parties utilise music in Delta State elections. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) was selected as the focus due to its prominence as the largest political party in Delta State, having held power since 1991 and currently serving as Nigeria's largest opposition party. Since its inception in 2006, the PDP has consistently integrated music into its campaign strategy.

A qualitative approach was employed to explore the historical, sociocultural, and technological dimensions of this subject. Semi-structured interview guides featuring open-ended questions were used to investigate the role of music and technology in past, present, and future political campaigns.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on two key theories among many proposed by scholars. According to Hall, the Cultural Studies Theory explores how music, as a cultural practice, interacts with technology to create meaning and influence resistance or compliance in electioneering (1997). Meanwhile, McLuhan's Technological Determinism asserts that technology drives societal and cultural change (9). This perspective helps analyse how developments in communication technology – such as radio, television, and social media – have reshaped electioneering campaigns in Delta State.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Music serves as a powerful tool for communication, particularly for marginalized groups expressing their struggles and aspirations. In political contexts, campaign music plays a strategic role in mobilization, branding, and message dissemination. Songs used in electioneering, such as Barack Obama's 2008 campaign anthem *Yes We Can* by Will.i.am or Delta State, Nigeria's 2015 gubernatorial election song *E Don Happen*, have successfully resonated with voters by articulating political visions and collective aspirations (Delta State Broadcasting Service, 2025). These songs encapsulate candidates' values and promises while fostering unity and engagement among supporters.

On a broader scale, governments and political movements have also harnessed the power of music to propagate ideologies and build national identity. For example, national anthems and patriotic songs evoke a sense of unity and pride, reinforcing loyalty to the state. Turino (2008), as cited in Mambwe (45) notes that:

what makes music work, as with other expressive cultural practices such as dance and festivals, is that it remains an important way that people live out their collective identities as they create and sustain social groups.

The passage highlights how music played a transformative role in Delta State's 2019 elections, with personalized campaign songs like "Delta We Go Better" by Ossai Blessing blending praise for candidates with subtle critiques of opponents. These songs, often performed in local dialects and enriched with traditional beats, tapped into cultural differences to resonate with grassroots voters, shaping public perception and behavior. Agberia (110) observes that such musical narratives not only reflected the socio-political climate but also effectively energized and persuaded the electorate by building a sense of belonging across the Delta's diverse communities. However, unlike past political campaigns in Delta State, contemporary ones lack the lyrical depth needed to inspire and influence the electorate.

Technological advancements have significantly influenced the creation, distribution, and consumption of music, driving social change in the process. The interdisciplinary field of Critical

Studies on Music and Technology examines this evolving relationship, exploring how innovations – from mechanical instruments to digital platforms – shape musical production and perception. Scholars analyse how technological tools are adopted and adapted, highlighting their impact on both the global music industry and grassroots artistic practices. Born and Hesmondhalgh emphasise the power dynamics within these innovations, questioning who benefits and who is marginalised as the music-technology landscape shifts (34).

Technological changes reinforce or challenge existing social structures, including issues of ethnicity, gender, and class in musical spaces. Digital platforms like YouTube and Spotify have democratised music access, enabling marginalised artists to share their work globally without relying on traditional industry gatekeepers. By examining these transformations, Critical Studies on Music and Technology provides valuable insights into how technology shapes both the production and experience of music, reflecting broader societal shifts and influencing cultural and social transformations.

### **Historical Overview**

Delta State, created in 1991 from the division of the former Bendel State, has experienced a political journey marked by a shift from military to civilian rule. Governed by a series of leaders, including James Ibori, Emmanuel Uduaghan, Ifeanyi Okowa, and the current governor, Sheriff Oborevwori – all from the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The state's political leadership reflects continuity and the dominance of a single party. This political evolution has been intertwined with cultural dynamics, especially through the use of music as a tool for mobilisation and identity formation during election campaigns.

Music has played a vital role in political communication in Delta State, evolving from traditional genres like Ekere and Isoko praise-singing to modern styles such as Afrobeat and hip-hop. Politicians have effectively used music to resonate with the values and aspirations of various communities, especially in PDP campaigns. In recent years, campaign music has become more sophisticated, involving collaborations with popular artists to craft songs that communicate political manifestos and foster a sense of unity. Scholars like Mambwe and Olayiwola note that these songs not only entertain but also influence voter perception and engagement, making music a powerful tool for shaping political narratives and connecting leaders with the electorate (46).

### **Technology in Past Electioneering Campaigns**

In earlier decades, communication technology played a limited yet transformative role in electioneering campaigns, shaping how candidates communicated with voters. Traditional media

such as radio, and television were pivotal in reaching large audiences, serving as primary platforms for political messaging. Radio broadcasts, in particular, emerged as a crucial tool in the mid-20th century, allowing candidates to speak directly to the public and convey their policies, personalities, and campaign promises. The rise of television further revolutionised political communication by adding a visual element, enabling voters to assess candidates not only by their words but also by their demeanor and presentation.

In addition to mass media, campaigns leveraged African Indigenous Technologies, which laid the groundwork for more sophisticated political communication in later years. African Indigenous Technologies have historically contributed to community mobilization, information dissemination, and social structuring – core aspects of electioneering campaigns. Though modern technology has dominated recent elections, indigenous systems such as Town Criers, folk songs and indigenous music, masquerades and cultural performances are still relevant, especially in rural or traditional communities, as they address issues of misinformation and digital exclusion. They demonstrated the importance of accessibility and reach in electioneering, setting the stage for the digital revolution that would dramatically transform campaign strategies in the 21st century.

### **Media Technology in Present Electioneering Campaigns**

Today, the media plays a far more integrated and sophisticated role in electioneering campaigns, fundamentally transforming the political landscape. Enli (76) highlights that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram provide candidates with direct channels to engage with voters, enabling them to disseminate messages instantly and interactively. These platforms facilitate real-time communication, fostering greater voter participation and engagement. By leveraging digital platforms, candidates can amplify their reach through political jingles and build personalized connections with their supporters, making political communication more dynamic and accessible.

The increasing dependence on performances and musical renditions by many artists poses serious concerns. It is troubling when these artists, after receiving bribes, disseminate false information about politicians' character and accomplishments through their songs. Such actions mislead voters into supporting leaders who lack vision. This situation casts doubt on the credibility of elections and underscores the pressing need for clear regulations and ethical guidelines in campaign practices. As technology advances, it becomes essential to strike a balance between innovation and accountability to ensure transparent and fair electoral processes.

### **Music, Technology and Electioneering Campaigns in Delta State**

Digital technology is transforming electioneering in Delta State by enabling candidates to overcome geographical barriers and connect with a wider audience. Cheeseman et al. affirms that studies have shown that Nigerian politicians increasingly utilize WhatsApp groups to communicate directly with grassroots supporters (148). Music plays a powerful role on WhatsApp

and other communication platforms, serving as a tool for mobilization, persuasion, and emotional connection. Politicians and campaign teams often circulate jingles, theme songs, and culturally resonant tunes through WhatsApp groups, voice notes, and status updates to reinforce their messages and create memorable slogans. These musical pieces are crafted to reflect local languages, values, and issues, enhancing relatability and grassroots appeal. Music's ability to transcend literacy barriers makes it especially effective in reaching diverse audiences, while its viral potential on digital platforms amplifies campaign visibility and engagement across different demographics.

### **Multimedia Campaigns and Social Change**

Multimedia platforms that incorporate sound and music have significantly transformed political campaigning strategies in Delta State, Nigeria. Traditionally, political mobilization in the region relied heavily on indigenous forms of communication such as Town Criers, folk songs, masquerades, and cultural performances. These methods allowed politicians to connect with local communities through culturally resonant messages. In contemporary times, however, the integration of music into digital platforms has redefined this process. Politicians now use theme songs, campaign jingles, and live musical performances featuring both artists and candidates to establish emotional connections with voters. These musical strategies not only entertain but also serve as powerful tools for political expression, policy promotion, and supporter engagement across Delta State's diverse ethnic landscape.

The rise of digital technologies has further enhanced music's role in political campaigns by increasing reach and interaction, particularly among younger voters. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which prioritize short-form, sound-driven content, have enabled campaign messages to spread rapidly and organically. These platforms allow political content to become viral through music, evoking emotional resonance and encouraging community dialogue. As digital tools like AI-curated playlists and immersive technologies evolve, campaigners in Delta State can leverage these innovations for deeper voter engagement. However, this also comes with challenges such as misinformation and digital inequity, which must be addressed to ensure that the benefits of multimedia campaigning are inclusive and ethically applied.

### **Analysis of Music and Electioneering Campaign in Delta State**

Past electioneering campaigns in Delta State were predominantly grassroots-driven, marked by physical rallies, town hall meetings, and door-to-door canvassing. Political campaigns relied heavily on personal interactions, with candidates engaging local leaders and community influencers to garner support. Indigenous campaign systems such as folk songs and indigenous music, masquerades and cultural performances were common, and the messaging often

emphasized ethnic identities – drawing on the diverse backgrounds of the Urhobos, Itsekiris, Ijaws, and others – to secure votes, even though this sometimes intensified communal tensions.

In contrast, modern electioneering in Delta State has embraced technological advancements and digital communication to create more sophisticated campaigns. Contemporary candidates, such as Sheriff Oborevwori and his running mate, Monday Onyeme, under the PDP platform in 2023 leveraged social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to circulate jingles and theme songs alongside live-streamed events to reinforce their messages to reach a broader and more tech-savvy audience.

The 2023 Delta State election campaign showcased over 400 musicians, DJs, across Delta State who unanimously endorsed the PDP ticket of Sheriff Oborevwori and his running mate, Monday Onyeme in Asaba, citing confidence in continuity and growth under PDP governance. This shows how music has become a vital instrument for political expression, blending technology and social change to reach and mobilise the electorate.

Analysis of two popular electioneering campaign songs used in Delta State during political campaigns, particularly in 2023 gubernatorial elections, drawing on their lyrical themes, linguistic strategies, cultural relevance, and political messaging:

**"Delta for Sheriff" by Various Artists (2023 Gubernatorial Election)**

Context: This song supported Sheriff Oborevwori, the PDP candidate in the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election. Performed by a coalition of Delta-based musicians during campaign events and media campaigns;

Lyrical Themes & Messaging: Lines such as "Delta for Sheriff", "Sheriff we want, Sheriff we need", "M.O.R.E. agenda go bring better Delta" or "our future dey sure" serve as campaign chants, reinforcing the candidate's brand;

Regional Balance: Lyrics often referenced support across Delta Central, South, and North to reinforce ethnic harmony and zone-to-zone solidarity;

Youth Inclusion: Parts of the song were youth-centric, speaking to empowerment, jobs, and education;

Language and Style: Code-switching between English, Pidgin, and native dialects (Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko) to appeal to different groups. Afrobeats-style instrumental with rhythmic call-and-response made it danceable and suitable for street rallies and concerts. The use of political slogans like "Street Credibility," "Na Sheriff we want," and "MORE Agenda" embedded the campaign narrative into pop culture; and

Impact: It became an anthem for Oborevwori's campaign buses, jingles, and youth gatherings. It helped to consolidate support from entertainers and youth, particularly in urban areas like Warri, Ughelli, and Sapele.



The majority of the electorates described candidate as “the man we trust”, “tested and trusted”, or “God-sent”, to build credibility and emotional appeal.

**"E Don Happen" by Aghogho (Gubernatorial Election)**

Context: Used during the 2015 Delta State gubernatorial campaign, this song supported the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate;

Lyrical Themes and Messaging: Victory and Fulfillment: The phrase “E don happen” (meaning “It has happened”) is a Pidgin English expression of triumph, suggesting that the expected victory has materialized;

Hope and Change: The song carried a tone of optimism and renewal, promoting the candidate as a change agent who would bring development and peace;

Inclusiveness: The song addresses various ethnic groups (Anioma, Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri, and Ijaw), fostering a pan-Delta identity;

Language and Style: Pidgin English was the dominant medium – informal, widely spoken, and easily understood by grassroots audiences. The chant-like chorus encouraged crowd participation and made it easy to remember; and

Impact: It energized campaign rallies across Delta North and beyond, becoming a rallying cry especially in Asaba, and surrounding communities.

It helped brand the candidate’s campaign as people-focused and grassroots-oriented.

**“As e dey sweet us, e go dey pain dem” by G5 Politicians:**

This was often chanted by supporters of the G5 politicians, particularly former Governor Wike. This phrase became a rallying refrain and symbol of political defiance and confidence, though not a formal campaign song with full published lyrics. Its chant-like nature made it synonymous with the election spirit. The phrase translates loosely to “As it pleases us, it will pain them,” and was used as a triumphal chant at rallies to express defiance and assert political resolve. The song mobilizes supporters while subtly discrediting opponents through contrast.

The three songs analysed above leveraged music as a tool of political mobilization, with a deep understanding of local languages, shared cultural identity, and emotional messaging. While “E Don Happen” focused on hope and unity, “Delta for Sheriff” emphasized continuity, youth involvement, and pan-ethnic support. These campaign songs exemplify how political music in Delta State fuses entertainment with persuasive communication to sway public opinion and energize the electorate.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

In Nigeria, election campaigns using copyrighted music are strictly governed by the Copyright Act of 2022. The law requires that any public performance or reproduction of a musical work must be authorised by the copyright owner, meaning that political parties must secure proper licenses

before using songs in rallies, advertisements, or online media. With digital platforms and streaming services on the rise, the unauthorised use of music has become a significant legal and ethical concern, potentially resulting in litigation, fines, and reputational damage for both political entities and artists.

Enforcement of these regulations is increasingly complicated by the ease with which music can be shared on social media. High-profile cases – such as the condemnation by Fela Kuti’s family over the unauthorised use of his song in a Presidential campaign, as well as controversies involving artists like Davido and Burna Boy – highlight the tensions between political messaging and intellectual property rights. Sag (142) advocates for the development of clearer licensing policies, closer collaboration between campaign teams and copyright holders, and enhanced digital rights management, including the use of AI-based content detection systems, to ensure that artistic integrity is upheld in political communication.

### **The Future of Music and Technology in Electioneering**

Technological advances and the growing influence of social media are transforming political campaigns, with music set to play a more dynamic role. Future strategies may include AI-generated soundtracks and personalized playlists that cater to specific demographics, making music an essential tool for shaping voter sentiment and enhancing campaign messaging.

Modern electioneering is increasingly data-driven, employing microtargeting on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, as well as AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants to reach voters in real time. Moreover, innovations such as blockchain technology are being used to secure campaign finance and voting processes, while augmented and virtual reality create immersive experiences. However, these advancements also bring challenges, including the rise of digital misinformation and deepfakes that can distort public opinion.

Ultimately, as music becomes more intertwined with emerging technologies, it will evolve from a mere background element into a central feature of political communication. By embedding powerful messages into cultural memory, music not only drives immediate influence but also fosters a lasting impact, transcending language and cultural barriers to address global issues like climate change and human rights.

### **Challenges and Ethical Considerations in the Use of Music and Technology**

The fusion of music and technology has transformed music creation and distribution, but it also presents notable challenges related to copyright infringement, fair compensation, and ethical concerns. Digital platforms make unauthorized copying and distribution easier, leading to financial losses for artists and raising questions about intellectual property rights (Marshall 47). The use of artificial intelligence in music production further complicates issues of authenticity and creativity

(Briot, Hadjeres, & Pachet 146), while data privacy concerns emerge as music platforms collect extensive user information. Moreover, technology has democratized music production, allowing its use in political campaigns and activism, particularly in places like Nigeria, where music strongly influences election outcomes and public sentiment (Behr 33). These developments call for a balance between innovation and ethical, legal protections in the evolving digital landscape.

## **Conclusion**

Music and technology synergise to create dynamic and effective electioneering campaigns. As both fields continue to evolve, their integration will likely play an even greater role in shaping political landscapes worldwide. Music's versatility makes it a powerful agent in electioneering campaigns and social change efforts. Its ability to stir emotions, unify groups, and disseminate messages ensures that it will remain a critical medium for influencing public discourse. Technology can amplify this impact by using tools like AI to personalize music selection for specific demographics or leveraging platforms like Spotify and YouTube to reach audiences effectively.

Based on the foregoing, campaign song lyrics should genuinely reflect the state of the economy and assess how well the candidate can deliver or has fulfilled his campaign promises. By resonating emotionally and intellectually, music fosters solidarity among listeners, inspiring them to engage with political and social causes. This will provide a foundation for the masses to decide whether to support or oppose a candidate or party. Often, the voting decisions of the underprivileged are influenced by the views of the youth, who make up the majority of campaigners.

To enhance the use of music and technology in campaigns, it is essential to prioritise the alignment of both with the campaign's core message and target audience. Music can evoke emotions and create memorable experiences, so selecting tracks or compositions that resonate with the campaign's tone and objectives is crucial. However, the effectiveness of these methods depends on overcoming digital divides and ensuring that the approach remains inclusive for all segments of the electorate.

Music's transformative power lies in its ability to transcend barriers, articulate shared emotions, and inspire collective action. By amplifying voices of resistance, fostering solidarity, raising awareness, and leaving lasting legacies, music remains a vital tool in the pursuit of social justice and societal change.

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**Navigating the Digital Landscape: Assessing Professionalism and Challenges in  
Nollywood's 'Internet Film' Revolution**

By

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**Abstract**

The invention of the camera as a motion-picture recording device heralded the birth of film, and continuing technological advancements have since transformed filmmaking practices worldwide. As global industries adjust to emerging digital standards, Nollywood—one of Africa's most influential film cultures—faces persistent challenges in adapting to contemporary digital production and distribution trends. The growing integration of the internet as a primary platform for film circulation has intensified debates surrounding professionalism in Nollywood. This paper examines the opportunities and constraints associated with online film distribution and evaluates its implications for the industry's development. Anchored in the Diffusion of Innovations Theory and employing a qualitative research approach, the study interrogates the dynamics shaping Nollywood's engagement with digital platforms. Findings reveal that the rise of internet-based film streaming has disrupted the traditional monopolistic structures that dominated physical film marketing in Nigeria. Yet, this shift has also contributed to a surge in films perceived as substandard, potentially due to the relative openness and vulnerability of online platforms. The paper therefore recommends the adoption of more rigorous digital regulatory strategies and strengthened film censorship mechanisms to enhance professionalism and safeguard the integrity of Nollywood in the evolving digital landscape.

**Keywords:** Internet Film, Nollywood, Professionalism, Digital Distribution, Film Quality

## **Introduction**

Marshall McLuhan's long-standing prediction that the world would evolve into a "global village" has become increasingly evident over the past decade, as instantaneous communication across continents is now a daily reality. Today, nearly every form of human activity is connected to the internet. Virtual meetings, online interactions, and digital exchanges occur routinely, reflecting the centrality of networked communication in contemporary society. The internet—described by Dominick as "a system that combines computers from all over the world into one big computer that you can operate from your own PC" (277)—ushered in the era of digital communication.

In the 21st century, communication technologies have advanced at unprecedented levels, with networked interactions no longer limited to computers but extended to mobile devices such as smartphones and iPads. This surge in technological innovation has fueled new practices in online communication, dissolving traditional barriers of time and space. Information in written, pictorial, audio, or video form can now be disseminated globally within seconds. As James Watson notes, cyberspace presents "new frontiers, new worlds" (236), suggesting that the internet has opened vast avenues for business and creative exploration—among the most notable being the rise of the "internet film."

By "internet film," this study refers to films distributed via online streaming platforms and digital marketplaces. Websites, channels, and social media platforms—including YouTube, Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram—have increasingly become hubs for film marketing and distribution. Nigerian filmmakers are taking advantage of these expanding digital markets, which offer professional, experimental, and amateur creators access to potentially global audiences.

Although a substantial body of scholarship addresses Nollywood's technological evolution and patterns of digital production and consumption, the specific impact of the burgeoning "internet film" phenomenon on the professionalization of the industry remains underexplored. This study therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how Nollywood practitioners navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the implications of adopting online distribution systems, and the direct consequences of these developments for professionalism within the industry.

## **Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Nollywood's "Internet Film" Revolution**

It is important to note that not all ideas or innovations, be it scientific, social, humanistic or artistic, survive the test of time. While some may be accepted either at local, national or international levels, others may either enjoy partial acceptance or outright rejection by the society. In order to unravel the intricacies behind such acceptance or rejection, the diffusion of

innovation formed a research paradigm for a French sociologist, Gabriel Tarde. In the words of Kumar Abhishek, “Tarde attempted to explain why some innovations are adopted and spread throughout a society, while others are ignored” (50). He further reveals that the French researcher delved into this investigation because of many innovations that influenced socio-cultural changes he witnessed (50). His findings, even though not well specified, established the fact that people absorb new ideas or products according to their varying socioeconomic statuses.

Tarde’s insight sparked off multiple research in this area and was adopted into many science fields the most popular of which were agricultural and medical sciences. Hence, “the fundamental research paradigm for the diffusion of innovations can be traced to the Iowa study of hybrid seed corn. Bryce Ryan and Neal C. Gross ... investigated the diffusion of hybrid seed corn among Iowa farmers” (Abhishek 50). The preference of traditional corn seeds over the newly introduced hybrid seed by Iowa farmers was what informed the study. During the process of the research, findings revealed that in spite of the many advantages of the hybrid seed, its cost, especially at a time the society was undergoing economic depression, discouraged farmers from purchasing it. However, discoveries showed that the hybrid seed later came to attention when the seed promoters exploited the various media of communication, both mass and interpersonal in marketing it. It was found through this experiment that effective communication is a strong agent in the diffusion of innovation. The two researchers, Ryan and Gross, therefore identified five major stages often involved in an innovation adoption process to include awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption (Abhishek 52).

The diffusion of innovation however became widely accepted as a theory.

... after James S. Coleman, Elihu Katz, and Herbert Menzel conducted a study on the diffusion of tetracycline, a new medical drug, in 1966. The Pfizer drug company invented this successful new drug and wanted to investigate the effectiveness of their tetracycline advertisements, which were placed in medical journals. The company asked three Professors at Columbia University to find out how physicians adopted the new innovation and how mass communication influenced this adoption process. (Abhishek 52)

The above account helps in identifying a strong correlation between diffusion of innovation and communication. Apart from the earlier-mentioned researchers who foregrounded the diffusion research, Everett M. Rogers appears to be the most important name in the study of diffusion of innovation theory. Rogers was an Iowa-born researcher whose academic reputation was earned through in-depth studies he conducted on the diffusion of innovation. His published book, *Diffusion of Innovations* “helped to expand diffusion theory. The book has become the standard textbook on diffusion theory and it creates applications of diffusion theory in such fields as ... communication” (Abhishek 54). Rogers therefore defines diffusion of innovation as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members

of a social system. An innovation is an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. The diffusion of innovations involves both mass media and interpersonal communication channels” (qtd. in Abhishek 54). Grade Imoh in explaining this theory further, adds that “the more individuals can practice or try out a new behavior and then see the visible effects of their action, the more they are likely to adopt the new technology or service” (164). Diffusion of innovation therefore, involves adoption and or adaptation of an idea, concept or practice.

The emerging trends in the methods of information dissemination, as well as other communications transformations taking place daily in society, can best be described as revolutionary. Dennis McQuail affirms that “the term ‘communications revolutions’, along with the term ‘information society’, has now almost come to be accepted as an objective description of our time and the type of society that is emerging” (104). In the light of technological transformations that characterize the media industry, film inclusive, analogue forms of communication have almost given way to digital formats. The mounting need to simplify life more is a major contributor to this wind of technological change blowing across human society. Describing the society as “a world of breakneck change”, Williams Sawyer adds that “two decades ago, cell phones, pagers, portable computers with communication links barely existed; now they are commonplace. Moreover, as computers and communications technology go digital, the computer, communications, consumer electronics, entertainment, and mass media industries are undergoing technological convergence” (415). This technological convergence seems to have successfully taken place on the internet. Hence, almost all media of communication, whether print as in newspapers and magazines, audio as in radio and musicals and video as in television, music videos, and film, have adopted the internet as a crucial medium for more expansive and effective communication.

The diffusion of technological innovations in the area of film production can best be described as radical. Drawing a semantic comparison between evolution and revolution, Peter Rea and David Irving state that;

... technology is an integral part of film and television production. Cameras, lenses, lights, editing machines, and even film stocks have evolved with the demands of this popular medium. Most of the technological changes have occurred gradually. But whereas evolution is gradual change, revolution is quick change, and we are currently in a technological revolution. (xiii)

These explanations regarding the concept of this theory are relevant to this study and support the earlier discussed narrative regarding Nollywood being an “innovation” that has successfully diffused into both its immediate and Diaspora societies. For instance, Nollywood’s replacement of Hollywood and Bollywood as initial providers of mainstream entertainment in Africa and the switchover from the initial analogue production to digital format are some of the proofs of the diffusion of Nollywood as an innovation. Similarly, the recent trend of online distribution that



culminated in what this study referred to as “internet film” which now complements or alternates the traditional channels of marketing, exhibition and distribution of Nollywood film, is also another sign of the diffusion of innovation not only in Nigeria but the world over. The diffusion of various innovations in Nollywood is a welcome development for an industry that desires to keep up with emerging trends in an ever-evolving global community.

As Nollywood continues to grow and expand, many trends become visible. While some exert a positive impact on the industry, some pose some negative implications. Some exert both positive and negative consequences. Barclays Ayakoroma notes some of the trends that define Nollywood. According to him, “promotion of many Igbo stars”, “projection of trained and non-Igbo artists”, “the parts or sequel syndrome”, “simultaneity or back-to-back productions”, “evolution of iconography”, “scriptwriter and plagiarism”, “alternative film market”, “piracy in the industry”, “co-productions”, “film awards” are some of the developments that continue to (re)define Nollywood since inception (97 – 107). Similarly, the transition from Igbo to English language films, an important innovation that successfully diffused in the Nollywood film business, paved the way for some trained theatre artists to join the industry.

In spite of the challenge of funding, among other production constraints, which make it difficult for Nigerian film entrepreneurs to compete favourably with their counterparts in developed countries according to global best practices, the industry has nonetheless made efforts to keep in touch with trending innovations in film production. Since the production of the first indigenous commercial video film in Nigeria, various technological transformations have taken place in the industry. It is known that the industry’s journey began with the VHS camera and was later upgraded to using the video 8 camera. Shortly after, DV camera replaced the latter. Today, the Nigerian film industry has succeeded in embracing digital film production with UltraHD camera, popularly known as 4K camera. This high-tech camera, which is of different models, is used by a number of Nollywood filmmakers in shooting films, especially those intended for cinema release. Others use various grades of Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR) cameras for shoots. Jacob Agba affirms that “Nigerian directors adopt new technologies as soon as they become affordable. Bulky video tape cameras give way to their digital descendants ... Editing, music and other post-production are done with common computer-based systems” (157). Izuu Nwankwo, while supporting Agba’s stance, holds that digital imaging technology has blotted the dividing line between celluloid and video film in Nollywood production (503). These emergent trends are precipitated by what Joseph Dominick terms “digital revolution” being witnessed daily in the world. Dominick describes “digital technology” as “a system that encodes information – sound, text, data, graphics, video – into a series of on – and off pulses that are usually denoted as zeros and ones. Once digitized, the information can be duplicated easily and transported at extremely low costs” (68). In the light of these innovations, methods of decoding and disseminating information continue to evolve.

Digital communication is therefore a welcome development because it eases data storage and dissemination compared to the heavyweight and at times inconveniencing experiences associated with analogue versions. In the film sector, film recording, production and distribution are now carried out with much ease. One does not need to bother about tapes as portable cameras with slot-in memory card ports have taken over. With this digital dimension, filmmaking has become relatively flexible and cheap. Apart from deleting and reshooting unsatisfactory actions or scenes on location more easily, rushes are transferred to an editing system within minutes, a process that took hours during the tape era. Again, the same memory card can be used to shoot multiple films. Although, there is occasional risk of data loss associated with memory card use on account of a virus attack, disk crash or any other form of accident, the advantages of this digital format far outweigh its potential risk. Indeed, the use of professional cine-cameras for film shoots heralded the dawn of digital filmmaking in the Nigerian film industry. Editing and other post-production activities are now equally carried out with minimal technical challenge. Furthermore, different professional editing software can be used to create special effects and other computer-generated images during production and post-production stages.

As is identifiable in many media theories, the public, which invariably constitutes the audience in any stage or screen show, is at the centre of the diffusion of innovation theory. Diffusion of innovation theory, which talks about people and their acceptance or rejection of an invention, whether tangible or intangible, suggests that public opinion or perception determines the extent to which an innovation can successfully diffuse within the society. Ayakoroma argues that evolution and consequent diffusion of various trends in Nollywood is also a result of the audience's acceptance or adoption of such innovation (85). In essence, the popularity of "internet film" can be attributed to the audience's adoption of the innovative approach to film marketing and distribution, which was viewed as an improvement on the traditional approach.

### **Professionalism and Challenges in Nollywood's "Internet Film" Revolution**

It is important to reiterate the fact that the rise in internet use orchestrated by digital communication technology is a welcome innovation among filmmakers and the public at large. Hence, hundreds of videos, including films, are on a daily basis on various online channels. Today, downloading of films and videos is a regular activity for people who have access to the internet. A large popular filmgoers visit film exhibition and distribution sites on a daily basis. Abhishek affirms that "the rise of ... videos shared from online sources such as YouTube is changing the perception of who makes video and how and why it is viewed... shared online videos have become a major cultural phenomenon in a few years" (7). This does not exclude Nollywood films. Ignatius Chukwumah and Raphael Amalaha hold that "in manipulating technology to full commercial advantage, the marketers make use of the internet to sell Nigerian videos directly to consumers" (76). In view of the internet's commercial potential, filmmakers adopt its use in order to maximize the opportunities it presents.

Some Nollywood producers and marketers who have been producing film before the internet became popular, see digital marketing / distribution as a means of expanding or sustaining their business. Nollywood producer and former Vice President of Film and Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria, FVPMAN, Emeka Igwemma in an interview with the researcher, explained that another advantage of online streaming of physically distributed Nollywood films is that the internet provides the producers an opportunity for wider reach and global visibility. Even though the internet supports their physical market, it cannot, according to him, replace the former as a good percentage of their audience who are rural dwellers lack basic knowledge and financial capability to afford internet-connected gadgets like smartphones or internet data in order to watch films (personal interview). Some other filmmakers regard the rise of 'internet film' as a viable alternative to the physical market, which, according to them, is marred by the monopolistic and bureaucratic stronghold producers / marketers. Filmmakers who belong to this category are majorly those who joined the industry at the inception of digital communication in Nigeria. Some of them claimed have undergone torturous experiences in the hands of film marketers in time past. Many independent filmmakers now opt for online marketing and distribution since it is faster, easier and far cheaper than the traditional method, which is cost intensive due to certain requirements that must be met like the design and printing of posters and DVD packs as well as other bottlenecks created by Nollywood producers / marketers in the physical film business sector,. These are some of the factors that contributed to the rise of internet film in Nigeria.

Due to the 'open gate' policy that is characteristic of the internet, the authenticity of content emanating from it is often called into question. Chinyere Okunna and Kate Omenugha reveal that the internet has continued to increase the number of unregulated sources of information, which poses serious threat to professionalism (173). This trend has created distrust among media scholars regarding internet content; hence Judy Pearson *et al* advise that since "some of the most outrageous news comes from the internet ... because many of the internet sites lack editorial control ... (one) should be skeptical of the information found on the internet" (340). The looseness with which the internet is associated with poses a big challenge to professionalism in the wake of internet film in Nigeria as it tends to encourage easy entry into filmmaking, thereby projecting Nollywood practice as an all comers affair. The Ghanaian film industry suffered similar fate as Africanus Aveh states that "the technical quality of many productions was deplorable for the industry was dominated by untrained filmmakers... this really created room for amateurish productions that dominated the video scene as these film enthusiasts developed the notion that there is no need for training in order to make films" (124). This is the bane of film practice. Most internet filmmakers see this trend more as a business venture than a vocation that has professional demands. This makes them churn out films with trite plot, poor audio and visual quality and worse of all, indecent content. A number of Nigerian films streamed on the internet are either uncensored or banned by the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) for contravening certain production laws, according to Hubert

Odeh, former Zonal Director, NFVCB, Onitsha Zonal Office, Anambra State (personal interview). An example is *A Village in Africa* (2016), directed by Henry Mgbemele, a member of the Directors' Guild of Nigeria (DGN) and produced by Amos Onwe. The film discusses the dictatorship of African leaders as well as some heinous traditional practices like the killing of twins perpetrated in Africa before the coming of the colonial masters. The film, which is distributed via YouTube, raises serious concerns regarding professionalism, especially in the area of costuming as well as other historical, cultural and technical issues.

*A Village in Africa* is a historical epic that is faulted on the grounds of its wrong period or distortion of historical facts, as it were. In an attempt to justify the primitivism in the pre-colonial Amagu community where the film is set, all characters in the film go bare-chested chest including females. However, wrappers and skirts worn by married women and maidens respectively were made of contemporary fabric. This contradiction betrays the director's ploy of employing obscenity as a means of gaining viewers' patronage. Although approximation of costume is an accepted practice in a creative enterprise like filmmaking especially in extreme cases especially where original materials may have gone extinct, appropriating contemporary fabrics and using the same to cover only the lower parts of female actors' bodies is not only a contradiction but a contravention of the principles of decency and good taste which every professional filmmaker is supposed to invoke. The flagrant exposition and display of the actresses' breasts is a subtle way of promoting nudity, thereby giving the film more of a pornographic appearance than a historical tone. This is capable of causing severe damage to the image of the Nigerian, nay African society in the international community, since being an "internet film", it is accessible to an unlimited population of the global audience. Worried about the trend in the Nigerian film industry, Udoka Ihentuge avers that "a great disservice has been done the society in many Nollywood films as the wrong signals are sent out to critical viewers from outside the nation" (322). This plundering of the nation's image is heightened by the increasing number of Nollywood films with negative trajectories about the country on the internet.

One can say that the director of *A Village in Africa* is torn between historical presentation and exhibition of nudity because costume and make up which are salient visual elements of filmic expression, appear to have been abused and misused in the film. As materials of culture, costumes and make up play vital roles in setting the cultural tone of a film by defining the characters that wear them in terms of their ethnic background, class, age and gender. In fact, reality is (re)presented through efficient costuming and make-up designing which should be with recourse to the promotion of the culture of the people. Charles Nwadike laments that the hope of redeeming the cultural image of the Nigerian nation pillaged by imperialistic filmmakers which was ignited at the emergence of Nollywood seemed to have been unfortunately dashed because "the producers of this new medium engaged in unbridled denigration of indigenous Nigerian cultures through unresearched storylines, historical distortions, flagrant abuse of special effects,

gaudy visual presentation, and the penchant to ape Western filmic styles” (288 – 289). Mgbemele’s *A Village in Africa* reflects most of the mentioned flaws. Based on the perspective from which the filmmakers have presented the colonial history of the African society, the film merely reiterates the hegemonic, imperialistic and pejorative insinuation of early Eurocentric filmmakers and literary writers like D.W Griffith and Joseph Conrad who captured Africa as a Dark Continent in their works; *The Birth of a Nation* and *Heart of Darkness* respectively. Hence, the film violates a fundamental precept every indigenous filmmaker is supposed to adhere to which in James Ademola’s words, is that “no exposition of Africans to ridicule” by presenting Africa as a society that lived an atavistic lifestyle before the colonial masters intervened (241).

Another disturbing dimension to the seeming promotion of nudity in the film is its corruptive tendency. The unwarranted exhibition and display of the breasts and the entire upper body contours of the female actors through emphatic camera angles and shots objectifies the female gender, presenting her as a sex symbol. This is capable of damaging the moral life of viewers especially the young. It was observed during this study that in this day and age, internet surfing has become a regular activity among adolescents and youths as ownership of internet connected mobile phones seems to have become commonplace. The prevalence of juvenile delinquencies and other vices among young people nowadays may not be unconnected with the negative impact of internet content consumption, as such content is capable of exerting severe corruptive tendencies especially among young people and even adults. Worried about the pornographic undertone of some Nigerian films due to poor or wrong costuming, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh points out the inherent dangers of the costuming to corrupt tendencies of some Nollywood films. According to her,

A provocative or sexy costume is bound to divert the viewer’s attention from the story of the film to unwholesome and perhaps perverted thoughts about the person of the actor or actress or even members of the female species. This would consequently galvanize the mind towards other unwholesome acts, such as rape or lesbianism. This has become the bane of the Nigerian film industry in recent times. (69)

YouTube’s distribution of Mgbemele’s *A Village in Africa*, despite its glaringly unethical content, may be for two reasons. First, it presupposes that the video distribution site had envisaged huge patronage that would follow its streaming. Secondly, YouTube, being a foreign-owned distribution platform, may have less to lose and more to gain by showing a film that presents the trajectories of a “subordinate” continent from a Eurocentric perspective. It was noticed from the viewership indicator on the channel handle that over a million people viewed the film within six months of its release. The political economy of control, domination and subjugation using modern tools of imperialism may have gone into play.

Costuming in film is a visual art meant to add to the aesthetics and overall interpretation of the story. The costume designer, in collaboration with the director, composes costumes that best define

and project the personality of each actor in relation to others by paying close attention to how the basic elements of design, like colour, texture and pattern, can be creatively manipulated to achieve emphasis, balance and contrast thus visually aiding the narrative. This fundamental principle in design is however, given minimal consideration in *A Village in Africa*. For instance, the chiefs of Amagu community are all costumed with the same fabric not minding that the duo oppose each other in most of the scenes they appear. For instance, Ichie Amaefule stern opposition to Ezemuo and Amaefule's co-chiefs' decision never to cede Amagu community to the Whiteman is not given any visual interpretation through costume selection or design. There is also no attempt to distinguish Ikenga, who is the lead warrior and strongest wrestler in Amagu, from the other young men of the village. Upon becoming the Whiteman's representative, Ikenga is further costumed in apparel made of the same fabric as that of the chiefs. Even though the change of costume suggests a change in class, the use of the same material for this purpose seems to blur the contrast that is supposed to be achieved between Ikenga's new personality as an arrogant and tyrannical paramount ruler and the chiefs, whom he constantly bullies.

A close reading of this film exposes the fact that Ikenga's oppressiveness must have been cultivated in the course of being trained by his new boss, Lord Peter. Although Lord Peter is depicted as the messiah of Amagu and other communities he invaded, a deeper interrogation of his actions reveals him as a bully and sexual molester. Instances include the manner in which he screams at Ikenga while kicking him viciously, and also the way he disguisedly fondles his maids' breasts during their respective physical exercise sessions. Although the director's major thematic preoccupation in the film is the redemption of Africa from heinous traditional practices and the archaic leadership system by the West, it is difficult for Afro-centric scholars to believe there was any positive agenda behind colonialism as evidenced by some of the actions of the "sanctimonious" Lord Peter, who represents the West in the film.

It is necessary to note here that not all Nollywood internet films raise worrisome concerns. As a matter of fact, some online distribution sites like Netflix, Showmax, IrokoTV, FilmHouse, and Nollyland are notable for streaming high quality Nollywood films and have metamorphosed into virtual cinema centres. This study observed that these distribution sites are mainly subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms, which require prospective viewers to download their app through which they can subscribe for viewership on a monthly basis. Upon subscription, all films released on the platform will be accessible to subscribers until the expiration of their subscription. More or less, the sites can otherwise be regarded as an internet television, only that, unlike the physical television, in which content viewing is determined by the various channels, the viewer, on the other hand, chooses what to watch at any moment. Although some critics accuse these registered SVOD sites of attempting to establish some kind of monopoly and thereby control the film business, their insistence on quality, however, encourages professionalism. A film producer

and participant in a Focus Group Discussion conducted by the researcher recalled his experience with an online distribution site. He explained that

... these standard online film distribution platforms are very strict when it comes to content. They have a team of assessors who evaluate the quality of film you submit for streaming. They base on a number of criteria like storyline, camera quality, cinematographic display, role interpretation and many others in judging films submitted to them for consideration. Your film will be trashed if it does not meet their basic requirements. (FGD)

The discussant's explanation shows that, unlike the conventional Nollywood marketers who are mainly concerned about profit to be garnered without much recourse to quality, the SVOD platforms are insistent on quality and accept only films that meet certain criteria. Such a stringent censorship procedure in some way encourages professionalism in the industry. The researcher regards the acquisition and streaming of Genevieve Nnaji's *LionHeart* (2018) by America-owned Netflix as a big breakthrough for Nollywood being the first Nigerian film to be streamed on one of the biggest digital film markets globally. Data gathered through interviews conducted during this study supported the researcher's stand, while adding that the stride was achieved due to the film's artistic and technical quality. Some other Nollywood films like Kemi Adetiba's *King of Boys: Return of the King* (2021), Moses Inwang's *Unroyal* (2021) and Seyi Babatope's *Sanitation Day* (2021), among others, had streamed on Netflix after Nnaji's record-breaking achievement with *LionHeart*.

In essence, some Nollywood filmmakers have been working hard to curtail the earlier raised negative dimension of Nollywood's "internet films" by making efforts to stream films that raise the standard of the industry significantly. Some of the films, which are sometimes regarded as "New Nollywood films" because of their peculiar composition, are at times screened first in cinemas both in Nigeria and abroad and afterwards distributed on the Internet. Kunle's Afolanya's *The Figurine* (2008) is good example. *The Figurine*, which tells the story of two friends who encounter a mysterious effigy that gives wealth to anyone who takes it in for seven years, after which it visits such a person with misery and woes, is set in both a pre-colonial Yoruba village and contemporary Lagos. Unlike *A Village in Africa*, the priest's costume and make-up in *The Figurine* are distinctly designed to aid him in exuding an aura of a mystic, which is strikingly different from the conventional Nollywood design. The film's prologue is exemplary of the stylistic departure of new Nollywood from the conventional Nollywood in content and form. With a panoramic shot that provides some details including the passage of time between the carving of the figurine of Araromire, the goddess that brings seven years of fortune to the community named after her, and her veneration by the carver-priest, the viewer is presented a visual aesthetic dramatically different from what conventionally obtains in Yoruba and English language Nollywood epic scenes as shown in **picture 1** below:



**Picture 1: The priest of Araromire venerates the figurine in *The Figurine*.**

From the picture above, one notices that the figurine is neither smeared with blood nor with any other ritualistic adornment as obtains in the Yoruba cosmological films. The picture further shows the priest venerating Araromire, the goddess of wealth, upon coming to the earth as represented by the figurine. The priest communes and welcomes the goddess using mystical words and esoteric lingo unfamiliar in the Yoruba milieu of idioms and proverbs. Such an uncommon pattern of incantation and *mise-en-scene* composition gives the scene an air of superior cultural aesthetics. Right from the travelling theatre age to the modern cinema period, the Yoruba folklorist performances are laced with ensemble cultural iconicity subsumed in music and dance. Afolayan however refuses to take this religious dimension which Jonathan Haynes says has been reduced to almost a formula in Yoruba films (104). The director adopts a personal creative approach in stuffing the film with cultural motifs that convey deep meanings. Kolker states that there is a difference between the realistic and the familiar in films. According to him, “what we call realistic in film, is more often than not, only the familiar” (6). Kolker’s assertion, in essence, implies that the realistic is often mistaken for the familiar scenes, theme, storylines or approaches to filmmaking which audiences are often used to in films. To make one’s work distinguished therefore, one needs to take a unique or creative dimension to one’s realistic presentations or interpretations.

The priest of Araromire’s appearance contrasts with that of Ezemuo, the chief priest of Amagu community in *A Village in Africa* as presented in the picture below.





**Picture 2: Ezemuo Addressing Amagu Chiefs in *A Village in Africa***

Ezemuo's character as shown in the above picture is given a stereotypical interpretation as obtainable in conventional Nollywood. Hence, he is costumed as a traditional priest with other body adornments that presents him within the purview of Nollywood. There is no identifiable attempt at capturing Ezemuo as a pre-colonial chief priest through costume and make up designs despite being a period film. Ezemuo's appearance is, in fact, stereotypical of chief priests and native doctors seen in both epic and contemporary conventional Nollywood films. Furthermore, Ezemuo's acting is patterned according to the mainstream Nollywood formula – high pitch vocal accompanied by exaggerated facial expressions.

Piracy is another serious challenge confronting Nollywood's internet film revolution. The fear of losing huge sums invested into film business to piracy tends to discourage prospective investors from confidently adopting the innovative opportunity the internet offers. Even though, "Nigeria has one of the highest rates of internet usage in Africa", according to Daniel Kunzler (qtd. in Jedlowski 29), producers and intending investors are skeptical about utilizing the opportunities it offers due to the high risk of piracy associated with it (Nwadigwe and Ilukwe 156). Nwadigwe and Ilukwe further observe that part of the reasons internet piracy appears to be on the rise in this digital era is due to lack of effective anti-piracy laws in Nigeria and the use of obsolete and near ineffective equipment by the Nigeria Copyright Commission (NCC) in carrying their regulatory responsibilities which makes it difficult to apprehend perpetrators or sufficiently punish culprits considering the weight of their offence (162-163). The porous nature of the internet also accounts for the proliferation of internet film sites, many of which do not have the required permission or license to stream films a challenge that significantly affects the growth of the Nigerian film industry.

## **Conclusion**

The internet is an innovation that has successfully diffused into the society. Virtually all business, academic and personal undertakings have some form of affiliation with the internet. The Nigerian film industry like other film industries elsewhere has imbibed this emerging trend as most films produced in Nigeria today are streamed on the internet. This is a welcome development for an industry that desires to keep up with current trends in an ever evolving global community.

This study identifies certain professional issues that tend to hinder the supposed positive impact of this trend on Nollywood practice while drawing the attention of relevant stakeholders to the identified concerns while hoping that steps are taken towards providing possible solutions to the issues raised. The study while also triggering further interest in the area of “internet film” research, recommends that practitioners in the creative industry should, in addition to undergoing constant (re)training, be licensed as a way of holding them accountable as critical stakeholders in societal development. Furthermore, there should be an adoption of more technology-driven approaches by film regulatory bodies like the Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) and the Nigeria Copyrights Commission (NCC) in carrying out their regulatory responsibilities.

Technological innovations have, no doubt, impacted the growth of the Nigerian film industry from various angles. For instance, from the VHS format, Nollywood became packaged and distributed in VCDs and, thereafter DVDs. With the introduction of internet technology and digital filmmaking, “internet films” emerged. The consequent launch of online distribution sites like YouTube, Netflix, ShowMax, IrokoTV and so on marked a shift from physical marketing and distribution to online distribution. As Nollywood continues to adopt the latest trends in digital technology, as well as adapt to its dynamics, it is expected that practitioners, as well as critical stakeholders of the industry, should navigate the digital landscape with professionalism.

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**Filmography**

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**Nigerian English: From Acceptability to Formality**

**by**

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**Abstract**

The age-old controversy surrounding the classification of Nigerian English (NE) as a standard variety of English in the world, in language research, has been on the wane in recent years. That is, the argument concerning its being a “fiction or non-fiction” (Adetugbo 1977) is no longer tenable. Rather, its acceptability all over the world has become a reality (Adeniran 2005, Berger and Luckmann 1966). This chapter contains, therefore, a discourse of its state from non-viability to viability as a distinct variety of English; that is, the currency of its acceptability as a variety of English among the New Englishes is no longer in doubt. Also, by using the theoretical/ conceptual construct of the Construction Grammar, a succinct analysis of its current state of usage as formal and informal expressions are provided. Theories are scientific tools of knowledge in all disciplines, including English. These scientific tools, especially the English language, are means by which science and technology provide developments for the advancement of humanity. This analysis is done, therefore, in order to consolidate its on-going standardization process as a distinct variety of English in the world of New Englishes. Standardisation in language planning is a continuous process in language acquisition and especially learning for national, international and technological developments and co-operation, worldwide.

**Keywords:** Nigerian English (NE), New Englishes, Construction Grammar, Acceptability, Formality.

## **Introduction**

A history of the English Language in Nigeria cannot be written fully without some notable scholars' perceptions of the subject, British and Nigerian scholars, in particular. This is owing to the fact that the two dialects, British English (BE) and Nigerian English (NE) share, obviously, some basic or cognate linguistic characteristics and differences. As examples, Nigerians who use the language as a Second Language (SL) speak it differently from one another and write it differently, at least, and clearly from those who use it as a First Language (FL). Technically, no one would expect the British and the Nigerian speakers of the language to speak or write it the same way by considering the socio-cultural and geographical differences that influence their use. In other words, there are different linguistic and contextual variability in their uses. Every user of the language as SL has already internalized, obviously, the features of his or her FL, physiologically, before the learning of English. These intrude into their pronunciation structures concerning word stress, pitch contours and intonational applications of meanings.

As a result of the differences in the use of English by FL and SL users in the world, the age-long controversy surrounding the classification of NE as a standard variety of English in the world, in language research, has been on the wane in recent years, about three decades now. That is, the argument concerning its being a "fiction or non-fiction" (Adetugbo 1977) is no longer tenable. Its acceptability or non-acceptability has become a non-issue. Rather, its acceptability all over the world, at least by scholars who have the wherewithal of linguistic analytical tools to make pronouncements on it, has become a reality (Adeniran 2005; Berger and Luckmann 1966).

This chapter contains, therefore, a discourse of its state from non-viability to viability as a distinct variety of English; that is, the currency of its acceptability as a variety of English among the New Englishes is no longer in doubt. In order to strengthen this resolve, we have used the theoretical/conceptual construct of the Construction Grammar (CG) to analyse its current state of usage of formal and informal expressions. Indeed, we have expanded the frontiers of the theory by introducing, exploratorily, a statistical analysis of measurement (see Daramola 2018). Specifically, we have worked on the theory's structure beginning from the introduction of, and an intuitive award of numbers to the pronunciation of words, phrases and sentences to establish their meaning potential. These numbers are our perceptions of the rate of use and meaning for each word or phrase in our data. We are able to do this because we are very good users of the language, and we also teach it to our undergraduate students year after year. In addition, we introduced the concepts of Visibility of Usage (VoU) and Variability of Content (VoC) to calculate their visibility and variability respectively. Finally, we illustrate the Variance formula to draw attention to the significance of the variability. Building on the state of the theory, exploratorily, for our analysis, no doubt, consolidates our position to contribute to the on-going standardisation process of the

language as a distinct variety in the world of New Englishes. More importantly, the theory's analytical tool has been extended to handle linguistic structures of English; nay, Nigerian English. Basically, theories are scientific tools used in all disciplines for the explication of the development of, and the utilization of, material resources for humanity.

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Construct**

A recent but relevant linguistic/grammatical tool of analysis is the Construction Grammar. As a theoretical concept, its central notion provides that all languages are constructions consisting of patterns. These patterns are basic to the analysis of all languages, although our focus is on the English language. Practitioners believe that all utterances are understood to combine multiple different constructions, all of them contributing to the meanings that they entail. Moreover, the analyses of these patterns and their internal properties produce larger patterns. The theory belongs to the field of cognitive concept in linguistics. Theorists in the field believe that constructions consist of pairing linguistic patterns that have meanings, and that these meanings are very basic to all human languages. The pairing of grammatical constructions, as in semiotics, relates form to content.

Construction Grammar (henceforth C x G) was developed in the 1980s by linguists such as Charles Fillmore, Paul Kay and George Lakoff (Goldberg 2006; Croft 2001). Their aim, then, derived from their desire to analyse idioms and fixed expressions. Whereas, the clearly distinct features of the theory are the use of compound and complex word structures or expressions as the building structures of syntactic analysis. Importantly, unlike other theorists who emphasise the innate essence of universal grammar in all languages, C x G analysts emphasise the fact that speakers and users of languages learn constructions inductively as they are exposed to using the languages' cognitive processes. This understanding, among its practitioners, is to develop the frontiers of the theory very fast. This understanding has assisted us in extending its boundaries in this work, exploratorily.

The following four models are used in relation to how information or texts are stored and reviewed in the theory:

**Usage-based model** – redundancy is the key used to store information; hence, minimal generalisations are applicable. This model is based on inductive meaning. That is, meaning is acquired linguistically in a bottom-up manner through use.

**Default model** – this consists of networks as form and meaning pairing, in which all features are derived. Unlike Usage-based model, it is derived at a fairly high level of generalization.

**Inheritance-model** – information is derived only once at the level superordination. The model does not give room for redundancy in the networks.

**Full-Entry model** – information or messages are derived redundantly at all levels in the taxonomy. Generalisations operate at minimal levels.

Of the four models, we have adopted the usage-based one because English is meaning-based and its realization is through its use. Our capability to assign numbers to words and phrases of our data is based on inductive reasoning and CXG pairing of structures for meaning realisations. More importantly, language usage is important, particularly in the onerous task of the acquisition and learning process. As in this work, our data belong to the usage process. So, we have analysed naturally occurring clauses and sentences.

### **Acceptability**

Prior to a description of the concept of acceptability, a succinct historical and sociolinguistic concepts of language contact and standardization become necessary. Before the Portuguese came to the West African coast in about 1445, the Arab traders came to Nigeria earlier through the Trans-Saharan trade routes about the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. It is generally agreed by many scholars of English that the British arrived the Nigeria in 1842 (Spencer 1971; Daramola 2019). As communication between the foreigners and the indigenous people must be difficult – it is assumed that the first means of communication must have been sign communication. There developed, therefore, what many people have referred to as “coast”, “working” or “broken English”, which later became Pidgin; today as Nigerian Pidgin (NP). Hence, the origin of the English language began in Nigeria.

In his book, *A Short Guide to English Style* (1961, see reference below) A. Warner wrote, *inter alia*:

“All writers of English, even those without trace of literary ambition, should try to keep their English as clean as they can. Words are the tools of thought. If they become rusty and dirty, and lose their sharp points and cutting edges, thinking itself becomes less keen and efficient. Man needs language for the control of his environment and the cleaner his language, the better his control”.

The above reference to the state of English in the early years of its introduction to Nigeria by Warner is evidence of the need to develop the language to a standard form. All of these developments were undertaken by the missionaries and British administration for the one hundred years of colonization. They had to develop clerical officers and interpreters to liaise between them and the people. As it was reported, many of the freed slaves from Sierra Leone were available to assist in the development of the language. Indeed, some of them still commanded their parent language (s); hence, Samuel Ajayi Crowther was able to translate the English Bible into Yoruba.

A Nigerian scholar, Omolewa (1979), also observed the state of the language and wrote as quoted below:



“During some examination of the papers, documents, letters and newspapers publications of Nigerians, the present writer was struck by the existence of a variety of English among Nigerians. This brand of English was ‘ungrammatical’, different from the ‘Queen’s English’ and indifferent to the rules of grammar, syntax, word formation or lexis. This variety of English was particularly noticeable because the country during the same period had a group of educated Nigerians who wrote in ‘standard’ English with ‘piquant’ style and ‘pugnacious’ diction.

The above statement by Omolewa (op cit.1979), contains a description of the language at the substandard but standardization level. Significant number of Nigerians used the language sufficiently as very good, good, fair and at illiterate levels.

As Jowitt (1955) concluded his very long analysis of the concept of “Nigeria’s National Language Question: Choices and Constraints” – examining many major Nigerian languages, his reference to English is obviously a tacit acceptability of the language being superordinately positioned above all languages in Nigeria. We quote it here, *inter alia*:

“Whichever scenario proves to be correct, it is likely – as many Nigerian commentators have pointed out – that English will also remain an official language in Nigeria for a long time to come. It will probably continue to have much the same functions as at present: the principal lingua franca of educated Nigerians, the principal medium of literary expression. The major change that it will undergo will concern not his status but its form, since the process of indigenization which already makes Nigerian English a recognizable and highly distinctive variety (or cluster of varieties) will continue.” (Jowitt 1995:53).

The above observation and assertive comments of Jowitt is an affirmation of the confirmation of the status of English in Nigeria. This research work consolidates, therefore, its distinctive variety as a tool of communication in the twenty-first century and beyond. It will continue to serve as the country’s official language for political, religious and the language of science and technology in a similar way that it has served British, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, nay, all developed countries of the world where English is used natively.

### **Formality**

Formality, as a concept in this work, engenders the concept of informality, automatically. In other words, an examination of formality must, of necessity, attract informality. A formal expression in English, either spoken or written attracts, therefore, grammatical rules of good punctuation, the maintenance of singularity or plurality of nominal words, orthographical representation of the upper case (capital) and lower case (small) letters, paragraphing, the mixture of long and short sentences although in many professions, short sentences are often preferred to long ones etc. It is very important in business settings to write short sentences. Long sentences are frowned at in business reports.

In its spoken form, good pronunciation of words, the maintenance of pauses commensurate with commas, semicolons, colons, dashes and the applications of stress and intonation patterns are required. More importantly, messages must be organized for presentations in board and committee meetings. Nowadays, messages may be couched in graphs, charts and pictures of various colours. No colloquialisms, jokes, are included in formal professional writings such as reports because time and space are economized maximally. For the academic formal presentations, similar rules are followed. The differences in various formal writings are the registers or registerial languages of the professions. That is, the technical terms associated with various professions differ from one to another. In other words, each profession must have its register or jargon that is used day-by-day to carry out its functions and duties.

Informal expressions are used in informal contexts. Unlike the formal expressions, their spoken forms are spontaneous, in most cases, without much care for the finesse of standard usage. Conversations among friends and relations exemplify informal speeches. No rules of turn-taking are formally adhered to, and voices are not modulated to show respect especially in moments of anger, anxiety and mood swings. These characteristics of informality are exhibited in second language situations, in particular. As a result of its spontaneity, even experts of English are faulted for committing grammatical errors at times. It occurs among native speakers of English and much more among second language users. In Nigeria, where multilingualism is dominant, the linguistic concepts of code-mixing and code-switching are frequently used in informal contexts. Informal expressions are introduced, nowadays, into some professions such as broadcasting – radio and television programmes, especially when indigenous languages are used. Nigerian Pidgin (NP) has gained prominence as a viable language in recent years. So, it is commonly used in theatrical or dramatic presentations, comedy and jokes. Ever since the inception of literary works in Nigeria, NP has taken root among several writers because messages are brought closer to the people in the grassroots by its use. Most importantly, Nigerian Pidgin, like Nigerian English, has been accepted and validated as a variety of pidgin in the world of its usage.

### **Data for this Study**

These texts were collected at random in the months of December 2024 and January 2025. Both authors used an observation method such that the producers were not aware that they were being observed. They were collected from members of the University community - academic and administrative, broadcasters on radio and television, contributors to programmes on radio and television, students' answer scripts etc. conference brochures and online writings. The data were collected, therefore, from educated speakers of English in Nigeria. What was common to all of them was their situational and contextual products. More importantly, they were produced as texts in sentences. Modern textual analysis is concerned with the explication of meaning in contexts. The choice of five examples in each group among scores of examples is for a wider coverage of examples and the management of space. The sentences were not edited at all, although we pointed

out the infelicities in the discussions that follow each presentation. Each datum is, therefore, a natural occurrence rather than being artificially constructed.

## Analysis

The exploratory concepts of Visibility of Usage (VoU) and Variability of Content (VoC) are basic to an understanding of the statistics in this section. The words form the basis of VoU because the authors used them in terms of the numbers or figures attributed to them concerning their perception of function in NE. The Total addition at the end of each word and the total number of words have been calculated to determine the VoC. We have applied the use of bar charts to further consolidate the varied texts. Also, an illustration of the Variance of both VoU and VoC is provided in the Discussion section of the work.

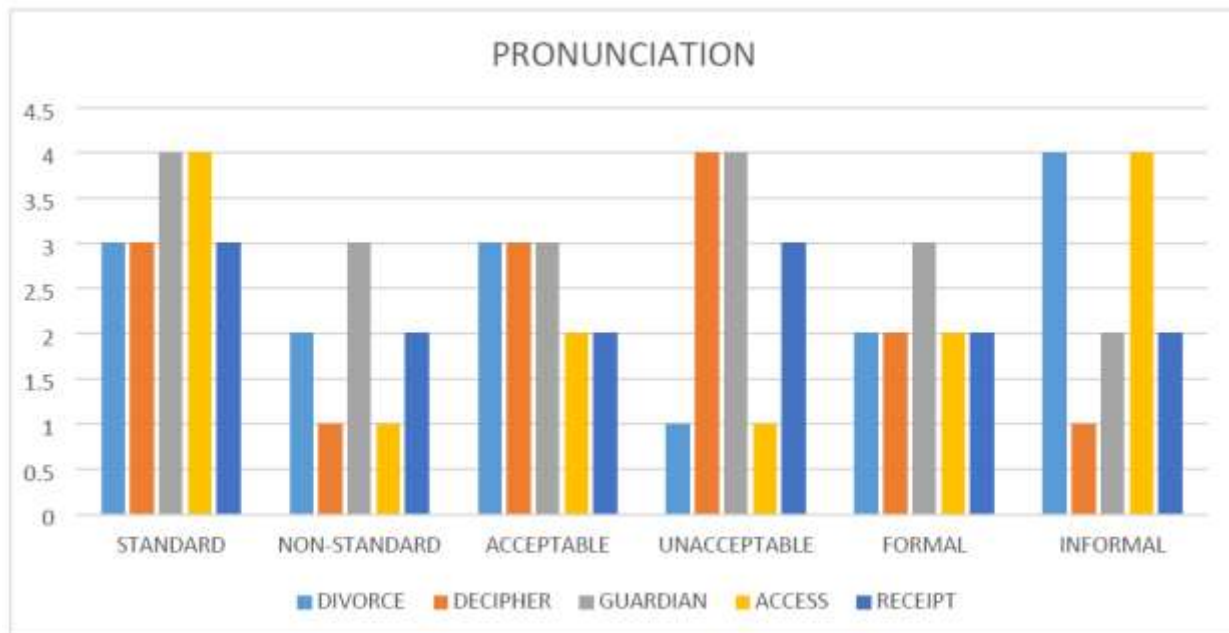
### Text 1: Pronunciation

- a. Both the man and the woman has *divorced* each other a long time ago.
- b. Members of the audience cannot *decipher* their right from their left.
- c. I know the current *Guardian* Newspaper Editor-in-Chief.
- d. Shall we drive slowly to *Access* Bank because we have plenty of time at our disposal?
- e. Where is the *receipt* of the car just purchased from Lagos?

Many Nigerians pronounce divorce as /daivos/ instead of /dIvɔ:s/. It has to do with First Language interference. In a similar way, decipher is pronounced /desifa/ instead of /dIsaIf(r)/. Guardian is pronounce /gaidian/ instead of /gɑ:diʌn/. Many Nigerians pronounce Access as if it is the word “assess” instead of /ækses/ So, it is pronounced without the sound /k/. Again, many Nigerians pronounce the /p/ of *receipt* /rIsi:t/whereas it is silent in good or standard pronunciation.

**Table 1, Text 1: Pronunciation**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	divorce	3	2	3	1	2	4	15
B	Decipher	3	1	3	4	2	1	14
C	Guardian	4	3	3	4	3	2	19
D	Access	4	1	2	1	2	4	14
E	Receipt	3	2	2	3	2	2	14
		17	09	13	13	11	13	76



## **Text 2: Orthographical Infelicities**

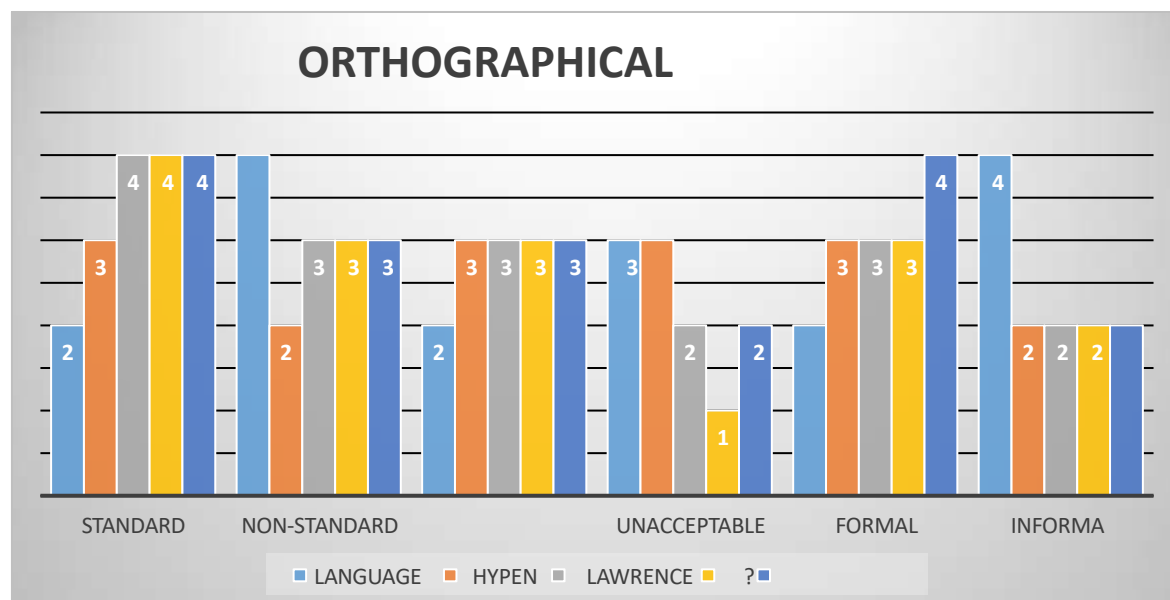
- (Marking instructions) Wrong division of *lang* (language) here!
- Use *hyphen* rather than the *dash*!
- lawrence* is very good in athletics but not in *english*.
- How, on earth do you compose a sentence in English without the *question mark* (?)
- You cannot write good essays without paragraph *indentation*.

Other than pronunciation as in Text 1 above, Text 2 is concerned with the writing system in English. It has a pedagogical essence in both its computer and handwritten applications. In other words, in spite of the pervasive influence of the computer in the writing system, users of English are made to write in special situations. Candidates attending standard interviews for jobs or admissions are tested as they write one-or-two-page essays. Text 2a. is concerned with the right-margin management. The word language can be written as follows depending on the space available – lan/gua/ lingua/ge. Some learners of the language cannot differentiate the *hyphen* from *dash*. Whereas the hyphen is for word division such as compound and complex words. Examples are: co-operation or word-for-word etc. The dash is used to extend the meaning of a construction – that is, what a particular statement means. To begin a word with the lower case (small) letter instead of the upper case (capital) letter as in Text 2c. *lawrence/english* is very poor.

Writers who forget to add a question mark after a question construction is careless. Some writers forget to use paragraphing to construct their writings. There are the indented and double spacing paragraphs.

**Table 2:Text 2**

	Word	Standard	Non- standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	Language	2	4	2	3	2	4	17
B	Hypen	3	2	3	3	3	2	16
C	Lawrence	4	3	3	2	3	2	17
D	?	4	3	3	1	3	2	16
E	Indentation	4	3	3	2	4	2	18
		17	15	14	11	15	12	84



### **Text 3: Titles**

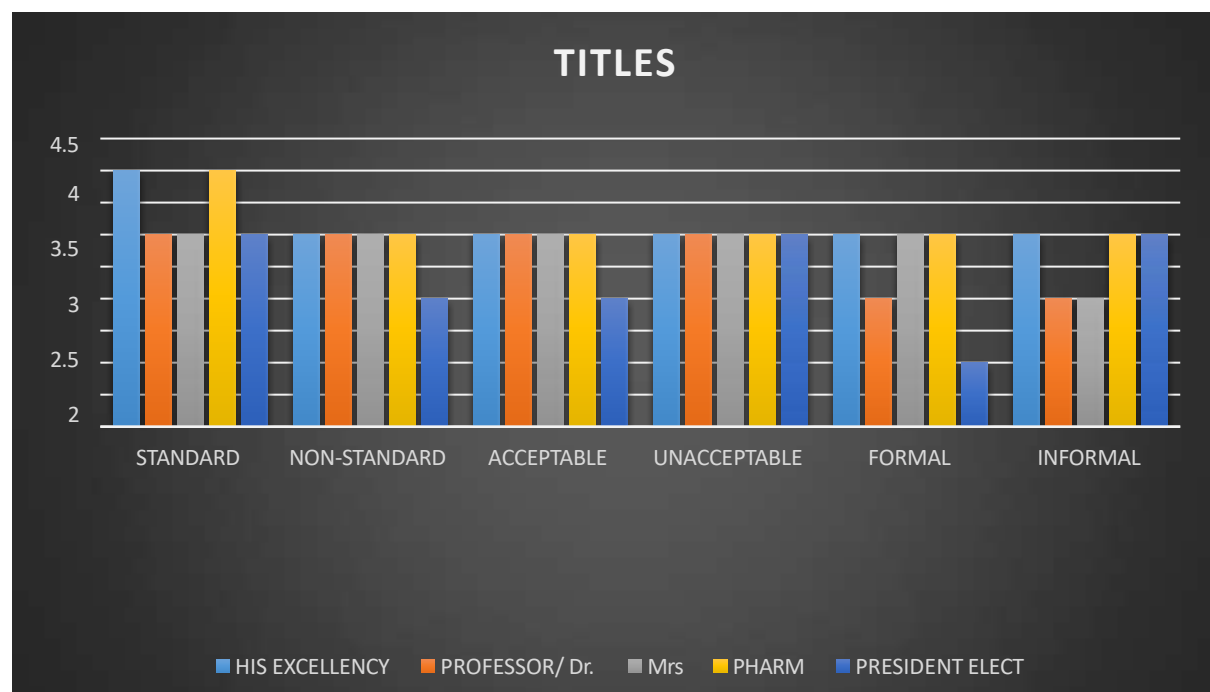
- a. His Excellency R.T. Honourable (Elder) Sheriff F.O. Oborevori CON, JP
- b. Professor Dr. High Chief Hon. Oghenetega Joshua called the Bishop on phone yesterday.
- c. Dr. (Mrs) Deborah Moses taught me in the third year in the University.
- d. Sir. (Pharm) Patrick Ferife was the best pharmacist of the year in 2024.
- e. President Elect, Engineer Korede, FAS, GCFR, Pharm was a brilliant person.

Much premium is placed on titles in NE. His Excellency R.T. Honourable (Elder) Sheriff F.O. Oborevori is the Governor of Delta State, Nigeria. So, his name has to be accompanied by these titles especially in formal situations. The reason for putting Elder in bracket is not known to sociolinguistics descriptions of titles. It ought to be written without the title if desirable to be written. Even the academics and academicians are not spared from the use of multiple titles. In some cases, some professors include Dr. or PhD to demonstrate the fact that they are professors

who had obtained the PhD earlier on because some become professors without having obtained the PhD degree. In Text 3.3, the Mrs ought not to be in brackets at all. It is a thing of pride for a lady to be married in Nigeria, hence its use. It is also used when there is no indication that the person is female. Text 3.d demonstrates that every profession has professional titles, such as Pharm, which stands for pharmacists. In Text 3.e, rather than being an ordinary description, President-elect is used as a title in Nigeria.

**Table 3: Text 3**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	His Excellency	4	3	3	3	3	3	19
B	Professor Dr.	3	3	3	3	2	2	16
C	(Mrs)	3	3	3	3	3	2	17
D	Pharm	4	3	3	3	3	3	19
E	President elect	3	2	2	3	1	3	14
		17	14	14	15	12	13	85



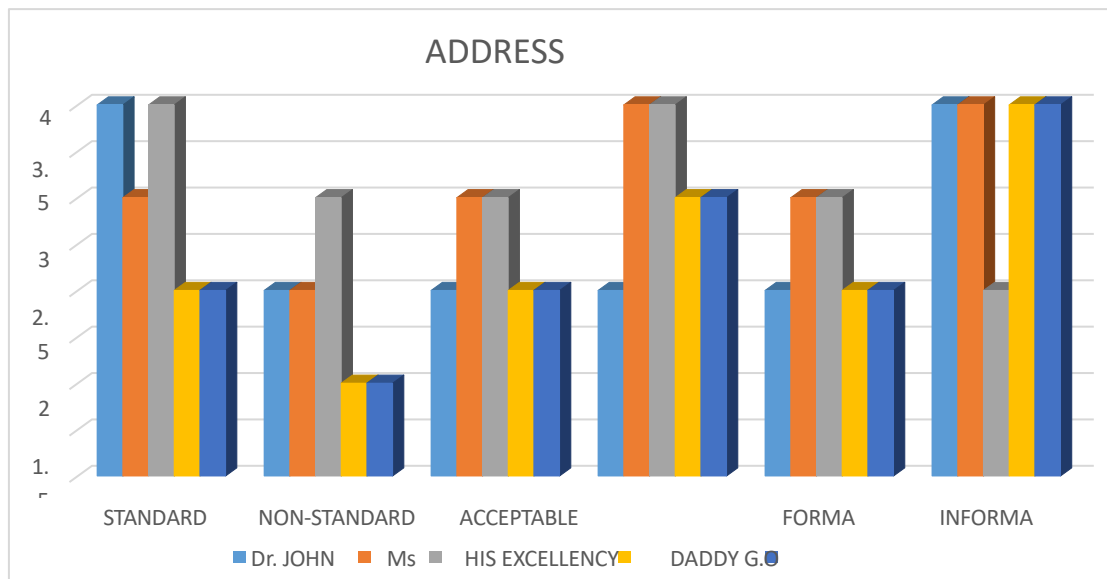
**Text 4: Address Patterns**

- a. Dr. John must be informed of the change in the examination time-table.
- b. Ms Mary Njokwu will be attending the meeting.
- c. His Excellency is supposed to speak first at the ceremony.
- d. Daddy G.O. cannot attend the meeting of the junior pastors.
- e. Mummy G.O. does not allow just anybody to see Our Daddy in the Lord.

Sociolinguistically, titles and address systems go hand-in-hand. That is, they are used sequentially. In Text 4. a., however, the use of the title Dr., as an example, with the First Name is informal if not wrong outright. Its formal form is Title+Surname. Ms as an address pattern is not as old in use as Mr. and Mrs. It is used for a lady who is old enough to marry, but she is not married. Or, it is used for a lady who was married before but has become single again. In Text 4.c., His Excellency as an address pattern, must include the name. Both Texts d. and e. are discussed together here because of their register – Christian address patterns. Their origin belonged to the Church, whereby the General Overseer is addressed as “Daddy” ( a Father in the Lord rather than a biological father). Similarly, his wife automatically becomes Mummy G.O.

**Table 4: Text 4.**

	Word	Standard	Non- standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Forma l	Informa l	Tota l
a	Dr. John	4	2	2	2	2	4	16
B	Ms	3	2	3	4	3	4	19
C	His Excellency	4	3	3	4	3	2	19
D	Daddy G.O	2	1	2	3	2	4	14
E	Mummy G.O	2	1	2	3	2	4	14
		15	09	12	16	12	18	82



### Text 5: Modal Auxiliaries

- Could you pass the salt (to me).
- I will attend the party
- Might we go home now?
- Shall we talk to both daddy and mummy tonight?
- Would you love me like no other person?

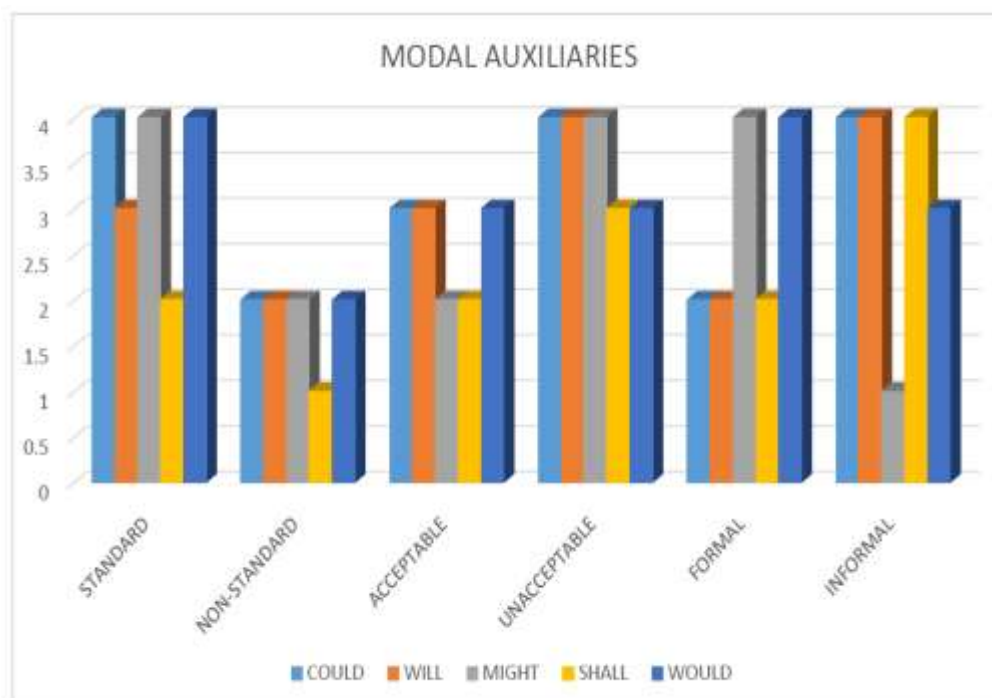
The Modal Auxiliaries are beautiful agents of formal and informal interpersonal relations. This is owing to the fact that they are used as, possibilities, polite, optional and obligatory expressions. In Text 5.a. “could” is used for a senior or an elderly person. For a younger colleague, “can” is used. It is often observed that many Nigerians add “please” before or after the sentence. This addition is unnecessary because “could” is the highest form of politeness in English. TEXT 5.b contains “will” which has obligatory meaning unlike “would”. “Might” in Text 5.c. is used to show both politeness and the possibility of an event which is yet to take place. While the word “may” is also polite here, “might” is more formal. Text 5.d. is in a question form. In practice, the modal auxiliary is not much in use nowadays among native speakers; some speakers use it for stylistic purposes. “Would” is very polite especially as a request form in Text 5.e.

**Table 5: Text 5**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	Could	4	2	3	4	2	4	19
B	Will	3	2	3	4	2	4	18



C	Might	4	2	2	4	4	1	17
D	Shall	4	1	2	4	4	2	17
E	Would	4	2	3	3	4	3	19
		19	09	13	19	16	14	90



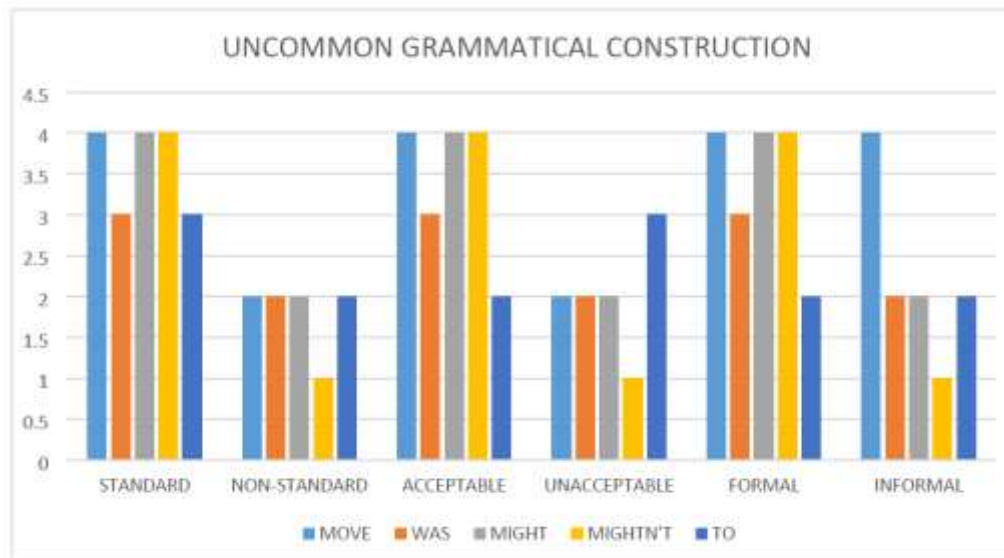
**Text 6: Uncommon grammatical constructions**

- a. It is high time we moved out of this bloody place.
- b. If I was him, I would climb to the to the highest point of Mount Sinai.
- c. Might we not have spoken to the General Manager of the company?
- d. Mightn't we close the case before the Tribunal of Justice Kehinde Durodola?
- e. Come to the table to dine with us.

Many Nigerians find the contents of Text 6. difficult to comprehend because they are not in common usage. Text a. should be "It is high time we *moved* out of this bloody place" in conventional grammatical usage. Its formality is fully meaningful in the sense that the movement has not taken place. Also in b., *was* is often replaced with *were* in order to take its meaning potential further from the immediate past. A reference of the event in the sentence is in the past and so could not be acted in the moment of speech. We testify that very few Nigerians would use "might" as it is used above. It would appear a quaint usage and uncommon. Whereas, we classify it as highly formal because native speakers use it quite often and formally. Text d. is like TEXT c. The only difference is that it is the negative form of the positive form in Text c. Text e is an uncommon use in Nigeria. What we have is "Come to the table and dine with us". It is distinctly a Nigerian usage because *and* is less formal than *to* in the context.

**Table 6: Text 6**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	Move	4	2	4	2	4	4	20
B	Was	3	2	3	2	3	2	15
C	Might	4	2	4	2	4	2	18
D	Mightn't	4	1	4	1	4	1	15
E	To	3	2	2	3	2	2	14
		18	09	17	10	17	11	82



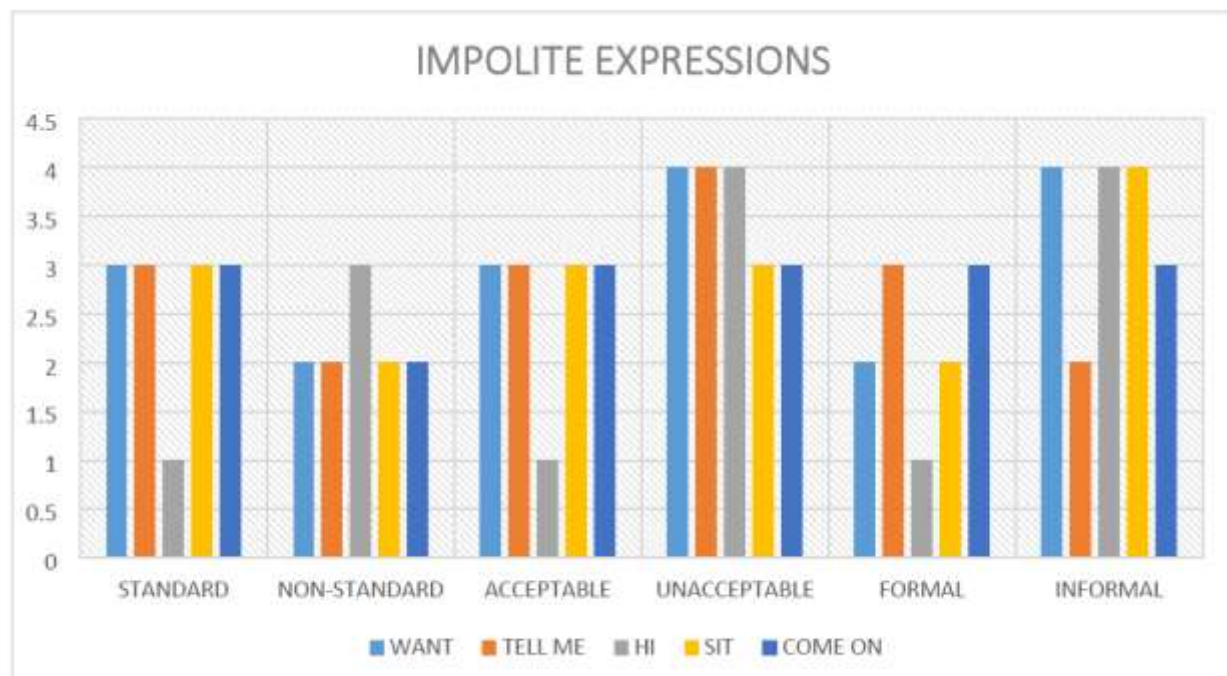
### **Text 7. Impolite Expressions**

- (in a formal meeting) I want to know, Sir, if African herbs and its nuances can cure all diseases.
- (From a journalist on radio or television to a guest) Tell me what you know for the benefit of our viewers.
- Hi (in a writing request note to a Professor) Sir!
- Sit down now! (a junior officer/staff in an office)
- Come on, Sir! (to a senior or an elderly person)

In Text 7a., the expression “I want to know” is impolite in a formal context. As in the study of economics, people’s wants are insatiable, but needs are satiable. In English, polite forms such as “Could I know... May I know, Do you mind responding to this question...etc.? are desirable in formal contexts. Similarly, for a journalist to ask a governor of s State or even a Minister: “Tell me” as in Text 7b above is very much impolite. Could, May, Might as in “Could you tell me” or “May I ask you, Sir...” would be very polite. Some Nigerians who use “could” often add “please”. For “could”, because it is the highest word for politeness in its category of the modal auxiliaries, it is unnecessary to do so. It is also unnecessary to add “Sir” to it but one may add “Sir” to “May” or “Can” should he or she mistakenly use these ones. To use “Hi” in the context of 7c. as recorded above is very impolite and rude. The word “Sir” may be used. Indeed, someone admitted to an office may be asked to sit down. Even for a colleague, how much more a senior person, it is very polite to say: “Do you mind to sit, Sir?” or “May you sit, please!” The word “down” is often not necessary because no one sits “up” anyway. In conversations in a formal setting, an expression such as “Come on, Sir” would be regarded as rude to a senior person. Instead, expressions such as” Would you look into the matter properly or, Not at all, Sir”.

**Table 7. Text 7.**

	Word	Standard	Non- standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	Want	3	2	3	4	2	4	18
b	Tell me	3	2	3	4	3	2	17
c	Hi	1	3	1	4	1	4	14
D	Sit	3	2	2	3	2	4	16
E	Come on	3	2	3	3	3	3	17
		13	11	12	18	11	17	82



### **Text 8: Comparative Use *Like***

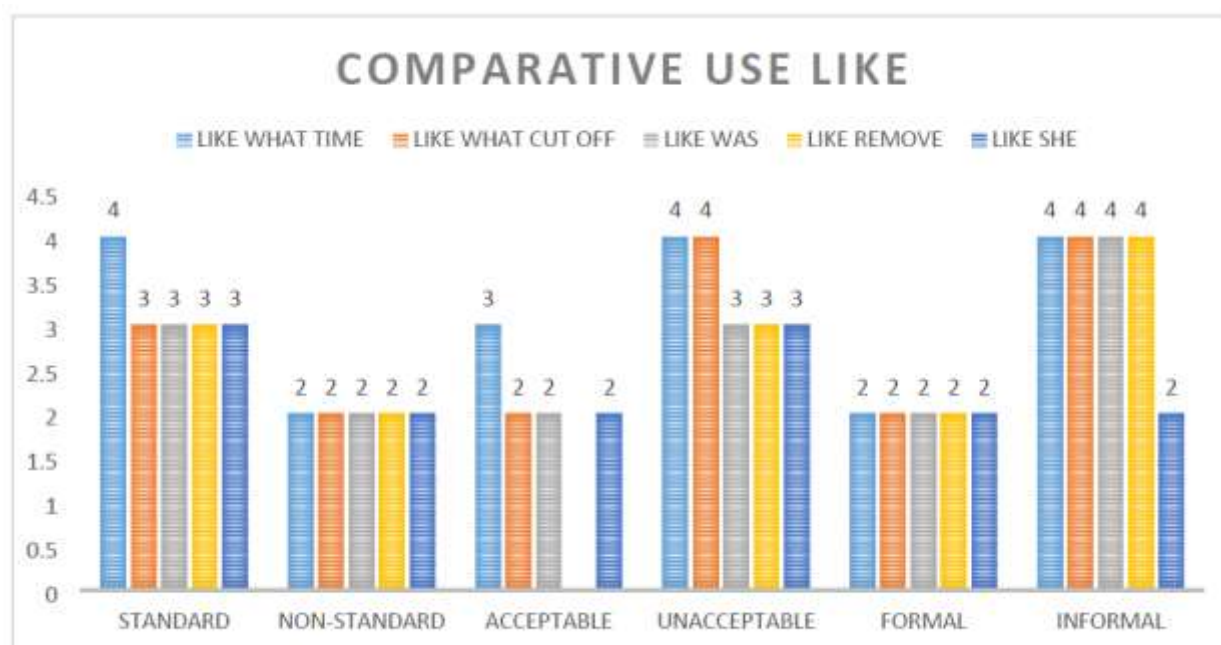
- a. It is like I want to visit the convenience.
- b. Like what cut off mark will give me admission into the University of my Choice?
- c. Like I was there for like three months before he joined the company.
- d. He wanted to like remove the money from my purse.
- e. Somebody was like she should come to work in the bank.

The common word “like” in English is a comparative one. We may give it the grammatical formular that  $X = Y$ . or  $Y = X$ ; that is,  $x$  looks like  $Y$  or  $Y$  looks like  $X$ . In Text a, all the uses of “like” are very informal although they are used to express the meanings that users have tacitly agree that they have. In Text 8a. “like” can be replaced, formally, with “as if”. In b., “like” can be replaced with “what”. In c., there are two ‘likes’. The first one, has a zero marker; that is, its use

is unnecessary whereas the second one can be replaced with “about”. In Text d, the like also has a zero marker – its use is unnecessary. In e. the use of like is meaningless; a situation that is different from containing a zero marker.

**Table 8: Text 8**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	Like what time ....	4	2	3	4	2	4	19
B	Like what cut off....	3	2	2	4	2	4	17
C	Like I was....	3	2	2	3	2	4	16
D	Like remove...	3	2		3	2	4	16
E	Like she...	3	2	2	3	2	2	14
		16	10	11	17	10	18	82



### **Text 9: Academic Papers**

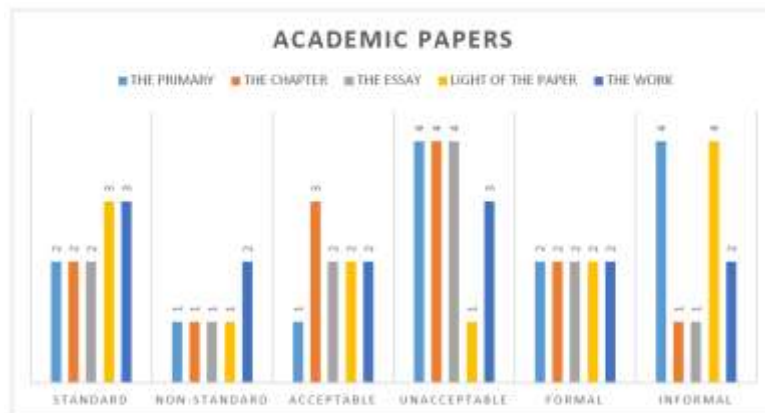
- a. The primary aim of the paper is to explore the possibility of the reduction of the country's population.

- b. This chapter contends that the rural farmers make more profit than the urban farmers.
- c. The essay's dialogue argues that Aristotle and Plato had the same aspirations towards building The Republic.
- d. It is in the light of the paper that the Federal Government stopped the double taxation plan.
- e. The work concludes, therefore, that the wisdom of God supersedes that of man

We consider the usage in Text 9, a universal practice in the composition of academic papers. As budding purists versus discourse analysts, we put meaning on top of the gradable characteristics of language. Also, we do not know what figures of speech or the mode of metaphor that can be chosen to explain the usage in the academic discourse. One is tempted to attribute the figure of speech of personification to many of the items. Yet, that figure of speech does not actually fit into the linguistic template of metaphor which in recent years is encapsulated in some linguistic theories – Hallidayan Systemic Functional Theory (SFT). (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004:586-636). In 9a., it is the paper that is attributed with the aim of the composition of the paper and not the author or the writer. Instead, we may have: “The aim of the writer of the paper is...”. In 9b., we have “The Chapter contends...”. How can the chapter do so – no spirit and no soul to evaluate the situation of contention? In the chapter, we/I contend that... may be a better option. In 9c. We don't know from the source whereby an essay has the resource to engage in any dialogic discourse. Rather, we suggest: “The essay is a dialogue...”. In 9d., we have “It is in the light of the paper that...”. This usage appear to be meaningless in its entirety. What nature of illumination does the paper have? Instead, we may have “The direction of our argument or our analysis of the paper is towards...”. Finally, for Text 9., “The work contains a conclusion, or we conclude in the paper that...”.

**Table 9: Text 9.**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	The primary	2	1	1	4	2	4	14
B	The chapter	2	1	3	4	2	1	13
C	The essay	2	1	2	4	2	2	13
D	Light of the paper	3	1	2	1	2	4	13
E	The work	3	2	2	3	2	2	14
		16	06	10	16	10	13	67



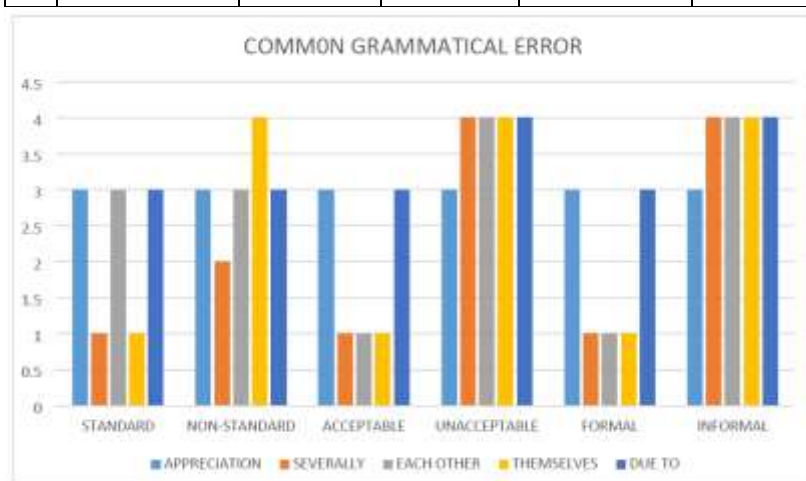
### Text 10: Common Grammatical Errors

- I *appreciate*.
- I looked you up in the office *severally*.
- All the members of the class, say about two hundred respect *each other*.
- Both the husband and wife began to beat *themselves* after a long argument.
- I couldn't come to school yesterday *due to* illness.

The common errors in Text 10 may be analysed as follows. The verb *appreciate* as used in the text must attract an object because it is used transitively. Examples are: "I appreciate your advice or I appreciate your intervention in the discourse". *Severally* in 10b. means separately (see *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* 10th Edition. So, it does not mean "several times" as it is used in NE. Text 10c. is an old-use error; that is, foundational to the beginning of the creation of NE. "Each other" has the meaning of two people. Over two hundred people in the sentence will attract "one another". In Text d., the meaning of *themselves* ought to be each other because it is madness if each one begins to beat himself or herself. Finally, in 10e., although Nigerians use 'due to' in many instances instead of 'owing to' we recommend the use of the latter phrasal one. In the text above, "due to" is inappropriate. The meaning of "due to" is an entitlement or what one is entitled to. We assert that no one would be willing to be entitled to illness as used in Text e. One may be "due to" to go on leave, nevertheless. So, it is good to have the expression – "I couldn't come to school yesterday owing to illness.

**Table 10: Text 10**

	Word	Standard	Non- standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	Appreciate	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
B	Severally	1	2	1	4	1	4	13
C	Each other	3	3	1	4	2	4	17
D	Themselves	1	4	1	4	1	4	15
E	Due to	3	3	3	4	3	4	20
		11	15	09	19	10	19	83



### **Text 11: Nigerian Pidgin Intrusions**

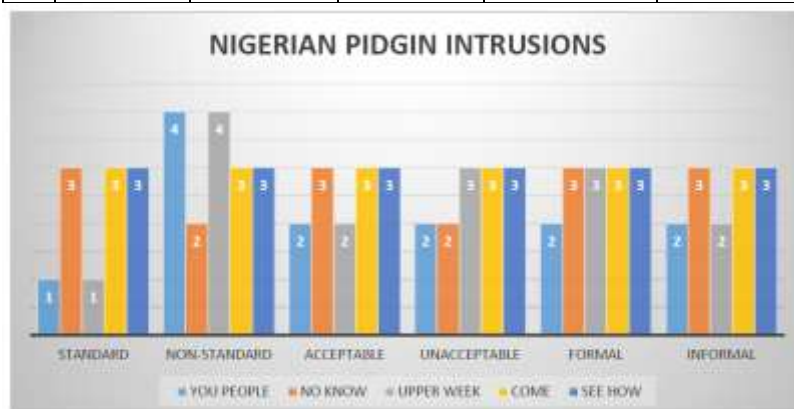
- You people* cannot do that!
- Dem no know sey people *come/kom* dey wise nowadays.
- Seeing you during the *upper* week.
- Now, come make we go now!
- In the interim, se you see how they com end the show.

In Text 11a above, the phrasal expression, "You people", as used in NE may be regarded as rude and impolite but seeing in the context of Nigerian Pidgin (NP), it is good. However, such a mixed usage can only be seen as the sociolinguistic concepts of code-mixing code-switching. Text 11b. has all the attributes of NP as many words have the orthography of NP. Again, the text could be used in the contexts of code-switching and code-mixing, sociolinguistically. Text 11c. has the phrasal expression *upper week* which was coined a few years ago, most probably a decade ago. Text 11d. has the unnecessary word *now* repeated at the beginning of and the end of the sentence. It might be a feature of the spoken discourse or outright NP. Text 11e. is NP with the use of the word *se* which is regarded as an interrogative marker.



**Table 11: Text 11**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	You people	1	4	2	2	2	2	13
B	No know	3	2	3	2	3	3	16
C	Upper week	1	4	2	3	3	2	15
D	Come	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
E	See how	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
		11	16	13	13	14	13	80



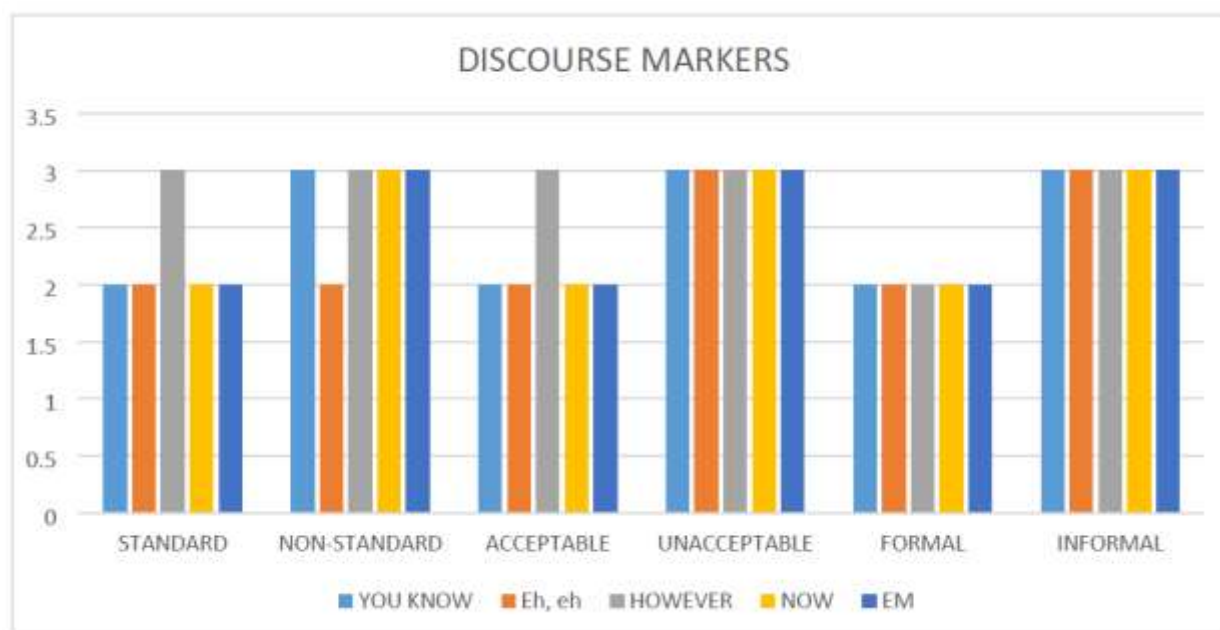
### Text 12: Discourse Markers

- You know* that I hate such acts of rudeness to elders *you know*.
- Come off it eh! eh! It's not good to do that eh!
- However you tried, you, you cannot climb the mountain!
- ow, go straight to the left; then to the right, now to the right again. Then you're there now!
- Em, em, em, you see, you see how they come kill the man.

Texts 12a, b, c and e portray different spoken discourse markers. They are repetitions of “*you know*”, “*eh, you* and *em*. It is only Text 12 d. that is different. There are multiple repetitions of *now* (3), and *right* (2).

**Table 12: Text 12**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	You know	2	3	2	3	2	3	15
B	Eh, eh	2	2	2	3	2	3	14
C	However	3	3	3	3	2	3	17
d	Now	2	3	2	3	2	3	15
e	Em	2	3	2	3	2	3	15
		11	14	11	15	10	15	76



### **Text 13: New Coinages**

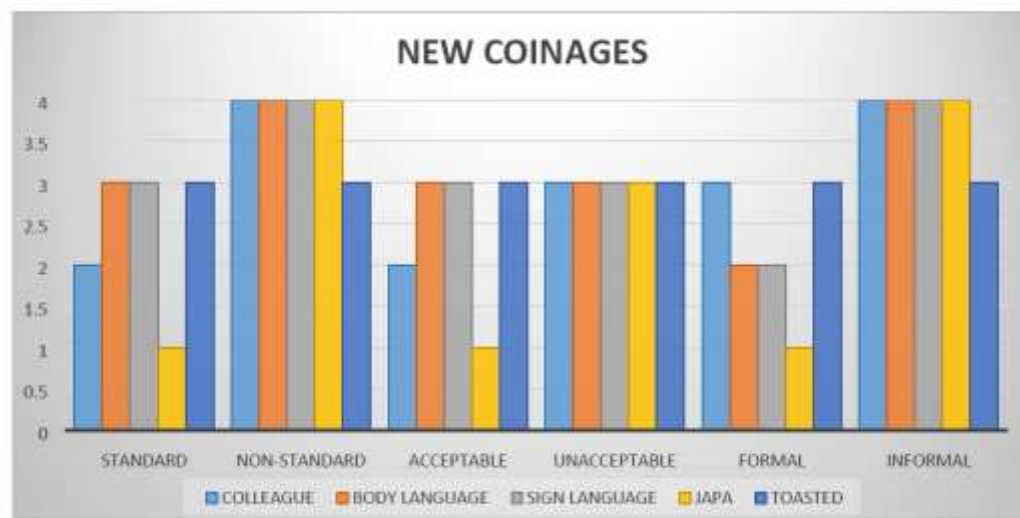
- The lady is my new colleague in the office, although she is a professor and I am a senior lecturer.
- Their body language says it all – she stole the money.
- You cannot understand the sign language except you learn it.
- We need to japa to London soon.
- Have you toasted her before she arrived from London?

Text 13a. consists of the use of the word *colleague* in an illogical context. The speaker is a senior lecturer, and the colleague is a professor. The inherent meaning of the word *colleague* is indicative of two people of the same rank. In NE, a colleague is someone with whom you work in the same office. We have introduced a new concept to use *person* instead of *colleague* whenever there are

differences in rank or position in a context. In a similar usage as in use in academic work, universally, the phrasal expression, *body language* is widely used in English. We object to its use especially in formal contexts. Body language is non-existent for this analysis. Scholars of English language and linguists all over the world agree that the two basic forms of language are the spoken and written genres. The “body” has no language. What its users mean is that the body is often used to signal some meaning that we do not and cannot refer to as body language but body communication. Similarly in 13c., we regard *sign language* as sign communication as body communication.

**Table 13: text 13**

	Word	Standard	Non-standard	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Formal	Informal	Total
a	Colleague	2	4	2	3	3	4	18
B	Body language	3	4	3	3	2	4	19
C	Sign language	3	4	3	3	2	4	19
D	Japa	1	4	1	3	1	4	14
E	Toasted	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
		12	19	12	15	11	19	88



## **Discussion**

The work on Nigerian English contains succinct discussions of the history of the language from its inception in Nigeria. That is, it is a contact/working language. It has developed tremendously since then to serve as the country's official language. With the introduction of Western education by the British, Nigerians have learnt to use the language very well, such that it is now regarded as a variety of English compared to other Englishes in any parts of the world.

Furthermore, in this work, discussions of its being formal and informal, acceptable or unacceptable have been provided. As already discussed and analysed, the data are naturally occurring texts. Most importantly, the use of tables and bar charts has been provided as graphical representations of the data. The theoretical model of Construction Grammar has been used. It is very relevant to the analysis because of its practical nature of the use of English in both the spoken and written forms.

The major highlight of the work is the extension of the boundary of the work, exploratorily, as a result of our introduction of the concepts of Visibility of Usage (VoU) and the Variability of Content (VoC). Both the tables and the bar charts perform the same function. The only difference is that while the figures show the variables' visibility of the figures, the bar charts show the variance of the variability. The easiest grammatical variance is that the range of figures is used to explain the figures from the lowest to the highest value or vice versa in the distribution. To find the range, one is expected to subtract the lowest value from the highest value or vice versa in the data set.

As an illustration, Grammatical Variance = X Maximum (Max.) – Y Minimum (Min) or Vice Versa.

In Text 1, 4a above, we calculate Dr. John as follows:

Standardisation Variance  $4 - 2 = 2$

Acceptability “  $2 - 2 = 0$

Formality “  $2 - 4 = -2$

In Text 13 above, we calculate colleague as follows:

Standardisation Variance  $2 - 4 = -2$

Acceptability “  $2 - 3 = -1$

Formality “  $3 - 4 = -1$

Across Texts 1 and 13, their Variance is  $76 - 78 = -12$ .

These variances are significant grammatically, both interpretatively and explanatorily.

## **Conclusion**

It is our submission that the work contains a demonstration of the concept of Nigerian English from its inception in the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. Our conception concerns its use as either formal and informal contexts or situations. Its formal use is official, while its informal use is non-official. We advocate the separation of its formal use from informal use. We identified various texts that form its pronunciation to new or emerging coinages because all languages must grow. Most importantly and in conclusion, Nigerian English has come to stay as a distinct variety of World Englishes.

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**Dissent and Orality as Praxis for Social Reformation in the Poetry of Niyi Osundare and  
Odia Ofeimun**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines Niyi Osundare's *Village Voices* and Odia Ofeimun's *A Handle for the Flutist and other Poems* from a reformatory perspective. It underscores the fact that the poets' thematic concerns reveal a pathetic disparity between the haves and the have-nots, the oppressors and the oppressed, poor leadership, corruption, political insensitivity, military dictatorship, war and ecological consciousness in the Nigerian society and how poetry is deployed to the service of the downtrodden. In the selected poetry collections under study, we examine how the poets put on the garb of the town crier and artistically engage the political oppressors with biting metaphors and images drawn from the oral resources of the people. The aim is to analytically evaluate the poets' use of the motifs of dissent and orality in their attempt to confront social inequality in the society. This technique enables us to bring to light the salient indices of the writers' reformatory quest for a society bubbling with hope and optimism. The study shows that various metaphors and anecdotal references in the collections: Osundare's *Village Voices* and Ofeimun's *A Handle for the Flutist and other Poems* not only connect individuals and groups to Nigerian bartered history, but unfurls the fact that committed poets, like Osundare and Ofeimun tell the truth artistically to power, dying for reformation. The paper concludes that the two poets, being the flagbearers of the Nigerian 'alter-native' literary tradition, are committed to the reclamation of Nigeria's lost glory

**Keywords:** Dissent, Orality, Praxis, Poetry, and Social Reformation



## **Introduction**

The artistic nuances of dissent and the dynamics of orality have always provided interesting materials for literary discourse. Dissent, for instance, constitute the main thrust of modern African poetry since its emergence as a literary tradition. This is given the fact that the socio-political experience that informed the African writers' imagination remains excruciating and disheartening. From the colonial to post-Independence periods, the Nigerian masses have experienced different socio-political upheavals which have impacted negatively on their collective psyche. As a result, there is an urgent need to find solutions to this sordid situation. Dissent, through literature, thus became the vision of the poets, a vehicle which they deploy as a viable instrument for social redemption.

'Dissent literature', in the context of this essay, adumbrates a work of art that engages socio-political issues that affect the ordinary people as well as expresses resistance against their sources. It is synonymous to protest literature. One of the distinguishing features of dissent literature, therefore, is that it foregrounds the indices of oppression and dispossession with significant effect on the emotional and psychological consciousness of its audience. It sets out to protest against identified situations and vices that are inimical to the general wellbeing of the people and, indeed, society, even in the face of intense socio-political and cultural repression.

The tradition of dissent in modern African literature can be traced to the negritude movement in francophone Africa, whose basic tenets is the preservation of the African cultural identity against Western politics of dislocation and dispossession. In the United States of America, protest literature serves as a form of social reformation based on sundry political and racial issues that affect the ordinary people. Literary works like those of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher, Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, attack American social and political institutions - slavery and racism - especially as they affect people of African descent. These works contain emotions and sentiments that are revolutionary, framed in a manner that makes sense to the reader. It is against this background that Harris (2009), observes with regard to the African-American social and political quarmire, that dissent literature refers to a literature "of bringing redress to the secondary status of black people, of attempting to achieve the acceptance of black people into the larger American body polity, of encouraging practitioners of democracy truly to live up to what democratic ideals on American soil means." (p.1). According to her, the intention of dissent literature then "was – and remains – to show inequalities in America ..." (p.1). Similarly, the early African writers used their works to engage the colonial distortion of the African identity and religious belief systems.

By orality, we mean the deployment of oral literary and folkloric motifs inherent in the culture area of the writer in the embellishment of their works. The African writer, in order to domesticate his/her artistic vision, often borrows, adapt and employs oral resources which are woven into their work as motifs. This, therefore, adumbrates the hybridity of modern African literature; a combination of indigenous and Western tropes. It is against this backdrop that Ojaide

(2001) submits that: “the creative writer is never an airplant, but someone who is grounded in some specific place. It is difficult to talk of many writers without their identification with place” (p.1). In other words, since African oral literature, in its functional state, serves and encourages integrity, honesty, industry, humility and heroism, its aesthetic framework becomes a source of inspiration to the modern African writer. Ekundayo and Iyayi (2013) support this view when they aver that the package of modern African literature may be western, the language and the formal patterns may be foreign, but the contents and quintessence are African. Whether purely Oral African Literature or Modern Written Africa Literature of foreign structuring, the two types have become fused and they individual and/or collectively perform the same developmental functions (p.87).

The essence of this technique is to preserve the oral tradition of the African people as well as use its aesthetic nuances to reform society.

Since the attainment of political independence in the early 1960s, many African states have had the misfortune of being plagued by insensitive political leaders. This has affected, significantly, the social and political progress of the continent. Thus, either explicitly or implicitly, the African writer uses his work to engage these socio-political and cultural misfortunes in their society as well as to record them in a manner that the audience would want to react to, either positively or negatively. This is why Awhefeada (2007), asserts that “... the writer should be seen as actively involved in the unfolding experiences of his society, not only as a recorder but also as a participant trying to shape events” (p.12). This, therefore, is the social vision of the African poet. The apparent burden that confronts the African writer, nay the poet, is the urgent need to right the wrongs in the existing social order. Arguing in this vein, Darah (2010), declares that “...all classical traditions of world literature are fostered by environments where there are intensive struggles against great evils for the restoration of human dignity” (p.100).

Although contemporary African poets derive their resources from the socio-political issues highlighted above, they have also expanded the frontiers of the African ideology and individualised their aesthetics by borrowing motifs from the indigenous oral tradition, thus assuming the role of the tribunes of the masses. They have become dissidents, opposing socio-political structures that work against the good of society. To this crop of African writers, the worth of the work of art should be measured by its ability to criticise any established order that goes against the tenets of fair play, even in the face of intense censorship and political persecution. These writers’ works are aimed at offering practical solutions by way of specific measures either for consensual reform or powerful revolution against the existing socio-political order. They, therefore, set their works against the backdrop of failure of leadership, political instability, corruption, insensitivity of sit-tight political office holders’ pauperisation of the masses and the regimes of military dictatorship across the African continent as well as environmental degradation. Most of these writers not explore the dialectics of Marxism as a backdrop but deploys

oral literary motifs in a bid to reconstruct the African concept of integrity, fairness and dignity of labour. It is in line with this view that Maduka (2004) asserts that:

Literature enhances man's awareness of the interlocking relationship between human freedom, self-determination of people and progress in society and the necessity of creating systems that sustain the life of social institutions. Each national literature encodes values which guide the people towards the development of effective mechanisms of response to the challenges of civilisation in the modern world... Our national life is in chaos because there is no poetry in the heads of our leaders (cited in Ekundayo and Iyayi, 2013).

Writing in the same vein in his assessment of modern Nigerian poetry, Awhefeada (2007), opines that the Nigerian poets of the 1980s whom Aiyejina (1988), describes as belonging to an "Alter-Native Tradition" (p.12), use their works to vivify "... history and made it a tool of angst against the rulers" (p.17). Continuing, he explains;

...the poets were prodded by the pressures of history. In response, they became ideological combatants, putting their poetry as a tool for social and political reordering. They adopted the Marxian praxis as the means to put an end to the oppression of the masses as a result of the depravity of a corrupt bourgeoisie. The poetry created new and revolutionary visions in a tone of angst and protest (p19).

This essay, however, focuses on the poetry of Niyi Osundare and Odia Ofeimun as a prism through which we can examine the indices of dissent and orality in contemporary African poetry. The choice of the two poets is appropriate because their poetry collections, *Village Voices* and *A Handle for the Flutist and other Poems* best exemplify the fecundity of dissent and orality which constitute the core of this paper. Niyi Osundare and Odia Ofeimun bear the flag of the 'alter-native' tradition of Nigerian poetry who deploy their works to address the tension between the African political-cum-capitalist elite and the masses. Their dissenting stance against established socio-political structures in the Nigerian state is unparalleled. In much of their poetic outputs, there is always one form of protest or the other, demystification of the difficulty associated with poetry through the infusion of oral aesthetic tools, giving birth to a poetic tradition which can variously be termed dissent or protest poetry. A poetry which according to Anyokwu (2015), "...is inherently and fundamentally different, both in thematic concerns and in style, from that of the preceding generation" (p.12). They understand that African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. To them, "... we must strive for a form of social organisation that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so that we can build a new country, and sing a new song." (Ngugi 1981, p.50).

### **Dissent and Orality as Praxis for Social Reformation**

This section is concerned with the analyses of the use of dissent in the poetry of Osundare's *Village Voices* and Ofeimun's *A Handle for the Flutist and other Poems* by highlighting the motifs of orality which the poets deploy in a bid to reform society. The investigation covers the basic ideas, thematic goals as well as the formal elements of his poetry, which endear them to readers. There are certain literary motifs which are combined with oral praxis by the poets to produce poems that are revolutionary in both content and form. The various literary devices utilised by the two poets in the examined collections are also analysed in this segment. As poets, Osundare and Ofeimun use poetry as a vehicle for social reformation. While some of their poems foreground private themes, it is public experiences that are predominantly recreated in their poetry. In other words, their poems serve as a social commentary on the Nigerian state and the global community. The thematic concerns of the two collections, for instance, reveal the pathetic disparity between the haves and the have-nots, the oppressors and the oppressed, poor leadership, corruption, political insensitivity, military dictatorship, war and a keen ecological consciousness. Thus, in the two collections: Osundare's *Village Voices* and Ofeimun's *A Handle for the Flutist and other Poems* which constitute the critical discourse of this essay, one comes across the writers protest against socio-political injustices aimed at redeeming the Nigerian people from oppressive manifestations

Osundare, for instance, believes that the poet must not only just write but must make concerted effort to salvage the Nigerian society from the hands of the local oppressors. In the words of Irele (2003), Osundare's poetry is adumbrates "his commitment to social issues of his country, his continent, and his world". According to him, "Osundare's concept of morality is steeped in the push for a balanced world, and equalised earth, and an uncensored goodness towards humanity" (p.xxv). This reformatory mission is done through a remarkable appropriation of indigenous motifs and images which are targeted as conscientization and social reformation. Jeyifo (1987), affirms that "only in the poetry of Agostinho Neto and David Diop will you find the same depth and passion and lyricism in solidarity with the oppressed, the downtrodden, the dispossessed, and a corresponding faith in their aspiration and will to revolutionary change as we confront in Osundare's poetry". According to Jeyifo, the "dispossession of the majority of our people, and more specifically of the rural producers, may in fact be said to be the grand theme of Osundare's poetry" (p.xi).

In *Village Voices*, for instance, we come across Osundare's social reformatory vision as a poet of common man who uses his poetry to convey the various socio-political injustices meted on the common people - the have-nots and the majority of the masses. The aptness of the title 'village voices', attests to Osundare's commitment towards demystifying obscure poetic language with the aim of communicating to the less literate class of the society - the poor peasants, including the hawkers, in fact the downtrodden in the fringes of society, that is village. The poet perceives that the pauperised majority are the people who need his message, not the elite oppressors. Thus, in order to convey the social disparity that constitutes the main fabrics of the Nigerian socio-political

domain, Osundare employs essential images of deprivation and affluence, which he uses to foreground the repressive manifestations of the ruling class (the haves) on the ruled (the have-nots). In other words, the poet takes his message to the oppressed peasants, who are found in villages and rural hamlets. Through the adroit exploitation of language oral rhetorics and themes, Osundare ontologises the motif of dissent in a manner that the oppressed masses are constantly incited to act and resist their oppressors.

In many of the poems in *Village Voices*, the dichotomy between the bourgeois and the proletariat is copiously represented. The Marxist thesis and antithesis expressed in many of the poems in the collection highlights the imperative of struggle, which is the only alternative left for the masses to reclaim their share of the resources in the land. In the collection, Osundare seems to inflame the oppressed in order to combat every instrument of the oppressor as perpetrated by the heartless capitalists and the political rulers, who are poachers that persistently conspire to torment them. The foregoing idea resonates in the poem “*The Land of Unease*”:

The yam of this world  
is enough for all mouths  
which pay daily homage  
to the god of the throat  
...  
But alas,  
men forge unequal knives  
a few slashing the yam  
with machetes greedier  
than Esimuda's sword

(*Voices*, p.46)

The issue of social disparity and class discrimination, which manifests in the Nigerian socio-economic domain, is depicted in the poetic lines above. The distinction along class lines in Nigeria, gives rise to exploitation of varying forms. Osundare incites the oppressed to react to the disturbing experience of injustice, where resources meant to satisfy the needs of all are abrogated by few individuals, who perpetuate and seek to entrench themselves in power. The sociological allusion to Esimuda's sword metaphorically depicts the greedy nature of the Nigerian politician, who embezzles all the fortunes of the nation, with little or nothing left for the majority. Esimuda, according to the poet's personal note, is a “legendary Ikere warrior with a sword extraordinarily large and sharp” (Osundare, 1984, p. 46). Being an indigenous oral motif, the character of Esimuda in the poem, is symbolic of the legendary greed of the Nigerian political class, who manifest a keen self-centredness. That the poet borrows this image from his indigenous oral culture in his home town, Ikere, in Ekiti State, Nigeria, reflects his consciousness of his native environment and the

commitment to redeem it from the hands of poachers. While the image of Esimuda depicts the greediness and insensitivity of the political class and the capitalists, Omodindinrin (the smallest finger), in contrast, represents the pauperisation of the masses and the labourers, who are left with nothing of significance by the highly placed. Again, Osundare illustrates:

why have few chosen to be thumbs  
and the many others *omodindinrin*  
clinging precariously  
to the periphery of the palm?

(*Voices*, p.46)

Osundare's use of images to capture the idea of class disparity appeals to our senses. For instance, the recourse to playing with the indigenous metaphor of the human fingers to convey the concept of class distinction and alienation, is socially convincing — it reflects the overbearing effects of political and capitalist greed on the masses and the labourers. The line "...few chosen to be thumbs", captures the opportunists few — political rulers and capitalists, who arrogate all the wealth to themselves, leaving little or nothing for the starving majority. The affluent class is represented by the fattest finger, the thumb, but the poor majority are depicted by the smallest finger, known as *omodindinrin* in the indigenous Yoruba language. The oral and metaphoric appropriation of the human fingers, to reflect social disparity, could be exemplified further: the separation of the fat thumb finger, from the other fingers in the human palm, signifies the class structure that exists between the rich and the poor in the society. The tone of protest in this poem is aimed at realising social parity and equality, which is the essence of social reformation in human society.

Again, in "*The Padlock and Key*", the poet protests the constant disdain with which the masses are held in their own country by a few who have the opportunity to rule over them. Here, Osundare highlights the inhuman manifestations of autocratic regimes in Nigeria, where the masses are persistently brutalised so that they will not be bold enough to demand better conditions of life. In other words, the people are threatened by the power play to remain docile in the midst of stern political trepidations. The dissenting pulse that runs through the poem is meant to spur the masses into taking radical decisions that would redeem them from the oppressors. The poet tells us in the first two stanzas:

We ask the tyrant:  
when will you end your torture  
he asks us  
when will snake stand on its own legs  
when will the rat wed the mouse's offspring  
we shiver with shrieks from death chambers  
he says they are laughs of men at play

We ask the tyrant:  
when will you destroy your chains  
he says  
when there are fires in the land  
hot enough to melt their links  
(*Voices*, p.65)

In this poem, “padlock” and “key” represent the bondage of the Nigerian people, who are subjugated by military dictators and civilians. The suffocating atmosphere that is generated by autocratic tension and the repressive manifestations of political highhandedness are exposed in the excerpt above. As is the case with military regimes, the people are treated with so much disregard are subjected to dehumanising treatment, hence they “shiver with shrieks from death chambers” (p.65). Furthermore, in the dialogue above, one experiences the richness of indigenous indices of orality inherent in the Yoruba culture. It also foregrounds the enthralling rhythm and mood of the traditional oral poetic tradition *ijala* of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Ironically, as in the oral tradition, the agony of the dehumanised majority serves as an amusement to the tyrants: “He says they are laughs of men at play”. In this kind of situation, the poet believes that every oppressed person must come out to protest against maladministration, bad leadership and every form of oppressive manifestations perpetrated by the ruling oligarchs. This dissenting motif is well anthologised in many of Osundare’s poems. In other words, in the struggle to redeem the land from the shackles of oppression, nobody should be left out— even the intellectuals in the ivory towers must be fully committed to the quest to liberate the people. The poet reprimands in “*Listen, Book Wizards*” thus:

Listen, you book wizards  
your pens are spears  
in the eye of this land  
your ink the stench  
coursing through gutters  
and government offices  
carrying debris of rot  
from the stagnant pond  
of legislative houses

The laws of your books  
bow a million heads  
hunching backs once straight  
like young rubber tree

they turn the world upside down  
for you to lick the spill

(*Voices*, p.58)

In this poem, everyone is involved in the struggle to redeem the land from the hands of the few heartless poachers, whose sole mission is to keep the people in perpetual subjugation. In other words, no matter your status in the society, all hands must be on deck to take the country out of the woods.

Furthermore, Osundare laments the insensitivity of the Nigerian rulers, who have no vision for the Nigerian state. He declares that the only thing Nigerian rulers are good at doing is the embezzlement of funds — they do not show any iota of commitment to advance the socio-economic condition of the country, except mere exhibition of Eurocentric or imperialist tendencies (Ajakah 2017, p.2). In the “*Eunuch Child*”, Osundare protests the Eurocentricism that is displayed by the political class through their privileging of imported goods from Euro-America over domestic products. The poet illustrates with yam, a local source of carbohydrate, which is grown in Nigeria. He parodies the politicians’ failure to encourage its commercialisation to become a major source of income in Nigeria. He condemns the reliance of the Nigerian economy on importation:

Oh! if only yam would grow in Europe  
we would send a thousand ships today  
and stop worrying about wayward weeds  
about droughts which crack the land  
like a harmattan lip  
about floods which carry pregnant heaps  
down the busy hill  
into the wolfish jaws  
of the tricky Atlantic

Oh! if only yam would grow in Europe  
we would buy a million barns  
with our oil billions  
and import white princesses  
to pound for our kings

But since yam never grows in Europe  
we will bring Europe here  
to grow for us:

(*Voices*, pp. 53-54)



From the above, it is evident that the poet protests the misplacement of values by the Nigerian political class and elites, who privilege European culture and products as elitist. In this poem, Osundare unearths an enigmatic nugget of wisdom when he says: “Oh! if only yam would grow in Europe/we would buy a million barns/with our oil billions”. This oral artist trope is used to lampoon the over-reliance of the Nigerian government on foreign goods at the detriment of the indigenous resources. To the poet, acts like these not only increase the colonial stronghold on the country but impoverished the people. For Osundare, therefore, the solution to Nigerian economic advancement lies mainly on the promotion of indigenous or domestic products. This inward-looking approach is the only means for the sustainable development of the Nigerian nation. As Osundare suggests, the commercialisation of domestic products is the most tenable measure to redeem the poor peasants from abject penury. Osundare’s suggestion is necessary in a time like this, when Nigeria is drifting rudderless. As Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2003) affirms, “the words of the poet must not be ignored because they are words that have been carefully selected and used to present useful ideas” (p.31).

As a social crusader, Osundare uses his poetry to champion the cause of the oppressed masses in order to redeem them from oppressive rules (Anyokwu 2015, p.9). In Osundare’s poems, one constantly encounters the images of protest against the recurrent debasement and dehumanisation of the downtrodden because he desires a world where the rich and the poor would have equal access to the social and political amenities in the country. His resort to dissent motif in his poetry is therefore a call for social justice and parity. As he intones in “*A Dialogue of the Drum*”, “When I raise my voice/The world will be my chorus” (... *Voices*, p.6). Here, the poet implies that he has the capacity to incite the world to protest against all forms of inequality in the land. He therefore warns the oppressors that their time will soon be over because the people are tired of their continuous subjugation. In the same poem, he sounds a warning to the tyrants thus:

Your drum is sounding too loud  
It may soon reach the tearing point  
You have reached the neck of the palm  
You may soon find the earth  
Cradling your broken head  
(... *Voices*, p. 7).

The metaphor of the drum demonstrates the indigenous means of mobilizing for war against the enemy. In other words, the tyrants should be careful when they hear the sound of the collective drum of the people. In the course of arguing for freedom for the masses from the shackles of oppression and dispossession, the poet manifests a revolutionary spirit which projects him as the people’s patriot. Thus, when the poet announces “I Wake up this Morning”, he appeals to the

audience as the poetic persona, whose vision is to chastise arrogant and heartless tyrants. He declares:

I wear courage like a shield  
telling kings their fart  
chokes the village nose  
I wear courage like a shield  
and shout mountains of distance  
into plains of touch  
rid of daunting echoes  
of the hillocks men build into forbidding peaks  
submerging valleys

*(Voices, pp. 1-2).*

As we experience in the lines above, Osundare is exposed to us as the people's poet, who uses poetry as a potent instrument for social redemption. Osundare constantly echoes the wastefulness, which corruption and inequality continually bequeath on the Nigerian state. In many of his poems, he graphically paints the picture of the disparity that exists between the rich and the poor. In "*Eating with all the Fingers*", for instance, he protests the affairs of men, where a few will arrogate all the food meant for the entire community to themselves. He tells us:

The affairs of this life  
are like people eating  
some dip ten fingers  
and clog their throats  
their greed chokes the land  
with sprawling dirt

*(Voices, p.15).*

He, therefore, engages the people in a conspiracy against their tormentor. According to him, in order to defeat oppression, the people must add their voices together and fight in one accord. The motive behind this call is to realise a society where equality for all men and women will be projected:

We will raise our voices  
and tell the world  
we will not be watchers  
of others eating

*(Voices, p.15).*

Like Osundare, Ofeimun's poetry resonates with images and metaphors of dissent aimed at sensitising the masses to their power to redeem the land from the hands of the tyrant poachers. He openly expresses his disdain on the socio-political malaise in the country and the pauperisation of the masses. Ofeimun, like other African committed writers, Omoko (2023) aver, "confront issues that have bearing on the people. This is because he imbues in his works, images and metaphor that deny the enemy of the masses sleep. Ofeimun's poetry is one that pitted the state against the downtrodden who looked to them for direction" (p.147). As a radical poet, his view is that as the politicians are insensitive to the plight of the ordinary citizens and thus cannot be trusted, the people must fashion a collective and a dissenting means to fight for their rights. It is in this regard that Awhefeada (2006), opines that Ofeimun and the poets of his generation, unlike their predecessors:

...became ideological combatants, putting their poetry in the service of humanity. Conceiving poetry as a tool for social and political reordering, they adopted the Marxian praxis as the means to put an end to the oppression of the masses as a result of the depravity of a corrupt bourgeoisie. The poetry created new and revolutionary visions on a tone of angst and protest (p.379).

Ofeimun's *A Handle for the Flutist and other Poems* in line with the above artistic sentiments, conjures an overtly political consciousness side-by-side an aesthetic inquisition into the labyrinths of the peoples' predicaments in the face of plenty. In the title poem, "*A Handle for the Flutist*", for instance, the poet differs with those who believe that poetry does not have the force to confront the socio-political inanities in the society nor can it reform. Rather, he sees poetry as means to disintegrate the gathering of the oppressors and enthrone social justice in the society. The use of the oral motif of the 'flutist' in the collection carries the metaphoric and wordsmithery adumbrates the vast inanities that retard the peoples' progress. The first two stanzas of the poem, for instance, foreground the artistic mission of the poet by locating poetry in the domain of social consciousness:

You have heard it said before  
that poetry makes no water jump  
blows not the wind it divines  
builds no pyramids nor does it  
repair bridges or start anything afresh

Yet in the common tongue of those  
who love to feel the terror of survival  
the survival of mouth as mouth alone

the worshipped word is enough  
to expiate crimes and to lay honour  
upon who the pleaded grace of song has fallen  
(*A Handle for the Flutist...*, p.7)

As a social reformer, the poet uses the functionality of poetry to explore the alternative potential of poetry in sanitising society. Although his artistic goal is to discredit the position of some classical critics such as Plato who believe that poets, because of their reflective and refractive use of materials derive from society, are unfit to reform society, the poem foregrounds the role of the poet as the conscience of the society. Of course, if poetry “builds no pyramids nor does it/repair bridges or start anything afresh”, it is capable of bringing people together as well as fight against crimes. The allusion to ancient Egyptian pyramids and bridges only adumbrates the rhetorics of oppression and force labour. It foregrounds the idea of tyranny which the masses are subjected to by the callous rulers. To the poets, pyramids and bridges are built with the sweat of the masses who are in turn prevented from enjoying the luxuries they provide. Poetry on the other hand, produces love by bringing people together. For those who love poetry, “the worshipped word is enough/to expiate crimes and to lay honour/upon who the pleaded grace of song has fallen” (p.7).

The poet’s position is clear. The masses must understand the fact that the aim of their oppressors is to annihilate them. In other words, the dehumanisation of the Nigerian majority by the few tyrant rulers is a means to make them useless not only to themselves but to society where they would survive at the instance of the oppressive political elites. Ofeimun illustrates this position further in the poem, “Beyond Fear” where he charges the poor Nigerian masses look to themselves as the source of their freedom. The poet charges the people to take their destinies into their hands in order to identify the road to salvation; even at the risk of facing combat:

The fact that we survive it compels us  
to do something about it: the hungerbash  
hidden by the syrupy communiques  
of the idols of warfare, trade, and ‘tricknology’  
The fact that we survive  
the beleaguered slumscapes  
the sweltering, tattered villages,  
dragoons of biocide  
afester with rancid commerce,  
the fact that we survive it  
compels us to do something about it,  
to scoff and wag our loaded fingers  
at the zanny cowboys on heat

heaping salted invectives and trash-talks  
at the daring ones who go at dusk

...

*(A Handle for the Flutist..., p.15)*

In other words, the power to restructure society lies significantly within the masses. Everybody must look inward and be strengthened by his/her will power to make the desired change that everyone craves for.

In the poem, “A Serious Matter”, Ofeimun charges the masses not to take the promises of their insensitive politicians serious because they are laden in lies. Here as a social crusader, Ofeimun does not spare the masses who by their actions and inactions compromised the process of electing new leaders in the country. To the poet, the people cannot be fully separated from their social, political and economic predicaments. This is because, they are too canal and fail to see beyond the immediate:

We have no need for  
the common salt of want and hunger  
said the spokespersons of the people  
as they rode kites of ballot paper  
to the truth of an ancient wish

But we must stop these  
air-conditioned arguments –  
do something – said the Peoples’ lawyers  
as they stood up and were  
carried shoulder high  
*(A Handle for the Flutist..., p.23)*

The lines above foreground the social and political context upon which Nigerian elections are held. The people, through their representatives are coaxed into supporting orthodox means of election rigging by financial inducements. The people are gullible, hence they believed that after collecting election inducement money: “We have no need for/the common salt of want and hunger/said the spokespersons of the people”. In other words, the people must be weary of those who they send to represent and speak on their behalf. This is because even from among the them, there are betrayals who speak from both sides of the mouth. Thus, having been bribed, the politicians are able to have their way in manipulating the election process: “as they rode kites of ballot paper/to the truth of ancient wish”. The poet uses this poem to caution the people that for every election that is compromised, there is a consequence. This is well ontologised in the last two stanzas of the poem thus:

...when my mother came back  
from the rally of rallies  
the kitchenware welcomed her  
with blank stares

The spokespersons of the people  
did not tell her  
where to find the next morsel  
for her children  
(*A Handle for the Flutist...*, p.23)

What the poet has done in the above lines is to accuse the people of being culpable in their socio-political woes. The people ought to know that the politicians are not to be trusted. Hence with their collective power, they should use the ballot to change wrong leaders. Furthermore, being the poet of the common man, Ofeimun takes the posture of the ignorant masses in the poem, "Ballast" and asks:

How could we know  
being calves on green grass  
we had so much promise in our horns  
to make the oaks panic  
at vague rumours of our hoofs

How were we to know  
that our dreamy eyes could give  
so much to the many-layered sky  
to make the earth envious  
of our footfalls  
(*A Handle for the Flutist...*, p.28)

The lines above adumbrate the ignorance of the people about their collective power to fight against all forms of oppression and dispossession that are meted on them by the insensitive politicians. Here, the image of the calves 'horns', 'hoof' and 'footfalls' become a convincing metaphor of strength inherent in the masses who are represented as calves to confront their political oppressors. In the poem, the metaphor of the 'oaks' which transcends into 'many-layered sky' foregrounds the elitism that characterises the upper class, which includes the political class and the bourgeois capitalists. This group must be confronted with the truth to enable them understand the meaning of social justice. This conscious sensitisation of the poor will certainly lead them into re-examining

their predicament. Significantly, the oppressed poor will one day rise in fury against their oppressors; and when that time comes, the people will understand the social power they wield over their oppressors. In other words, when the people finally summon the courage to take their rights, the tyrants will be overthrown and will become worthless in the scheme of things. Here, Ofeimun seems to corroborate Rotimi's assertion that "to sit down and do nothing is to be crippled fast" (*The Gods*, p.7). This is why he charges the people to rally themselves together to speak truth against power with one voice. The invitation is open to all. This is well presented in the poem, "Come to our Rally":

Come to our rally  
I said to the rain  
in every sun  
that found a blade of grass  
renew the sap  
from root to budding wish  
dare to sing  
of life as terminus  
a splash of truth  
with greenness as home  
in the spurting wilderness of forest flowers  
(*A Handle for the Flutist...*, p.40)

In this poem, the enemy of the people are the heartless, insensitive politicians and tyrant kings who take pleasure in pauperising the people. Here, the poet becomes a social activist who takes upon himself to rally the people together to confront their oppressors squarely. Furthermore, as the voice of the voiceless, Ofeimun takes the side of the downtrodden and becomes their drummer who awakes them to consciousness anytime they become docile to their predicaments. In the poem "The Drummer" for instance, the drummer is used as a motif of reformation commissioned to recreate the despoiled socio-political landscape of the society. This is the drummer:

...came to tie knots  
to create new riddles  
out of  
the too-simple truths  
of festivating crowds

From by-ways to thoroughfares  
disdaining the fists  
lifted in facile worship  
of rude power

he sought the deft idiom  
beyond the kobo-wise  
haggle  
of praise-singers  
(*A Handle for the Flutist...*, p.32)

The poetic import of the above lines becomes redolent when one considers how successive governments in Nigeria have succeeded in trading away national assets for personal gains and aggrandisement. Like the flutist in the oral setting who represents the conscience of the society, Ofeimun impressively collects social, political and economic materials in the society which undermine the progress of the country and reconstructs them as in the traditional setting in a manner that it transforms into a call for change and reformation. This is why Omoko (2014), argues that the oral poet in traditional society, “must be abreast of the goings-on in the society. He is always alive to both the old and current trends of the sociopolitical environment. Thus, he collects materials from the society and weaves them into songs” (p.159). In other words, in order to re-right this public anguish, the poet, through his poetry becomes the catalyst to the reformation which society seeks.

### **Conclusion**

Poetry, no doubt, serves as a tool for social and political reformation. However, it is artistic use of certain motifs such as dissent and oral cadences that enhance the extent to which such reformation goals may be achieved. The examination of the poetry of Niyi Osundare and Odia Ofeimun in this essay has shown that the poets are not only intellectuals but radical reformers who use various aesthetic tropes including dissent and oral resources to proffer solutions to the sundry socio-political distortions in the Nigerian society. Thus, through the use of dissent and orality as poetic tools, the poets have been able re-evaluate the plight of the downtrodden and voiceless masses of the society who daily bear the violence, dispossession and dislocation of the insensitivity of various hegemonic structures in the Nigerian state and redefines and recreates ‘dissent’ as an important tool in confronting the various oppressive structures of society.

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**Reverse-Acculturation and Identity: An Overview of Recent Title-taking Trend among  
Diaspora Onitsha Indigenes.**

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**Abstract**

Between November 2024 and early January 2025, over one hundred Onitsha indigenes, spanning various ages and genders, assumed traditional titles—Ozo for men and Odu for women. A significant proportion of these titleholders were members of the diaspora who, in a reversal of their acculturation process, sought to attain prestigious statuses that hold little practical value in their host societies. Similar patterns are observable across Western nations, where native Africans and other migrant communities organize sub-cultural groups, confer traditional titles, and perform rituals reminiscent of their countries of origin. While such Afro-centric cultural consciousness is commendable, the high frequency of title-taking risks trivializing historically revered institutions. This study investigates this emerging trend, exploring the motivations behind the increased engagement with native culture, including self-affirmation, belonging, social identification, and nostalgia for the homeland. Employing a **Cultural Identity Theory lens**, the research examines how diaspora indigenes construct and navigate their cultural identities to mitigate alienation induced by unfamiliar social and political structures. Methodologically, the study utilizes qualitative approaches, including interviews with community leaders and titled diaspora members, supplemented by literature and online sources to contextualize the findings within existing theories. The study concludes that, although identity is dynamic, heritage exerts a strong influence on individual self-conception. Furthermore, while personal ambition drives participation in these cultural practices, it should not undermine collective well-being.

**Keywords:** Acculturation, Reverse Acculturation, Retro-Acculturation, Identity, Cultural Identity.

**Introduction**

Globalization in recent decades has profoundly impacted non-Western cultures, facilitated by advances in technology, transportation, and communication. Cultural boundaries are increasingly blurred, giving rise to the notion of a “global village.” Historically, transnational migration and cultural exchanges predominantly flowed from dominant to minority cultures,

particularly following the end of colonial rule in African nations. Many native Africans migrated to Western countries for education and employment, undergoing a process of **acculturation** that often disrupted emotional, communicative, and cultural norms.

A notable trend is now emerging among diaspora communities, including Onitsha indigenes, as minority groups resist full assimilation into host cultures and instead revert to their cultures of origin. They form cultural associations, celebrate festivals, import artifacts, and confer traditional titles. Scholars such as Kim Younghee, Sung Yeon, and Carlos Garcia have described these dynamics as **Reverse Acculturation** or **Retro-Acculturation**. Between November 2024 and early January 2025, over one hundred Onitsha indigenes assumed Ozo and Odu titles, most of them diaspora members, signaling a return to indigenous prestige systems.

While this trend fosters community engagement and may offer personal and economic benefits, it has elicited mixed reactions. Some indigenes celebrate the festivities, while others view the widespread title-taking as diminishing historically exclusive and esteemed institutions, traditionally reserved for elders and the highly deserving. This development also underscores potential **identity concerns**, suggesting a subtle cultural revolt against alien host cultures.

This study investigates the increasing engagement of the Onitsha diaspora with indigenous titles and cultural practices in the US and Europe. It examines how these individuals navigate and construct their cultural identities, the social and political forces influencing their actions, and the broader implications for culture, identity, and globalization.

### **Reverse and retro-acculturation**

Reverse Acculturation is a recent phenomenon which describes the change in direction of the acculturation process, back towards the culture of origin. In this process, individuals or groups from a dominant culture adopt values and practices from a minority and subordinate culture through exposure.

Kirsten Chan in the abstract of her dissertation, titled “Reverse acculturation: a Global Rebalancing Phenomenon” opines that this recent development is driven by globalisation, which has emphasized two forces in cross-cultural research – heterogenisation and homogenisation, which in themselves have increased power of diasporas and the emergence of a global consumer culture. Again, in the abstract of their paper, Younghee Kim and Sung-Yeon Park, reverse acculturation can be attributed to global exchange, advanced digital technology and multiculturalism. They cite the example of young Koreans who are fully acculturated members of the mainstream American Society but have learnt their heritage culture through international travels and advanced communication channels. They then introduce the heritage culture to their non-Korean spouses and family. Reverse acculturation can manifest in diverse ways, such as in food, drinks and cuisine,

adoption of language, music and the arts, cultural practices as well as values and worldview. Other examples of reverse acculturation can be found in instances of inter-ethnic title-taking and marriages which are becoming regular indicators of global cultural exchanges across peoples and continents.

Retro-acculturation was first used to describe Latinos by Carlos Garcia in the early 1990s as “the phenomenon of people who were well on their way to assimilation, pausing along the path and making a conscious decision to go back and re-discover the culture of their parents and grandparents”. It is the conscious search for ethnic identity or roots especially by diasporas who may feel that they have lost their cultural identity. Hence, retro-acculturation can best apply to second and third generation Diasporas who never had the opportunity to experience their heritage culture. For such individuals, it is usually a process of assimilation/integration to incorporation and reinforcement of heritage culture. Cases of retro-acculturation abound among diaspora Nigerians. Many young Nigerians who were born in the West sometimes take an interest in their heritage culture, adopting practices totally incongruous with what they had learnt all their lives. Some of them return to Nigeria to take titles, take lessons in their heritage language and teach their children to speak the same in their bid to identify with their fatherland.

### **Culture, Identity, and Stuart Hall’s Cultural Identity Theory**

The concept of identity can be understood through diverse prisms. While some view the concept as referring to the combination of an individual’s physical and behavioural traits that define him or her, others approach the term from the standpoint of their disciplinary biases. It can refer to the complex and multifaceted concept of who a person is, including the self-concept, personality, values and beliefs, as well as social status, roles and relationships in groups and family.

Towa, quoted in Olayiwola, contends that identity is essentially an effort at “reduction and differentiation. It also involves singularisation and individualism, by which a particular ethnic group is circumscribed through the identification of certain elements or factors that delineate them from others. These elements could include current family systems, beliefs, mentalities, morals, arts and linguistic situation” (Olayiwola, 2013). However, Olayiwola concludes that identity is synonymous to culture since, to him, culture is the singular element of differentiation among human societies. Identity cannot be divorced from culture since there is a symbiotic relationship between individuals and their culture – the individual exists within a cultural milieu while culture finds expression through the individual. Culture shapes the identity, while the identity influences culture. They continue to interact, influencing each other in complex ways. Adopted culture can change identity just as the individual has the ability to challenge and influence or change the same culture. This is why culture is, inexorably, an identifying factor of the individual.

The Cultural Identity Theory as propounded by scholars like Kim Younghee posits that an individual's sense of self is derived from formal and informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions and ways of life (Kim, 2009). It deals with how people construct, negotiate and maintain their cultural group identities through communicative processes. Stuart Hall further propounds that identity is not a fixed or innate concept but actively constructed through interactions with people, culture, social experiences and representations. In other words, people form their identities from their interactions with the world around them and the more familiar these experiences are, the deeper the impact on the individual's identity. Hall expands that cultural identity is a complex and dynamic process shaped by historical, cultural, and power relations (Hall, 2018). Among some key aspects of his theory are such concepts as dynamism and fluidity, hybridity and creolisation, representation and power as factors that shape and reshape cultural identity.

As a theory, Hall's Cultural Identity theory explains the phenomenon of acculturation, reverse and retro acculturation. It gives an insight into an individual's ability to assimilate and adopt a Westernized identity yet quickly revert to the original cultural identity through association and communication. It also explains the process of retro-acculturation whereby second generation immigrants suddenly and successfully abandon dominant cultures for unknown native cultures, adopting totally different cultural identities. The fluidity and dynamism of communication, as well as hybridity of association can easily be identified as propellers of cultural change.

### **Significance of Ozo Title-Taking in Onitsha**

Onitsha is a town in Anambra State of Nigeria and lies eastwards of the banks of the River Niger. There are several versions of the history of the people known as Onicha Ado N'Idu, however, all the versions rule out autochthony with each of them indicating prolonged movements from various origins to the same destination called Onicha-Mmili (Anionwu, 2019, p25).

The Onitsha political system is centralised with the Monarch or King at the head, though the monarchy is elective and not hereditary, open only to the clans that are descendants of Eze Chima, a former tributary to the Oba of Benin and father to several settlers/communities on both sides of the Niger River including Isele, Onicha-Ugbo, Onicha Olona, Ubulu towns, Onicha-Ukwu, Obamkpa, Ilah and Onicha Mmili (Henderson, 1978, p7). All these communities call themselves "Umu-Eze Chima" meaning children of King Chima.

The King or Obi of Onitsha is assisted in his administrative duties by the Chiefs (ndi-ichie) who are categorised into "ndi ichie-ume" (first class chiefs, who are six in number); the "ndi-ichie okwa" (second class chiefs); and the "ndi-chie okwa-areze" (the third class chiefs). These chiefs are selected by the Obi from the villages and clans that make up the community (Arah, 2010 p37).

At the village level, the chiefs are assisted by the “Ozo-titled” men who are also spiritual leaders of their families and clans. At the family level, however, the “okpala” or “diokpa” is the administrative and spiritual head, though where he is not a titled man, he must abdicate spiritual leadership to any of the titled men in the family. This was why, in the past, the “diokpa” or “ikpala isi” had to be an ozo priest to “put him in a comfortable position to render full service to the community ie, oblation in all spiritual ceremonies...” (Amuta, 2024, p154). Hence, the religious significance of an Ozo title holder is of utmost importance in the community. The Ozo title elevates its holders to a higher religious, social and political order with certain rights and privileges and is also the first step to attaining a place in the ruling hierarchy of the kingdom.

### **The Process of Ozo Title-Taking in Onitsha**

The rites of passage for an Agbalanze or Ozo-titled man begins with “Inyedo Muo” which serves as a sort of notification to the ancestors and a plea for their blessings (Bosah, 1981, p155). It also serves to bring back the “spirit” of the initiate’s dead father (where the latter is late) into the house to receive his annual share of sacrifice from the hands of his son (Anionwu, 2019, p53).

Next is “Igba okonti” where he consults with his relatives. Then, there is “Igo Muo” for prayers from his mothers and father’s maternal kindred. “Ibu Ego” involves cash exchange as against food crops and cowries of past days; then there is “Igbako Mmanyanya” and “Isi Mmanyanya” before “Ina Obibi” the initiation ceremony which lasts a whole night till morning, when the big ceremony “Mmacha N’ozo” comes up.

This “Mmacha” is the climax of the whole ceremony and is attended by a large crowd consisting of the Agbalanze, friends and family. The new member, in immaculate white, eagle feathers on his headgear, dances into the arena followed by a virgin “okwachi” bearer. The dancing, amidst other “nze na ozo” (Agbalanze) climaxes when the initiate embraces his first son and daughter, and lastly his wife. The final rites takes place on the following, day when the initiate and his immediate relatives assemble before the kindred “Ani” shrine for the “Ugwo Ozo” and “Afia Ozo” respectively.

### **Reverse and retro acculturation among Onitsha Diaspora Ozo-Title-Holders**

The year, 2024, witnessed a record high in the number of initiates into the Agbalanze Society of Onitsha. In the last quarter of the year alone, out of eighty-six (86) new entrants into the prestigious society, forty-four (44) reside in America and Europe. Furthermore, many of the remaining 42 initiates were sponsored into the fold by these diasporas because by Onitsha law, a man cannot take the title when his father or elder brother is an “iregwu” or non-initiate. One can only do so when the elder abstains and gives his permission for the younger to go ahead. The object of this study remains the interrogation of the purpose for which these Diasporas will go to great lengths for a native African title after having undergone the often difficult process of acculturation into their host and dominant societies. Perhaps,

there exists a need to establish, through the process of singularisation and differentiation, an identity that is wholly and uniquely African, for personal fulfillment and more.

In separate interviews with new initiates, older members of the Agbalanze society and non-initiates, many reasons were adduced for this recent trend.

**Interviewee 1** is a resident of the United Kingdom who took the Ozo-title in August 2024. According to him, he took this step purely for social reasons - to acquire and belong to a social circle which would meet his social needs upon his return to Nigeria because he plans to come back to his native land in the near future. He insists that he has always seen himself as an Onitsha man and loves the culture and traditions of his homeland to which he shall return.

**Interviewee 2** is a third class chief, who took the title of “Ike Akatamkpoani” and is, as well, the Palace Secretary in the Traditional Ruling Council. He believes the trend is a “normal” and welcome development, as according to him, it is the ambition of every Onitsha man to take the Ozo-title. He argues that the Diasporas in question are Onitsha men and will always identify with their heritage, hence, it has nothing to do with the depreciation of the Naira against the dollar.

**Interviewee 3** is an Ozo-titled man who believes that internal/family rivalry and squabbles have led many into the society, so their lineage shall not be subjugated to others in the clan. He, however, believes that the fall of the naira has certainly facilitated many title-taking ventures including the “ozo” and “odu” titles in Onitsha.

**Interviewee 4** is the current Secretary of the Agbalanze Onitsha. He believes many are coming to realize that the group is more of a social group, against the many misconceptions which people had held. Beyond this, many Onitsha indigenes are coming to realize that taking the title does not impede their Christian and other pursuits.

**Interviewee 5** an Ozo-titled man is the president of the Igbo peoples’ association of Oslo in Norway, Europe, who has sojourned over 40 (forty years) abroad. He insists that as an Onitsha indigene, this is his identity and he will remain so no matter how long he resides in the West. His father was a titled man so it is natural for him to follow suit. He does not miss his cultural heritage as they practice it in Norway whenever they gather. He imported the “Ijele” Masquerade into Oslo and they invite Norwegians to witness African cultural performances each year. However, unlike diasporas in the USA, there are no competitions and no pressure to take the titles. He affirmed that among the Onitsha residents in the USA, non-initiates, regardless of age, are made to feel inferior to the title-holders, hence the rush to belong to the “upper class”.

**Interviewee 6**, however, described the recent spate of title-taking in the society as an unhealthy development which has mostly been spurred by unnecessary competition and rivalry among some Onitsha immigrants in the USA. He regretted that the trend was affecting the younger generation of the community and exacerbating an already existing dangerous tendency to make wealth at



any cost. He, however, believes there would be a downturn in number if the Nigerian currency appreciates significantly against its Western counterparts.

## **Conclusion**

The revelation that some Onitsha indigenes in diaspora return to take the Ozo title for unhealthy reasons such as competition or the need to belong to the “high and superior” class, casts a negative light on the institution’s values and ethos, especially as it is a misrepresentation of the Onitsha Ozo cultural system. Reports of younger titled indigenes holding elders, who are non-initiates, in derision have been a source of worry to many indigenes as such behavior belies the respect usually accorded to elders. This concerned group believes that even though the Ozo title is known to elevate the individual in status, an elder should always be accorded his place of authority in a gathering as the Onitsha custom demands.

Other areas of concern arise from this title-taking trend, such as the bastardisation of the standards and traditions of the people. Every community has its set qualifications for attaining certain status in the society and all over Igbo land, especially, these titles are meant to be given in recognition of such qualifications, as a mark of honour bestowed by the community and not merely for anyone who can afford it. Moreover, an “agbalanze” or “Ozo Onitsha” is a priest with responsibility to his family and clan. One wonders how children who are also given these titles alongside their fathers fit into this priestly order.

The sixth interviewee’s response underscores Hall’s belief that representation and power play an important role in shaping cultural identities. The desire to remain relevant and belong to the controlling group is a strong motivation, but in this case, is also a source of rancour and concern which calls for proper regulation and supervision from the community leaders, especially the Obi-in-council. Moreover, an Ozo title is taken at a very exorbitant price, which also explains why only a few could afford to take it in the past. Only ndigenes of unquestionable character and integrity, whose source of wealth was known, were accorded this honour. Such considerations should be sustained for the preservation of the moral fabric of the society and its traditions.

Whatever the motives and aspirations of these title-taking Diasporas may be, a connecting link runs through them all – the power of self-perception and the need to belong and possess a cultural identity. Acculturation as a process has social, psychological and cultural dimensions with changes that are borne of the need to balance two cultures while adapting to the prevailing ways of the dominant society. However, the imposition of a dominant culture on a weaker one may lead to loss of cultural heritage and feelings of alienation from both the original and new culture. This explains the urge among many diasporas, whether African, Asian or Hispanic to re-enforce their heritage for socio-cultural identity and wholeness of the self. As Olayiwola (2013) argues,

“cultural identity is, therefore, used to designate those recurrent features that consummate a people’s mode of existence and when eroded ultimately annihilate such people from the global cultural landscape” (p324).

The economic advantage afforded to the Onitsha Diasporas by the fall of the Naira accorded them the opportunity to advance their social ambition and identify with their roots. Nevertheless, even the “usurper” called globalisation is assuming different dimensions through reverse and retro-acculturation as there is a gradual melding of cultural practices and values owing to the interaction of diverse cultural identities. After all, this insidious but obvious assertion of minority cultures, as represented by the Diaspora indigenes of Onitsha, does not occur in isolation but is also leaving the global space with significant colouration.

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**The Interface of English and Computing Languages: An Innovative Union**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the functional, pedagogical, and semiotic relationship between English (a natural language) and computing languages (formal systems). The work responds to a persistent misconception: that the presence of English lexical items in programming implies a linguistic merger between natural and formal languages. Using representative examples from Python, SQL, HTML, and contemporary natural language processing (NLP) pipelines, and drawing on Saussurean and Peircean semiotics as well as contemporary semiotic thought, the study demonstrates that English primarily serves as a human-centered interpretive bridge, improving readability, learnability, and human–computer interaction, while programming languages retain formal autonomy. A qualitative, document and example-based methodology is used to analyze lexical, syntactic, and semantic relationships. Key findings show that English improves accessibility but does not alter computational syntax or machine-level semantics. Visual and non-English programming paradigms evidence the language-agnostic character of computation. NLP models computationally represent English for task performance without merging English into programming syntax. Implications touch pedagogy, multilingual computing, AI-assisted programming, and the semiotic theory of digital artefacts.

**Keywords:** English Language, Programming Languages, Semiotics, NLP, Human–Computer Interaction, Readability

**Introduction**

Digital computation has transformed communication, culture, and cognition; at its core sits an interplay between human natural languages and machine-oriented formal languages. English; owing to its global reach in science, business, and technology, frequently appears as the surface

vocabulary (keywords, identifiers, documentation) of many mainstream programming languages. At the visual level a novice might read `if`, `while`, `print`, or `select` as recognizably English-like tokens; yet the computational reality of these tokens is governed by formal grammars, parsers, and execution semantics rather than by natural-language meaning.

This study interrogates the nature of that intersection. Is the presence of English lexical items evidence of a linguistic integration, or is it a pragmatic affordance to humans? The working hypothesis is the latter: English functions as a human-centred accessibility tool rather than becoming part of the programming language's formal semantics. To substantiate this claim the paper combines examples from popular programming languages, evidence from visual and non-English programming systems, and insights from NLP research that treats English as data to be modeled rather than as a fused hybrid with programming syntax.

Because the relationship is both functional and semiotic, the research draws on structuralist and semiotic theory to clarify how signs operate across human and machine interpreters. The study thereby contributes to theoretical clarity and practical recommendations for teaching, multilingual computing, and AI-driven programming interfaces.

## **Literature Review**

### **Programming languages as formal systems and readability concerns**

Programming languages are artificial systems created to specify computational procedures; they are implemented through compilers or interpreters and characterized by precise syntactic and semantic rules. While many high-level languages use English-like keywords to increase human readability, the computational effect of these tokens is strictly operational and unambiguous within the language grammar. The mainstream description of programming languages highlights their engineered nature and the distinction between human-facing syntax and machine-executable semantics.

Empirical work on vocabulary and naming in code also suggests linguistic patterns e.g. Zipf-like distributions in identifier usage, yet these observations are about human practices (naming, convention) rather than about computation requiring English. Studies on readability and “vocabulary” in code argue that lexical choices influence comprehension, maintenance, and collaboration. Readability metrics form part of modern language design discussions.

Visual programming environments (e.g., Scratch and Blockly) and regionally localized programming tools illustrate that computation does not inherently depend on English vocabulary. Block-based systems convert drag-and-drop constructs into underlying formal representations; their success in teaching computational thinking underscores that symbolic structure and control

flow can be represented without linear English text. Likewise, programming languages and environments have been localized or created with non-English keywords, demonstrating that the choice of surface forms is a matter of human usability, not computational necessity.

Advances in NLP, particularly with Transformer-based architectures like BERT, treat natural language (including English) as input data to be represented, encoded, and transformed. Landmark models (BERT, GPT-family) achieve sophisticated performance on tasks by learning statistical and structural patterns, but crucially they do so as formal systems that operate on tokens and vectors, not by merging programming syntax with natural language grammar. The literature on NLP for programming (program synthesis, code generation, program understanding) further clarifies that “natural-language programming” is a layer of interface and specification: systems translate human descriptions into formal code representations via models and synthesis techniques. Surveys in NLP for programming map the space of tasks (code generation, summarization, translation between natural language and code) and emphasize that the relationship is one of representation and transformation rather than linguistic fusion.

Semiotics offers a conceptual vocabulary to understand how signs operate across human and machine interpreters. Saussure’s signifier-signified duality foregrounds arbitrariness and the socially constituted nature of signs; read in this light, programming tokens have significance only within the formal system’s conventions and the developer community’s interpretive practices. Peirce’s triadic sign; object, representamen, interpretant, helps chart how code functions: a token (representamen) refers to an operation or value (object) and is processed by the machine (interpretant) while also being read by human developers (secondary interpretants). Contemporary semioticians (e.g., Eco, Barthes) extend these insights to artefact-centred and cultural readings of technological sign systems. Applying these frameworks illuminates why English keywords serve as human-oriented signifiers without altering machine-internal referential semantics.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The analysis draws on three interlocking theoretical lenses; Saussurean Structuralism, Peircean Semiotics and Contemporary semiotic and HCI thought (Eco & Barthes). Saussurean Structuralism will aim to distinguish between form (signifier) and meaning (signified) across natural and formal languages, highlighting the social nature of linguistic signs and the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. Peircean Semiotics model code as triadic signs where the machine, as interpretant, enacts an operational meaning separate from human interpretants. This helps to illustrate how the same token participates in distinct sign processes (machine execution vs. human comprehension). Contemporary semiotic and HCI thought (Eco & Barthes) is to situate code within cultural and interpretive practices and to underscore the role of readability and user-

centered design in choosing surface forms. These approaches emphasize that signs acquire layered meanings depending on context and interpretive communities.

Together these frameworks make it possible to track sign-level differences (syntactic tokens) versus interpretive-level functions (readability, pedagogy, interface design).

## **Methodology**

A qualitative, interpretive methodology was adopted. The study selected representative programming constructs; small, readable examples from Python, SQL, and HTML because they are commonly cited as instances where English-like keywords are visible. The research also sampled evidence from visual programming (Scratch, Blockly) and from the NLP literature (BERT, program-synthesis surveys) to triangulate findings.

Data sources included canonical language documentation and descriptive overviews (programming language definitions and modern-language analyses); official project pages and descriptions for educational/visual languages (Scratch, Blockly); foundational NLP papers (BERT) and recent surveys on NLP for programming and program synthesis; semiotic and theoretical texts (Saussure, Peirce, Eco) as framing evidence.

## **Analytic Steps**

Lexical sampling: extract typical keyword examples (e.g., if, while, print, SELECT) and analyze their syntactic role.

Comparative analysis: compare textual code with block-based examples and with localized/non-English language variants.

Semiotic mapping: apply Saussurean and Peircean categories to each example, tracking signifier–signified relations and triadic sign functions.

Cross-domain synthesis: integrate findings with current NLP research on program synthesis and code modeling.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

English as a readability and pedagogical affordance

Considering the canonical Python snippet:

```
if temperature > 30:
```

```
    print ("Warning: High Temperature")
```

Here, *if* and *print* are English-derived tokens that signal conditional branching and output. From a human-readability perspective they leverage English vocabulary to lower cognitive friction for learners and maintainers. Nevertheless, the Python interpreter treats *if* as a reserved token defined by Python's grammar; its semantics are mechanically specified and executed irrespective of any English semantics beyond convention. This illustrates lexical borrowing (*if*, *print*) that facilitates human comprehension. The keywords function according to Python syntax; their semantic meaning is entirely formalized. The pattern recurs in SQL:

```
SELECT name, age FROM students WHERE age > 18;
```

SELECT and WHERE are English words that serve to structure human-readable queries; the database engine parses these tokens according to SQL's formal syntax and semantics. The presence of English here optimizes communication among developers, DBAs, and technical documentation writers, but the computational rule set is independent of English meaning. This demonstrates that English words clarify logic for humans without influencing the formal system. These observations align with scholarly descriptions of programming languages as engineered formal systems designed for precise execution.

```
class Student:
```

```
    def __init__(self, name, age):
```

```
        self.name = name
```

```
        self.age = age
```

```
student = Student("Jane", 22)
```

```
print(student.name)
```

The tokens *class*, *def*, and *print* are English-like and semantically suggestive, helping learners relate the structure to natural-language concepts such as "define" and "print." The lexical familiarity improves comprehension and aids in teaching object-oriented design concepts without altering the underlying computational execution.

Visual and localized programming: proving language-agnostic computation

Visual and non-English programming languages confirm this functional distinction. Scratch and Blockly remove textual reliance, while region-specific programming languages demonstrate that English is not essential for computational logic.

Educational platforms such as Scratch and Google's Blockly have succeeded precisely because they separate the symbolic structure of computation from linear English text. Blocks capture control flow, state, and events via shape and composition; a program assembled in blocks can be translated into textual code in multiple surface languages. This demonstrates that the computational structure (the program's abstract syntax tree, execution semantics) is independent of the surface lexical choices developers or learners make. The practical pedagogical success of these platforms supports the claim that English is an accessibility medium rather than a computational necessity.

### **Natural Language Processing: modeling English, not merging it with code**

Transformers and large pre-trained language models (e.g., BERT) show how English can be represented and manipulated by statistical and neural systems for tasks ranging from classification to generation. BERT's architecture and training demonstrate that natural-language processing is a formal procedure operating on tokenized inputs, embeddings, and learned transformations; it represents English patterns in vector spaces for downstream tasks. In the domain of code, program synthesis research builds models that translate natural-language descriptions into code or vice versa, but these processes are translational rather than integrative: the models map between two formal representations (a human-text representation and a programming-language representation). Surveys of NLP for programming detail this mapping, noting open challenges such as specification ambiguity, semantics-preserving generation, and cross-lingual code understanding.

in NLP-based programming and AI-assisted code generation, English functions as data to be modeled, not merged into program syntax. For example, consider a Python snippet;

```
summarizer = pipeline("summarization")

text = "English readability enhances programming pedagogy."

summary = summarizer(text, max_length=20)

print(summary)
```



The string "English readability enhances programming pedagogy." is in natural language. Tokens in English guide the model to perform summarization but do not influence Python syntax. English serves a representational role, enhancing human interpretation of the program's purpose while the computation remains language-agnostic.

### **Semiotic mapping: dual audiences, dual interpretants**

From a semiotic perspective, programming languages are symbolic systems. Peircean semiotics identifies symbols (if, print) representing operations (object) interpreted by the machine (interpretant). Saussurean Structuralism highlights that the signifier–signified relationship is arbitrary within the formal system, with English aiding human interpretation rather than shaping computation.

Applying Saussure and Peirce clarifies why English tokens occupy a hybrid semiotic space. Saussure's emphasis on social convention explains why if or select function as meaningful signifiers for developer communities: their social meaning is constituted by usage and documentation. Peirce's triadic model, by contrast, helps separate machine execution from human interpretation: the same token participates in a machine-level interpretant (program execution) and a human-level interpretant (comprehension, maintenance). Eco and Barthes remind us that cultural and rhetorical dimensions—documentation style, naming conventions, comment practices—imbue code with additional interpretive layers that affect collaboration, pedagogy, and the socio-technical life of software.

### **Multilingual and multicultural implications**

The dominance of English in many mainstream tools raises equity and access concerns. Localization efforts and non-English programming initiatives show feasible alternatives for non-Anglophone learners and practitioners. For global collaboration, it is crucial that tooling, documentation, and educational resources be multilingual. Moreover, AI-driven interfaces (natural-language programming assistants and code-completion tools) must account for linguistic diversity to avoid further entrenching English-centric workflows. Current advances in NLP for programming point to opportunities and challenges in multilingual code modeling and localized developer tooling.

In NLP, English is computationally modeled. BERT and GPT process English to generate meaningful outputs, demonstrating functional integration. The language is the object of computation, not a merged linguistic system. This underscores that English serves human accessibility and interpretive guidance, while formal structures govern computational operations.

## **Findings**

The study's qualitative analysis yields the following principal findings:

1. English enhances readability and comprehension in programming and NLP but does not integrate into syntax or semantics. Surface English improves human readability and learning but does not determine machine-level syntax or semantics. The lexical resemblance to English is a design choice for human usability, not a linguistic integration into the computational substrate.
2. Programming languages are formally autonomous. Their grammars, parsing rules, type systems, and runtime semantics are specified independently of natural-language meaning; replacement of surface keywords with non-English tokens or block-based representations preserves computational behavior.
3. NLP treats English as representational data. Transformer-based models (e.g., BERT) and program-synthesis systems process English via tokenization, embeddings, and learned mappings to/from code; these are computational transformations, not syntactic fusions.
4. Semiotic theory clarifies dual interpretants. Saussurean and Peircean frameworks show that tokens play distinct semiotic roles for humans and machines; the dual interpretant model explains why human-facing lexical choices facilitate collaboration and pedagogy without changing execution semantics.
5. Pedagogical and equity implications are substantial. Localization, block-based platforms, and AI-assisted code tools provide avenues to broaden access; however, current research in multilingual code modeling and no-code interfaces must be accelerated to reduce English-centric barriers.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

The interaction between English and computing languages is best characterized as a pragmatic semiotic union oriented toward human interpretability rather than as a linguistic merger. English functions as an interpretive scaffold that improves readability, learnability, and collaboration; computation itself relies on formally specified grammars and semantics that are language-agnostic. For pedagogy, the findings recommend continued use of English-like keywords where appropriate for readability, paired with concerted efforts to develop multilingual resources, block-based introductory environments, and interfaces that reduce language barriers. For AI and programming tool design, the results suggest prioritizing models and interfaces that treat natural language as a distinct representational layer subject to translation and formalization rather than as part of

program syntax. For semiotics and critical theory, the paper offers an analytical vocabulary for examining how code functions as a cultural artefact with layered meanings.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

1. Empirical readability studies that quantify how surface lexical choices affect comprehension across linguistic backgrounds.
2. Longitudinal studies of multilingual codebases and the impact of localization on collaboration.
3. Interdisciplinary investigations combining semiotics, HCI, and machine learning to design inclusive natural-language programming interfaces.
4. Ethnographic research into naming conventions, code comments, and documentation across developer communities to better understand socio-semiotic practices.

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## **Integrating Technology in the Teaching of French Grammar**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the impact of technology on the teaching of French in Nigerian universities, with particular emphasis on the use of digital tools to enhance grammar instruction. Grammar constitutes the structural foundation of language learning, yet it remains a major challenge for learners of French as a foreign language. In Nigeria, where students have limited exposure to authentic French-speaking environments, the acquisition of grammatical competence is further hindered by insufficient classroom interaction, teacher-centered pedagogies, and inadequate instructional resources. Integrating digital tools into grammar instruction offers opportunities to address these constraints. Using a descriptive research method, this study examines how technological resources—such as language learning applications, interactive grammar software, virtual classrooms, and multimedia platforms—contribute to improving students' mastery of French grammar. It highlights the pedagogical implications of adopting digital tools to create more interactive and learner-centered grammar instruction. Findings from existing studies indicate that such tools significantly enhance learners' understanding of grammatical structures, increase engagement, and support personalized learning pathways. Nevertheless, the integration of technology into French language programmes in Nigeria is limited by factors such as inadequate ICT infrastructure, low digital literacy, unreliable internet access, and insufficient institutional support. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions, including capacity-building programmes for language teachers and increased investment in educational technology. It concludes that when effectively implemented, technology holds immense potential to transform the teaching and learning of French grammar in Nigerian universities.

**Keywords:** Language Teaching and Learning; Technology; French Grammar; French as a Foreign Language

### **Introduction**

In recent years, the integration of technology into education has become a central focus, reshaping how knowledge is delivered and acquired across various disciplines. Language education, in particular, has been significantly transformed by digital innovations, especially in the teaching of

grammar. This article examines the impact of digital technology on the teaching of French grammar and its implications for both teachers and learners.

French grammar—characterized by its complexity and detailed rules—often presents considerable challenges to learners and instructors alike. While traditional methods such as textbooks and direct instruction remain relevant, they may not always provide sufficient engagement or facilitate the individualized feedback necessary for effective mastery. The introduction of technology, however, offers new possibilities for addressing these challenges by creating learning environments that make the study of French grammar more accessible, interactive, and adaptive.

Digital technologies, including computers, specialized software, and multimedia platforms, possess the potential to revolutionize grammar instruction. These tools provide learners with extensive resources and immediate feedback, enabling autonomous practice beyond the traditional classroom setting. As noted by Godwin-Jones (2018), the interactive features of digital platforms not only complement but also enhance conventional instructional approaches, offering a more dynamic and engaging learning experience.

In Nigeria, the integration of technology into French language instruction presents significant opportunities to improve teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes. Yet, despite its transformative potential, the use of digital tools in university French programmes remains limited by infrastructural deficits, pedagogical constraints, and institutional challenges. It is therefore essential to explore how technology can be effectively deployed to enhance grammar-focused instruction while acknowledging the barriers that impede its widespread adoption.

This study undertakes a descriptive examination of the use of digital tools in teaching French grammar in Nigerian universities. Drawing on existing literature, it explores the benefits and limitations of technological integration and considers its practical implications for both teaching and learning. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate the role of technology in enhancing grammar instruction in French as a foreign language and to identify the challenges associated with its implementation in Nigerian higher education contexts.

It is expected that this paper will respond to the following questions:

1. How effectively are digital resources being integrated into French grammar instruction?
2. What challenges continue to hinder their adoption?
3. And what practical implications can be drawn for improving the teaching and learning of French grammar in this context?

Addressing these is essential for advancing pedagogical practices and ensuring that French language education in Nigerian universities remains relevant and responsive to contemporary needs.

### **The Concept of Grammar and Its Importance in Language Acquisition**

Grammar is generally regarded as the system of rules governing the structure of a language, encompassing syntax, morphology, and the conventions that enable meaningful communications. It dictates how linguistic elements interact to convey meaning effectively and coherently. Mastery of grammar enables clear communication, both in writing and speech, by ensuring consistency and adherence to standardized linguistic norms.

According to Crystal (2004), grammar is “the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves,” as it provides the framework through which words and phrases are organized to convey meaning. Similarly, Chomsky (1965) conceptualizes grammar as the set of principles and rules that allow speakers to generate an infinite number of sentences from a finite set of elements. From a pedagogical perspective, grammar refers to a description of the rules for forming sentences, including an account of their meaning.

The importance of grammar in language acquisition lies in its role as the bedrock of communicative competence. While vocabulary provides the building blocks of speech, grammar ensures that these blocks are arranged in meaningful and socially acceptable ways. It is pertinent to note that grammar instruction is essential towards achieving accuracy in communication. Furthermore, Ellis (2006) highlights that grammar knowledge contributes to both fluency and accuracy, as it allows learners to internalize patterns and use them spontaneously in communicative contexts.

In the context of French as a foreign language, grammar is particularly crucial because of the language’s complex system of verb conjugations, agreements, and syntactic structures. For Nigerian learners with limited exposure to natural French environments, systematic grammar instruction supported by digital tools can help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical usage. Thus, grammar not only underpins linguistic competence but also serves as a critical element in fostering communicative proficiency in second and foreign language learning.

Not minding the central position of grammar in language acquisition, its teaching is still faced with lack of engagement. Many students find grammar lessons dry and uninspiring, particularly when taught through repetitive exercises rather than interactive and contextualized activities.

Traditional grammar instruction often follows a rigid, rule-based methodology, emphasizing memorization and correction rather than practical application. This can make learning feel mechanical and disconnected from real-world language use.

To enhance grammar instruction, teachers must integrate interactive, context-based, and communicative approaches that bridge the gap between theory and practical language use.

### **Definition of Technology**

Technology can be defined as the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry, communication, education, and daily life. In a broader sense, it refers to the

tools, machines, systems, and methods that humans develop to solve problems, improve efficiency, and enhance the quality of life.

There are different categories of technology depending on their applications and functions, such as medical technologies, information technologies, agricultural technologies, etc. Each type of technology plays a unique role in advancing society and solving specific challenges in various fields.

This work is concerned with educational technology, which refers to the use of digital tools and resources—such as computers, software, the internet, and multimedia—to support teaching and learning processes.

### **Role of Technology in Foreign Language Education**

Technology has become an indispensable pillar of modern education, revolutionizing pedagogical approaches and transforming the way learners interact with knowledge. In the context of foreign language education, technological advancements have not only enhanced access to resources but have also reshaped the dynamics of classroom engagement, learner autonomy, and language acquisition.

### **Enhancing Access and Exposure**

One of the most significant contributions of technology to foreign language education is the democratization of access. Through online platforms, digital libraries, and language learning applications, students can engage with authentic linguistic materials anytime and anywhere. Tools such as Duolingo and Rosetta Stone offer structured learning paths enriched with multimedia content, fostering exposure to diverse accents, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances.

### **Promoting Interactive and Immersive Learning**

Technology promotes interactive and immersive learning through digital platforms such as learning management systems (LMS), online grammar tools, discussion forums, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), simulations (such as ImmerseMe, Mondly VR), which enable learners to actively practice communication in real-life scenarios, engage with content, collaborate with peers, and receive immediate feedback. These tools foster learner autonomy, participation, and motivation by shifting the classroom from teacher-centered to learner-centered.

### **Fostering Learner Autonomy and Personalization**

Adaptive learning systems driven by artificial intelligence are also reshaping foreign language instruction. These systems analyze individual learning patterns and tailor content accordingly, ensuring that learners progress at their own pace and focus on areas requiring improvement. Eyisi explained that such systems use algorithms to analyze students' performance data and adapt instructions materials, accordingly, ensuring that learners receive content and exercises suited to their individual learning pace and style (2025:756).



### **Supporting Teacher Innovation and Pedagogical Flexibility**

Technology empowers teachers to diversify their instructional strategies and incorporate multimodal teaching methods. From interactive whiteboards to collaborative platforms like Google Classroom, teachers can design dynamic, student-centered learning experiences. Ezeodili (2018) affirmed the necessity of incorporating digital technology in French grammar instruction as proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Blended and flipped classroom models, supported by digital tools, encourage active learning and maximize classroom time for communicative practice. While technological tools are helpful, they should complement, not replace, traditional teaching methods.

Having examined the role of technology in Language Education, this paper proceeds to highlight selected Language acquisition theories and how they align with, and support, the pedagogical use of technology.

### **Theories of Language Acquisition and Digital tools**

The theories of language acquisition, such as Behaviorism, Nativist, and Input Hypothesis, provide a strong framework for understanding how technology can be most effectively employed in the teaching of French grammar. As technology continues to evolve, so too will the ways in which grammar is taught, creating more innovative and effective methods for learners worldwide. Below are the key theories of language acquisition, along with an explanation of how technology complement these approaches.

#### **The Behaviorist Theory (B.F. Skinner)**

According to the behaviorist theory, language learning is primarily a process of habit formation. It emphasizes the role of reinforcement, imitation, and repetition. In this view, learners acquire language through the repeated exposure to language stimuli (e.g., sounds, words, and sentences) and the reinforcement of correct language responses. The theory suggests that children or learners can be conditioned to produce correct language forms by positive reinforcement (praise, rewards).

Technology aligns well with the behaviorist theory because many language-learning Apps and platforms (e.g., Duolingo, Memrise) use repetition, immediate feedback, and reinforcement to guide learners. For instance, digital Apps often provide instant corrections, reinforcing the correct form of a grammar rule, while rewarding learners with points or achievements when they answer correctly. The gamified elements of these tools, such as leveling up or earning badges, serve as positive reinforcement, encouraging learners to continue practicing.

Through these repetitive, reinforced practices, learners internalize grammar rules through gradual habituation. Technological tools effectively replicate the stimulus-response cycle in the behaviorist model, enhancing the acquisition of grammatical structures in a way that is both engaging and systematic.

### **The Nativist Theory (Noam Chomsky)**

Noam Chomsky's nativist theory suggests that humans are biologically predisposed to acquire language. He introduced the concept of a "universal grammar," an inherent set of linguistic rules common to all languages. According to this theory, children are born with an innate ability to understand and apply grammatical structures, which are activated by exposure to linguistic input.

Technology supports the nativist theory by providing learners with extensive input in the form of authentic language (via listening, reading, and interacting with native speakers). Moreover, tools that offer progressive difficulty levels or adaptive learning systems (allow learners to encounter language at a level just beyond their current understanding) which align with Chomsky's idea that learners are ready for more complex structures when they have mastered foundational elements

Just as Chomsky suggests that exposure to language triggers innate grammatical faculties, digital tools provide continuous exposure to a variety of language inputs, enhancing learners' ability to internalize grammar. These tools help activate learners' internal linguistic knowledge by facilitating language practice and increasing their capacity for acquiring new grammatical rules through interaction.

### **The Input Hypothesis (Stephen Krashen)**

Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language learning. According to Krashen (1982), learners acquire language most effectively when they are exposed to language that is slightly above their current level ( $i+1$ ). This exposure should be meaningful and understandable, even if some of the vocabulary or grammatical structures are unfamiliar. Krashen also stresses that language acquisition occurs when learners focus on communication rather than consciously studying grammar.

Digital tools provide extensive opportunities for comprehensible input. These tools offer content at various proficiency levels, ensuring that learners are consistently exposed to language input that challenges them without overwhelming them. Through the exposure to context-rich input that is just beyond their current proficiency, learners gradually absorb grammatical structures in a natural and intuitive way. The use of technology aligns with Krashen's hypothesis by providing vast amounts of comprehensible input and supporting grammar learning through the natural, contextualized usage of language.

Finally, these theories of language acquisition align well with the use of Technology in learning the grammar of a foreign language, French in particular. Whether through reinforcement, interaction, comprehensible input, or active experimentation, Technology enhances and supports the processes described by these theories. When combined with traditional language-learning methods, technology provides a dynamic and effective way to acquire grammar and achieve proficiency in French language.

### **Case Study on the Role of Technology**

Here are studies demonstrating how technology has enhanced the teaching and learning of French grammar:

1. In the research carried out by Chenu, Gayraud, Martinie, & Wu (2007) in their work titled: *Is computer-assisted language learning (CALL) efficient for grammar learning? An experimental study in French as a second language*, learning of French relative clauses, was investigated. The researchers tried to discover if the acquisition of this grammatical aspect led to better performance and retention through CALL compared to traditional classroom instruction.

It was gathered that CALL is more effective than the traditional method for grammatical points. Participants were adult learners of French as a second language. The experimental group used CALL while the control group received traditional teacher-led instruction

2. Dooly, M., & O'Dowd, R. (2018), in their book *In This Together: Teachers' Experiences with Online Grammar Teaching* investigated teachers' practices, perceptions, and challenges in teaching grammar through online and digitally mediated environments.

Data was collected from language instructors integrating digital tools in grammar lessons across various languages, including French. The researchers examined how tools like Google Docs and collaborative platforms helped with grammar-focused tasks.

The research findings show that using collaborative tools helped students become more engaged and self-aware of grammar usage through peer editing and correction. Digital platforms enhanced the visibility of grammar as a communicative tool rather than just a set of rules.

## **Findings**

Previous research shows that the integration of digital tools has a positive influence on the teaching and learning of grammar in foreign languages, including French. In the research carried out by Chenu, Gayraud, Martinie, & Wu (2007) on the efficiency of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in the acquisition of French grammar, focusing on relative clauses. The result showed that technology (CALL) enhances greater performance in the French grammar instruction.

Dooly, M., & O'Dowd, R. (2018). *Teachers' Experiences with Online Grammar Teaching*. The researchers examined how tools like Google Docs and collaborative platforms helped with grammar-focused tasks. The research findings show that using collaborative tools helped students become more engaged and self-aware of grammar usage through peer editing and correction. Online environments enabled multimodal resources, which enriched grammar practice, enhanced the visibility of grammar as a communicative tool rather than just a set of rules.

## **Discussion**

The integration of technology in grammar instruction has been investigated from both experimental and experiential perspectives. Chenu, Gayraud, Martinie, & Wu (2007) explored the efficiency of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) for the acquisition of French relative clauses. Using an experimental design with control and treatment groups, they compare learners exposed to CALL with those receiving traditional teacher-led instruction. Results indicated that

the CALL group significantly outperformed their peers both in immediate post tests and in delayed assessments, suggesting superior retention of grammatical structures. The study attributed this success to the interactive design of CALL activities and the immediate feedback provided, which supported learner autonomy and reinforced accuracy.

Dooly and O'Dowd (2018), on the other hand, examined teachers' experiences with online grammar teaching. Drawing on interviews, reflections and case studies across diverse teaching contexts, they highlighted how educators adapted grammar pedagogy to digital environments. With teachers increasingly embedding grammar instruction within communicative and collaborative tasks rather than on rule-driven explanations. Despite difficulties such as technological limitations and increased preparation demands, teachers reported greater learner engagement and autonomy when grammar instruction was mediated through online tools.

These studies highlighted complementary dimensions of technology integration, while Chenu, Gayraud, Martinie, & Wu (2007) provide evidence of measurable gains in learners' performance through CALL, Dooly and O'Dowd (2018) show how teachers negotiate the pedagogical and practical realities of online grammar instruction. Both works illustrate that successful technology-enhanced grammar instruction depends on alignment of interactive tools with adaptive teaching practices.

## **Implications of Technology for French Grammar**

### **Personalized Learning**

With technology, teachers can offer a learning experience that is not only engaging but also personalized. Technology provides personalized learning experience tailored to the learner's proficiency level and specific needs. This is particularly useful in the context of French grammar, where students may struggle with different aspects, such as verb conjugation or the use of prepositions.

This adaptive learning process allows students to focus on their weaknesses, offering a more targeted and efficient approach to grammar acquisition. Personalization ensures that learners spend time practising the grammar concepts that are most challenging for them, rather than going through repetitive exercises they have already mastered (Godwin-Jones, 2018, p. 10). In other words, this approach helps learners at different proficiency levels progress according to their own needs, improving motivation and retention.

### **Real-Time Feedback and Error Correction**

One of the most significant benefits of using digital platforms for learning French grammar is the interactive nature of many tools. These platforms present grammar exercises in the form of drills, quizzes, and challenges that offer immediate feedback, helping learners understand their mistakes and correct them in real-time. This form of active learning encourages retention and enhances understanding.

The app's real-time corrections make learning grammar more effective because learners are provided with instant reinforcement, allowing them to quickly internalize grammatical structures. Research has shown that such feedback loops are critical for language acquisition (VanPatten, 2004, p. 23).

### **Accessibility and Flexibility**

Technology offers learners unprecedented accessibility and flexibility. Learners have access to a wide range of resources and platforms that best respond to their learning needs. Grammar exercises, video lessons, and interactive activities are available anytime and anywhere. This makes learning French grammar more flexible and accessible, giving the learners more control over their learning schedule.

### **Multimedia Resources for Grammar Contextualization**

Another advantage of Technology is its ability to provide multimedia resources that contextualize grammar in real-life usage. Some digital platforms provide learners with short stories, dialogues, and audio-visual content where grammar rules are exemplified in context. This approach allows learners to see how grammar structures are used in actual conversations, making abstract rules more tangible and relatable.

Research suggests that language learners benefit from exposure to grammar in meaningful, communicative contexts (Myles, 2005, p. 123). For example, the use of authentic video content helps learners hear native speakers applying grammar rules in real-life situations, which facilitates comprehension and retention. Moreover, watching videos or listening to podcasts reinforces pronunciation and accent, which is crucial for mastering French grammar, especially verb tenses and sentence structures.

### **Challenges of Integrating Technology in French Grammar Teaching in Nigerian Universities**

Despite the transformative role of digital tools in enhancing French grammar instruction, its implementation in Nigerian universities is still constrained by some factors. Issues such as digital literacy, inadequate infrastructure, equitable access, and the need for continuous teacher training remain critical. Effective implementation requires thoughtful instructional design and alignment with pedagogical goals.

#### **Limited Digital Literacy**

Lack of digital literacy has been identified as one of the issues militating against technology implementation for improved French language teaching and learning in Nigeria (Ezeodili 2018). This is a serious issue because, in the event of the possible application of these tools and the teacher is not capable of operating them, the goal of acquiring them becomes forfeited.

We suggest continuous formation of teachers on digital technological skills to enable them to keep abreast with recent innovations and best practices in their teaching profession.

### **Inadequate ICT Infrastructure**

Some Nigerian Universities lack adequate ICT Infrastructure: computers, smart classrooms, and multimedia equipment, etc. The purchase, installation and maintenance of the technological tools require huge sums and may be difficult to achieve. There is also an issue of lack of internet connectivity and/or unstable power supply.

### **Curriculum Integration Issues**

The existing curriculum prioritizes traditional teaching methods. There is a need for curriculum developers to incorporate digital tools and resources towards achieving the learning objectives.

### **Recommendations**

The integration of technology in the language class offers the students the opportunity to learn in class and online at the same time. This method tends to give students control over their learning as well as increase their motivation towards learning.

To address these challenges, teachers and policymakers can consider the following strategies:

**Professional Development:** It's encouraged that teachers undergo training regularly in order to keep abreast with the recent innovations in the field and how best to integrate them in class for an improved learning experience (Ezeodili, 2018).

**Infrastructure Investment:** Schools should be provided with adequate ICT tools and internet access, as well as a steady power supply to ensure the application of these tools towards enhanced learning. Ohanma (2023) also included the use of solar-powered facilities to minimise cost and to ensure steady power needed for the teaching materials.

**Curriculum Alignment:** Curriculum developers should ensure the inclusion of digital resources and activities that align with the language learning objectives.

**Blended Methodology:** This study recognizes the impact of technology in language education. It however does not recommend that it replaces the traditional classroom method but that technology complements it for a balanced approach.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the integration of digital tools in the teaching of French grammar in Nigerian universities, highlighting their impact, pedagogical benefits, and challenges. Evidence from previous research underscores that technology enhances grammar instruction by providing learners with interactive exercises, immediate feedback, and opportunities for independent learning. It further shows that teachers benefit from digital resources in diagnosing errors and differentiating instruction, while learners develop greater engagement and autonomy. These insights collectively affirm the transformative role of technology in reshaping French language pedagogy in Nigeria.

However, the study also reveals that infrastructural deficiencies, limited digital literacy, inadequate funding, and inconsistent institutional support remain major obstacles to effective technology integration. Without addressing these systemic challenges, the potential of technology in French grammar instruction will remain underutilised.

In light of these findings, the study suggests that teachers, curriculum developers, policymakers, and university management must collaborate to create enabling conditions for sustainable technology adoption. Practical strategies such as blended learning models, mobile-assisted grammar practice, and teacher capacity building can help maximize the pedagogical benefits of digital tools.

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**Bantu Ontology of Vital Forces and Moral Development in Generation Z World: A  
Tempelsian Intervention**

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**Abstract**

This study explores the contemporary relevance of Placide Tempel's interpretation of the Bantu ontology of vital forces for shaping the moral development of Generation Z in a rapidly transforming global context. The moral landscape of today's youth is increasingly defined by digital technologies, fluid identities and weakened communal bonds—conditions that expose the limitations of dominant Western moral paradigms grounded in individualism and procedural rationality. Through philosophical analysis, this work argues that Tempels' claim that "being is force, and force is being" offers a life-centered ethical framework capable of addressing these moral dislocations. The ontology of vital forces shifts the ethical focus from rule-based prescriptions to actions that enhance or diminish life within a relational and communal web. This perspective resonates with Generation Z's emerging concerns for social justice, inclusivity, mental well-being and ecological sustainability, while also offering a corrective against tendencies toward moral relativism, hyper-individualism and digitally mediated superficial engagements. Drawing on African philosophical resources, especially those that emphasize relational personhood and communal interdependence, the study proposes that a Tempelsian ethic can provide Generation Z with a morally grounding horizon that affirms autonomy without severing it from communal responsibility. The study concludes that integrating the ontology of vital forces into moral education and youth development can enrich contemporary ethical discourse by fostering a generation oriented toward the flourishing of the self, the community and the environment.

**Keywords:** Bantu ontology, vital force, Tempel's, Generation Z, moral development.

**Introduction**

Moral uncertainty within Generation Z has become increasingly pronounced in a world shaped by digital hyperconnectivity, rapid globalization and shifting cultural norms. As traditional moral frameworks lose their binding force, young people often struggle to negotiate the tension between

personal autonomy and communal responsibility. Giddens' (1996) observation that modernity "disembeds social relations" (p. 28) captures the lived experience of many members of this generation who find themselves navigating fragmented moral horizons with limited grounding.

These developments invite a return to African philosophical traditions that conceive morality not as abstract rule-following, but as the enhancement of life within a relational community. Placide Tempels' influential articulation of the Bantu ontology of vital forces provides a compelling framework for such a return. His assertion that "being is force, and force is being" (2010, p. 43) situates moral action within a metaphysical vision where existence is dynamic and relational. Within this ontology, actions are evaluated according to their capacity to increase or diminish the vitality of persons and communities. For Generation Z—whose moral choices increasingly occur in digital spaces where consequences often seem distant or obscured—this life-centered orientation offers a concrete reminder that moral agency is inseparable from its effects on others. Mbiti's (1999) dictum, "I am because we are" (p. 141), further deepens this insight by situating the self within a network of communal belonging.

The aim of this study is therefore constructive: to demonstrate how Tempels' interpretation of Bantu vital force ontology can serve as a meaningful philosophical resource for addressing the moral dilemmas of contemporary youth. Scholars such as Gyekye (1997) have shown that African moral thought remains salient in modern ethical discourse precisely because of its emphasis on the social character of personhood. In contrast, Western individualism—while expanding personal freedoms—often contributes to fragmented commitments and the erosion of communal obligations. Bauman's (2006) notion of "liquid modernity" (p. 59) captures this erosion vividly. By employing philosophical analysis, this study argues that the ontology of vital forces offers a robust grounding for moral development that speaks to Generation Z's concerns for justice, inclusivity and sustainability while counteracting moral fragmentation. It proposes that integrating a Tempelsian ethic into contemporary moral formation can nurture a generation that is both self-directed and communally responsible, ultimately fostering the flourishing of individuals, communities and the broader ecological order.

### **Placide Tempels and the Bantu Ontology of Vital Forces**

Placide Tempels remains one of the earliest scholars to systematically articulate the metaphysical foundations of African thought through his influential book *Bantu Philosophy*. Writing as a Belgian missionary in the Congo during the mid-20th century, Tempels believed that the key to understanding Bantu ontology lies in the category of vital force. According to him, in Bantu metaphysics, "being is force and force is being" (Tempels, 2010, p. 43). This striking formulation reflects the belief that existence itself is not static substance but dynamic vitality. For the Bantu, everything that exists, whether divine, human, animal or material, participates in this

universal life-force. The moral life, therefore, consists in preserving, increasing and harmonizing these forces in a way that strengthens the community and sustains the order of existence.

Tempels explained that the Bantu conceive reality as hierarchically ordered, with God or the Supreme Being at the apex as the source of all life. Below God are the ancestors, who mediate spiritual vitality, followed by living human beings, animals, plants and inanimate objects, each possessing different degrees of force. In this scheme, moral action is judged according to whether it enhances or diminishes life-force. Tempels (2010) observes that “the supreme good consists in the increase of vital force; evil consists in its diminution” (Tempels, 2010, p. 46). This understanding stands in contrast to Western metaphysical categories of substance and accident, suggesting instead a relational ontology where life itself is the fundamental category.

The originality of Tempels’ thesis lies in how it gives systematic philosophical language to African categories of thought, even though critics have debated the accuracy of his interpretation. Still, scholars have acknowledged that the notion of vital force captures something central to African worldviews. Mbiti (1999) affirms this when he writes that “the concept of vital force runs through African ontology like a golden thread” (p. 93). he further explains that human beings are seen not as isolated individuals but as nodes within a web of life, always connected to the community, the ancestors and the natural world.

One of the key implications of Tempels’ analysis is that morality in the Bantu worldview is inseparable from ontology. Ethical conduct is not an external code imposed on individuals but an intrinsic part of being. Every action has metaphysical significance because it either strengthens or weakens life. Gyekye (1997) supports this perspective when he notes that “the moral life of the African is inextricably linked to the metaphysical conception of life as force” (p. 42). This means that to act immorally is not only to harm another person but also to upset the balance of existence itself. Furthermore, the Bantu ontology of vital forces emphasizes community over individuality. The self is understood primarily in relation to others and vitality increases through harmonious social relations. Tempels (2010) explains that “the good of the individual is the good of the community and the good of the community is the good of the individual” (p. 54). This resonates with Mbiti’s oft-cited dictum, “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am” (1999, p. 141). Such a view challenges modern tendencies towards excessive individualism, suggesting instead that true flourishing comes through participation in the life of others.

Another important aspect of Tempels’ account is the role of ancestors. Ancestors are not merely remembered but are active participants in the vital economy of existence. They serve as mediators of divine force and protectors of the community. To neglect them or to break the moral codes they uphold is to weaken the flow of vitality into the community. Magesa (1997) emphasizes this when he notes that “the moral traditions of Africa are essentially life-centered, grounded in the imperative to preserve life through respect for God, the ancestors, and the community” (p. 37).

This highlights the continuity between metaphysical and ethical dimensions of African thought. Tempels' contribution can also be seen as a critique of Western categories imposed on African societies. Whereas Western metaphysics has long privileged notions such as substance, matter or essence, Tempels demonstrated that African categories are different but no less philosophical. He insisted that "the Bantu live by a philosophy which has its own system, its own categories, its own unity" (Tempels, 2010, p. 29). This recognition opened the way for African philosophy to be taken seriously in academic discourse, even if later scholars criticized aspects of his approach as paternalistic or too missionary-driven.

The relevance of Tempels' ontology of vital forces extends beyond the historical and philosophical. In today's context, where moral fragmentation and ecological crisis threaten both human and non-human life, the idea of life as an interconnected force provides a timely corrective. It challenges modern generations to rethink morality as the preservation and enhancement of vitality, not only for individuals but for communities and ecosystems. Asouzu (2007) argues that "the African idea of being as force provides an integrative horizon for overcoming the dichotomies of modern thought" (p. 61). Thus, Tempels' intervention continues to be meaningful in discussions on ethics, ecology and human development.

Therefore, Placide Tempels' articulation of the Bantu ontology of vital forces presents a metaphysical system where existence is defined by vitality, morality is grounded in life-preservation and community constitutes the core of personhood. Though debated and sometimes critiqued, his work has had enduring significance in bringing African thought into philosophical recognition. The idea that "being is force" (Tempels, 2010, p. 43) not only captures the heart of Bantu metaphysics but also opens possibilities for moral reflection in contemporary contexts, particularly for younger generations seeking ethical grounding in a fragmented world.

### **Moral Development in the Context of Generation Z**

The moral development of Generation Z presents both unique opportunities and serious challenges in the contemporary world. Born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, this generation has grown up in a world shaped by digital technology, globalization and fluid cultural identities. Their moral outlook cannot be separated from the unprecedented access to information, social media influence and the weakening of traditional structures of authority. Twenge (2017) observes that "no generation has been more exposed to technology at such an early age, with profound effects on their values, relationships and sense of self" (p. 21). This exposure has given Generation Z remarkable adaptability and awareness but it has also left them vulnerable to moral fragmentation and relativism.

One defining feature of Generation Z's moral development is the emphasis on personal autonomy and self-expression. Unlike earlier generations, whose moral codes were largely shaped by religious institutions or cultural traditions, Gen Z tends to prioritize authenticity and personal

choice. According to Smith & Admaczyk (2021), “young people today tend to approach morality as a matter of individual decision-making, without appeal to external authorities” (p. 58). This orientation, while promoting freedom and creativity, often results in the erosion of stable moral anchors. The challenge, therefore, is to understand how moral growth can occur within a context where traditional sources of ethical guidance carry less authority.

Another factor influencing the moral development of this generation is the rise of digital culture. Social media platforms not only shape relationships but also create new moral spaces where issues of justice, identity and responsibility are constantly negotiated. Gardner and Davis (2013) describe this as the “app generation,” where “young people’s values and worldviews are profoundly shaped by the digital apps they use” (p. 12). This environment fosters a heightened awareness of global issues such as climate change, racial justice and gender equality but it also encourages superficial involvements and performative morality. The result is that moral commitments can become situational, shaped by online trends rather than deeply rooted ethical convictions.

The weakening of communal bonds further complicates the moral growth of Generation Z. Bauman (2006) has described contemporary life as “liquid modernity” (p. 59) where relationships and commitments are fragile and transient. This reality is evident among young people, who navigate shifting social networks with little long-term stability. Without strong communal frameworks, moral values risk being reduced to individual preferences. Yet, as research in moral psychology has shown, community plays an essential role in shaping virtues such as empathy, responsibility and justice. Haidt (2013) argues that “morality binds and blinds, creating communities of trust and cooperation” (p. 56). For Generation Z, the absence of such binding moral communities leaves a significant gap in their moral development.

Despite these challenges, Generation Z also exhibits strong moral potential. Many members of this generation are deeply concerned with justice, inclusivity and environmental responsibility. Their activism around issues such as climate change and human rights suggests a moral orientation toward global solidarity. Seemiller and Grace (2019) note that “Gen Z students are motivated by values of fairness, equality and sustainability, seeking to make a difference in the world” (p. 77). This indicates that, while traditional frameworks may be less influential, new moral commitments are emerging that align with concerns about the future of humanity and the planet.

However, the risk of moral relativism remains ever-present. The constant exposure to diverse cultural values online can create confusion about the nature of right and wrong. Taylor (2007) explains that modern pluralism leads to “the fragility of moral horizons” (p. 475) where individuals lack firm convictions about ethical norms. For Generation Z, this fragility manifests in the difficulty of sustaining consistent moral commitments amid competing influences. It is here that philosophical and cultural resources such as the African ontology of vital forces, may provide

an alternative grounding for moral development. The educational and developmental implications of this situation are significant. Scholars in youth studies emphasize that moral education for Generation Z must move beyond rigid codes and instead cultivate critical reflection, empathy and relational responsibility. Noddings (2013) highlights the importance of care ethics, arguing that “moral education must center on the relational self, for it is through caring relationships that moral development takes place” (p. 89). This relational orientation resonates with African communal philosophies and could provide a bridge between indigenous wisdom and contemporary youth realities.

Thus, the moral development of Generation Z is marked by a tension between autonomy and community, freedom and responsibility, digital engagement and moral depth. While this generation shows remarkable sensitivity to global justice and inclusivity, they lack stable moral frameworks to sustain these commitments. Their context requires a moral grounding that speaks both to their individuality and their interconnectedness. As Giddens (1996) reminds us that “in conditions of modernity, the self becomes a reflexive project” (p. 32). For Generation Z, this project of the self must be accompanied by a vision of moral life that emphasizes life-enhancement and communal responsibility, a perspective that the Bantu ontology of vital forces, as interpreted by Tempels, is well-suited to provide.

### **Intersections of Tempelsian Thought and Gen Z Moral Experiences**

The intersection of Placide Tempels’ interpretation of Bantu ontology with the moral experiences of Generation Z provides a meaningful way to rethink how traditional African categories of thought can engage contemporary ethical challenges. Tempels (2010) emphasized that in Bantu philosophy “the supreme good consists in the increase of vital force; evil consists in its diminution” (p. 46). This principle resonates deeply with the experiences of Generation Z, a cohort navigating fragmented moral frameworks shaped by digital culture, globalization and individualism. The ethical question for today’s youth is no longer merely about obedience to rules but about whether their actions promote flourishing, of themselves, others and the wider community.

Generation Z’s moral experiences are often defined by their consideration of global justice, inclusivity and ecological responsibility. Many of them participate actively in movements for climate action, gender equality and racial justice. These commitments reflect a concern with life in its fullness which Tempels’ ontology describes as the core of morality. Magesa (1997) notes that “the moral traditions of Africa are essentially life-centered, grounded in the imperative to preserve life through respect for God, the ancestors and the community” (p. 37). For Gen Z, this translates into activism that seeks to preserve the planet, challenge oppressive systems and affirm human dignity. In this way, the Tempelsian notion of vital force finds a living expression in their global consciousness.

Yet, the moral struggles of Generation Z also reveal how far their experiences diverge from traditional African communal structures. In Tempels' framework, vitality is nurtured within community and individuality cannot be understood apart from social relations. He writes that "the good of the individual is the good of the community and the good of the community is the good of the individual" (Tempels, 2010, p. 54). By contrast, Gen Z faces the challenge of reconciling their strong sense of individuality with the need for collective responsibility. Social media reinforces this paradox because it provides spaces for activism and solidarity, yet it also fosters self-promotion, consumerism and shallow engagement. The intersection here is therefore not seamless but dialectical, highlighting both affinities and tensions between Tempelsian thought and digital-age morality.

The Bantu ontology of vital forces also sheds light on how Generation Z approaches relationships and identity. In African thought, the human person is a nexus of relationships and moral development is measured by the ability to strengthen bonds that enhance life. Mbiti (1999) captured this idea when he stated, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 141). For Gen Z, identity is increasingly constructed through networks, both physical and digital. Their friendships, communities and even political affiliations emerge in online spaces where relational bonds can be strong yet fragile. The Tempelsian emphasis on interconnectedness suggests that moral growth for Gen Z requires grounding these relationships not in fleeting digital exchanges but in enduring commitments that genuinely enhance life.

Another area of intersection lies in how both Tempels' thought and Gen Z experiences grapple with authority and tradition. For the Bantu, ancestors are vital mediators of moral vitality, ensuring continuity between past and present. Ancestors embody moral wisdom and serve as guardians of communal life. Tempels (2010) argues that "the whole of morality and law is contained in the relationships of forces and it is the ancestors who safeguard the order of these forces" (p. 67). Generation Z, however, resists traditional authority structures, preferring to shape morality through personal autonomy and peer networks. This divergence raises the question of how ancestral wisdom or its equivalent in modern contexts, can be reinterpreted for a generation skeptical of rigid traditions. One possibility is to frame the role of ancestors metaphorically as symbols of heritage, memory and continuity, thereby linking Gen Z's emphasis on innovation with a grounding in enduring values.

The ecological consciousness of Generation Z provides another striking intersection with the Tempelsian worldview. Bantu ontology understands nature not as inactive matter but as a bearer of vitality. Plants, animals and even minerals participate in the hierarchy of forces and contribute to the harmony of existence. Asouzu (2007) highlights that "the African idea of being as force provides an integrative horizon for overcoming the dichotomies of modern thought" (p. 61). Gen Z's concern for environmental justice reflects this integrative orientation as they increasingly advocate for sustainable living, renewable energy and climate action. Their activism mirrors the

African insistence that harming nature diminishes life-force while protecting it ensures collective flourishing.

Nevertheless, Generation Z also experiences challenges that Tempels' ontology could address but does not automatically resolve. One such challenge is moral relativism. Taylor (2007) explains that in pluralist societies, individuals face "the fragility of moral horizons" (p. 475), unsure of what principles to prioritize. For Gen Z, this fragility is amplified by exposure to competing values online. The Tempelsian idea that moral action must always enhance vitality provides a possible standard of evaluation that transcends relativism while remaining adaptable to context. It gives young people a way to assess actions not simply by personal preference but by their contribution to life in community.

The intersections between Tempelsian thought and Gen Z moral experiences, therefore, reveal both harmonies and dissonances. On one hand, the emphasis on life, interconnectedness and community resonates with Gen Z's activism and concern for global justice. On the other hand, tensions arise around issues of individualism, authority and the instability of digital relationships. The meeting point of these traditions suggests that Tempels' ontology of vital forces can serve as a philosophical lens through which Generation Z's moral struggles and aspirations can be understood and guided. By integrating African metaphysical insights with contemporary youth realities, it becomes possible to articulate a moral vision that affirms both personal autonomy and communal vitality.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The intersections between Tempels' ontology of vital forces and the moral experiences of Generation Z point to the possibility of constructing a renewed ethic that is both life-centered and socially responsible. Placide Tempels' claim that "being is force, and force is being" (2010, p. 43) establishes a moral principle where the value of human action is measured by its capacity to enhance vitality. In the context of Generation Z, whose moral struggles are shaped by digital culture, individualism and pluralism, this principle can serve as a corrective against fragmentation and moral relativism.

Generation Z demonstrates a strong concern for justice, equality and ecological sustainability which aligns closely with the Bantu idea that morality is about preserving and increasing life. Magesa (1997) reinforces this by stating that "the moral traditions of Africa are essentially life-centered" (p. 37), suggesting that an ethic grounded in vitality could guide young people toward deeper moral commitments. Such an approach would move beyond rules or subjective preferences, offering instead a relational standard where the flourishing of the individual is inseparable from the flourishing of the community.



The adoption of a vital force ethics for Generation Z also emphasizes responsibility toward the environment and future generations. Mbiti's (1999) assertion that "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 141) captures the communal orientation that Gen Z already expresses in global activism but which requires a stronger philosophical foundation. By situating morality within the web of life, Tempels' vision provides a framework that affirms autonomy while grounding it in solidarity. In conclusion, a Tempelsian-inspired ethic of vital forces offers a path toward moral development that speaks directly to the dilemmas of Generation Z. It calls for an education and practice of morality that enhances life, nurtures community, and sustains the vitality of both humanity and nature.

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