



# Omo, what are you waiting for? The discourse-pragmatic imports of *omo* in Nigerian multilingual online interactions<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines a borrowed bilingual pragmatic item *omo* in Nigerian multilingual online interactions to establish its frequency, syntactic features, collocational patterns and discourse-pragmatic functions. The data are extracted from the Nigerian component of the Global Web-based English corpus and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively within the framework of pragmatic borrowing and postcolonial corpus pragmatics. The findings show that *omo*, a Yoruba loan translated as 'child' in English, is routinely found at utterance-initial position in Nigerian multilingual online interactions and has assumed extended meaning and functions. It serves as a vocative among online commenters to single out a specific addressee and gain their attention, and as an interjection that signals various shades of emotions and emphasises different speech acts. The study establishes the continuous interplay of linguistic resources in a multilingual situation.

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## 1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multilingual nation comprising an estimated population of more than 200 million people (Worldometers, 2024), over 500 Indigenous Nigerian languages (INLs) and diverse geo-tribal groups (Eberhard et al., 2023). The country is home to three of the four phyla into which African languages are classified, which are the Nilo-Saharan (e.g. Kanuri), the Afro-Asiatic (e.g. Hausa, Tera, Ngizim and Bade), and the Niger-Kordofanian (e.g. Bini, Urhobo, Efik/Ibibio, Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) (Yusuf, 2010; Jowitt, 2019). Added to this myriad of INLs are Nigerian Pidgin (NigP) and exoglossic languages, which include English, French and Arabic.

Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are the three major INLs that serve as lingua francas in their respective domains – North, South-East and South-West. French is studied as a school subject and used for specific purposes, while Arabic is spoken chiefly for religious reasons by Muslims in the core Northern states (e.g. Kano, Borno and Sokoto). Only NigP and English transcend regional and ethnic boundaries, functioning as national lingua francas. However, NigP has the advantage of being non-elitist and more inclusive. Studies have revealed that NigP has the largest speaker population (Akande, 2021; Egbokhare, 2021; Faraclas, 2021). It is used primarily as a language of wider communication (although restricted to informal situations) by many Nigerians, and as a mother tongue for some speakers in the South–South region of the country (Simpson and Oyètàdè, 2007; Egbokhare, 2021). According to Faraclas (2021), an estimated 112 million Nigerians speak NigP as a first and second

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language, making it one of the world's largest and rapidly growing languages. It is largely English in vocabulary but INLs in structure.

Although NigP does not have a standard or acceptable codified<sup>1</sup> orthography yet, which has restricted its functionality officially, it is used across different strata of Nigerian society. It features in the broadcast media, both traditional (e.g. BBC Pidgin Service, Wazobia FM) and digital (e.g. podcasts, online video platforms), for newscasts, jingles, advertorial and public sensitisation (Osoba, 2014). It is also used in the print media (newspapers, magazines, blogs, and billboards), hip-hop music, popular culture, stand-up comedy, poetry and drama (Egbohare, 2021). The language is commonly heard in Nollywood movies, used to run football commentaries and spoken in religious circles. In fact, there is currently the NigP version of the Bible (Ekundayo, 2022).

On the other hand, English performs official functions in education, administration, law, politics, business, and the media (Gut, 2004; Jowitt, 2019). Since its arrival in Nigeria in the 16th century through trading activities in the coastal area and its implantation in the 19th century through Christianity and British colonisation, English has become the preferred language of the Nigerian elite and has gained ascendancy over INLs. The multiple functions English performs and the influence of indigenous languages and cultures have altered its form. It has been appropriated, domesticated and acculturated to suit the local culture and norms (Taiwo, 2009), resulting in Nigerian English (NigE, henceforth). The variety possesses distinct features at the level of sounds, intonation, sentence structures, lexis and expressions (Banjo, 1995). However, English is not just a second language in Nigeria; it also serves as a first language for the children of the elite across Nigerian cities. Recent studies (Jowitt, 2013; Oladipupo, 2021) have shown that many young Nigerians acquire English as a sequentially first language and possess adequate proficiency in it.

A corollary of such linguistic plurality in Nigeria is that features of one language often reflect in another during interactions through borrowing, code-mixing, code-switching, interference, and so on. Previous studies on NigE have established such cross-linguistic impact. For instance, the influence of INLs and cultures on English has been highlighted by scholars at the levels of phonology (e.g. Awonusi, 2009; Oladipupo and Akinola, 2022), lexico-semantics (e.g. Jowitt, 2019), syntax (e.g. Akinlotan, 2021), and discourse-pragmatics (e.g. Unuabonah, 2022a). Studies have also shown how NigP has contributed to the linguistic resources of NigE (e.g. Jowitt, 2019; Unuabonah et al., 2021), and the impact of English on INLs (Udoh and Anyanwu, 2020; Adamo, 2012; Owolola, 2018).

Recent discourse-pragmatic studies of NigE have particularly discussed some linguistic items borrowed from INLs and NigP into NigE. These include pragmatic markers, such as *o*, *sha*, *abi*, *biko*, *jare*, *lor*, *shey*, *shebi* and *fa* from different INLs, and *abeg*, *sef*, and *na* from NigP (Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2018, 2021; Unuabonah et al., 2021). Also included are interjections, such as *haba*, *kai*, *chai*, *na wa* and *shikenah*. (Unuabonah, 2020; Unuabonah and Daniel 2020). A notable lexical item in NigE that remains under-researched is *omo*, meaning 'child' in English. Borrowed from the Yoruba word *omọ*, it has undergone a spelling modification (omitting diacritics) and acquired new pragmatic functions.

Despite its prevalence in Nigerian multilingual interactions, little is known about its status and functions apart from (Unuabonah, 2022a: 146) claim that it functions "as an address term to indicate solidarity among peers". Therefore, this study examines *omo* in Nigerian multilingual online interactions in order to:

- i identify its frequency and syntactic features; and
- ii. describe its collocational patterns and discourse-pragmatic functions.

Instances of *omo* as used in the corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE) are cited in 1–2:

1. " Idiot! # I guess I made a quick call on his good looks *omo* I AM NOT SORRY FOR THAT. So wut if he's never been to. (GloWbE-Nig 7)
2. we graduated, and me and the chick remain " friends " till date. *Omo* dem no dey carry anything for head # as for u ladies scaring linda pls (GloWbE-Nig 37)

This section has provided the background to the study. The definition, scope and previous works on discourse-pragmatic features are discussed in Section 2, while the theoretical framework for the study is explained in Section 3. We present the data and methods in Section 4, provide the findings in Section 5, discuss them in Section 6 and conclude the study in Section 7.

## 2. Discourse-pragmatic features: Definition, scope and previous studies in the postcolonial context

Discourse-pragmatic features encompass a range of functionally diverse and syntactically optional items, which scarcely add to the content meaning of an utterance but perform interpersonal and/or textual functions in discourse, such as discourse initiation or closure, filler or turn-holding device, utterance interpretation, expression of speaker stance, hedging and politeness (Brinton, 1996; Aijmer, 2013; Pichler, 2013, 2016). The items included in this category, naturally, do not have a set of linguistic properties in common but can perform various pragmatic functions. They comprise such elements as interjections (e.g. *oh*, *ehn*), vocatives (e.g. *Bro*, *Guy*), pragmatic markers (e.g. *well*, *so*), response elicitors (e.g. *Do you get?*), adverb-like features (e.g. *now*, *what happens next?*), question tags (e.g. *It's good, innit?*) utterance-final tags (e.g. *You have seen her, right*), general extenders (e.g. *and so on*), quotatives (e.g. *I was like, Oh my god*) and intensifiers (e.g. *really*, *sort of*), amongst others (Pichler, 2016).

<sup>1</sup> A working orthography for NigP has been proposed (see Mensah et al., 2021) and a Nigerian Pidgin Dictionary has been produced (Egbokhare, 2024).

English-based discourse-pragmatic features have enjoyed elaborate investigations under different labels in world Englishes. For example, Huddleston and Fairhurst (2013) examine *anyway*, *okay* and *shame* in South African English (SAfE), while Leuckert and Rüdiger (2021) highlight the discourse-pragmatic functions of *basically* in Singapore English (SingE), *you know* and *I think* in Zanzibar English, *like* in South Korean English, *just* in Tyneside English, and *so* in Bulgarian, German, Finnish, Italian and Spanish Englishes. In Nigeria, scholars have investigated the extended usage of some English discourse-pragmatic markers such as *okay* (Adegbiya and Bello, 2001), *even* and *still* (Fuchs et al., 2013), *as in* (Ogoanah, 2011), *now* (Oladipupo and Unuabonah, 2021) and *it is well* (Aboh and Amgbapu, 2021; Unuabonah and Kupolati, 2023). Studies have also compared pragmatic variations across African Englishes, such as *anyway* in Ghanaian English (GhE) and NigE (Unuabonah and Daniel, 2024) and *sorry* in Ghanaian, Nigerian and Ugandan Englishes (Unuabonah et al., 2024).

Recent studies have particularly examined some discourse-pragmatic items borrowed from indigenous cultures and languages in postcolonial contexts to English. These include pragmatic markers *ba*, *lah*, *lor*, *meh* and *ya* in SingE (Gupta, 2006; Wee, 2010; Leimgruber, 2016), *no/na* and *yaar* in Indian English (Lange, 2009), *lah*, *meh* and *lor* in Malaysian English (MyE) (Tay et al., 2016), *kale*, *naye*, *anti* and *bambi* in Ugandan English (UgE) (Isingoma, 2016), *o*, *sha*, *abi*, *jor*, *biko*, *jare*, *shebi*, *fa* and *shey* in NigE (Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2018, 2021), and *si*, *sijui*, and *kweli* in Kenyan English (KenE) (Muro and Unuabonah, 2022). Also investigated are the bilingual interjections *tweaa* in GhE (Thompson, 2019), *haba* and *chai* in Nigerian English (Honkanen, 2020; Unuabonah and Daniel, 2020), *ja* and *ag* in SAfE (Unuabonah, 2022b) and *Eish* and *kumbe* in KenE (Muro and Unuabonah, 2022).

Most of these studies agree that the adoption of borrowed discourse-pragmatic features by L2 English speakers is responsible for the fewer usage or absence of some English discourse-pragmatic items in L2 discourse (Unuabonah et al., 2021), because they often serve as alternatives for English-based pragmatic items. It has also been revealed that the borrowed items perform varied discourse functions that extend beyond those supplied by the English elements and that the functions tend to be more interpersonal than textual and may serve as identity markers (Honkanen, 2020). This underscores the need to examine the discourse-pragmatic features of *omo* in the Nigerian multilingual space.

### 3. Theoretical consideration: Pragmatic borrowing and postcolonial corpus pragmatics

This study adopts, as the theoretical framework, pragmatic borrowing and postcolonial corpus pragmatics, which are apt for investigating pragmatic practices in postcolonial settings using corpus methods.

#### 3.1. Pragmatic borrowing

Pragmatic borrowing is a “contact-induced language change” phenomenon involving the adoption of pragmatic and discourse features (e.g. discourse markers, expletives, vocatives, interjections, general extenders, response markers, tags) of one language in another (Andersen, 2014: 14). It is an aspect of linguistic borrowing which emphasises the contextual factors associated with a borrowed lexical item rather than the lexeme itself (Andersen et al., 2017). Unlike lexical borrowing, pragmatic borrowing is concerned with the transfer of syntactically optional pragmatic items that are external to the content meaning of an utterance but provide signals for the interpretation of a discourse segment (Fraser, 1996). Thus, pragmatic borrowing extends linguistic borrowing beyond merely identifying the borrowed concept to examining their discourse-pragmatic functions and speaker attitude.

Pragmatic borrowing may be direct, whereby items that perform pragmatic functions in one language are adopted in the discourse of another; for instance, the English agreement marker *okay*, the interjection *gosh* and the discourse markers *well*, *sorry*, *you know* and *so* used in different linguistic contexts (Gumperz, 1982; Lipsky, 2005; Hennecke, 2012; Peterson, 2012; Andersen, 2014). The borrowing may also be indirect, whereby a recipient language (RL) lexeme assumes new discourse functions due to contact with a source language (SL). It may also include other features such as clause-connecting and clause-structuring phrases (Prince, 1988), greetings and politeness phenomena (Peterson, 2008), as well as intonation and contact-induced para-linguistic features (Andersen, 2014).

Pragmatic borrowings may be subjected to varying degrees of “stability or adaptation in form or function” (Andersen, 2014: 19). Formal stability implies that a borrowed item retains its original form, while in its adapted form, it undergoes structural changes, such as altering the spelling to conform to the orthography of the RL. An example is the spelling adaptation of the American English emotive interjection *man* as *mehn* in Nigerian English (Unuabonah et al., 2021). In terms of function, a borrowed item may maintain a similar meaning with the usage in the SL or assume narrow or extended (broadening or shift) attitudinal or communicative functions in the SL. Andersen (2014) thus proposes a range of factors through which the multifunctionality of pragmatically borrowed items can be accounted for across the SL and the RL, which includes structural/syntagmatic, functional and sociolinguistic features.

The discourse-structural and syntagmatic feature involves investigating the adoption of different syntagmatic constraints in the RL, such as utterance placement, scope, orientation, degree of syntactic integration and collocational features. The second factor specifies the functional dimension of pragmatic elements in the SL and RL. It describes the extent to which the RL users adopt a borrowed item, either wholesale or adapted. This considers such scenarios as functional stability, functional adaptation (narrowing and broadening) and functional shift. The final factor considers the sociolinguistic context within which pragmatic items are used and the influences on them. At this level, attention is paid to the users of the pragmatic item and their demographic peculiarities, as well as the contextual constraints on its usage in both the SL and RL.

This study will benefit from aspects of this theoretical orientation. Specifically, the analysis will rely on its discourse-structural and syntagmatic features to examine the positioning, grammatical properties and collocational patterns of *omo*, and adopt its functional adaptation to investigate the discourse-pragmatic functions of the item.

### 3.2. Postcolonial corpus pragmatics

Postcolonial Corpus Pragmatics (PCP) is a fusion of postcolonial and corpus pragmatics principles. Postcolonial pragmatics is a framework that seeks to investigate pragmatic practices in postcolonial communities and offer cultural explanations for their occurrences (Anchimbe and Janney, 2011). The concept is premised on the idea that languages and communicative practices are intermixed in postcolonial settings due to the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity and typical speech patterns of the communities on the one hand and the influence of Western linguistic habits on the other. The corollary of this linguistic situation in postcolonial settings is complex hybridised social norms, concepts and communicative practices shaped by the intermixture of the pragmatic practices of the interacting cultures and languages. It is believed that the mainstream pragmatic theories in the monocultural, monolingual Western context cannot explain pragmatic phenomena in such socially and culturally heterogeneous postcolonial environments. Hence, the need for postcolonial pragmatics, which accounts for the transfer of pragmatic features, which include politeness, speech acts, address terms, and pragmatic markers, among others, from one language to another in postcolonial settings, especially from indigenous languages to European languages and vice-versa.

Corpus pragmatics is the application of corpus linguistic methods in studying pragmatics (O'keeffe et al., 2019). It entails a balance of the vertical (quantitative) and horizontal (qualitative) analyses of corpus data in explicating pragmatic phenomena (Rühlemann and Aijmer, 2015), thereby bridging the gap between the form-to-function approach of corpus linguistics and the function-to-form method of pragmatics. Therefore, the postcolonial corpus pragmatic approach integrates postcolonial pragmatics and corpus linguistics, focusing on the transfer of a postcolonial community's pragmatic practices, concepts, language and social norms to a European language or vice versa, using corpora.

This study combines the postcolonial corpus pragmatics framework with the theory of pragmatic borrowing to examine *omo*, a discourse-pragmatic marker borrowed from Yoruba (a major indigenous Nigerian language), used in multilingual online interactions. This is premised on the acknowledgment of corpus pragmatics as a suitable method for cross-linguistic studies, which can provide full insights into pragmatic borrowing (Andersen, 2017).

## 4. Methodology

The sub-sections that follow describe the corpus and methods employed in this study.

### 4.1. The corpus

The data for this study comprise utterances that contain the discourse-pragmatic item *omo*, which were extracted from the Nigerian component of the Global Web-based English (GloWbE) corpus (Davies, 2013), consisting of 42,646,098 words gathered from various Nigerian websites, such as discussion forums, blogs and online newspaper reports. The entire GloWbE corpus, which was compiled to facilitate cross-linguistic studies of world Englishes, contains 1.9 billion words of English language usage from six inner-circle countries (e.g. the United States, Canada, Great Britain, etc.) and 14 outer-circle countries, which include Kenya, Nigeria, India, Jamaica, Singapore and others. The texts of the corpus consist of 60 % informal web materials from blogs and 40 % more formal texts from online newspapers, magazines and company websites, among others. The corpus complies with the copyright principle of fair use since users can only access a portion of the materials for academic purposes (Davies and Fuchs, 2015).

Although a spoken corpus like ICE-Nig, which includes spoken conversations, would have been more appropriate for this study—given that previous studies (e.g. Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2018, 2021) have shown that bilingual pragmatic markers are commonly found in informal dialogue—only three occurrences of *omo* as a discourse-pragmatic marker were found in ICE-Nig. Consequently, the GloWbE corpus was selected for this analysis. Notwithstanding this limitation, GloWbE is still apt for this study as 60 % of the texts were culled from informal blogs and newspaper commentaries (Davies and Fuchs, 2015), representing informal language use which often engenders borrowed bilingual elements due to the casual mood of commenters. Besides, the texts of the corpus represent Popular Nigerian English, which Jowitt (1991) describes as the general usage of Nigerians.

### 4.2. Procedure of analysis

Using the inbuilt concordancer on the GloWbE website, the Nigerian component of GloWbE was searched for the occurrences of the linguistic item *omo*, and the search produced 654 tokens. The extracts were checked and sorted to eliminate instances of *omo* that are not relevant to this study, such as repetition of the same utterance, and where the item does not occur as a discourse-pragmatic marker but as (part of) the name of a person, as shown in (3), a product, as indicated in (4), a

swear phrase, as contained in (5) and in its literal meaning, as seen in (6). Through this process, 105 tokens of *omo* as a discourse-pragmatic element were selected for analysis, while 639 cases were excluded.

3. This mother of four is endowed with a good height and good figure. "Omo Sexy " as she is popularly called majored in Estate Management from Yaba College (GloWbE-Nig 3).
4. She was also featured in several commercials, some of which included Pronto beverage and *Omo* detergent. In 1998, at the age of 19, she made her debut (GloWbE-Nig 410)
5. that girl your comment on 13:37 shows that you are and will forever be an *omo* ale jatijati.hmmm you think cuz we do nt know your identity you can always leave (GloWbE-Nig 499)
6. the bus and the two other passengers into each other. # " Ema binu *omo* mi. " She mumbled and began to pat the intricate braiding on her head (GloWbE-Nig 607)

Furthermore, it was necessary to distinguish cases of *omo* as a vocative (address term) from its use as a secondary interjection from the selected tokens ( $N = 105$ ), since it has been established in the literature that some lexical items (e.g. *boy*, *man*, *damn*, *shit*, etc.), alongside their function as members of major word classes, can also occur as interjections (see [Norrick, 2015](#)). However, because the GloWbE corpus is not tagged for part of speech and does not have corresponding sound files through which *omo* may be disambiguated, we had to rely on context to closely inspect the extracted data for qualitative analysis. This was done by clicking on the Context section on the GloWbE interface for the contextual analysis of the utterances within the purview of the literature on address terms and interjections. Therefore, *omo* was determined as a vocative (address term), as [Biber et al. \(1999\)](#) suggest, if it is followed by an utterance that directly addresses a speaker, as indicated in (7–9).

7. POINT IN CASE YOU CAN NOT TOAST ME. PERMISSION NOT GRANTED. *Omo* no block road for me and Tony o! # Belle I agree with what (GloWbE-Nig 9).
8. manager or sponsor 4 putting his hand on her behind. # *omo* you failed this, big time. you should have lost 40 kg before this (GloWbE-Nig 66).
9. 4 months gone; no adequate makeup c'on now this is not Nollywood. honestly *omo* i don't wan na be you in this pic at all. that dress (GloWbE-Nig 67).

On the other hand, following [Norrick \(2015\)](#), *omo* was regarded as an interjection if it expresses an emotion or a reaction not necessarily directed at any specific person, is followed by an exclamation mark or exclamatory phrase/clause, or occurs with another interjection, as shown in (10), (11) and (12), respectively.

10. off his mouth at any of the police guys, to which he responded " *Omo!* I'm gentle oh! They're brushing guys here. If you behave (GloWbE-Nig 166).
11. SWEET ATTRACTIVE ladies and get filled with lust. They will say," *Omo*, that girl fine o! Look at her this and that. Na she (GloWbE-Nig 6).
12. and killed in d day? where we're they all thru d nite? *omo* mehn! pple wicked o # Clean, ugly, fat, thin, poor (GloWbE-Nig 34).

Each process was undertaken separately by two raters. They both considered instances of disagreement and decided on the correct form. The data were descriptively and qualitatively analysed within the framework of pragmatic borrowing cum postcolonial corpus pragmatics to identify the syntactic position, grammatical properties, collocational patterns and discourse-pragmatic functions of *omo* in different utterances.

## 5. Results

As earlier noted, 105 tokens of *omo* (with a relative frequency of 2.46 calculated per million words (pmw)) as a discourse-pragmatic marker found in the GloWbE-Nig corpus were extracted for analysis. As is typical of informal communication in a bi/multilingual context, cases of code-mixing/switching involving English and other Nigerian languages are present in the corpus. Thus, *omo* occurred both within a single code and switched code. As shown in [Table 1](#), *omo* appeared in English-based utterances ( $N = 51$ ), in Nigerian Pidgin-based utterances ( $N = 53$ ) and in Yoruba-based utterances ( $N = 1$ ) as in (8), (7) and (13), respectively. The utterances were identified based on the language the writer adopted or switched to when *omo* occurred. This suggests that *omo* appears most frequently in pidgin-based utterances, more frequently in English-based dialogues and rarely in Yoruba-based interactions.

**Table 1**  
Frequency of *omo* in Nigerian multilingual online interaction.

Item	English-based utterances	Pidgin-based utterances	Yoruba-based utterances	Total raw frequency	Total relative frequency (pmw)
Omo	51	53	1	105	2.46
Rate (pmw)	1.20	1.24	0.02		

13. *you don don don sexy The way she moves that ass up on the floor Omo jowo ma lo ma tempt mi o Duro na sumobi, move a little closer (GloWbE-Nig 239).*

In the following sections, we consider the syntactic features, collocational patterns and discourse-pragmatic features of *omo*.

### 5.1. Syntactic features and collocational patterns of *omo* in Nigerian multilingual online interaction

In terms of syntactic placement in an utterance, *Omo* is most frequent at clause-initial position ( $N = 96$ ), as shown in (14), less common at clause-medial position ( $N = 9$ ), as indicated in (9), but never at clause-final.

(14) how you go dey ask that one, who still dey watch that one, *omo* I don forget that station o..... ". I just did a survey from (GloWbE-Nig 619).

The syntactic properties of *omo* reveal that its occurrence is most frequent with declaratives (N = 72), less often with imperatives (N = 18) and exclamatives (N = 13), and rarely with interrogatives (N = 02), as depicted in (15), (16), (17) and (18) respectively:

- (15) sokoto. # babe, where you also posted to that place as well? *Omo*, I was posted there too and I ve very authentic plans to redeploy (GloWbE-Nig 323).  
 (16) No time for dulling, no time for dulling Kojo So hold me tight, *Omo* just hold me tight Oya just wine your waist, Moni ko wine that waist (GloWbE-Nig 219).  
 (17) up was wen nija was parading.. popsy woke me up to see it. *Omo* this british no get culture oo! The only thing that made sense there was (GloWbE-Nig 299).  
 (18) You cant fly there's no Gucci in your suitcase You wan stay in lagos *omo* in who's place Celebrity ko, celebrity ni You way no fit pay your (GloWbE-Nig 237).

In relation to collocational patterns, *omo* co-occurs mainly with the interjection *mehn* (N = 6) but hardly with *chai* (N = 1) and *ehn* (N = 1), as shown in (19), (20), and (21), respectively. Its correlation with the address term, *my guy* (N = 1), is also very minimal, as in (22). It, however, shows a strong association with the discourse marker *but* (N = 6), as seen in (23), but far less with *and* (N = 1), as in (24).

- (19) when Yorubas pronounce it " shocolate " its razz. Always putting ourselves down. *Omo* mehn no body go accept u until u accept urself and advance urself. (GloWbE-Nig 139).  
 (20) then suddenly it went up with a terrible noise... chai!! *Omo*, i was scared. # I almost released when the plan was about to (GloWbE-Nig 332).  
 (21) exam hall, I met a classmate who asked how the paper was. " *Omo* ehn, I wish I hadn't submitted that paper o! The thing hard (GloWbE-Nig 547).  
 (22) how on earth can those african things u mentioned be pda lol ahahn chilll # *Omo*, my guy, come let me educate you. I have PDA'd on  
 (23) Anyway am so use to these questions that I always have an answer but *omo* the question someone asked me yesterday made me shock. # "Fine babe like (GloWbE-Nig 617).  
 (24) They tell me 99' say everything go nice The cake is very big and *omo* you can have a bite You put me in the office (GloWbE-Nig 232).

## 5.2. Discourse-pragmatic imports of *omo* in Nigerian multilingual online interaction

As a discourse-pragmatic element, *omo* performs dual functions as a vocative (address term) and an interjection. As a vocative, it is similar to such forms as *guys*, *dude*, *man*, *mate*, *folks*, *buddy* and *bro*, which Biber et al. (1999) describe as familiarisers that can be used to address people who are not really known to us for the purposes of calling attention, singling out an addressee or establishing a social relationship. As a vocative in the GloWbE-Nig corpus, *omo* serves as an attention-getter (N = 36) amongst online commenters who are not acquainted with each other, as shown in (7–9). As an interjection (N = 69), it is similar to the English interjections *mehn*, (*oh*) *boy*, functioning as a secondary emotive interjection (N = 33) to emit various shades of emotions (see Table 2), or as an emphasis marker (N = 36), as shown in (Table 3). This suggests that, overall, *omo* is used in multilingual Nigerian online interaction more frequently as an interjection than vocative.

**Table 2**  
Types of emotive interjections expressed by *omo* in GloWbE-Nig.

Emotion	Frequency (raw) count
Admiration	3
Negative surprise	4
Disappointment	4
Fear	3
Pain	4
Regret	3
Agreement	1
Pride	1
Complaint	1
Positive surprise	3
Disapproval	2
Neutral surprise	2
Shock	2
Total	33

Regarding its function as an emotive interjection, as seen in Table 2, *omo* expresses such emotions as admiration, positive, negative and neutral surprise, fear, disappointment, pain, regret and shock, among others. For example, in (25), *omo* is used by the commenter to indicate their admiration for the stunning beauty of Linda, while in (26), the writer expresses disappointment in her ex-boyfriend, who cheated on her despite her goodwill toward him. In (27), the writer expresses the fear of being intimate with her ex-wife because he is not sure of her intention.

- (25) Linda. God my dick is hard I swear. Linda drives me crazy. *Omo* see shape now! Her lips are so god like shaped. Mehn I would (GloWbE-Nig 46).  
 (26) him night n day just to set up he started cutting corners to cheat me. *omo* if i tell my story na PHD project o. But in all i tank (GloWbE-Nig 164).

(27) 's true joor, my ex's wife wanted to be chummy with me, *omo* I was scared cos d heart of a woman eh! Guess what happened? (GloWbE-Nig 505).

*Omo* also functions to express feelings of negative surprise, regret and pain, as in (12), (21) and (28), respectively.

(28) confirm from God that I'm the one God wants him to be with. *Omo*, I cried like it was the end of the world, but I thank (GloWbE-Nig 140).

In (12), *omo* is used to indicate a negative surprise at the sheer wickedness exhibited by individuals who kill innocent people. The writer in (21) expresses regret for submitting their examination paper, while in (28), *omo* is used to show the magnitude of pain the writer bore when she was jilted by her ex-boyfriend, which made her cry as though her world had collapsed.

**Table 3**  
Frequency of the speech acts emphasised by *omo* in GloWbE-Nig.

Speech act	Frequency (raw) count
Evaluation	13
Assertion	14
Advice	3
Intention	3
Wish	1
Warning	1
Imagination	1
Total	36

Besides its emotive functions, *omo* can be used to emphasise the content meaning of an utterance to which it is attached. In the GloWbE-Nig corpus, *omo* emphasises evaluation, assertion, advice, intention, wish and warning as contained in Table 3. In (19), the commenter employs *omo* to emphasise their assertion that Nigerians must first accept and appreciate themselves before other nations can respect them. The writer in (29) makes use of *omo* to emphasise their evaluation of the shape of the body of Americans, describing them as slim with flat stomach, while in (30), the commenter deploys *omo* to emphasise their advice for a change of attitude by Nigerians.

(29) advised her to wear this number? She looks like a sack of potatoes. *Omo*, americans white/black are all slim with flat stomach, she looks terrible (GloWbE-Nig 338)

(30) You would have seen how they were loud and aggressive..... *omo* we need to change our ways o \*\*30;2695;TOOLONG i weep for my country # (GloWbE-Nig 438)

Extracts (15) and (31) also exemplify the emphatic function of *omo* in expressing intention and wish. In (15), the commenter employs *omo* to emphasise her intention to redeploy from Sokoto State, where she is observing the one-year mandatory national service, while in (31), *omo* emphasises the kind of problem the writer wishes to always come across in movies.

(31) be equivalently amazing in order to match up... (Did I say problem? *Omo* that is the kind of problem I wish we had in every movie then)

## 6. Discussion

The first objective of this study was to establish the frequency and syntactic features of *omo* in Nigerian multilingual online interactions. Results show that *omo* is used across three different languages, which depicts its multilingual resourcefulness. It is, however, most frequent in Pidgin-based utterances, followed by English-based utterances, but very rare in Yoruba-based utterances. Its infrequent occurrence in Yoruba-based utterances is possibly connected to the scarce deployment of indigenous languages in online interactions involving participants from different linguistic backgrounds. In such a situation, neutral codes such as English and NigP are often preferred. On the other hand, the higher frequency of *omo* in Pidgin-based utterances points to the status of NigP as a prominent linguistic code in informal interactions in Nigeria and makes *omo* a potential discourse-pragmatic marker for speakers from different language backgrounds in Nigeria, since NigP is said to have the highest population of speakers who cut across social, educational and ethnic boundaries.

Although the overall raw and relative word counts of *omo* ( $N = 105$ ; 2.46 pmw) in GloWbE do not suggest a high frequent use, its frequency in English-based utterances ( $N = 51$ ; 1.20 pmw) is relatively higher than what was obtained from the same corpus on some bilingual discourse-pragmatic features previously studied in NigE (see Unuabonah, 2020; Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2021), for example, *ehen* ( $N = 48$ ; 1.1 pmw), *shebi* ( $N = 41$ ; 1 pmw), *shey* ( $N = 31$ ; 0.7 pmw) and *fa* ( $N = 14$ ; 0.3 pmw). It also has a higher relative frequency than a number of bilingual discourse pragmatic features in some African Englishes, for example, *nogal* ( $N = 37$ ; 0.8 pmw) and *sommer* ( $N = 14$ ; 0.3pmw) in SAfE (Unuabonah, 2022b); *si* ( $N = 34$ ; 0.8), *sijui* ( $N = 34$ ; 0.8) and *eish* ( $N = 35$ ; 0.9) in KenE (Muro and Unuabonah, 2022). As suggested for other borrowed discourse-pragmatic markers in previous studies, the low frequency of *omo* may be linked to the users' need to accommodate an international audience who may not understand the meaning of the marker (Unuabonah et al., 2021).

In terms of syntactic positioning, *omo* most frequently occurs at the utterance-initial position, which may be connected to its vocative functions of addressing a specific person and calling attention, which are the main functions of initial vocatives (Biber et al., 1999). This may also be linked to its exclamatory role as an interjection. According to Norrick (2015, p. 260), exclaimatives are preceded by interjections and, together, they express the same emotions. This also suggests that, unlike free-standing interjections, *omo* is often part of an utterance. It is probably for these reasons that *omo* also occurs most frequently with declaratives and sometimes with exclaimatives. In relation to collocational patterns, *omo* co-occurs more frequently with a closely related English interjection *mehn* and the discourse marker *but*. This further foregrounds its placement at the initial position, as both collocating items also prefer the same location.

Regarding its discourse-pragmatic functions, *omo* serves dual purposes. First, it is used as a term of address among online commenters to call attention and/or maintain solidarity with one another. This is connected to the fact that participants in the corpus belong to an online community with no physical knowledge of one another. However, *omo* is not just an address term, as claimed in a previous study (Unuabonah, 2022a), it functions more frequently as a secondary emotive interjection to emit various shades of emotion, such as admiration, positive, negative and neutral surprises, agreement, pride, and complaint. In this respect, it shares similar emotive functions with the English interjections *mehn*, (*oh*) *boy* and Korean discourse marker *omo*<sup>2</sup> (also used in SingE), an equivalent of *oh my god/gosh*, used to express surprise, disbelief or a feeling of awefulness (Nie, 2023). Besides, *omo* functions as an emphasis marker to reinforce different speech acts, such as assertion, evaluation, advice, wish, and so on. In respect to syntactic positioning and functions, therefore, *omo* shares similarities with some African discourse-pragmatic markers, such as *sasa*, *ati* in KenE, and *wena*, *ja* in SAfE, which all favour the clause-initial position due to their functions of calling attention and/or expressing emotions (Unuabonah, 2022b; Unuabonah and Muro, 2022).

## 7. Conclusion

This study has shown that *omo*, a borrowed lexical item from Yoruba, routinely occurs with declaratives at utterance-initial position in Nigerian multilingual online interactions, and has assumed extended meaning and functions. It serves as a vocative among online commenters to point out a specific addressee and secure attention, and as an interjection that signals various shades of emotions and emphasises different speech acts. This foregrounds the multifunctional roles of bilingual discourse-pragmatic markers (Norrick, 2015) in an ESL context such as Nigeria. It also portrays the continued influence of the Yoruba language on the linguistic resources of NigE and NigP at the discourse-pragmatic level (Unuabonah et al., 2021). Such cross-linguistic influences have also been observed in other L2 English varieties, such as Indian English (Lange, 2009), SingE (Leimgruber, 2016), UgE (Isingoma, 2016) and MyE (Tay et al., 2016). As long as continuous interactions persist between English and indigenous Nigerian languages, especially the major ones, new bilingual discourse-pragmatic markers will keep emerging, some of which may shape the NigE variety and likely be considered candidates for endonormative stabilisation (Unuabonah and Oladipupo, 2018). Therefore, further studies should be undertaken to explore more bilingual discourse-pragmatic markers and other innovative language use in the English as a second language environment, using spoken corpora. It would also be illuminating to investigate the frequency and usage patterns of such features in the informal dialogue of young speakers who acquire English as a mother tongue in Nigeria, given their growing influence in the Nigerian linguistic circle (Jowitt, 2013; Oladipupo, 2021) and their recognition as “rightful first language users of English” in post-colonial contexts (Vida-Mannl et al., 2024: 2).

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Rotimi Oladipupo:** Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Aderonke Akinola:** Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Validation, Investigation, Formal analysis, Methodology.

## Declaration of competing interest

The article is a contribution to the Special Issue entitled “New Englishes”. The authors have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Data availability

The dataset, Global Web-based English (GloWbE) Corpus, is freely accessible for non-commercial research and educational purposes.

<sup>2</sup> *Omo* is typically used by middle-aged women in Korea and Singapore (see Nie, 2023).

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