Language play and digital creativity in Yoruba internet memes: A sociolinguistic and multimodal discourse analysis

Raphael Idowu Ibiowotisi*

Nwafor Orizu College of Education, No.1 college road, Nsugbe, Anambra state, 432108, Nigeria
*Corresponding author, email: bunmiidowu63@gmail.com

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Abstract
This study examined language play and digital creativity in Yoruba internet memes, with a focus on how linguistic and semiotic resources are deployed to construct humor, identity, and cultural meaning in online spaces. The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed traditional forms of Yoruba oral expression such as proverbs, idioms, and satire into digitally mediated communicative practices. Despite the growing visibility of Yoruba memes, scholarly attention to their linguistic structure and sociocultural significance remains limited. Anchored in sociolinguistic theory and multimodal discourse analysis. This study adopted a mixed-methods qualitative approach to analyze 15 purposively selected Yoruba memes sourced from platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter). The analysis focused on language play strategies including code-switching, phonological manipulation, semantic shifts, proverb adaptation, and orthographic stylization, alongside visual-textual interactions. Findings revealed that Yoruba internet memes function as sites of linguistic innovation where users creatively blend Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin to achieve humor and social commentary. The study also found that meme creators frequently recontextualize traditional Yoruba proverbs and cultural expressions to address contemporary issues such as politics, relationships, and economic hardship. Furthermore, multimodal elements images, emojis, and typography were found to enhance meaning-making and audience engagement. The study concluded that Yoruba internet memes represent a dynamic extension of indigenous communicative practices into digital spaces, contributing to language preservation, cultural continuity, and identity negotiation. The study recommended the integration of digital discourse into Yoruba language studies and highlighted the need for further research on African languages in online environments.

1. Introduction

Language is not only a system of communication but also a dynamic resource for creativity, identity construction, and cultural continuity (Fatema & Nadeem., 2025). In Yoruba society, language play has historically been embedded in oral traditions such as proverbs (*òwe*), riddles (*àlọ́ apamọ́*), chants, praise poetry (*oríkì*), and other forms of verbal artistry. These expressive practices rely heavily on figurative language, tonal manipulation, and contextual meaning, thereby reflecting the richness and flexibility of the Yoruba linguistic system. However, with the rapid expansion of digital technologies and social media platforms, these traditional forms have increasingly migrated into online environments, giving rise to new genres of communication, particularly internet memes (Odebunmi, 2020; Taiwo, 2022).

Internet memes, broadly understood as units of digital content that are replicated, modified, and circulated across online platforms, have become a dominant form of participatory culture in contemporary society (Shifman, 2019). Typically combining textual and visual elements, memes function as tools for humor, satire, and social commentary. In multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, memes often reflect linguistic hybridity, drawing on multiple languages and registers to achieve communicative goals (Adebayo et al., 2025). Consequently, Yoruba internet memes represent a unique intersection of language, culture, and technology, where traditional expressive resources are recontextualized within digital discourse (Nwagbara & Rasheed, 2021; Umeobi & Orji, 2025). More specifically, Yoruba internet memes frequently exhibit features of language play, including code-switching between Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin, phonological stylization, lexical innovation, and the creative adaptation of proverbs and idiomatic expressions. For instance, meme creators may deliberately manipulate orthography to mimic spoken Yoruba or blend linguistic codes to enhance humor and ratability. Such practices not only demonstrate linguistic ingenuity but also reflect broader sociocultural dynamics, including identity negotiation, generational shifts, and responses to socio-economic realities (Akande & Salami, 2019; Dynel, 2021).

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Furthermore, the multimodal nature of memes underscores the importance of visual communication in digital environments (Bashir et al., 2025; Lande et al., 2025). Meaning in memes is not constructed solely through language but through the interaction of text, images, emojis, and typography. As argued by Kress and Leeuwen (2021), communication in contemporary media is inherently multimodal, requiring an integrated analysis of different semiotic resources. In the context of Yoruba internet memes, visual elements often reinforce or even transform the meaning of textual content, thereby enhancing audience engagement and interpretive complexity.

Despite these developments, scholarly attention to Yoruba internet memes remains limited. While there is a growing body of research on digital discourse and internet memes globally, much of this work focuses on Western languages and contexts (Bou-Franch & Blitvich, 2019; Yus, 2021). As a result, African languages, including Yoruba, are underrepresented in studies of online communication. This gap is particularly significant given the role of language in preserving cultural heritage and facilitating social interaction. Without adequate research, the evolving forms of Yoruba digital expression risk being overlooked in academic discourse.

Statement of the Problem: Although Yoruba language is widely used in both offline and online contexts, there is a noticeable lack of empirical studies examining how language play operates within Yoruba internet memes. Existing studies on Nigerian digital discourse have primarily focused on general language use, with limited attention to the specific mechanisms of creativity and meaning-making in memes (Odebunmi, 2020; Taiwo, 2022). Furthermore, the transformation of traditional Yoruba expressive forms into digital formats has not been sufficiently explored. This lack of scholarly engagement limits our understanding of how indigenous languages adapt to technological change and how they contribute to contemporary digital communication.

In addition, the multimodal nature of memes presents analytical challenges that have not been fully addressed in Yoruba studies. While memes combine linguistic and visual elements, there is limited research on how these components interact to produce meaning in Yoruba contexts. Consequently, important aspects of digital communication such as the role of images, emojis, and typography remain under examined. This study therefore seeks to address these gaps by providing a systematic analysis of language play and multimodal creativity in Yoruba internet memes.

Major Objective of the Study: The major objective of this study is to examine how language play and multimodal resources are employed in Yoruba internet memes to construct humor, identity, and sociocultural meaning in digital communication.

Justification/Rationale: The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it extends the scope of sociolinguistics and digital discourse studies by incorporating African language perspectives, thereby addressing the imbalance in existing scholarship. By focusing on Yoruba, the study highlights the relevance of indigenous languages in contemporary communication and challenges the dominance of Western-centric research paradigms.

Practically, the study provides insights into how digital platforms can serve as spaces for language preservation and cultural expression. In an era where globalization and language shift pose threats to indigenous languages, the use of Yoruba in internet memes demonstrates its resilience and adaptability. Moreover, understanding these digital practices can inform language teaching, curriculum development, and the design of technological tools for language learning and documentation.

Scope of the Study: This study focuses specifically on Yoruba internet memes shared on selected social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and X. It examines linguistic features such as code-switching, lexical innovation, and proverb adaptation, as well as multimodal elements such as images, emojis, and typography. The study is limited to memes that contain identifiable Yoruba language elements and that function primarily as humorous or satirical content.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Internet Memes as Digital Discourse

Recent scholarship has increasingly conceptualized internet memes as significant units of digital discourse that facilitate participatory culture and collective meaning-making. Memes are not merely humorous artifacts but also socially constructed texts shaped by user interaction, replication, and reinterpretation (Shifman, 2019). However, while Shifman's work provides a foundational understanding of meme culture, it has been critiqued for its primary focus on Western digital environments, thereby limiting its applicability to non-Western linguistic contexts. Similarly, Dynel (2021) views memes as multimodal discourse forms that rely on pragmatic inference and contextual knowledge to generate humor. Although this perspective effectively highlights the complexity of meme interpretation, it tends to underrepresent the role of indigenous linguistic structures in shaping meaning.

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Furthermore, emphasizing how users derive meaning from memes through shared cognitive environments (Yus, 2021). While this approach is valuable in explaining interpretive processes, it argues downplays the sociocultural specificity of memes, particularly in multilingual societies such as Nigeria. Consequently, these studies, although insightful, do not fully capture the unique dynamics of Yoruba internet memes, where cultural knowledge and linguistic hybridity play central roles.

2.2. Digital Discourse and Sociolinguistic Practices

The study of digital discourse has revealed that online communication is characterized by informality, creativity, and rapid linguistic innovation. contend that digital platforms foster new communicative norms, allowing users to experiment with language in ways that challenge traditional linguistic boundaries (Bou-Franch & Blitvich, 2019). However, their analysis largely focuses on global digital interactions, thereby overlooking localized linguistic practices. Nigerian digital communication reflects social realities, identity construction, and linguistic innovation (Taiwo, 2022). However, the study focuses broadly on media discourse and pays little attention to internet memes. The present study extends this work by specifically examining language play and creativity in Yoruba memes.

In the Nigerian context, provides a pragmatic analysis of digital discourse, arguing that online communication reflects sociocultural realities such as power relations, humor, and identity negotiation (Odebunmi, 2020). While this study offers valuable insights into Nigerian digital communication, it does not specifically address the role of memes as a distinct genre. Language use in Nigerian media spaces is shaped by socio-political contexts, yet his work remains more focused on institutional discourse than on informal digital practices such as memes (Taiwo, 2022). Thus, although these studies acknowledge the importance of digital discourse in shaping language use, they fall short of examining how creativity and playfulness operate within specific linguistic communities, particularly Yoruba-speaking users.

2.3. Code-Switching and Multilingualism in Nigeria

Code-switching has been widely studied as a central feature of multilingual communication in Nigeria. Akande & Salami (2019) argue that code-switching serves not only linguistic but also social functions, including identity expression, solidarity, and humor (Udeze & Voigt., 2026). Their findings are particularly relevant to digital communication, where language boundaries are often fluid. However, their study is primarily based on spoken and formal discourse, thereby limiting its applicability to online contexts. The significance of online data in understanding language variation and change, noting that digital communication provides access to naturally occurring linguistic practices (Androutsopoulos, 2018). While this perspective is valuable, it does not specifically address how multilingualism interacts with multimodality in meme production. Consequently, there remains a need to explore how code-switching functions within the unique semiotic environment of internet memes, especially in Yoruba contexts.

2.4. Multimodality and Meaning-Making in Digital Media

Multimodality has become a central concept in the analysis of digital communication. The interaction of multiple semiotic modes, including text, images, and layout (Kress & Leeuwen, 2021). Their framework provides a robust tool for analyzing memes; however, it has been critiqued for its limited engagement with non-Western visual cultures (Otto & Sukmono, 2026). Additionally, Dynel (2021) observes that humor in memes often arises from the interplay between visual and linguistic elements. While this observation is significant, it tends to generalise meme practices without accounting for cultural specificity. In Yoruba memes, for instance, visual elements often carry culturally embedded meanings that may not be immediately accessible to non-native audiences. Therefore, existing multimodal frameworks require contextual adaptation to fully capture the nuances of Yoruba digital discourse.

2.5. Limitations in Existing Literature

Despite the growing body of research on memes and digital discourse, there remains a noticeable gap in the study of African languages, particularly Yoruba, in online contexts. Most existing studies are either geographically limited to Western settings or thematically focused on general digital communication rather than specific linguistic practices. Furthermore, there is a lack of interdisciplinary approaches that integrate sociolinguistic and multimodal perspectives. In addition, previous studies have not sufficiently examined how traditional Yoruba expressive forms, such as proverbs and idioms, are adapted in digital environments. This omission is significant, as these forms constitute an essential aspect of Yoruba linguistic identity. Therefore, this study seeks to address these limitations by providing a focused analysis of language play and digital creativity in Yoruba internet memes.

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3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Sociolinguistic Theory

Sociolinguistic theory provides a foundational framework for understanding the relationship between language and social context. The work of Labov (1972), emphasizes language variation and its correlation with social variables such as class, age, and identity. Labov's approach is particularly useful in analyzing how Yoruba speakers adapt their language use in digital environments. However, his model has been critiqued for its focus on structured variation, which may not fully account for the fluid and dynamic nature of online communication.

Similarly, Hymes (1972), introduces the concept of communicative competence, which highlights the appropriateness of language use within specific contexts. While this framework is valuable for understanding digital interaction, it has been criticized for its limited attention to multimodal communication. In the context of Yoruba memes, where meaning is constructed through both linguistic and visual elements, a purely sociolinguistic approach may be insufficient.

3.2. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis, as developed by Kress & Leeuwen (2021), provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing communication that involves multiple semiotic modes. This approach is particularly relevant for studying internet memes, which integrate text, images, and other visual elements. However, despite its strengths, multimodal discourse analysis has been critiqued for its emphasis on visual grammar, which may not fully capture the cultural specificity of certain communicative practices. In Yoruba memes, for example, visual elements often carry culturally embedded meanings that require contextual interpretation. Therefore, while this framework is useful, it must be adapted to account for the cultural and linguistic nuances of Yoruba discourse.

3.3. Dialogism and Heteroglossia

The concept of dialogism, proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, provides valuable insights into the multiplicity of voices and perspectives in discourse. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia emphasizes the coexistence of different linguistic codes and social voices within a single text. This is particularly relevant to Yoruba internet memes, where multiple languages and cultural references are often blended. Nevertheless, Bakhtin's framework has been critiqued for its abstract nature, which may make it difficult to apply empirically to specific contexts. Additionally, it does not explicitly address multimodal communication, thereby limiting its applicability to digital discourse.

3.4. Integrative Theoretical Perspective

The integrative theoretical perspective is supported by Kress & Leeuwen (2021), who argue that contemporary communication requires the combination of linguistic and visual analyses, and by Gee (2021), who emphasizes integrating multiple theories to understand digital discourse. Together, these scholars justify combining sociolinguistic, multimodal, and dialogic approaches. Given the limitations of individual frameworks, this study adopts an integrative approach that combines sociolinguistics, multimodal discourse analysis, and dialogism. This integration allows for a more comprehensive analysis of Yoruba internet memes by addressing linguistic variation, multimodal meaning-making, and the interaction of multiple voices. By synthesizing these frameworks, the study provides a nuanced understanding of language play and digital creativity. Sociolinguistics accounts for the social dimensions of language use, multimodal discourse analysis addresses the interaction of semiotic modes, and dialogism explains the coexistence of multiple linguistic and cultural perspectives. Consequently, this integrative approach is well-suited for analyzing the complexity of Yoruba internet memes in contemporary digital communication.

4. Empirical Studies

Empirical investigations into internet memes have expanded considerably in recent years, particularly within pragmatics, discourse analysis, and media studies. For example, Dynel (2021) conducted a detailed pragmatic analysis of memes and demonstrated that humor often arises from implicit meanings, intertextual references, and shared background knowledge. While this study provides valuable insights into the inferential processes involved in meme interpretation, it has been critiqued for its reliance on predominantly Western datasets, thereby limiting its cross-cultural applicability.

Similarly, meme comprehension using relevance theory and found that successful interpretation depends on the audience's cognitive environment and contextual assumptions (Yus, 2021). Although this perspective effectively explains how humor is processed, it tends to generalize meme interpretation without adequately accounting for sociolinguistic diversity. In multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, where linguistic and cultural knowledge varies significantly, such generalizations may oversimplify the interpretive process.

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In the Nigerian context, empirical studies have begun to examine digital communication, though not always with a focus on memes. Analyzed online discourse and found that Nigerian users employ pragmatic strategies such as humor, politeness, and indirectness to negotiate social relationships (Odebunmi, 2020). While this study provides a useful framework for understanding digital interaction, it does not specifically address the role of multimodality or language play in memes. Likewise, Taiwo (2022) investigated language use in Nigerian media and observed that digital platforms reflect socio-political realities, including power dynamics and cultural ideologies. However, Taiwo's work is largely centered on institutional discourse, thereby overlooking informal genres such as memes, which are often more representative of everyday communication. Consequently, these studies highlight the importance of digital discourse but leave a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms of creativity in Yoruba internet memes.

Empirical research on code-switching in Nigeria has provided important insights into multilingual communication. Code-switching serves multiple functions, including humor, emphasis, and identity expression (Akande & Salami, 2019). Their findings suggest that language alternation is a deliberate and strategic choice rather than a random occurrence. However, the study primarily focuses on spoken and formal contexts, thereby limiting its relevance to digital communication. Furthermore, the importance of online data in studying language variation, noting that digital platforms offer access to naturally occurring linguistic practices (Androutsopoulos, 2018). While this approach is methodologically significant, it does not fully address how code-switching interacts with visual elements in memes. As such, there remains a need for empirical studies that integrate linguistic and multimodal perspectives.

In addition, the role of social media in shaping cultural expression and identity in Africa (Nwagbara & Rasheed, 2021). Their study found that digital platforms enable users to reinterpret and disseminate cultural practices in innovative ways. While this finding is relevant to Yoruba memes, the study does not provide a detailed linguistic analysis of such practices. Moreover, recent studies have shown that digital media can serve as a site for the preservation and transformation of indigenous languages. However, these studies often adopt a broad perspective, focusing on language use in general rather than on specific genres such as memes. Consequently, the unique features of Yoruba internet memes, including language play and multimodal creativity, remain underexplored.

The above justified because most studies on Yoruba digital communication focus broadly on social media language use rather than internet memes as a distinct genre. Consequently, linguistic creativity, language play, code-switching, humour, and multimodal meaning-making in Yoruba memes remain insufficiently explored, creating a significant gap in contemporary digital linguistic research.

Overall, existing empirical studies provide valuable insights into internet memes, digital discourse, and multilingual communication. However, they are limited in several ways. First, most studies are based on Western contexts, thereby neglecting African languages and cultural practices. Second, there is a lack of interdisciplinary approaches that combine sociolinguistic and multimodal analyses. Third, few studies focus specifically on memes as a distinct genre within digital communication. Therefore, this study addresses these limitations by providing an empirical analysis of Yoruba internet memes, focusing on language play, code-switching, and multimodal meaning-making. In doing so, it contributes to a more inclusive understanding of digital discourse and highlights the relevance of African languages in contemporary communication.

5. Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design, complemented by descriptive quantitative elements, to provide an in-depth analysis of language play and multimodal creativity in Yoruba internet memes. Data were purposively collected from widely used social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and X, over a specified period. A total of 20 memes were selected based on criteria such as the presence of Yoruba language elements, evidence of humor or satire, and the integration of textual and visual components.

The data were analyzed using thematic and discourse analytic methods. Linguistic features such as code-switching, lexical innovation, phonological stylization, and proverb adaptation were systematically identified and categorized. In addition, multimodal elements, including images, emojis, and typography, were examined to determine their role in meaning-making. To ensure validity, data triangulation was employed through multiple sources, while reliability was maintained through consistent coding procedures and cross-validation of interpretations.

6. Result and Discussion

6.1. Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

15 Sampled Yoruba Internet Memes with Critical Analysis and Sociolinguistic Interpretation

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Sample 1: "*Sàpá ti wọlé, happiness ti lọlé.*"

This meme reflects sociolinguistic creativity through parallel clause construction rooted in Yoruba oral aesthetics. The repetition of "*ti wọlé/ti lọlé*" demonstrates rhythmic balance, a feature common in Yoruba verbal art. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the blending of Yoruba and English indexes urban youth identity and shared economic struggle. The lexical item "*Sàpá,"* a contemporary slang, signals in-group belonging, while the contrastive structure encodes collective experience, reinforcing solidarity among speakers navigating similar socio-economic realities.

Sample 2: "*Owó ni kókó, grammar náà decoration*."

This meme illustrates sociolinguistic revaluation of societal norms through language play. The prioritization of "*owó*" over "grammar" reflects shifting attitudes toward education and economic survival. The use of Nigerian Pidgin alongside Yoruba signals linguistic hybridity typical of urban discourse. Sociolinguistic ally, the meme indexes class consciousness and pragmatic orientation, where economic capital outweighs linguistic prestige. The humorous reduction of "grammar" to "decoration" challenges traditional ideologies of language as a marker of status.

Sample 3: "*Brain mi ti 'log out', body ṣi 'online'*."

This meme demonstrates sociolinguistic innovation through technological metaphor and code-mixing. The integration of digital terms such as "log out" and "online" reflects globalization and the influence of digital culture on language use. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, this hybrid expression indexes a digitally literate youth identity. The Yoruba-English blend also reflects functional multilingualism, where speakers draw from multiple linguistic resources to express cognitive and emotional states creatively.

Sample 4: "*Àìlera kì í jẹ́ ká hustle, but bill no dey hear excuse*."

This meme highlights the sociolinguistic function of code-switching as a tool for expressing complex realities. The Yoruba clause introduces a culturally grounded explanation, while the English/Pidgin segment emphasizes economic pressure. This layered structure reflects the multilingual competence of Nigerian speakers. Sociolinguistic ally, the meme encodes shared experiences of hardship, reinforcing group identity and collective understanding within a socio-economic context.

Sample 5: "*Ọpọlọ mi say 'rest', but life say 'run'*."

This meme employs dialogic language play, reflecting internal conflict through personification. The alternation between Yoruba and English represents heteroglossia, where multiple voices coexist within a single utterance. Sociolinguistically, this reflects the negotiation of personal agency within societal demands. The creative blending of linguistic codes also indexes youth discourse, where emotional and psychological experiences are articulated through hybrid expressions.

Sample 6: *"Who no get owó, no get explanation."*

This meme represents a sociolinguistic transformation of proverbial structure. By mimicking the form of traditional Yoruba proverbs, it creates familiarity while introducing irony. The use of Pidgin alongside Yoruba reflects linguistic convergence in informal settings. Sociolinguistically, the meme critiques socio-economic inequality, suggesting that poverty necessitates justification. This aligns with the role of humor in negotiating social realities and maintaining group cohesion.

Sample 7: "Motivation ti pọ̀, action ti lọ."

This meme draws on Yoruba rhythmic and tonal patterns to create a balanced structure. The contrast between "motivation" and "action" reflects a common social experience of unfulfilled intentions. Sociolinguistically, the meme indexes a shared cultural narrative about productivity and procrastination. The integration of English lexical items within a Yoruba framework demonstrates linguistic flexibility and creativity.

Sample 8: "*Sleep kò fẹ́ catch me, but problem ń hug me every day*."

This meme uses metaphorical personification to express emotional states. The verbs "catch" and "hug" are creatively reassigned, reflecting linguistic innovation. Sociolinguistically, the use of Pidgin alongside Yoruba structures signals informality and accessibility. The meme resonates with shared experiences of stress, reinforcing solidarity among speakers.

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Sample 9: "*Relationship sweet gan-an, until data mi finish*."

This meme reflects sociolinguistic adaptation to digital realities. The concept of "data" becomes central to interpersonal relationships, indicating the influence of technology on social interaction. The linguistic simplicity enhances accessibility, while the humor arises from contextual relevance. Sociolinguistically, the meme indexes a generation whose relationships are mediated by digital connectivity.

Sample 10: "*Ọmọ Yorùbá ni mi, but Sàpá fluent in me."*

This meme demonstrates identity negotiation through language play. The phrase "fluent in me" creatively mimics language proficiency structures. Sociolinguistically, it reflects the coexistence of cultural identity and economic struggle. The use of "*Sàpá*" reinforces in-group identity, while the hybrid structure signals multilingual competence.

Sample 11: "*Life no hard, àwa náà weak díẹ̀ ni*."

This meme employs irony and reversal as a form of language play, shifting responsibility from structural conditions to the individual. The use of Nigerian Pidgin creates an informal and relatable tone, while the exaggerated self-blame functions as humor. Sociolinguistically, this reflects a coping mechanism within economically constrained communities, where humor mitigates hardship. The structure mirrors everyday conversational patterns, reinforcing shared identity and solidarity. It also demonstrates how speakers creatively manipulate language to express resilience and normalize collective struggles.

Sample 12: "*God, when? Network kò connect no blessing rara*."

This meme blends religious discourse with technological metaphor, illustrating digital-era language creativity. The phrase "*network kò connect*" recontextualizes spiritual delay using familiar technological failure, making the message relatable to digitally engaged audiences. Sociolinguistically, it reflects the intersection of faith and modern experience in Nigerian society. The use of Pidgin enhances accessibility and emotional immediacy, while the rhetorical question "God when?" signals shared frustration. This hybrid expression demonstrates how language evolves to accommodate new realities.

Sample 13: "*Àgbàlagbà ni mi, but money no dey respect age."*

This meme challenges traditional Yoruba sociocultural norms through ironic language play. While age is typically associated with respect in Yoruba culture, the statement subverts this by foregrounding economic power. The code-switching between Yoruba and Pidgin reflects linguistic hybridity and modern identity negotiation. Sociolinguistically, the meme highlights shifting value systems where financial status overrides age-based hierarchy. The humor emerges from this contradiction, revealing how language is used to critique evolving social structure

Sample 14: "*Exam ń bọ̀, knowledge mi ń lọ*."

This meme utilizes parallelism and semantic opposition as a form of linguistic creativity. The predictable structure creates rhythm, while the unexpected reversal generates humor. Sociolinguistically, it reflects shared academic anxiety among students, making it widely relatable. The simplicity of the language enhances accessibility, while the exaggeration captures emotional experience. This meme demonstrates how language play can transform everyday stress into communal humor, reinforcing group identity within educational contexts.

Sample 15: "*Ẹ̀mí mi fẹ́ rest, destiny mi say no."*

This meme reflects internal conflict through dialogic language play and code-switching. The Yoruba phrase conveys emotional desire, while the English segment introduces an opposing force, creating a dual-voice structure. Sociolinguistically, this represents the negotiation between personal agency and societal expectations. The blending of linguistic codes indexes bilingual competence and modern identity. The humor arises from the tension between rest and responsibility, illustrating how language is used to articulate psychological experiences.

6.2. Factors That Hinder the Study and Possible Solution

The study of language play and digital creativity in Yoruba internet memes is constrained by several specific challenges. First, restricted data access is a major limitation because a large proportion of memes circulate in private WhatsApp groups, where researchers cannot easily retrieve or archive content. Second, the

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short lifespan of memes makes systematic tracking difficult, as posts are often deleted, altered, or quickly replaced by new trends. Third, non-standard Yoruba orthography online such as omission of tone marks, inconsistent spelling, and heavy mixing with English or Pidgin creates ambiguity and complicates linguistic analysis. In addition, there is a lack of established Yoruba digital corpora and analytical tools, which limits large-scale or computational research. Another issue is interpretive subjectivity, since understanding meme humor often requires deep cultural competence that non-native researchers may lack. Finally, limited institutional funding and low prioritization of indigenous language research reduce opportunities for extensive fieldwork and documentation.

To address these issues, researchers should deliberately build structured meme databases by capturing screenshots and metadata from multiple platforms over time. The development of standardized Yoruba digital writing guidelines will improve consistency. Scholars should also collaborate with native speakers and online communities to ensure accurate interpretation. Furthermore, investing in AI-driven Yoruba language tools and corpora development will enhance analysis, while increased funding and interdisciplinary collaboration will strengthen research capacity in this field.

6.3. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that Yoruba internet memes function as vibrant sites of language play and digital creativity, where speakers actively manipulate linguistic resources to produce meaning. A major pattern observed is the strategic use of code-switching among Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin. This practice is not arbitrary; rather, it reflects speakers' sociolinguistic competence and their ability to select linguistic forms that best convey humor, identity, and shared experience. In many cases, Yoruba provides cultural grounding, while English and Pidgin introduce modernity and accessibility.

In addition, the data reveal a consistent adaptation of traditional Yoruba rhetorical forms, especially proverbs and parallel structures. These forms are not reproduced verbatim but are creatively modified to suit contemporary realities. This suggests that digital communication does not erode indigenous linguistic traditions; instead, it reshapes and extends them. The presence of rhythm, repetition, and contrast across many samples reflects the enduring influence of oral aesthetics in digital discourse.

Another important finding is the widespread use of metaphor, particularly technological metaphors such as "*log out,*" "*mute,*" and "*network*." These expressions show how speakers map modern digital experiences onto everyday life, thereby expanding the expressive capacity of the Yoruba language. Furthermore, the frequent use of lexical innovations like "*Sàpá*" highlights the dynamic nature of youth language and its role in constructing group identity.

Overall, the findings indicate that Yoruba internet memes are not merely humorous artifacts but complex sociolinguistic texts. They serve as platforms for negotiating identity, expressing socio-economic realities, and maintaining cultural continuity. By combining traditional linguistic features with modern digital elements, these memes illustrate how language evolves in response to changing communicative environments.

6.4. Implications of the Study

The findings of the study carry significant implications for sociolinguistics, language education, and cultural preservation. First, they challenge the widely held assumption that globalization and digital communication lead to the decline of indigenous languages. On the contrary, the study shows that Yoruba remains highly relevant and adaptable, functioning effectively within modern digital spaces. This suggests that digital platforms can serve as important sites for language maintenance rather than language loss.

Second, the study highlights the need to re-conceptualize what constitutes valid linguistic data. Internet memes, often dismissed as trivial or informal, should be recognized as valuable resources for understanding contemporary language use. They provide insights into how speakers negotiate identity, express emotions, and respond to socio-economic conditions. Consequently, sociolinguistic research should increasingly incorporate digital texts to capture the realities of modern communication.

Furthermore, the findings have implications for language teaching and curriculum development. The prevalence of code-switching and linguistic hybridity suggests that rigid adherence to standard language norms may not reflect actual usage. Educators may need to adopt more flexible approaches that acknowledge the role of multilingualism and creativity in language use. Incorporating digital materials such as memes into teaching could enhance student's engagement and make learning more relevant.

In addition, the study underscores the importance of multimodal literacy. Since meaning in memes is constructed through the interaction of text, images, and symbols, language users must develop the ability to interpret multiple semiotic resources. Finally, the findings point to the need for greater investment in indigenous

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language research and digital tools. Supporting Yoruba in technological spaces will not only preserve the language but also promote its continued evolution in the digital age.

7. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Yoruba internet memes function as dynamic platforms for language play, cultural expression, and social interaction. Through creative manipulation of linguistic and semiotic resources, users construct humor, negotiate identity, and reflect shared experiences. Importantly, the study shows that Yoruba is not declining in the face of digital globalization but is instead evolving in innovative ways. By bridging traditional oral practices and modern digital communication, Yoruba internet memes exemplify the continuity and transformation of language. Therefore, digital discourse should be considered an essential area of study within sociolinguistics and African language research.

In addition, the study makes several contributions to knowledge. First, it expands the scope of digital sociolinguistics by providing empirical evidence from a Yoruba context, which has been underrepresented in existing literature. Second, it demonstrates how language play operates as a sociocultural tool, linking humor, identity, and communication. Additionally, the study contributes methodologically by integrating sociolinguistic and multimodal approaches in the analysis of digital texts. It also bridges the gap between traditional Yoruba oral literature and contemporary digital practices, showing how cultural forms are reinterpreted in new media. Overall, the study enriches understanding of how indigenous languages function in modern technological environments.

Recommendations: based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

a. Digital discourse should be integrated into Yoruba language studies.
b. Researchers should document emerging online linguistic practices.
c. Educational institutions should incorporate digital texts into curricula. Digital practices.
d. Investment in language technologies will support analysis, preservation, and wider usage of Yoruba in digital spaces.
e. Further studies should explore other Nigerian languages in digital contexts.

Limitations of the Study: The study was limited by the dynamic nature of internet memes, which change rapidly across digital platforms. Time and resource constraints restricted the volume of data collected and analysed. Furthermore, the scarcity of previous scholarly works specifically on Yoruba internet memes limited comparative analysis. The study also focused on selected memes, which may not fully represent all forms of Yoruba digital creativity.

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The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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