



Nigerian Pidgin English: Multi-Prepositional Functionality of “Fo” Among Nigerian Staff of Ces in Manchester

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Abstract: Preference for the use of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) as a medium of communication among Nigerian staff of Controlled Event Solutions (CES) in Manchester is because of its simplicity and linguistic neutrality. Studies on NPE revealed that it derives its vocabulary from English (superstrate), and its sound system from the syntax of the local languages (substrate). This study examined how the preposition “fo” (English “for”) functions differently in various context, and what inherent meaning it has that explains its semantic versatility. The study was conducted with fifteen (15) Nigerian staff of CES, all within the age bracket of between 20 and 40 years. Four (4) participants were females while eleven (11) were males. The data were collected through naturally occurring casual speech. The findings revealed that “fo” can coincide with the English “for”; “fo” can function as a possessive marker when it precedes a proper noun; “fo” can function as “in” both as spatial and temporal; “fo” can function as “inside” (spatial) to overtly indicate the relationship between direct and indirect objects; “fo” can function as “on” (spatial locative [positional] & temporal), the interpretation of which is determined by the listener’s semantic instinct at notional level coupled with the type of nominal in the string; “fo” can function as “of” to indicate a point of reference; “fo” can function as “by” (preposition of agent); and “fo” can also function as the spatial “to” (directional) among other roles. This study further revealed that “fo” in NPE is used to specify the mood and attitude of the speaker. With the findings from this study, it is obvious that “fo” is mutable in every sense of its use.

Keywords: Fo, For, Manchester, Nigerian Pidgin English, Preposition.

INTRODUCTION

Given its degree of neutrality and linguistic simplicity among the culturally and linguistically heterogeneous people of Nigeria, it can be rightly argued that Nigerian Pidgin English (henceforth NPE) is currently undergoing a shift towards creolization. In the past, NPE was regarded as “unruly jargon”, “vulgar” and “broken English” mainly associated with a socio-economically deprived set of people. The reason for this negative perception was in connection to its origin as mainly a trade language which distanced its speakers from the speakers of language of the educated class, the lexifier English. This implies that the typical speakers of NPE were those who had little or no formal education.

Recently, Nigerians have adopted a change in nomenclature from NPE to “Naija” because of its expanding functionality. The term “Naija” as used by the speakers of NPE refers to “Nigeria” as a country. The change to the reformed name is an attempt to erase the negative perception and attitude people have towards NPE as “broken English”, argued to be either inaccurate or derogatory. NPE has become so popular that it is now recognized as one of the four commonly spoken languages in Nigeria while it competes with Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – the country’s national languages (Emananjo, 1985). It now operates as a de facto lingua franca, a bridge between social classes and ethnicities even when it lacks a standard orthography.

The reality is that NPE, which was considered to be a debased, bastardized, jargonized and intellectually inferior language in Nigeria, is gradually growing to the status of language of wider communication. Media houses

like Naija FM Radio Station and WAZOBIA Radio Station now exclusively anchor all their programmes in NPE. Others that carry out some of their programmes in NPE include: Radio Faaji (social commentaries, political issues and news); Purity FM (public interactive programmes); Lagos State Television Station (sports, news and social commentaries); and Delta Broadcasting Service (news, sports and social issues). Among the Nigerian musicians, NPE is the predominant language of expression. These are popular musicians like Fela Kuti, D.Banj, Idris Abdulkarim, Wiz-kid, Daddy Shockey, Iyanya, 2-Face and P. Square.

Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) now recognizes NPE in its members' literary works as many books and poetry volumes have been published in NPE. Some of the notable works include: Eriata Oribhabor's *If Yu Hie Se A De Prizin*, Ezenwa-Ohaeto's *I wan Bi President*, Tunde Fatunde's *No Food No Country* and Ola Rotimi's *Grip Am*. Though NPE is not a medium of instruction in Nigerian schools, students often use it in situations where rules are not regulated. As a language of public announcements and information campaigns, university professors, graduates, lawyers and other professionals have all embraced the NPE. With all this, the NPE is still unofficially recognized, but rendered an unplanned language that only exists in oral tradition.

Many stimulating studies conducted on NPE have surveyed its origin, structure, ethnolinguistic and sociolinguistic relevance, some of which sampled peoples' attitudes towards its use in either formal or informal settings. For instance, Mann (2001) conducted a survey of peoples' attitudes towards the use of NPE in southern Nigeria. Few studies have addressed the concept of lexicalization. Mensah's (2011) study on lexicalization in Nigerian Pidgin is an example of such. In the present study, I will concentrate on multi-prepositional functionality of *fo* (borrowed from English *for*) as it contributes in expressing grammatical relationships with other words. Specifically, among Nigerian staff of CES in Manchester.

Controlled Event Solutions (CES) is a company that provides safety and security personnel within the football safety management structure of Manchester United, UK. It is responsible for recruiting general safety "stewards" and "response teams" to support in match day operation. Majority of the staff are casual who only go to work when there is a match in the Manchester United stadium. For every event, about six hundred (600) staff are required to work the fixture. Many Nigerians of different ethno-linguistic background are part of the stewards that offer security solutions at the time of events. Each time these Nigerian staff meet in small groups, the only medium of interaction that brings everybody together is the NPE.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to look into the effectiveness of Nigerian Pidgin English in Manchester, using Nigerian CES staff as a case study. The idea is to find out how the preposition *fo* functions in NPE. Specifically, this study aims at finding answer to the following questions:

- How does the preposition *fo* function in NPE?
- Do Nigerian speakers of NPE in Manchester consider it as being ethnically-balanced?

THE NIGERIAN LIGUISTIC SITUATION

Nigeria is largely a multilingual country with over 400 indigenous languages spoken within its borders (Crozier & Blench, 1992) and a population of over 140 million people (Ajulo, 2008). The linguistic situation in Nigeria is often described as a complex one. Of all the indigenous languages, only Hausa (predominant in the north), Igbo (predominant in the east) and Yoruba (predominant in the west) are recognized as national or major languages in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It's estimated that over 70% Nigerians constitute the speakers of the major languages (Bamgbose 2001). Each of these three national languages plays a role in the country's educational system along with English.

The other indigenous languages are regarded as minor languages, with little or no recognition at the national level. These languages include: Fulfulde, Kanuri, Idoma, Igala, Ebira, Chamba, Nupe, Tiv, Gwari, Ijaw, Angas, Urhobo etc. Nigeria's multilingual situation is so obvious that local languages of people living within a 20 kilometres radius are mostly different and not understandable to one another (Shuaibu, 2013). This lack of recognized effective communication among the Nigerian communities became the basis for resorting to use the English language and the NPE as the *linguae francae*. Given the linguistic diversity in Nigeria, majority of Nigerians grow up speaking more than one language, depending on the level of contact.

Although English is not officially mentioned in the policy document as the official language in Nigeria, it still functions as the language of officialdom: instruction, legislature, politics, mass media, official business etc. English attracts higher prestige among the elites and more widespread than the so-called national languages. The growing trend of increased urbanization resulted into NPE gaining the status of *lingua franca*, while all other Nigerian languages continue to exist as local languages, spoken only in the communities where they exist. Akande (2008) claims that NPE is "a marker of identity and solidarity".

PIDGIN ENGLISH

It is usually assumed that pidgins all over the world evolved from contact situations. In spite of its universality as an aspect of popular speech, the origin of Pidgin remained highly controversial. According to Todd (1974), pidgin is defined as "a language which arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language." This view is in consonance with Matras' definition of pidgin as "a cover-term for languages that arise from situations of semi-communication among a population of potential interlocutors who have no single language in common" (Matras, 2009). This definition maintains that pidgins do not have native speakers but begin their "life-cycle" as a makeshift medium, thus creating a makeshift linguistic repertoire to which all participants contribute.

In West Africa, pidgin was accepted as the de-facto language of blue collar trade and merchants. In some West African countries, the trappings of the contact with Europeans promoted the use of pidgin and relegated the status of indigenous languages. Holm (2000) reveals that because of its nationwide currency, English-based pidgin is now used in the media and in the House of Assembly in Papua New Guinea.

NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH

The origin of pidgin in Nigeria can be traced back to the contact established between Nigerians and Europeans. According to Elugbe and Omamor (1991), NPE arose from the contact between multilingual coastal communities of Nigerian and their earliest trading partners the Portuguese starting from 1469, which brought about a Portuguese-based Pidgin language known as Negro Portuguese. The Portuguese pidgin was short lived with the ousting of the Portuguese traders by other European traders and missionaries: the French, then briefly the Dutch and finally the English. Among these European interest groups, the British trade contact which started from the beginning of the 17th century endured, from which an English-based pidgin was developed along the coast.

Jowitt (2000) remarked that NPE "served as a language of trade for communication between Englishmen and Nigerians living along the Nigerian coast and pidgin was useful because it could be learned easily by both races". In the oil rich Niger-Delta, NPE has now developed to Creole as most of its population use it as their first language. In some areas it is used as a second language while to the rest of Nigerians, NPE is a *lingua franca*. Ihimere (2006) reveals that, NPE has creolized into the native language of about 3 to 5 million of Nigerians and a second language for at least another 75 million people. Jibril (1995) also claims that among the existing Nigerian languages today, NPE has the highest number of speakers.

Like other pidgin languages around the world, NPE is made up of substrate and superstrate languages. The structure of NPE derives its vocabulary from English, and its sound system from the syntax of the local languages (Edith, 2014). For the dominant role in the fusion of what evolved as NPE, English is the superstrate while the indigenous Nigerian languages which are less dominant form the substrate language. Because of the linguistic diversity of the substrate situation, different dialects of the NP emerged. Obiechina (1984) classified the NPE into five (5) variants: Bendel, Calabar, Kano/Maiduguri, Lagos & Port Harcourt. The speakers of these variants can be summarized below:

	VARIANT	SPEAKERS
1	Bendel	Abraka, Wari, Isoko, Sapele, Agbor, Itsekiri, Effurun, Agbaraha-Oto, Urhobo & Ewu
2	Calabar	Calabar, Cross-River, Akwa-Ibom & Kalabari Regions.
3	Kano/Maiduguri	North-East, North-West & North-South
4	Lagos	South-West, South-Central, Eastern Part
5	Port Harcourt	Port Harcourt, River, Regional Suburbs.

THE ENGLISH PREPOSITION FOR

The term preposition comes from the idea of being positioned before. A preposition (a member of the closed word class) is a word that indicates the spatial, temporal or logical relationship of its object in a sentence or making various semantic roles (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Prepositions typically combine noun and pronoun or more generally a noun phrase. Lyons (1968) claims that, the term preposition “is employed to refer to a class of invariable words, which has a grammatical or local function and which tend to occur immediately before the noun or noun phrase they modify”, adding that there are approximately 100 prepositions attributed to multiple meanings. Here are examples of commonly-used Prepositions:

Above	Between	For	Through
Across	By	In	Toward
Along	Down	On	Under
Below	During	With	Underneath
Behind	From	Outside	Within

On the basis of the relationship they show, prepositions can be categorized into:

Prepositions of time: at, on, in

Prepositions of place: at, on, in

Prepositions of direction: toward, through

Prepositions of agent: with, by

Prepositions of instrument: on, with, and

Prepositional phrase: look after, laugh at

PREPOSITION (FOR): FUNCTIONAL OR LEXICAL?

Function word is a word that expresses grammatical or structural relationship with other words (content/lexical) in a sentence. Function words (closed class) are also known as functional (grammatical) categories which include: determiners, auxiliaries, prepositions, conjunctions and complementizers (Klammer et al 2009). Most function words are unstressed and they are functional because they:

- serve as part of connectors
- have no synonyms
- determine the syntax of a sentence

- give some grammatical information on other words
- are defined in terms of their function
- specify the attitude or mood of the speaker

Rouveret (1991) in a study of functional categories and agreement in Welsh discovers that some prepositions are inflected while others are not. He claims that on the one hand, the inflected ones transparently fill a functional head while the uninflected ones don't. According to Jackendoff (1973), preposition has been generally accepted as a lexical category along with nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The problem with this claim is that all of the other three major lexical categories are open-class, and thus are characterized by a high rate of membership readily able to accommodate new members. Rauh (1993) uses syntactic and semantic properties to make a strong argument for a distinction between lexical and non-lexical prepositions, and arrived at a conclusion that prepositions are a heterogeneous category.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was conducted with fifteen (15) Nigerian staff of Controlled Event Solutions (CES) in Manchester, all within the age bracket of between 20 and 40 years. Four (4) participants were females while eleven (11) were males. The data were collected through naturally occurring casual speech. Having sought the consent of the participants, I recorded their conversations at intervals. Sometimes the conversations were audio recorded and sometimes when I was not with my tape recorder I would take note of the few sentences I could remember in my jotter. The researcher is a speaker of NPE and one of the CES staff which helped to orient the study.

The fact that there are several theories that suggest that prepositions are not a single class shows a growing awareness of their problematic nature. Because of this contradiction within the category of prepositions, the data for this study will be analyzed based on the theoretical assumption of conceptual semantics, which primarily investigates word meaning as constituted by its relations with the rest of the context (Cruse, D., 1986). This theory is not strictly lexical.

LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS

All the participants are speakers of NPE from different linguistic background. Specifically from Chamba (North Eastern Nigeria), Fulfulde (North Western Nigeria), Hausa (North Western Nigeria), Igbo (South Eastern Nigeria) and Yoruba (South Western Nigeria). The conversational context involved a wide range of subjects: politics, office, religion, economy, education etc.

	Mother Tongue	Number
1	Chamba	1
2	Fulfulde	1
3	Hausa	4
4	Igbo	3
5	Yoruba	6

FO (FOR) IN NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH

The analysis examines how the preposition *fo* functions differently in various contexts, and what inherent meaning it has that explains its semantic versatility (Charles, 1993). In this analysis, English is written in plain, while pidgin is italicized - the gloss in English is written below each utterance, each of which is numbered for easy reference in the discussion.

In regard to its functionality, first there is a tendency that *fo* coincides with the English *for* in NPE.

1. Abeg wait *fo* me mek we dey go together.

Please *for* let PROG. PART

Please wait *for* me let us be going together.

2. E better fo dat guy.

It's for that

It's better for that person.

3. Who do am fo you?

It for

Who did it for you?

In (1) fo appears within nominalized object complement to introduce an inner indirect object you. The dey in this context functions as a progressive marker while go functions as a particle that expresses future. Here the speaker is requesting the hearer to wait for him to go for an outing together. Fo in (2) introduces the common noun person. In (3) fo functions as English for introducing you in the object position.

4. That fone na fo Helen.

Phone COP for

That phone is Helen's.

In (4), fo is used differently as it functions as a possessive marker preceding proper noun Helen. The preceding na is a copular verb.

5. Who dey fo dat side today?

PROG. in that

Who is in that side today?

6. I go check you fo evening

PART. in

I will check you in the evening.

7. You fit put am fo my bag.

Can it in

You can put it in my bag.

8. My jacket dey fo your car.

PART inside

My jacket is inside your car.

In (5) & (6), fo functions as the temporal in describing time (today & evening). In (7), fo functions as the temporal in describing the location of the object bag. In (8), fo occurs as inside (spatial) overtly indicating the relationship between the direct and indirect objects jacket and car.

9. Na El-rufai dey fo dat position now.

It is PROG on that

It is El-rufai who is on that position now.

10. Im fit slap you fo face.

3SG can on

He can slap you on the face.

11. E dey fo dat chair.

It is on that

It is on that chair.

In the case of (9), (10) and (11), fo occurs as on (spatial locative [positional] temporal), the interpretation of which is determined by the listener's semantic instinct at notional level coupled with the type of nominal in the string. It should be noted that (9) is a response to (16) where in the absence of further specification, the interlocutor's notional and experiential sense leads to the assumption, that the position of El-rufai here is in relation to the governor of Kaduna. In the context of (11), the most usual position for an object to be in relation to a chair is on it. It is a similar construction in (10) as regard the relations that exist between the face and slap.

12. Dat time we still dey fo home.

That PART at

That time we were still at home.

13. Charlie sey mek we report fo 7:45 tomorrow.

Said should at

Charlie said we should report at 7:45 tomorrow.

14. Zaharaddeen dey fo pitch perimeter today.

Is at

Zaharaddeen is at pitch perimeter today.

15. I go join dem fo train station na.

PART them at PART. PART.

I will join them at the train station.

In (12), fo functions as the temporal at (locative). A similar construction occurs in (13) with the temporal at describing the event in relation to the time of reporting (7:45 tomorrow) as Charlie informed. In (14), fo is used as locative at describing the event in relation to pitch perimeter where Zaharaddeen was posted to work the fixture. A similar construction occurs in (15), with the spatial preposition indicating place (train station).

16. Who be gofnor fo Kaduna now?

governor of

Who is the governor of Kaduna now?

17. I tire fo this queue.

1SG of

I am tired of this queue.

In (16), fo is used as of indicating a point of reference. This expression precedes (9), where a response was elicited. A similar construction is in (17), with the preposition of making a reference in relation to queue.

18. Dem post Bolaji fo west stand.

3PL to

They posted Bolaji to west stand.

In (18), *fo* is used as the spatial *to* (directional) indicating a direction of where Bolaji was posted to in relation to west stand (a particular place in the Old Trafford Stadium).

19. All that talk na *fo* mouth.

COP by

It is only by boasting.

20. The guy no fit commot *fo* there.

3SG NEG can leave from

The person cannot leave from there.

In (19), *fo* is used as *by* (preposition of agent), describing the act of agency. In (20), *fo* functions as *from*, preceding the existential *there*.

21. Na only four hours dem go pay you *fo* today

PART. PL will for

They will only pay you four hours (*for*) today.

In (21), the use of the preposition *fo/for* is optional and is used as temporal to indicate time. The sentence can read: Na only four hours dem go pay you today.

22. I *fo* carry that book come.

AUX.

I would have brought that book.

In the case of the data in (22), *fo* functions as a perfect aspect, combining modal auxiliary and aspectual auxiliary to refer to the completed action of bringing the book.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis above, the findings can be summarized below:

- *Fo* is borrowed from the superstrate English but its grammatical role is influenced by the grammatical structure of the substrate indigenous languages.
- In NPE, *fo* functions as the English *at* both as spatial and temporal.
- *Fo* functions as the English *to* both as spatial and directional.
- *Fo* functions as the English *in* both as spatial and temporal.
- *Fo* functions as the English *on* both as spatial and temporal.
- *Fo* functions as the English particle *of*.
- *Fo* functions as the English particle *from*.
- *Fo* functions as the English modifier *for*.
- In addition to its prepositional role, *fo* also functions as auxiliaries (aspectual & modal).
- *Fo* in NPE is used to specify the mood and attitude of the speaker.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the findings of this study reveal that the role of *fo* in NPE seems to be a prepositional jack-of-all-trade; *fo* is mutable in every sense of its use. The Nigerians' (staff of CES) preference

for NPE is because of its simplicity and neutrality. The rising importance of the NPE and its recognition as language of unity among Nigerians is fast endangering the indigenous languages.

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Citation: Jalaludeen Ibrahim Department of European Languages, Federal University Birnin-kebbi, Nigeria
Nigerian Pidgin English: Multi-Prepositional Functionality of "Fo" Among Nigerian Staff of Ces in Manchester
American ReserachJournal of English and Literature Volume 2, 2016; pp:1-10

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