

Research Paper



Language on the move: analyzing communication pattern between drivers and loaders in uyo

Kingsley James Effiong 

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.

Article Info

Article History:

Received: 22 May 2025

Revised: 01 August 2025

Accepted: 09 August 2025

Published: 27 September 2025

Keywords:

Sociolinguistics

Speech Act

Ethnopragmatics

Transportation

Language



ABSTRACT

This study investigates the language exchanges and communication techniques used by loaders and commercial drivers in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State's urban transportation system. The study looks into how people use language to manage interpersonal relationships, coordinate activities, and negotiate positions in the hectic setting of automobile parks. To give a comprehensive picture of the communication context, data were gathered using the survey method with assistance from focused group interviews, non-participant observation, and pertinent secondary sources. AKTC Park, God is Good Park, and Itam Motor Park are the three main parks in Uyo from which fifty informants were purposefully chosen. A descriptive analysis of the data was conducted using Speech Act Theory as the analytical framework, emphasising the usage of directives, expressives, commissives, and assertives, among other speech acts, in daily encounters. The findings demonstrate a dynamic, context-dependent use of language characterized by informal codes, slang, gestural complements, and culturally anchored expressions that enhance effective communication and job performance. The study highlights the socio-pragmatic roles of language in transport hubs and provides insightful information about workplace talk in informal urban settings.

Corresponding Author:

Kingsley James Effiong

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.

Email: kingzleejay@gmail.com

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. INTRODUCTION

A vital instrument for human connection, language is used not just for communication but also for identity expression, social role negotiation, and cooperation in a variety of spheres of life. Language is

essential for organising activities, settling disputes, establishing authority, and preserving social links in professional settings, particularly in casual and highly dynamic areas like vehicle parks. The communicative behaviours that define everyday encounters between drivers and loaders in car parks in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, are examined in this study.

Motor parks are linguistically active places where a variety of people meet in a fast-paced, goal-oriented atmosphere, particularly in metropolitan Nigerian settings. In these settings, communication is frequently characterised by informality, urgency, and a common set of codes and idioms that have developed over time. According to [1], language in these situations is an instrument for action rather than just a means of communicating information. This is especially true for the driver-loader interaction, which depends on efficient, unambiguous, and frequently non-standard language exchanges to make loading and transporting passengers and products easier.

Depending on their backgrounds and the situation, drivers and loaders in Uyo use a variety of languages, such as Ibibio, Nigerian Pidgin, and other native tongues. These multilingual activities demonstrate how language is strategically employed for collaboration and social cohesion, reflecting the sociolinguistic diversity of the area. According to Speech Act Theory, as theorized by [2], [3] which holds that utterances do more than just transmit information they also perform actions, the communicative acts in these contexts such as making instructions, asking for help, warning others, or joking around are frequently performative in character.

The main goal of this research is to comprehend how these speech acts operate in the particular social and professional setting of the vehicle park. It looks at how language use influences power dynamics, reflects larger cultural norms and social hierarchies, and makes loading operations run more smoothly. In addition to adding to the expanding subject of occupational sociolinguistics, this study illuminates the communicative fabric that supports daily mobility in Uyo by analysing the language patterns and techniques used by loaders and drivers.

2. RELATED WORK

Language and Work: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

Workplace environments, as opined by [4] are shaped and maintained in large part by language. The sociolinguistic analysis of language at work looks at how people use language to negotiate power, identity, and social relationships in professional contexts, from everyday conversations to task-specific directives as enshrined by [5], [6], [7]. In specific occupational contexts, [8] believes that it focusses not only on what is said but also on how, when, and why it is said.

As agreed by [9], [10] as well as [11], workplace talk is multifaceted, serving both transactional and relational purposes. This means that although communication in the workplace is used to perform tasks and exchange information, it is also crucial for preserving interpersonal relationships and establishing rapport among coworkers. For instance, small talk, jokes, and casual greetings may seem insignificant, but they are crucial for promoting team cohesion and establishing a welcoming work environment.

Language use, according to [12] and [13] is characterised by a combination of linguistic innovation and functional necessity in many job situations, particularly in informal industries like market trade, construction, and transportation. According to [14], Pidgin English frequently serves as a lingua franca in multilingual countries like Nigeria, facilitating successful communication between employees from various ethnic origins. Slang, context-specific jargon, and code-switching are frequently employed in these situations to promote unity and guarantee clarity.

Language has the ability to perpetuate hierarchies in the workplace. Also [15], [16] assert that it is also a site of power relations. According to [17], language can be used for both resistance and dominance. Supervisors' instructions to subordinates, for example, frequently convey an implicit authority, and employees may quietly defy or misunderstand these commands through humour or hedging.

As asserted by [1], professional success also depends on sociolinguistic competence, or the ability to utilise language correctly in a variety of work contexts. Communication breakdowns can result from

misinterpreting language and cultural clues, according to [18], particularly in multicultural or multiethnic workplaces.

Instead of being a neutral instrument, [19] states that language is a dynamic medium that is used in the workplace to execute professional duties, create social identities, and uphold or undermine organisational systems. A sociolinguistic viewpoint offers important insights into how social realities of work are reflected in and shaped by communication practices.

Communication in Transport and Informal Workspaces

Drivers, conductors, and loaders are examples of transport personnel who frequently communicate quickly and directively. These actions of communication, an essential but frequently disregarded component of sociolinguistic research is communication in informal settings, such as transportation. Motor parks, loading bays, roadside markets, and construction sites are examples of places that function according to certain communicative norms that are influenced by the type of work being done, the physical location, and the interpersonal interactions between participants. Language is used in these settings not merely to accomplish tasks but also to establish rapport with others, resolve disputes, and balance power.

Nigerian Pidgin English serves as a functioning lingua franca in informal transportation situations in many Nigerian cities, including Uyo. It ensures mutual intelligibility between speakers from different backgrounds by bridging linguistic and ethnic divides [14]. In situations where speed, effectiveness, and clarity are crucial, this linguistic flexibility is crucial. In their research on motor parks in Lagos, [20] highlight the importance of paralinguistic components, including as body language, horn patterns, gestures, and whistles, which frequently supplement or even replace spoken language. In hectic, noisy settings, these nonverbal clues improve coordination and lessen miscommunication. Furthermore, the occupational identity and culture of transport workers include these communication patterns.

In casual work environments, hierarchical ties can affect communication. In speaking patterns, drivers may use more instructions while loaders answer with deference or informal affirmatives, reflecting the power imbalance that drivers frequently have over conductors and loaders. According to [17], language in these contexts both reflects and perpetuates social power dynamics.

In addition, informal workplaces are full of slang, humour, and teasing linguistic devices that promote unity and lessen stress. These expressive communication methods support solidarity, in-group identity formation, and the psychological needs of hard work [18]. Social ties, function, and setting all have a significant impact on communication in informal workplaces and transportation. In non-formal occupational contexts, social cohesiveness and operational effectiveness depend on the dynamic interaction of language, gesture, and cultural norms.

Power, Hierarchy and Language

There are also unspoken hierarchies that affect communication in the relationship between loaders and drivers. Language both reflects and perpetuates social power. Loaders respond to directions from drivers, who are usually in charge of the truck and overall operation, within the parameters of their alleged subservient role [17]. However, loaders also use words to exercise agency, perhaps arguing, negotiating, or renouncing their significance to the task.

Speech actions, particularly instructions, expressives, and commissives, are frequently used in the course of daily activities to carry out this dynamic engagement. Here [3] Speech Act Theory is pertinent because it offers a framework for examining how phrases like "shift am small," "hold that side," or "e dey okay so?" serve as real-time collaborative actions.

3. METHODOLOGY

With an emphasis on language use in the transportation industry, this study uses a mixed-methods approach to examine the communication dynamics between loaders and drivers in Uyo, Nigeria. A survey strategy comprising secondary sources, non-participant observation, and focused group interviews was employed to gather data. 50 informants in all were purposefully chosen from AKTC Park, God is Good Park,

and Itam Motor Park, the three main parks in Uyo. Because both drivers and loaders were included in the sample, a thorough grasp of the communication patterns in this context was guaranteed.

Speech Act Theory, which provided the theoretical foundation for comprehending the performative character of the language used in the exchanges between drivers and loaders, was used to conduct a descriptive analysis of the data. In order to determine the roles and objectives of communication in this situation, speech acts such as commands, requests, and statements were investigated. The sociocultural elements affecting language choices and the power relationships between the communicators were also considered in the study. This methodology makes it possible to thoroughly examine the linguistic practices used in the transportation industry, providing insight into the norms of interaction and communication techniques used by loaders and drivers in Uyo.

Theory

According to the Speech Act Theory, which was developed by [2], [3], language is employed to carry out actions as well as to transmit information. The theory states that utterances have a variety of purposes, including declarations (changes in status), directives (commands or requests), expressives (emotions), commissives (promises or offers), and representations (assertions). It separates speech acts into three categories: perlocutionary acts, which have an impact on the listener, illocutionary acts, which have an aim behind the words, and locutionary acts, which are the actual words said.

Speech Act Theory can be used to examine how drivers and loaders in the informal transportation industry utilise language to carry out jobs and handle social responsibilities. For example, a driver may provide an instruction like "load the goods quickly," which serves as an illocutionary act to persuade the loader to take action. The perlocutionary effect is represented by the loader's response, whether it be spoken or nonverbal (such as a nod or gesture).

Additionally, the theory can be used to analyse how power dynamics affect language in this space. Drivers, who are usually in positions of power, may speak more directly or authoritatively, whereas loaders may respond with cooperation or deference. Additionally, body language and horn signals are examples of nonverbal communication that enhance speaking acts and are essential for completing tasks. These communication dynamics can be thoroughly examined using Speech Act Theory, which emphasises linguistic techniques as well as their social ramifications in this casual workplace.

Data Presentation

Table 1. Communication Pattern between Drivers and Loaders in Uyo (AKTC Park)

No	Utterance	Speech Act Type	Illocutionary Force
1	"This motor no dey go Aba."	Assertive	Direction clarification
2	"Oya, oga conductor, close door."	Directive	Command
3	"Thank God say we reach safely."	Expressive	Gratitude
4	"Na wetin you carry be that?"	Assertive	Interrogative check
5	"That load heavy well-well."	Assertive	Observation
6	"You wan follow me or not?"	Directive	Demand for decision
7	"I swear I go return your money."	Commissive	Promise under pressure
8	"Shebi I talk am before we comot."	Assertive	Reminder/reinforcement
9	"God go punish that thief!"	Expressive	Cursing/exclamation
10	"This journey go smooth."	Assertive/Commissive	Optimism/reassurance
11	"E remain just two passengers."	Assertive	Status update
12	"Carry the generator enter last."	Directive	Task instruction
13	"I tire for all this wahala."	Expressive	Frustration
14	"That okada man bend my side mirror!"	Expressive	Complaint
15	"I go come tomorrow early."	Commissive	Plan/assurance
16	"Abeg, help me carry this bag."	Directive	Polite request
17	"Don't argue with passenger o!"	Directive	Conflict avoidance
18	"If I no return, collect my key."	Commissive	Contingent promise

19	"See as you dey delay us."	Expressive	Complaint
20	"Tell that man to reverse small."	Directive	Instruction
21	"This park no get order again."	Assertive	Social commentary
22	"Make we pray before we move."	Directive	Group spiritual act
23	"I dey proud of how we work today."	Expressive	Pride/satisfaction

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2. Communication Pattern between Drivers and Loaders in Uyo (God is Good Park and Itam Park)

No	Utterance	Speech Act Type	Illocutionary Force
1	"Uyo! Uyo! Last one chance o!"	Directive	Passenger recruitment
2	"Load that bag fast-fast."	Directive	Urgency command
3	"You go pay extra for that load."	Assertive/Directive	Fee declaration
4	"No space again for boot."	Assertive	Informative
5	"You dey waste my time, oga."	Expressive	Complaint
6	"I go carry am reach by 4pm."	Commissive	Promise
7	"Na me dey go Calabar straight."	Assertive	Identity clarification
8	"Abeg, shift make customer enter."	Directive	Request
9	"You wan spoil my motor?"	Expressive	Annoyance
10	"Carry this load go back!"	Directive	Rejection command
11	"The tyre still strong well."	Assertive	Assurance
12	"Oya, pack the bags small-small."	Directive	Instruction
13	"We no dey carry goats inside."	Assertive/Directive	Policy enforcement
14	"Tomorrow I go go early."	Commissive	Intention declaration
15	"That driver no sabi road at all."	Assertive	Criticism
16	"Madam, your change na ₦200."	Assertive	Informative
17	"If rain fall now, we go suffer."	Assertive	Predictive warning
18	"No vex, traffic hold me."	Expressive	Apology
19	"Make una enter fast, time dey go."	Directive	Coordination request
20	"I go help you push am small."	Commissive	Offer of assistance
21	"Wetin you dey find?"	Directive	Question/engagement
22	"I dey come, make I park well."	Commissive	Assurance
23	"No overpack that thing o!"	Directive	Instructional warning

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Figures



Figure 1. AKTC Park Terminal, Uyo



Figure 2. God is Good Park, Uyo



Figure 3. Itam Motor Park, Uyo



Figure 4. Itam Motor Park, Uyo



Figure 5. God is Good Motor Park, Uyo

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assertives

As seen in Table 1 and Table 2, assertives are used to evaluate circumstances, disseminate information, or defend actions.

Examples: “This motor no dey go Aba.”, “E remain just two passengers.”

Function: Provide information, enlighten loaders and passengers, or uphold authority.

Directives

As seen in Table 1 and Table 2, directives issue command, request, or coordinate activities.

Examples: “Pack the bags small-small.”, “Help me carry this bag.”

Function: Encourage teamwork, regulate safety, and guarantee efficiency.

Commissives

As seen in Table 1 and Table 2 commissives are used to reassure, offer, or make a guarantee regarding future acts.

Examples: “I go carry am reach by 4pm.”, “I go help you push am.”

Function: Establish reliability and confidence.

Expressives

As seen in Table 1 and Table 2, expressives are used to convey emotions, annoyances, or thankfulness.

Examples: “No vex, traffic hold Me.”, “I tire for all this wahala.”

Function: Manage relationships with others and display emotional states.

Declarations

As stated in Table 1 and Table 2, in instructions that alter roles or statuses in the transport chain, declarations are limited but may be implied (e.g., proclaiming a journey to have started or concluded). From the data in Table 1 and Table 2, the study found that loaders and drivers in the transportation industry have different communication styles. The results demonstrate that language has both social and functional functions in this setting. To go through their everyday tasks, drivers and loaders use a mix of direct speech acts, like orders and requests, and indirect speech acts, such as non-verbal clues and regional slang.

The frequency of informal, highly contextual language that was brief and urgent was a reflection of the fast-paced nature of their work. While drivers use both instructions and

enquiries to promote efficiency and maintain order while loading and unloading, loaders frequently utilise imperative forms to guide passengers or coworkers. Curiously, the study also discovered that teasing, humour, and colloquial language were frequently employed to promote teamwork and lessen the strain of a demanding workplace. The study, as analysed from data in Table 1 and Table 2, also found that communication dynamics are greatly influenced by cultural influences, with expressions originating from social conventions and local customs. This implies that communication in this field is not just practical but also intricately woven with Uyo culture. As also seen in Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 5, the display of the vehicles outside the park signifies that each of the parks are ready and open for business. When this is not the case, it send a message to travelers that the reverse is the case. As also seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, the serenity of the environment and cleanliness is a priority and one of the things that attracts customers to the park hence ensuring that each of the buys are washed and kept clean, the environment is also kept tidy.

On the whole, the results highlight how critical it is to comprehend the sociolinguistic environment in which transportation workers function. Maintaining social relationships and facilitating efficient operations in the workplace depend heavily on effective communication, which is impacted by both linguistic systems and cultural norms.

5. CONCLUSION

A rich interaction of speech actions influenced by context, hierarchy, and urgency was revealed by this study, which examined the dynamic communication patterns between loaders and drivers in Uyo. The study used Speech Act Theory to show how instructions, expressives, and commissives are used to manage conflicts, coordinate work, and establish rapport. Working language in informal sectors is both adaptive and functional. The study emphasises how important pragmatic competence is for promoting productive teamwork and urges greater focus on routine communication techniques in understudied professional contexts.

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable support and guidance received from Professor John Udoidem and Professor Ikechukwu Acha throughout the course of this research. Sincere appreciation is also extended to Dr. NseAbasi Etukafia, Dr. Ubong Andem, Mr. Nnamso Dan, and Mr. Kufre Etuk for their constructive feedback, encouragement, and moral support during the development and completion of this article.

Funding Information

This research was entirely self-sponsored by the author. No external funding or institutional grant was received for the execution or publication of this study.

Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Kingsley James Effiong	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. This study did not involve any human subjects, personal data, or interviews requiring informed consent.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable. The research did not involve any procedures or participants requiring ethical review and approval by an institutional board.

Data Availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

REFERENCES

- [1] E. Adegbiya, 'Titbits on discourse analysis and pragmatics,' in *The English Language and Literature in English: An Introductory Handbook*. Ilorin, Nigeria, 1993.
- [2] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962.
- [3] J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969. doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173438
- [4] J. Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. London, UK: Longman, 1995.
- [5] P. Brown and S. C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987. doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813085
- [6] J. P. Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. London, UK: Routledge, 2011.
- [7] *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. London, UK: Penguin, 2000.
- [8] P. Drew and J. Heritage, *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992.
- [9] J. Holmes and M. Stubbe, *Power and Politeness in the Workplace: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Talk at Work*. London, UK: Pearson Education, 2003.
- [10] A. Koester, *Investigating Workplace Discourse*. London, UK: Routledge, 2006. doi.org/10.4324/9780203015742
- [11] S. Sarangi and C. Roberts, Eds., *Talk, Work and Institutional Order: Discourse in Medical, Mediation and Management Settings*. Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999. doi.org/10.1515/9783110208375
- [12] E. Adegbiya, *Language Attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Sociolinguistic Overview*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2004.
- [13] M. Ugot, 'Language and identity in the Nigerian workplace', *Calabar J. Liberal Stud. (CAJOLIS)*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 56-70, 2010.
- [14] A. Adegoju, 'The rhetoric of conflict and conflict in rhetoric: Analyzing the discourse of the Agbekoya Revolt', *Nebula: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 271-287, 2007.
- [15] Y. K. Yusuf, 'English in the workplace: Communicative competence in Nigerian work environments,' in *Language and Society in Nigeria*. 1994.
- [16] Y. K. Salami, 'Use of code switching and code mixing in communication among Nigerian commercial vehicle drivers', *Nordic J. Afr. Stud*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 23-38, 2006.
- [17] N. Fairclough, *Language and Power*. London, UK: Longman, 1989.
- [18] J. J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982. doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611834
- [19] F. Akindele and W. Adegbite, 'The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria: An Introduction', *Ile-Ife*, 2005.
- [20] T. Ajayi and V. Ikegwuonu, 'Communicative strategies in Nigerian motor parks: A study of the Lagos urban transport discourse', *J. Lang. Soc*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 45-60, 2018.

How to Cite: Kingsley James Effiong. (2025). Language on the move: analyzing communication pattern between drivers and loaders in uyo. Journal of Language and Linguistics in Society (JLLS), 5(2), 45-54. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jlls.52.45.54>

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Kingsley James Effiong  holds a Masters degree in Sociolinguistics from University of Uyo, Nigeria in 2023. He also received his Diploma (Communication Arts) and BA (Linguistics) from University of Uyo, Nigeria in 2009 and 2015, respectively. He is currently studying for his Doctorate Degree in Sociolinguistics from University of Uyo. His research includes symbolic interactionism and ethno-communicativeness of select libation performances in Itu, South-South, Nigeria as well as the odudu ikpaisong media-sociology theory (TOIMST). He can be contacted at Email: kingzleejay@gmail.com