

# “*Abeg na!* we write so our comments can be posted!”

## Borrowed Nigerian Pidgin pragmatic markers in Nigerian English

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This paper examines three borrowed pragmatic markers from Nigerian Pidgin into Nigerian English, *abeg*, *sef* and *na*, with a view to exploring their meanings, frequencies, spelling adaptability, syntactic positions, collocational patterns and discourse-pragmatic functions in Nigerian English. The data which were extracted from the International Corpus of English-Nigeria and the Nigerian component of the corpus of Global Web-based English were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively, using the theory of pragmatic borrowing. The results indicate that the three pragmatic markers differ distinctly in their frequency across text types, syntactic position, the range of pragmatic meanings, the number of spelling variants and their collocations: *abeg* is used as a mitigation marker which can also function as an emphasis marker, *sef* is an emphasis marker but has additive and dismissive functions, while *na* is used purely as an emphasis pragmatic marker. The study shows the influence of Nigerian Pidgin on Nigerian English.

**Keywords:** corpus pragmatics, global web-based English, international corpus of English, postcolonial pragmatics, pragmatic borrowing, Nigerian English, Nigerian Pidgin

### 1. Introduction

One systematic difference between native and English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers appears to be their use of discourse-pragmatic items. Various corpus-based studies have shown that ESL speakers make use of a reduced lexical range in different areas: de Klerk (2005), for instance, found that Xhosa speakers of English use fewer different intensifiers compared to native English speakers

from New Zealand. Likewise, Unuabonah and Gut (2018), comparing ICE-Nigeria and ICE-GB, the Nigerian and the British components of the International Corpus of English (Greenbaum 1991; Wunder et al. 2010), found that Nigerian speakers of English have a reduced inventory of commentary pragmatic markers compared to British English speakers. Moreover, Nigerian speakers of English seem to use a smaller amount of stance markers expressing doubt: unlike in ICE-GB, there are no instances of the stance markers *I presume*, *I reckon*, *I'm/I am not convinced*, *I'm/I am not confident* and *doubtful* in ICE-Nig (Gut and Unuabonah 2019).

Not only the richness of specific lexico-pragmatic categories, but also the use of individual lexical items differs across varieties of English. Biber and Staples (2014) analysed the conversations, interviews and lectures contained in the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English and found that the ESL speakers employ more certainty adverbials and use fewer emphatic stance markers, especially in the conversations and lectures, compared to the English native speakers. In addition, Gilquin (2015) examined the use of five discourse-pragmatic features *and so*, *and then*, *I mean*, *sort of*, and *you know* in the conversations of the ICE components of Hong Kong, India, Singapore, Philippines, Tanzania and Kenya. She also found that the ESL speakers used the markers less frequently than speakers of British English, except in the case of the marker *you know*, which had a higher frequency in the ESL varieties than in British English.

One reason why ESL speakers use fewer different intensifiers and pragmatic markers and use individual lexical items less frequently than native speakers might lie in the fact that ESL varieties of English are spoken in multilingual contexts that afford speakers many opportunities of lexical borrowing from the indigenous languages used in the speech community. When having available discourse-pragmatic items from other languages, ESL speakers might not need to employ the full range of English lexical items to fulfil their communicative goals. Indeed, a growing number of studies have demonstrated that many postcolonial varieties of English have borrowed pragmatic markers from the indigenous languages spoken in their environment, for example Indian English (Lange 2009), Singapore English (Gupta 2006; Gilquin 2015; Leimgruber 2016), Malaysian English (Tay et al. 2016) and Ugandan English (Isingoma 2016). It has been suggested that they serve as ethnic identity markers that allow speakers to maintain their specific identity (Boas and Weilbacher 2007: 33).

This study aims to explore pragmatic borrowing in Nigerian English (NigE), a postcolonial English variety spoken in a highly multilingual context. English exists together with an estimated 400–500 local languages in Nigeria as well as Nigerian Pidgin and various foreign languages, such as French and Arabic (Jowitz 2019; Eberhard, Simmons and Fennig 2019). The three Nigerian languages with

the largest number of native speakers are Hausa (about 44 million native speakers, mainly spoken in the north of Nigeria), Yoruba (about 40 million native speakers, mainly spoken in the west) and Igbo (about 30 million native speakers, mainly spoken in the east). These three languages also function as a lingua franca in their respective regions. Hausa, for example, has approximately 20 million second language speakers in the north.

Nigerian Pidgin (NigP) is the language with the largest number of speakers in Nigeria. While it may be difficult to determine the exact number of native speakers of NigP in Nigeria, it has been reported that more than half of the Nigerian population can speak it (Ihemere 2006; Faraclas 2008, 2013). Projecting Faraclas' (2013) estimate that well over half of the then 150 million inhabitants of Nigeria were speakers of NigP, it can be estimated that there are currently about 100 million NigP speakers in Nigeria with the total population having grown to over 200 million (UN estimates for 2019). The origin of NigP is difficult to determine. While factors such as the contact between the European merchants and the various ethnic groups along the coastal rivers (Elugbe and Omamor 1991) and the influence of missionary activities from Sierra Leone (Faraclas 1996) could have played a role in the development of NigP, scholars are cautioned not to overemphasise the role of these factors in isolation (e.g. Faraclas 1996; Ihemere 2006).

Contemporary NigP has a vocabulary that is largely based on English but includes words and expressions from indigenous Nigerian languages. It has a structure that is very similar to the structure of the indigenous Nigerian languages (Faraclas 1996), and thus differs from the structure of other standard varieties of English. Examples include verbal grammar (Akande 2010) and sound systems (Elugbe and Omamor 1991). Although many scholars have noted that the most salient aspect of NigP grammar is the lack of inflection (e.g. number marking) on nouns and verbs, which in standard Englishes expresses grammatical categories such as number and gender or mark tense and aspect (Akande 2010), it has recently been reported that NigP pronouns now increasingly have inflections for gender, case and number (see Oyebola and Abidoye 2018). NigP is mainly used in contexts where speakers with different first languages meet, for example in the market place, in military barracks and on university campuses as well as in informal day-to-day conversations. In addition, it is used in stand-up comedy, radio and television discussion programmes, advertisements, and news broadcasts in Nigeria (see Jibril 1995; Adetunji 2013). NigP has grown to such an extent that Multichoice (an international cable television provider) included it as one of the languages of sports commentaries in the 2018 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) cup as well as the 2019 African Cup of Nations (AFCON). Equally, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) now holds news broadcasts and documentaries in NigP (BBC 2019; The Guardian 2019). Although it is mainly

used as a spoken language, several proposals for an orthography of NigP have been made, and NigP is now also widely used in writing in social media (see Chiluwá 2013; Heyd 2014).

Only very few studies have so far investigated the influence of NigP on NigE and vice versa (e.g. Mensah 2011; Agbo and Ingo 2017). For example, Mensah (2011) suggests that lexical expressions such as *go slow*, *machine*, *watchnight*, *houseboy* and *upstair(s)* were borrowed from NigE into NigP. Although some studies have emerged that discuss borrowed pragmatic markers such as *o*, *sha* and *abi* from indigenous Nigerian languages into NigE (see Unuabonah and Oladipupo 2018; Jowitt 2019), little is known about borrowed pragmatic markers from NigP into NigE.

In the investigation of commentary pragmatic markers, Unuabonah and Gut (2018) showed that NigE speakers appear to use fewer emphasis pragmatic markers than British speakers: in ICE-Nig, only five different emphasis pragmatic markers (*really*, *indeed*, *definitely*, *I insist that*, *to say the least*) were found (with the last two being very rare), while in ICE-GB eight of such markers occur at least once. Moreover, the two most frequent emphasis markers *really* and *indeed* occur only about half as frequently in ICE-Nig than in ICE-GB. This suggests that Nigerian speakers of English might make use of borrowed emphasis pragmatic markers instead, and this has been confirmed in Unuabonah and Oladipupo (2018), where the borrowed marker *o* was found to function largely as an emphasis pragmatic marker. It is the aim of this study to explore three pragmatic markers borrowed from Nigerian Pidgin into NigE, which might perform emphatic functions: *abeg*, *sef*, and *na*. These pragmatic markers were mainly selected based on two of the authors' native speaker intuitions on their highly frequent use in NigE. This is also testified in the fact that *sef* has been included in the Oxford English Dictionary where it is, however, only identified as an adverb without considering that it may have developed pragmatic functions in NigE.

In this section, we have presented the background to this study. In Section 2, we provide more information on pragmatic markers, outline our data and method in Section 3 and present our results in Section 4. Finally, we discuss our findings and conclude in Section 5.

## 2. Pragmatic markers

Pragmatic markers are syntactically optional elements, such as *anyway*, *in fact* and *really*, which do not significantly add to the propositional content of an utterance but contribute to the interpretation of a discourse segment by connecting an utterance to the linguistic and/or situational context of its interaction (Fraser 2009;

Buyse 2012). Pragmatic markers have meaning potential as they may have “one or more several core meanings from which new functions can be created in the interaction” (Aijmer 2013, 12). Scholars have indicated that they perform textual, subjective and intersubjective functions (see Traugott 2010). The textual functions cover discourse-organising aspects which deal with relations of elaboration, contrast and inference between discourse segments; subjective functions that address relations between the speaker and the speaker’s beliefs and attitudes which are expressed in turn-taking, epistemic and evaluative meanings; while intersubjectivity focuses on the relationship between the addresser and the addressee’s face and considers issues such as politeness and turn-giving (see Traugott 2010).

Generally, pragmatic markers have been studied from different theoretical approaches including the discourse-coherence approach (Schiffrin 1987; Lenk 1998), the grammatical-pragmatic approach (Brinton 1996; Fraser 1996), the cognitive-pragmatic approach (Blakemore 2002) and the variational pragmatic approach (Aijmer 2013; Unuabonah and Gut 2018). In this study, the borrowed emphasis markers are explored from a postcolonial corpus pragmatic perspective. This approach employs corpus-based investigations of pragmatic phenomena in postcolonial speech communities, which, due to their colonial histories, are characterised by the transfer of indigenous cultures and languages to the European language used and vice versa (Anchimbe and Janney 2011; Rühlemann and Aijmer 2015). This transfer results in variety-specific pragmatic phenomena such as speech acts, address terms and pragmatic markers. In order to fully describe the use of the borrowed emphasis markers in NigE, we employ Andersen’s (2014) concept of pragmatic borrowing, which deals with the process and results of the transfer of discourse-pragmatic features from a source language into a recipient language. The concept pays attention to phenomena such as spelling adaptation, scope, collocations, positions, distribution, semantic stability, and pragmatic multifunctionality of the emphasis markers (see Balteiro 2018).

Very few scholars have examined the three NigP pragmatic markers under study: *abeg*, *sef*, and *na*. For example, Kemmer (2008) identifies *abeg* as a derivation from the English term *I beg*, such as in *I beg of you*, which shares similar meanings with the English politeness marker *please*, as shown in (1). In *abeg*, the diphthong /aɪ/ in *I* has been replaced by [a] and then blended with *beg*.

- (1) # *Abeg come dey go. I no dey for that one. Abeg abeg abeg... #*  
 # Please come PROG<sup>1</sup> go. I NEG<sup>2</sup> exist PREP that one. Please please please  
 # ‘Please start leaving. I am not interested in that one. Please please please’

(GloWbE 228)

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1. Progressive  
 2. Negation

As shown in (1), *abeg* is used to mitigate the command given to the addressee to leave a particular location, and the repetition of *abeg* indicates that it is also used for emphasis.

Working specifically on NigP, Faraclas (1996) identifies *sef* as a particle which is a modification of the English emphatic pronoun ending – *self* that can indicate both contradictory and noncontradictory sentence emphasis and contrastive and non-contrastive constituent emphasis. Thus, in NigP, it is already identified as an emphasis marker and this influences the use of *sef* in NigE. An example from ICE-Nig is cited in (2):

- (2) *but e be like e be like say them don implement that increment*  
 but EXP<sup>3</sup> COP<sup>4</sup> like EXP COP like NCI<sup>5</sup> 3PL<sup>6</sup> PFV<sup>7</sup> implement that increment  
*sef*  
 really  
 ‘but it looks like it looks like they have implemented that increment really’  
 (ICE-Nig con<sup>8</sup>\_o4.txt)

In (2), *sef* emphasises the proposition contained in the clause and can be replaced by *really*; it also occupies the clause-final position.

Faraclas (1996) also identifies *na* as an emphatic focus introducer with copular features (*Na mi/It is I*) in NigP, which is found in cleft sentences and which forms part of the syntactic structure of an utterance. Thus, this *na* is a grammatical item and not a pragmatic marker because its absence would lead to the distortion of the syntactic structure of the utterance. There is, however, another *na* that also exists in NigP but which has not yet been fully discussed. An example of this *na* in a NigP clause from the corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE) is cited in (3):

- (3) # *Linda Approve all your comments make we read na...* (GloWbE 3)  
 Linda approve all your comments SBJV<sup>9</sup> we read indeed  
 ‘Linda approve all your comments so that we can read indeed’

In (3), *na* is an optional item and its absence from the clause does not affect the propositional meaning of the utterance. Rather, it emphasises the proposition

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3. Existential pronoun
  4. Copula
  5. Noun clause introducer
  6. Third person plural
  7. Perfective verb
  8. conversations
  9. Subjunctive clause introducer

contained in the clause, *so that we can read*, and it occurs in the clause-final position. Thus, this *na* is a pragmatic marker and not a grammatical item.

### 3. Data and method

The data for this paper comprise three pragmatic markers *abeg*, *sef*, and *na*, which have been borrowed from NigP into NigE. The markers were searched for in the International Corpus of English-Nigeria (ICE-Nig) and the Nigerian component of the Global Web-based English Corpus (GloWbE), both of which are freely available online. ICE-Nig is a 1-million-word corpus of spoken and written Nigerian English as it is used in Nigeria at the beginning of the 21st century (Wunder et al. 2010). The corpus contains the text categories and annotations specified by the ICE project (Greenbaum 1991), including categories such as conversations, broadcast discussions, business letters, and examination scripts. Although the entire corpus was searched, the three NigP pragmatic markers which occurred in NigE utterances were found only in the category of private face-to-face conversations (containing 180,000 words) except one case of *sef*, which occurred in cross-examinations (containing 20,000 words). The Nigerian component of GloWbE contains 42,646,098 words sourced from different Nigerian websites such as discussion forums, blogs, and online newspapers (Davies and Fuchs 2015). A few scholars (e.g. Mukherjee 2015; Nelson 2015)<sup>10</sup> have suggested that GloWbE should be used with a measure of caution because it is very possible for users from other countries to comment on webpages that belong to a different country and to be thus included in the corpus components.

ICE-Nig was searched with the corpus analysis toolkit AntConc 3.4.4 (Anthony 2015), while the Nigerian component of GloWbE was searched with the search software provided on the GloWbE website (<https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>). The retrieved data were checked for unwanted instances, for example, repetitions within one post and repeated posts (through copying) by other writers as indicated in (1), instances where the NigP pragmatic markers occurred in utterances made in NigP as indicated in (2), or in other indigenous Nigerian languages, as in (4). In addition, utterances were discarded in which the pragmatic markers occurred as names of people or substances, as cited in (5), where *sef* was used as a reflexive or emphatic pronoun ending, as shown in (6), where *sef* occurred as a noun, as in (7), where *na* was used as a variant of *no*, as cited in (8) and unclear cases, as in (9):

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10. For a detailed review of the GloWbE corpus, see Mair (2015) and Peters (2015) in the special edition of *English World-Wide* 36(1).

- (4) “Mba, obu ihe aru ini madu **na** mba” (No, it is a shameful thing to bury a man outside. (GloWbE 1003)
- (5) Muhammad **Na** Bakin Ruwa and’ alim Yunus Zawai who flourished in the reign of Muhammad Shashiri. (GloWbE 227)
- (6) if I was d one immediately as I get am gon na rape my bf and satisfy my **sef** see wat dat 2 mins enjoyment has caused her. (GloWbE 35)
- (7) i stayed wit his mum for three month nd was workin as a teacher bt after smtime she showed me her tru **sef**..... i had no wea to go. (GloWbE 51)
- (8) take necessary actions instead of whining and ranting about marginalization all the time # **Nah**, it is not the same thing. (GloWbE 138)
- (9) # 275 # 12.20 # 2.15 # **NA?** # **NA?** # P- value + # **NA?** # 0.001\* # (GloWbE 205)

#### 4. Results

Table 1 shows that the three pragmatic markers are used more frequently in the conversations than in web-based writings. While *abeg* has a similar frequency in both text categories, *sef* and *na* are more than five times more frequent in the spoken than the written category. While in the spoken conversations, *sef* and *na* occur more frequently than *abeg*, *abeg* is the most frequently used of the three pragmatic markers in the web-based language.

**Table 1.** Frequency per 100,000 words of the borrowed pragmatic markers in ICE-Nig conversations and GloWbE (raw numbers in brackets)

Pragmatic marker	ICE-Nigeria conversations	GloWbE	Total (raw)
<i>abeg</i>	2.2 (4)	1.7 (711)	715
<i>sef</i>	5 (9)	0.9 (410)	419
<i>na</i>	5 (9)	0.4 (175)	184

##### 4.1 Abeg in NigE

*Abeg* generally functions as a mitigation (politeness) marker, as evident in (10), but it can also function as an emphasis marker as we will explain later in this section.

- (10) # **Abeg**, with due respect, you do not need to have a degree in English. (GloWbE 791)



In some cases, *abeg* may occur as *abegi* ( $n=38$ ), in order to indicate the degree of emphasis or exasperation, as in (11). There, it shares some meanings with the English emphasis markers such as *honestly* or *really*.

- (11) married, good n fine... If not, still good n fine. # Abegi! I am tired of all this  
write ups about not being married. (GloWbE 17)

*Abeg* has only four tokens in NigE utterances in ICE-Nig and all the four instances occur at the clause-initial position as in (12), while there is no instance of *abegi* in ICE-Nig.

- (12) **Speaker 2:** I'm not going to library o  
**Speaker 1:** that erm  
**Speaker 2:** which  
**Speaker 1:** the library I told you  
**Speaker 2:** **abeg** me I don't know  
**Speaker 1:** that I tell you (ICE-Nig con\_o7.txt)

In GloWbE, *abeg* has 711 instances, out of which it occurs at the clause-initial ( $n=485$ ), clause-medial ( $n=1$ ) and clause-final ( $n=225$ ) positions, as shown in (13), (14), and (15), respectively. This shows that the clause-initial position is the most favoured position for *abeg* in NigE even though there is no notable difference in the discourse-pragmatic functions of *abeg* at clause-initial and clause-final positions.

- (13) Take 10 naira and buy me 5 naira pure water, **abeg** bring change ooo!!!  
(GloWbE 988)
- (14) MC with an MSc and getting a PhD. The only MC with a PhD **abeg** from an  
ivy league school sef. (GloWbE 261)
- (15) # But who made that rule **abeg**? Is there a hard age gap where it becomes too  
old? (GloWbE 1020)

As indicated in (13), (14), and (15), *abeg* can appear in imperative, declarative and interrogative clauses.

*Abeg* may be doubled, as shown in (16), and also collocate with other mitigation markers such as *please*, *jare*, *jor*, and *biko*<sup>11</sup> (see Unuabonah and Oladipupo

11. *Jor* (with the repetition of the letter 'o' in different spellings) and *biko* are borrowed from Yoruba and Igbo respectively, and both can be translated as *please*. They also perform mitigation and emphatic functions just like *abeg*. *Jare* is slightly different: it is an emphasis pragmatic marker but it sometimes combines the emphatic function with the mitigation function, especially in conflictual situations (see Unuabonah and Oladipupo 2020).

2020), in order to emphasise an opinion or concern, as seen in (17), (18), (19), and (20), respectively:

- (16) # Pleas give me Emekas contact details **abeg abeg**. Just please. LOL? What a wicked world we live in. (GloWbE 38)
- (17) If you have a son or a daughter, **please abeg**, never tell them that. There is no justification for abuse. (GloWbE 370)
- (18) peter was contrite after denying Jesus thrice. her man is still sharpening mouth. **abeg jare!** # The popular saying goes “Love is Blind” – (GloWbE 593)
- (19) that’s what K did throught the 91 days. # **abeg joor**, i was sooo happy and jumped up wen i hrd. (GloWbE 372)
- (20) these popular trends can be found there for less than \$ 3 at times. # **Abeg biko**, I do nt like anything cheap. They always come with some kinda. (GloWbE 588)

In addition, *abeg* also collocates with other emphasis markers such as *o* and *na*, as exemplified in (21) and (22), respectively:

- (21) and your card will surely be deliver to you soonest... **abeg oooo** #... You will get it. (GloWbE 127)
- (22) Linda e be like say I don offend U, abi? **abeg na!** we write so our comments can be posted! (GloWbE 55)

*Abeg* also collocates with different forms of address terms, such as personal names, kinship terms, and terms of solidarity or comradeship, as shown in (23), (24), and (25), respectively:

- (23) Her family members are putting pressure on her to dump the dude. **Abeg o Linda**, wisdom is profitable to direct. (GloWbE 51)
- (24) A kiss, a hug and another round of applause for Glory. **Nne abeg** tell them o. Keep telling them till they not only hear but comprehend! (GloWbE 268)
- (25) Fidel Castro and the late Ernesto Che Guevara! I like these Men!... **Abeg, My Igbo Folks**, I’m waiting for translations! # (GloWbE 534)

*Abeg* also collocates with emotive interjections such as *mtscheew*, *lol*, and *haba* (see Norrick 2015; Unuabonah and Daniel 2020), as cited in (26), (27) and (28), respectively:

- (26) MBGN to nigerians who are suffering? there are important issues on ground to tackle **abeg! mtscheew!** # (GloWbE 709)

- (27) a hot dude and I won't do? Ha... life is too short **abeg! lol**. This my current situation is even giving me nightmares.... (GloWbE 49)
- (28) but some treat theirs like they didn't carry for 9 months? **Haba... Abeg** oh! # I go with Ema Leecious on this one. (GloWbE 1012)

*Mtchew* (with different spellings based on the repetition of 'e' and 'w') is an emotive onomatopoeic interjection borrowed from indigenous Nigerian cultures into NigE, and it is used to show derision and utter disgust, while *haba* which is used to show strong surprise is an emotive interjection borrowed from Hausa into NigE (see Kperogi 2015; Unuabonah and Daniel 2020). Their combination with *abeg* further indicates that *abeg* is often used as an emphasis marker.

As earlier indicated and as evident in numerous examples, *abeg* functions very often as an emphasis marker in NigE. Thus, it is often employed to emphasise one's opinion on a subject matter, as in (29).

- (29) Thunder thighs, cankles and christian mama arms are not sexy **abeg**. Not everyone can be skinny but hello fat will kill you. (GloWbE 41)

Frequently, *abeg* is used to emphasise agreement or disagreement with opinions, as shown in (30) and (31), respectively, and to show interest or disinterest in a subject matter, as indicated in (32) and (33), respectively:

- (30) Some of us may never qualify!!! # Please I agree with Mary-Anne **abeg**. I may not totally subscribe to her comments 100%. (GloWbE 207)
- (31) so u dnt knw wat ur brother gets to..... talk 4 ur self alone **abeg**, this girl made a whole lot of sence. (GloWbE 26)
- (32) We need some more interesting stuff to read **abeg** enough of all this baseless crap about Private jets and pastors. (GloWbE 879)
- (33) go read naija constitution.or do nt you see an igbo man in fasholas cabinet? **abeg** go to d nxt gist jor. # (GloWbE 946)

In (30), the writer uses *abeg* to emphasise his/her agreement with the stand of a third party, while in (31), the writer uses *abeg* to emphasise his rejection of the earlier comment on why a man should not cheat on his wife by asking the earlier writers to speak only for themselves while refusing to accept their opinion. While the writer in (32) uses *abeg* to emphasise his interest in a new topic instead of discussing pastors who own private jets, the writer in (33) uses *abeg* to emphasise his/her disinterest in the ongoing discussion.

Also, *abeg* marks and/or emphasises orders, requests, warnings, assertions, and questions, as illustrated in (34), (35), (36), (37), and (38), respectively:

- (34) record their conversation and act..... so so out of line..... **Abeg** go jooor #  
Yall freak hos shut the eff up, I herd bout dis. (GloWbE 91)
- (35) I can safely say I'm odourless down there. \*wink\*wink\*. P.S. Linlin, **abeg** post  
my comment oh # What you eat has a lot to do with smel. (GloWbE 94)
- (36) leaders are talking about acquiring nuclear technology from Iran? **Abeg** some-  
body should warn them o, petrol fire/plane crash is moi moi. (GloWbE 799)
- (37) being sexy for him while holding a good profession to support the family....  
**abeg** I am only human, one of the days a very attractive man I never  
(GloWbE 27)
- (38) why can't Nigerians think logically without blaming the devil for every situa-  
tion **abeg**? I hope the girl gets the treatment she deserves. (GloWbE 64)

In (34), *abeg* is used by the writer to order the interlocutor to either excuse him/her or stay quiet, while in (35), *abeg* is employed in order to request that Linda (the web host) post the writer's comments on her blog. In (36), *abeg* is used to emphasise the writer's concern about the danger in people going to hell. In (37), *abeg* is employed in order to emphasise the writer's claim to be a normal person, while in (38), *abeg* is used to emphasise the writer's question on why Nigerians quickly blame the devil for their bad behaviours.

Also, *abeg* is sometimes used to emphasise displeasure or disapproval of something, as evident in (39) and (40):

- (39) God forbid I lose sleep like that. # **Abeg** all these desperate single & divorced  
ashawos shld leave married men alone. (GloWbE 33)
- (40) Okay let's start with the bolded as they are hosting the next olympics # **Abeg**,  
you people should STOP attacking afam, it's his opinion. (GloWbE 537)

In (39), the writer uses *abeg* to emphasise his/her displeasure about single or divorced women who cling onto married men, while the writer in (40) employs *abeg* to show his/her disapproval or dislike for people who criticise others unnecessarily.

In the same manner, *abeg* is often used to encourage or discourage other interlocutors from performing an action, as exemplified in (41) and (42), respectively:

- (41) totally unaware dat any of u exist.... its just LAUGHABLE men! **Abeg** lets go and  
make our own impact so pple can talk about us jare! (GloWbE 665)
- (42) wen she was up 4 eviction n he bought her a guitar. **Abeg** free d guy let him do  
wat he likes # (GloWbE 88)

While *abeg* is used in (41) by the writer to encourage his/her interlocutor to strive to make impact instead of criticising others, it is used in (42) to dissuade the interlocutors from criticising a guy who tries all he can to express his affections to his girlfriend.

## 4.2 Sef in NigE

NigE *sef* is used as an emphasis pragmatic marker with the core meaning of emphasising any proposition that is contained in the clause to which it is attached. It thus shares similar meanings with the English pragmatic marker *really*, as shown in (43). *Sef* ( $n = 392$ ) is also written as *self* ( $n = 27$ ) by some online users, but this *self* behaves the same way as *sef*, as shown in (44) and (45):

- (43) God wont be happy with you *sef* if you keep complaining. All of us on this blog have enough thats why. (GloWbE 164)
- (44) the dude is done n he is done, i support the guy to run *self*, you cant even hold your own as a woman, Crap # (GloWbE 2402)
- (45) if PHCN did not give us light they should not be distributing bill. Even *self* as far i am concerned if i am in the position to do that. (GloWBE 3143)

However, as we will later explain, *sef* has additional functions where it can be used as an elaborative marker or a dismissive marker, and thus, it shares similar meanings with *indeed*, *actually* and *anyway*, which also have emphatic, elaborative, and dismissive functions (see Ferrara 1997; Aijmer 2013).

*Sef* occurs in ICE-Nig ( $n = 9$ ) where it occupies both the clause-initial ( $n = 3$ ) and clause-final ( $n = 6$ ) positions, as shown in (46) and (47), respectively:

- (46) **Speaker 5:** who don't even dress well  
**Speaker 3:** even ten o'clock *sef* you will see me coming out of the brothers' hostel  
**Speaker 1:** what campus is that (ICE-Nig con\_11.txt)
- (47) **Speaker 2:** I don't know how they even do all those things *sef*  
**Speaker 1:** erm you will take it to a technician  
**Speaker 2:** yes all those people that (ICE-Nig con\_09.txt)

In GloWbE, *sef*<sup>12</sup> ( $n = 410$ ) occurs at clause-initial ( $n = 33$ ), clause-medial ( $n = 44$ ) and clause-final positions ( $n = 333$ ). This indicates that the clause-final position is

12. This includes *self*.

the most favoured position for *sef*. An example at the clause-medial position is given in (48):

- (48) d idiot dat brought up d bird strike issue am pretty sure his won family **sef**  
 doesn't fly dana airways ill mannerd son of a bitch # (GloWbE 124)

What is noticed is that, in the initial position, *sef* is always preceded by another discourse element that is syntactically optional such as pragmatic markers and address terms, as shown in (57) and (58), respectively. It appears that *sef* (in form of *-self*) moved from the clause-medial position to the clause-initial and clause-final positions, as the medial position is where the emphatic pronoun *myself/yourself* usually stays, as shown in (49) and (50), although it may also be positioned at the final position of a clause, as shown in (51):

- (49) **Speaker 1:** how will you counsel people when **you yourself** are  
**Speaker 2:** you're not my teacher you don't have to teach me  
**Speaker 1:** behaving (ICE-Nig cr\_09.txt)
- (50) **Speaker 2:** and even it's going to be free and fair but **I myself** I know that this  
 erm (ICE-Nig con\_53.txt)
- (51) GB:S1A-015 #37:1:A> You could I suppose commission some prints of **you**  
**yourself** <ICE-GB:S1A-015 #38:1:B> Uh <ICE-GB:S1A-015 #39:1:A> You could  
 commission prints of yourself <ICE-GB:S1A-015 #40:1:B>  
 (ICE\_GB\_spoken.txt)

*Sef* tends to collocate with pragmatic markers, such as *in fact* ( $n=5$ ), *even* ( $n=5$ ), *as a matter of fact* ( $n=4$ ), and *gan* ( $n=3$ ) in (52), (53), (54), and (55), respectively. These markers also have emphatic, elaborative and contrastive functions (see Aijmer 2013; Fuchs, Gut and Soneye 2013). It also collocates with *mtchew*, which is an emotive interjection in NigE, as seen in (56):

- (52) So the old cow with rotten teeth is lying!! **In fact sef** let us just look at the  
 picha and feel sorry for her! Eeahhyyaaaa... (GloWbE 452)
- (53) I respect a man who can handle his business and handle it well, **even sef** it  
 frees me up to do my own thing. # (GloWbE 141)
- (54) **As a matter of fact sef** they are our stalker hard core fans who are definitely  
 stewpid ediotic people. (GloWbE 68)
- (55) By the look of things it seems Afro Poet **gan sef** is not really into Naija.  
 (GloWbE 578)

- (56) that oge ugly okoye also fhucked married men and is still fhucking married men **sef!** **Mtchew!** Let's all NAME n SHAME those shameless beitches!!!  
(GloWbE 445)

*Gan* is an emphasis pragmatic marker which is borrowed from Yoruba.

In addition, *sef* collocates with address terms such as personal names, community-based names and pronouns (in the objective/accusative case), as depicted in (57), (58), and (59), respectively:

- (57) # **Oke, you sef**, I'm ashamed you are still so narrow minded. (GloWbE 273)
- (58) anthropologist will put this matter to rest in less than 5 sentences # **but Nigerians sef**, why is it strive to be foreigner but no foreigner wants to be Nigerian.  
(GloWbE 45)
- (59) # A tiny girl washing oga's coats and jeans haba! **Even me sef** i used to duck out of the house to avoid spending hrs at night. (GloWbE 330)

As noticed in (59), *sef* collocates with personal pronouns in their objective case. The few cases where it collocates with possessive pronouns such as *my* and *your*, from where emphatic pronouns can be formed have been removed.

*Sef* can occur in declaratives, interrogatives and exclamatives (see also in NigP, Faraclas 1996), as shown in (57), (58), and (60), respectively. It occurs only once in an imperative clause, as indicated in (61):

- (60) I noticed the baby almost immediately too. Linda you **sef**. (GloWbE 33)
- (61) # Visit winners chapel or any church **sef**... and you will know what christianity is all about. (GloWbE 529)

As earlier indicated, *sef* can perform additive functions where it could be replaced with elaborative or additive pragmatic markers such as *too* and *also*, as exemplified in (62) and (63):

- (62) # At least that's what he's claiming... with photo evidence **sef**. For those who don't understand what this is about, let me explain. (GloWbE)
- (63) is this son of a bitch calling u when he is married? and you **sef** will be picking his calls, on the second hand he cld just need u. (GloWbE 166)

In (62), the writer uses *sef* to indicate that the person in question has added the photo evidence in addition to the claims he made, while in (63), the writer uses *sef* to indicate that the addressee's action of picking a man's call adds to the wrong act of the married man calling the addressee.

*Sef* also performs dismissive functions and thus shares similar meanings with the English pragmatic marker *anyway* (see Ferrara 1997), as illustrated in (64) and (65):

- (64) start preparing your candle, torch light and gen (thats if there's fuel **sef**) smh 2.  
terrible internet.. OMG!! i cant believe in this day. (GloWbE 172)
- (65) woman that much agony, abeg... that is if this story is for real **sef**.  
(GloWbE 593)

Like *anyway*, *sef* is used after an evaluation that negates a previous observation. In (64), the writer inserts *sef* after a negative evaluation of the possibility of lack of fuel which would affect the use of a generator in the previous clause, while in (65), the writer uses *sef* after an observation that a story about a woman might not be real. This negates the previous observation that the woman had gone through a lot of agony.

### 4.3 Na in NigE

NigE *na* is a syntactically optional item, as shown in (66) and (67). It occurs 9 times in NigE utterances in ICE-Nig.

- (66) **Speaker 1:** do you know ah who el- who whosoever get that place ah you  
know he will collect bribe **na**  
**Speaker 2:** no (ICE-Nig con\_50.txt)
- (67) **Speaker 2:** I'm sure it's from either the mosques she went to cause it's defi-  
nitely not our parents  
**Speaker 1:** of course **na** there's a there's a way the religion integrate the chil-  
dren (ICE-Nig con\_44.txt)

In GloWbE, NigE *na* appears as *na* ( $n=81$ ), *nah* ( $n=62$ ), *nau* ( $n=15$ ), *naa* ( $n=8$ ), *naaa* ( $n=8$ ), and *naah* ( $n=1$ ), as shown in (68), (69), (70), (71), (72), and (73), respectively:

- (68) decide not to pick my calls? “#” My phone was on silent **na**. I didn't even know  
you were calling.” # (GloWbE 4718)
- (69) u are talking about, Me too... been there, done that. But **nah**, no no no no!!! I  
have only rolled with strippers for. (GloWbE 118)
- (70) just say he should use his brain...? He s been using his brain **nau**, btw they  
should do more investigation, maybe his Phd is in kidnapping. (GloWbE 8)



- (71) That does not mean he's the most succesful **naa**, afterall he's not an artiste anyway. Look at Tuface who undoubtedly is very successful. (GloWbE 11)
- (72) I think its the lady that keeps the ring oh! But you know **naaa**.. Men can be petty, some just demand for it outright. (GloWbE 6)
- (73) 100 million dollars this year i would probably date 4 girls at the sametime too **naah** scratch that make it 40 girls # (GloWbE 2)

We propose that NigE *na* (with its variants) is a shortened form of *now* as an emphasis pragmatic marker (see Oladipupo and Unuabonah 2020).<sup>13</sup> *Now* has been identified as a temporal marker and as an attention pragmatic marker with discourse-organising functions (see Fraser 2009). However, in NigE (as well as in NigP), *now*, in addition to its temporal and discourse-organising functions, has developed an emphatic function like NigE *o* (see Faraclas 1996; Unuabonah and Oladipupo 2018; Jowitt 2019). This *now* is pronounced differently from *now* as a temporal or attention pragmatic marker. NigE emphatic *now* has a fall-rise tone compared to the rise-fall tone of *now* as temporal and attention markers. The suggestion that *na* is a shortened form of emphatic *now* is evidenced in the use of the spelling variant *nau*, as shown in (74) and (75):

- (74) Is it possible to love two guys at the same time? # Of course **nau**. Take me for example; there was this stupid boy I was loving. (GloWbE 15)
- (75) Thorpe, ur a clown joor... Yes **nau**, we" re now friends. Av been calling for friendship since naa but u no. (GloWbE 22)

In (74) and (75), *nau* is emphatic as it emphasises agreement, which is indicated in *of course* and *yes*, respectively. In (75), it occurs in the same utterance with *now*, which is used as a temporal marker in the clause *we" re now friends*. A similar situation in the co-occurrence of *na* and *now* is found in (76):

- (76) What warrants your stupid comment **now na**... what is ignorant in the post? Please explain. (GloWbE 1525)

This indicates that Nigerian users know that the temporal marker *now* is different from the emphatic *now*, and are now finding ways to differentiate the two words. It appears that the NigE *na/nau* identified in GloWbE is similar to Faraclas' (1996) *nàw* which is a constituent-final particle that is used to "indicate that the

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13. We do recognise that *na* may also be spelt as *now*. However, it will be impossible to prove this since we do not have access to the writers of the post. We have already argued that the pragmatic marker *na* developed from *now* as an emphasis pragmatic marker, and both are used in the corpora as well as in everyday conversations, based on participant-observation.

preceding constituent is the topic of the assertion at hand” (p.121). An example from Faraclas (1996, 121) is cited in (77):

- (77) Im sel gari nàw for maket.  
 3sP sellF gari T p market  
 ‘(S)he sold gari (you know) in the market.’

Faraclas (1996) equally identifies *now* as a temporal marker in NigP, which is written as *naw* (p.117). Thus, we can claim that *na* and its variants have been formed from emphatic *now*.

In ICE-Nig, *na* occurs in both clause-initial ( $n=2$ ) and clause-final ( $n=7$ ) positions, as exemplified in (66) and (67) above. In GloWbE, *na* occurs at the clause-initial ( $n=11$ ), and clause-final ( $n=163$ ) positions, as shown in (75) and (76). It occurs only once in clause-medial position, as seen in (78). This shows that the clause-final position is the most preferred position for *na*.

- (78) each others events even without Wayne so I get that case more. This one **NAH** that Sunmbo will just be smiling and plotting. **NOLLY HAS SPOKEN.** #  
 (GloWbE 240)

Unlike *sef* and *abeg*, *na* rarely collocates with other discourse-pragmatic items. The few items it collocates with include address terms, secondary interjections, and discourse markers, as shown in (79), (80), and (81), respectively:

- (79) want you to read this. And I know you will \*kisses\* # U c **naa Sarah?** That’s why u can never be among such delegates cos what u. (GloWbE 6)
- (80) do nt give a fluck character is fake all for publicity stunts. # **Yes nah** we all know that! That her “tweet” is the death of her. (GloWbE 190)
- (81) I’m trying to convey. They say Naija is lawless no be so? **Okay na**, let’s get dirty!!! # jimmy # No comment! # (GloWbE 1714)

In addition, as can be seen in (80), (81) and (82), *na* can be attached to interrogatives, declaratives, and imperatives.

As earlier indicated, *na* emphasises any speech act or proposition in the clause to which it is attached. Thus, *na* can be used to emphasise disagreement as illustrated in (69), opinion as exemplified in (71), intention as seen in (73), confirmation as shown in (80), challenging as cited in (81), ordering as indicated in (82), warning as exemplified in (83), advice as seen in (84), and insult as shown in (85).

- (82) does not mean it isn’t being made. Oya stay in your beloved America **na**, soon you won’t be paid enough. (GloWbE 1534)

- (83) wow, brethren. You're spoiling the unbelievabers' party **na**. They were close to having fellowship and whining in persecution. (GloWbE 2494)
- (84) girls marry early, even majority oyinbo get children early. try to find out **na**. (GloWbE 3613)
- (85) you that our boss is your boy? It is YOU who is a boy **na**. Boy sef? Let me not give you disciplinary! (GloWbE 4311)

#### 4.4 *Abeg, sef* and *na* compared

Table 2 shows that the three pragmatic markers borrowed from NigP into NigE vary distinctly in terms of their spelling variants, position in the clause, collocations, distribution across clause types and their pragmatic functionality. While *abeg* and *sef* only have two spelling variants each, there are six different spellings attested in GloWbE for *na*. However, this does not reflect a wider range of pragmatic functions: on the contrary, *na* is only used as an emphasis marker, while *abeg* can function as both mitigation and emphasis marker and *sef* is used as emphasis, additive, and contrastive marker in NigE. Likewise, *na* has fewer collocational options than the other two pragmatic markers borrowed from NigP. All of the three borrowed pragmatic markers can be found in a variety of speech acts and sentence types such as imperatives, declaratives and interrogatives. They differ sharply, however, in their preferred position within the clause: while *abeg* occurs clause-initially in two thirds of all cases and finally in one third, both *sef* and *na* occur predominately in final position. *Sef* is the only borrowed pragmatic marker that is also produced in medial position.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated the use of the pragmatic markers *abeg*, *sef* and *na* borrowed from NigP into NigE. It showed that they differ in terms of their semantic and pragmatic functions, the syntactic position they can occur in as well as their collocational patterns. *Na* stands out as having the most restricted functionality, only as an emphasis marker, a less variable syntactic position (this it shares with *sef*) and a smaller collocational range by not collocating with other pragmatic markers. In addition, it has many more spelling variants than the other two borrowed pragmatic markers. Possibly, the greater variety of spellings of *na* reflects an attempt of the writers to render visible the great variety and importance of the prosodic characteristics of *na* described above.

**Table 2.** Spelling variants, position, collocations, distribution and pragmatic functions of *abeg*, *sef* and *na*

PM	Spelling variants	Position	Collocations	Distribution	Pragmatic functionality
abeg	abeg, abegi	initial:	with other emphasis markers, other pragmatic markers, address terms, secondary interjections	in imperative, declarative and interrogative clauses	mitigation, emphasis
		68.4%			
		medial:			
		0.1%			
final:	31.5%				
sef	sef, self	initial:	with emphatic, elaborative and contrastive markers, also address terms, secondary interjections	in declaratives, interrogatives and exclamatives	emphasis, additive and contrastive
		8.6%			
		medial:			
		10.5%			
final:	80.9%				
na	na, naa, naa, nau, nah, naah	initial:	rarely with other pragmatic markers, only address terms, secondary interjections, discourse markers	in declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives	emphasis
		7%			
		medial:			
		0.5%			
		final:			

Furthermore, the findings show that it is the pragmatic *na* that is borrowed from NigP and not the grammatical *na*, since the use of the grammatical *na* automatically means that the utterance is in NigP. We have also indicated that the pragmatic *na* developed from the emphasis marker *now*, which itself developed from the temporal marker *now* due to mother tongue influence (see Oladipupo and Unuabonah 2020), and which is evidenced in one of the variants of *na*, as shown in some of the examples. Although both are emphatic, it is not likely that it is the grammatical *na* that has become the pragmatic *na*. As evident in the examples of Faraclas (1996) and in GloWbE, grammatical *na* is still a very strong feature of NigP sentence structures.

There is no evidence of semantic broadening, narrowing or semantic shift when the uses of the markers within NigP and NigE utterances in ICE-Nig and in web-based writing in GloWbE are compared, which may be due to the fact that both corpora roughly comprise language produced in the same period. It thus appears that any case of semantic broadening or semantic shift would have taken place within NigP itself. For instance, *abeg*, which occurs very frequently both in NigP and NigE utterances in GloWbE was only mentioned once in Faraclas (1996)

as separate items i.e. *a beg*. Thus, it appears that it is a fairly recent phenomenon in NigP.

We hypothesised that NigE speakers use pragmatic markers borrowed from NigP as a multilingual resource and possibly as a marker of a specific Nigerian identity (cf. Boas and Weilbacher 2007). Confirmation for this hypothesis might come from two findings: the difference of frequencies of occurrence of the borrowed pragmatic markers across text categories and their overall frequency. First, it was found that the three borrowed pragmatic markers are more frequent in face-to-face conversations than in online language. While reflecting general differences between spoken and written language use, this might also be caused by audience differences: in the conversations in ICE-Nig, speakers were talking to other Nigerians, while when writing on some of the websites included in GloWbE, writers might have unconsciously adapted their use of borrowed pragmatic markers, thus catering for a wider international audience (see also Loureiro-Porto 2017). Second, the frequency of the NigP markers in NigE indicates that they are regularly used. Unuabonah and Gut (2018) showed that only five ‘English’ emphasis markers are used in NigE with a frequency of 2.2 per 100,000 words across all text categories of ICE-Nig. The three pragmatic markers with emphatic functions borrowed from NigP with a frequency of between 0.4 and 5 occurrences per 100,000 words in the two corpora analysed for this study therefore do by no means have a marginal status but seem to constitute commonly chosen alternatives or additions to the ‘English’ emphasis markers present in NigE. This might also explain why some emphasis markers such as *by all means*, *by no means* and *on earth* that are used in ICE-GB do not occur in ICE-Nig at all (Unuabonah and Gut 2018). Future investigations may also include emphasis markers borrowed from indigenous Nigerian languages in NigE to offer a comprehensive account of the multilingual resources NigE speakers have and use for expressing this pragmatic function.

Another promising avenue for future research might be an investigation of other pragmatic markers borrowed from NigP in earlier times. This is possible by examining NigE texts produced from the 20th century. Presently, a historical corpus of NigE is being compiled by one of the authors, which could reveal such borrowing. It is quite possible that the frequent use of NigP pragmatic markers in contemporary NigE is correlated with the rising esteem of NigP as a language across Nigeria and a positive change towards the language (see Akande and Salami 2010). This is a recent phenomenon that has developed only over the past 20 or 30 years. Before then, NigP was mainly regarded as ‘broken English’ and the language of the uneducated and had little prestige (Faraclas 1996; Deuber 2005). As Akande and Salami (2010) argue, NigP may now be seen as the language that enhances “the propagation of national ideas, socio-cultural, linguistic

and political developments as well as peace and unity in the country since it is the only language that both the educated and the uneducated, irrespective of their ethnic affinities, can identify with,” and thus, NigP can be taken as a marker of identity by NigE users. If pragmatic markers borrowed from NigP by the speakers of NigE indeed constitute identity markers, their use should be far less frequent in the NigE spoken in the 20th century than it is now.

Another area of future investigation is the possible spread of some of these markers to other varieties of English, especially West African varieties, as English-based Pidgin is spoken across Anglophone West Africa. Indeed, *abeg* also occurs in Ghanaian Pidgin; however, its use in Ghanaian English is relatively low compared to NigE as evidenced in the Ghanaian component of GloWbE. Since the data in GloWbE were collected shortly before its release in 2013, it is possible that newer data might reveal a spread of these markers in Ghanaian English. Moreover, a number of Nigerians live and have businesses in other West African countries such as Ghana, which may also influence the spread of *abeg*, *sef* and *na* in other West African Englishes.

## Funding

Research funded by Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung (N/A) to Foluke Olayinka Unuabonah.

## Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and also appreciate the critical comments of two anonymous reviewers and the journal editors.

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## **Publication history**

Date received: 26 September 2019

Date accepted: 29 September 2020

Published online: 8 March 2021