

## **EVOLVING LINGUISTIC TRENDS: ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH SLANG IN THE NIGERIAN NIGER DELTA REGION**

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the evolving linguistic trends of English slang within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, a linguistically rich and socio-culturally diverse area. This research aims to document and analyze the slang terms prevalent in this region, examining their origins, meanings, and functions in everyday communication. By exploring the socioeconomic and cultural factors that influence the creation and usage of these slang terms, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how local contexts shape linguistic innovations. Data for this research were collected through a qualitative method, predominantly by observation in various social settings such as markets and public transportation systems. This study engaged with a diverse demographic, encompassing different age groups, genders, and occupational backgrounds, to capture a broad spectrum of slang usage. The findings reveal a rich tapestry of slang that reflects the unique socio-cultural dynamics of the Niger Delta. The study identified several key factors influencing slang usage, including youth culture, socio-economic status, ethnic diversity, and exposure to global media. Slang in the Niger Delta serves multiple functions, from reinforcing group identity and social cohesion to enabling creative. This research contributes to the broader field of sociolinguistics by highlighting the role of local contexts in language evolution. This underscores the importance of considering regional variations in the study of English and provides insights into the dynamic nature of language in a postcolonial context in the Niger Delta.

**Keywords:** Niger Delta, Slang, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, creation.

### **Introduction**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, rich in natural resources and cultural diversity, is a vibrant linguistic landscape where English slang has evolved uniquely. This region, comprising states such as Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta, has become a melting pot of languages, dialects, and sociolects, influenced by its history, economy, and sociopolitical dynamics. The interplay of these factors has caused a distinct variety of English slang that reflects the identity, experiences, and aspirations of its speakers.

The researcher, having lived in most of these states and currently residing in one, has encountered comprehension challenges with certain words and their usage. Due to these difficulties—and because such words and expressions

can be confusing to those unfamiliar with them, often leading to misunderstandings—the researcher decided to document this personal experience.

Additionally, since this study covers multiple states in the Niger Delta, it is important to note that the meaning of a word or expression can vary depending on: the location where it is used, the group of people using it, and the context in which it is used, as language continually evolves to reflect social realities and current needs. Therefore, this research aims to reduce communication barriers arising from variations in word usage.

### **Historical Context**

The history of the Niger Delta region is marked by trade, colonization, and migration, all of which have significantly influenced its linguistic trends. During the pre-colonial era, the region served as a hub for trade, attracting merchants from various parts of Africa and beyond. This early interaction with foreign traders introduced new words and expressions into local languages, setting the stage for the emergence of a dynamic linguistic environment (Adegbija, 2004, p. 35).

With the advent of British colonization in the 19th century, English became the dominant language of administration, education, and commerce. However, the local population did not merely adopt English passively; they actively reshaped it, incorporating elements from their native languages and creating a hybrid form of communication known as Pidgin English. This hybridization process laid the groundwork for developing a regional slang that is distinctively Nigerian (Igboanusi, 2001, p. 72)

### **Sociolinguistic Influences**

The Niger Delta's sociolinguistic landscape is characterized by a high degree of multilingualism. Indigenous languages such as Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri, and others coexist with English and Pidgin. This multilingual setting fosters constant linguistic innovation and borrowing, creating slang that is rich in metaphor, idiomatic expression, and localized meaning.

One of the key sociolinguistic factors driving the evolution of slang in the Niger Delta is the region's economic activities, particularly the oil industry. The discovery of oil in the 1950s transformed the Niger Delta into an economic powerhouse, attracting a diverse workforce from various parts of Nigeria and beyond. This influx of people brought different linguistic backgrounds into contact, facilitating the exchange and fusion of slang terms (Ogbogbo, 2005, p. 108).

Moreover, socioeconomic disparities in the region, marked by wealth from oil revenues and widespread poverty, have also influenced the development of slang. Slang serves as a tool for expressing resistance, identity, and solidarity among different social groups. For instance, youths in the Niger Delta often use slang to criticize social injustices and assert their cultural identity despite marginalization (Akindele & Adegbite, 1999, p. 214).

### **Linguistic Features of the Niger Delta Slang**

The slang of the Niger Delta is characterized by several distinctive linguistic features. These include:

1. **Code-Switching and Code-Mixing:** Speakers frequently switch between English, Pidgin English, and indigenous languages in a single conversation. This practice, known as code-switching, allows for greater expressive flexibility and communicative effectiveness (Myers-Scotton, 1993, p. 51).
2. **Metaphorical and Idiomatic Expressions:** Slang in the Niger Delta often involves the use of metaphors and idiomatic expressions. These expressions convey meanings that go beyond their literal interpretations, adding richness and depth to the language (Adegbija, 2004, p. 48).

3. **Borrowing and Adaptation:** Slang terms are frequently borrowed from other languages and adapted to local contexts. This process of linguistic borrowing reflects the region's history of contact with different cultures and languages (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988, p. 19).

4. **Creativity and Innovation:** The slang of the Niger Delta is characterized by a high degree of creativity and linguistic innovation. Speakers constantly invent new words and expressions, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of language (Bamgbose, 1995, p. 127).

**Definition of terms used.**

**Pidgin:** Anthony et.al defined pidgin as “a simplified language that develops as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common in situations like trade” adding that “by implication pidgin here, though not regarded as a standard language is used in a linguistically diverse society”

**Creole:** Acquired pidgin, i.e., pidgin taken as a first langue.

**Slang:** a language unique to a particular profession or subject. The specialized language of a social group is sometimes used to make what is said unintelligible to those not members of the group.

Google defined Slang as “a type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal or more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people.”

**Neologism:** Julia Gontsarovea (2013) quoting Collings Cobuild English Dictionary (1987) defined neologism as “a new word or expression in a language or a familiar word or expression that is now being used with new meaning”.

**Blend:** Refers to a linguistic process in which two or more words are combined to create a new word that carries the meaning and features of its constituent parts. Blends are typically formed by taking parts of two or more words (usually their initial or medial segments) and merging them to form a single word. This process is also known as "portmanteau" or "portmanteau word," a term coined by Lewis Carroll in "Through the Looking-Glass,"

**Denotative meaning:** Refers to the literal dictionary definition of a word—the explicit meaning that a term conveys directly. The straightforward, objective meaning of a word, without emotional, cultural, or contextual nuances.

According to Crystal (2008, p. 137), denotation is "the relationship between a linguistic form and the actual entity or concept it refers to in the real world."

**Connotative meaning:** encompasses the emotional and cultural associations that a word carries beyond its literal definition. These meanings are subjective and can vary depending on personal experiences, cultural context, and societal norms. Barthes (1964, p. 89) added that connotation refers to the secondary meanings or associations invoked by a word, which can be influenced by cultural and personal contexts.

**Explained words and locutions from the Nigerian Slang.**

**WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS FORMED BY THE INFLUENCE OF RECENT HAPPENINGS.**

**Street:** The English dictionary defines "street" as “a paved part of a road, usually in a village or a town.” However, this definition has no correlation with its modern or neologized meaning. In contemporary society, "street" has taken on a connotative sense, now referring to “fraud or scam.” For instance, when someone says, “He/she dey run street,” it does not mean the person is literally running on a paved road. Instead, it implies “he/she is a fraudster,” particularly one involved in internet fraud rather than physical scams. Similarly, the expression “he/she is into street” does not mean that people construct paved roads—it still signifies involvement in internet fraud.

**Yahoo/Yahoo+:** "Yahoo," generally, is a domain name that facilitates sending and receiving messages, documents, and files worldwide. However, it has also been given another meaning, referring to “an internet

scammer or fraudster.” The addition of the mathematical plus sign (+) further intensifies this meaning. When someone is referred to as “running Yahoo+,” it does not just imply that they are an internet scammer—it suggests that they have incorporated voodoo/rituals, including human sacrifices, to enhance their fraudulent activities for maximum profit.

**G/G+:** These are also other variants that most people use when they prefer not to say “street,” “yahoo,” or “yahoo+.” “G” or “G+” are also used to refer to someone involved in internet fraud—with “G+” specifically indicating that the person has gone the extra mile by incorporating ritualistic activities into their fraudulent schemes.

## **WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS FORMED THROUGH THE INFLUENCE OF CURRENCY AND COLOR.**

**Sky/White:** As defined by the English dictionary, "sky" refers to “the atmosphere above a given point, especially as visible from the surface of the earth—the place where the sun, moon, and clouds are seen.” Meanwhile, "white" is defined as “the color of light, containing equal amounts of all visible wavelengths.” In Nigerian slang, however, these two words are used interchangeably to refer to the ₦50 currency note. The term "sky" comes from the bill's color, which resembles the ashy clouds in the sky. On the other hand, "white" is more commonly used among public transport operators in certain Nigerian states, such as Rivers State.

So, when someone says, “Give me white/sky,” they are not referring to the actual sky or the color white—they are asking for ₦50.

**Green:** The word "green" is a color term that can refer to an inexperienced person or an unripe fruit that changes color when ripe. However, in Nigerian slang, this word has also been neologized to represent the ₦20 currency note. This usage originated from the fact that the ₦20 bill features the color green, leading society to adopt this color as its representation. Therefore, when someone says, "Give me green," they are not referring to an unripe fruit or an inexperienced person; they are asking for ₦20.

**Red:** Ordinarily, "red" refers to a color that can signify "danger" in certain contexts, such as near riverbanks. However, in Nigerian slang, "red" represents the ₦10 currency note, a meaning derived from the bill's color. Important Note: When the expression "E don red" is used in some areas or situations, it does not mean that ₦10 bills are literally appearing. Rather, it indicates that circumstances have become dangerous and out of control. In such cases, the appropriate response is to immediately leave the area or find a safe place.

## **WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS FORMED IN POLITICAL INFLUENCE**

**A.P.C.:** "APC" is the acronym for Nigeria's political party "All Progressive Congress," whose slogan is "Change." However, among store vendors and public transportation operators, this acronym has taken on a different meaning. When a customer makes a purchase and is owed balance (what we call "change"), the vendor might ask, "How much is your APC?" meaning "How much is your balance/change?" Similarly, if the vendor currently has no change available, they might say, "No APC for now." This usage bears no direct connection to the political party itself. Rather, it is a playful reference to the party's "Change" slogan, repurposed to refer to monetary change in everyday transactions.

## **WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS FORMED THROUGH BLENDS AND PORTEMANTEAUS**

**Moneria:** "Monaria" is a portmanteau formed by blending "money" and "malaria." While money serves as a medium of exchange for goods and services and malaria is a mosquito-borne parasitic disease, the combined term does not carry either of these literal meanings. Instead, it is used by individuals who currently lack funds or have

insufficient money to meet their immediate needs, indicating that they require financial assistance. This term has evolved beyond Pidgin English usage to become a euphemism for being “broke”. When someone says, "I get monaria" or "Na monaria dey worry me," they're not referring to illness—they're simply stating they're financially strapped.

**Nairamacine:** This portmanteau word combines "Naira" (Nigeria's currency) and "medicine" (commonly understood as any substance taken to treat or prevent illness) to form "Nairamedicine." The term was created as a humorous antidote to "Moneria" - the metaphorical "illness" of lacking money. Thus, "Nairamedicine" represents the provision of money as a cure for this financial condition.

## WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS FORMED THROUGH REGIONAL IDENTITY

**Torchlight:** The dictionary defines "torchlight" as either "a dim light produced by a burning torch" or "the light produced by a flashlight." However, in Nigerian Pidgin English, particularly among broadcasting stations, this word has acquired a contextually neologized meaning. Here, "torchlight" means "to investigate" or "to inquire." This usage typically applies when authorities are examining an incident. For example, one may hear in Pidgin: "Authorities wan go do torchlighting for the mata" "Police/authorities dey torchlight the mata" Both expressions translate to "The authorities are investigating the matter."

**One by follow:** This expression is commonly paired with "torchlight" because after the investigative process ("torchlighting"), the findings are presented "one by follow" - meaning sequentially or one after another. While the phrasing might suggest a literal interpretation of "one goes by then followed by another," it actually refers to the systematic presentation of results.

**Scatter-blast:** This term originated during the height of illegal oil refining activities in Rivers State, Nigeria, when residents struggled with severe air pollution. The soot was so dense that it became visible during daylight hours, settling on freshly laundered clothes and even indoor furniture. As the situation reached critical levels, the state governor issued an order to dismantle all illegal refining sites. This led to the coinage of the word "scatter-blast," meaning to destroy, demolish, or annihilate these operations. The term was adopted in common parlance to clearly communicate the governor's decisive mandate.

**Kpo-fire:** In analyzing the term “scatter-blast,” we discussed the illegal refining of crude oil, which caused severe air pollution in Rivers State Nigeria. These illegally refined products consisted of all three major fuel types: kerosene, petrol, and diesel. Locally, these finished products are referred to as “kpo-fire”—a term meaning “illegally refined fuel.” The phrase “kpo-fire” has been widely adopted because it is easier to grasp and more commonly understood than lengthier alternatives like “illegally refined kerosene, petrol, or diesel.”

**Lap:** The word "lap" traditionally refers to the upper leg area near the waist, but in Nigerian Pidgin English, it has acquired a new meaning: "to come, meet, or visit." While it is primarily used in Pidgin, this neologism has also entered standard usage. For example: "Make I lap your side?" means "Should I come to your house/place?" "I will lap you later" translates to "I will meet you later."

**Bracket:** "Bracket" is a punctuation mark used in both English and mathematics. However, in Nigerian Pidgin English, it has acquired a new meaning beyond its original function. The neologized meaning now signifies "to meet up." For example: When a speaker says, "I go bracket you for there [place name]", it does not mean enclosing something in punctuation marks. Rather, it translates to "I will meet you there [place name]."

**Compass:** The word "compass" typically refers to either: A navigational device that detects cardinal directions or a mathematical instrument used in construction and drawing. However, in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, it has acquired an additional meaning: "method," "approach," "connection," or "way of doing something." For example: When someone says, "Give me compass," they're not asking for the physical tool. Rather, they mean the following: "Show me how to do this" or "Explain the proper way to handle this."

**Run:** The word "running" is generally understood as either: A form of physical exercise or sport, or the act of fleeing from potential danger. However, in Nigerian Pidgin English, the verb "run" has evolved to mean simply "to do" or "to perform." For example: When someone says, "Just help me run am," they're not asking for assistance with exercise or escape but rather: "Just help me do it."

**411:** The number "411" isn't pronounced as "four hundred and eleven" or "four eleven" - these pronunciations would fail to convey its intended meaning. To properly express the slang meaning ("What's going on?", "What's new?", or "What's happening?"), the digits must be pronounced separately as "four-one-one." For example: "Wetin be the 4-1-1?"

Means: "What's going on?" or "What's new?"

**Shenkess/Bani:** These words have evolved over time and continue to develop new meanings based on their context of use (speaker, location, situation) while maintaining their core significance. Their specific meaning depends on how the speaker employs them. When used as a form of address, they can mean "girl" or "lady," as in "Hey shenkess!" = "Hey girl/lady!" However, when used in a sentence, they can take on the meaning of "girlfriend," for example: "She na my shenkess/bani." = "She's my girlfriend."

**Comot body:** This expression emerged as a way to avoid complex language (what some might call "grammar" or "vocabulary") and to facilitate clearer communication. It conveys the meaning "to leave something alone" or "not to get involved," particularly in situations involving disputes or misunderstandings. For example: If you encounter a conflict and consider intervening to resolve it, someone might say: "Comot body!" This translates to: "Stay out of it!" or "Don't get involved!"

**Breakfast:** Traditionally, breakfast refers to the important morning meal eaten before beginning daily activities or the first meal after a period of fasting. However, in Nigerian slang, the term has acquired a new metaphorical meaning: "to experience a romantic breakup" or "to have one's heart broken." For example: "Dem don serve am breakfast" "They've broken his/her heart" (literally: "They've served him/her breakfast") "He/she don chop breakfast" "He/she has gotten heartbroken" (literally: "He/she has eaten breakfast"). This creative adaptation transforms the concept of "breaking fast" into the emotional experience of a broken relationship.

**Collect:** The original meaning of the term is willingly accepting something offered by another person. However, the term has evolved to convey a more aggressive connotation—"to slap," "a punch," or "to beat/fight." This shift stems from scenarios where the "giving" occurs not voluntarily but out of anger or force. For example: During an argument, if someone says: "You go collect oh!" It translates to "You're going to get slapped/punched!"

**Play tape:** As demonstrated here, this expression does not refer to playing an audio tape or recording. Instead, it means "to give a report" or "to recount an event." For example: When someone says: "I go play you tape (later)," They mean: "I will give you a full report later" or "I'll tell you all the details later."

**High:** The word "high" originally refers to physical position or elevation. The neologized meaning - "intoxicated," "not in one's normal state," or "extraordinary" - remains conceptually linked to this root sense. When someone is under the influence of substances, their mental state becomes altered, functioning either at an exaggerated (higher) or diminished (lower) capacity than normal. Similarly, if a person says something inappropriate or uncharacteristic, others might ask "Are you high?" - Essentially questioning whether they are thinking clearly.

**Cap:** A "cap" is traditionally headwear designed to protect against the sun or weather, existing in various forms such as face caps and top hats. However, in Nigerian Pidgin, the verb "to cap" has evolved to mean "to talk" or "to say," completely unrelated to clothing. For example: "He dey cap careless" → "He's talking nonsense/rubbish." "I no grab wetin he dey cap" → "I don't understand what he's saying."

**Wack:** While the word "wack" literally means "bad" or "unattractive," it has acquired a new meaning that changes its grammatical function from an adjective to a verb: "to eat." Many people find this usage confusing because it overlaps with other slang terms like "chop."

For example: "I don wack/chop" → "I have eaten."

**Control:** Originally, "control" means to exercise influence over someone or something. However, in Nigerian slang, it has acquired a new meaning as a noun referring to a "phone number." When someone asks, "Give me your control," they're requesting your contact information—not actual authority over you. No reason am: This expression emerged from some individuals' reluctance to openly apologize when wrong, despite the need to maintain peace. Since then, it has become widely adopted as an indirect way to say the following: "I'm sorry," "My bad," "It's my fault," or "I apologize." For example: When someone says "No reason am," they're offering an apology without using the actual word "sorry."

**Gel/follow:** The word "gel" typically refers to either: A hair care product or a semi-solid substance. Meanwhile, "follow" literally means "to accompany." However, in Nigerian Pidgin, when combined as "gel/follow," they take on a new collective meaning: "acceptable" or "good." Notably, these terms are most often used in their negative forms. For example: "Wetin he do no gel/follow" → "What he did is unacceptable" (or "not good" / "not what we expected from him").

**Jonzes:** The term "jonzes" originates from the proper noun "Jones" (a personal name) but has evolved into slang with no connection to its original meaning. In Nigerian Pidgin, it functions as: A verb meaning "to mess up" or "to misbehave" an adjective meaning "not alright" Examples: "You dey jonzes" → "You're not alright" (typically used when angry) "You dey jonzes oooo" → "You're misbehaving"

**Embezzle:** The word "embezzle" traditionally means "to steal or misappropriate" money or funds entrusted to one's care. However, in Nigerian slang, it has acquired a new violent meaning: "to punch." For example: During an argument, if someone says: "I go embezzle you!" They mean: "I will punch you!"

**Load, weigh 500, Sand:** These terms are used interchangeably to mean "to slap," with the choice depending on the speaker's preference. The expressions: "to load" "to weigh someone 500" "to sand" all carry the same violent connotation. For example, during an argument: If someone threatens: "I go load you!" "I go sand you!" or "I go weigh you 500!" they mean: "I will slap you!"

**Note:**

1. The formation and usage of these words and locutions are influenced by the environment or context, a sense of belonging, the group of people one is addressing and a lack of appropriate expressive vocabulary.

2. These words and locutions can be used by anyone at any time, in any situation.
3. Some words and locutions are not explained here and are only used by a certain group of initiates. It is advised that even when we are familiar with them, being non-initiate should desist from their usage.
4. The frequent use of these words and locutions when not necessary i.e in a non-supporting context, may make the user appear uneducated or ruffian.
5. These words tend to change, adapt or can be modified to express modern/recent realities.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, an analysis of English slang in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria reveals a dynamic and adaptive linguistic landscape shaped by historical, sociocultural, and economic forces. The creativity and resilience of the region's inhabitants are evident in their linguistic innovations, which continue to evolve in response to changing circumstances. Understanding these linguistic trends not only enriches our knowledge of the Niger Delta but also contributes to broader discussions on language, identity and society in a globalized world.

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