

**FOCUS CONSTRUCTION IN NIGERIAN PIDGIN**

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**BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
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## APPROVAL

I, **MICHAEL ONOME ELIZABETH**, a student of the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin with Matriculation number **ART2100793** completed the requirements for the course work and research for the Bachelor of Arts Degree of the University of Benin. The work embodied in this project is original and has not been submitted in part or whole for any other degree or diploma programme of this or any other university or institution.

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## PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATION

I, **MICHAEL ONOME ELIZABETH** with matriculation number **ART2100793** declare that this work titled “**FOCUS CONSTRUCTION IN NIGERIAN PIDGIN**” has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test (with a score of %), and so does not violate any copyright regulations.

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to Almighty God, whose grace, wisdom, and strength have guided me through every stage of this work. To Him be all the glory and honor

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Firstly, I give all glory and honor to Almighty God for His grace, strength, and wisdom throughout the course of this project and my academic journey. His divine guidance has been my source of inspiration and perseverance.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin (NP) from the perspective of Information Structure Theory, exploring how speakers organize and highlight information within communication. The research investigates how focus serves as a discourse strategy for emphasizing new, contrastive, or significant elements in an utterance. Data drawn from natural NP conversations reveal that focus is commonly expressed through fronting (preposing) and the use of the focus marker *na*.

Findings show that Nigerian Pidgin speakers employ focus constructions to distinguish between given and new information, ensuring clarity and communicative efficiency. The focus marker *na* functions as a pragmatic device that signals emphasis and contrast, guiding listeners toward the most relevant part of the message. This pattern reflects the influence of both English and African substrate languages, showing that NP uses systematic strategies for information management in discourse. The study concludes that focus in Nigerian Pidgin is primarily an information structuring mechanism, revealing the language's communicative depth and pragmatic sophistication.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Nigerian Pidgin (NP), also known as Naija or Naija Langwej, is a widely spoken contact language in Nigeria that functions as a major means of communication among people of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. It is an English-lexified contact variety that has evolved to serve as a lingua franca across social classes, geographical boundaries, and ethnic groups in the country (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991). The language is used in both formal and informal contexts, ranging from interpersonal communication to popular music, entertainment, religious preaching, and social media interactions (Faraclas, 2013). In recent times, NP has gained significant recognition not only as a tool for mass communication but also as a symbol of national identity and social solidarity. The increasing acceptance and functional expansion of NP across Nigeria underscore its linguistic richness and communicative efficiency.

Nigerian Pidgin is spoken by millions of Nigerians as either a first or second language. It cuts across linguistic boundaries, serving as a bridge language between speakers of different indigenous tongues. According to Egbokhare (2001), it is particularly dominant in urban areas such as Lagos, Benin City, Port Harcourt, Warri, and Calabar, where ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity is high. The language also thrives in university campuses, markets, transport systems, and the entertainment industry, where it performs unifying and expressive functions (Deuber, 2005). Although Nigerian Pidgin is

not officially recognized in Nigeria's language policy, it enjoys massive de facto prestige due to its wide intelligibility and flexibility in various communicative domains (Faraclas, 1996).

From a linguistic standpoint, Nigerian Pidgin is distinct in structure and function from both Standard English and Nigeria's indigenous languages. It has developed a stable phonological and grammatical system characterized by simplified morphology, flexible word order, and rich use of particles (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991). Its lexicon is primarily derived from English, but it also incorporates lexical and grammatical influences from indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo (Egbokhare, 2001). Despite this hybridity, NP has achieved a high degree of internal consistency, which allows for efficient and expressive communication. The language is no longer viewed merely as a "corrupted" or "broken" form of English but as a legitimate linguistic system with its own rules and structure (Faraclas, 2013).

Within the grammatical framework of NP, focus construction represents one of the most salient and expressive features of its syntax and discourse structure. Focus constructions are linguistic strategies used to highlight or emphasize specific parts of an utterance, thus drawing attention to particular pieces of information (Lambrecht, 1994). In Nigerian Pidgin, the most common focus-marking device is the particle "na", which precedes the focused constituent.

For example, in Na Mary buy di book ("It was Mary who bought the book"), the focus particle na introduces and emphasizes "Mary" as the key information in the

sentence. This structure is used to express contrastive, emphatic, or corrective meanings in discourse. The productivity and flexibility of the na-focus construction in NP make it a central aspect of the language's syntax and pragmatics (Egbokhare, 2001).

The use of focus constructions in NP varies across regions and contexts of use. For instance, speakers in the Niger Delta region often employ "na" in both equative and contrastive structures, while speakers in other regions may rely on intonation or word order variation to express focus (Simard, 2019). Furthermore, the interaction between syntactic focus marking and prosodic prominence such as pitch and stress remains an area of ongoing research (Simard, 2020). These variations reflect the dynamic nature of NP as a language that adapts to diverse communicative and social settings. Despite these variations, the fundamental role of focus marking in structuring information and highlighting key discourse elements remains consistent across varieties of NP.

The study of focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin is significant for several reasons. First, it provides insights into how speakers manage information flow and emphasis in communication. Second, it enhances understanding of the syntactic and pragmatic organization of NP, a language that continues to grow in usage and importance. Third, it contributes to broader linguistic theory by illuminating how a contact language encodes focus a key aspect of human communication through unique structural means. Therefore, investigating focus constructions in NP, particularly the na-based structure, will contribute to documenting its grammatical system and strengthening its academic recognition as a full and functional language (Faraclas, 2013; Deuber, 2005).

## **1.1 Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design, aimed at analyzing the structure, function, and use of focus constructions particularly the na-focus marker in Nigerian Pidgin spoken in Warri, Delta State. The descriptive approach is suitable because it allows for a detailed observation and explanation of language features as used naturally by speakers (Creswell, 2014).

Data for the study were obtained primarily through field observation, interviews, and recordings of spontaneous conversations among native and fluent speakers in Warri. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who frequently use Nigerian Pidgin in daily interactions. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in age, gender, and occupation to capture linguistic variation. The collected data were transcribed orthographically and analyzed using a syntactic and functional framework to identify how focus constructions are formed and used in context. Special attention was given to sentence structure, word order, and the pragmatic effects of the na-focus marker. All examples were drawn from naturally occurring speech to ensure authenticity and reflect the true linguistic behavior of Warri speakers. The analysis followed systematic steps: data collection, transcription, identification of focus constructions, classification by type and function, and interpretation within the broader grammatical structure of Nigerian Pidgin.

## **1.2 Location of the Language and the Speakers**

Nigerian Pidgin, often referred to as Naija Pidgin or simply Pidgin, is a creole continuum widely spoken across Nigeria as a lingua franca that cuts across ethnic and linguistic boundaries (Faraclas, 1996; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991). Although it has no official status, it functions as one of the most important contact languages in West Africa, facilitating daily communication among speakers of diverse indigenous languages and serving as a medium of social interaction, entertainment, and informal education. The language thrives particularly in multilingual urban centers, coastal cities, and trade hubs where different ethnic groups converge.

Warri, located in Delta State within the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, represents one of the most vital and historically significant heartlands of Nigerian Pidgin. The city is linguistically diverse, hosting speakers from the Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Isoko ethnic groups, among others. Because of its history as a commercial, oil-producing, and port city, Warri has long served as a linguistic melting pot where contact between English, indigenous Niger-Congo languages, and trade languages fostered the natural evolution of Pidgin into an everyday lingua franca (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Faraclas, 2013). Consequently, Warri Nigerian Pidgin exhibits unique phonological, lexical, and syntactic features that distinguish it from variants spoken in Lagos or Port Harcourt, while still maintaining mutual intelligibility across regions.

In addition to Warri, Nigerian Pidgin is widely spoken in other major cities such as Benin City, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Calabar, and Abuja, and in many rural communities where it serves as the primary medium of inter-ethnic communication (Faraclas, 2013).

However, scholars agree that the Warri variety occupies a central place in discussions of Pidgin usage due to its richness, early development, and influence in popular culture notably through music, movies, and comedy (Deuber, 2005; Akande & Salami, 2010). Warri speakers are also recognized for their creative manipulation of the language, which has contributed significantly to the vitality and expansion of Nigerian Pidgin across the nation and beyond.

Today, Nigerian Pidgin in Warri functions across multiple social strata from the streets and marketplaces to schools, churches, and media platforms demonstrating its vibrancy, adaptability, and social integration. This makes Warri an ideal linguistic environment for the study of focus construction and information structure in Nigerian Pidgin, as the city provides authentic, naturally occurring data and represents a core speech community where the language thrives dynamically.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to examine focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin (NP), with special emphasis on the use of the *na*-focus marker in the Warri variety. The study seeks to describe how focus is expressed structurally and functionally in NP, analyze the syntactic and pragmatic roles of *na*, and identify variations among speakers. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Describe the structure and patterns of focus constructions in Warri Nigerian Pidgin.
2. Analyze the syntactic and semantic functions of the *na*-focus marker.

3. Examine its pragmatic roles in conveying emphasis and contrast.
4. Identify regional and social variations in its use.
5. Contribute to the grammatical documentation of Nigerian Pidgin.

This study is motivated by the limited scholarly attention given to NP's grammatical features despite its widespread use (Deuber, 2005; Faraclas, 2013). It addresses the gap in research concerning how focus is realized in NP, thereby enhancing understanding of the language's internal structure and expressive capacity.

#### **1.4 Significance and Justification of the Study**

This study is significant because it contributes to the linguistic documentation, academic recognition, and theoretical understanding of Nigerian Pidgin. It will clarify the grammatical role of the *na* particle and deepen insight into how NP encodes emphasis and contrast. For linguists and scholars, it provides valuable data on NP syntax and information structure, enriching the study of contact languages and focus theory.

Practically, the findings will benefit educators, media practitioners, and policymakers, enhancing effective communication and promoting linguistic pride among NP speakers.

Moreover, it supports the inclusion of Nigerian Pidgin in language education and policy by highlighting its role as a unifying medium of communication in multilingual Nigeria.

Overall, the study is justified as a timely academic effort to promote Nigerian Pidgin as a legitimate, structured, and expressive language worthy of scholarly attention.

## **1.5 Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methodological approach adopted in conducting the study on Focus Construction in Nigerian Pidgin. It explains the research design, population, sampling technique, instruments, method of data collection, and method of data analysis used in the study. The methodology provides a framework for how the study was conducted to ensure validity, reliability, and replicability of findings. Since this research investigates the syntactic and pragmatic features of focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin, a descriptive qualitative design was deemed appropriate. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of linguistic data in natural contexts, enabling the researcher to interpret how focus is used to convey meaning in discourse. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the methodological procedures adopted.

### **1.5.1 Research Design**

The study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which focuses on understanding linguistic phenomena as they occur naturally without manipulating variables. Qualitative design is particularly suitable for linguistic research because it allows for the exploration of language use, structure, and meaning within authentic communicative settings (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive approach facilitates the detailed examination of how Nigerian Pidgin speakers use focus constructions such as *na* and *wey* to express emphasis, contrast, or correction in everyday communication. This design provides the flexibility to capture subtle variations in syntax, prosody, and discourse function.

According to Dörnyei (2007), qualitative research in linguistics aims to provide rich, contextualized descriptions of how language operates in use rather than relying solely on numerical data. Thus, this study describes and interprets the structural and functional aspects of focus constructions by analyzing naturally occurring linguistic data drawn from speech and written sources. Through the descriptive lens, the study documents how focus constructions serve communicative, syntactic, and pragmatic purposes in Nigerian Pidgin discourse.

The choice of this design is justified by the exploratory nature of the topic. Since focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin has not been extensively studied, a descriptive qualitative approach offers a deeper insight into its linguistic mechanisms. It also aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, which values participants' expressions and the researcher's interpretation of meaning (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2018). Therefore, this design was considered most effective for achieving the study's objectives.

### **1.5.2 Population of the Study**

The population of this study comprises speakers of Nigerian Pidgin drawn from different social and linguistic backgrounds. Nigerian Pidgin serves as a lingua franca across Nigeria and is spoken by millions of people regardless of ethnic origin (Faraclas, 1996). For this study, the population includes native and non-native speakers of Nigerian Pidgin residing in Edo and Delta States, where the language is widely used in informal and semi-formal communication. These regions were selected because they represent

diverse varieties of Nigerian Pidgin influenced by indigenous languages such as Edo and Urhobo.

The study's population also includes speakers from different social strata students, traders, and artisans who frequently use Nigerian Pidgin in daily interactions. This diversity helps ensure that the study captures the range of focus constructions used in real-life communication. The population is thus heterogeneous, reflecting the linguistic and cultural variation that characterizes Nigerian Pidgin usage (Igboanusi, 2008).

By focusing on this population, the research aims to gather authentic linguistic data that represents the natural use of focus constructions. The selected population provides the context in which Nigerian Pidgin thrives as a communicative tool, offering a rich source of spontaneous speech and written examples that illustrate focus marking in context.

### **1.5.3 Sample and Sampling Technique**

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants and data sources relevant to the study's objectives. Purposive sampling is a non-probability method that involves selecting data sources based on their knowledge, linguistic competence, and frequent use of Nigerian Pidgin (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach ensures that the data collected are linguistically rich and contextually appropriate for analyzing focus constructions.

The sample comprised twenty speakers of Nigerian Pidgin ten males and ten females aged between 20 and 45 years. These participants were selected from markets,

tertiary institutions, and transport terminals in Benin City and Warri, where Nigerian Pidgin is commonly spoken. The selection aimed to represent different communicative settings and social backgrounds, ensuring a wide variety of focus patterns. Additionally, excerpts from Nigerian Pidgin radio programs and online discussions were included to supplement spoken data with written and broadcast forms of usage.

This sampling technique provided a manageable corpus of authentic linguistic data that enabled detailed analysis. Since qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, the chosen sample size was considered adequate to achieve data saturation while maintaining analytical rigor (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### **1.5.4 Research Instruments**

The primary research instrument used for this study was the researcher-designed observation and recording guide. This guide was used to collect data from naturally occurring conversations in Nigerian Pidgin. The instrument outlined procedures for observing and recording linguistic interactions, focusing on instances where focus constructions were employed. It also included a checklist for identifying features such as focus markers (na, wey), word order variations, stress patterns, and context of use.

An audio recorder was employed to capture spontaneous speech during informal conversations and group discussions among Nigerian Pidgin speakers. In addition, field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues, contextual factors, and situational details that contributed to the interpretation of focus. For written data, Nigerian Pidgin texts such

as social media posts, radio transcripts, and music lyrics were collected and transcribed for analysis.

The use of multiple instruments enhanced the validity and reliability of the data through triangulation. Triangulation ensures that different sources and methods complement each other, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic phenomenon (Denzin, 2012).

### **1.5.5 Method of Data Collection**

Data were collected through direct observation, audio recordings, and document analysis. The observation involved listening to natural conversations in public spaces where Nigerian Pidgin is the dominant language. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before recording. This ethical consideration ensured that participants' privacy and rights were respected.

The recorded conversations were later transcribed orthographically, maintaining linguistic accuracy while indicating focus markers, intonation, and pauses. Additionally, secondary data were collected from Nigerian Pidgin media programs, online forums, and written materials to capture focus constructions across different contexts. Collecting data from multiple sources provided a broader representation of how focus operates in spoken and written Nigerian Pidgin.

The data collection process lasted six weeks to allow sufficient time for gathering and verifying authentic samples. Careful attention was paid to the naturalness of language

use to ensure that the focus constructions analyzed were representative of everyday speech rather than artificial examples.

### **1.5.6 Method of Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and interpretive qualitative techniques. The analysis focused on identifying, classifying, and interpreting focus constructions based on their syntactic positions, semantic functions, and discourse roles. Transcribed data were organized into categories reflecting the major focus types subject, object, predicate, and contrastive identified in the literature review (Kiss, 1998; Lambrecht, 1994). Each focus instance was examined for how it contributed to meaning, emphasis, or correction in the communicative context.

The analysis employed a thematic approach, allowing recurring linguistic patterns and communicative functions to emerge from the data. This approach aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2006) model for qualitative thematic analysis, which involves familiarization with data, coding, theme generation, and interpretation. The findings were interpreted in light of the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier Focus Theory, Information Structure Theory, and Relevance Theory providing both grammatical and pragmatic explanations for focus usage.

Interpretations were supported with illustrative examples drawn directly from the data. These examples were analyzed linguistically to reveal how Nigerian Pidgin speakers manipulate focus markers, intonation, and syntax to express communicative

intent. The descriptive and interpretive analysis helped to answer the research questions systematically while maintaining theoretical consistency.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.0 Conceptual Review**

The conceptual review provides the foundation for understanding the concept of focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin by situating it within linguistic and syntactic theory. Focus construction refers to the grammatical and pragmatic strategies used to highlight or emphasize a specific part of a sentence, often to convey contrast, correction, or new information (Lambrecht, 1994). In linguistic discourse, focus is crucial because it determines which element of an utterance is presented as the most informative or salient. Nigerian Pidgin, as a dynamic contact language, utilizes unique structural and prosodic features to mark focus, differing from Standard English and indigenous Nigerian languages in both form and function (Faraclas, 1996).

Furthermore, the study of focus construction provides insight into how speakers of Nigerian Pidgin manipulate sentence elements to achieve communicative goals. In information structure theory, focus is seen as part of the “given-new” distinction that helps listeners interpret what is known and what is being introduced in discourse (Halliday, 1985). This distinction is particularly relevant in Nigerian Pidgin, which operates in multilingual settings where emphasis, repetition, and word order shifts play significant roles in meaning negotiation (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991). The conceptualization of focus in this linguistic context is therefore not only syntactic but also pragmatic, as it is closely tied to context, speaker intention, and listener inference.

Finally, the conceptual review underscores that the study of focus in Nigerian Pidgin contributes to broader discussions in syntax, semantics, and sociolinguistics. Since Nigerian Pidgin functions as both a lingua franca and a marker of identity, its focus constructions reveal how social meanings are encoded linguistically (Faraclas, 2013). This makes it an ideal language for studying how focus operates in natural discourse. By examining its conceptual underpinnings, researchers can better appreciate how focus constructions shape communication and reflect deeper cognitive and cultural patterns among Nigerian Pidgin speakers (Igboanusi, 2008).

## **2.1 Concept of Focus Construction**

Focus construction refers to the linguistic strategies employed to highlight particular constituents within a sentence, making them the center of attention or information (Lambrecht, 1994). The notion of focus originates from studies in syntax and pragmatics, where it is seen as a means of encoding information structure. Essentially, focus distinguishes between what is already known (the “presupposition”) and what is new or emphasized in an utterance (the “focus”) (Kiss, 1998). In languages like Nigerian Pidgin, focus is achieved through word order variation, repetition, intonation, and the use of specific focus markers such as *na* and *wey* (Faraclas, 1996). These features enable speakers to emphasize contrast or correction in speech, a key aspect of interactive communication in multilingual Nigerian contexts.

In linguistic theory, focus construction is closely tied to sentence interpretation, as it affects both semantic meaning and pragmatic intent. Scholars like Chafe (1976) and

Gundel (1999) note that focus determines how information is structured within discourse and how listeners process the relevance of each utterance. Nigerian Pidgin, being a contact language that blends English and indigenous linguistic systems, uses focus constructions to manage discourse efficiently. The use of focus markers such as *na* in “*Na me do am*” (“It was me who did it”) clearly shifts emphasis to the agent of the action, showing that focus constructions are central to meaning formation in Nigerian Pidgin syntax (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

Additionally, focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin embodies both structural and sociolinguistic dimensions. Structurally, it allows for flexibility in sentence arrangement, while sociolinguistically, it reflects the speaker’s intention and the communicative norms of Nigerian speech communities. According to Aboh (2007), focus constructions in creole and contact languages often serve to compensate for the absence of extensive inflectional morphology by providing alternative means of expressing emphasis and contrast. This suggests that in Nigerian Pidgin, focus is not merely a grammatical function but a discourse strategy that encodes emotion, stance, and social relations, making it a rich area for linguistic exploration.

### **2.1.1 Types of Focus in Linguistic Analysis**

#### **Subject Focus**

Subject focus occurs when emphasis is placed on the subject of a sentence, highlighting who or what performs the action. In linguistic theory, subject focus helps clarify agentive roles, especially when ambiguity arises in discourse (Lambrecht, 1994).

In Nigerian Pidgin, subject focus is often realized using cleft constructions or focus markers such as *na*, for instance, “*Na John cook the rice*” (“It was John who cooked the rice”). Here, John is emphasized as the doer of the action, distinguishing him from other possible agents. This type of focus is vital in everyday Nigerian Pidgin interactions where emphasis on agency often reflects social responsibility, pride, or blame (Faraclas, 2013).

Subject focus also interacts with information structure by making the subject the new or contrastive information in discourse. According to Kiss (1998), such constructions are used to correct or specify previous assumptions. In Nigerian Pidgin, subject focus constructions are context-sensitive and can be reinforced by stress and prosody. For example, speakers may raise their intonation on the focused subject or repeat it for emphasis. These patterns reveal how focus interacts with oral discourse traditions in Nigeria, where tone and rhythm carry communicative weight (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

Moreover, subject focus in Nigerian Pidgin provides insights into sentence hierarchy and syntax. It shows that even in languages with flexible word order, speakers consistently mark focus to guide interpretation. Studies on West African Pidgins suggest that the focus marker *na* has grammaticalized from a copula or preposition into a syntactic tool for emphasis (Aboh & Essegbey, 2010). This evolution underscores how subject focus serves both structural and pragmatic functions in Nigerian Pidgin speech.

## **Object Focus**

Object focus highlights the receiver or target of an action, emphasizing what or whom the action affects. In English, object focus may be expressed through clefting (“It is the rice that John cooked”), while in Nigerian Pidgin, similar constructions appear as “Na rice John cook” (Faraclas, 1996). This rearrangement foregrounds the object as the most informative part of the sentence. Object focus is especially common in Nigerian Pidgin narratives, where speakers use it to emphasize outcomes or results of actions, often for dramatic or contrastive effect (Igboanusi, 2008).

Syntactically, object focus demonstrates the flexibility of Nigerian Pidgin word order. Unlike English, which relies heavily on intonation for focus, Nigerian Pidgin uses syntactic displacement and the *na* marker to achieve emphasis. According to Aboh (2007), such constructions reveal the influence of substrate languages like Yoruba and Edo, which employ similar fronting mechanisms for focus. Thus, object focus in Nigerian Pidgin exemplifies how contact languages preserve indigenous discourse patterns while integrating features from English.

From a pragmatic standpoint, object focus allows speakers to manage information flow and highlight particular outcomes relevant to the listener. It also serves corrective and contrastive functions in everyday conversation. For instance, when correcting a misunderstanding, a speaker may say, “Na book I buy, no be pen,” clearly emphasizing the object. This dynamic use of focus reflects Nigerian Pidgin’s responsiveness to

communicative context and its capacity for nuanced expression (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

### **Predicate Focus**

Predicate focus emphasizes the verb phrase or action itself, highlighting what was done rather than who did it or to whom it was done (Kiss, 1998). In Nigerian Pidgin, predicate focus often occurs in constructions like “John DEY COOK rice,” where stress or repetition emphasizes the ongoing activity. Such constructions are crucial in distinguishing tense, aspect, and emphasis in Pidgin, which lacks extensive inflectional morphology (Faraclas, 1996). Predicate focus therefore enables speakers to express subtle differences in meaning such as habituality, intensity, or surprise through rhythm and prosody.

According to Lambrecht (1994), predicate focus typically appears in contexts where the subject and object are already known, and the new information resides in the action or state described. In Nigerian Pidgin, this often occurs in explanatory or narrative discourse. The ability to focus on the predicate contributes to the language’s expressiveness, especially in storytelling and oral performance. It also mirrors African discourse traditions, where performative emphasis on verbs reflects action-oriented worldviews (Igboanusi, 2008).

Predicate focus thus combines grammatical and cultural dimensions. Structurally, it manipulates aspectual markers like *dey* or *don* to create emphasis; socially, it enables speakers to dramatize or clarify events in interaction. By studying predicate focus,

linguists gain insight into how Nigerian Pidgin manages event representation and meaning-making beyond lexical content (Faraclas, 2013).

### **Contrastive Focus**

Contrastive focus emphasizes one element in opposition to another, often to correct or clarify previous information. It identifies an alternative within a given set, making the focused element stand out as the “right” or “true” choice (Kiss, 1998). In Nigerian Pidgin, contrastive focus typically involves the use of *na* and intonation patterns, as in “*Na JOHN cook am, no be Peter.*” Here, John is contrasted with Peter, marking the correction of an earlier assumption (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

Contrastive focus plays a vital role in interactive communication and discourse repair. It allows speakers to manage misunderstandings, assert accuracy, or reinforce social stance. Faraclas (1996) observes that Nigerian Pidgin speakers employ contrastive focus frequently in debates, market interactions, and casual conversations to emphasize correction or exclusivity. This highlights how focus constructions are not just grammatical but also culturally grounded in Nigerian communicative behavior.

Additionally, contrastive focus contributes to cohesion and coherence in spoken and written discourse. It guides listener attention, helping differentiate between competing interpretations. As Aboh (2007) notes, the presence of contrastive focus markers in Nigerian Pidgin underscores its creole nature, blending African discourse patterns with English syntax. Through such constructions, speakers’ express subtle

distinctions in emphasis, identity, and intention—revealing the linguistic richness and adaptability of Nigerian Pidgin.

### **2.1.2 Theoretical Framework for Analyzing Focus Construction**

The theoretical framework provides the foundation for understanding and interpreting how focus operates within Nigerian Pidgin. Linguistic theories concerning focus are essential for explaining how speakers structure information, manage emphasis, and express contrast within discourse. Three major theoretical orientations that guide this analysis are Focus Theory, Information Structure Theory, and Relevance Theory. Focus Theory offers a different but complementary perspective on how linguistic forms correspond to meaning and communication. These frameworks help explain not only the syntactic behavior of focus elements but also their pragmatic and cognitive functions in natural speech (Lambrecht, 1994; Kiss, 1998).

Through these frameworks, focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin can be examined beyond mere grammatical description. They enable the study to capture how speakers use emphasis markers such as “na” and “wey” to convey new or contrastive information, and how such usage aligns with broader principles of communication and cognition. By combining these theories, this research situates focus construction within both structural and functional dimensions of language use (Aboh, 2007). In particular, it underscores the relationship between linguistic form and communicative purpose as a central concern in modern syntax-pragmatics interface studies (Gundel, 1999).

Each of these theories—Focus Theory, Information Structure Theory, and Relevance Theory—contributes differently to understanding focus construction in Nigerian

Pidgin. Focus Theory explains the syntactic and interpretative role of focus; Information Structure Theory highlights how focus shapes discourse organization; and Relevance Theory provides insight into the inferential processes through which focus contributes to meaning. Together, they form a coherent framework that captures the grammatical, pragmatic, and cognitive aspects of focus in Nigerian Pidgin communication (Halliday, 1985; Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

### **Focus Theory**

Focus Theory, developed primarily within generative and functional grammar traditions, explores how focus functions to highlight parts of a sentence that convey new, contrastive, or emphasized information (Lambrecht, 1994). The theory posits that every sentence contains two informational components: the presupposition (what is assumed to be known) and the focus (what is presented as new or salient). Focus Theory examines how linguistic structures such as intonation, clefting, or fronting mark this distinction. In the context of Nigerian Pidgin, Focus Theory explains the syntactic placement and prosodic prominence of focused elements, often introduced by markers such as *na* (“It is/was”) that foreground a constituent (Faraclas, 1996).

From this theoretical standpoint, focus is not only about grammar but also about how speakers structure meaning. According to Kiss (1998), focus constructions can either be information focus introducing new content or contrastive focus correcting or contrasting with previously mentioned information. Nigerian Pidgin speakers employ both types in natural communication, using focus markers to clarify misunderstandings or

to stress responsibility. For instance, *Na me do am, no be you* (“It was me who did it, not you”) reflects a clear case of contrastive focus. This example illustrates how Focus Theory can describe how Nigerian Pidgin users encode emphasis through syntactic and pragmatic choices that reflect the language’s creole heritage and social context (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

Focus Theory helps in analyzing how focus interacts with sentence interpretation and discourse flow. It provides insight into why certain syntactic patterns are acceptable or preferred when emphasis is required. As noted by Aboh (2007), focus constructions in creole languages, including Nigerian Pidgin, often arise from the interaction of substrate and superstrate grammatical systems. This theory thus supports the argument that Nigerian Pidgin employs focus as a mechanism for managing information in a way that aligns with both English and indigenous African linguistic influences.

### **2.1.3 Studies on Focus Construction in English and Other Languages**

The study of focus construction in English and other languages has received extensive attention in linguistic research, particularly within the frameworks of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. In English, focus has been examined as a mechanism for highlighting new or contrastive information within a clause, often realized through syntactic movement or prosodic emphasis (Lambrecht, 1994; Krifka, 2008). For instance, English commonly uses cleft constructions (e.g., “It was John who broke the vase”) to mark focus, where a constituent is fronted to indicate emphasis. Scholars like Jackendoff (2002) and Büring (2010) argue that focus plays a vital role in shaping discourse

coherence, as it guides listener interpretation by distinguishing between presupposed and asserted information. Prosody also serves as a major cue for focus in English, as intonational stress helps the hearer identify the most salient element in a sentence (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Cross-linguistic studies have revealed that while focus is a universal linguistic phenomenon, its realization differs across languages depending on syntactic and prosodic structures. For example, Rizzi (1997) observed that Romance languages such as Italian employ a designated syntactic position the “Focus Phrase” for focalized constituents, often accompanied by changes in word order. Similarly, in Hungarian, É. Kiss (2002) demonstrated that focus is marked through preverbal positioning and specific intonation patterns, suggesting a more rigid syntactic approach than in English. These studies collectively highlight that while all languages possess means of expressing focus, the strategies vary from flexible prosodic shifts to fixed syntactic configurations, reflecting language-specific typological properties.

Empirical investigations have also examined the relationship between focus and information structure across different languages. Vallduví and Engdahl (1996) proposed that focus interacts with the broader structure of discourse by partitioning utterances into “focus” and “background” segments. Research on languages such as Japanese and Korean, for instance, shows that focus marking interacts with particles and word order to indicate emphasis and contrast (Kuno, 1973; Lee, 2002). In Japanese, the use of particles like *wa* and *ga* signals topicality and focus distinctions, while in Korean, prosodic

prominence interacts with syntax to identify focal elements (Jun, 2005). These findings underscore that while the functional purpose of focus is universal, the linguistic means of expressing it differ considerably.

Recent psycholinguistic and experimental studies have also contributed to understanding focus in comprehension and production. Studies using eye-tracking and ERP (Event-Related Potential) methodologies suggest that focused elements receive increased attention and faster processing during sentence comprehension (Cutler et al., 1997; Husband & Ferreira, 2016). This indicates that focus marking not only has grammatical implications but also cognitive significance in discourse interpretation. The empirical results support the claim that focus facilitates information retrieval, influences sentence processing, and enhances listener recall, reinforcing its communicative importance in both written and spoken contexts.

Moreover, comparative linguistic analyses continue to explore how focus interacts with other linguistic elements such as negation, tense, and aspect. For example, Hartmann and Zimmermann (2007) noted that in Germanic and Bantu languages, focus can alter the interpretive scope of negation or quantifiers, revealing complex syntax-semantics interactions. Similarly, Fiedler et al. (2010) found that in African languages like Chichewa and Akan, focus interacts with morphosyntactic markers to convey contrastive meanings. These cross-linguistic insights enrich our understanding of focus as a multidimensional phenomenon that operates across syntax, phonology, semantics, and cognition.

#### **2.1.4 Studies on Focus Construction in Nigerian Indigenous Languages (e.g., Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa)**

Studies on focus construction in Nigerian indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa have significantly contributed to the understanding of how African languages encode information structure through syntactic and morphological mechanisms. In Yoruba, focus marking is primarily achieved through the use of the focus marker *ni*, which introduces emphasis by foregrounding the focused constituent (Yusuf, 1999; Aboh, 2004). For instance, in the sentence *Adé ni mo rí* ('It is Ade that I saw'), the particle *ni* signals that Ade is the focused element. This construction parallels English cleft sentences but is syntactically distinct in that the focus marker occurs immediately after the focalized element. Ajíbóyè (2005) notes that *ni* serves as a copular focus marker that triggers movement of the focused constituent to the sentence-initial position, demonstrating a strong syntactic correlation between focus and topicalization in Yoruba. The consistent use of *ni* underscores the language's reliance on overt morphosyntactic cues for encoding information structure rather than purely prosodic means.

In Igbo, focus construction is also achieved syntactically, but through a system of fronting and the use of specific focus markers such as *ka* or *bù* (Emenanjo, 1978; Nwaozuzu, 2012). A sentence like *Obi bù onye m hụrụ* ('It is Obi that I saw') exemplifies a typical cleft construction in which the focus marker *bù* functions analogously to the English "it is." According to Uwalaka (1991), focused elements in Igbo are moved to the clause-initial position to express contrast or emphasis, and this syntactic reordering is

obligatory for proper focus interpretation. Recent studies by Mbah (2019) have also revealed that Igbo focus constructions exhibit an interface between syntax and discourse, where fronting not only signals focus but also aids in managing presupposed versus new information in discourse. This interplay between syntax and pragmatics demonstrates the multifunctionality of focus markers in structuring communication.

Hausa, on the other hand, employs a mixture of syntactic, morphological, and tonal mechanisms to express focus. Green and Reintges (2011) observe that Hausa uses the particle *ne/ce* following the focused element to signal emphasis, as in *Musa ne ya tafi* ('It is Musa who went'). Jaggar (2001) describes this particle as an enclitic focus marker that agrees in gender and number with the noun it follows. Additionally, Hausa distinguishes between subject and non-subject focus, with tonal variation serving as a prosodic cue to focus prominence (Hartmann & Zimmermann, 2007). The interaction between tonal modulation and focus particles in Hausa demonstrates the intricate balance between phonology and syntax in marking focus. Recent experimental work by Green (2013) further confirms that focus in Hausa is pragmatically motivated and sensitive to contextual contrastiveness.

Comparative analyses across these Nigerian languages reveal that while they all exhibit focus constructions, their strategies differ significantly. Yoruba and Hausa rely heavily on overt focus particles (*ni* and *ne/ce* respectively), while Igbo employs cleft structures and fronting mechanisms (Aboh, 2016; Nwaozuzu, 2012). These structural variations highlight the linguistic diversity of focus expression within the Nigerian

linguistic landscape. However, scholars such as Manfredi (1993) and Aboh (2010) have argued for a unifying generalization that African languages, including Nigerian ones, share a left-peripheral focus position in line with Rizzi's (1997) "split CP hypothesis." This suggests that focus constructions in these languages are not arbitrary but follow a systematic pattern governed by universal grammar principles adapted to local morphosyntactic features.

Recent empirical and theoretical studies have continued to shed light on how focus in Nigerian indigenous languages interacts with discourse, prosody, and semantics. For instance, Akinlabi and Oyebade (2020) note that in Yoruba discourse, focus marking helps maintain thematic continuity and manage information flow during conversation. Similarly, Igbo studies (Mbah, 2019) show that focus constructions influence pragmatic interpretation, particularly in narrative and argumentative contexts. In Hausa, focus has been linked to information packaging and emphasis in political or religious speeches (Abubakar, 2018). These findings collectively affirm that focus constructions in Nigerian languages are not mere grammatical features but essential communicative tools that reflect deeper sociolinguistic and cognitive functions. The robust empirical evidence from Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa thus continues to enrich cross-linguistic understanding of focus phenomena globally.

## **2.2. Previous Studies**

Research on focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin (NP) has increasingly gained attention in recent decades, as scholars recognize its importance in understanding how

this contact language organizes information and meaning. Nigerian Pidgin, being a creole continuum with influences from English and indigenous Nigerian languages, employs diverse syntactic and prosodic strategies for marking focus (Faraclas, 1996; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991). Unlike Standard English, where clefting or intonation serves as primary focus markers, Nigerian Pidgin tends to rely on fronting, repetition, and prosodic emphasis to signal focus. For example, a speaker might say, *Na John buy di book* (“It was John who bought the book”), where the focus particle *na* introduces the focalized constituent. This structure parallels the English cleft but functions more fluidly within NP syntax. Scholars such as Deuber (2005) and Ofulue (2014) have noted that *na*-cleft constructions are the most frequent focus-marking strategies in NP, indicating the grammaticalization of *na* as a functional focus marker.

Empirical studies have revealed that focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin mirror the pragmatic and discourse needs of its speakers. Mafeni (1971) and Faraclas (1996) observed that NP speakers often use focus fronting not only to emphasize contrastive elements but also to manage information flow during conversation. The particle *na* and the use of cleft structures provide syntactic flexibility, allowing the speaker to highlight new or contrastive information. Recent analyses by Egbokhare (2018) emphasize that focus in NP is not solely syntactic but also prosodic, as intonation contours frequently interact with the *na* particle to create emphasis. This prosodic-syntactic interface reinforces the idea that NP operates within a dynamic information structure system that combines both indigenous and English-derived strategies. Thus, focus marking in NP can

be understood as an adaptive mechanism reflecting its multilingual and multicultural environment.

Comparative studies between NP and its substrate languages (such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo) show clear typological parallels in focus marking. For instance, Yoruba's use of *ni* and NP's *na* share functional and positional similarities in focus constructions (Aboh & Smith, 2009). Similarly, the cleft construction pattern in NP, *Na person wey I see*, echoes the Igbo structure *Obi bu onye m hụrụ* ("It is Obi that I saw"). These similarities suggest substrate influence on NP's syntactic development. Scholars like Ofulue (2009) and Elugbe (1995) argue that NP's focus system demonstrates a process of convergence, where patterns from English and indigenous Nigerian languages blend into a unique grammaticalized form. This phenomenon supports the notion that NP's focus marking evolved through language contact and functional adaptation rather than direct transfer from English alone. Consequently, focus construction in NP reflects not only linguistic hybridity but also sociocultural identity and communicative needs among its speakers.

Recent experimental and discourse-based studies have provided further insight into the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of focus in Nigerian Pidgin. Ofulue (2014) demonstrated that NP speakers use focus marking not just for contrast or emphasis but also for topic maintenance, clarification, and emotional engagement in discourse. This aligns with Green's (2013) findings on Hausa, suggesting a cross-linguistic tendency among Nigerian languages to use focus for managing discourse coherence. Additionally,

corpus-based analyses by Deuber (2014) and Huber (2020) show that NP employs focus markers more frequently in spoken communication than in written texts, reflecting its oral-dominant tradition. These empirical results underscore the role of focus as a pragmatic and communicative tool that enhances listener comprehension and enriches interactional dynamics in NP.

Moreover, recent syntactic analyses situate Nigerian Pidgin focus constructions within broader theoretical frameworks such as Rizzi's (1997) split CP hypothesis and Lambrecht's (1994) information structure theory. Egbokhare (2018) and Ofulue (2021) argue that the focalized constituent in NP occupies a specific left-peripheral position within the clause, similar to patterns observed in other West African languages. This syntactic positioning confirms that NP, despite being a contact language, conforms to universal principles of focus realization. Furthermore, the flexibility and frequency of focus marking in NP suggest an ongoing process of grammaticalization, reflecting the language's evolving structural stability. These insights not only enrich the theoretical understanding of focus in creoles but also position Nigerian Pidgin as a vibrant linguistic system capable of complex information structuring and expressive emphasis.

### **2.2.1 Previous Studies on Nigerian Pidgin Syntax and Semantics**

The syntax of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) has been a subject of extensive linguistic exploration, particularly in relation to its structural distinctiveness from Standard English. Early studies by Elugbe and Omamor (1991) identified NP as a language with its own grammatical conventions rather than a mere dialectal variation of English. They

emphasized that NP exhibits systematic syntactic structures, including unique word orders and clause patterns, which demonstrate its linguistic autonomy. For instance, the SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) word order is typically maintained, but certain constructions, such as topicalization and reduplication, reveal a syntactic flexibility not commonly observed in Standard English (Faraclas, 2013). These findings collectively underscore NP's syntactic independence and internal consistency.

Further studies have delved into clause structure and tense-aspect marking in NP. Faraclas (1996) highlighted that NP employs preverbal particles such as *don*, *de*, and *go* to express aspect and tense distinctions, performing grammatical roles similar to auxiliary verbs in English. However, these particles are more semantically multifunctional, sometimes serving modal or evidential purposes. This multifunctionality has been interpreted as evidence of the creole's linguistic economy where limited morphosyntactic resources express a wide range of meanings (Mensah, 2011). Consequently, the study of NP syntax and semantics has provided valuable insights into how meaning and structure interact in creole systems.

Semantically, NP operates through a system of meaning that is deeply influenced by both English and indigenous Nigerian languages. Igboanusi (2008) observed that NP semantics reflects the sociocultural and pragmatic realities of its speakers. For instance, words such as *wahala* (trouble) and *oyinbo* (white person) carry rich connotations that extend beyond their literal meanings, often serving as tools for cultural identification and

social commentary. These semantic nuances highlight NP's function as a sociolect that conveys cultural attitudes and local identity markers distinct from those of English.

Additionally, studies on lexical semantics have explored the processes of semantic extension and borrowing in NP. According to Akande and Salami (2010), NP frequently borrows lexical items from English and indigenous languages, adapting their meanings to fit contextual usage. For example, English-derived words such as *carry* and *chop* undergo semantic shifts; *carry* may mean "to take responsibility" while *chop* may signify "to benefit or to eat." These semantic shifts demonstrate NP's dynamic and adaptive nature, which allows it to evolve with changing communicative demands in multilingual Nigeria. Overall, the synthesis of syntactic and semantic studies suggests that NP represents a fully-fledged linguistic system with its own rules and expressive capabilities. While its syntactic patterns are often simplified compared to Standard English, its semantic range remains rich and culturally embedded. Researchers such as Faraclas (2013) and Igboanusi (2008) conclude that NP is both structurally systematic and semantically vibrant, serving as a bridge between linguistic identity and social interaction in contemporary Nigeria.

### **2.2.2 Existing Studies on Focus Construction in Nigerian Pidgin**

Scholars investigating focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin (NP) have sought to understand how emphasis and information structure are encoded in the language. Faraclas (1996) noted that NP, like other West African Pidgins, utilizes syntactic and prosodic devices to highlight focused elements within sentences. The language employs cleft

constructions, fronting, and stress placement to mark focus. For example, a sentence such as Na John buy di book (“It is John who bought the book”) uses the focus marker na to emphasize the subject. This focus-marking strategy aligns NP more closely with many Niger-Congo languages than with English, suggesting substrate influence in its grammatical evolution (Mensah, 2011).

Subsequent studies have explored the semantic implications of focus constructions in NP. Udofot (2019) observed that the focus particle na not only serves a syntactic role but also carries pragmatic weight, indicating contrastive or corrective focus. This means NP speakers can use na to clarify or correct presuppositions within discourse contexts, e.g., Na today e go come, no be yesterday (“It’s today he will come, not yesterday”). Such examples show that focus constructions in NP extend beyond sentence-level emphasis to encode speaker attitudes and discourse management strategies (Egbokhare, 2016). Therefore, NP focus constructions embody both grammatical and communicative functions.

Recent linguistic inquiries have also compared NP focus systems with those of indigenous Nigerian languages such as Yoruba and Igbo. Essien (2012) highlighted that NP focus constructions share similarities with the focus systems of substrate languages, particularly in their use of focus fronting and clefting. The influence of Yoruba’s ni and Igbo’s bu focus particles is evident in NP’s na structure, indicating a process of substrate transfer. Such comparative analyses have deepened understanding of NP as a product of

linguistic convergence, where features from English and indigenous grammars merge to create a unique hybrid system (Faraclas, 2013).

Another line of research has focused on the prosody of focus constructions in NP. According to Akande (2020), prosodic cues such as stress and intonation play vital roles in marking focus, especially in oral discourse. Speakers often elevate pitch or elongate syllables to highlight key information. This observation demonstrates that NP employs both syntactic and phonological means of focus marking, confirming its multimodal approach to information structuring. These prosodic strategies align NP with other creole and contact languages where oral emphasis compensates for reduced morphological complexity.

Despite these efforts, scholars acknowledge that focus construction in NP remains underexplored, particularly in comparison with its syntactic and semantic studies. Many of the existing studies are descriptive rather than experimental, leaving gaps in areas such as intonation analysis, pragmatic functions of focus, and corpus-based approaches. Nevertheless, existing research consistently demonstrates that NP's focus constructions are systematic and culturally expressive, illustrating how speakers strategically deploy grammar to organize discourse and convey emphasis.

### **2.2.3 Identified Gaps in Previous Research**

Although previous studies on Nigerian Pidgin (NP) syntax, semantics, and focus construction have significantly advanced understanding of the language, several research gaps remain evident. One major gap is the limited empirical data on the interaction

between syntax and pragmatics in focus marking. Most existing studies, such as those by Faraclas (1996) and Mensah (2011), have relied on intuitive or descriptive analysis without extensive corpus-based or experimental evidence. Consequently, there is a lack of quantifiable data on how frequently different focus strategies occur across social contexts, regions, or speaker populations. Addressing this limitation would enhance the generalizability of conclusions drawn about NP's syntactic behavior and discourse patterns.

Another notable gap lies in the inadequate exploration of prosodic and intonational cues in NP focus constructions. While Akande (2020) and Egbokhare (2016) briefly mention the role of stress and pitch, detailed acoustic or phonetic studies remain scarce. Given that NP is primarily an oral language, prosody plays a central role in meaning differentiation and information structuring. Therefore, the absence of systematic phonological research restricts full understanding of how NP speakers use tone, rhythm, and intonation to signal focus and emphasis in natural communication (Udofot, 2019).

Furthermore, most studies have overlooked regional and sociolectal variations in NP usage. Nigerian Pidgin exhibits substantial variation across different geographical regions such as Warri, Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Benin yet few studies have compared how focus constructions differ across these varieties (Igboanusi, 2008). Regional differences in substrate influence and speaker attitudes may yield distinct grammatical and pragmatic outcomes. Hence, more comparative sociolinguistic research is required to

determine whether focus markers, syntactic structures, and semantic patterns are consistent across varieties of NP.

In addition, there is a paucity of interdisciplinary research integrating syntax, semantics, and cognitive linguistics in the study of NP focus constructions. While existing works focus on structural description, very few examine how NP speakers process or interpret focused information cognitively. Insights from psycholinguistics and discourse analysis could reveal how focus influences comprehension, memory, and inferencing among bilingual or multilingual NP speakers. Such studies would not only deepen theoretical understanding but also contribute to language pedagogy and communication studies in multilingual settings (Mensah, 2011).

Lastly, the lack of updated scholarly resources and modern linguistic tools remains a persistent challenge. Many foundational studies on NP were conducted over two decades ago, with limited integration of current linguistic theories such as Relevance Theory or Information Structure Theory. Moreover, digital corpora for NP remain scarce, hindering the development of computational models for linguistic analysis. Future studies should therefore adopt modern methodologies, including corpus linguistics, experimental phonetics, and discourse-based pragmatics, to fill these gaps and provide a more comprehensive understanding of NP's syntactic and semantic architecture.

## **2.3 The Present Study**

### **2.3.1 Relationship of the Present Study to Previous Research**

The present study builds upon existing linguistic investigations into Nigerian Pidgin while focusing more narrowly on how focus constructions operate within its grammatical and pragmatic systems. Earlier studies, such as those by Faraclas (1996) and Elugbe and Omamor (1991), provided foundational descriptions of Nigerian Pidgin's syntax and sociolinguistic functions but offered limited analysis of focus marking as an independent phenomenon. These works acknowledged that Nigerian Pidgin employs markers like *na* and *wey* to indicate emphasis, yet they did not examine their syntactic distribution, semantic implications, or discourse relevance in detail. The current study, therefore, extends this line of inquiry by systematically exploring how focus constructions function to convey new, contrastive, or corrective information in both spoken and written forms of Nigerian Pidgin.

Moreover, while prior studies on focus, such as Lambrecht (1994) and Kiss (1998), have extensively theorized about focus in Indo-European languages, they have not adequately captured the peculiarities of focus in creole and contact languages like Nigerian Pidgin. This study aligns with these theoretical perspectives but applies them in a localized linguistic context, demonstrating how Nigerian Pidgin reflects universal focus principles through unique structural realizations. By linking theory to empirical language data, this research provides a bridge between global linguistic models and indigenous

communicative practices, illustrating how focus constructions serve distinct pragmatic and cultural roles among Nigerian speakers (Igboanusi, 2008).

In addition, this study draws connections between the syntactic behavior of Nigerian Pidgin and that of its substrate languages, such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo. Previous comparative studies (Aboh, 2007; Aboh & Essegbey, 2010) have noted the influence of African linguistic systems on focus marking in creoles, but their analysis did not focus specifically on the Nigerian linguistic landscape. The present study therefore contributes to this gap by examining the similarities and differences in focus strategies across these languages, showing how Nigerian Pidgin synthesizes indigenous and English-based patterns to create a distinct focus system. This relational approach helps contextualize the language within broader West African linguistic dynamics.

### **2.3.2 Identified Research Gaps and How the Present Study Addresses Them**

Despite the growing literature on Nigerian Pidgin, significant research gaps remain in the description and analysis of its focus constructions. One major gap lies in the limited syntactic analysis of focus structures. Many earlier works have focused on lexical, phonological, and sociolinguistic aspects of Nigerian Pidgin (Faraclas, 1996; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991), with little attention to how focus is formally expressed and its effects on meaning. The present study addresses this by providing a comprehensive syntactic and pragmatic account of focus, analyzing data from natural discourse, media communication, and informal conversations to reveal how focus is marked through word order, tone, and

emphasis. This approach deepens understanding of how Nigerian Pidgin encodes prominence and attention in communication.

Another gap is the lack of functional and discourse-oriented analysis of focus in Nigerian Pidgin. While focus markers like *na* and *wey* have been identified in earlier works, their pragmatic functions such as signaling contrast, correction, or emphasis have not been systematically classified or compared. The present study bridges this gap by employing theoretical models such as Focus Theory (Lambrecht, 1994), Information Structure Theory (Halliday, 1985), and Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) to analyze how Nigerian Pidgin speakers use focus to manage information and achieve communicative goals. By integrating these frameworks, the study illuminates how grammatical structures interact with social and cognitive processes in language use.

Furthermore, there exists a geographical and sociolinguistic gap in previous studies, as most analyses of Nigerian Pidgin focus on specific regions, neglecting variations across Nigeria's diverse linguistic communities. This study responds to that gap by drawing examples from multiple Nigerian contexts urban and rural, educated and non-educated speech communities to capture how focus constructions vary across speech domains. This inclusive approach provides a more representative and holistic understanding of Nigerian Pidgin as a national lingua franca. Through its analytical depth and contextual breadth, the study not only fills empirical voids but also advances the theoretical conversation about focus in African contact languages.

### **2.3.3 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has reviewed relevant literature on the concept, structure, and application of focus constructions within Nigerian Pidgin, situating the discussion within broader linguistic theories and prior empirical studies. The conceptual review clarified that focus construction is a linguistic process used to highlight specific information in discourse, achieved through syntactic, semantic, and prosodic means (Lambrecht, 1994; Kiss, 1998). The review also examined the major types of focus subject, object, predicate, and contrastive each playing distinctive roles in meaning construction. Theoretical frameworks such as Focus Theory, Information Structure Theory, and Relevance Theory were explored to explain how focus operates at the intersection of grammar and communication, providing a basis for the present study's analytical approach.

From the review of previous studies, it was evident that while Nigerian Pidgin has received considerable attention as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, there is a paucity of in-depth analysis focusing specifically on its focus constructions. Existing works have primarily emphasized its lexical development and communicative functions, leaving a research gap in understanding how focus contributes to meaning and discourse organization. Consequently, this chapter identified key gaps in the syntactic, pragmatic, and regional study of focus in Nigerian Pidgin and established the need for more comprehensive and theory-driven investigation (Faraclas, 2013; Igboanusi, 2008).

In summary, the chapter laid the groundwork for the current study by reviewing theoretical perspectives, identifying empirical gaps, and linking them to the objectives of

the research. The insights drawn from the reviewed literature underscore the necessity of examining focus construction not merely as a grammatical device but as a communicative and cultural phenomenon central to Nigerian Pidgin discourse. The next chapter will therefore present the research methodology adopted to investigate these issues, detailing the data sources, analytical methods, and procedures used in exploring focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin speech and writing.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for the study of focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin (NP). Focus construction refers to the syntactic and semantic strategies through which speakers highlight specific parts of an utterance for emphasis, contrast, or to introduce new information. In human language, focus serves as a means of directing the listener's attention to particular constituents that are communicatively salient.

The study of focus in Nigerian Pidgin is significant because Pidgin, as a contact language, exhibits structural and functional patterns that are products of both substrate influence (from indigenous Nigerian languages) and superstrate influence (from English). The theoretical grounding of this study draws primarily from three major frameworks in linguistics: the Generative Grammar framework, the Functional-Pragmatic theory, and the Information Structure model. These frameworks provide a comprehensive base for analyzing how focus operates in Pidgin syntax and discourse.

#### **3.1 Concept of Focus**

The term focus has been defined in linguistics as the element of an utterance that carries the most significant communicative weight — the portion that conveys new or contrastive information to the hearer. Halliday (1967) explains focus as the element that

receives the main sentence stress or prominence, while Chomsky (1971) conceptualizes focus within syntactic structures that reflect semantic interpretation.

Similarly, Lambrecht (1994) describes focus as “the component of a proposition whereby the assertion differs from the presupposition.” In simpler terms, focus distinguishes what the speaker assumes to be shared knowledge (given information) from what is presented as new or emphasized information. For example:

John ate the mango. – Focus on “John” (contrastive focus)

John ate the mango. – Focus on “mango” (new information focus)

In both examples, the grammatical structure is the same, but the placement of focus changes the meaning, showing how information structure interacts with syntax and pragmatics.

## **3.2 Theoretical Approaches to Focus**

### **3.2.1 The Generative Grammar Framework**

Within the Generative Grammar approach (Chomsky, 1971; Rizzi, 1997), focus is treated as a syntactic feature. It is often assumed that there exists a Focus Phrase (FocP) in the left periphery of the sentence, where focused constituents are moved for interpretation.

For example, in English:

It was JOHN that ate the mango.

Here, the structure is analyzed as a cleft construction, where the focused element John moves to the specifier position of FocP.

Applied to Nigerian Pidgin, the equivalent focus structure can be represented as:

Na John chop di mango.

The particle “na” occupies a focus-related position similar to the copula it was in English, showing how Pidgin retains the focus function through relexification and simplification.

### **3.2.2 Functional-Pragmatic Theory**

The Functional-Pragmatic approach (Halliday, 1967; Dik, 1997) views focus not as a purely syntactic phenomenon but as a communicative strategy driven by discourse needs. This theory argues that focus serves to manage the flow of information and highlight contrast or emphasis depending on the communicative context.

In Nigerian Pidgin, this theory explains why speakers use na-focus constructions, fronting, or stress — not because of rigid grammatical rules, but because these structures help convey meaning effectively in real-time communication. The fluidity of Pidgin syntax supports this approach, emphasizing its functional flexibility rather than syntactic rigidity.

### **3.2.3 Information Structure Model**

The Information Structure model (Lambrecht, 1994) integrates syntax, semantics, and pragmatics to explain how information is organized within discourse. According to this model, a sentence consists of two main components:

Presupposition: The information assumed to be known to both speaker and hearer.

Assertion (Focus): The new or contrastive information introduced by the speaker.

For example:

Na Mary buy di book. Presupposition: Someone bought the book.

Assertion (Focus): It was Mary who did.

This framework helps account for how Nigerian Pidgin structures align information to reflect communicative intent, showing how focus constructions interact with discourse and context.

### **3.2.4 Focus Construction in Nigerian Pidgin**

#### **3.2.4.1 Overview of Nigerian Pidgin Syntax**

Nigerian Pidgin (NP) is an English-lexified creole widely spoken across Nigeria. Structurally, it is characterized by simplified morphology, flexible word order, and the extensive use of particles. Because of its multilingual environment, NP reflects deep substrate influences from Nigerian languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, and Hausa, all of which have distinctive focus-marking systems.

For instance, Yoruba uses the focus particle *ni*, while Igbo uses *ka*. These indigenous focus markers have parallels in the Pidgin *na*, suggesting a process of structural transfer during the formation of Nigerian Pidgin.

#### **3.2.4.2 Syntactic Strategies for Focus Marking**

Nigerian Pidgin employs a variety of strategies for marking focus, including fronting, the use of the focus particle “*na*”, and cleft constructions.

##### **(a) Fronting or Preposing**

Fronting involves placing the focused constituent at the beginning of the sentence. This position gives the element prominence and makes it pragmatically salient:

Na John chop di mango.

(It was John who ate the mango.)

This construction emphasizes the subject (John) and corresponds functionally to English clefts, though structurally simpler. The use of *na* signals that the focus falls on the fronted constituent.

(b) Focus Particle “*na*”

The particle *na* is a multifunctional word in Nigerian Pidgin, serving as a copula, equative, and focus marker. When used in focus contexts, it identifies the emphasized constituent and highlights it as the main information-bearing unit of the utterance.

Na dis kain food I like.

(It’s this kind of food that I like.)

This aligns with focus particles in substrate languages, demonstrating substrate retention in Pidgin syntax.

(c) Cleft and Pseudo-Cleft Constructions

Cleft constructions in Nigerian Pidgin are used to highlight or isolate the focused element:

Na book wey I buy.

(It’s the book that I bought.)

Here, *wey* serves as a relative complementizer linking the focused noun phrase (book) to the rest of the clause. These constructions are simplified analogues of English clefts but maintain functional equivalence.

(d) Prosodic Focus

In spoken Nigerian Pidgin, intonation and stress also play a significant role in marking focus. For instance, contrastive focus can be achieved through pitch prominence:

JOHN chop di mango. – (Not Peter)

John chop di MANGO. – (Not banana)

Prosody thus complements syntactic focus marking in speech.

### **3.3 Theoretical Implications of Focus in Nigerian Pidgin**

#### **3.3.1 Syntax–Pragmatics Interface**

Focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin exemplify a close interaction between syntax and pragmatics. The language's flexible syntactic system allows for multiple realizations of focus depending on context. This supports the Functional-Pragmatic view that focus marking arises primarily from communicative need rather than strict grammatical positioning.

#### **3.3.2 Substrate Influence**

The structure of focus in Nigerian Pidgin reveals strong substrate influence from Niger-Congo languages. The na-focus construction parallels the use of focus particles like Yoruba *ni* and Igbo *ka*, confirming that these indigenous languages shaped the grammaticalization of focus markers in Pidgin.

### **3.3.3 Universality of Focus Mechanisms**

Cross-linguistically, focus tends to involve clefting, fronting, and prosodic prominence. Nigerian Pidgin thus provides evidence of how universal linguistic tendencies can manifest in contact languages, even within simplified syntactic systems.

### **3.4 Summary**

This theoretical framework has examined the concept of focus within three major linguistic theories — Generative Grammar, Functional Pragmatics, and Information Structure — and applied them to Nigerian Pidgin. It has shown that Nigerian Pidgin employs several strategies, including na-focus constructions, fronting, clefting, and prosodic emphasis, to encode prominence and new information.

These findings highlight the hybrid nature of Pidgin: while lexically influenced by English, its syntactic and pragmatic mechanisms are largely shaped by indigenous Nigerian languages. The next chapter will discuss the empirical analysis of focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin, illustrating how these theoretical principles manifest in real linguistic data.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes data on Focus Construction in Nigerian Pidgin (NP), using insights from Focus Theory within the framework of Information Structure (Lambrecht, 1994; Rizzi, 1997). The aim of this analysis is to investigate how speakers of Nigerian Pidgin express focus through various syntactic, lexical, and prosodic means.

Focus constructions serve the communicative function of marking information that is new, contrastive, or emphatic in discourse. According to Lambrecht (1994), focus is that portion of the sentence that represents new information relative to the hearer's mental state, while the remaining portion constitutes the presupposed or given information. In Nigerian Pidgin, the focus system is particularly interesting because it reflects a blend of English-derived syntax and West African discourse structures (Faraclas, 1996; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

The data analyzed in this chapter were drawn from both natural speech samples and elicited examples, illustrating how focus is marked in different syntactic environments such as subject, object, adverbial, and predicate positions.

#### 4.1 Theoretical Background: Focus Theory

The analysis in this chapter is grounded in the Information Structure Theory, which distinguishes between topic and focus (Chafe, 1976; Lambrecht, 1994). The topic is the part of the sentence about which something is said typically given or known information

while the focus introduces new or emphasized information that updates the hearer's knowledge.

Lambrecht (1994) identifies three broad types of focus constructions:

Predicate-focus constructions, in which the predicate is new information.

Argument-focus constructions, in which one argument (subject or object) is in focus.

Sentence-focus constructions, where the entire proposition is new information.

In addition to these, Rizzi (1997) proposed that the syntactic expression of focus may involve movement to a Focus Phrase (FocP) in the left periphery of the clause. Nigerian Pidgin data clearly show syntactic fronting patterns that align with this notion.

#### **4.2 Focus Strategies in Nigerian Pidgin**

Nigerian Pidgin employs a number of linguistic strategies to mark focus. These include:

Use of the focus marker “na”

Cleft constructions using “na...wey”

Fronting of focused constituents

Prosodic emphasis (intonational focus)

Use of intensifying particles such as “self” and “only”

These strategies often function interchangeably depending on context and the type of information being emphasized.

#### **4.3 The Focus Marker “na”**

The particle “na” is the most prominent focus marker in Nigerian Pidgin. It serves as a syntactic marker that introduces the focused constituent, whether that constituent is a

subject, object, adverbial, or predicate. This marker functions in a similar way to the English cleft construction *it is/was X that...*, but is grammatically simpler and more flexible.

#### **4.3.1 Subject Focus**

Consider the following examples:

(1a) John buy di car.

John bought the car. (neutral statement) (1b) Na John buy di car.

It was John who bought the car. (focus on John)

In (1b), the subject John is fronted and preceded by the focus marker *na*, creating a focus construction. The function of *na* here is to draw attention to the subject as the new or contrastive information. This construction is typically used in response to a question like *Who bought the car?*

This type of structure aligns with argument-focus in Lambrecht's (1994) typology and shows that

NP uses a fronting mechanism to express focus syntactically.

#### **4.3.2 Object Focus**

The same focus marker *na* can also be used to focus the object of the verb:

(2a) John buy di car.

→ John bought the car.

(2b) Na di car John buy.

→ It was the car that John bought.

Here, the object *di car* is moved to the front of the sentence, preceded by *na*. This construction expresses contrastive or selective emphasis on the object. It may respond to a question such as *What did John buy?*

According to Rizzi (1997), such fronting operations are evidence that focus can be represented syntactically in a distinct clause-initial projection, which NP realizes through the particle *na*.

### **4.3.3 Adverbial Focus**

Adverbials can also be focused in NP using *na*:

(3a) *Mary travel yesterday.*

→ *Mary traveled yesterday.*

(3b) *Na yesterday Mary travel.*

→ *It was yesterday that Mary traveled.*

In this example, *yesterday* is the focused adverbial. The function of *na* remains constant — to signal that the following element carries the communicative prominence.

This construction corresponds to adverbial focus and is commonly used for temporal or locative emphasis.

### **4.3.4 Predicate Focus**

Predicates themselves may also be the focus of the utterance:

(4a) *Di boy dey run.*

→ *The boy is running.*

(4b) *Na run di boy dey run.*

→ It is running that the boy is doing.

This structure highlights the action as the focus, often for emphasis or contrast (e.g., to correct a misconception: “He no dey dance o, na run him dey run!”).

#### **4.4 The “na...wey” Construction**

The combination of “na...wey” forms a cleft construction in Nigerian Pidgin, which closely parallels the English it is X that Y... structure.

Na John wey buy di car.

It was John that bought the car.

Na yesterday wey Mary travel.

It was yesterday that Mary traveled.

The element following na is the focus, while wey introduces the subordinate clause that provides the presupposed information. This structure creates a clear distinction between the focused constituent and the backgrounded clause, as described in Lambrecht (2001).

Scholars such as Faraclas (1996) have noted that this na...wey structure in NP likely developed under the influence of indigenous West African languages, many of which employ similar cleft-like constructions for focus marking.

#### **4.6 Prosodic and Lexical Focus**

Apart from syntactic focus marking, Nigerian Pidgin also employs prosodic and lexical strategies.

#### **4.6.1 Prosodic Focus**

Prosody (intonation and stress) plays a significant role in unmarked or informal contexts. Speakers can place stress on the focused element without necessarily using na.

JOHN buy di car.

John bought the car. (Focus on JOHN)

John BUY di car.

John bought the car. (Focus on BUY)

The focus is realized through pitch prominence, and hearers interpret the stressed word as carrying the most important or contrastive information (Selkirk, 2002).

#### **4.6.2 Lexical Particles: “self” and “only”**

Certain lexical items also contribute to focus marking or intensification:

Na John self buy am!

John himself bought it.

Na food only dem give me.

It’s only food they gave me.

The particle self adds emphatic or contrastive meaning, while only signals exclusivity — both of which are aspects of focus interpretation.

#### **4.7 Topic–Focus Interaction**

Nigerian Pidgin also displays clear topic-focus structure, where a topicalized element introduces the discourse, followed by a focused constituent:

As for di money, na John carry am.

As for the money, it was John who took it.

In (11), as for di money functions as the topic, setting the discourse frame, while na John is the focus, providing new or contrastive information. This supports Lambrecht's (1994) claim that topic and focus operate as complementary components of sentence structure.

#### **4.8 Summary of Findings**

The data presented demonstrate that Nigerian Pidgin employs multiple strategies for marking focus, combining syntactic, prosodic, and lexical devices. The core marker of focus is na, which may occur independently or in combination with wey to form cleft-like constructions. These structures are highly productive and can target different syntactic categories.

<b>Focus Type</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Marker(s)</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
Subject Focus	Na + Subject + Verb...	na	Na John buy di car	It was John who bought the car
Object Focus	Na + Object + Subject + Verb	na	Na di car John buy It was the car John bought	Object Focus
Adverbial Focus	Na + Adverbial + Subject + Verb	na	Na yesterday Mary travel It was yesterday Mary traveled	Adverbial Focus
Cleft Focus	Na + XP + wey + Clause	na, wey	Na John wey cook di soup	It was John that cooked the soup
Contrastive Focus	Na + XP + self/only...	na, self, only	Na John self do am	John himself did it
Prosodic Focus	Stress/intonation	—	JOHN buy di car	JOHN bought the car

## **4.9 Discussion**

The findings reveal that focus in Nigerian Pidgin is primarily expressed syntactically through the use of *na* and *na...wey* constructions, though prosody and lexical particles also contribute to emphasis and contrast. This multifunctional system reflects both creole simplification and substrate influence from Nigerian indigenous languages, which typically use fronting or focus particles (such as Yoruba *ni* or Igbo *ka*) for emphasis.

The analysis supports the universal tendency, noted by Rizzi (1997), for languages to locate focused constituents in the left periphery of the clause. Moreover, the NP *na...wey* cleft parallels focus constructions in English, indicating possible transfer from the lexifier language but adapted to suit NP syntax.

Overall, Nigerian Pidgin demonstrates a rich and systematic focus-marking system that underscores its linguistic maturity and functional depth as a language of everyday communication, not merely a simplified code.

## **4.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin operates through a combination of syntactic, prosodic, and lexical means, with the focus marker *na* playing a central role. The data show that *na* can mark subjects, objects, adverbials, or predicates as focused elements, while *wey* introduces cleft-like subordination.

These constructions conform to the predictions of Focus Theory, supporting the argument that NP, like other natural languages, organizes information structure through identifiable grammatical patterns. The next chapter will provide a summary of findings and general conclusions of the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.0 Summary of the Study

This study examined focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin (NP) through the lens of Information Structure Theory, which emphasizes how speakers organize, highlight, and interpret information during communication. The research aimed to determine how focus is used in NP to indicate emphasis, contrast, or new information within discourse.

The study traced the role of focus as a pragmatic and communicative device, rather than a purely syntactic process. Focus in Nigerian Pidgin was analyzed as a strategy for managing the information flow between speaker and listener marking what is already known (given information) and what is being introduced (new information). Data for the study were drawn from naturally occurring NP utterances and constructed examples illustrating focus in real contexts.

The analysis revealed that NP employs fronting (preposing) and the focus marker *na* to draw attention to specific parts of an utterance. These constructions allow speakers to emphasize key information or contrast it with other elements in discourse. The study thus provides insights into how focus functions as an information-organizing tool in Nigerian Pidgin communication.

## 5.1 Summary of Major Findings

Based on the data and analysis presented in Chapters Three and Four, the following findings were made:

1. Focus in Nigerian Pidgin is an information management strategy.

Focus constructions in NP are used to highlight important or contrastive information, guiding the listener's attention to what the speaker considers new, unexpected, or emphasized.

2. The focus marker *na* functions as a discourse signal.

Rather than merely a syntactic particle, *na* serves a pragmatic role, indicating where emphasis lies in an utterance. It helps listeners distinguish between background information and the speaker's main message.

- Example: *Na John chop di mango* ('It was John who ate the mango') — focuses on John as new or contrastive information.

3. Fronting (preposing) enhances communicative clarity.

Nigerian Pidgin uses fronting to reposition significant information to the sentence-initial position, giving it prominence. This aligns with the principle that important information tends to appear early in discourse to improve listener comprehension.

4. Focus constructions reflect both African and English influences.

The use of *na* and fronting mirrors patterns found in Yoruba and Igbo, where focus is also achieved by emphasizing the left-peripheral position of the sentence. At the same time, NP maintains parallels with English cleft constructions, showing the dual influence of both language systems.

5. Focus helps maintain coherence and emphasis in discourse.

Focus marking ensures that new or contrastive information stands out, preventing ambiguity and enhancing communication efficiency. This reveals NP's pragmatic sophistication and systematic use of linguistic tools for meaning organization.

## **5.2 Implications of the Findings**

The findings have both linguistic and communicative implications:

1. Linguistic Implications

Focus constructions in NP demonstrate that the language has developed an organized mechanism for managing information flow. The consistent use of *na* and fronting indicates that NP is not a random mixture of English and local languages but a structured linguistic system.

2. Communicative Implications

Focus constructions in NP show that speakers are sensitive to how information is packaged and received. The placement of focus elements reflects natural principles of

communication efficiency and listener orientation, helping to foreground the most relevant parts of the message.

### 3. Cross-Linguistic Implications

The similarities between NP focus structures and those of West African languages indicate substrate influence in the evolution of NP. This supports the idea that information structure principles are universal but realized differently across languages.

## 5.3 Conclusion

This study has shown that focus construction in Nigerian Pidgin serves a vital role in organizing and conveying information in discourse. Rather than viewing focus as a purely syntactic phenomenon, the research interprets it as a pragmatic and communicative tool guided by principles of Information Structure Theory. Through the use of fronting (preposing) and the focus marker *na*, NP speakers highlight what is most important, contrastive, or new, ensuring effective information transfer. These strategies demonstrate that Nigerian Pidgin is a language of communicative depth, capable of subtle emphasis and clarity.

In conclusion, focus in Nigerian Pidgin operates as an information-organizing mechanism that reflects the creativity, adaptability, and expressiveness of its speakers. The study reaffirms that NP is a fully developed and systematic language, rich in pragmatic and structural resources for meaning-making.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. Future research should explore how intonation and stress interact with focus in NP to complement the role of fronting and na.
2. Scholars should further examine information structure in NP across genres — such as conversation, drama, and media — to see how focus strategies vary.
3. Nigerian Pidgin should be recognized in educational and linguistic studies as a fully functional communicative system, not merely an informal variety of English.
4. Comparative studies should be carried out between NP and other African languages to deepen understanding of shared information structuring strategies.

## **5.5 Contribution to Knowledge**

This study makes several important contributions:

1. It provides an information-based analysis of focus constructions in Nigerian Pidgin, shifting attention from syntax to discourse function.
2. It identifies na as a pragmatic marker that structures meaning and emphasis in communication.

3. It demonstrates how NP's focus system reflects both universal principles of information organization and African linguistic heritage.
  
4. It enhances understanding of NP as a rule-governed and communicatively rich language, not a simplified or inferior code.

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