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Language and Identity in Nigeria's Nollywood Dialogues

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Abstract

This paper explores how language in Nollywood dialogues constructs and negotiates sociocultural identity. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and sociolinguistic theory, this paper examines six contemporary Nigerian films that employ multilingual dialogue to convey class, ethnicity, gender, and global belonging. The findings show that practices such as code-switching, diglossia, and vernacular use serve as semiotic tools that mirror Nigeria's multicultural identity and politics. The paper also situates Nollywood's linguistic creativity within global cinematic contexts, positioning it as a site of ideological negotiation. Given these findings, the paper recommends that Nollywood filmmakers continue integrating indigenous and multilingual language strategies to promote cultural authenticity, inclusivity, and national cohesion. It also urges policymakers to support such efforts through language-sensitive film initiatives.

Keywords: Language, identity, Nollywood dialogue, multilingualism, CDA

Introduction

Language is far more than a medium of communication; it is a crucial repository of culture, identity, and power (Bakhtin, 1981). Globally, the role of language in shaping personal and collective identities has been a focal point of sociolinguistic inquiry, particularly in the context of media and presentation. Film, as one of the most influential forms of mass communication, offers a compelling lens through which cultural expressions, social values, and identity negotiations are both represented and consumed. As Anderson (1983) noted, nations are imagined communities whose unity often depends on shared symbols such as language and media narratives. Thus, in multilingual and postcolonial societies, film dialogues do not merely entertain; they encode, reproduce, and sometimes challenge dominant ideologies about who belongs, speaks, and is heard.

In this regard, Nigeria's film industry, Nollywood, provides a fertile ground for studying language and identity. With its impressive output of over 2,500 films annually and reach across Africa and the diaspora, Nollywood is not just a cultural product but a linguistic force. It thrives in a linguistically diverse environment, where over 500 languages coexist, many with overlapping cultural and political significance (Egbokhare, 2003). Nollywood dialogues typically feature Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin, and a range of indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, among others. These linguistic choices are not incidental. They serve as mechanisms for indexing ethnicity, social status, geographic affiliation, and modernity or tradition (Akande & Taiwo, 2012). In doing so, Nollywood becomes a vital site for negotiating Nigeria's pluralistic identity.

The increasing scholarly and policy interest in this topic reflects a growing



awareness of Nollywood's potential as both a mirror and a moulder of national identity. Researchers are intrigued by how the fluid integration of languages in Nollywood dialogues challenges the binaries of high versus low language, urban versus rural values, and elite versus popular culture (Adejunmobi, 2004; Egbokhare, 2003). Policy makers, on the other hand, are concerned with how the industry can be leveraged to promote cultural cohesion, social integration, and the revitalisation of indigenous languages. In a country often strained by ethnic and linguistic tensions, Nollywood's embrace of linguistic hybridity offers an inclusive narrative that resonates with a broad spectrum of Nigerians. Agencies such as the National Council for Arts and Culture and the Nigerian Film Corporation have begun to recognise the strategic role of film in preserving linguistic diversity and shaping national consciousness (Igwe, 2014).

The effects of these linguistic practices are both symbolic and practical. For instance, the use of Nigerian Pidgin in film has grown dramatically, functioning as a neutral, accessible medium that cuts across ethnic lines while retaining a distinct Nigerian identity (Faraclas, 2004). This has allowed filmmakers to reach mass audiences without alienating any particular group. Simultaneously, the selective use of indigenous languages in dialogue evokes a sense of authenticity and cultural rootedness, often grounding characters within specific ethnic or regional contexts. English, especially Nigerian English, is typically reserved for more formal settings or elite characters, reinforcing its status as a symbol of education, power, and modernity (Bamgbose, 1991). Such language hierarchies reflect broader socio-political

dynamics in Nigerian society, illustrating how power is distributed and perceived through language.

Yet, while Nollywood's linguistic patterns are culturally resonant, they remain largely ungoverned by explicit language policies. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2004) advocates the use of mother tongues for early education and supports multilingual competence, but its application in media is not clearly defined. The Cultural Policy for Nigeria (1988) similarly encourages the promotion of local languages in cultural products but lacks robust mechanisms for enforcement. Meanwhile, the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code urges local content creation but does not systematically address the implications of multilingualism in film. As a result, Nollywood operates in a policy vacuum, where its language choices are driven more by market forces and creative expression than by deliberate state intervention (Salawu, 2006). This disconnection poses challenges for using the film industry as an instrument of language planning and identity formation.

This study, therefore, arises from a critical need to explore the intersection between language and identity in one of Africa's most powerful cultural industries. Despite Nollywood's expansive influence, scholarly attention has often focused on its economic growth, narrative forms, or gender representation, with relatively less emphasis on how it functions as a site of linguistic identity construction. Furthermore, the absence of coherent governmental frameworks addressing the role of film in language preservation and social integration highlights a gap between creative practice and national policy. Without intentional engagement with how film dialogues shape public



perceptions of language and identity, opportunities for nation-building and cultural continuity may be underutilised.

The central objectives of this study are threefold. First, it seeks to analyse how language use in Nollywood dialogues reflects and constructs Nigerian identities, taking into account factors such as ethnicity, class, and gender. Second, it examines the socio-political implications of linguistic choices in films, including their impact on national unity, inter-ethnic communication, and youth language trends. Third, it evaluates the extent to which existing governmental policies support or neglect the linguistic practices of Nollywood and suggests ways to better align policy with cultural reality.

To achieve these goals, the paper is structured in the following manner: following this introduction, the theoretical framework section outlines key concepts in sociolinguistics, postcolonial theory, and identity studies that inform the analysis. This is followed by a literature review that surveys previous studies on language in African cinema and the role of media in identity formation. The methodology section details the criteria for film selection and analytical approach. Subsequent sections present and analyse data drawn from selected Nollywood films, followed by a discussion of findings to existing theories and policy implications. The paper concludes with recommendations for cultural policy reform and directions for future research.

Conceptual Clarifications

Language

Language is a structured system of communication essential for human

expression and interaction. Crystal (2003) defines it as a system of spoken, manual, or written symbols through which humans communicate. Fairclough (2015) emphasises language as a social practice shaped by and shaping societal power dynamics, while Halliday (1978) views it as a semiotic system embedded within culture. In this study, language is both symbolic and performative, reflecting sociocultural dynamics in Nollywood. Through multilingualism, code-switching, and variation (e.g., Pidgin, indigenous languages, English), films express identity and power. For instance, the switch between Yoruba and English in *King of Boys* signals shifts in the protagonist's social positioning. Language thus serves as both a reflection and construction of identity (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2008). Standard English typically denotes elite, educated characters, continuing colonial legacies of linguistic gatekeeping (Bamgbose, 1991), while Nigerian Pidgin serves as an inclusive urban code that unites across ethnic lines (Faraclas, 2004). Anderson (1983) argues that language helps imagine nations as shared communities—a notion evident in Nollywood, where language choices symbolise national and ethnic affiliations. Akande and Taiwo show that Pidgin English in film effectively indexes identity, grounding it in everyday Nigerian realities.

Identity

Identity encompasses how individuals and groups define themselves through language, culture, ethnicity, and social belonging. Jenkins (2008) sees identity as shaped by race, language, and culture, while Bucholtz and Hall (2005) stress its fluid, discursive nature. Gee (2000) adds that identity is about being recognised within context. In this paper, identity is seen as constructed through language in



Nollywood's sociocultural settings, covering ethnic, class, gender, and national dimensions. Characters in films like *Lionheart* and *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* perform identity through linguistic choices, supporting Okonkwo and Mohammed's (2021) claim that language in Nigerian cinema is vital for identity assertion. Igwe (2014) argues that film language encodes cultural values and social relationships, influencing audience perceptions. Linguistic portrayals shape both individual character identity and broader national narratives. Films using Igbo, Yoruba, or Hausa without translation often promote ethnic pride, while multilingual ones foster national unity. Hall (1994) describes identity as a continuous production, a concept reflected in Nollywood's diverse linguistic landscape. Thus, Nollywood becomes a site where identities are negotiated and reimagined through language, aligning with the poststructuralist view of identity as discursively constructed (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Nollywood Dialogue

Nollywood dialogues are spoken exchanges in Nigerian films that reflect linguistic and cultural diversity. Okonkwo and Mohammed (2021) describe them as language choices that mimic real-life speech and convey cultural meaning. Afolayan (2022) sees them as tools for expressing class, ethnicity, and ideology, while Iroegbu (2013) highlights their blending of indigenous and colonial languages to capture Nigeria's multilingual reality. These dialogues blend language varieties and registers, portraying sociolinguistic realities and embedding cultural ideologies. The interplay of indigenous languages with English reflects issues of identity, modernity, resistance, and marginalisation (Afolayan, 2022).

Through this hybrid style, Nollywood dialogues not only mirror daily linguistic practices but also shape and critique notions of Nigerian identity.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on two theoretical frameworks that provide a solid foundation for analysing the sociolinguistic and cultural dimensions of language use in films. These theories are the Speech Community Theory and Postcolonial Theory, both of which have been instrumental in shaping scholarly understanding of language, power, and identity in multicultural and postcolonial contexts.

Speech Community Theory

The Speech Community Theory, developed during the rise of sociolinguistics in the 1960s and 1970s by scholars such as John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, is central to understanding how linguistic behaviour is embedded in social norms. This theory posits that a speech community comprises individuals who share common linguistic norms and social expectations in communication (Gumperz, 1982). These norms influence pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and the pragmatic functions of language within a given group. Applied to Nollywood, this theory explains how the linguistic choices of characters, whether in English, Nigerian Pidgin, or indigenous languages, mirror the practices and expectations of their respective communities. For example, upper-class characters are often portrayed speaking Standard English, reflecting real-world prestige associated with the language, while working-class or urban youth frequently speak Pidgin, which functions as a streetwise lingua franca across ethnic boundaries (Akande & Taiwo, 2012). The theory is thus directly related to the



paper's dependent variable, identity construction, by providing a lens through which language becomes a social index of belonging, status, and cultural values.

However, while the Speech Community Theory offers an insightful framework for analysing sociolinguistic variation, it has limitations. It often assumes homogeneity within speech communities and does not fully account for the role of media or power in shaping language use. Moreover, it does not explain how linguistic practices evolve in contexts where speakers move fluidly between codes for strategic or creative reasons. These shortcomings necessitate the integration of a second framework, the Postcolonial Theory, which addresses the historical and ideological layers embedded in language choices.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory was developed by scholars such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak in the late 20th century. The theory examines how colonial legacies continue to shape cultural, linguistic, and social identities in formerly colonised societies (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1993). Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry describe how colonised subjects blend indigenous and colonial influences to form complex identities. This is reflected in Nollywood dialogues, where English—the colonial language—coexists with Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Nigerian Pidgin. These hybrid linguistic practices illustrate what Bhabha terms the "Third Space," a cultural zone where identity is neither wholly indigenous nor colonial but something new and fluid.

This hybrid use of language in Nollywood allows filmmakers to portray characters whose identities are layered,

simultaneously local and global. Postcolonial theory, therefore, highlights how language in Nigerian cinema is not merely communicative but deeply political, symbolising resistance, negotiation, and identity formation in a postcolonial context.

Although the theory can be abstract and may overlook individual agency or market-driven motivations, its emphasis on power, cultural reappropriation, and identity negotiation aligns closely with Nollywood's linguistic dynamics. By situating language within broader historical and ideological frameworks, Postcolonial theory complements Speech Community theory, which explains how linguistic norms function within specific social groups.

Given the above review, this paper adopts Postcolonial theory as its central analytical lens due to Nigeria's status as a postcolonial society where colonial and indigenous legacies converge in everyday communication. The theory enables a critical examination of how Nollywood dialogues mirror the linguistic realities of modern Nigeria—multilingual, hybrid, and ideologically charged. It also provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how cinematic language shapes and reflects evolving Nigerian identities.

Empirical Review

Rai et al. (2025) conducted a comprehensive cross-cultural study examining expressions of shame and pride in over 5,400 film scripts on two geographical locations: Hollywood (United States) and Bollywood (India), representing Western and South Asian film cultures, respectively. Utilising a psychology-informed language analysis alongside large language models, their



study found that Hollywood predominantly portrays shame as self-directed, while in Bollywood, shame is more socially imposed. Notably, women were more frequently depicted as transgressors of societal expectations across both industries. The paper recommended that filmmakers remain sensitive to these emotional codes to avoid perpetuating harmful norms. However, a key limitation of the study is its exclusion of audience interpretation, which may dilute the broader cultural impact of such representations.

Afolayan (2022) investigated how code-switching and multilingual expression in Nollywood dialogues contribute to class distinctions and regional identity in Nigeria between 2015 and 2020. This study employed content and discourse analysis using both primary and secondary data and found that multilingualism in Nollywood is a deliberate stylistic tool that emphasises cultural authenticity and audience relatability. The study recommended that future Nollywood productions should be more intentional in their linguistic choices, using language as a strategic tool to promote national unity and cultural inclusivity, rather than reinforcing social and regional divides. However, one major limitation of the study is its restricted temporal scope in that it focused only on films produced between 2015 and 2020, which may not fully capture evolving linguistic trends or broader historical shifts in Nollywood's language practices.

Dadzie (2022) examined how Ghanaian popular video movies depict everyday life experiences and respond to societal anxieties, with a focus on cultural identity representation. The study analysed six films produced over the past fifteen years using qualitative contextual analysis to

interpret their narratives. It found that the films reflect mechanisms such as marriage, religion, family, and economic conditions, expressing concerns over family disintegration, consumerism, and the conflict between personal aspirations and communal expectations. The main recommendation was for broader discourse on the cultural value of video films within cinema and cultural studies. However, the study was limited by its small sample size, which may not fully capture the diversity of Ghanaian cinema.

Okonkwo and Ibrahim (2021) used qualitative content analysis of selected Nigerian films to explore the use of indigenous languages in reinforcing ethnic identities. Their findings revealed that the use of local dialects not only preserves cultural heritage but also serves as a mechanism of resistance against linguistic imperialism. In line with these findings, the study recommended that filmmakers balance the promotion of ethnic identity with national cohesion by incorporating indigenous languages in ways that foster intercultural understanding. Nevertheless, the study suffers from one main limitation, which is its limited film sample that does not fully capture the diversity of linguistic and ethnic representations across Nigerian cinema.

Adetunji (2016) explored the relationship between language and identity in Nollywood films by focusing on the use of English and indigenous Nigerian languages to represent national and ethnic identities. The study covered films produced between 2010 and 2015. It employed content analysis with quantitative frequency analysis of language usage in films to achieve its objective. The study revealed that indigenous languages are used to assert



ethnic identity, while English serves as a symbol of national unity and modernity. Based on this discovery, the study recommended that Nollywood filmmakers should continue to explore the intersection of language and identity, particularly how language shapes social and political perceptions. However, the study's reliance on language as the sole indicator of identity is the main limitation of this study.

Nanbigne (2015) investigated the mediation of cultural identities in Ghanaian video films, focusing on how texts and contexts shape cultural identity in narratives. The study analysed films produced from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, particularly those in the Pentecostal and occult genres, using textual analysis within the frameworks of representation and identity theories. It found that these films often generate new cultural worldviews, deeply influenced by the socio-economic conditions of their production and reception. The study recommended that filmmakers consciously shape the cultural identities portrayed in their films to contribute positively to national identity discourse. Its major limitation lies in its concentration on specific genres, which may not provide a comprehensive view of the broader industry.

Akande and Taiwo (2012) examined the use of Nigerian Pidgin in Nollywood films, focusing on how the language functions as an indicator of identity for characters and mirrors the socio-cultural landscape of Nigeria. The study spans films produced between 2000 and 2010 and uses secondary data, specifically analysing film dialogues. The study employed qualitative content analysis, with a particular focus on sociolinguistic variation. The findings discovered that Nigerian Pidgin, often

used by working-class and urban youth characters, acts as a marker of social mobility and unity across ethnic groups. The study recommended that Nollywood filmmakers continue using Pidgin to authentically portray the linguistic realities of Nigerian society. However, the study could benefit from more in-depth exploration of the emotional and psychological aspects of language use in Nollywood, as well as insights from filmmakers and actors on their language choices.

Hoffmann (2010) provided a diachronic analysis of Hindi-English code-switching in Bollywood scripts by highlighting how language mixing mirrors urban identity and social stratification in Indian society. Spanning film dialogues from the 1980s to the early 2000s, the study employed structural linguistic methods to analyse syntactic and lexical elements of code-switching. The findings of this study revealed a steady increase in English usage within Bollywood dialogues by reflecting a sociolinguistic shift toward Westernisation and urban hybridity. The study argued that this pattern positions English as a symbol of modernity and class mobility, while Hindi retains cultural and emotional resonance. Based on these findings, the study recommended that filmmakers acknowledge the power of bilingual dialogue in shaping perceptions of identity and cultural hierarchy. The main shortcomings of this study are its reliance on script-based analysis, which omits the visual and performative aspects that also contribute to language's identity-making role.

Omoniyi (2007) investigated the role of both English and Nigerian Pidgin in Nollywood films, analysing how these languages represent different identities



and social classes. The study, covering films from the 1990s to the early 2000s, uses secondary data from film scripts and dialogues, employing critical discourse analysis and comparative analysis to explore the intersection of language, power, and identity. The study found that English is predominantly used by the elite characters, while Pidgin is associated with the working class, reinforcing class distinctions. The study also points to the symbolic association of English with modernity and global influence, while Pidgin is seen as a marker of local authenticity. Given these findings, the study recommended that Nollywood filmmakers embrace the linguistic diversity of Nigeria in their films. Though this study is defective in that it has a narrow focus on class and lacks audience reception data, which would provide a fuller picture of how language choices are interpreted by viewers.

Clark (2005) offered a valuable framework for understanding how national identity is negotiated in the face of state censorship and global market forces in contemporary Chinese cinema, particularly the works of the Fifth-Generation filmmakers from the 1980s to the early 2000s. The study adopted a historical-critical lens to explore themes of collectivism, tradition, and modernisation. Based on this, the study recommended that future studies should integrate audience-centred research, particularly empirical analyses of contemporary audience reception, to complement the historical-critical approach. However, the main defect of this study is its inability to provide empirical data on contemporary audience reception, which would enhance understanding of how these identity narratives are consumed and internalised.

While existing empirical studies from Hollywood, Bollywood, and Chinawood offer valuable insights into the interplay of language and identity in cinematic dialogues, there remains a significant gap in scholarship concerning African film industries, particularly Nollywood. Much of the existing literature is either Eurocentric or Asia-focused, often neglecting the unique linguistic plurality and sociocultural dynamics that shape Nigerian film narratives. Unlike Bollywood or Hollywood, Nollywood operates within a linguistically diverse environment where English, Pidgin, and indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa frequently intersect in film dialogues. This multilingualism serves not only as a narrative device but also as a powerful tool for identity construction, social stratification, and cultural representation. However, few empirical studies like Afolayan (2022), Okonkwo and Ibrahim (2021), and Adetunji (2016) have systematically examined how Nollywood filmmakers use language to reflect or reshape Nigerian identities across ethnic, regional, and class lines. This paper, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by exploring the linguistic strategies and identity performances embedded in Nollywood dialogues, using both qualitative and textual analytical methods.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research methodology grounded in textual and discourse analysis. The primary focus is on analysing language use in selected Nollywood film dialogues to understand how linguistic choices contribute to the construction of identity. Textual analysis is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth examination of dialogue patterns, code-switching, language mixing, and sociolects



that are deliberately crafted to convey meaning within specific sociocultural contexts (Fairclough, 2015).

A purposive sampling technique was used to select six Nollywood films that reflect diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The selected films span different genres: drama, comedy, and urban thrillers, and were produced between 2015 and 2023. The rationale for this sampling range is to capture a wide spectrum of linguistic practices in contemporary Nigerian cinema, particularly those that highlight urbanisation, globalisation, and regional diversity. The six selected films are:

1. *King of Boys* (2018) – Directed by Kemi Adetiba. This political drama incorporates English, Yoruba, and Pidgin, exploring themes of gender, regional power, and ethnic identity.
2. *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019) – Directed by Ramsey Nouah. A thriller that features English and Igbo, centred on spiritual and socio-economic identity transformation.
3. *Lionheart* (2018) – Directed by Genevieve Nnaji. A corporate-family drama using English and Igbo to portray gender roles and regional business dynamics.
4. *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* (2020) – Directed by Funke Akindele. A comedy-drama using Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin to explore urban ghetto life and gender expressions.
5. *Citation* (2020) – Directed by Kunle Afolayan. A transnational academic drama with dialogue in English, Yoruba, and French that addresses gender and global identity.

6. *The Milkmaid* (2020) – Directed by Desmond Oviagele. A culturally rich film using Hausa, Fulfulde, and English to examine religious and regional identity in Northern Nigeria.

Data collection involved transcription and coding of dialogue scenes that demonstrate multilingual usage or identity-based discourse. These transcriptions were analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interpret the relationship between language, power, and identity, as advocated by scholars like van Dijk and Fairclough. CDA allows the researcher to uncover implicit ideologies and social structures embedded in linguistic practices (van Dijk, 2008).

The analysis also drew on sociolinguistic principles such as language prestige, diglossia, and ethnolinguistic vitality to assess how characters use language to assert, negotiate, or resist identities based on ethnicity, class, gender, and regional affiliation. These analytical tools are crucial in decoding the layered meanings in film dialogues, where identity is not only expressed but also performed and contested.

Ethical considerations were observed in the use of film data, ensuring that all films were legally sourced and publicly accessible. The study maintains academic rigour by triangulating findings with existing literature and empirical studies across Nigerian and global contexts. This methodology enables a robust, context-sensitive understanding of the nexus between language and identity in Nollywood dialogues.



Analysis and Findings

The six selected Nollywood films revealed a strategic and multidimensional use of language as a powerful vehicle for identity construction.

In *King of Boys*, Sola Sobowale's character employs code-switching between Yoruba and English not only to affirm her ethnic background but also to assert political authority and command respect, thereby reinforcing Afolayan's (2022) assertion that language in Nigerian films signifies social class and political power.

Example from a scene in the movie: "I have a question for you, I want you to think very carefully before you answer. Ni oş kan lati oninpe odomokunrin ati omobirin rẹ. Sẹ o fe lati rii wọn ni ojo igbeyawo wọn tabi se o fe iroyin pe odomokunrin kan tik u sile? The choice is yours; I'm listening."

This linguistic flexibility highlights the performative aspect of identity as characters manoeuvre between different sociolinguistic domains to achieve dominance or acceptance.

In *Lionheart*, Genevieve Nnaji's character skillfully blends Igbo and English to navigate both familial expectations and corporate professionalism.

Example from a scene in the movie: "Relax, my dear Nna gi maara ihe m nwere ike ime." "Mummy, I can't, mama m enweghi ike ime nke a."

"Ezigbo m wetuo obi i nwere ike ime nke a, you are built for greatness."

The interplay of languages underscores how traditional and modern identities coexist and reinforce each other. This agrees with Okonkwo and Mohammed's (2021) view that indigenous language use in Nollywood serves as an anchor of cultural identity amidst the tides of globalisation. The language strategies used in this film articulate a hybrid

identity that bridges generational and regional divisions.

Omo Ghetto: The Saga presents a more grassroots perspective where Nigerian Pidgin and Yoruba are used to articulate urban, gendered, and subcultural identities. Characters in this film rely on Pidgin to establish street credibility, marginal solidarity, and resistance against societal norms.

Example from a scene in the movie:

"But you know what you are doing is not right. Mo n be e pe ki o yipada."

"Wat I do is not right, yes I sabi, I'm lefty so wat I do is left nah."

"If no be lefty, who go open am? If you like, put am inside rock with padlock, lefty she go open am. She be correct tiff o, big ole buruku na she be dat."

This aligns with previous empirical studies that identify Pidgin as a language of the underclass and youth expression (Okonkwo and Mohammed 2021). In this context, language becomes a badge of solidarity and resistance against the dominant sociolinguistic order.

In *Citation*, the multilingual interplay among English, Yoruba, and French symbolises global citizenship, gender empowerment, and academic elitism.

Example from a scene in the movie:

"Sorry, I didn't get your name the first time." "Je m'appelle Moremi."

"Oh! You speak French. Le premier chapitre est excellent. Quand nous ne sommes que tous les deux, tu peux m'appeller Lucian."

"Don't tell me that. Emi kii se omode. Nko feran re. How long? So mo n gbo."

The protagonist's linguistic dexterity enables her to challenge patriarchal academic structures, echoing Rai et al. (2022), who emphasised how language can communicate emotions and social hierarchies across cultures. The multilingual dynamics of the film reveal the role of language in negotiating



transnational identities and educational expertise.

The Milkmaid offers a compelling case of identity constructed through religious and regional discourse. The use of Hausa and Fulfulde frames the characters' experiences in the cultural and religious attitude of Northern Nigeria.

Example from a scene in the movie: "In zan tuna, lura da Zainab shine manufa na a rayuwa ta."

"I can't, ba zan iya ba. Mi yeeyat tan kosam ngam dañde nguura e toppitaade besngu am."

"Leave her alone. Yarinya ce, ko o cukalel tan."

This supports findings by Ifeoma and Mohammed (2021), which suggest that indigenous language in Nollywood does more than provide cultural authenticity; it centres marginalised voices and highlights regional difficulties.

Living in Bondage: Breaking Free revitalises Igbo language and cosmology to navigate themes of spiritual awakening, economic aspiration, and moral crisis.

Example from a scene in the movie: "Nwanne m nwoke, my brother. I am looking at it right now, 50 million in my bank account, I swear to God Legos ga-anu maka m. Legos ga-ama na m bjara obodo."

Language here functions as a narrative device to portray internal conflict and societal expectations, which affirms earlier studies that link indigenous language use with moral and spiritual storytelling in African cinema (Okonkwo & Mohammed, 2021).

Collectively, the findings reveal that language in Nollywood is far from incidental; it is a deliberate, strategic tool used to reflect, perform, and reshape identities. The use of code-switching, language mixing, and linguistic variation represents not just stylistic choices but

socio-political statements. These findings expand upon existing literature by showing how Nollywood uniquely encapsulates Nigeria's complex identity matrix through linguistic appearance. It also goes beyond regional studies by triangulating African data with international comparisons from Hollywood, Bollywood, and Chinawood, thereby presenting a holistic view of how cinematic language reflects identity politics. These findings corroborate and expand on the Nigerian studies by Okonkwo and Mohammed (2021) and Afolayan (2022), but also show subtle divergences. While previous studies mostly emphasised identity as fixed and culturally determined, this study reveals identity in Nollywood to be far more fluid and contextually redefined in response to modernity, urbanisation, and global engagement. The findings challenge monolithic representations of African identity in media and encourage a reconceptualisation of how language performs and transforms identities in multicultural societies.

The analysis aligns with and enriches the empirical studies reviewed earlier by highlighting how Nollywood dialogues serve as a mirror and a mould for identity. While previous studies largely focused on language as a reflection of fixed cultural traits, this study shows identity as fluid, contested, and constructed in the moment of linguistic interaction. Thus, the cinematic language in Nollywood becomes a site of ideological negotiation and cultural reimagination, solidifying the role of film as a powerful medium for shaping collective consciousness in a multilingual society.



Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper sets out to examine how language use in Nollywood film dialogues constructs, reflects, and negotiates identity across sociocultural dimensions. The findings confirm that language in Nollywood is a powerful tool for expressing multiple, intersecting identities shaped by class, ethnicity, gender, and globalisation. By engaging multiple linguistic codes within single narratives, filmmakers not only mirror Nigeria's complex multilingual reality but also contribute to reshaping how identities are perceived and performed.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Nollywood scriptwriters and directors should continue to integrate indigenous and multilingual language choices to foster cultural inclusion and authenticity. Policymakers should support film initiatives that preserve Nigeria's linguistic diversity through subsidies and language-focused grants. Scholars are encouraged to further examine how emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and dubbing influence the representation of identity in Nigerian cinema.

This paper contributes to knowledge by establishing Nollywood as a fertile ground for linguistic and identity discourse and provides a comparative framework for understanding how film language shapes cultural perceptions. Prospects for further study include comparative research between Nollywood and other African cinemas, or longitudinal studies tracing how language use in Nollywood evolves in response to socio-political changes.

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