

LANGUAGE CHOICE, CODE-SWITCHING AND NIGERIAN PIDGIN IN MODERN MARKET, MAKURDI

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Abstract

Market places are dynamic multilingual spaces where people of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact daily for economic and social purposes. This research aims at investigating the sociolinguistic patterns of language use in Modern market, Makurdi. The study adopts a descriptive research design, combining qualitative analysis of language interactions with quantitative analysis of questionnaire responses. The primary methods of data collection were interview, questionnaire and participant observation while Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Speaking and Erving Goffman's Interactionist Sociolinguistic Theory were deployed as the theoretical framework for analysis. The findings indicate that Pidgin English functions as the dominant lingua franca, while code-switching involving Tiv, Idoma, Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin is used strategically to build solidarity and have better price negotiation. The study concludes that language use in Modern market, Makurdi, is deliberate, context-sensitive and trade-driven.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, market, code-switching, lexical borrowing, Interactionist theory

Introduction

Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, focusing particularly on how social factors influence language use and how language reflects social structures. It examines the intricate relationship between language and society, focusing on how social factors influence language use and how language reflects social structures. Coulmas (2013) opines that the principal concern of sociolinguistics is uncovering, describing and interpreting the socially motivated choices made by an individual. It is a branch of linguistics that answers questions like who says what, to whom, when, where, how and why. One of the major aims of sociolinguistics is to examine language use within its social and cultural contexts (Holmes, 2013). Sociolinguistics explores the dynamic interplay between linguistic behaviour and social variables such as class, age, gender, occupation and culture, hence establishing a framework for understanding language beyond its grammatical form.

The market place is one of the contexts where language is used for communication. The importance of studying language use in market places extends beyond linguistic curiosity; it has

practical implications for trade efficiency, conflict resolution and social cohesion. In a market place, effective communication determines the success of transactions, negotiations and customer relations. Miscommunication due to language barriers can lead to misunderstandings, disputes and loss of business opportunities. Understanding the sociolinguistic strategies used in market interactions can help traders to develop better communication practices that enhance trade relations and economic development (Anthony, 2010).

The marketplace is an important domain of human interaction where language serves both commercial and social functions (Adeyemi & Olayemi 2023). In multilingual societies like Nigeria, markets bring together people of different ethnic, educational and linguistic backgrounds who must negotiate meaning for successful trade. Language use in this context is strategic, as traders and customers select from indigenous languages, Nigerian Pidgin and English to achieve mutual understanding, build rapport and facilitate transactions. Scholars have observed that language choice in the marketplace is rarely random. It is strategic, shaped by factors such as ethnicity, level of education, as well as the need for mutual

understanding and economic gain.

This study aims at examining the sociolinguistic aspects of language use in Modern market, Makurdi. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. identify the dominant languages used for trade interactions in Modern market, Makurdi
- ii. examine the sociolinguistic strategies employed by traders and buyers to overcome language barriers
- iii. investigate the role of code-switching and language choice in facilitating communication in the market
- iv. assess the impact of Nigerian Pidgin English as a lingua franca in this market place
- v. explore the influence of sociocultural factors on language choice among market participants.

To achieve this, the study intends to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the dominant languages used in Modern Market for trade interactions?
- ii. What sociolinguistic strategies do traders and buyers employ to navigate language barriers?
- iii. What is the role of code-switching and language choice in facilitating communication in Modern market?
- iv. What role does Nigerian Pidgin English play in facilitating trade communication in this market?
- v. What influence do sociocultural factors such as age, gender and ethnicity have on language choice among market participants?

The Concept of Code-switching

Code-switching is a consequence of language contact, which is also one of the factors responsible for multilingualism (Adegbite 2022, p.81). Scholars have offered various definitions to elucidate this concept. Suhartini and Nggawu (2022) conceive code-switching as alternation across clauses and sentences. Lending credence to

this position, Putri, Radman and Zainuddin (2025, p.375) observe that “code-switching is a ... switch from one language to the other during a discourse.” The concept, according to O’Brien-Melford (2026), is the “systematic alternation between two or more languages or language varieties within a single interaction, utterance, or communicative event.” Based on these scholarly positions, code-switching implies switching between two or more languages or dialects in the same conversation. It should be noted that code-switching does not apply to only interpersonal interlocution, same is germane to educational domain (Suhartini & Nggawu, 2022; Abdullahi, 2023; Putri, Rachman & Zainuddin 2025; O’Brien-Melford, 2026).

Three types of code-switching that have been established in literature are inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching and tag-switching (Alagbe, 2021; Suhardianto & Afriana, 2022; Abdullahi, 2023). Tag-switching involves inserting a tag or short phrase from one language into an utterance predominantly in another language. It is the switching of either a tag, phrase or a word or both, from one language to another. A good example of tag switching is “The proposal will be due tomorrow, *abi*?” In this example, the speaker makes use of a Yoruba word “abi” to seek confirmation in the discussion. Another example is: “Let’s go to the market, *oya*!” Here, the speaker uses Yoruba item “*oya*” to add emphasis or an attitude.

Inter-sentential switching occurs at clause or sentence boundaries. It involves a switch at the clause or sentence boundary where the clause or sentence is in different languages (Romaine, 1989). When a speaker switches his language from one to another in a different sentence or after the turn-taking with another speaker, then it is considered to be an inter-sentential switch. An example of inter-sentential switching is given thus;

Va ya kwagh.

I just finished cooking.

The speaker starts the conversation in Tiv, “*va ya kwagh*,” meaning “come and eat”, then switches to English, “I just finished cooking”

Don’t beat him. *Ka wanye.*

In the example above, the speaker commences the conversation in English with, “don’t beat him.”

Then, he switches to Tiv “ka wanye”, which means “he is just a child.”

Intra-sentential switching involves alternation within a single sentence or clause. It requires the speaker’s ability to control two linguistic systems simultaneously. This type of switching occurs at the clause, phrase or word level. An example of intra-sentential switching is demonstrated below.

John bought the bread, *kpa* ya
alone without sharing it *mfa* why
ga.

Here, the speaker starts conversation in English and then switches to Tiv. The switch is within a single sentence. The sentence means “John bought the bread, but he ate alone without sharing it, I don’t know why.”

Lexical Borrowing

Lexical borrowing, a phenomenon where one language incorporates words from another, has been extensively examined by linguists. Lexical borrowing, another outcome of language contact, has been said to be “the most widespread type of linguistic transfer” (Rendon 2008, p. 65). Haugen (1950, p. 212) defines it as “the attempt by a speaker to reproduce in one language patterns which have previously been learned in another.” This definition underscores the replication of linguistic elements across languages. Sankoff (2001, p. 643) describes lexical borrowing as “a privileged window of linguistic inter-influence”, highlighting the dynamic interplay between languages. This perspective considers borrowing as a bidirectional process, though it may overlook the power dynamics that often accompany language contact.

According to Alagbe (2023, p.195), “lexical borrowing along with coinages, compounding, blending, clipping, backformation, conversion, acronyms, reduplication and affixation, has been identified as the major word formation processes in English, and the major tools for the development and growth of the vocabulary of the English language”. In summary, lexical borrowing is when words or phrases from one language are used in the conversation of another language. For instance, making use of the English word “computer” in a sentence while speaking in Tiv language such as in

the expression: “*Va nam computer wam*,” meaning “come and give me my computer”, is an instance of lexical borrowing. In this example, the English word, “computer” is borrowed into an expression in Tiv language. This process of borrowing enriches languages and reflects the dynamic nature of language use.

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE)

Like other pidgin languages in other contexts where the language is not native to its users, Nigerian Pidgin English is a contact language that emerged from the fusion of Nigerian indigenous languages and English. Supporting this view, Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p.1) see it as “some kind of a marginal language that arises to fulfil specific communication needs in well-defined circumstances.” This definition shows that pidgin is not an official language but a marginal language used for communication especially by people who do not speak each other’s languages. Todd (1974) claims that pidgin usually combines elements of the native language of its users and is typically simpler than those native languages. In so far as it has fewer words, less morphology and a more restricted range of phonological and syntactic options, Todd (1974, p. 1) claims that pidgin is a language which “arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who do not have one common language.” In Nigeria, Pidgin English is the language of inter-ethnic communication at the informal domain (Alagbe, 2016, p.67). Other functions of the language include the language of internal trade, media, barracks, political campaign (Elugbe, 1995; Osisanwo, 2012).

Research Problem

There are numerous extant studies on language use in the marketplace in Nigeria. A few of such are mentioned here. Fakuade et al. (2021) investigate language use in Ipata open-air market in Ilorin, North-Central Nigeria. Their findings show that bargaining interactions involve persuasion, negotiation and strategic language choices. The study found out that traders frequently alternate between Yoruba, Hausa, English and Pidgin at Ipata market to maximize communication and sales opportunities.

In another study, Ayeomoni (2006)

examines code-switching and code-mixing among traders in Nyanya and Mararaba markets, near Abuja. The findings of the study indicate that language switching promotes rapport, solidarity and successful bargaining between traders and customers. The study concludes that multilingual practices are essential tools of commercial interaction.

Akinwumi (2015) examines communication patterns among fish traders in waterside markets in Itu, Akwa Ibom State. The study reveals that traders frequently use indigenous languages, market-specific jargon and pragmatic speech strategies to facilitate transactions and maintain social relationships. The research concludes that language serves both economic and social functions in market interactions.

Adeyemi and Olayemi (2023) investigate attitudes toward English as a lingua franca among traders in Kano metropolis, using metrolingualism as the analytical framework. The findings indicate that traders combine English, Hausa, Pidgin and other indigenous languages (where necessary) to communicate effectively. The study emphasizes the role of language flexibility in sustaining trade relations.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that language use in Nigerian marketplaces is characterised by multilingualism, code-switching, code-mixing and flexible language choices shaped by bargaining, persuasion, social relationships and the need for effective communication. The studies also show that traders draw on different linguistic resources according to their interlocutors and the demands of particular commercial situations. However, the existing studies vary in their geographical focus and areas of emphasis, with attention given to markets in Ilorin, Abuja, Akwa Ibom and Kano. Most importantly, there is limited empirical attention to multilingual market interactions in Benue State, particularly in Makurdi, where traders and customers from different linguistic backgrounds interact regularly. The existing literature, therefore, leaves a contextual gap concerning language use in Modern Market, Makurdi. While previous studies have examined language practices in other Nigerian

marketplaces, little is known about how participants in Modern Market negotiate linguistic diversity, select languages and manage communication among speakers of Tiv, Idoma, Igbo, Hausa and other languages. The present study addresses this gap by examining language choice, code-switching and the use of Nigerian Pidgin in Modern Market, Makurdi, with particular attention to the linguistic strategies employed by market participants in facilitating commercial and social interaction.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design along with simple statistical frequency to analyse language use in market transactions in Modern market, Makurdi, identifying linguistic patterns, communication strategies and sociocultural influences on language choice. Since the study focuses on analyzing discourse, qualitative method is used to capture some interactions in the selected market, while some responses are captured in simple frequency distribution and percentages.

The study relies on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were sourced via interview, questionnaire and direct observation. Responses from some traders and buyers in Modern market, Makurdi were also used for analysis. Secondary data include relevant literature, academic journal articles, books and reports on sociolinguistics and language use in market places. The study used one hundred participants drawn from the market. Fifty people were interviewed -these were participants whose responses were used for analysis. The second set of fifty participants were respondents who returned their questionnaire (out of seventy copies of the questionnaire administered to traders and buyers).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for the analysis in this study comprises Interactionist Sociolinguistic Theory, associated with Erving Goffman (1981) and John Gumperz (1982), and Dell Hymes' (1972) Ethnography of Speaking. These perspectives are complementary, as they provide both micro-level and broader sociocultural approaches to understanding language use in

Modern Market, Makurdi.

Interactionist Sociolinguistic Theory, shaped by the works of Goffman (1981) and Gumperz (1982), views language as a dynamic phenomenon negotiated through social interaction. Conversations in a place like Modern Market do not simply involve the exchange of words; they are interactions in which meaning, respect, trust and, sometimes, tension are negotiated in the course of buying and selling. Participants rely on sociolinguistic resources such as code-switching, tone, gesture, shared background knowledge and contextual cues to interpret meaning beyond the literal level of words. Gumperz (1982) refers to such signals as contextualisation cues, which help speakers indicate how their utterances should be interpreted. In a multilingual market, for instance, a trader's shift from English to Nigerian Pidgin or an indigenous language may signal solidarity, familiarity or an attempt to persuade a customer, while the use of a more standard variety of English may indicate seriousness, authority or social distance.

Goffman's (1981) concept of face-work is also relevant to market interactions. In bargaining, both buyers and sellers are concerned with maintaining their social image or "face." Participants may therefore employ politeness, humour, indirectness, exaggeration or strategic silence to negotiate prices and maintain social relationships without causing offence. These strategies demonstrate that language use in the market is embedded in social relationships and cultural expectations. Interactionist Sociolinguistics also emphasises that meaning is co-constructed. When misunderstandings occur because of differences in linguistic backgrounds, participants may use repetition, clarification or code-switching to negotiate and restore understanding.

Complementing the Interactionist perspective is Hymes' (1972) Ethnography of Speaking, which provides a framework for examining language use within its sociocultural context. Hymes developed the concept of communicative competence to emphasise that knowing a language involves more than grammatical knowledge; speakers must also know

how to use language appropriately in particular social and cultural situations. This perspective is particularly relevant to Modern Market, Makurdi, where traders and customers from different linguistic backgrounds interact and adjust their language choices according to participants, purposes and circumstances.

Hymes' SPEAKING model provides a systematic framework for analysing speech events through eight components: Setting and Scene, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms and Genre. In this study, Setting and Scene refer to the physical and social environment of Modern Market; Participants include traders, buyers and other market actors; Ends refer to purposes such as buying, selling, bargaining and establishing relationships; Act Sequence concerns the organisation of the interaction; Key refers to the tone or manner of communication; Instrumentalities refer to the languages and varieties employed, including English, Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous languages; Norms concern the socially appropriate rules governing interaction; and Genre refers to the type of speech event, such as bargaining, persuasion, joking or argument.

The two perspectives are applied to different but complementary aspects of the data. Gumperz (1982) is used to analyse contextualisation cues, code-switching and the negotiation of meaning, while Goffman (1981) is used to examine face-work, politeness and the management of social relationships during interaction. Hymes (1972), through the SPEAKING model, is used to analyse the broader sociocultural and situational context of market interactions. Together, these perspectives provide the analytical basis for examining how market participants select and use different linguistic codes and how such choices facilitate commercial and social interaction in Modern Market, Makurdi.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the data collected from the field through interviews and questionnaire. Analysis is done by using frequency distribution and percentages based on the responses of the respondents, and by responding to the research questions guiding the

study.

Question One: What languages are used in trade interactions in Modern market, Makurdi?

Table 1: Languages Commonly Used in Trade

Languages Used in Trade	Frequency of Distribution	Percentage (%)
Tiv	12	24
Hausa	10	20
English	5	10
Nigerian Pidgin	20	40
Igbo	3	6
Total	50	100

The data in table 1 reveal a highly multilingual trading environment where the languages used for communication in the market are identified – Tiv, Hausa, English, Nigerian Pidgin and Igbo. However, Nigerian Pidgin is the most widely used language in trade interactions in this market, where twenty respondents (40%) indicated the use of the language. This suggests that Nigerian Pidgin serves as the dominant communicative medium in the market transactions.

Tiv has twelve respondents out of fifty, which is twenty-four percent (24%); Hausa has ten respondents (20%). This reflects the indigenous linguistic identity of Modern market in Makurdi. English recorded five respondents which is ten percent (10%) usage. This suggests that while English is Nigeria's official language, it is not the dominant medium of trade in Modern market. Igbo recorded three responses at six percent (6%).

Table 2: Most Frequently Used Language for Trade

Language	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Tiv	10	20
Hausa	8	16
English	6	12
Nigerian Pidgin	25	50
Igbo	1	2

While Table 1 shows multiple language usage, Table 2 narrows the focus to the most frequently used language. Nigerian Pidgin remains dominant with twenty-five respondents at fifty percent (50%), thus identifying it as the primary language of trade. Tiv follows with ten responses at twenty percent (20%). English has six responses, which is twelve percent (12%) while Igbo has only one response at two percent (2%) respectively. This data shows that Igbo is sparingly used as the language of trade in Modern market, Makurdi, Benue State.

The contrast between Table 1 and Table 2 is significant. Although five languages are used in transactions, when the respondents were asked to identify the language they used most frequently, nearly half of them selected Nigerian Pidgin. This confirms that Nigerian Pidgin is not merely supplementary but it is central to communication in the market.

Question Two: What sociolinguistic strategies are used to overcome language barriers in trade interactions in Modern Market, Makurdi?

This research question examines the communicative strategies adopted by traders and buyers to overcome language barriers during transactions in Makurdi, particularly in Modern market. The analysis is based on responses from fifty (50) participants. Frequency distribution and percentages were used to present and interpret the findings.

Table 3: Strategies Used

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Repetition	6	12
Simplification of Words	20	40
Gestures/Demonstration	10	20
Asking Someone to Interpret	4	8
Switching to Pidgin	8	16
Written price tags	2	4

Table 3 reveals that traders and buyers employ a range of sociolinguistic strategies to ensure successful communication in market transactions. The most commonly reported strategy was simplification of words, reported by twenty (20) respondents (40%), indicating that majority of the respondents consciously adjust their vocabulary to make it easier for customers or sellers to understand them. Simplification often involves the use of short, direct expressions such as “see this,” “how much” or “good price.” This suggests that clarity and brevity are prioritized in transactional discourse. Following simplification is the use of gestures and demonstration - ten respondents - twenty percent (20%). This percentage highlights the importance of non-verbal communication in market interactions. Pointing at goods, demonstrating product use, showing quantity with fingers or physically displaying items are common practices. This indicates that communication in the market is multimodal, combining verbal and non-verbal strategies to enhance understanding.

Eight respondents (16%) indicated that they often switch to Nigerian Pidgin. This reinforces the findings of research question one which identify Nigerian Pidgin as the dominant trade language. When communication breaks down, many respondents revert to Pidgin as a substitute because it is widely understood across ethnic groups. Repetition, with six respondents -

twelve percent (12%) is another commonly used strategy. Traders often repeat prices, product names or instructions to ensure comprehension. Repetition functions as a reinforcement tool, reducing the likelihood of misunderstanding. Less frequently used strategies are asking someone to interpret (four respondents, at eight percent (8%)) and writing down prices (two respondents at four percent (4%)). The lower percentage for interpretation suggests that traders prefer direct communication rather than relying on third parties. Writing prices appears to be used selectively, possibly when dealing with customers who neither share a common language nor fully understand spoken explanations. The findings indicate that traders rely more heavily on adaptive and immediate strategies (simplification, gestures, switching languages) than on formal mediation strategies (interpretation or writing).

Question Three: How often do traders and buyers engage in code-switching, and what factors influence language choice in Modern market, Makurdi?

This research question explores the frequency and situational factors influencing code-switching during trade interactions in Modern market. Fifty (50) participants, as usual, were involved.

Table 4: Frequency of Code-switching

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Always	5	10
Often	12	24
Sometimes	14	28
Rarely	15	30
Never	4	8
Total	50	100

Table 4 shows that code-switching is a common but not constant practice in market interactions in Modern market. Five respondents, at ten percent (10%), reported they “always” switch languages, while twelve respondents, at twenty-four percent (24%), indicated that they switch “often.”

Fourteen respondents (28%) claimed they switch “sometimes.” Similarly, fifteen respondents (at 30%) admitted that they “rarely” switch, while only four respondents at eight percent (8%) reported that they never engage in code-switching. The responses indicate that code-switching occurs with varying frequency among participants. Traders seem to rely on code-switching selectively, based on the linguistic needs of their interlocutors or the social context of the interaction.

Question Four: What is the role of Nigerian Pidgin English as a lingua franca in facilitating trade interactions in Modern market, Makurdi?

This question explores the use and importance of Nigerian Pidgin English as a bridge language among traders and buyers from different ethnic backgrounds in Modern market.

Table 5: Use of Nigerian Pidgin Across Ethnic Groups

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	38	76%
No	12	24%

Table 5 shows that thirty-eight respondents at seventy-six percent (76%) claimed using Nigerian Pidgin to communicate with people from different ethnic groups, while twelve respondents at twenty-four percent (24%) declined. This overwhelmingly positive response demonstrates that Nigerian Pidgin functions effectively as a lingua franca in this market, enabling communication across ethnic boundaries such as Tiv, Hausa, Igbo, and others. Interviewed respondents explained their reliance on Pidgin in various ways. For instance: a Modern market buyer stated: “If I no know the person language, I just talk Pidgin, na so we understand each other.” Another respondent added: “Pidgin dey connect everybody. Even when we be different tribes, na Pidgin dey carry the deal finish.” These examples indicate that Nigerian Pidgin is widely recognised, understood and socially neutral, allowing traders and buyers to bypass potential language barriers in a multi-ethnic market setting like Modern market,

Makurdi.

Question Five: How do sociocultural factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity influence language choice in Modern Market, Makurdi?

This research question examines the impact of sociocultural variables on traders’ and buyers’ choice of language during market interactions in Modern market. Data collected from fifty (50) participants have the result mentioned in the table below.

Table 6: Influence of Age, Gender, Ethnicity

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	18	36%
No	32	64%

Table 6 shows that eighteen respondents (36%) reported that age, gender or ethnicity influenced their choice of language, whereas thirty-two respondents (64%) reported that these factors did not influence their language choice. This suggests that for majority of traders and buyers, pragmatic and functional considerations such as ensuring comprehension and completing transactions are more important than sociocultural identity when selecting a language. Interview responses support this interpretation. A trader from Modern market stated that: “I no dey consider my age or gender for choosing language. I go use Pidgin for everybody, na so market go run well.” Another respondent noted that: “Even if the person no be Tiv like me, I dey use Pidgin mostly. Age or tribe no matter, we just need to complete the deal.” However, those with affirmative response indicated that sociocultural factors occasionally play a role. For example, a participant observed thus: “If the customer be younger or same age as me, I fit use Tiv for familiarity, or small Pidgin to show friendliness. Sometimes I dey greet older people in Tiv or Hausa to show respect before starting business talk.” This utterance illustrates that while sociocultural considerations are secondary, yet, they inform language choice in social interactions in the market.

Discussion of Findings

This study has examined language choice, code-switching and Nigerian Pidgin in Modern

market, Makurdi. The findings reveal that language use in Modern Market is influenced by multilingualism, with market participants deploying Nigerian Pidgin, English and indigenous languages such as Tiv, Idoma and Hausa in their daily interactions. The distribution of languages reflects the linguistic diversity of the market and the need for buyers and sellers to choose languages that are appropriate for particular interactants and communicative situations. From the perspective of Interactionist Sociolinguistic, these language choices are socially negotiated and influenced by the negotiation between the participants and the context of interaction. Hymes' *Ethnography of Speaking* also offers a useful explanation in that the choice of language can be influenced by the relationship existing between the participants, purposes and the setting of market interaction. The findings also show that traders employ several strategies to overcome communication barriers in Modern market. These range from simplified expressions, switching to Nigerian Pidgin, repeated statements, interpretation assistance to using price tags. These findings indicate that participants utilized multiple complementary strategies to ensure that prices and the terms of transactions are understood.

Furthermore, findings show that code-switching occurs with varying frequency among Modern market interlocutors. Language switching was reported as a conscious communicative strategy, particularly when participants interacted with people from different linguistic backgrounds. Some traders indicated that they switch from Tiv, Hausa or English to Nigerian Pidgin when dealing with customers who may not understand their preferred language. This suggests that code-switching serves practical communicative functions by enabling participants to adjust their language to the linguistic needs of their interlocutors. This finding is consistent with Akande and Salami (2010), as well as Tanimu and Suleiman (2023) that code-switching in Nigerian multilingual environments can be strategic and context-dependent.

In addition, the findings reveal that Nigerian Pidgin English dominates market

communication as the main language of trade. It is widely understood across ethnic groups and is prominently used in Modern market, Makurdi. Furthermore, it is the most widely used for trade interactions in the market. The findings suggest that Nigerian Pidgin functions as an important lingua franca in the market. According to Tanimu and Suleiman (2023) in Masaka market, Nasarawa State, sellers use Pidgin intelligently to benefit the non-native speakers to help facilitate transactions. As observed in the present study that "it is faster for bargaining" and "everyone can understand me in Pidgin", NPE serves as a neutral and efficient medium which facilitates communication in market exchanges.

Finally, the findings also indicate that sociocultural factors such as age, gender and ethnicity have limited influence on participants' language choices in Modern market. As indicated in Table 6, thirty-two respondents (64%) reported that these factors do not influence their language choice, while eighteen respondents (36%) indicated that they do. This finding suggests that pragmatic and transactional considerations play a more prominent role in participants' language choices. In a multilingual market environment, traders and buyers appear to prioritise mutual understanding, efficiency and successful transactions when selecting a language or communicative strategy.

The finding is consistent with Interactionist Sociolinguistic Theory, particularly the view that language choice is influenced by the immediate interactional context. Hymes' *Ethnography of Speaking* similarly emphasises the influence of participants, purposes and setting on communicative behaviour. In the studied market, the communicative purpose of buying and selling supersedes the influence of age, gender and ethnicity in many interactions.

The findings are in line with Interactionist Sociolinguistic Theory, (Goffman, 1981; Gumperz, 1982) which focuses on the socially negotiated and situationally constrained aspects of language choices, and also with *Ethnography of Speaking* framework (Hymes, 1972) that highlights the adaptive and functional aspects of communication in multilingual market settings.

Conclusion

This paper has considered language choice, the use of code-switching and Nigerian Pidgin in Modern market, Makurdi. Data for the study were collected through interview, questionnaire and observation. Using Interactionist theory and Ethnography of Speaking for analysis, the study found that Nigerian Pidgin is the dominant language of communication in the studied market. Furthermore, simplification of

words, gestures, code-switching, repetition and price tags are effectively used to facilitate communication. Based on the findings of this study, the study contributes to understanding multilingual commercial communication in North-Central Nigeria by demonstrating how Nigerian Pidgin, code-switching and multimodal strategies are used to negotiate meaning across linguistic boundaries.

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