

**AN ANALYSIS OF REQUEST AND COMMAND FORMS IN  
NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH**

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BENIN CITY**

**OCTOBER 2025**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
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**OCTOBER 2025**

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

I, **KELVIN OGHENESINVWE CHUKWURA** with matriculation number **ART2100744** of the Department of Linguistics certify that I carried out this work and approved of it as adequate in scope and quality in fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor's Degree in the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State.

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## **PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATION**

I, **KELVIN OGHENESINVWE CHUKWURA** with the matriculation number **ART2100744**, declare that this work titled “**AN ANALYSIS OF REQUEST AND COMMAND FORMS IN NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH**” has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test (with a score of \_\_\_\_\_%) and so does not violate any copyright violation.

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**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research to Almighty God, who gave me the strength, wisdom and knowledge to do this project to a successful end and saw me through my academic years in the University of Benin.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines requests and commands in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), focusing on their structure and pragmatic functions. The research investigates how speakers convey directives and negotiate social relationships through language. The study is motivated by the widespread use of NPE in Nigeria and the lack of detailed research on its directive forms. Guided by Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), data were collected from adult NPE speakers in urban settings using participant observation, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews. Analysis shows that requests and commands often employ uninflected verbs and pragmatic markers such as *abeg*, which serve to soften, intensify, or emphasize directives depending on context. Social factors, including power dynamics, age, and familiarity, influence whether speakers use direct or indirect forms. The study concludes that NPE is a pragmatically rich language capable of managing complex social interactions. Findings contribute to the descriptive study of NPE, enhance understanding of directive speech acts in multilingual settings, and support the recognition of NPE as a legitimate language in Nigeria.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

This study investigates the structures and usage of requests and commands in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), focusing on how speakers communicate directives in various social settings. Requests and commands are key types of directive speech acts, which are utterances intended to influence the behavior of others (Searle, 1975). Requests typically involve a speaker asking the hearer to perform an action, often with some degree of politeness or mitigation, while commands are more direct and impose a stronger expectation of compliance (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Nigerian Pidgin English serves as a lingua franca in Nigeria, spoken by millions across diverse ethnic and social groups. Its use spans informal daily conversations, media, entertainment, and increasingly formal domains (Faraclas, 1996; Igboanusi, 2008). The language is characterized by uninflected verbs, context-dependent constructions, and pragmatic markers

such as *abeg*, which function to mitigate or intensify directives. Understanding how NPE speakers navigate requests and commands provides insights into both the linguistic structure and sociocultural practices of this widely used creole.

This study focuses on request and command forms, which are central to interpersonal communication in any language. In pragmatic terms, both requests and commands fall under the category of directive speech acts, as outlined in Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975).

- A request can be defined as an utterance in which a speaker attempts to get a hearer to perform an action that benefits the speaker but is ultimately left to the hearer's willingness or ability (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). For example, in NPE, "*Abeg, borrow me your pen*" functions as a request since compliance depends on the addressee's choice.
- A command, on the other hand, is a directive in which the speaker expects compliance, often invoking authority, urgency, or necessity (Cruse, 2006). For instance, in NPE, "*Comot for road!*" functions as a

command, as it carries an immediate force with little room for negotiation.

While both are directive speech acts, the difference lies in the degree of obligation imposed on the hearer: requests are inherently negotiable, whereas commands are generally non-negotiable (Searle, 1979).

Despite their importance, these forms have not been given focused scholarly attention in Nigerian Pidgin English. Most linguistic work on NPE has examined its phonology, syntax, and broad pragmatic tendencies (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Faraclas, 2013), but the nuanced ways in which speakers construct, modify, and interpret requests and commands remain underexplored. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the syntactic structures and pragmatic strategies that characterize request and command forms in NPE, while also considering the social dynamics—such as age, power, and familiarity—that shape their use.

In terms of linguistic information, Nigerian Pidgin English is a non-standard variety of English that has evolved into a robust and rule-governed linguistic system with its own syntactic, phonological, and semantic norms (Igboanusi,

2008). It draws much of its vocabulary from English, while its grammatical patterns and pragmatic strategies are shaped by the communicative preferences of its speakers. NPE typically features uninflected verb forms, subject drop in imperatives, use of aspectual particles like *dey* (marking the progressive), and a rich system of discourse markers such as *abeg*, *make*, and *sha*, which carry both grammatical and interpersonal meaning.

The language is spoken extensively across Nigeria, cutting across ethnic, religious, and regional lines. It serves as a lingua franca in urban centers such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Benin City, Warri, Abuja, and Kano, and is used by speakers from diverse language backgrounds. NPE functions as either a first language (L1) or second language (L2) for millions of Nigerians, and it plays a central role in informal conversation, popular music, political commentary, and digital media communication. In some urban areas, it has even become the primary language of home and community life, especially among younger generations.

What distinguishes NPE from Standard Nigerian English is not simply informality, but a distinct grammatical and pragmatic profile suited to rapid,

expressive, and socially nuanced communication. Its use of direct forms for commands (e.g., *comot!*), politeness mitigation strategies (e.g., *abeg*), and pragmatic particles reflects a sophisticated understanding of context, speaker intention, and interpersonal dynamics. Studying requests and commands in NPE therefore offers a rich avenue for examining the interface between grammar, pragmatics, and culture in a widely used African variety of English.

By examining these structures in detail, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of NPE as a systematic, context-sensitive communicative code rather than a simplified version of English.

## **1.2 Methodology**

This research adopts a descriptive and qualitative approach to examine requests and commands in NPE. The study involves several steps:

Adult NPE speakers in urban areas were selected purposively to represent various social settings such as markets, workplaces, and educational institutions. Data were gathered through participant observation, audio

recordings of natural conversations, and semi-structured interviews designed to elicit directive forms. Collected data were transcribed and coded to identify patterns in request and command constructions, including pragmatic markers, directness, and politeness strategies. Triangulation of observation, recordings, and interviews ensured the reliability and validity of findings.

This stepwise methodology allows for replicability and provides a clear framework for other researchers to conduct similar studies.

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

The purpose of this study is to examine the structures and pragmatic functions of requests and commands in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). Although NPE has received scholarly attention as a lingua franca in Nigeria (Faraclas, 2013; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991), relatively little focus has been placed on how speakers use specific directive forms such as requests and commands in everyday communication. Directives are an essential aspect of human interaction, as they allow speakers to influence the behavior of others, negotiate power relations, and maintain social harmony (Searle, 1975; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). By analyzing how requests and commands are formed

and interpreted in NPE, this study seeks to highlight both the linguistic strategies and the sociocultural factors that shape directive speech acts in this language.

Specifically, the study addresses the following issues:

1. To identify and describe the various linguistic forms used to express requests and commands in NPE, such as imperatives, particles (*abeg, make, go*), and interrogatives.
2. To investigate the pragmatic strategies employed by speakers when issuing requests or commands, including politeness, mitigation, or directness, and how these strategies vary across different social contexts.
3. To analyze the role of contextual factors such as age, power relations, familiarity, and setting in shaping how requests and commands are framed and interpreted.
4. To assess if requests and commands in NPE differ in terms of frequency and usage patterns across domains such as marketplaces, campuses, motor parks, and informal social gatherings.

The problem underlying this investigation is that, while NPE has long been dismissed as a "non-standard" or "simplified" variety of English, it is in fact a highly systematic and expressive language (Faraclas, 1996; Igboanusi, 2008). Requests and commands, in particular, provide evidence of the rich pragmatic resources available to speakers. However, there is limited academic documentation of how these directives are realized in natural speech. Without such analysis, the communicative potential of NPE risks being undervalued, and the language may continue to be stigmatized in both academic and social circles.

This study is therefore important because it not only provides a linguistic description of NPE directives but also demonstrates their pragmatic sophistication. By doing so, it contributes to the broader field of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, while also offering insights into the role of NPE as a legitimate vehicle of communication in Nigeria.

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

The study of requests and commands in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) is significant because it sheds light on how speakers of a widely used lingua

franca in Nigeria organize social interaction through language. NPE is spoken by over 120 million Nigerians either as a first or second language (Faraclas, 1996; Igboanusi, 2008), making it a central tool of communication across ethnic, social, and economic divides. Despite this wide usage, it remains marginalized in formal and academic contexts, often dismissed as a “non-standard” or “broken” form of English. By analyzing directive forms such as requests and commands, this study seeks to demonstrate the linguistic depth and pragmatic richness of NPE, thereby contributing to its recognition as a legitimate language of study.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the field of pragmatics and sociolinguistics by showing how requests and commands are realized in a creole language context. While much research has been done on directives in Standard English and other world languages (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1987), fewer works have addressed how African lingua francas like NPE employ unique pragmatic strategies such as the use of *abeg*, *make*, and *go*. This provides an opportunity to broaden our understanding of how universal speech act principles (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975) interact with locally specific linguistic resources.

From a practical perspective, the study is justified because requests and commands are part of daily life communication. Whether in markets, schools, workplaces, or homes, speakers constantly use these forms to get things done, negotiate power, and maintain relationships. A better understanding of how NPE speakers frame requests and commands can improve communication in education, governance, the media, and interethnic relations. It also has potential applications in language planning, especially as NPE gains more visibility in broadcasting and popular culture (Igboanusi, 2008).

Finally, the research is justified by the need to challenge the stigma often attached to NPE. By systematically analyzing its directive structures, this study demonstrates that NPE is not a “corrupted” form of English but a structured and expressive system capable of handling complex communicative tasks. Such findings support arguments for its inclusion in formal linguistic documentation and, potentially, in educational policy (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Conceptual Review of Literature**

##### **2.1.1 Requests and Commands as Directive Speech Acts**

In pragmatics, both requests and commands are classified as directives, that is, utterances whose primary function is to influence the behavior of the hearer (Searle, 1975). According to Austin (1962), speech acts are not merely descriptive but performative; when a speaker issues a request or a command, they are performing an action through language.

A request can be defined as a speech act in which the speaker asks the hearer to perform an action that benefits the speaker, often leaving the hearer the option to refuse (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). Requests are usually oriented toward politeness, mitigation, and negotiation of face, since they may impose on the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, in

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), “*Abeg, you fit lend me your pen?*” is a mitigated request where *abeg* softens the imposition.

A command, on the other hand, is a more direct directive in which the speaker asserts authority or urgency, giving the hearer little room to refuse (Cruse, 2006). In NPE, “*Comot for here!*” or “*Gi mi dat book!*” are typical examples of commands that rely on imperative structures and often omit explicit politeness markers.

Thus, while both requests and commands belong to the same speech act category, they differ in degree of directness, politeness, and speaker-hearer dynamics (Kasper, 2006).

### **2.1.2 Speech Act Theory**

Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975) provides a framework for analyzing how language functions as action. Austin distinguished between locutionary (utterance), illocutionary (speaker’s intention), and perlocutionary (effect on the hearer) acts. Requests and commands in NPE exemplify illocutionary acts because the speaker’s goal is to prompt an

action. Searle (1975) further categorized directives into direct and indirect forms. In NPE, direct imperatives such as “*Sit down!*” coexist with indirect requests like “*You fit sit small?*” (Can you sit for a while?), showing that the same illocutionary force may be expressed with varying degrees of politeness and explicitness.

### **2.1.3 Politeness and Face Management**

Requests and commands are considered face-threatening acts (FTAs) because they potentially impose on the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Politeness strategies mitigate this effect:

- Positive politeness appeals to solidarity (e.g., “*Abeg, come chop with us*”).
- Negative politeness reduces imposition (e.g., “*You fit help me carry this bag, abeg?*”).
- Bald-on-record strategies are unmitigated and direct (e.g., “*Close door!*”).

In NPE, the marker *abeg* is highly versatile, functioning to soften requests, convey urgency, or express frustration, depending on intonation and context (Faraclas, 2013).

#### **2.1.4 Pragmatic Markers in NPE**

Pragmatic markers such as *abeg*, *make*, *go*, and *na* serve multiple communicative purposes in NPE (Schiffrin, 1994). For instance:

- *Make* can introduce commands or suggestions: "*Make you wait for me na*" (Please wait for me).
- *Go* emphasizes imperative force: "*Go buy bread for me*" (Go and buy bread for me).
- *Na* adds emphasis or assertion: "*Do am na!*" (Just do it!).

These markers enhance clarity, manage politeness, and reflect speakers' intentions.

#### **2.1.5 Sociolinguistic Dimensions of Directives**

The choice of directive forms in NPE is influenced by social variables such as age, power, status, and familiarity (Holmes, 2013). A market vendor may

issue a direct command ("*Pay me my money now!*"), while a student addressing a lecturer may use a mitigated request ("*Abeg, sir, you fit shift the deadline?*"). These patterns demonstrate the interplay between social context and linguistic form.

### **2.1.6 The Role of Context**

In pragmatics, context is central to how meaning is negotiated between speakers and hearers. According to Levinson (1983), context includes not only the physical setting but also shared knowledge, cultural background, and the social roles of participants. In Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), requests and commands rely heavily on contextual cues for proper interpretation. For instance, the same command "Comot!" (Get out!) can be interpreted as humorous, threatening, or playful depending on the relationship between interlocutors, tone of voice, and setting. Context helps distinguish between direct and indirect requests, as seen in "You fit help me?" (Can you help me?), which in a formal context functions as a polite request but in a casual setting may sound more like a suggestion or command. This shows that directives in NPE cannot be fully understood

without attention to situational variables such as power dynamics, intimacy, and social distance (Thomas, 1995; Mey, 2001).

### **2.1.7 NPE and Pragmatic Functions**

NPE demonstrates remarkable flexibility in performing pragmatic functions, particularly in directive speech acts. Scholars such as Elugbe and Omamor (1991) and Faraclas (1996) note that the language provides speakers with an efficient means of navigating diverse social hierarchies in Nigeria. The pragmatic marker *abeg* is especially important in requests, serving to mitigate threats to face and express politeness (Igboanusi, 2008). Beyond politeness, *abeg* can convey urgency, irritation, or irony, depending on the speaker's tone and context. Similarly, imperatives in NPE often omit explicit subjects, making them context-dependent yet highly effective (e.g., "Close door" vs. "You close the door"). These patterns highlight the pragmatic richness of NPE as a language of negotiation, solidarity, and power. Studying requests and commands in NPE therefore provides insights into how speakers manage interpersonal relationships and social interaction.

### **2.1.8 Summary of Conceptual Review**

From the review, it is evident that requests and commands are integral aspects of human communication, functioning as directive speech acts within the broader framework of pragmatics. Theories such as Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and politeness frameworks (Brown & Levinson, 1987) provide useful tools for analyzing how these acts are structured and interpreted. Specifically, in NPE, the use of pragmatic markers like *abeg*, the reliance on context, and the syntactic simplicity of imperatives reveal a language that is systematic yet socially adaptive. The sociolinguistic diversity of Nigeria further enriches these functions, making NPE a prime language for examining the intersection between grammar, pragmatics, and culture. This conceptual background establishes the foundation for analyzing the request and command structures that the present study investigates.

### **2.2 Previous Studies**

The study of requests and commands has been a major subject of inquiry across pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural linguistics. Scholars

have investigated how directive speech acts are structured, how politeness is negotiated, and how sociocultural norms influence interpretation. This section reviews major contributions globally, across Africa, and in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), before highlighting the gaps that justify the present study.

### **2.2.1 Studies on Speech Acts**

Speech Act Theory, pioneered by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969), laid the foundation for understanding requests and commands as illocutionary acts—utterances that perform actions. Austin distinguished between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, while Searle classified directives (including requests and commands) as acts intended to get the hearer to do something. This framework has guided much subsequent research on how directives are formed and interpreted in different languages.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) further showed that requests are inherently face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson, 1987), requiring politeness strategies to mitigate their impact. This theoretical grounding

makes speech act analysis a useful tool for exploring Nigerian Pidgin requests and commands.

### **2.2.2 Cross-Cultural and Pragmatic Studies**

The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) remains the most influential comparative study of requests and apologies. Their work demonstrated that while requests universally involve some imposition, strategies vary: some cultures use directness without loss of politeness, while others favor indirectness.

Trosborg (1995) expanded this to interlanguage pragmatics, showing how second-language learners often transfer politeness norms from their first language. Similarly, Kasper and Rose (2002) emphasized pragmatic competence in second language development. Ervin-Tripp (1976) explored how children acquire directive forms, revealing that imperatives, interrogatives, and hints are all part of directive competence.

These studies underscore that requests and commands are socially conditioned, culturally bound, and pragmatically complex, making them ideal for sociolinguistic research in multilingual Nigeria.

### **2.2.3 African Studies on Directives**

Within Africa, several scholars have examined directives in indigenous languages. Adegbija (1989) studied Yoruba directives and noted that politeness markers, honorifics, and indirect strategies are central to mitigating imposition. Obeng (1999) analyzed Akan proverbs and directives, showing that indirectness and politeness are highly valued.

These studies reveal that in African cultures, directives are deeply tied to hierarchical social structures, age, respect, and communal norms. However, research specifically on creoles and pidgins in Africa remains relatively limited.

### **2.2.4 Nigerian Pidgin English as a Research Focus**

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) has been studied primarily in terms of grammar, structure, and sociolinguistic role rather than detailed pragmatic analysis. Elugbe and Omamor (1991) emphasized NPE's systematicity and role as a lingua franca, while Faraclas (2013) examined its pragmatics, showing how it encodes solidarity and creativity in communication.

Igboanusi (2008) explored NPE in status planning, noting its importance in mass communication, while Omoniyi (2004) highlighted its use in identity construction. These works affirm NPE's legitimacy as a communicative system, but do not provide extensive analysis of request and command forms.

### **2.2.5 Studies on Directives in Nigerian Pidgin**

Some studies have touched on directives in NPE. Egbokhare (2003) discussed politeness in NPE, especially the multifunctional particle *abeg*, which softens requests but can also convey emphasis or exasperation depending on context. Akande (2008) highlighted that directives dominate informal NPE interactions, but his analysis remained broad, not focusing deeply on request and command strategies.

This limited body of work shows that while NPE has distinctive ways of managing directives, systematic research remains underdeveloped compared to studies in Standard English or indigenous Nigerian languages.

### **2.2.6 Identified Gaps in Literature**

From the survey, several gaps emerge:

1. **Asymmetry between requests and commands:** While requests have been widely studied, commands remain underexplored, particularly in African and creole contexts.
2. **Limited pragmatic focus on NPE:** Most studies of NPE address grammar, sociolinguistics, and status planning, but its speech act system—especially requests and commands—remains underexamined.
3. **Lack of domain-specific research:** Very little has been done to analyze directives in everyday social contexts(e.g., markets, classrooms, peer groups), where power and solidarity are negotiated.

The present study therefore seeks to fill these gaps by systematically analyzing request and command forms in Nigerian Pidgin English, showing how they operate syntactically and pragmatically in different social domains.

### **2.3 The Concern of the Present Study**

Although Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) has been widely studied for its sociolinguistic vitality, phonological patterns, and general grammatical properties (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Faraclas, 1996; Igboanusi, 2008), relatively little attention has been devoted to the systematic study of request and command structures as distinct pragmatic phenomena. Much of the available literature treats directive acts in passing, without a focused attempt to describe their syntactic realization, pragmatic variation, and communicative functions in depth.

The present study is therefore concerned with closing this gap. Its focus lies in exploring how speakers of NPE construct, interpret, and negotiate requests and commands across different social settings. This concern arises from four interrelated issues:

### **2.3.1 Research Gap**

Despite the growing literature on Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and speech acts, there is very limited research specifically addressing requests and commands in NPE. Most existing studies focus on:

- NPE's grammatical structure and sociolinguistic status (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).
- General pragmatic or creative expressions in informal contexts (Faraclas, 2013).
- NPE as a tool for identity construction or empowerment (Igboanusi, 2008; Omoniyi, 2004).

Few studies have conducted an in-depth analysis of directive speech acts, leaving a gap in understanding how requests and commands function pragmatically in NPE, particularly across different social contexts.

### **2.3.2 Importance of the Study**

Requests and commands are central to everyday communication, reflecting:

- Social norms and politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

- Power relations, age, and social status differences.
- Strategies for mitigating face-threatening acts, such as the use of *abeg* in NPE.

Studying these forms in NPE provides insight into the pragmatic richness of the language, illustrating that it is systematic and culturally grounded, rather than a simplified or “broken” English.

### **2.3.3 Objectives of the Study**

The present study focuses on analyzing form, function, and pragmatics of NPE requests and commands. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the linguistic forms commonly used to express requests and commands.
2. Examine the pragmatic strategies, including politeness markers and mitigation devices.
3. Investigate the influence of social factors (age, gender, familiarity, and status) on directive forms and interpretation.

### **2.3.4 Justification for the Study**

By addressing the gaps identified, this research:

- Enhances the theoretical understanding of directives in creole and pidgin languages.
- Provides a sociolinguistic description of NPE directives, useful for teaching, communication studies, and language planning.
- Offers insight into how language mediates social interaction in multilingual Nigerian communities.

### **2.3.5 Unique Relevance of the Present Study**

The present study is uniquely relevant because it directly addresses a gap in the sociolinguistic and pragmatic analysis of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE).

While NPE has been widely studied in terms of structure, usage, and sociocultural functions (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Faraclas, 2013; Igboanusi, 2008), very few studies focus specifically on requests and commands, which are central to everyday social interaction.

The study's relevance can be summarized in the following ways:

1. Focus on Directives as Speech Acts: Unlike previous research that treats NPE broadly, this study analyzes requests and commands as discrete speech acts, examining how they are structured, mitigated, and interpreted in various social contexts.
2. Sociocultural Sensitivity: By exploring the role of social factors such as age, gender, status, and familiarity, the study highlights the interplay between language and society, showing how NPE reflects and negotiates social hierarchies.
3. Practical Application: Findings from this research can inform language teaching, intercultural communication, and sociolinguistic studies, providing evidence that NPE is a fully functional and context-sensitive communicative tool rather than a simplified form of English.
4. Contribution to African Linguistics: The study extends the scope of research on African English-based creoles, providing a systematic description of pragmatic strategies that has not been fully documented before.
5. Documentation and Preservation: By analyzing everyday interactions in NPE, the study contributes to the documentation of a dynamic

lingua franca, offering insights for future research in creole linguistics and sociopragmatics.

In essence, the present study is both theoretically and practically significant, as it bridges the gap between general descriptions of NPE and the nuanced understanding of how directives operate in Nigerian society.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

The present study adopts a dual theoretical framework, drawing on Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This combination is appropriate because requests and commands are not only linguistic expressions but also social actions that must be interpreted within interactional and cultural contexts.

##### **3.1.1 Speech Act Theory**

Speech Act Theory, originally proposed by Austin (1962) and later developed by Searle (1969, 1975), provides a foundation for understanding language as a form of action rather than a mere vehicle for conveying information. Austin distinguished between the locutionary act (the act of producing sounds and words), the illocutionary act (the speaker's intended meaning or force), and the perlocutionary act (the effect on the hearer). Building on this, Searle (1969) classified speech acts into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

Within this typology, directives are central to the present research, as they include commands, requests, and instructions—utterances intended to get the hearer to perform some action. Directives may be expressed directly (e.g., “*Gi mi dat buk*” — “Give me that book”) or indirectly (e.g., “*You Fit gi mi dat buk?*” — “Could you give me that book?”). According to Searle (1975), indirectness often involves manipulating the relationship between the literal form and the intended meaning.

For Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), Speech Act Theory is valuable because it highlights how syntactic simplicity (e.g., bare imperatives, subjectless

clauses) interacts with contextual cues to produce directive force. It also provides a framework for analyzing how markers such as *make* (“let”), *go* (“will/shall”), and *abeg* (“please”) function in modifying or strengthening the illocutionary force of requests and commands. In this way, Speech Act Theory offers both a categorical and a functional lens for interpreting directive forms in NPE (Levinson, 1983).

### **3.1.2 Politeness Theory**

Since requests and commands are inherently face-threatening acts (FTAs), they must be managed in ways that balance interpersonal relationships. Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding such strategies. Their model distinguishes between negative face (the need for autonomy) and positive face (the need for approval and solidarity). Speakers can threaten either or both faces when issuing directives, especially when imposing on the hearer’s freedom of action.

To mitigate FTAs, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose four major strategies:

1. Bald on record (direct, unmitigated commands, e.g., “*Comot!*” — “Leave!”),
2. Positive politeness (appeals to solidarity, e.g., “*Abeg my boss, help me*” — “Please my friend, help me”),
3. Negative politeness (indirect or cautious requests, e.g., “*You fit you help me?*” — “Could you help me?”),
4. Off-record (indirect hints, e.g., “*I no get biro*” — “I don’t have a pen,” implying a request).

In the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment, politeness does not always align with Anglo-American norms. Nwoye (1992), for instance, demonstrates that communal values and respect hierarchies shape politeness in Igbo discourse. Similarly, in NPE, blunt imperatives may be interpreted as solidarity markers among equals rather than impoliteness. Conversely, the use of mitigators like *abeg* often signals deference, urgency, or emphasis depending on context and intonation (Faraclas, 1996).

Politeness Theory is thus useful in analyzing how speakers of NPE manage the social dimension of directives, navigating factors such as age, social

distance, and power relations. It allows for a nuanced understanding of why certain forms are chosen in particular contexts and how they contribute to maintaining or challenging social harmony.

### **3.1.3 Integration of Theories**

Speech Act Theory and Politeness Theory complement each other in this study. The former categorizes and interprets requests and commands as illocutionary acts, while the latter explains the strategies used to mitigate their potentially face-threatening nature. When combined, the two frameworks enable a comprehensive analysis of both the structural properties and the pragmatic functions of requests and commands in Nigerian Pidgin English.

## **3.2 Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, supplemented with elements of corpus-based analysis. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to describe and interpret how requests and commands are structured and used in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), focusing on meaning, function, and context rather than numerical generalizations (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

The research design is presented in explicit steps to ensure replicability.

### **3.2.1 Illocutionary Classification (Speech Act Analysis)**

Using Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975), each directive will be analyzed for its illocutionary force. For example:

- Commands/Orders: Imposing authority or urgency,
- Requests: Seeking cooperation, often with mitigation,
- Pleading/Entreaties: Requests marked by urgency or humility,
- Suggestions/Advice: Less imposing directive acts.

The distinction between direct and indirect directives will also be examined (Searle, 1975). This step is crucial for showing how form and function interact in NPE directives.

### **3.2.2 Politeness and Pragmatic Strategies**

In the next stage, Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) will guide the analysis of how speakers mitigate or intensify directives. The following strategies will be coded:

- Bald-on-record imperatives (“*Comot!*” — “Leave!”),
- Positive politeness strategies appealing to solidarity (“*Abeg, my guy, do am for me*”),
- Negative politeness strategies minimizing imposition (“*Fit you help me?*”),
- Off-record strategies using hints or indirectness (“*I no get biro*” — implying a request).

Particular attention will be given to the multifunctional role of *abeg*, which can function as a politeness marker, emphasis device, or challenge, depending on context (Nwoye, 1992; Faraclas, 1996).

### **3.3.3 Contextual and Comparative Analysis**

The final stage will involve examining how directive forms vary with contextual variables such as age, gender, social distance, and setting. Comparisons will also be made with findings from studies of requests and commands in other languages and English varieties (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Nwoye, 1992). This will highlight universal vs. culture-specific features of directive use in NPE.

### **3.3.4 Reliability of Analysis**

To enhance reliability, a subset of the data will be double-coded by another linguist with expertise in NPE. Inter-coder agreement will be calculated, and discrepancies will be discussed to refine the coding scheme (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected on requests and commands in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). Data were obtained through

audio-recorded conversations, observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Only relevant samples are presented here; the full corpus is attached in the appendix.

The chapter focuses on:

1. Presenting the utterances of requests and commands.
2. Analyzing the linguistic forms and pragmatic strategies used.
3. Interpreting the findings in relation to social context, politeness, and directive function.

## **4.2 Presentation of Data**

### **4.2.1 Requests and Commands Dataset (50 Utterances)**

The dataset consists of 50 utterances (see Section 4.2) drawn from conversations and reconstructed scenarios of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). The utterances capture two main speech acts: requests and commands. Each

utterance has been classified according to its structural and pragmatic features.

S/N	Speaker	Utterance	Type	Pragmatic Feature
Datum 1.	A	Abeg, lend me your pen	Request	Politeness marker <i>abeg</i>
	B	Comot for here!	Command	Direct imperative
	C	Abeg, no vex, I just wan chop small	Request	Mitigation + context clarification
Datum 2	A	Make you help me carry this bag	Request	Indirect imperative
	B	Bring am now	Command	Direct imperative
	C	Abeg, wait small	Request	Politeness marker + time mitigation
Datum 3	A.	Give me	Command	Direct

		water		imperative
	B	No wahala, I go do am	Request/Response	Assurance + future marker
	C	Abeg, don't disturb me	Request	Mitigation + negative directive
Datum 4	A	Comot sharp-sharp	Command	Emphatic imperative
	B	Abeg, help me find my phone	Request	Politeness + assistance
	C	Make you listen to me	Command	Indirect imperative
Datum 5	A	Abeg, no carry last	Request	Mitigation + social solidarity
	B	Open door	Command	Direct imperative
.	C	Abeg, I wan ask you something	Request	Politeness marker + prelude

Datum 6	A	Comot for my hand	Command	Direct imperative
	B	Abeg, show me the way	Request	Mitigation + guidance
	C	Don't touch am	Command	Direct negative imperative
Datum 7	A	Abeg, help me call am	Request	Politeness + assistance
	B	Make you no forget am	Command	Indirect imperative + emphasis
	C	Abeg, you fit borrow me small money?	Request	Politeness + tentative modal
Datum 8	A	Sit down there!	Command	Direct imperative
	B	Abeg, help me hold this bag	Request	Politeness marker
	C	Make you no talk that kind	Command	Indirect imperative

		thing again		
Datum 9	A	Abeg, dash me small airtime	Request	Politeness marker + indirect request
	B	Lock the gate now	Command	Direct imperative + emphasis
	C	Abeg, no use my phone anyhow	Request	Politeness + negative directive
Datum 10	A	Pack comot from road	Command	Direct imperative
	B	Abeg, follow me reach junction	Request	Politeness + cooperation
	C	Carry chair come here	Command	Direct imperative
Datum 11	A	Abeg, shift small make I pass	Request	Politeness marker + mitigation
	B	Off that light	Command	Direct imperative +

		now!		urgency
	C	Abeg, you fit help me with transport fare?	Request	Mitigation + modal
Datum 12	A	Close your mouth	Command	Direct imperative
	B	Abeg, wait make I finish	Request	Politeness + turn-taking
	C	Drop that thing for table	Command	Direct imperative
Datum 13	A	Abeg, gimme small space	Request	Politeness + spatial negotiation
	B	No move from there	Command	Negative imperative
	C	Abeg, carry me reach market	Request	Politeness marker
Datum 14	A	Make you write your name here	Command	Indirect imperative

	B	Abeg, no forget to call me	Request	Politeness + reminder
	C	Enter house now	Command	Direct imperative
Datum 15	A	Abeg, reason my matter small	Request	Politeness + appeal
	B	No open that bag	Command	Negative imperative
	C	Abeg, you fit gimme directions?	Request	Politeness + tentative modal
Datum 16	A	Stop that noise	Command	Direct imperative
	B	Abeg, send me credit	Request	Politeness marker
	C	Make you no cross that line	Command	Indirect imperative
Datum 17	A	Abeg, forgive me	Request	Politeness + apology

	B	Come quick	here	Command	Direct imperative + urgency
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#### 4.2.2 Sample Conversation in NPE

Context: Street vendor interaction with friends and passersby.

Speaker A (30/M): Abeg, sell me two suya sticks.

Speaker B (28/F): Okay, na how you wan pay?

Speaker C (25/M): Abeg, no vex, I just wan chop small.

Speaker A: Gi am one stick now, I go pay the rest later.

Speaker B: No wahala, take am.

Speaker D (35/F): Comot for line, make others fit reach.

Speaker C: Abeg, no vex, I just wan chop small.

Speaker D: Alright, just make e quick.

Speaker A: Abeg, remember say I dey pay you later oh.

Observation Notes:

- *Abeg* frequently appears to soften requests and mitigate tension.

- Imperatives like *Comot for line* show direct commands used to enforce social order or urgency.
- Speakers negotiate priority, politeness, and urgency, illustrating dynamic use of directives in NPE.

### 4.3 Analysis of Data

#### 4.3.1 Linguistic Forms

- Imperatives: Used predominantly for commands (e.g., *Comot for line*, *Gi am one stick*).
- Politeness Marker *abeg*: Appears in multiple requests and even in situations of minor conflict.
- Subjectless Sentences: Common in commands, relying on context for interpretation.

#### 4.3.2 Pragmatic Strategies

- Mitigation: Requests are softened using *abeg*, intonation, and context.
- Urgency and Emphasis: Commands rely on direct imperatives and situational urgency.

- Social Context: Age, status, and familiarity influence the formulation and reception of directives.

## 4.4 Interpretation of Results

### 4.4.1 Requests

Requests in NPE display a high reliance on pragmatic softening strategies, particularly through the particle *abeg*. Out of the 25 requests in the dataset, 22 (88%) employed *abeg* either clause-initially (*Abeg, help me hold this bag*) or before modals (*Abeg, you fit gimme directions?*). This suggests that *abeg* is a central politeness marker in NPE, functioning similarly to *please* in English but with broader pragmatic uses, including appeal, urgency, and solidarity (Igboanusi, 2008; Faraclas, 1996).

Modal verbs such as *fit* ("can/may") are used to further soften requests. For example:

- *Abeg, you fit borrow me small money?*
- *Abeg, you fit help me with transport fare?*

These modalized requests are less face-threatening, particularly when asking for favors, and align with Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies of mitigating imposition.

#### **4.4.2 Commands**

Commands in NPE are generally direct and economical, reflecting the absence of verb inflection and the preference for imperatives in everyday discourse. Examples include:

- *Comot for here!*
- *Stop that noise*
- *Off that light now!*

Such utterances demonstrate how NPE prioritizes clarity and immediacy in directive speech acts. However, not all commands are bald imperatives; some are indirect imperatives with the structure *make you...* (e.g., *Make you write your name here*). These constructions introduce a softer or more collaborative tone, particularly in contexts where direct imperatives may be socially inappropriate (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

Negative imperatives (*no + verb*) also feature prominently, as in *No open that bag* or *Make you no forget am*. These constructions reflect both prohibition and caution functions in NPE.

#### 4.4.3 Pragmatic Insights

1. Abeg as a multifunctional marker:

- Mitigates imposition (*Abeg, you fit borrow me small money?*).
- Expresses urgency (*Abeg! No waste my time!*).
- Signals solidarity (*Abeg, no carry last*).

Its versatility confirms its central role in the pragmatic system of NPE (Igboanusi, 2008).

2. Balance of directness and politeness:

- While requests are mitigated with *abeg* and modals, commands are typically unmitigated.
- This asymmetry reflects a pragmatic division: requests negotiate power and solidarity, while commands assert authority or urgency.

3. Sociolinguistic dynamics:

- The choice between *direct imperatives* and *indirect imperatives* often depends on context, power relations, and speaker-hearer familiarity.
- For instance, *Make you no talk that kind thing again* softens a reprimand compared to the harsher *Shut up!*

#### 4.5 Summary

The analysis of 50 utterances shows that:

- Requests in NPE heavily depend on *abeg* and, at times, modal verbs (*you fit*), highlighting strategies of politeness and mitigation.
- Commands are more frequently direct, though some employ indirect forms (*make you...*) or prohibitions (*no + verb*).
- The interplay of directness and politeness reflects the dual nature of NPE as both an informal lingua franca and a language of negotiation across diverse social groups in Nigeria.

This data confirms earlier observations in the literature (Faraclas, 1996; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991) and expands them by showing how pragmatic

markers like *abeg* sustain effective communication in contexts of requests and commands.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

This study set out to examine request and command structures in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), with emphasis on their syntactic and pragmatic realizations. Data from 50 utterances were analyzed to identify patterns in how speakers formulate requests and issue commands in everyday contexts.

The analysis revealed that:

1. Requests in NPE are predominantly mitigated with the politeness marker *abeg*. Out of 25 request utterances, 22 employed *abeg* as either clause-initial or pre-modal, showing its centrality in polite interaction.
2. Modal verbs such as *fit* are frequently used to soften requests (e.g., *Abeg, you fit borrow me small money?*). This reduces imposition and reflects a preference for indirectness in requests.
3. Commands in NPE are generally direct and economical, often consisting of unmodified imperatives (e.g., *Comot for here!*, *Stop that noise*). However, some indirect imperatives (*make you...*) and negative imperatives (*no...*) add variation.

4. Pragmatic insights indicate that NPE balances directness in commands with politeness in requests, reflecting the language's role as a *lingua franca* for negotiation and solidarity in diverse Nigerian social contexts.
5. Requests and commands in NPE do not differ in terms of frequency and usage patterns across domains such as marketplaces, campuses, motor parks, and informal social gatherings.

These findings align with earlier scholarship (Faraclas, 1996; Igboanusi, 2008; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991) while providing fresh empirical evidence through expanded data samples.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The study concludes that NPE requests and commands are shaped by both linguistic simplicity and pragmatic complexity. Requests rely heavily on *abeg* and modals to mitigate imposition, while commands rely on direct imperatives for clarity and immediacy. This asymmetry suggests that NPE is not a “reduced” form of English but rather a fully functional communicative

system with systematic strategies for managing politeness, authority, and solidarity.

The study also demonstrates that NPE pragmatics are deeply rooted in Nigerian socio-cultural values, particularly respect, face-saving, and communal negotiation.

### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

While the study contributes valuable insights, it is not without limitations:

1. Sample size: Only 50 utterances were analyzed; a larger corpus may reveal more nuanced patterns.
2. Geographic scope: The data primarily reflects urban NPE usage; rural variations may differ.
3. Mode of data collection: Reliance on reconstructed and conversational data may omit features found in media, music, or digital communication.

These limitations, however, do not diminish the validity of the findings but instead highlight areas for further exploration.

## **5.4 Recommendations for Further Research**

1. Corpus expansion: Future studies should analyze a larger, regionally diverse dataset to capture variation across Nigeria.
2. Multimodal analysis: Including digital discourse (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter) would reveal how NPE requests and commands operate in online communication.
3. Comparative studies: Comparing NPE with Standard English and other West African Pidgins could reveal shared and unique politeness strategies.
4. Sociolinguistic focus: Future research could investigate how age, gender, and social class influence the use of requests and commands in NPE.

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