

**SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF PIDGIN ENGLISH  
(FOCUS ON THE PHRASE STRUCTURE)**

**BY**

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## **APPROVAL PAGE**

This research has been read and approved as meeting part of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (B.A Hons) in English Language in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to all my family.

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All thanks and adorations are due to the Almighty Allah who has given me life, courage, insight, and the opportunity to start and finish this study. I could not have finished this research project without His mercy. I ask that He extends His mercy upon the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his households and anybody who chooses to heed his teachings till the day of judgment.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the phrase structure of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) with the aim of identifying its underlying syntactic organization in comparison with Standard English. The research was motivated by the perception that Nigerian Pidgin English lacks structural regularity and grammatical depth. Adopting the Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG) framework, the study analysed both spoken and written data obtained from undergraduate students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Using a qualitative descriptive design, linguistic data were collected through audio recordings, semi-structured interviews, observation, and written samples from WhatsApp chats and social media posts. The findings reveal that Nigerian Pidgin English, contrary to popular belief, exhibits systematic syntactic structures similar to those found in natural languages. The phrase markers and tree diagrams constructed from the data show that Nigerian Pidgin maintains recognizable hierarchical relationships among its constituents, including noun phrases (NP), verb phrases (VP), prepositional phrases (PP), adjective phrases (AdjP), and adverbial phrases (AdvP). The study concludes that Nigerian Pidgin English is not a random or deficient linguistic system but one that follows identifiable grammatical rules.

# CHAPTER ONE

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

Linguists have described Pidgin languages as makeshift, marginal, minimum, auxiliary, emergency, contingency, rudimentary, trade, contact, simplified, debased languages, among other terms, for reasons such as the way they originate(d) through emergency trade contacts, the limited functions they are initially supposedly meant to perform, the nature of their inconsistent or reduced 'grammars' and puerile vocabulary. Because of all of the foregoing, Pidgin languages are largely underestimated by those who speak the superstrate language(s) from which they originate. Many people think Pidgins are funny, babyish, and have low self-esteem. Holmes (2013) observes that, “It is very difficult for native speakers of a language to overcome these attitudes to pidgins which are based partly on their language”. It is also true for non-native speakers of its standard form, they underestimate the Pidgin and look down on its speakers.

Pidgin languages have been regarded as inferior languages because their syntax lacks regularity. To make matters worse, some believe Pidgin is made up of haphazard linguistic elements. In essence, they believe there is a lack of convention in the arrangement of lexical items to convey meaning.

This research has been embarked on to investigate the analysis of the underlying syntactic structure of Pidgin English language focusing on its phrase structure and the extent to which structural patterning in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) differs from Standard English.

## **1.1 Background to the Study**

Language is a multifaceted and varied means of communication, encompassing a wide range of mutually comprehensible variations. It is a storehouse of a community's cultural and historical heritage, with distinct regional, professional, and social interpretations.

Ethnologue (2022) recorded that there were 7151 languages spoken in the world. Although this data vastly differs from the Académie Française's record of 2800 in the twentieth century, it suggests that more living languages have been discovered in the last century, half of which are endangered and on the verge of extinction (Ethnologue, 2022). The degree of a language's communicative usefulness in various domains is a significant factor contributing to language endangerment in a speech community. When a language experiences a significant reduction in its usage, there is a tendency for its speech community to shift towards another language (Trudgill, 2000). The Nigerian English speech community has recently shifted towards Pidgin English because of their socio-communicative needs and globalisation (Faraclas, 2021). This shift may result in speakers moving properties of their culture and heritage languages into the new language, creating a unique variety that may or may not fit into an existing language family (Pennycook, 2010).

Some scholars do not entirely agree with the monogenesis theory of language, which propounds that language originated from a single, probably universal language (Southworth & Dasani, 1974). In response, some linguists adopted the polygenesis theory of language, which suggests that multiple languages may have originated from different parts of the world almost simultaneously (Freedman & Wang, 1996). The assertion that languages may have originated from single or multiple languages remains ongoing. For example, Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin have a common origin, which is English (Agbo & Plag, 2020). Although both varieties are from one language, they have been classified into different language families (Ibrahim, 2016).

Pidgin has been variously defined by different scholars. For instance, Ojoo (2022) defines it as a language that lacks native speakers and does not belong to any specific group but rather functions as a contact language. It emerges in multilingual contexts where individuals need to communicate and therefore create a simplified language system to facilitate understanding. Often, this arises in situations where there is an unequal power dynamic among languages, with speakers of one language exerting economic or social dominance over speakers of another language. In marked contrast, researchers state that:

Pidgins as minimal and makeshift languages which are the results of language contact, developed for the purpose of communication, particularly in multilingual societies. Being spoken in many countries of the world, Pidgin is recognized as a contingency language in the absence of a central communicative code. (Bob & Obiukwu, 2022, p. 173)

It has become so pervasive that the original belief that Pidgin is an on-the-spot language created between people with no common language is gradually fading. Trask and Stockwell (2007) assert that Pidgin is a language developed by people with no common language. Although it is hardly spoken as a first language, it is increasing as a means of communication in virtually all spheres of life. In education, businesses, social services, politics, religious gatherings, etc. Pidgin is adopted in addition to English to perform different communicative roles.

Despite the fact that Pidgin is creolising in some states like Delta, Rivers, Edo, Bayelsa and a few others where Pidgin is being used for broadcasting news over the Radio and Television and in public enlightenment programs including entertainment, numerous advertisements and soap-opera in the entire country. However, Pidgin as a language is officially stigmatized and not taught in most Nigerian schools partly because of its labels such as bad English, improper English, broken English, rotten English etc.

The importance of Pidgin in the 21st century cannot be ignored because it has become a language that the old and young find exciting and use, thus spreading and growing. Pidgin has been assumed to be limited in function and, therefore, does not last very long. However, Nigerian Pidgin is reported to be gaining global recognition on a daily basis. It is noted as one of the most widely spoken languages across West Africa, even though it is not officially recognized.

Its development and pervasiveness have brought about its continuous use. Many African countries with several ethnic groups adopt it as a lingua franca when the need arises. According to BBC News, it is widely spoken in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, and Cameroon. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a leading news media organization that provides coverage of events around the world, including in Nigeria. In its coverage of the February 25th presidential election in Nigeria, the BBC used Nigerian Pidgin alongside Standard English to provide a wider audience with a better understanding of the events.

Nicholas (2013) describes Nigerian Pidgin as an English-based Creole language that originated from contact between English and various indigenous Nigerian languages. It is widely spoken in Nigeria, particularly in urban areas, and has gained recognition as a national language. The emergence of Pidgins and Creoles has been described as one of the sociolinguistics significant outcomes of European contact in Africa (Adegbija, 2004; Echu & Obeng, 2004).

At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) discuss the classification of words into categories such as nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, and determiners. While their work focuses on English, the framework they provide has been instrumental in analyzing other languages, including Nigerian Pidgin, highlighting its structured grammatical system. In similar vein, Elugbe and Omamor (1991) argue that Nigerian Pidgin is not merely a debased form of English but a fully developed language with its own grammatical rules and structures. They

provide comprehensive analyses demonstrating the language's systematic nature across various levels.

According to Anagbogu et al. (2014) “anything that comes from the mouth of man which systematically conveys meaning, any system of utterance with which people interact in society, is a subject worthy of study”.

Nigerian Pidgin has its own unique syntax, which differs from that of Standard English. While numerous studies have explored the syntax of Nigerian Pidgin in general, there is a need to investigate the underlying syntactic structure of Pidgin English language focusing on its phrase structure, understanding the syntactic differences between Pidgin English and Standard English. Therefore, this research tends to provide for the Pidgin English speakers the mechanism for splitting up a given sentence structure into its constituents, with the aid of phrase marker such as: S NP VP AUX ADJ DET PRO etc., and as well interested in the study of the analysis of the underlying syntactic structure of Pidgin English language focusing on its phrase structure, and the extent to which structural patterning in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) differs from Standard Nigerian English.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Pidgin language emerged through contact situation, and it is mostly seen as debased, sparse and intellectually inferior language rather than a full language that serves special communicative purposes. To worsen the situation, some believe that pidgin constitutes haphazard admixtures of linguistic elements. In essence, they believe that it lacks convention on how lexical items are arranged to make meaning. This research has been

embarked on to investigate the analysis of the underlying syntactic structure of Pidgin English language focusing on its phrase structure and the extent to which structural patterning in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) differs from Standard English.

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to conduct a Syntactic Analysis of Pidgin English. The aim is to be achieved through the following objectives:

1. To examine the basic syntactic rules that governs phrase structure in Pidgin English.
2. To examine the consistent patterns in the arrangement of syntactic elements in Pidgin English sentences.
3. To examine the extent to which phrase structure of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) differs from Standard English.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of the research, the following questions are put forward:

1. What are the basic syntactic rules that govern phrase structure in Pidgin English?
2. Are there consistent patterns in the arrangement of syntactic elements in Pidgin English sentences?
3. How does the phrase structure of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) differ from Standard English?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to analyse the phrase structure of Pidgin English. Pidgin English often considered as a non-standard or informal language, lacks the extensive linguistic documentation that standard languages enjoy. Analysing its syntactic structure helps legitimise it as a structured and rule-governed language, contributing to its academic recognition. Studying its syntax, especially its phrase structure, sheds light on how new languages form, simplify, or innovate grammatical patterns.

It will therefore be of great importance to up-and-coming researchers who will like to study any related topic on Pidgin English focusing on syntactic analysis. Similarly, it will provide materials for researchers in this field and serve as a reference point. Generally, this study will contribute to the growth of educational development.

### **1.6 Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

The research focuses on the syntactic analysis of Pidgin English, specifically examining its phrase structure. The research aims to identify the structural patterns and rules that govern how phrases are formed and used in Pidgin English. The study draws its data primarily from spoken and written samples of Nigerian Pidgin English, with a particular emphasis on informal conversations, and social media content. The analysis will be ground in basic syntactic theory to compare phrase structures in Pidgin English and Standard English highlighting the similarities and differences.

The study is limited to Nigerian Pidgin English and does not attempt to analyse other varieties of Pidgin spoken in other regions, such as Ghanaian Pidgin English, Native American Pidgin English, or Chinese Pidgin English. The study focuses only on phrase-level syntax and does not cover other linguistic aspects such as phonology, morphology, semantics, or sociolinguistic variations. The data collection is restricted to 300 Level students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the scholarly literature relevant to the syntactic structure of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), with a particular focus on phrase structure. It covers theoretical foundations of syntax, phrase structure grammar, and the distinctive syntactic features of Nigerian Pidgin English. Additionally, it highlights previous works on Pidgin syntax and identifies the gaps this study aims to fill.

#### **2.1 Overview of Pidgin English**

Language is no doubt one of the most valuable assets endowed man by God. Language is used to mark man's identity, express his thoughts, and preserve his culture. A famous Nigerian linguist Adetugbo (1984), asserts that "all human societies and institutions are made possible only by man's possession of language. In short, it is language that defines man's humanity". Due to the insatiable nature of man and the need to survive in a highly competitive world, there became need for his interaction with one another. This interaction is usually possible through language.

It has been observed that when two or more languages come in contact, different kinds of sociolinguistic chemistry take place. Sometimes a diglossic situation may result, or language shift, or even language death. In some other instance, it can lead to formation of a Pidgin, a Creole or even birth of a new language altogether (Sebba, 1997). Other phenomena

that could result from languages coming in contact with one another are: bilingualism, borrowing, code alternation, etc.

Many people have already put out some quantity of literature on the subject of pidgin, trying to trace its origin, structure, ethnolinguistic and sociolinguistic relevance. People like Hall, Hymes, etc have all written good survey works on different aspects of Pidgin and creoles. In Nigeria, such writers as Agheyisi and Mafeni (1971), Banjo (1969) have concentrated on Nigerian Pidgin.

Pidgin was once, and still is in some places, thought of, as the language of the uneducated, of those who could not make it to school. This perhaps arose partly because of its origin and the fact that it once had its speakers mostly among the lowly in society-artisans, office messengers, cooks, drivers, petty traders, etc. Pidgin has been variously defined by linguists, some from a positive view, and others from a parochial, prejudiced point of view. These diverse views about Pidgin, especially which sees pidgin as an inferior language that lacks syntactic structure, are what this study intends to clear.

### **2.1.1 Historical Development of Pidgin**

Pidgin languages have historically emerged as simplified contact languages that facilitate communication between speakers of different native tongues who lack a shared linguistic medium. Their development is closely tied to specific socio-historical, economic, and political circumstances, particularly trade, migration, colonization, and intercultural contact. While Pidgins are often stigmatized as “broken” or “corrupted” forms of language,

linguists now recognize them as complex systems with their own grammatical rules, lexicons, and socio-cultural functions (Holm, 2000; Siegel, 2008).

The emergence of Pidgin languages can be traced to periods of extensive contact between diverse linguistic communities, often under asymmetric power relations. Early forms of Pidgin developed along the West African coast during the Atlantic slave trade era (15th–19th centuries) when European traders, primarily Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French engaged in commercial interactions with African traders and local communities (Mufwene, 2015). These interactions necessitated a functional but simplified communicative code, leading to the birth of Pidgins based largely on European lexifiers but with substrate influences from African languages.

Nigerian Pidgin, in particular, developed from contact between English-speaking colonial administrators, traders, missionaries, and the indigenous peoples of the Niger Delta in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Faraclas, 1996; Elugbe&Omamor, 1991). Initially, Pidgin is used in trade, it gradually expanded into domains such as interethnic communication, labor relations, and urban street discourse. Over time, Nigerian Pidgin evolved from a restricted contact language to an increasingly nativised variety spoken across social classes.

### **2.1.2 The Origin and Definition of Pidgin**

The origin of pidgin languages is deeply rooted in human history, particularly in contexts where speakers of different languages have been brought into sustained contact but lacked a common medium of communication. Pidgins emerge out of necessity, functioning

as improvised linguistic bridges in settings characterized by trade, colonization, slavery, and migration (Holm, 2000; Siegel, 2008). Their creation is typically driven by pragmatic communicative needs rather than deliberate language planning.

Regarding the Global Perspective on Pidgin Origins, historically, some of the earliest known Pidgins arose in trading ports, plantation economies, and colonial outposts from the 15th century onwards, particularly during the European Age of Exploration. When European powers such as Portugal, Spain, England, France, and the Netherlands ventured into Africa, Asia, and the Americas, they encountered communities with vastly different linguistic systems. The absence of a shared language necessitated the development of simplified linguistic codes drawing heavily from the vocabulary of the dominant European language (the lexifier) and structural influences from indigenous substrate languages (Mufwene, 2015). For example, West African Pidgin English emerged along the Guinea Coast as a result of interaction between British traders and African middlemen in the 17th century. Similarly, Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea and Hawai'i Pidgin in the United States originated from plantation economies where workers from diverse linguistic backgrounds needed to communicate (Bakker, 2020). These cases illustrate that pidgins are a universal linguistic response to multilingual contact situations.

In Africa, the development of Pidgin languages is closely linked to the transatlantic slave trade and later European colonialism. The earliest English-based Pidgins in West Africa appeared in coastal trading settlements in the 16th and 17th centuries, influenced initially by Portuguese contact, as Portuguese traders were among the first Europeans in the

region (Elugbe&Omamor, 1991). Over time, as British influence grew, English replaced Portuguese as the primary lexifier in many West African coastal pidgins.

These contact languages were initially highly restricted in scope, functioning mainly in trade negotiations and shipboard interactions. However, as trade routes expanded and European settlement deepened, Pidgin use spread inland, adapting to different ethnic and linguistic environments.

Etymologically, opinions differ on the origin of the word “Pidgin”. Edwards (1994) traces the word “Pidgin” to Portuguese “ocupacao” which means “business” or “pequeno” meaning “babytalk” or simply “baby”. He says that the word could as well be linked to the Amerindian “pidian” which means “people”. He concludes by defining Pidgin as “a baby-like and rather superficial repetitions associated with trade communications”. Holmes (2008) refutes the above assertion saying that “Pidgins and Creoles are real languages not baby talk; they are used for serious purposes”.

Todd (1990) sees Pidgin as a marginal language which arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language. She further says that “pidginisation, takes place whenever and wherever people of linguistically different backgrounds are brought together in contact”.

Decamp (1987) describes Pidgin as an incidental communicative language within a multilingual setting which “is the native language of nobody”. Its vocabulary, according to Decamp, is denoted by the socio-politically dominant language in the original contact

situation, most especially, with the European imperialists. Pidgin is therefore an amalgam of the main, foreign and superstrate language and the indigenous or substrate language.

For the researchers, a Pidgin is a language which developed as a result of the need for communication between the Europeans and Africans in the early fourteenth century. A Pidgin has no native speakers but it is used as a medium of communication between people who are native speakers of other languages because it is simplified with reduced vocabulary and grammatical structure. A Pidgin is influenced by the society where it exists. As such, it is fashioned in ways it can reflect the ideals and world view of the society.

Pidgin languages that developed across the world have been described by linguists as makeshift, marginal, minimum, auxiliary, emergency, contingency, rudimentary, trade, contact, adulterated, bastard(ised), simplified, debased languages among other terms for reasons such as the way they originate(d) through emergency trade contacts, the limited functions they are initially supposedly meant to perform, the nature of their unstable or inconsistent or reduced 'grammars' and puerile vocabulary, the disdain with which they are looked upon and for their expected short lifespan. By reason of all of the above, Pidgin languages are predominantly underrated by those who speak the superstrate language(s) from which they emanate. For many, Pidgins are humorous and babyish and of low esteem.

Holmes (2013) observes that: "It is very difficult for native speakers of a language to overcome these attitudes to Pidgins which are based partly on their language". It is also true about non-native speakers of its standard form, they also underrate the Pidgin and look

down on its speakers. However, Pidgins have also been known to become lingua franca after long use in the countries they developed.

According to Yule (2007), a Pidgin is a language variety that emerges when individuals who do not share a common linguistic background come into regular contact, often for the purpose to conduct business transactions. In such situations, a simplified form of communication, combining elements from different languages, develops as a means of facilitating basic understanding and communication among the diverse group of speakers. This definition of a Pidgin aligns with the commonly accepted understanding of the term. However, Hudson (2001) perspective on Pidgin languages emphasizes their role as communication tools for groups of people who lack a common language. In this view, Pidgin languages serve as a means of communication among individuals with no mutually intelligible language for interaction. The members of these communities acquire and use Pidgin languages as the primary medium of communication within their specific social and linguistic context. Pidgin languages, in this sense, are seen as a practical solution for overcoming language barriers and facilitating communication among diverse groups.

Modern linguistics tends to view Pidgins less as “imperfect languages” and more as innovative linguistic systems shaped by the socio-historical environments of their speakers. Mühlhäusler (1997) argues that Pidgins should be defined as “norm-governed languages that arise out of necessity, with structural systems influenced by both universal linguistic principles and specific socio-historical contexts”. This approach shifts focus from perceived deficiencies to linguistic creativity and adaptability.

Furthermore, with increasing social acceptance of Nigerian Pidgin in media, literature, and political discourse, some scholars suggest that rigid definitions based solely on the absence of native speakers are becoming outdated (Omoniyi, 2020). Instead, definitions now acknowledge Pidgins as legitimate languages capable of long-term stability and cultural relevance.

In Nigeria, the English-based Pidgin developed from the first trade contacts between the British and Nigerians in the coastal areas as far back as the fifteenth century. According to Elugbe (1995), it was “in the Niger Delta and around the mouth of the Cross River that Nigerian Pidgin first flourished”. Since then, the language has operated alongside the English language, its superstrate or lexifier and the multiple indigenous Nigerian languages, its substrates. It has defied the description of Pidgins as emergency or makeshift languages; has entrenched itself as a widely used language in the country; has taken the nomenclature of Nigerian Pidgin (as if it is a language of its own) and it is today being used in more domains than trade contacts. It is assumed that the terms ‘Pidgin English’ or ‘Nigerian Pidgin English’ or ‘Nigerian Pidgin’ refer to the same subject and may be used interchangeably in this work.

### **2.1.3 Stages of the Development of Pidgin**

Linguists generally outline the development of Pidgin through the following stages (Bickerton, 1981; Todd, 1990):

- i. **Pre-Pidgin Jargon Stage:** This is the earliest stage, characterized by extreme linguistic simplification, unstable vocabulary, and inconsistent grammar. Communication here is ad hoc and highly context-dependent.
- ii. **Stabilized Pidgin Stage:** Through repeated use, the language begins to develop more stable grammatical patterns, a fixed core vocabulary, and conventionalized expressions. This stage often emerges when the language is used over an extended period for specific purposes such as trade or labor relations.
- iii. **Expanded Pidgin Stage:** At this point, the language broadens its functions beyond limited domains to serve more complex communicative needs, developing richer vocabulary, more elaborate grammatical structures, and stylistic variation. Nigerian Pidgin today fits largely into this category, functioning in entertainment, politics, media, and interpersonal communication.

## **2.2 The Origin and Development of Nigerian Pidgin**

With a large and vigorous population and a long tradition of ethnic and linguistic diversity and tolerance, Nigeria was able to develop a highly mercantile society with major urban centres centuries before the landing of European merchant ships in the fifteenth century or the arrival of the Jihad in the thirteenth century (Faraclas 1988). City life, intermarriage, trading and travel have brought Nigerians who speak different languages into close contact with one another for thousands of years. Bilingualism and multilingualism have always been the norm rather than the exception in most parts of Nigeria. For these reasons, it is very likely that pidginised versions of Nigerian languages were widely used in

many areas. In fact, pidginised Hausa is still spoken by non-native speakers of Hausa in the markets around Lake Chad while a pidginised form of Igbo is used at present in some Niger Delta markets (Faraclas 1988).

Nigerian Pidgin may very well have developed from one or several such pidginised Nigerian languages that were spoken along the coast before the Europeans arrived. Because of the importance of the European trade and the reluctance of Europeans to learn other languages, European words would have been substituted for Nigerian words to facilitate communication. Since the Portuguese arrived first, a few Portuguese-derived items such as *sàbi* ‘know’ and *pikín* ‘child’ would have been initially adopted (Ktravula, 2017).

As British colonial power solidified in Nigeria, more and more English words would have been integrated into the language. Along with British colonialism came European education via missionaries, many of whom were Krio speakers from Sierra Leone (mostly ex-slaves or descendants of ‘repatriated’ slaves from the Caribbean).

Baghana et al. (2023) reported that, “the question of the Nigerian Pidgin English origin is still debatable. It is impossible to have a true determination whether the Nigerian Pidgin developed based on market contacts between European traders and various ethnic groups along the coast or if it was developed under the influence of Sierra Leone missionaries”. It is reasonable to assume that both of these factors played some part, but scholars must be careful not to over-emphasize the role of either the traders or the missionaries in the evolution of Nigerian Pidgin. In the frantic search for origins, creolists typically ignore the fact that at every stage of its history, Nigerian Pidgin has been used

primarily as a means of communication among Nigerians rather than between Nigerians and traders, missionaries or other foreigners. Mounting evidence indicates that it is impossible to formulate any plausible scenario for the origin and development of Nigerian Pidgin that does not ascribe a significant role to influence from the linguistic patterns with which southern Nigerians have always been the most familiar: the structures that typify the languages of southern Nigeria (Faraclas, 1988).

### **2.3 The Concept of Nigeria Pidgin**

Nigerian Pidgin, sometimes referred to as Naija Pidgin or Naija Language, is an English-based contact language that emerged in Nigeria through prolonged interaction between English speakers, primarily colonial administrators, missionaries, traders and speakers of diverse indigenous Nigerian languages. While it shares features with other West African Pidgins, it has developed unique structural, lexical, and sociolinguistic characteristics that make it a distinct linguistic entity (Faraclas, 1996; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

Elugbe and Omamor (1991) describe Nigeria Pidgin as “a linguistic medium whose lexicon is largely derived from English but whose grammar and phonology are shaped by Nigerian indigenous languages”. This emphasizes its hybrid nature and the interplay between its lexifier and substrate influences.

Faraclas (1996) defines Nigerian Pidgin as “an English-lexified contact language spoken as a second language by millions of Nigerians, and as a first language by an increasing number, particularly in urban coastal areas”. This definition recognizes both its pidgin origins and its ongoing creolisation in certain communities.

Igboanusi (2008) characterizes it as “a language of wider communication in Nigeria, cutting across ethnic, regional, and social boundaries”, highlighting its role as a *lingua franca* in a highly multilingual nation.

Nigerian Pidgin has evolved into a primary language for certain minority groups in Nigeria, as observed by Igboanusi (2008). Unlike English, which is formally taught and adheres to standardized orthography, Nigerian Pidgin is informally acquired and lacks a standardized writing system. Agbo and Plag (2020) claim that Nigerian Pidgin is not officially recognized but is another widely used *lingua franca*. Nigerian Pidgin is an English-based contact language that emerged due to European contact with West African languages. Despite not being officially recognized and historically associated with individuals without formal education, Nigerian Pidgin has gained significance over time. Agantiem and Alagbe (2023) corroborate that Nigerian Pidgin English, which initially developed for trade purposes during the first British-Nigerian contacts in the fifteenth century, has expanded its usage beyond trade and is now prevalent in various domains such as homes, neighborhoods, churches, music, media, and schools. Research indicates that Nigerian Pidgin now boasts the highest number of users and is even considered a first language among certain minority groups in Nigeria (Faraclas, 2008; Jibril, 1995; Igboanusi, 2008). Notably, Nigerian Pidgin

has also become prevalent in tertiary institutions nationwide. Given the languages' coexistence, prolonged contact, and respective statuses, it is expected that they influence and undergo changes due to contact-induced effects (Sankoff, 2004; Thomason, 2001). Elugbe (1995) notes that the written form of Nigerian Pidgin also demonstrates adherence to a structure that closely resembles SNE.

The views expressed by linguists and language scholars regarding Pidgin English vary, reflecting the ongoing debates and diverse perspectives in the field. Some linguists, such as Hymes (1971) and Labov (1990), have criticised Pidgin English, considering it a language with deviant forms and limited complexity. They argue that Pidgins arise to fulfill restricted communication needs among people who lack a common language. Ndimele (2011) notes that the perception of pidgin languages is often nuanced, with some considering them degraded or corrupted versions of standard languages.

Historically, educated Nigerians, in particular, have regarded Nigerian Pidgin as inferior to Standard English, discouraging its use among their children, as highlighted by Elugbe and Omamor (1991).

Deuber (2006) examines the variation in spoken Nigerian Pidgin among educated speakers and concludes there is no evidence of a dialect continuum between Nigerian Pidgin and English. It was historically associated with low prestige in Nigeria and was primarily used by individuals with limited education. Nigerian Pidgin has often been negatively stigmatized as a “bad” form of English (Igboanusi, 2001). Nonetheless, Ojoo (2022) emphasizes caution on the use of Pidgin as it may harm proficiency in Standard English.

Ojoo examines the nature of Pidgin expressions by both male and female users, taking into account sociolinguistic perspectives on language choices in multilingual settings and the influence of gender on language use. One of the key recommendations is to limit the use of Nigerian Pidgin on campus to achieve language standards.

On the other hand, scholars like Bickerton (2010) argue that Pidgin English can be considered a language with unique characteristics, such as easy word order and syntax. They suggest that its construction may be unstructured or influenced by unintelligible languages. Moreover, Nigerian Pidgin possesses unique grammar rules that distinguish it from Standard English, underscoring its distinct nature as a separate language with its own set of rules and structures. Adebayo (2022) affirms that although Nigerian Pidgin shares syntactic similarities with Standard Nigerian English (SNE), it has its distinct characteristics. These include the absence of inflection for tense, the use of appropriate synonyms for verbs, adjectives, and complements, the presence of serial verbs, nominalization, verbalization, and more. Egbohware (2001) asserts that the ability to communicate in Nigerian Pidgin effectively is becoming increasingly indispensable in Nigeria.

However, Trask and Stockwell (2007) present a contrasting view, claiming that Pidgin is not a natural language and lacks ornate grammar. They emphasise its functional role in fulfilling simple communication objectives and argue that Pidgin is a language developed by people with no common language. It is observed that although it is hardly spoken as a first language, it is increasing as a means of communication in virtually all

spheres of life. In education, businesses, social services, politics, religious gatherings, etc., Pidgin is adopted in addition to English to perform different communicative roles.

The study conducted by Adebayo (2022) suggests that Nigerian Pidgin English is leaning towards the Creole continuum. This is likely due to the increasing use of Nigerian Pidgin by educated individuals in various language domains. The research reveals a significant transfer or importation of English vocabulary into the variety of Pidgin being used. The analysis of sentences indicates that Nigerian Pidgin has seven dominant structure types, with the SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) structure being the most commonly used. It suggests that Nigerian Pidgin is becoming more similar to English in its spoken form.

Over time, Nigerian Pidgin has developed structural depth and regional variations, gaining functional roles in politics, religion, media, and education. However, its syntactic features remain under-documented compared to those of Standard English.

### **2.3.1 Status of Nigerian Pidgin**

Nigerian Pidgin (NP) occupies a unique sociolinguistic position in Nigeria's multilingual landscape. While it is not officially recognized in the Nigerian constitution or formal language policy, it is widely spoken across the country as a lingua franca, bridging communication between speakers of different indigenous languages and between locals and foreigners (Igboanusi, 2008; Omoniyi, 2020).

According to Faraclas (2013), Nigeria Pidgin is spoken by over 75 million Nigerians, with estimates suggesting that at least 5–10 million speak it as a first language, especially in urban coastal areas such as Warri, Port Harcourt, Sapele, and parts of Lagos. Despite its widespread usage, Nigeria Pidgin remains stigmatized by some segments of society, often perceived as “non-standard” or “broken English,” particularly within formal education and official communication contexts (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Igboanusi, 2017).

However, in recent decades, Nigeria Pidgin has experienced status elevation due to its presence in Nigerian popular culture, literature, music, and media. Radio and television stations, such as Wazobia FM and Naija FM, broadcast primarily in Nigeria Pidgin, significantly boosting its prestige among urban youth and the working class (Faraclas, 2013). Moreover, some public figures, including politicians, increasingly use Nigeria Pidgin in speeches to connect with grassroots audiences, reflecting its rising symbolic capital (Omoniyi, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Functions of Nigerian Pidgin**

The functions of Nigeria Pidgin span across multiple domains, reflecting its versatility and adaptability.

#### **i. Interethnic Communication**

Nigeria is home to over 500 indigenous languages, many of which are mutually unintelligible. Nigeria Pidgin serves as a neutral, non-ethnic medium that facilitates communication among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds, reducing the

dominance of any single ethnic group's language in intergroup interaction (Igboanusi, 2008).

#### ii. Mass Media and Entertainment

Nigeria Pidgin has become a staple in Nigerian music, film, comedy, and sports commentary. Nollywood movies frequently incorporate NP in dialogue to depict realism and reach broader audiences (Faraclas, 2013). Popular musicians such as Fela Kuti, Burna Boy, and Wizkid have used NP in their lyrics to convey authenticity and connect with local audiences.

#### iii. Political Mobilization

Political actors employ Nigeria Pidgin during campaigns and rallies to reach the grassroots population. Its use in political messaging makes political discourse more relatable and accessible to those who may not be proficient in Standard English (Omoniyi, 2020).

#### iv. Informal Commerce and Street Interaction

In markets, bus stations, and other informal sectors, Nigeria Pidgin functions as the dominant language of bargaining, negotiation, and casual conversation. It allows fluid interaction between traders, customers, and transport workers from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

#### v. Social Media and Digital Communication

With the growth of social media, Nigeria Pidgin has found a new domain of influence. Platforms like Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok feature Nigeria Pidgin memes, hashtags, and viral content, helping standardize certain expressions and reinforcing Nigeria Pidgin as a tool of youth identity (Igboanusi, 2017).

#### vi. Cultural Identity and Solidarity

Nigeria Pidgin serves as a marker of Nigerian identity, allowing speakers to express solidarity, informality, and cultural belonging. For many, speaking Nigeria Pidgin is a way to demonstrate urban savvy, humor, and national pride.

### 2.4 The Concept of Syntax

Historically, the term "syntax" means arranging together (from the word: syn 'together' and taxis 'an arrangement') and the name given to the part of grammar which treats the ways in which words are arranged together in sentence and of the function they perform (Onion, 1971).

Similar to Onion, Mathews (1981) said the term "syntax" is from ancient Greek "syntaxis", a verbal noun which literally means "arrangement" or "setting out together" words into phrases, or clauses and phrases or clauses into sentences.

Gleason (1961) defined syntax as the principles of arrangement of the construction formed by the process of derivation and inflection (word) into larger constructions of various kinds. Further, Hodge (1978) defines that syntax concerns with the discovery of basic sentence types with the description or the possible substitutions for each element of the basic types.

Chomsky (2015) explains syntax as "the system of rules and principles that determine the form and interpretation of sentences." Further, Radford (2016) defines syntax as "the branch of linguistics that investigates how words are arranged to form grammatical sentences."

Haegeman (2020) describes syntax as “the component of grammar that concerns how words are combined to form larger units such as phrases and sentences.” Similarly, Tallerman (2020) notes that syntax is “concerned with the patterns and rules that speakers use unconsciously to combine words into meaningful sentences.”

Carnie (2021) said, “Syntax is the study of the rules, principles and processes that govern sentence structure, how words and morphemes combine to form phrases and sentences.” In Carnie’s view, he gives a textbook/generative-syntax account: syntax is a rule-governed system modelled formally (constituency, movement, tree structure) and is aimed at providing explicit analyses students can apply to data.

It can be concluded that syntax is the arrangement and relationship among words, phrases, and clauses forming sentences or larger constructions based on grammatical rules.

#### **2.4.1 Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG)**

Phrase Structure Grammar, also referred to as Constituent Structure Grammar, is one of the earliest formal models used in syntactic theory. It is based on the idea that sentences are hierarchically organized and that every sentence consists of phrases that can be broken down into smaller units or constituents (Carnie, 2013).

Phrase structure refers to the way words combine to form phrases and larger syntactic units in a sentence. It is a central concept in generative grammar (Chomsky, 1957, 1965; Radford, 2009) and forms the basis of how meaning and grammatical relations are

expressed in a language. Phrase Structure Grammar describes sentences using phrase structure rules, such as:

|      |             |
|------|-------------|
| S →  | NP + VP     |
| NP → | Det + N     |
| VP → | V + (NP/PP) |

These rules allow for recursive expansion of phrases, making it possible to analyze complex sentence structures. Phrase Structure Grammar also makes use of constituent trees, or phrase markers, to represent syntactic structure. These visual tools help illustrate how syntactic elements relate to one another within a sentence.

Stating that a phrase, as a group of words functions together as a single unit within a sentence. The phrase typically has a head word that determines its type, along with optional modifiers and complements.

For example:

Noun Phrase (NP): the tall boy → head = boy

Verb Phrase (VP): is running fast → head = running

Prepositional Phrase (PP): in the market → head = in

Adjective Phrase (AdjP): very beautiful → head = beautiful

Adverb Phrase (AdvP): quite quickly → head = quickly

In phrase structure grammar (PSG), sentences are generated through Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs). A simplified version of such rules is:

$$S \rightarrow NP + VP$$
$$NP \rightarrow (Det) + (Adj) + N$$
$$VP \rightarrow V + (NP) + (PP)$$
$$PP \rightarrow P + NP$$

These rules allow us to represent sentences visually through tree diagrams, which show hierarchical syntactic relations.

In analyzing Nigerian Pidgin English, Phrase Structure Grammar allows us to deconstruct sentences and identify regularities or deviations in their phrase structure. While Pidgin may simplify or omit some elements common in Standard English (e.g., determiners, auxiliary verbs), Phrase Structure Grammar offers a method for representing its internal structure in a systematic way. This is especially important in demonstrating that Pidgin is not chaotic, but instead governed by implicit rules.

#### **2.4.2 Phrase Structure in Nigerian Pidgin English with Syntactic Analysis Examples**

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) simplifies certain grammatical features of Standard English while still retaining phrase structure organization. The main difference lies in the surface realization of phrases (reduced morphology, fewer auxiliaries, simplified agreement).

Example 1: Noun Phrase (NP)

Pidgin English: Di big man

Standard English: The big man

Analysis:

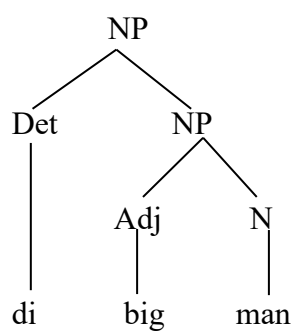
Head noun = man

Determiner = Di (Pidgin equivalent of "The")

Modifier (Adj) = big

The Phrase Structure Rule:  $NP \rightarrow Det + Adj + N$

Using the Tree Structure for simplification:



Example 2: Verb Phrase (VP)

Pidgin English: E dey chop rice

Standard English: He is eating rice

Analysis:

Subject NP: E (he)

VP: dey chop rice

- Auxiliary/Progressive marker: dey (equivalent to "is/are")
- Main verb: chop (eat)
- NP object: rice

Phrase Structure Rule:  $VP \rightarrow Aux + V + NP$

Using the Tree Structure for simplification:



Analysis:

- NP (Subject): Di pikin (The child)
- VP: dey play ball for field

Aux: dey

V: play

NP object: ball

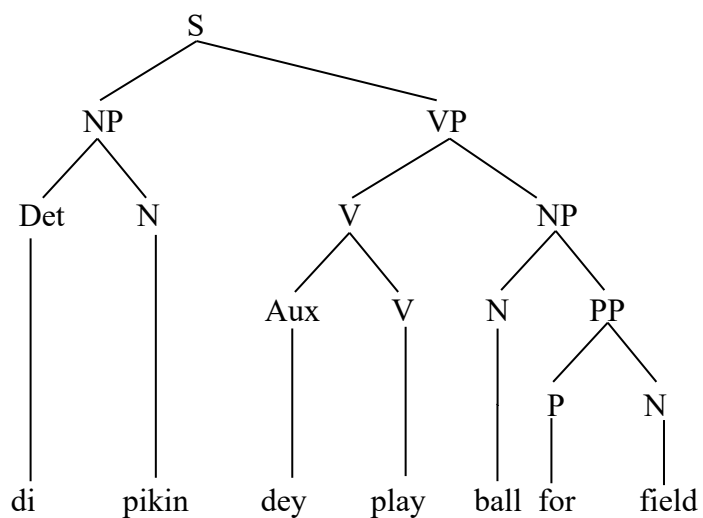
PP: for field

Phrase Structure Rule:

$S \rightarrow NP + VP$

$VP \rightarrow Aux + V + NP + PP$

Using the Tree Structure for simplification:



## 2.5 Syntactic Differences between Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English

Several scholars (e.g., Agheyisi, 1984; Uzoezie, 2002) have documented contrasts between Nigerian Pidgin and Standard English syntax. In Standard English, the noun phrase

typically includes determiners, modifiers, and head nouns. In contrast, Nigeria Pidgin English often omits or generalizes these components. Although Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English share the same SVO (Subject–Verb–Object) word order, they differ in several important syntactic areas. These differences reflect the reduced morphology, analytic structure, and creole features of Nigeria Pidgin English.

1. Tense, Aspect, and Mood (TAM) Marking: In Standard English, Tense/aspect is expressed by inflection on the verb or auxiliaries (goes, is going, has gone). However, Nigeria Pidgin English Tense, Aspect, and Mood is expressed by independent preverbal particles (e.g., bin, don, dey, go). Verbs themselves are bare (no conjugation).

Examples:

| <b>Standard English</b> | <b>Nigeria Pidgin English</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| She has eaten.          | She don chop.                 |
| They were working.      | Dem bin dey work.             |
| He will come.           | E go come.                    |
| The red book            | Red book or Di red book       |
| He is eating            | He dey chop                   |

Such comparisons reveal both structural reduction and functional substitution. These syntactic patterns highlight how Nigeria Pidgin English retools grammatical rules to suit local communicative realities.

2. Verb Inflection and Agreement: In Standard English, verbs agree with the subject in number/person (he goes, they go). In contrast, Nigeria Pidgin English: No subject–verb agreement; the same verb form applies to all persons/numbers.

Examples:

**Standard English**

**Nigeria Pidgin English**

We were waiting outside.

We dey wait outside.

She goes to school every day.

She dey go school every day.

She works very hard.

She dey work well well.

The boy runs fast.

The boy dey run fast.

3. Negation: In Standard English, negation uses auxiliaries (do, be, have) + not. However, Nigeria Pidgin English negation is marked by particles (no, never) placed before the verb or Tense, Aspect Mood marker.

Examples:

**Standard English**

**Nigeria Pidgin English**

I do not know.

I no sabi.

She has never been there.

She never go there before.

They are not going.

Dem no dey go.

4. Articles and Determiners: In Standard English, Articles (a, the) and determiners are obligatory in many contexts. However, Nigeria Pidgin English Articles are often optional or absent. Plural marking can be done with dem or left to context.

Examples:

| <b>Standard English</b>   | <b>Nigeria Pidgin English</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| The children are outside. | Dem pikin dey outside.        |
| The man is here.          | Di man dey here.              |
| That house is big.        | Dat big house.                |
| Every student must come.  | Every student gatz come.      |
| A child is crying.        | One pikin dey cry.            |

5. Pronouns: Standard English, distinguishes between subject, object, and possessive pronouns (he, him, his). However, Nigeria Pidgin English Pronoun system is simpler, with less case distinction.

Examples:

| <b>Standard English</b> | <b>Nigeria Pidgin English</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| I am tired.             | I don tire.                   |
| He is my brother.       | E be my brother.              |
| It is not good.         | E no good.                    |
| He gave it to me.       | E give am to me.              |
| This is her book.       | Na she own buk.               |

6. Relative Clauses: Standard English uses that, who, which as relativizers. However, Nigeria Pidgin English uses “wey” as a general relativizer; resumptive pronouns are common.

Examples:

| <b>Standard English</b>             | <b>Nigeria Pidgin English</b>      |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| I saw the book that you bought.     | I see di book wey you buy.         |
| The food which you cooked is sweet. | Di food wey you cook sweet.        |
| The man that I saw.                 | Di man wey I see.                  |
| That is the house where I live.     | Na dat be di house wey I dey live. |

7. Copula (Be): In Standard English, obligatory copula in predicative sentences (She is happy). However, Nigeria Pidgin English, Copula can be dey (progressive/stative), na (identification/focus), or sometimes omitted.

Examples:

| <b>Standard English</b> | <b>Nigeria Pidgin English</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| This is my house.       | Na my house be dis.           |
| I am ready              | I don ready                   |
| She is a teacher.       | She na teacher.               |
| He is a good boy.       | E na good boy.                |
| It is late already.     | E don late already.           |

8. Prepositions: Standard English is large, specialized inventory of prepositions. However, Nigeria Pidgin English is smaller in set, with multifunctional prepositions. “for” covers “in, at, to, on”.

Examples:

| <b>Standard English</b>    | <b>Nigeria Pidgin English</b> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| I am in Lagos.             | I dey for Lagos.              |
| He sat beside me.          | E siddon near me.             |
| She is in the kitchen.     | She dey for kitchen.          |
| Put the book on the table. | Put the book for table.       |

9. Questions (Interrogatives): Standard English uses auxiliary inversion, e.g, (Are you coming?). In contrast, in Nigeria Pidgin English there is no inversion; word order remains the same, intonation signals the question.

Examples:

| <b>Standard English</b> | <b>Nigeria Pidgin English</b>   |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| What is your name?      | Wetin be your name?             |
| Who is that boy?        | Who dat boy be?                 |
| How are you?            | How you dey?                    |
| Are you coming?         | You dey come?                   |
| What did you buy?       | Wetin you buy? / You buy wetin? |

## **2.6 Previous Studies on the Syntax of Nigerian Pidgin**

Over the past few decades, linguistic scholars have engaged with the grammar and syntax of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), challenging the long-standing stigma that the language is linguistically impoverished or structurally chaotic. Although Pidgin languages, especially those spoken in West Africa, were historically overlooked in formal linguistic

inquiry, contemporary research has shown that Nigerian Pidgin possesses systematic grammatical rules, particularly at the syntactic level.

One of the earliest and most influential works in this regard is Elugbe and Omamor's (1991) seminal study *Nigerian Pidgin: Background and Prospects*. The authors assert that Nigerian Pidgin, far from being a mere corrupt version of English, is a language system with its own unique grammatical features. They examine its sentence structure, verb usage, and tense-aspect-modality system, and argue for its recognition as a legitimate language worthy of academic and societal consideration.

Similarly, Faraclas (1996), in *Nigerian Pidgin: Grammar and Usage*, provides a detailed grammatical overview of NPE. His work underscores the regularity and structure of Pidgin syntax, particularly in the domain of tense marking, word order, and subject-verb agreement. Faraclas argues that Nigerian Pidgin syntax mirrors universal syntactic principles but adapts them in context-specific ways. For instance, instead of inflectional morphology, NPE relies on particle-based syntax for marking aspect (e.g., *de* for progressive aspect, *don* for perfective, *go* for future).

Another critical contribution is Mensah and Udoh's (2015) study on *Syntactic Processes in Nigerian Pidgin English*. Their analysis provides evidence that Nigerian Pidgin maintains a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) syntactic structure similar to English but differs significantly in its handling of determiners, auxiliaries, and relative clauses. For example, while Standard English marks tense through morphological inflection (e.g., *walks*, *walked*),

NPE utilizes auxiliary-like markers (e.g., dey, don, go) that remain invariant regardless of subject or time frame.

Essien (2018) further explores syntactic innovation in NPE, emphasizing how the language adapts to various communicative settings, particularly in media, youth culture, and social media discourse. Essien finds that NPE's flexibility in phrase formation and simplification does not imply the absence of rules. Instead, it reflects the socio-functional dynamism of the language, where speakers prioritize semantic clarity and contextual appropriateness over rigid grammatical conformity.

From a comparative syntax perspective, Agheysi (1984) offers insights into how Nigerian Pidgin diverges from Standard English not merely in vocabulary, but in phrase structure and clause combination strategies. She observes, for instance, that while Standard English relies on embedding and subordination (e.g., I know that he came), Nigerian Pidgin prefers parataxis or coordinated structures (e.g., I sabi say im don come), which preserve information without complex embedding.

In recent years, attention has shifted to using formal linguistic models to analyze NPE. For example, Ihemere (2020) uses X-bar theory to explore the structure of noun and verb phrases in Nigerian Pidgin. He demonstrates that NPE, despite its contact origin, follows hierarchical constituency rules that align with major syntactic theories. His findings show that noun phrases in NPE are often head-initial and may lack functional projections like Determiner Phrases (DPs), but still maintain internal consistency.

Another significant contribution is Okoh (2022) who applies Minimalist syntax to the analysis of Pidgin clause structure. In his study, he uses the concept of Merge to demonstrate that Pidgin's syntactic structure is both efficient and minimalist. For example, in the sentence *Dem don go*, the functional heads (Tense and Aspect) are realized as particles rather than affixes, yet still fulfill the syntactic roles postulated in generative grammar. This supports the claim that Pidgin languages are optimal grammatical systems shaped by cognitive and communicative needs.

Furthermore, Ojebode (2021) analyzes the syntax of Nigerian Pidgin in the context of digital communication. His study reveals that Pidgin syntax online shows a high degree of economy, elliptical constructions, and code-switching. Yet, even in these reduced or hybridized forms, syntactic rules are still observable. This is evident in repeated subject marking (e.g., *"I dey go I no wan late"*), topicalization, and consistent SVO ordering.

Collectively, these studies converge on the view that Nigerian Pidgin English is not merely a corrupted or degenerated form of English, but a language with its own structured syntax, especially at the phrase level. While the language lacks extensive standardization and varies regionally, there is a broad syntactic framework that governs its usage. Pidgin's syntactic system is flexible, context-driven, and influenced by both its English lexifier and indigenous Nigerian languages. However, these influences do not render it grammatically unstable; instead, they enrich its syntactic architecture and offer a unique window into language evolution, simplification, and contact dynamics.

Nevertheless, many of the reviewed studies have focused on general syntactic features or clause-level structures. There remains a significant gap in the literature regarding detailed phrase structure analysis of Nigerian Pidgin English using formal syntactic models like Phrase Structure Grammar or the Minimalist Program. Very few studies have systematically used phrase markers, tree diagrams, or constituency tests to isolate and describe the underlying structure of noun phrases, verb phrases, and other syntactic units in Nigerian Pidgin. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to that under-explored area by offering a formal analysis of phrase structures in NPE and comparing them with their Standard English equivalents.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for the study. It discusses the research design, the population and sample of the study, sampling technique, instruments for data collection, methods of data collection, method for data analysis, and issues of validity and reliability. The purpose is to ensure a systematic approach to investigating the syntactic structures of Nigerian Pidgin English, particularly its phrase structure, and comparing them with Standard English.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Bryman (2016) highlights “Research design as a framework for collecting and analyzing data that reflects decisions about priority given to dimensions of the research process.” Research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data, reflecting decisions about the priority given to a range of dimensions of the research process. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design.

According to Silverman (2020), “Qualitative research as an interpretive process that seeks to understand how people construct meaning in their everyday lives”. Qualitative research focuses on the meanings, experiences, and descriptions rather than on numbers or quantitative measures. This is considered appropriate because the research seeks to analyze and describe the underlying phrase structures of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) without manipulating variables. The design allows for the collection of authentic linguistic data in

both spoken and written forms, followed by syntactic analysis using the framework of Phrase Structure Grammar.

### **3.2 Population for the Study**

The population for this study comprises 300 Level students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. This group is considered relevant because students frequently alternate between Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English in informal communication, making them suitable sources of data for examining phrase structure patterns.

### **3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique**

A sample of twenty (20) students at the 300 Level is purposively selected from the Department of English and Literary Studies. Purposive sampling is considered suitable because the study requires participants who are active users of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) in both spoken and written contexts. Several variables informed the choice of sampling:

- i. Age: Participants fall within the age range of 18–25 years, which represents the dominant age group of undergraduates in Nigerian universities and a group that frequently alternates between Standard English and Nigerian Pidgin in informal communication.
- ii. Gender: Both male and female students are included in order to ensure gender balance and to avoid bias in the linguistic data. This also allows the study to capture possible gender-based differences in the use of phrase structures.

- iii. Native Language Background: The sample includes students from diverse linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulfulde, and others) since Nigerian Pidgin functions as a lingua franca across ethnic groups. This diversity provides a wider representation of how Pidgin phrase structures are used by speakers with different first languages.
- iv. Frequency of Pidgin Use: Participants are selected based on their demonstrated regular use of Nigerian Pidgin English in informal interactions, ensuring that the data collected reflects natural usage.

By considering these variables, the sampling technique ensures that the data represents a realistic and diverse range of Nigerian Pidgin English usage among university students, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the findings.

### **3.4 Research Instruments**

The instruments employed in this study are selected to facilitate the collection of authentic linguistic data in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). They include:

- i. Audio Recorder: Audio recorder was used to capture naturally occurring spoken interactions among students. This ensures that spontaneous use of Nigerian Pidgin English is preserved for syntactic analysis.
- ii. Interview Guide: A semi-structured interview guide is designed to elicit additional spoken data where needed, focusing on participants' everyday use of Nigerian Pidgin English.

- iii. Observation Checklist: Observation checklist was used to document contextual details (such as setting, participants, and interactional dynamics) during the recording of conversations.
- iv. Written Text Samples: Written text samples were collected from participants' WhatsApp chats, social media posts, and short informal written pieces in Nigerian Pidgin English. These serve as written data sources for comparative analysis with spoken Nigerian Pidgin English.

By employing these instruments, the study ensures the availability of rich, diverse, and reliable data sources that will be subjected to syntactic analysis using Phrase Structure Grammar.

### **3.5 Sources of Data**

The primary sources of data for this study were spoken and written outputs of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) produced by undergraduate students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Spoken data were obtained from audio recordings of informal conversations among students, while written data were collected from WhatsApp chats, social media posts, and short compositions voluntarily submitted by participants. These diverse sources ensured that both oral and written forms of Nigerian Pidgin English were adequately represented.

In addition to the primary data, the study made use of secondary sources. These included textbooks, journal articles, dissertations, and online publications related to Nigerian Pidgin English, syntax, and phrase structure grammar. The secondary sources

provided the theoretical and empirical background necessary for analyzing the data, helped to frame the study within existing scholarship, and served as a point of reference in comparing findings with previous studies.

### **3.6 Method for Data Collection**

This study adopts a qualitative method of data collection since it focuses on non-numerical data in the form of naturally occurring speech and written texts in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). The choice of the qualitative method aligns with the research design, which emphasizes describing and analyzing phrase structures rather than quantifying language use.

Data were collected in two stages during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic session. In the first stage, spoken data were obtained through audio recordings of informal student conversations in hostels and common areas. Participants were informed beforehand, and their consent was obtained before recording. An observation checklist was also employed to note relevant contextual features such as setting and participant interaction.

In the second stage, written data were sourced from participants' WhatsApp chats, social media posts, and short informal written pieces that they voluntarily submitted. These texts were compiled to complement the spoken data, thereby providing a comprehensive set of linguistic materials for syntactic analysis.

All recorded and written data were transcribed, anonymized to protect participants' identities, and organized systematically for analysis using Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG).

### 3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the framework of Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG). Sentences in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) were broken down into their constituent structures (NP, VP, PP, AdjP, AdvP, etc.). Phrase markers and tree diagrams were employed to illustrate the hierarchical syntactic structures.

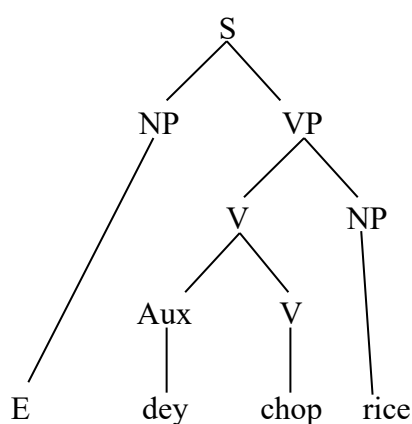
A comparative analysis was then carried out to identify similarities and differences between Nigerian Pidgin English phrase structures and those of Standard English. This approach provided a systematic means of describing the grammatical features of Nigerian Pidgin English and determining how its phrase structures diverge from or align with Standard English.

#### 3.7.1 Sample Phrase Structure Diagrams

To illustrate the analytic method, below are sample tree diagrams representing Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) sentences and their Standard English equivalents.

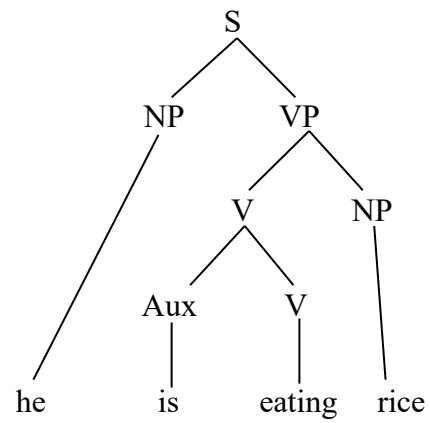
##### **Example 1:** Verb Phrase (VP)

Nigerian Pidgin English: E dey chop rice



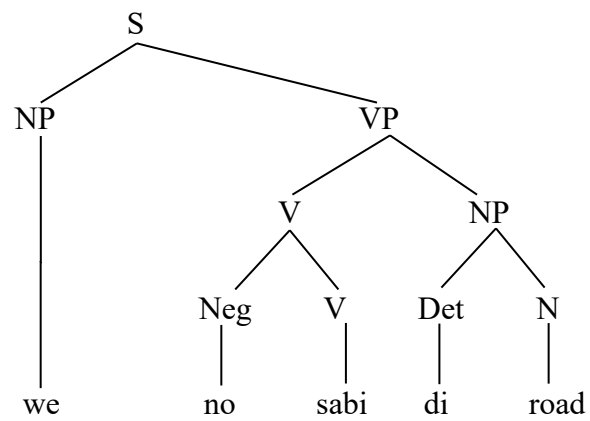
Standard English:

He is eating rice

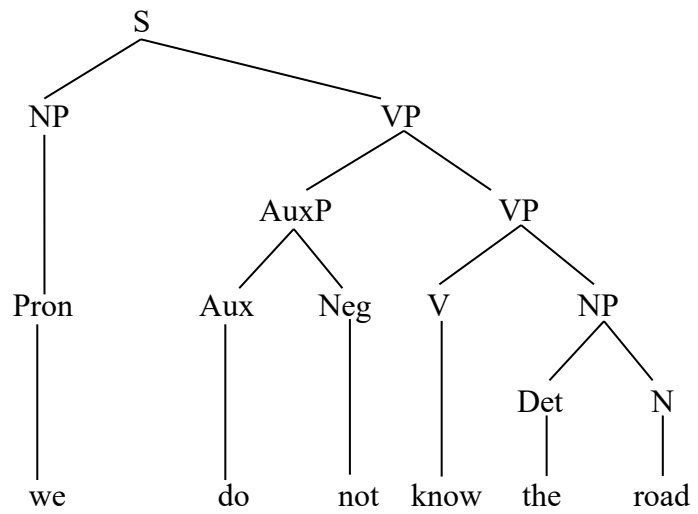


**Example 2:** Full Sentence (S)

Nigerian Pidgin English: We no sabi di road.

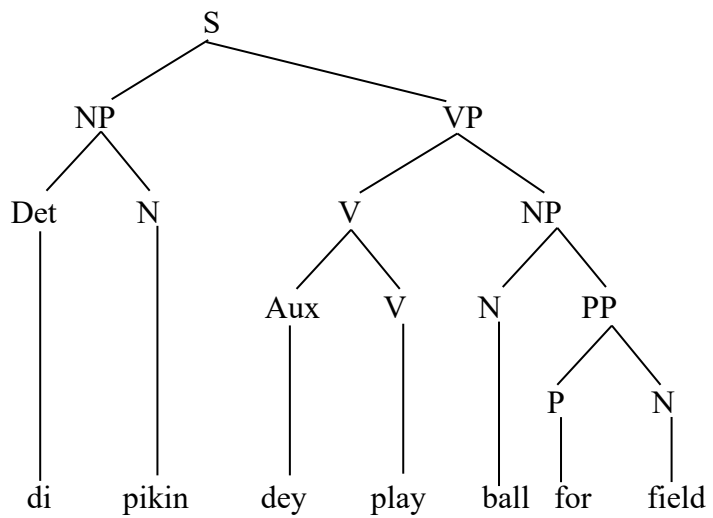


English: We do not know the road.

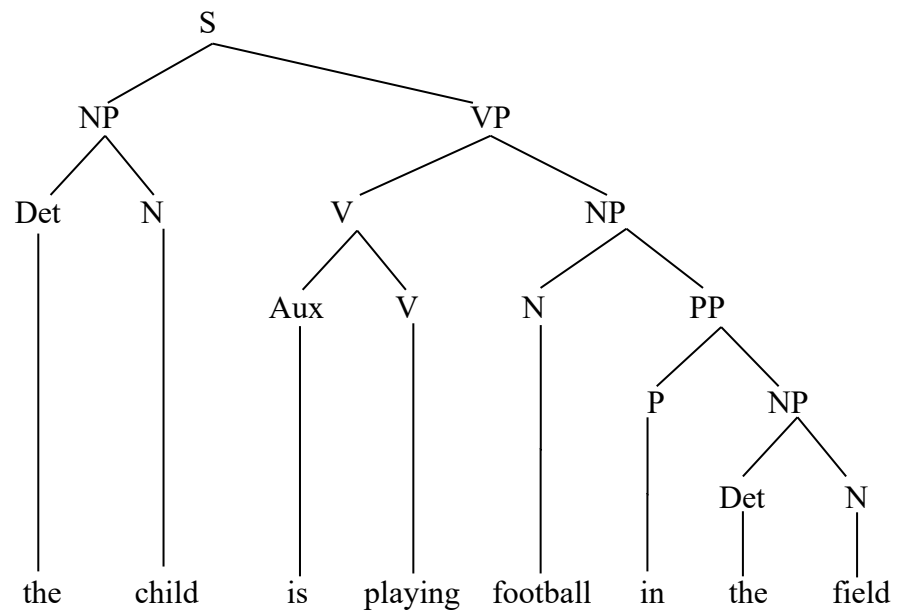


**Example 3:** Full Sentence (S)

Nigerian Pidgin English: Di pikin dey play ball for field



Standard English: The child is playing football in the field



These sample trees demonstrate the use of Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG) to identify the hierarchical structure of Nigerian Pidgin sentences. In Chapter Four, more complex data will be analyzed systematically with phrase markers.

### 3.8 Limitations of the Methodology

While the chosen methodology was effective in generating authentic linguistic data, certain limitations were encountered. First, the sample size of twenty participants, though sufficient for qualitative analysis, limits the generalizability of the findings to a larger population. Second, the reliance on informal conversations and social media texts may not capture all possible syntactic structures of Nigerian Pidgin English, particularly in formal or semi-formal contexts. Finally, issues of observer's paradox where participants alter their

speech due to awareness of being recorded could not be entirely eliminated, although efforts were made to minimize this effect.

### **3.9 Ethical Consideration**

Ethical guidelines were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and no real names or identifying details appear in the transcripts. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes in line with research ethics standards.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected for the study. The analysis focuses on phrase structure in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), using the framework of Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG). For clarity, the data is presented in two parts. The first part focuses on sentences collected from spoken and written Pidgin English, and the second part focuses on its Standard English equivalents. The analysis highlights similarities and differences in the phrase structure of both varieties, using phrase markers and tree diagrams for illustration.

#### **4.1 Data Presentation**

The data for this study were drawn from both spoken and written forms of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). The spoken data were obtained through audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations among 300-level students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, complemented by observational notes taken during interactions. The written data were collected from participants' WhatsApp chats, social media posts, and short informal compositions voluntarily submitted.

The selected sentences represent commonly used expressions in Nigerian Pidgin English across different domains of interaction. They include structures involving noun phrases, verb phrases, adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases, tense–aspect markers, and negation.

Examples include:

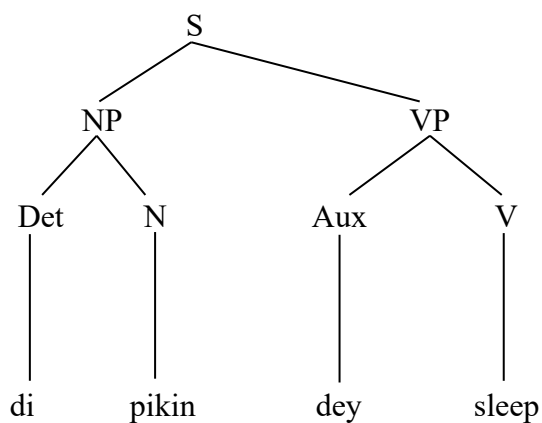
1. Di pikin dey sleep. (Pidgin) → The child is sleeping. (English)
2. Di woman dey cook rice. (Pidgin) → The woman is cooking rice. (English)
3. Dem don chop food. (Pidgin) → They have eaten food. (English)
4. I don finish the work. (Pidgin) → I have finished di work. (English)
5. Di pikin dey cry for house. (Pidgin) → The child is crying in the house. (English)
6. Di boy dey play for field. (Pidgin) → The boy is playing on the field. (English)
7. She go come tomorrow. (Pidgin) → She will come tomorrow. (English)
8. E go travel next week. (Pidgin) → He will travel next week. (English)
9. We no sabi di road. (Pidgin) → We do not know the road. (English)
10. Dem no like di food. (Pidgin) → They do not like the food. (English)

These sentences were selected because they represent typical syntactic constructions involving noun phrases, verb phrases, adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases, tense-aspect markers, and negation.

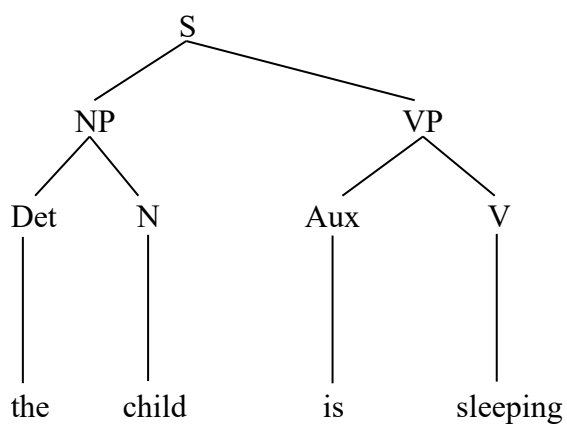
## 4.2 Analysis of Phrase Structure in Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English

### 4.2.1 Sentence One

Pidgin: Di pikin dey sleep.



English: The child is sleeping.



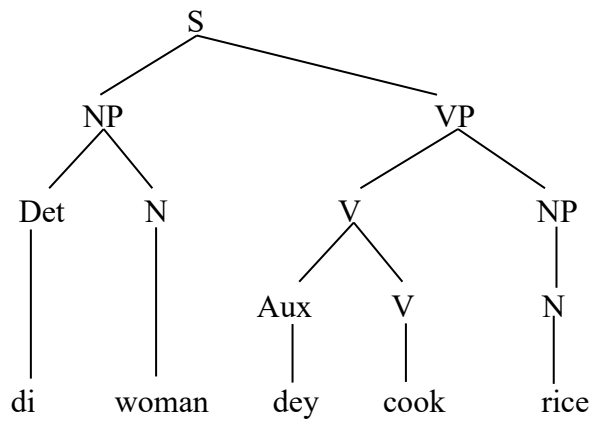
Analysis:

In Nigerian Pidgin English, the auxiliary “dey” marks the progressive aspect, whereas Standard English expresses the same function with the auxiliary “is” combined with the -

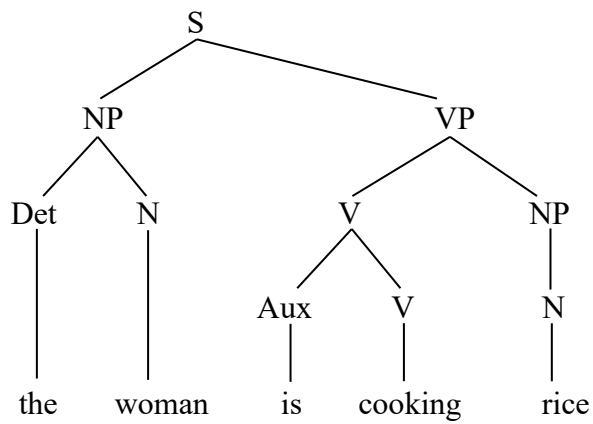
ing form of the verb (sleeping). Thus, NPE uses a particle-based progressive marker, while SE relies on inflectional morphology.

#### 4.2.2 Sentence Two

Pidgin: Di woman dey cook rice.



English: The woman is cooking rice.

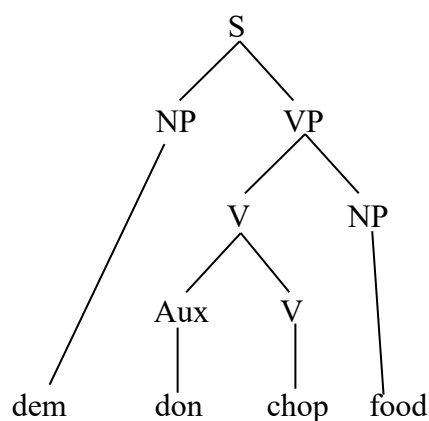


Analysis:

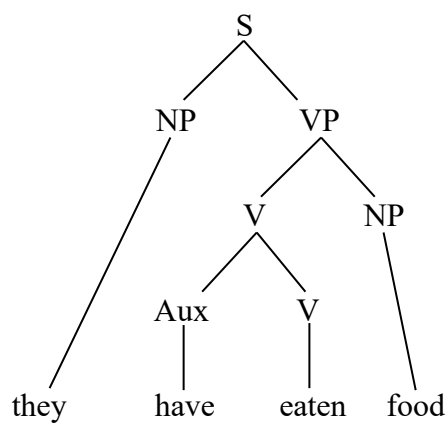
The auxiliary “dey” marks the progressive aspect, showing an ongoing action just like “is/are” in English. The verb “cook” remains uninflected, maintaining Pidgin’s non-inflectional pattern. The sentence retains a clear  $S \rightarrow NP + VP$  structure.

### 4.2.3 Sentence Three

Pidgin: Dem don chop food.



English: They have eaten food.

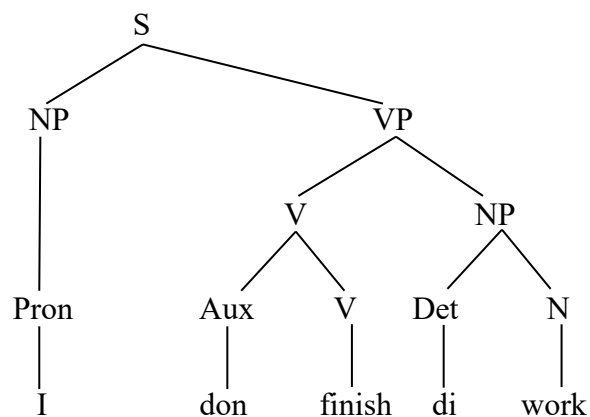


Analysis:

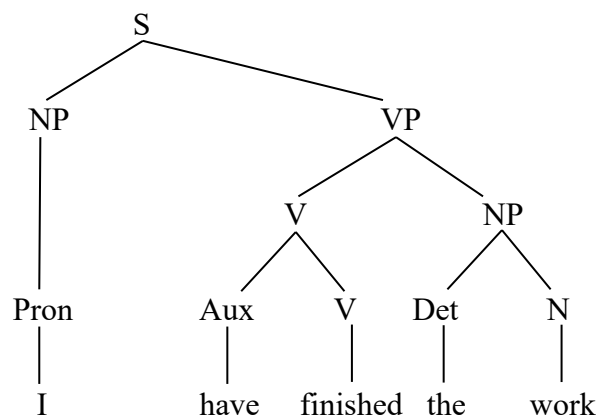
The perfective aspect in Nigerian Pidgin English is expressed through the preverbal particle “don”, while Standard English uses auxiliary have + past participle (have eaten). This shows functional equivalence but structural difference, as Pidgin avoids inflectional morphology and uses invariant particles.

#### 4.2.4 Sentence Four

Pidgin: I don finish di work.



English: I have finished the work.



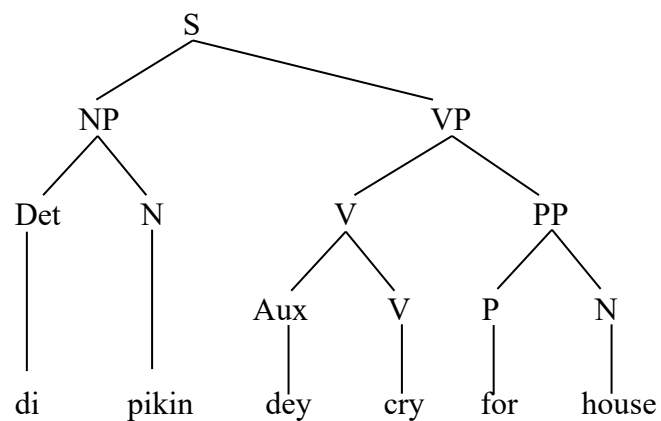
Analysis:

The perfective marker “don” indicates a completed action, similar to “have” in English.

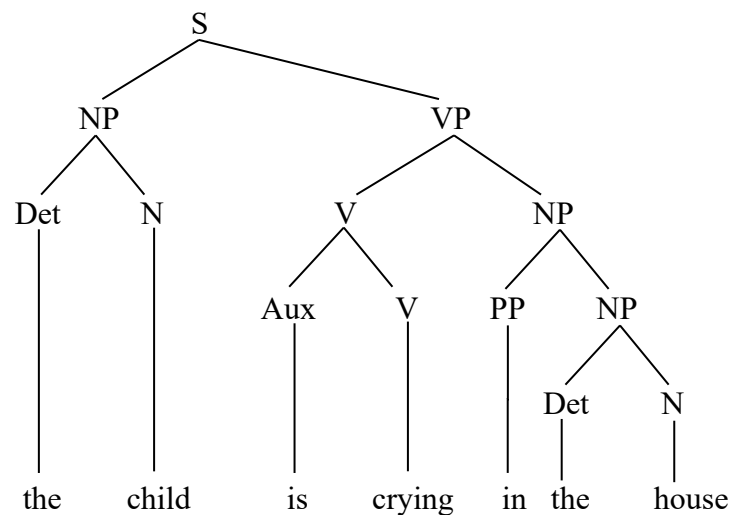
While Standard English uses inflection (have + past participle), NPE uses invariant particles before the verb, maintaining analytic simplicity.

#### 4.2.5 Sentence Five

Pidgin: Di pikin dey cry for house.



English: The child is crying in the house.

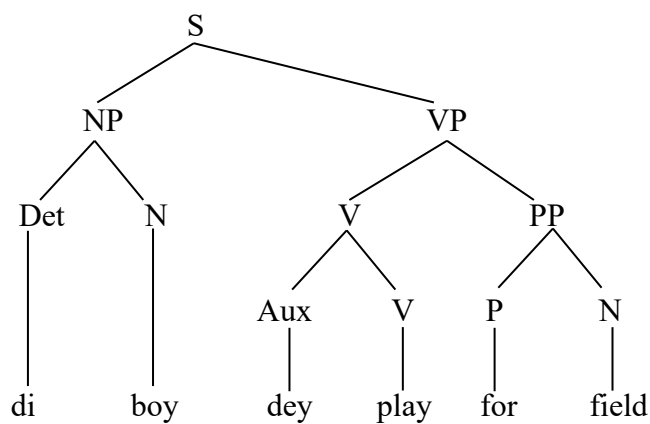


Analysis:

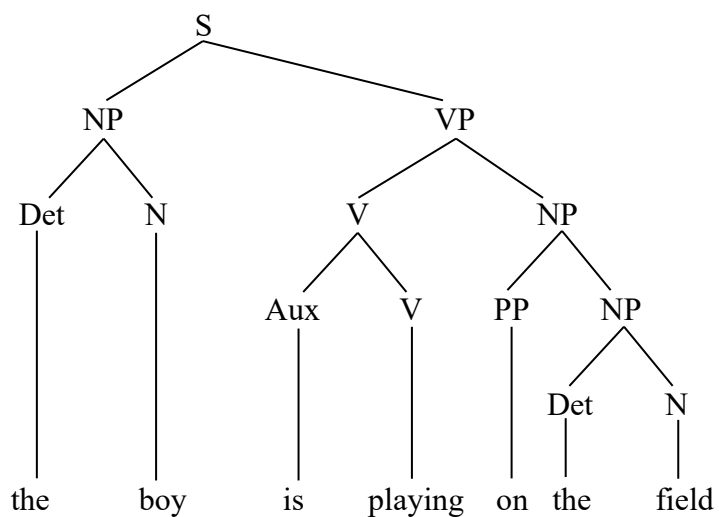
The preposition “for” is multifunctional in Nigerian Pidgin English, covering several meanings (in, at, on). In Standard English, prepositions are semantically more specialized. Despite this, the syntactic position of Prepositional Phrase (PP) remains constant in both varieties.

#### 4.2.6 Sentence Six

Pidgin: Di boy dey play for field.



English: The boy is playing on the field.



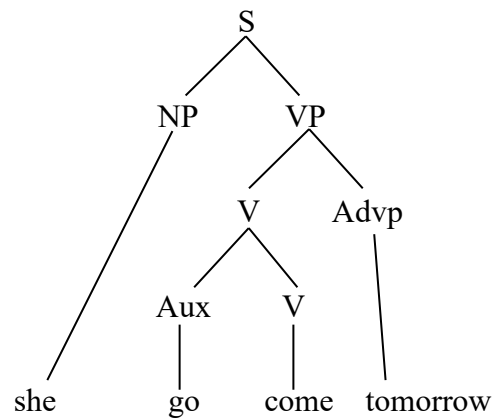
Analysis:

The preposition “for” functions broadly, meaning “in,” “at,” or “on” depending on context.

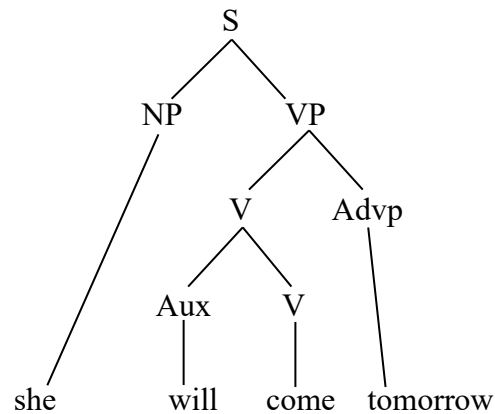
This shows Pidgin’s semantic flexibility compared to English’s more restricted prepositional system. The syntactic order, however, mirrors that of Standard English.

#### 4.2.7 Sentence Seven

Pidgin: She go come tomorrow.



English: She will come tomorrow.

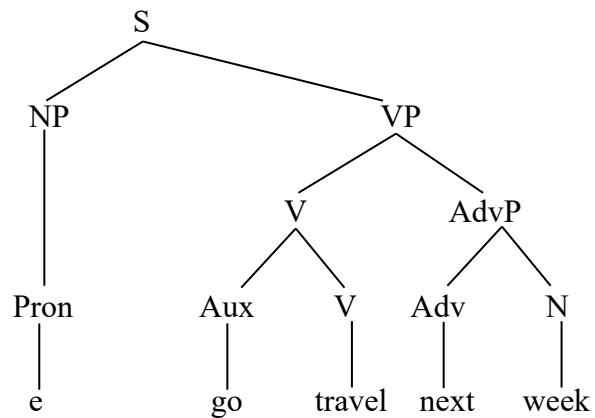


Analysis:

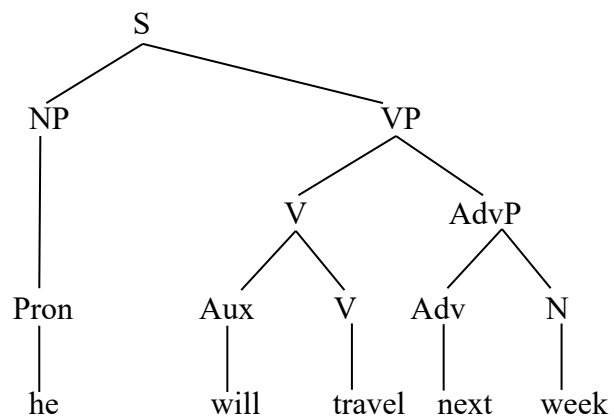
Future tense in Nigerian Pidgin English is marked by the preverbal particle “go”, which serves the same function as will/shall in English. However, unlike English, the verb remains in base form (come), without morphological variation.

#### 4.2.8 Sentence Eight

Pidgin: E go travel next week.



English: He will travel next week.



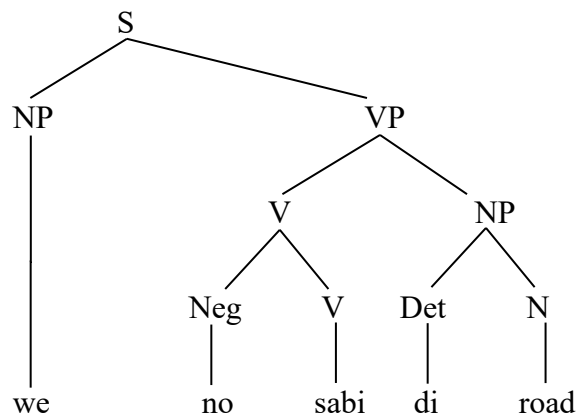
Analysis:

The particle “go” is the future marker in NPE, corresponding to “will/shall” in English.

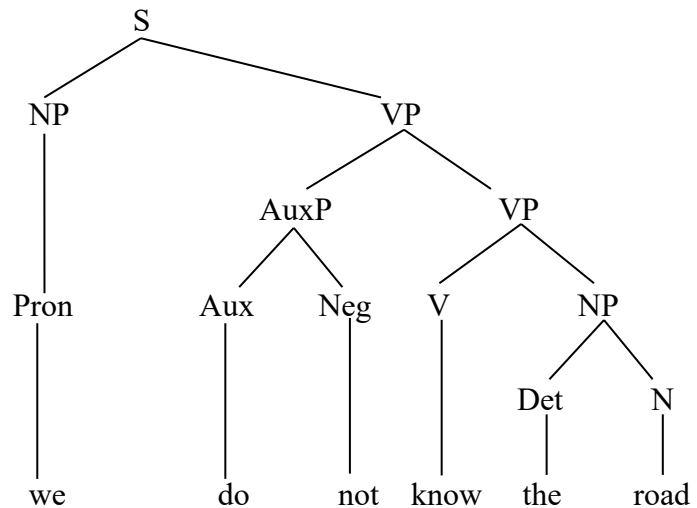
Pidgin verbs do not inflect for tense; instead, they rely on preverbal particles to express temporal meaning, demonstrating a more analytic tense marking system.

#### 4.2.9 Sentence Nine

Pidgin: We no sabi di road.



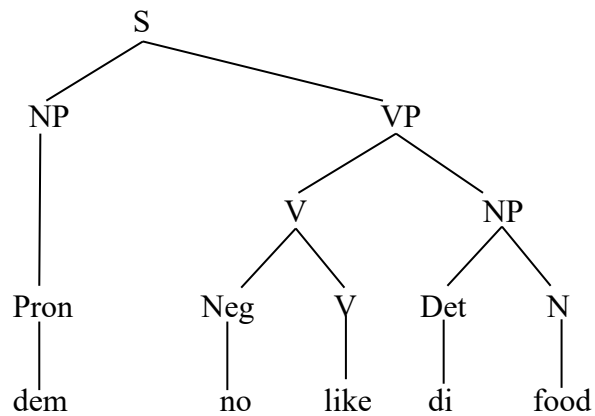
English: We do not know the road.



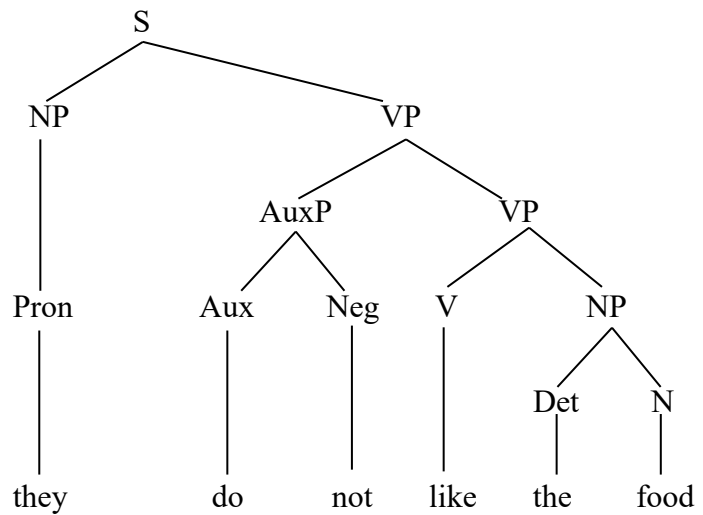
Analysis: Negation in Nigerian Pidgin English is realized through “no”, placed directly before the verb, unlike Standard English where negation requires an auxiliary (do + not). This illustrates the analytic nature of Nigerian Pidgin English syntax, with invariant markers replacing inflectional auxiliaries.

#### 4.2.10 Sentence Ten

Pidgin: Dem no like di food.



English: They do not like the food.



Analysis:

In Nigerian Pidgin English, negation is marked by the particle “no” placed directly before the verb (Dem no like). This structure does not require any auxiliary verb. In Standard English, however, negation involves do-support, where the auxiliary “do” carries the negative marker “not” before the main verb (They do not like).

### **4.3 Comparative Findings**

From the analysis above, several key syntactic differences between Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English emerge:

**Tense/Aspect Marking:** Nigerian Pidgin English uses preverbal particles (dey, don, go) instead of auxiliary + inflection (is eating, has eaten, will come).

**Negation:** Nigerian Pidgin English uses simple negative markers (no, never), while English uses auxiliary + not.

**Prepositions:** Nigerian Pidgin English relies heavily on multifunctional prepositions like for and go, unlike the specialized inventory in Standard English.

**Verb Inflection:** Verbs in Nigerian Pidgin English are not inflected (chop, come, sabi remain unchanged), whereas English verbs change form (eat/eats/ate).

**Word Order:** Both Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English maintain SVO word order, showing structural similarity despite morphological reduction.

#### **4.4 Discussion of the Findings**

The analysis of phrase structures in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) compared with Standard English (SE) reveals both convergence and divergence, with important implications for the study of syntax and the linguistic status of Nigerian Pidgin English.

First, the findings on tense and aspect marking show that Nigerian Pidgin English consistently uses preverbal particles such as “dey” (progressive), “don” (perfective), and “go” (future), while Standard English relies on auxiliary verbs combined with inflectional morphology (is eating, has eaten, will come). This demonstrates that Nigerian Pidgin English follows an analytic grammatical strategy, using separate words rather than bound morphemes to express grammatical categories. Such findings confirm earlier claims by Faracías (1996) and Mensah & Udoh (2015) that Nigerian Pidgin English systematically employs invariant particles to mark tense and aspect. These results also directly answer the research objective of describing how Nigerian Pidgin English structures tense and aspect compared to Standard English.

Second, negation in Nigerian Pidgin English is achieved by placing the negative particle *no* directly before the verb (We *no* sabi di road), unlike Standard English which requires auxiliary support (We do not know the road). This highlights Nigerian Pidgin English’s syntactic economy, as noted by Adegboja (2004), since it avoids auxiliary insertion while retaining clarity of meaning. The finding underscores that Nigerian Pidgin English operates with its own consistent rule for negation, challenging the perception of it as a deficient system.

Third, the analysis of prepositions shows that Nigerian Pidgin English makes extensive use of multifunctional markers such as “for” and “go”, which cover a wider semantic range than Standard English prepositions (in, at, on, to). This multifunctionality simplifies the prepositional system while also demonstrating semantic flexibility. As Holm (2000) observed, contact languages often streamline grammatical systems, and Nigerian Pidgin English’s prepositions illustrate this tendency clearly. This fulfils the research objective of identifying areas where Nigerian Pidgin English diverges structurally from Standard English.

Fourth, the findings on “verb inflection” confirm that Nigerian Pidgin English verbs remain invariant (chop, sabi, waka), while SE verbs undergo morphological changes (eat/eats/ate/eaten). This pattern aligns with Bickerton’s (1981) observation that Pidgin and Creole languages generally avoid complex inflectional morphology. The lack of inflection in Nigerian Pidgin English does not hinder communication but instead reflects a systematic simplification strategy.

Finally, despite these differences, both Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English consistently follow the Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) word order. This structural similarity underpins mutual intelligibility between the two varieties and reinforces the argument of Elugbe & Omamor (1991) that Nigerian Pidgin English, though simplified, is syntactically stable and rule-governed.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Nigerian Pidgin English is not a chaotic or “broken” form of English but a structured linguistic system with its own strategies for expressing tense, aspect, negation, and possession. The discussion confirms that Nigerian Pidgin English simplifies morphology and auxiliary use but compensates through analytic markers and stable word order. This not only validates Nigerian Pidgin English as a legitimate subject of linguistic study but also contributes to broader debates on the syntax of contact languages.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides a summary of the research, presents the major findings, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations. It also suggests areas for further study. The purpose is to bring the study to a close by highlighting its contributions to linguistic knowledge, particularly in the area of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) syntax.

#### **5.1 Summary**

This research set out to examine the syntactic structure of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) with a specific focus on phrase structure. The study was motivated by the persistent misconception that Pidgin English is a “broken” or “inferior” form of English, lacking systematic rules.

In Chapter One, the background to the study was introduced, with emphasis on the increasing use of Nigerian Pidgin as a lingua franca across Nigeria. The problem statement highlighted the need for linguistic analysis of Pidgin at the phrase structure level. The aim, objectives, research questions, and significance of the study were clearly outlined.

Chapter Two reviewed related literature on Pidgin English and its historical development, status, and functions in Nigeria. It also examined syntactic theory, with Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG). Previous studies were reviewed to identify gaps that this study sought to fill, particularly the under-explored area of phrase structure analysis in Nigerian Pidgin English.

In Chapter Three, the methodology was presented. A descriptive qualitative design was adopted, with data drawn from spoken and written sources among 300-level students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. The sampling technique was purposive, and phrase structure grammar was chosen as the method of analysis. Sample phrase structure diagrams were provided to illustrate the analytic approach.

Chapter Four presented and analyzed data. Sentences from Nigerian Pidgin English were compared with their Standard English equivalents, and phrase structure trees were constructed. The analysis revealed both similarities and differences between the two varieties, with particular emphasis on tense/aspect marking, negation, prepositional usage, verb inflection, and word order.

## **5.2 Summary of Major Findings**

Based on the analysis, the following findings were made:

**Rule-Governed Syntax:** Nigerian Pidgin English is not chaotic; it operates with systematic syntactic rules that can be described and analysed using phrase structure grammar.

**Tense and Aspect Marking:** Nigerian Pidgin English employs preverbal particles (*dey*, *don*, *go*) to indicate tense and aspect, whereas Standard English relies on auxiliaries and verb inflections (*is eating*, *has eaten*, *will come*).

Negation: Negation in Nigerian Pidgin English is marked with simple particles (no, never) placed before the verb, unlike Standard English, which requires auxiliaries plus not.

Prepositions: Nigerian Pidgin English uses multifunctional prepositions such as for and go that cover a wide semantic range, whereas English uses specialized prepositions with more restricted functions.

Verb Inflection: Verbs in Nigerian Pidgin English are invariant (chop, come, sabi), while Standard English verbs undergo morphological inflection (eat/eats/ate).

Word Order Similarity: Despite these differences, both Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English consistently follow the Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) word order, showing that Pidgin maintains syntactic stability.

Simplification, Not Deficiency: Nigerian Pidgin English simplifies grammar by removing morphological inflections and auxiliaries but compensates with particles and word order. This proves that the language is functional and adaptive, rather than deficient.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The study concludes that Nigerian Pidgin English is a structured and legitimate language variety, governed by identifiable syntactic rules. Its phrase structures, though simplified compared to Standard English, reveal consistency, order, and communicative adequacy.

Contrary to negative perceptions that Pidgin English is “broken English,” this research has shown that Nigerian Pidgin English exhibits systematic grammar that is analyzable within established linguistic frameworks. By relying on preverbal particles, multifunctional prepositions, and a simplified syntax, Nigerian Pidgin English demonstrates linguistic creativity and adaptation to the sociolinguistic realities of Nigeria.

Thus, Nigerian Pidgin English deserves academic recognition as a language of study, as well as wider acceptance as a functional *lingua franca* in Nigeria.

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