# Noun phrases and complexity in Nigerian Pidgin English

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**Abstract**
Works showing the extent to which structural complexity characterizes syntactic structures in contemporary Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) are underrepresented in recent studies on structural complexity, especially in creoles and pidgins. For instance, no works have shown the extent to which the noun phrase (NP), an important syntactic measure of variability and complexity, exhibits variability and complexity in NPE, and the extent to which pattern found converges with /diverges from similar linguistic varieties. The present study provides a basic description of corpus-driven structures of simple-complex NP alternation in contemporary NPE, including how factors such as syntactic function and weight explain contexts where simple or complex NPs might be realised. Our results, though preliminary, show that NPs in NPE exhibit considerable complexity, which is against the simplification hypothesis exemplified in standard Nigerian English.
**Keywords:** noun phrase, Nigerian Pidgin English, variability, simplicity, complexity, syntactic function

## 1. Introduction

The nature of complexity of the structure and meaning of pidgins and creoles, as well as new varieties of English, has remained a dominant theme in contact linguistics. The central discussion in the literature concludes that the structure of pidgins/creoles is simpler compared to structures in comparative standard languages. However, the extent to which structural patterning in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) differs from standard Nigerian English is missing in the literature. The present study provides data on alternation between simple-structured and complex-structured noun phrases (NPSs) in NPE and compares this data with previous findings for standard Nigerian English (Akinlotan and Housen 2017). Previous studies have not paid attention to the contemporary nature of NPE, which shows some structural complexity in its syntax. Investigating how contemporary speakers of NPE pattern their syntactic constructions allows us to provide insights into idiosyncratic pairing of form and meaning in this linguistic variety. A profile of idiosyncratic pairing of form and meaning in NPE can, among other things, tell us the extent to which NPE converges with or diverges from its substrate and/or superstrate. Taking the noun phrase (NP) as a reference point, the present study investigates the extent to which the NP in NPE exhibits variability and complexity. The NP, which is an important syntactic structure, is a good measure of variability and complexity, as well as interface between syntax and semantic processing.

Given that issues of simplification/complexification are central to the discussion of syntactic structures in pidgins/creoles, investigating naturally occurring

instances of NPs in NPE becomes interesting. Surprisingly, no prior studies have show how NPs in NPE vary, or discussed the extent to which variability is characterised by complexity and/or motivated by important syntactic constraints. The present study thus provides the initial basic description of NP complexity in NPE, and also explores whether factors representing syntactic function and syntactic weight can predict where we might find simple or complex NPs, such as in (1) and (2).

1. Death sentence for dia head as of 22 February 2019
   'Death sentence for their head as of 22 February 2019'
2. Mata wey concern how to make Malaysia goment reduce di way e dey sama pipo death sentence
   'Matter which concerns how to make Malaysia government reduce the way they commit people to death sentence'

The NPs in (1) and (2) vary considerably. While (1) is to some extent complex, (2) is much more complex, such that (1) can be classified simpler than (2) even though both NPs involves complexity in recursiveness and embeddedness. As will be explored in this paper, the syntactic position of the NP within the clause structure may shed light on when/where we might find differently structured NPs such as (1) and (2).

**1.1 Structural descriptions of creoles/pidgins and NPE**
One of many questions that arise from descriptions of creoles/ pidgins concerns grammatical complexity, and the extent to which different varieties of pidgin/creoles demonstrate a varying degree of complexity. For example, McWhorter (2001) claim that creoles have the world's simplest grammar, and thus has refocused attention to further investigate the extent to which evidence from different creoles/pidgins demonstrate some degree of complexity in their structural patterning. Taking the NP as a reference point, the present study aims to shed light on the extent to which variability and complexity in the NP is present in NPE.

Explicating on McWhorter's (2001) assertion, structural simplicity in creoles/pidgins can be attested when similar syntactic structures in creoles/pidgins are compared to similar but syntactically more matured languages. Exploring McWhorter's claim, Parkvall (2008) applied a quantitative method to a large-scale study of pidgin/creoles provided in the World Atlas of Language Structures, annotating and comparing complexity. Parkvall (2008) concluded that although "[t]ypologically speaking, Creoles stand out from languages in general, and the most salient difference is that they present a lower structural complexity[,]" this might not be true for all creoles and pidgins or in all contexts. Good (2012, 2015), for instance, has questioned the universality of McWhorter's claim; even though pidgins in general might demonstrate a tendency for structural simplicity, this tendency may not be universally true for all pidgins/creoles.

In other words, according to Good's proposal, the simplified structural tendency

in NPE may not account for, or represent, the prototypical structural mapping for West African Pidgin English, let alone for the Caribbean Creoles. Rather, the emergent structural pattern/tendency should arguably be seen in light of the socio-historical matrices of NPE which also accounts for their evolution and decades of contact and co-existence. Good further identified two possibilities for complexity: (1) syntagmatic complexity, which refers to complexity arising from one component of a construction, and (2) paradigmatic complexity, which refers to complexity arising from different grammatical categories. The present study is more concerned with the extent to which complexity is present in (2) by investigating the different internal structures of NPs in NPE. Framed within construction grammar, this study draws on naturally occurring language to answer two research questions:

1) To what extent does variability of NP in NPE reflect simplicity/complexity?
2) To what extent do factors representing syntactic function and syntactic weight explain the nature of the complexity/simplicity found?

Notable works informing this paper include Faraclas (1996, 2002), Akhimien (2004), Akande (2008), Akande and Salami (2010), Mazzoli (2013), Ihemere (2006), Herbert (2008), Poplack and Tagliamonte (1996), and Hammarström et al. (2017). Within a comprehensive descriptive background, Faraclas (1996, 2002) provides some benchmark descriptions showing how forms/constructions that are distinct from standard Nigerian English function in distinctive ways in NPE. More specifically, Akhimien (2004) present a wide range of pragmatic and communicative variations associated with the construction 'How are you?', which is a syntactic template for 'How you na dey' in NPE.

Furthermore, Ihemere (2006) provided some syntactic evidence demonstrating the different forms and functions of noun clauses. Although Ihemere's (2006) primary focus was to provide a basic description of noun clauses, it can be inferred from the samples provided that there are indeed processes of simplification in the noun clause structures. Relatedly, Poplack and Tagliamonte (1999) investigated the variation involved in the use of past tense marking involving unique semantic processing. Further, using a quantitative method, Tagliamonte, Poplack and Eze (1997) examined syntactic, semantic, and phonological characterisations involved in the variability of the pluralisation system of NPE. Also, using a distribution analysis which attested to different structural patterns, Tagliamonte et al. (1997) provided empirical evidence that suggested the grammar underlying NPE might be reflected in a distributional manner that attests different structural tendencies. Relatedly, Akande (2008) compared the form and function of the verb in standard (Nigerian) English and NPE in light of sociolinguistic factors, showing variability in the form and function of the verb.

However, in all of these works describing the structure and meaning of NPE there has been no contribution showing the extent to which NPs in NPE exhibit variability and complexity, which is crucial to our understanding of the syntactic

idiosyncrasies in NPE. Also, although Akinlotan and Housen (2017) showed the extent to which simplification/complexity is present in standard Nigerian English, it is not clear how their findings compare with NPE. Hence, it is important to provide some benchmark contexts regarding where NPE stands in terms of its structural tendency, which is expected to tilt towards simplification or complexification depending on the factors considered.

In this vein, the present study provides the first basic description of the NP in NPE showing the extent to which simplification/complexification is present, while also considering how factors such as syntactic function and length influence complexity or simplicity. The paper follows Tagliamonte et al. (1997), Schilk and Schuab (2016), Akinlotan and Housen (2017), and Berlage (2014). Similar to the present study, these works employed both quantitative and qualitative measures to explain structural patternings. For instance Berlage (2014) showed that length as a measure of complexity can be teased apart from structural node, a reasoning adopted in this paper as well.

## 1.2 NPE and Construction Grammar as a theoretical framework

The present study focuses on the alternation between simple-structured and complex-structured NPs in NPE and how such alternation sheds light on issues of variability and complexity in this language. Such descriptions can also provide insights into how speakers of NPE make certain choices in relation to language-internal and language-external factors (see for example, Divjak 2019). The theoretical framework of construction grammar (CxG) allows for such a combined quantitative-qualitative analytic description and is the framework used in the study. Notably, CxG allows a move from frequencies/distributions to potential explanations of how such frequencies might reflect certain cognitive abilities and/or constraints of the speakers (see Hilpert 2014, Divjak 2019, Akinlotan 2021). Hoffmann & Graeme (2013) provide comprehensive descriptions of central theoretical aspects of CxG. For instance, Akinlotan (2021) draws on theoretical tools from CxG to explain BE-relativisation constructions in Nigerian and Canadian varieties of English. Akinlotan shows that a complex network of cognitive factors is responsible for processing this sort of relativisation, and that these cognitive factors are independent of the peculiar sociolinguistic features that define these varieties.

One starting point in CxG is form-function pairing; that is, the speakers of a language draw on the syntactic/phonological templates of that language to build (form) a linguistic construction that then performs a social function, primarily an expression of meaning, thought, or construct. Either the form or its function can exhibit a varying degree of variation, resulting in different patterns of frequencies motivated by different factors. One such factor includes the speaker's mental grammar, which is more or less the speaker's experiential background and knowledge of language use shaped by linguistic exposure including the language learning process. This thus explains that CxG is intimately related to the interface of language, language use, cognitive psychology, and neurobiology, an interface

that allows us to explain why and when certain speakers might use (pair) certain linguistic structures in particular contexts (Akinlotan 2021). This means that frequencies in language can be related to, and potentially explained by, a wide range of cognitive and linguistic issues including entrenchment, retrenchment, constraints, idiosyncrasies, among other phenomena. This further explains the wide-range of approaches that characterize CxG: from cognitive construction grammar to usage-based grammar to issues of memory, attention, learning, entrenchment, retrenchment, productivity, etc.

Hence, different scholars have applied different approaches of CxG to different data (Mapel 2014, Divjak 2019, Hoffmann 2008, Jach 2018, Goldberg 2013). For example, Mapel (2014) demonstrates how different conceptual tools within CxG can be applied to different syntactic structures in the English language, while Goldberg (2013) further demonstrates applicability of CxG to different linguistic varieties. The analysis provided in the present study draws on several conceptual framework within the wider theoretical orientations of construction grammar, which extends to aspects of cognitive linguistics, usage-based grammar, and corpus linguistics. Common issues are for instance questions as to when certain speakers prefer certain structural patterns to other choices in similar contexts, as well as why and when certain speakers choose simple NPs rather complex NPs.

The extent to which we move to formalise frequencies into theoretical claims is not only fuzzy, however, but also decided by what we take them to mean. If we find in our data that speakers prefer certain patterns such as a simple NP, do we argue that this simplified pattern reflects entrenchment of simplified syntactic structures in NPE? Do we argue that such a pattern reflects retrenchment of certain syntactic structures in NPE? Can we argue that our distribution is simply a reflection of the corpus, which in itself might not be an accurate reflection of different speakers' cognitive linguistic behavior? To what extent does frequency reflect the mental grammar of speakers? Divjak (2019), Geeraerts (2017:154), and Mukherjee (2005) provide further insights on how distributions can reflect the state of our mental grammar.

## 2. Method: data and preliminary analyses

The NPs serving as empirical data in this study were extracted from the BBC News Pidgin website (https://www.bbc.com/pidgin) and transferred into spreadsheets where they were later processed. News writing totalling 8000 word-length formed the corpus for the present study. The BBC News Pidgin was chosen as it provides contemporary usage of NPE media language, which, given its deliberate stylistic variation, provides a variety of NP structures. A total of 1144 NPs were extracted for analysis. In order to compare findings with standard Nigerian English, the extraction and annotation procedures in Akinlotan and Housen (2017) were followed. Only NPs which are syntactically replaceable with a noun or pronoun, or embedded in another NP, and found within clause structures were extracted while nominalised NPs were not included. Compound NPs (i.e., The First Lady of Nigeria and her husband President Muhammed Buhari) were split into two NPs: (1) The

First Lady of Nigeria and (2) her husband President Muhammed Buhari.

Using Huddleston and Pullum's (2002) NP framework as operationalised in Akinlotan and Housen (2017), the internal structure of the NPs was annotated as being DH (determiner + headword), HC (headword + complement), MHM (premodifier + headword + postmodifier), and DMHMPD (determiner + premodifier + headword + postmodifier + peripheral dependent). Huddleston and Pullum's (2002) NP framework follows the schematic representation: (D) + (M) + H + C + (M) + (PD) where there are two mandatory elements: headword and complement. To illustrate, in (3) we have MH; 'indomitable Lions' + 'coach' while the *e* in (4) represents 'he', which is classified as a H structure.

3. indomitable Lions coach
4. e
   He
   'S/he'

In (5), we have *his story for BBC News Pidgin* which constitutes DHM, representing 'his' determiner, 'story' headword, and 'for BBC News Pidgin' (M).

5. e    tori  for   BBC News Pidgin
   His story   for   BBC News Pidgin
   'His story for BBC News Pidgin'.

Furtheer, (6) translates into DDHM; as in 'number' (D) + 'three' (D) + 'rape' (H) + 'weh   ah see say e no bi joke' (M))

6. number  three  rape    weh    ah   see say  e  no   bi j oke
   number  three  rape    which  I   see say      THAT NEG  BE  joke
   'number three rape which I see that is not a joke'

In (7), we have 'The First Lady of Nigeria', which consists of DHC, i.e., 'the' is a determiner, 'First Lady' is H, and 'of Nigeria' is C. The NP 'First Lady' in this context refers to a well-defined single referent in the real world, and it may not be syntactically congruent to classify 'first' as a separate component. In another context where ordering is intended (i.e. 'first', 'second', 'third' lady), 'first' would become a determiner, but, here, we treat it as a compound noun.

7. Di  First Lady  for  Una    kontri    Nigeria
   The First Lady  for   your   country  Nigeria
   'The first lady of Nigeria'

Example (8) has the structure HMPD; 'bill' as (H), 'to update di Gender Based Violence (GBV) Prohibition Law' as (M), and '2011' as (PD).

8. bill to update di Gender Based Violence (GBV) Prohibition Law, 2011

In addition to this structural classification, two variables representing *length* and *syntactic function* are operationalised. The length of every NP was measured in terms of the number of words. For example, the lengths of the NPs in (9) and (10) below are five and three words, respectively. Also, the length/number of the determiner and premodifier in the NP were accounted for. For example, in (9) there are two determiners *di* and *some* but no premodifier, while there are two premodifiers but no determiners in (10).

9. Some of di lawmakers of di house
10. Ambode house visit

Prepositions and conjunctions were included in the word counts. Also, the syntactic function of every NP was categorised according to the eight different eight different syntactic functions used in Akinlotan and Housen (2017), as exemplified in (11)-(18) below.

NP as subject:
11. Datuk Liew Vui Keong, di minister wey dey in charge of law for di Prime Minister's Department tok give local tori pipo for event for University of Malaysia

NP as indirect object:
12. Senegal giv dia goakeeper a run for dia draw

NP as adverb:
13. De Communications Ministry last week Friday Order Mobile Network Operators *(MNOs)*

NP as preposition complement:
14. Dey say dem stop dey deduct di tax from *consumer*

NP as direct object:
15. Ghanaian telcom operators, MTN, AirtelTigo, Vodafone den Glo all start dey charge *de full 9 percent of CST*

NP as appositive:
16. Ghanaian telcom operators, *MTN, AirtelTigo, Vodafone* den *Glo all* start dey charge de full 9 percent of CST

NP as object complement:
17. Di coach give am *chance for show e skills*

NP as subject complement:

18. Dey say na *Firmino score di goal* (They said it is *Firmino who scored the goal*)

After the annotation, which semi-automated (i.e., both manual and automated annotion), the NPs were classified into a binary pattern of a simple or complex NP, using a revised framework from Crystal (2004) and Akinlotan and Housen (2017). NPs structured as HC; H; DH; and HD were classified as simple NPs, while other structures such as MHM; DMHM; MHMPD; DHPD were classified as complex NPs. The distributions were further analysed quantitively and qualitatively drawing on conceptual frameworks from construction grammar.

## 3. Findings

In this section, findings from the preliminary analyses detailed in the method section are presented. The findings are presented in two sections, the distribution by their structural nodes and by their word length. Both dimensions show distributions that clearly present the structural tendency expected to be found within the NP in NPE. As these distributions do not speak for themselves, concepts from construction grammar are employed to explain their underlying patterns.

Table 1 gives the overall figures for simplicity and complexity of the NPE data.

*Table 1.* NP Simplicity/Complexity in NPE

| SimpleNP | Complex NP | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 552 (48%) | 592 (52%) | 1144 (100%) |

As shown in Table 1, NPs are more likely to be complex-structured than simple-structured, though with 4% greater tendency for complexity. Importantly, this distribution shows that structural complexity is present in NPE, and that such complexity can indeed be demonstrated by syntactic structures such as the NP. Further, the proximity shown in the frequencies shows that structural variation is fluid and that speakers are likely to vary their constructions depending on a number of factors. While this distribution simply shows a structural patterning tendency that should be contextualized, there is an important comparison to be made: The slightly higher frequency for complex NPs in Table 1 differs from findings for Nigerian English. Akinlotan and Housen (2017) have found that NPs in standard Nigerian English are more likely to be simple-structured (56%) than complex-structured (44%). Although the current study drew on a smaller amount of data than Akinlotan and Housen (2017), these contradictory tendencies suggest that there is some degree of continuum/relationship between NPE and standard Nigerian English.

On the other hand, the differences might have little to do with data size and rather reflect the possible points of convergence and/or divergences between NPE and similar linguistic varieties. Regardless of comparison, Table 1 shows that there is strong competition between the selection of simple and complex NPs, and that certain contexts are motivators for such selection/deselection. It is therefore

interesting to consider different contexts that aggregate into the binary pattern.

### 3.1 Development of complexity of NP in NPE

Table 2 shows the different configurations that exhibit complex NPs in our data, and allows us to see how often different internal components are combined to produce complex NPs.

*Table 2.* Configuring complexity within NP in NPE: 592

| NP patterns | Frequency | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | N | % |
| *DHM* | 109 | 18 |
| *DHMPD* | 9 | 2 |
| *DHPD* | 1 | 0 |
| *DMHPD* | 4 | 0 |
| *DMHM* | 27 | 5 |
| *DMHMPD* | 6 | 0 |
| *DMH* | 86 | 15 |
| *MHPD* | 9 | 2 |
| *MHMPD* | 11 | 2 |
| *MH* | 141 | 24 |
| *MHM* | 68 | 11 |
| *MHCMPD* | 1 | 0 |
| *HMPD* | 26 | 4 |
| *HPD* | 3 | 1 |
| *HCPD* | 2 | 0 |
| *HM* | 88 | 15 |
| *HCM* | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 592 | 100 |

Interestingly, Table 2 shows that certain NP forms of complexity are rarly used. As can be seen, DHPD, HPD, HCPD, and HCM constitute the least common configurations in the material. These four least contributors of complexity support our earlier hypothesis that deselection of PD is related to cognitive load as well as syntactic weight, such that a pattern combining postmodifier and PD is rare.

As the relative low frequency of DHPD, HPD, HCPD, and HCM show, a PD is often used, especially when a postmodifier is not used, and a postmodifier is used when a PD is not used. Another noteworthy observation from Table 2 is the frequent omission of premodifier in structures involving PDs, which is another slot offering possibilities of structural complexity and variability. It can thus be suggested that usage of PDs may be related to the use of premodifiers as well as postmodifiers. This further supports our assertion that PD is more likely to move to the premodifier slot when a postmodifier is present.

If we compare the highly complex forms (MH 24%; DHM 18%; HM 15%; and DMH 15%) to the less complex forms (DHPD 0%, HPD 1%, HCPD 0%, and HCM

0%), one can argue that the development of complexity of NP in NPE is strongly related to PD, postmodifier and premodifier in that order. As shown in Table 2, only six occurrences combining postmodifier and PD are found in 592 cases. Also, co-occurrence of PD and postmodifier is rarer than co-occurrence of PD and premodifier, as well as co-occurrence of postmodifier and premodifier. In other words, the typical most complex NP structure in NPE is not the same as that of standard Nigerian English.

This suggests that maximizing structural complexity is more constrained by internal syntactic interdependency than it is constrained by external factors such as discourse-pragmatic effects in NPE. For instance, the possible most complex form of an NP is that form in which all the slots are filled up, DMHCMPD, a pattern not produced at all in 592 cases.

What are the roles of the slots representing determiner, headword, and the complements? How does the prenominal slot compare with the postnominal slot? Since the premodifier slot strongly competes with both the PD and the postmodifier (note that MH is the most preferred pattern exhibiting complexity), it becomes important to examine the distribution in a more unified dimension, which Table 3 provides.

*Table 3.* Frequency of syntactic slot within NP in NPE

| Prenominal *(determiner)x (premodifier)* | Nominal *head x complement* | Postnominal *(postmod) x (PD)* |
|---|---|---|
| det. present (33%) | complement present (0%) | postmod present (30%) |
| det. omitted (67%) | complement omitted (99%) | |
| premodifier present (31%) | | PD present (6%) |
| premodifier omitted (69%) | | PD omitted (94%) |

Table 3 shows that determiners are more likely to be omitted (33%) than present (67), which follows a pattern found for Nigerian English (Akinlotan 2016, 2017). Akinlotan (2016) has found that a determiner is rarely used, and when used, they are rarely combined. In our data, we also found that determiner usage is often restricted to definite articles and some demonstratives. A determiner combined with another determiner, such as *two of my, many of the*, is rarely used. Rarity or lack of determiner complexity in NPE can be explained by a tendency to place more emphasis on context (or semantics, meaning) than on syntactic structure (or observing grammatical rules, or of concord agreement. Specificity, referentiality, and definiteness, which are the primary functions of determiners, are often activated contextually in NPE.

Other compositional slots shown in Table 3 are also likely to be omitted. For those small proportions of occurrence, it is important to find out when and where we might find them within the clause structure. Schilk and Schuab (2016) and Akinlotan and Housen (2017) have shown that syntactic function is an important factor with which variability and complexity of NP can be explained. Following

this hypothesis, we can further show the extent to which NPE reflects a continuum with its superstrate standard Nigerian English.

## 3.2 Constraint of NP complexity/simplicity in NPE: the case of syntactic functions

Table 4 below shows the NP complexity in then NPE material by the eight (8) syntactic functions considered by Akinlotan and Housen for NE (2017). The hypothesis that structural patterning of NPs is strongly related to their syntactic functions has also been attested in Aarts (1971) and Schilk and Schuab (2016). More specifically, they found that subject NPs are more likely to be simple-structured while non-subject NPs are more likely to be complex-structured. Since no hypothesis exists for NPE, we then expect also that syntactic functions can provide some specific contexts when and where we might find simple and complex NPs.

*Table 4.* NP in NPE by syntactic functions

|  | Simple NP | | Complex NP | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| *Subject* | 346 | 65 | 185 | 35 | 531 | 100 |
| *Object complement* | 7 | 50 | 7 | 50 | 14 | 100 |
| *Subject complement* | 22 | 29 | 53 | 71 | 75 | 100 |
| *Indirect object* | 5 | 71 | 2 | 29 | 7 | 100 |
| *Preposition complement* | 41 | 40 | 70 | 60 | 111 | 100 |
| *Direct object* | 91 | 28 | 235 | 72 | 326 | 100 |
| *Adverb* | 24 | 49 | 25 | 51 | 49 | 100 |
| *Apposition* | 16 | 52 | 15 | 48 | 31 | 100 |
| Total | 552 | 48 | 592 | 52 | 1144 | 100 |

As Table 4 shows the subject-simple NP hypothesis is supported, as the subject NPs in this material are far more simple-structured (65%) than complex-structured (35%). The 35% proportion of complex subject NPs in NPE is greater than the 26% proportion found in Akinlotan and Housen (2017) for Nigerian English. Although the data size of the two studies differ, this disparity strongly suggests that subject NPs are more likely to be complex-structured in NPE than in Nigerian English. More data subjected to multivariate analysis will be required to further test out this hypothesis.

Given that pidgins/creoles are often characterized with more simplicity than their substrate or superstrate, then one would have expected subject NPs in Nigerian English to exhibit more complexity than those in NPE. Since our data is media language, rather than a mix of different text types in Akinlotan and Housen (2017), the higher proportion of complexity in NPE might thus be a reflection of media language which is characterized with deliberate stylistic variation.

Another point of convergence and divergence with the current NPE material and standard Nigerian English NPs is evident in the figures for indirect object and

adverb. While indirect object NPs in NPE are more likely to be simple-structured (71%), equivalent NPs in Nigerian English are more likely to be complex-structured. On the other hand, NPs which function as adverb are more likely to be complex-structured in NPE (51%) while those similar NPs in Nigerian English are more likely to be simple-structured. So, in NPE, subject and indirect object NPs are more likely to exhibit simplicity, while subject and adverb NPs are those more likely to exhibit simplicity in standard Nigerian English.

For closer comparison, Table 5 gives results for NE in Akinlotan and Housen (2017), including specific number of frequencies, tokens and type. The difference in text type between the present study (i.e. Table 4) and Akinlotan and Housen's (2017) study (i.e. Table 5) is an important consideration to be made, though these patterns can indeed point us towards complexity/simplicity praxis in both languages. Note that the distributions in Table 5 emerged from a variety of text type (e.g. media, student, literary, academic, interactional) rather than one text type (media) in Table 4.

*Table 5.* NP in standard Nigerian English by syntactic functions (Akinlotan and Housen 2017)

|  | Simple NP | | Complex NP | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| *Subject* | 1917 | 74 | 686 | 26 | 2603 | 100 |
| *Subject complement* | 147 | 27 | 393 | 73 | 540 | 100 |
| *Apposition* | 25 | 35 | 47 | 65 | 72 | 100 |
| *Direct object* | 616 | 43 | 830 | 57 | 1446 | 100 |
| *Indirect object* | 20 | 19 | 86 | 89 | 106 | 100 |
| *Object complement* | 21 | 25 | 62 | 75 | 83 | 100 |
| *Preposition complement* | 393 | 35 | 715 | 65 | 1108 | 100 |
| *Adverbial* | 286 | 94 | 18 | 6 | 304 | 100 |
| Total | 3425 | 56 | 2837 | 44 | 6262 | 100 |

Akinlotan (2019) has shown that in news writing, especially those of headlines in Nigerian news media, variability and complexity/simplicity can be a means to constructing non-ambiguous headlines. For example, the tendency to write a non-ambiguous news headline might motivate a choice of an DMHC structure (i.e., determiner + headword + complement) rather than an H structure. In other words, *The First Lady of Nigeria,* an NP composed of determiner (D) + premodifier (M) + headword (H) + head complement (C), is more likely to be preferred to *First Lady* (i.e. a simpler NP composed of premodifier + headword; or even *the First Lady*, which is still simpler compared to that of complex structure involving DMHC).

Hence, the tendency for complex NPs is higher in both media as well as in academic text types, which suggests that further studies comparing more text types in NPE are required. Such future studies can also show whether media language in NPE is representative of written NPE, or the extent to which writers of these media language in NPE borrow phrasal and clausal structures from standard Englishes in order to reach a wider audience.

One way to further test out the tendencies found in our data is to look at the number from another dimension different from earlier method. According to Berlage (2014), analysing complexity/simplicity from both dimensions representing structural node and word-count can provide great insight into theoretical and methodical orientations. This is indeed the case with Akinlotan and Housen (2017), who applied both dimensions to their data, showing how significant variability underlies NP in Nigerian English. Among other things, the word count is indeed useful for NPE because it allows us to specifically penetrate the semantic content and syntactic weight of each syntactic slot representing determiner, premodifier, postmodifier, and PD. For instance, an NP structured as MH does not clearly state the exact syntactic and semantic weight of the premodifier, which might be presented as a one-, two-, or three-worded premodifier. Indeed, a premodifier slot with three words is different from a one- or two-worded one, and such differences allow us to clearly examine the weight of each syntactic slot in comparison with others. This approach can also reduce the effect of text type allowing more reliable comparison with the findings in standard Nigerian English reported in Akinlotan and Housen (2017). This word-count dimension of our data is thus presented in the next section.

### 3.3 Complexity through syntactic weight/word-length
Table 6 gives the relative length of the NPs in the NPE material.

*Table 6*. NPs by length of words

| Length | Simple NPs | | Complex NPs | | Total | |
|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|
|        | N   | %   | N   | %   | N    | %   |
| *1-2*  | 524 | 84  | 100 | 16  | 624  | 100 |
| *3-4*  | 24  | 11  | 204 | 89  | 228  | 100 |
| *5-6*  | 3   | 2   | 153 | 98  | 156  | 100 |
| *7-8*  | 1   | 2   | 59  | 98  | 156  | 100 |
| *9-10* | 0   | 0   | 24  | 100 | 24   | 100 |
| *11+*  | 0   | 0   | 52  | 100 | 52   | 100 |
| Total  | 552 | 48  | 592 | 52  | 1144 | 100 |

As seen, complex NPs show more variability than simple NPs. This makes sense since complex NPs can be produced in a variety of word-lengths, while those of simple NPs are restricted to a few word-length, of which the 1-2 length is the most frequent pattern. For instance, simple NPs are more likely to be constructed in two words, while complex NPs often involve 3 words or more. As observed above, NPs of 1-2 words in length are aptly distributed: 84% for simple NPs and 16% for complex NPs. This suggests that the 84% simple NPs are essentially the d + h (for example, *33 offence dem*) structure which lacks premodifiers.

The 16% complex NPs, together with other combinations,  include a variety of different structures such as D + M +H (e.g., *all death penalty*), D + H + M (e.g., *di way e dey sama pipo death sentence*), M+ H+M (e.g., *international law wey need*

*death penalty*), D+H+M+P+D (e.g., *di announcement on October 10 wey be World Day Against the Death Penalty*), M+H+M+PD (e.g., *friendly match wit Cameroon for Stade Olympic for Rades for Tunisia*), and D+M+H+M+PD (e.g., *Di community area wey di offender bin dey live go get posters of di convict all over*). This pattern suggests that determiners and premodifiers are often omitted in the structures of NPs in NPE.

From our corpus, a total of 402 NPs from a total of 524 NPs consisting of 1-2 words are composed of 1 word-length, which essentially is the H structure involving pronominals and nouns. Of 402 NPs composed of 1-word, 259 NPs are composed of common nouns (e.g., *consumers*, *police*), while 143 NPs are pronouns and proper nouns (e.g., *dem, we, dey, e, im, dis*), which, irrespective of their syntactic positions, can actually still co-occur with a postmodifier (M), or a peripheral dependent (PD). Unlike NPs in standard Nigerian English, NPs composed of pronouns and proper nouns in NPE are more likely to be used without modification, even when they could appear so positionally.

Furthermore, NPs in NPE, just as those in standard Nigerian English, demonstrate similar variability in word-length/structural choices of complex NPs. Berlage (2014) has argued that complexity/simplification can be measured hand-in-hand in terms of length of words and structural components. Given that no information exists about the structural complexity of NP structure in NPE, it becomes much more important to provide some benchmark tendencies in terms of how length of words and structural nodes reflect processes of complexification and/or simplification.

Following Biber et al. (1999) and Akinlotan and Housen (2017), we collapsed the distribution in Table 6 into a binary path of short versus long NPs such that a clearer pattern validating Barlage's argument may suffice. According to Biber et al., 1-4 words can be categorised as simple NPs, while 5 words and above can be categorised as complex NPs. Akinlotan and Housen (2017) used the term short versus long for simple and complex, respectively. Given the peculiar nature of our data in which variability is lacking in its prenominal combination, 1-2 words in length are classified as short NPs and 3 words and above are classified as long. Table 7 shows a clearer pattern of how length and structural node can indeed provide different dimensions to structural complexity.

*Table 7*. NPs complexity by length of words

| Length | Simple NPs | | Complex NPs | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| *Short* | 524 | 84 | 100 | 16 | 624 | 100 |
| *Long* | 28 | 5 | 492 | 95 | 520 | 100 |
| Total | 552 | 48 | 592 | 52 | 1144 | 100 |

A chi square test of independence showed that there is positive relationship between length of NPs and their relative complexity/simplicity. The relation between these variables was insignificant: X2 (1, N = 1144) = 701.592, p=0. In other words, NPs

consisting of longer words are often those with more structural nodes involving premodifier, postmodifier, and/or peripheral dependent, while those NPs consisting of fewer words are often structured with determiner, but without a combination of premodifier, postmodifier, and peripheral dependent. In fact, our data reveals this tendency, as a mere 5% of NPs are composed of structural nodes involving postmodifier, premodifier, and/or peripheral dependent.

Overall, as the word-count dimension attests, though to a varying degree, the tendency in our material is that certain slots within the NP structure are sparingly used. Such rarely used slots include PD, postmodifier, and premodifier. Notable among these slots is PD whose word-length is expected to correlate with complex NPs. Hence the infrequencies of such internally complex slots such as PD, as well as postmodifier, are related to low frequency of long-worded NPs in NPE.

### 3.4 NP and the determiner and premodifier structures in NPE

Table 8 gives the overall figures for determiner and premodifier structures in the NPE data.

*Table 8.* Determiner and premodifier structures in NPE

| Length | Determiner | | Premodifier | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 0 | 885 | 49 | 933 | 51 | 1818 | 100 |
| 1 | 373 | 56 | 293 | 44 | 666 | 100 |
| 2 | 17 | 26 | 48 | 74 | 65 | 100 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 100 | 1 | 100 |

As seen, determiners and premodifiers are rarely used in the configuration of NPs in this data. We observe that NPs usually drop determiners and premodifiers. Given that 259 NPs are pronouns, which hardly co-occur with determiners and/or premodifiers, the distribution in Table 8 is excluded of this proportion, such that only 1275 NPs with potentials to use determiners and/or premodifiers are accounted for. Further, as the distribution shows, NPs are likely to drop determiners in about the same likelihood as premodifiers (49% versus 51%). NPs that use determiner are more likely to use one-worded than two-worded determiner. A closer look at our data shows that 75% of uses of this one-word determiner are mainly the definite article *the*, followed by the demonstrative *this/these*.

As stated above, the scope of determiner usage is limited to the definite article and demonstratives. Furthermore, determiner complexity involving three determiners (e.g. *some of + the + many*) was not found. A similar pattern was found for the usage of premodifiers, where 75% of the total NPs (i.e., a proportion of 933 NPs) drop premodifiers in contexts where they could have co-occurred syntactically with a premodifier (1275 NPs). These results can be compared with Akinlotan (2016, 2017), who has shown that determiner complexity is lacking in NPs in standard Nigerian English, which suggests that the present findings are not surprising. Of the 25% of NPs that appeared with premodifiers, 23% (i.e., a

proportion of 293 NPs from a total of 1275 NPs) preferred a one-word premodifier. A surprisingly 2% (i.e. 48 NPs from 1275 NPs) used two-word premodifiers. These figures suggest that determiner and premodifier components in these NPs lack complexity, which implies a contribution of simplicity to the overall structure of the NPs in our data. Conversely, the findings suggests that the postnominal components involving postmodifier and peripheral dependents contribute almost all of the complexity processes found in the overall structure of the NPs in the data. We have earlier attested to scarcity of these slots, though specific contexts of usage are not identified.

### 3.5 Postmodifier and peripheral dependent (PD): complex relativity and apposition

The analysis above tells us that NPs are more likely to include postnominals than prenominals. Also, where prenominals are used, they are more likely to be short or simple-constructed. A closer look at the distribution shows that 276 NPs are composed of postnominals. Of this proportion, 204 NPs used postmodifiers only in the postnominal position and 19 NPs used peripheral dependent only in the postnominal position, while 53 NPs combined postmodifier and peripheral dependent in the postnominal position.

It can be observed that postmodifier-only NPs are essentially complex relative clauses, while peripheral dependents are essentially long/complex appositive NPs. In 19-21, the complexity of the relative clause is shown, and the relativizer *wey* is predominantly used.

19. Aisha Buhari wey say she bin travel go see medical doctors for London during di two months   wey she no dey di kontri don kom back.
20. Anoda video wey show somebodi wey look like Aisha as im dey vex dey ask anoda woman for   Hausa
21. Anoda lawmaker wey dey represent Badagry constituecy Ibrahim Layode

The relativizer *wey* is animate-neutral in that it can be used to mean *which* or *who,* two important relativizers that distinguish the animacy of nouns. Such distinction is often both a matter of syntactic and semantic processing in standard varieties of English (Akinlotan 2022, forthcoming). However, it appears that semantic and pragmatic processing are more important factors in our data, especially when the relativizer doubles up within the same clause structure. The animateness of the NP in (19), *Ashia Buhari*, can only be distinguished semantically or more pragmatically from the inanimateness of the NP *video* in (20).

The doubling up of the relativizer *wey* in (20) 'anoda video wey show somebodi wey' and (19) 'Aisha Buhari wey...during di two months wey she...' indicate that processing meaning in relative clauses can be more difficult than processing its structure. In the same vein, the structures of the relative clauses in (19) and (20) are complex, with recursive structures. In (19), the proper noun 'Aisha Buhari' is relativized, together with the common noun in 'di two months'. However, the NP

'medical doctors' is not relativized. From our corpus data, it can observed that there is a selection in the relativization within the clause structure.

When the NP is syntactically positioned towards the beginning and/or the end of the clause structure, relativization is more likely to occur, regardless of the animacy of the NP. This shows that there is strong relationship between *wey* relativisation and NP structure in NPE, which is also attested to in Akinlotan (2022, forthcoming). In (21) 'anoda video'*,* and 'somebodi' are each relativized, whereas 'Aisha'*,* an NP relativized when positioned at the start of the clause in (19), is unrelativized. Furthermore, peripheral dependents, which are essentially appositive NPs, are also relativized, allowing for a postnominal combination of postmodifier + peripheral dependent.

22. Justice Oluwatoyin Taiwo of the Special Offences Court wey dey for Ikeja, Lagos
23. Professor Adefemi Gunbodede, wey be former Director-General for Institute of Agriculture Research and Training for Ibadan, Oyo State

In (22) and (23), the appositive NPs 'Lagos' and 'Oyo State' co-occur with the postmodifiers 'wey dey for Ikeja' and 'wey be former Director-General for Institute of Agriculture Research and Training for Ibadan', providing extra information that may not impact the identification of the referent in the real world. All of the peripheral dependents that occur alone without postmodifiers are in the form of appositive NPs, given extra locative information that is often a writing style in news writing.

As (24) shows, the postnominals involving a postmodifier + peripheral dependent can be preceded by a functional pronominal such as *dem*. There is also a possibility that the pronominal can function as a relativizer *dem* (i.e., *that)*, such that there is a choice between *that* (i.e., dem) and *wey* (i.e. which). Also, *dem* can translate into *that*, which functions as a specifying determiner, such as in 'That is one of di longest cases wey di President Muhammadu Buhari goment don try to achieve since e enta office for May 29, 2015'.

24. one of di longest cases dem wey di President Muhammadu Buhari goment don try to achieve since e enta office for May 29, 2015
25. di fourth republic for 2003 wey di likes of Chukwuemeka Chikelu and Frank Nweke Jr (37 years old dat time) P
26. Di community area wey di offender bin dey live go get posters of di convict all over.

This double-relativizer reading often characterises a relative clause in which the relativizer *wey* translates as 'which'. In (24), *wey* is of the same form, function, and meaning with *wey* in (25). In other words, the particle *dem* can be introduced as well as precede *wey* in (26): 'Di community area *dem* wey di offender bin dey live go get posters of di convict all over.'

Such doubling up means the construction can then be interpreted in at least two ways: (a) 'That is di community area wey di offender bin dey live go get posters of di convict all over,' which refocuses the emphasis and specificity on the subject NP 'di community areas', and also (b) 'Di community area that/which di offender bin dey live go get posters of di convict all over.' Unlike the structure and meaning of relative clauses in standard variety of English, the structure and meaning of relative clauses in Nigerian Pidgin is rather volatile and more volatile than its superstrate.

**4. Conclusion**
The present study has explored the extent to which NPs in NPE exhibit complexity and the extent to which factors representing syntactic function and syntactic weight can explain the nature of complexity/simplicity found. The data indicates that speakers alternate between simple-structured and complex-structured NPs, and suggests that this alternation is influenced by a number of factors. Overall, the study provides answers that are preliminary. For instance, the distribution shows that NPs in NPE vary considerably and reflect some degree of both complexity and simplicity. However, while our data size is small, coupled with descriptive analytic method, it seems safe to conclude that NPs in NPE are capable of demonstrating complexity just as it they are able to demonstrate simplicity. Although our data shows a higher preference for complex NPs rather than simple NPs, the difference between 52% and 48% cannot firmly assert that NPs in NPE are perpetually complex, or significantly more likely to be complex-structured across the board.

Thus, the present study has succeeded in providing basic research into NP complexity in NPE, and is intended to stimulate more corpus research so that the issue of complexity can be further explicated on. Further, our data appears to dismiss the expectation that structures of pidgins/creoles are perpetually simple-structured, especially when compared to other more matured linguistic varieties such as its substrate or superstrate. For instance, the NP in NPE is not less complex than the NP in standard Nigerian English.

Specifically, if NPs in standard Nigerian English exhibit considerable simplicity, one would expect NPs in NPE to follow the pattern, but this is not the case. Such divergence possibly reflects that speakers of NPE are exposed to strategies of linguistic creativity in much the same way as speakers of standard varieties of English. Having this exposure thus means that they can also make choices between processes of simplification and complexification which produce comparable (in)frequencies of patterns found in standard Nigerian English. Another implication of our preliminary finding relates to the question of a continuum between NPE and Nigerian English (Agbo and Plag 2020). What our data shows is that there is indeed strong pointers suggesting that NPE and standard Nigerian English share a number of properties, at least at the syntactic levels of variability and complexity, including factors that suggest where and when we might find simple and complex syntactic structures exemplified by NPs.

**Primary source**

BBC News Pidgin (https://www.bbc.com/pidgin) Accessed between November 01, 2019 -May 22, 2021

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