Journal of Pragmatics 237 (2025) 4–13

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Pragmatics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma

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

Rotimi Oladipupo *, Aderonke Akinola

Department of English, Redeemer's University, PMB 230, Akoda, Ede, Nigeria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Keywords:
Discourse-pragmatic markers
Nigerian English
Nigerian pidgin
Pragmatic borrowing
Interjections
GloWbE

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.

© 2025 Elsevier B.V. All rights are reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.

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, lgbo 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 Oyètádé, 2007; Egbokhare, 2021). According to Faraclas (2021), an estimated 112 million Nigerians speak NigP as a first and second

☆ This article is part of a special issue entitled: New Englishes published in Journal of Pragmatics.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: olarotimi2002@yahoo.com (R. Oladipupo), aderonke197@gmail.com (A. Akinola).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2024.12.011
0378-2166/© 2025 Elsevier B.V. All rights are reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.