

PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF IKWERRE BASED SLANGS

By

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Introduction

Despite the importance of Port Harcourt as a cultural and economic hub, there is limited systematic study of how local slang functions pragmatically that is, how speakers use slang to do social work (index identity, perform solidarity, mitigate face threats, create humour, or exclude others). Existing work documents language shift (from indigenous languages to Pidgin) and the rise of pidginized varieties (Ihemere, 2006), but few studies give a detailed pragmatics account of specific slang items and their conversational effects. This lack matters because without pragmatic description we miss how slang shapes everyday interaction and social identity in Port Harcourt. While pragmatics provides a robust framework for interpreting meaning, previous literature rarely combines pragmatic analysis with local urban slang. Most studies focus on general pragmatic principles rather than examining how slang is used to perform social actions and manage identity in specific urban communities. This research bridges that gap by applying pragmatics to the study of Port Harcourt slang.

Language in cities is full of surprises. Port Harcourt a fast-growing oil city in Nigeria's Niger Delta has its own unique way of speaking: a mixture of Nigerian Pidgin, words and expressions from indigenous languages (especially Ikwerre and Ijaw), English, and creative youth slang. This everyday speech commonly called "Port Harcourt slang" does more than label things: it signals identity, friendliness, social class, humor, and attitude. To understand how people mean things in Port Harcourt (not just what they say), we need pragmatics the branch of linguistics that studies how context shapes meaning (Korta & Perry, 2024). As the Stanford Encyclopedia explains, "Pragmatics deals with utterances typically involving language" and focuses on how context contributes to meaning

(Korta & Perry, 2024, para. 66). This chapter introduces the study, explains why Port Harcourt slang deserves a pragmatic analysis, and sets the research framework for the rest of the project.

Language in Port Harcourt is shaped by history, migration, and contact. Port Harcourt was founded by the colonial administration in 1912 as a port town and later became a major Centre of the Nigerian oil industry; since then it has grown into a multiethnic metropolis. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Port Harcourt “was founded in 1912 and began to serve as a port” after rail links made exportation possible (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Today the city’s urban region is home to millions, and the Greater Port Harcourt area draws people from multiple ethnic groups and foreign workers (Macrotrends, 2024). That multiethnic mix provides the social setting in which new speech varieties including local slang and pidginized forms evolve.

Nigerian Pidgin (often shortened to “Pidgin” or “Naijá”) functions as a lingua franca across Nigeria and is widely used in Port Harcourt as the language of daily interaction and informal discourse (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Mafeni, 1971). As Ihemere’s fieldwork in Port Harcourt shows, “the medium of wider communication is naturally NPE (Nigerian Pidgin English)” in many community domains such as markets, neighborhoods, workplaces and sometimes even churches. This reality creates a fertile ground for creative slang that blends Pidgin, Ikwerre lexical items, Nigerian English, and youth coinages (Ihemere, 2006). Scholars have shown that when different languages and social groups meet in cities, new pragmatic meanings appear: words acquire indexical meanings (they point to social identity, attitude, humour), and speakers use forms strategically to perform actions (to tease, to show solidarity, to insult, to praise) (Korta & Perry, 2024; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

Short quoted authority (pragmatics): “Pragmatics deals with utterances typically involving language.” (Korta & Perry, 2024, para. 66).

Because Port Harcourt slang operates in socially rich contexts, it is best analyzed with pragmatic tools which are speech acts, deixis/indexicality, politeness strategies and code-switching (Austin, 1962; Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1978). These frameworks help us say how a particular slang

expression does something in conversation (for instance, by insulting playfully, establishing in-group membership, or softening requests).

Authorities cited for major claims above: Encyclopedia Britannica on Port Harcourt history; Macrotrends for population; Ihemere (2006) on language use in Port Harcourt; Elugbe & Omamor (1991) and Mafeni (1971) on Nigerian Pidgin; Korta & Perry (2024) on pragmatics theory.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to do a pragmatic analysis of Port Harcourt Slang, it will be guided by the following objectives as it seeks to:

- i. identify at least Twenty Five (20) common Port Harcourt slang items and their apparent meanings in everyday conversation (market, school, parties, online).
- ii. analyze selected slang tokens using pragmatic tools such as speech act theory, deixis/indexicality, politeness.
- iii. examine social distribution: who uses which slang (age groups, gender, social class).
- iv. discuss the sociolinguistic consequences e.g., identity marking, language shift, and attitudes towards local slang.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two major theories in pragmatics and sociolinguistics:

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory explains that when people speak, they are not just saying words they are doing something with them. This means that every utterance performs an action. For example, when someone says, "I apologize," they are not just speaking; they are performing the act of apologizing. This idea was first introduced by J. L. Austin (1962) and later expanded by John Searle (1969). Austin called these "performative utterances" and categorized them as acts that do something rather than just describe something.

The theory identifies three kinds of acts: locutionary (the actual words said), illocutionary (the speaker's intention), and perlocutionary (the effect on the listener). In real-life communication, especially in slang or informal

language, the illocutionary act is key. For instance, when a youth in Port Harcourt says “E choke!” they may literally mean “it is overwhelming,” but the illocutionary meaning could be excitement, surprise, or admiration. Without context, the listener may not understand what the speaker intends.

Searle (1969) also notes that meaning is tied to intention and context. This is highly relevant to urban slang because many words are used creatively, and their effects depend on how the speaker delivers them and who is listening. Understanding Speech Act Theory helps us analyze how slang performs social actions, such as showing friendship, teasing, or joking, rather than just conveying literal meaning.

This theory fits the study because it shows that language is action-oriented. Slang is more than words; it’s doing things with words, shaping interactions, and creating social meaning in everyday communication.

Indexicality and Identity Theory

Indexicality and Identity Theory explains how language reflects social identity and positions speakers within a community. The theory, developed by Silverstein and applied by Penelope Eckert (2008), suggests that language carries social meaning and indexes certain identities, like age, class, gender, or urban group membership. For example, the way someone speaks can immediately show that they are a youth, part of an urban street culture, or belong to a particular city like Port Harcourt.

Eckert (2008) argues that language is not only a means of communication but also a tool for performing social identity. Slang, code-switching, and Pidgin are ways speakers index urban identity and youth culture. For instance, saying “No wahala, bros” indexes friendliness, youthfulness, and belonging to an urban peer group.

Studies by Akande and Salami (2010), Alabi and Adeyemi (2024), and Adegaju et al. (2024) demonstrate that Nigerian Pidgin and code-switching are strategic communication tools. Youths mix English, Pidgin, and local languages to achieve humor, emphasis, solidarity, or social identity. Nigerian Pidgin is not broken English but a flexible, creative medium that reflects urban linguistic ingenuity.

These studies are valuable because they show that language choice is deliberate and meaningful, not random. However, many of these studies focus on generalized patterns of code-switching without examining how regional urban slang blends with Pidgin in real social interactions, especially in a city like Port Harcourt. The current study fills this gap by analyzing how code-switching interacts with local slang and social context in the city.

This study focuses on slang as used within Port Harcourt city (Port Harcourt metropolis and nearby neighborhoods) over the last decade, with particular attention to:

Spoken slang items used in face-to-face interaction (markets, street talk, informal gatherings).

Slang practices among youth and young adults (ages roughly 15–35), while noting older speakers for comparison.

Pragmatic analysis of a selected sample of slang tokens (not an exhaustive lexicon): the study will choose representative items and analyze them in detail.

Geographically, the research concentrates on typical Port Harcourt metropolis and online spaces where Port Harcourt youths interact. Temporally, the emphasis is contemporary slangs within the last 10–15 years, because slang evolves quickly and is often ephemeral and context-bound.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it fills a gap by applying pragmatic frameworks to a local urban slang variety. Pragmatic descriptions add depth beyond lexicon lists telling us how language acts in social life. Findings will help document Port Harcourt's linguistic creativity and identity markers, useful for cultural studies and local history. Understanding how Pidgin and slang function may inform language policy, literacy programs, and media communication strategies that engage youth.

For journalists, public health communicators, and marketers who work in Port Harcourt, pragmatic insights into slang help craft messages that resonate. Although these studies show the importance of media in slang dissemination, they often overlook the nuanced pragmatic functions of slang in real-life conversation, such as teasing, softening criticism, expressing solidarity, or performing social identity in local settings. By studying Port Harcourt slang, this research links digital trends with face-to-face urban interactions, providing a fuller picture of language use. While some slang is widely understood nationally, cities like Port Harcourt have distinct patterns of usage, pronunciation, and meaning. This highlights the importance of studying urban slang contextually rather than assuming uniformity across Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Slang

A slang is an informal non-standard vocabulary composed typically of coinages, arbitrarily changed words and extravagant, forced or factions figures of speech. Slang is one of the most lively and expressive forms of language. It is the kind of language people use when they feel relaxed and comfortable with one another. Unlike formal English, which is taught in classrooms and guided by rules, slang grows naturally from everyday life. It develops from streets, campuses, markets, music, movies, and social media. Because of this, slang is creative, flexible, and always changing.

Scholars describe slang as a set of informal words and expressions used mainly by particular social groups, especially young people. Ojiakor and Ibe (2025) explain that slang is a social tool used by youths to express creativity, identity, and a sense of belonging. This shows that slang is not just about casual talk; it is also about social connection and group identity. In cities like Port Harcourt, slang is part of daily communication. It is heard in buses, on campuses, in football viewing centres, at roadside joints, and online. Expressions such as “no wahala,” “omo,” “e choke,” “wetin dey sup,” and “japa” are commonly used. These expressions often mean more than their literal interpretations. For example, “wahala” may mean trouble, stress, or difficulty depending on how it is used. This shows how slang adapts meaning to suit local experiences.

Young people are the main creators and users of slang. They constantly invent new expressions to sound fresh and different from older generations. Egbo (2024) notes that youth slang functions as a marker of identity and creativity. In Port Harcourt, many slang expressions begin among students and young urban dwellers before spreading to the wider society.

Slang also helps build closeness among speakers. When people share the same slang, communication feels more personal and friendly. At the same time, slang can exclude outsiders who do not understand it. Ojiakor and Ibe (2025) observe that slang creates a sense of “us” versus “them.” In Port Harcourt, slang reflects the city’s struggles, humour, and hopes. For example, “japa” captures the desire of many youths to leave in search of better opportunities. Through slang, people express real-life experiences in a simple and relatable way.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics that studies how language is used in real-life situations. It focuses on what speakers intend to mean and how listeners understand them, rather than just the literal meaning of words. In everyday communication, people often mean more than what they say directly, and pragmatics explains how this extra meaning is understood.

Yule (1996) defines pragmatics as the study of speaker meaning. This means that pragmatics looks at how meaning is shaped by context, intention, relationship, and shared knowledge. For example, when someone says “It’s hot here,” they may not simply be talking about temperature but requesting that a window be opened. The listener understands this because of the situation.

Wikipedia (2024) explains pragmatics as the study of how context contributes to meaning. This shows that language does not function on its own. Meaning depends on who is speaking, who is listening, where the conversation is taking place, and what both speakers already know. In daily life, people rely on tone, gestures, and shared experiences rather than complete sentences.

Pragmatics is especially important in the study of slang. Slang expressions often do not have fixed meanings. Their interpretation depends on context. For example, “omo” can express surprise, excitement, fear, or disbelief. Without understanding the situation, the meaning may be unclear. Pragmatics explains how listeners are able to interpret such expressions correctly.

Another key idea in pragmatics is speech acts. Through language, people perform actions such as greeting, warning, joking, or apologizing. Many slang expressions perform these actions. For instance, “bros” can signal friendliness, while “guy, calm down” may function as advice or warning. Pragmatics also explains implicature, where speakers suggest meaning without stating it directly (Grice, 1975). Expressions like “Na cruise?” depend on shared understanding. Pragmatics therefore provides a useful framework for analysing slang.

Urban Sociolect

An urban sociolect refers to a particular way of speaking that develops among people living in the same city. It grows naturally from daily interaction and reflects shared urban experiences. Unlike standard language, an urban sociolect is informal, flexible, and shaped by city life.

In linguistics, a sociolect is a language variety associated with a particular social group. Wikipedia (2024) defines it as a variety linked to social class or group. In urban environments, people from different backgrounds interact regularly, leading to the development of a shared way of speaking that helps communication across differences.

Cities like Port Harcourt are linguistically diverse. People from different ethnic, educational, and social backgrounds live and work together. To communicate easily, they develop common expressions that cut across these differences. This shared speech style becomes the urban sociolect and often includes slang, borrowed words, and code-mixing.

Urban sociolects reflect everyday city life. Experiences such as hustle, unemployment, traffic, entertainment, and youth culture influence how people speak. In Port Harcourt, expressions linked to street life and

economic realities are common. These expressions reflect survival, ambition, humour, and social bonding.

Youth play a major role in shaping urban sociolects. Labov (1972) explains that language change often begins within specific social groups before spreading. Urban sociolects are also constantly changing, with new expressions appearing and old ones fading. In Port Harcourt, the urban sociolect draws from Nigerian Pidgin, English, and local languages, making it rich and expressive.

Context

Context refers to the situation in which language is used. It includes the setting, the people involved, their relationship, cultural background, and what has happened before the conversation. Without context, many utterances would be difficult to understand.

Wikipedia (2024) defines context as the circumstances that allow an utterance to be fully understood. For example, the statement “It’s cold” may describe the weather or request that a window be closed. The intended meaning depends on the situation.

Context is especially important in slang usage. Slang expressions often change meaning depending on tone and situation. For example, “you dey whine me?” can be playful among friends but insulting during an argument. Social context also affects language choice. People speak differently to friends than to elders or lecturers (Cutting, 2002).

Cultural context also shapes meaning. Slang used in Port Harcourt may confuse outsiders who do not share the same cultural background. Often, speakers assume shared knowledge and leave meanings unstated. Expressions like “you know now” rely entirely on shared context.

Meaning in Use

Meaning in use explains how words get their meaning from how they are actually used in communication. Meaning is not fixed in dictionaries; it is created through interaction between speakers and listeners.

Wittgenstein (1953) argues that the meaning of a word lies in its use. For example, “That thing don die” does not mean literal death but that something has stopped working. The meaning becomes clear through usage.

Wikipedia (2024) supports this view by stating that meaning is determined by how expressions are used in communication. This idea is important in the study of slang, where meanings often differ from standard definitions. For instance, “mad” in Nigerian slang may mean impressive or excellent.

In urban communication, meaning changes with tone, relationship, and situation. The same word can sound friendly in one context and insulting in another. Meaning therefore emerges through use, not from words alone.

Identity and Language

Language plays a very big role in how people show who they are. The way a person speaks can tell others about their background, culture, age, education, and even their beliefs. Identity simply means how people see themselves and how they want others to see them, while language is one of the strongest ways to express this identity. People often use language to show that they belong to a particular group or community.

Scholars have explained that identity is not something fixed; it is created and reshaped through daily interactions. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) explain that identity is constructed through language use in social situations. This means that every time people speak, they are presenting a version of themselves. For example, young people may use slang to show that they are modern or trendy, while professionals may use formal language to show seriousness or authority.

In a multilingual society like Nigeria, language is even more connected to identity. Nigerians often switch between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages depending on who they are talking to. This choice of language helps speakers express ethnic identity, social class, or level of closeness. A student may speak Standard English in class but switch to Pidgin with friends to appear relaxed and relatable.

Therefore, language is not just a tool for communication; it is a way people express who they are. Through language, individuals negotiate their identity and position themselves within society (Joseph, 2004).

Nigerian Pidgin

Nigerian Pidgin is one of the most widely spoken languages in Nigeria. It developed as a contact language between Europeans and local people during trade and colonial interactions. Today, Nigerian Pidgin has grown beyond its original function and is used in everyday communication across different ethnic groups.

Nigerian Pidgin is popular because it is simple, flexible, and expressive. It allows people from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate easily. According to Faraclas (1996), Nigerian Pidgin serves as a lingua franca that promotes social interaction and unity among Nigerians. It is commonly used in markets, streets, music, comedy, social media, and informal conversations.

Many people use Nigerian Pidgin to show friendliness and closeness. Unlike Standard English, which may sound formal or distant, Pidgin creates a sense of equality and shared understanding. Young people especially use Pidgin to express creativity, humour, and identity. Musicians and comedians also use it to connect with a wider audience.

Although Nigerian Pidgin is sometimes seen as “incorrect English,” linguists argue that it is a complete language with its own rules and structure. Akande and Salami (2010) note that Nigerian Pidgin is not broken English but a legitimate language shaped by Nigeria’s social and cultural environment.

Ikwere Language

The Ikwere (Iwhuruohna) are a major ethnic group in Nigeria’s Rivers state. They occupy the upland region of Rivers state. Primarily occupying the Emohua, Obio-Akpor, Ikwere and Port Harcourt LGAs. The Ikwere language is often identified as Igboid group. They speak a distinct related language (Ikwere) and have a rich traditional culture and a distinct identity. The Ikwere language is part of the Igboid language cluster with a

high degree of mutual intelligibility with the Igbo language yet recognized as a separate distinct ethnic group.

Code Switching

Code switching refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages or language varieties in a single conversation. It is very common in multilingual societies like Nigeria where people speak more than one language fluently.

People code switch for many reasons. Sometimes it is done to express ideas better, especially when one language cannot fully capture a feeling or meaning. According to Gumperz (1982), code switching helps speakers manage social relationships and convey meaning more effectively. It can also be used to show identity, education, or group membership.

In Nigeria, speakers often switch between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages. For example, a speaker may start a sentence in English and finish it in Yoruba or Pidgin. This switching is not a sign of confusion but a sign of linguistic competence.

Code switching can also show closeness or distance. When people switch to a shared language, it creates intimacy and solidarity. On the other hand, switching to a formal language like English can show authority or seriousness, especially in official settings.

Therefore, code switching is a natural and meaningful linguistic practice. It reflects the speaker's social awareness and ability to navigate different contexts (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Power and Solidarity in Speech

Language is often used to show power and solidarity in social interactions. Power in speech refers to the ability to control conversations, give orders, or influence others, while solidarity refers to the sense of closeness and equality between speakers.

According to Brown and Gilman (1960), language choices often reflect power relations and social distance. For example, people in authority positions may use formal language to assert power, while friends and

peers use informal language to show solidarity. Titles, polite forms, and respectful expressions are often used to acknowledge power.

In Nigerian society, power and solidarity are clearly reflected in speech. Elders are addressed respectfully, and formal language is used when speaking to superiors. In contrast, Nigerian Pidgin and slang are often used among equals to show friendliness and unity.

Language can also shift depending on the situation. A speaker may use formal English in an office to show professionalism, but switch to Pidgin outside the office to show solidarity with colleagues. This flexibility shows that speakers understand social relationships and use language strategically.

Pragmatic Analysis of some Ikwere-based Slangs

Port Harcourt slang is very pragmatic heavy. Half the meaning lives in context, tone and relationships, not the words themselves e.g the slang: “abeg shift” literally means “to move” but pragmatically means either a soft request for another to adjust or a territorial assertion but what it does socially are to: establish a personal space, signal impatience without full aggression, it may also signal disgust at another person’s speech or action. The hidden rule in Port Harcourt is that the same words may have different force, intonation distinguishes their roles.

Some examples of a Port Harcourt slangs include: “*shey you dey whine me?*”

Literary meaning: Are you teasing me?

Pragmatic meaning:

It challenges sincerity and seriousness

It accuses the other person of disrespecting one’s intelligence

What it does socially: It tests boundaries: pushes the other person to clarify intent, can escalate quickly if said in public

Context sensitivity:

Among friends – playful skepticism

From strangers – near conflict

Another example of Port Harcourt slang
“No dulling”

Literary meaning: Don’t make me dull, bored, be serious

Pragmatic Meaning: go straight to point

Don’t deceive me or slow me down socially:

It is used to assert time value, positions the speaker as sharp or alert and signals dominance move

Another example

“That thing no pure”

Literal meaning: suspicion, dishonesty, rarely about cleanliness, it is most always about intent and it expresses distrust.

Socially: It warns others without accusation, allows speakers to stay safe, save face while expressing uncertainty, in Port Harcourt it reflects skepticism instead of direct confrontation

Another example:

“calm down na”

Literal meaning: Relax, rest, take it easy, etc

Pragmatic Meaning: can either subtly patronize, entreat a person or de-escalate a situation.

Social Effect:

From a friend – supportive, grounding

From an opponent - invalidating, provocative as the one who is spoken to feels his intelligence and emotions are being taken for granted.

This phrase often increases anger if power relations are not equal because indirectness is power, people avoid direct accusations, slang allows for plausible deniability, face-saving exits and flexible interpretations. Slangs may use same words to express different things such as love, threat warnings depending on delivery e.g. “You know wetin dey na” – you know the matter on ground. “wetin de na” – what’s happening. Slangs in Port Harcourt indexes identity, signals street compliance, signals belonging and filters insiders versus outsiders.

Ikwerre Based slangs

Most of what people refer to as Port Harcourt slang is actually Ikwerre based, either directly borrowed or pragmatically reshaped in Nigerian pidgin and urban speech. Interestingly many of these slangs do not sound like Ikwerre anymore but their logic, metaphors and interaction style come straight from Ikwerre language and culture.

There are three main categories of Port Harcourt slangs

1. Direct Ikwere expressions used in urban speech
2. Ikwere words embedded into pidgin
3. Pidgin expressions with Ikwere pragmatic logic

Encodes power, age, respect

Many Port Harcourt slangs follow Ikwere rules about age, status, familiarity, for example you can say slangs freely to peers but same slangs to an elder may signal disrespect even if the wording is mild that is why often times, outsiders use the right words but trigger the wrong reaction.

Importantly, Ikwere vocabulary is less about vocabulary and more about how directly you speak, how fast you escalate and how much respect you encode implicitly that is why Port Harcourt slang feels “cautions side-eye heavy” and tone sensitive.

Contextual meaning (situational pragmatics)

Many Ikwere slangs don't mean much, outside their situation e.g. 'I dey your back'

Literarily mean “I am behind you” but pragmatically means “I support you / I've got you covered.

Contextually, it is used during conflict negotiations or just to signal loyalty. Here, meaning comes from shared social knowledge and not syntax.

Politeness and Face Saving

Ikwere slangs often soften commands or criticism to avoid direct confrontation. This is a very important factor in Ikwere culture.

Indirectness and Implicature

Ikwere slangs rely heavily on implicature – what is suggested but not said e.g. “leave am” literally means leave it/him/her; but depending on context,

it may mean: stop arguing, it is not worth it, don't interfere, don't bother, let it go. The listener infers meaning based on tone, relationship or ongoing activity.

Power, age and social literacy

Some slangs cannot be used freely across age or status lines. Example "You too de do"

Literarily it could mean: busy body, over stepping bounds or hyper activity

- Among peers: it is a playful critic
- From juniors to elders: disrespect
- From elders to juniors: corrective warning and a call to order

Pragmatically, it shows asymmetrical power relations in speech acts

Solidarity and Group Identity

Slangs mark in group membership

Example:

"Na our person" literarily, this means he/ she is one of us.

Pragmatically, it signals a person is trustworthy, deserves preferential treatment, and belongs to the part of a social network.

This slang is used to signal inclusion, justify bias and create social boundaries (us versus them)

Code Switching as a Pragmatic Strategy

Speakers switch between Ikwere, pidgin and English in order to adjust formality, show education or street credibility and control social distance

E.g "Enyi, nyem chance make I pass"

"Mama, bikno calm down"

This switch pragmatically shows respect and softens command.

Cultural Values Reflected Pragmatically

Slangs are living systems constantly adopting to urban youth culture while still rooted in traditional communicative values.

Direct Ikwere slang expression used in urban speech

Ikwere Based Slangs	Literary Meaning	Pragmatic Meaning	Social implication	Context sensibility
<i>Nynereshi!</i>	Leaders, team lead, head	Acknowledgment of another as superior. Expresses loyalty and organizational respect	It announces the speakers' desire to be led by the listener. It signals commitment by the speaker, also shows hierarchy and indicates a subtle patronage. It signals belonging	Political context – it maybe used for a political leader's office – may be used for superiors Among peers – may be used for the one with higher influence, charisma or wealth.
<i>Obu n'onu?</i>	It's not just by talking, talk is cheap, action, not just talk.	It challenges seriousness. It is used to interject when someone seems to boast with words; used to address a loud and almost ambitious expression	It is used to interject when someone seems to make a verbal boast. It is used to address a loud and ambitious expression. An indirect mockery	Socially to express disgust or displeasure over a one who appears to be boisterous. It is use to show lack of confidence in the one talking
<i>Badnu!</i>	A full-grown human. A person or individual	Could signal a praise for a great achievement. In acknowledgment of a person's effort. It can also be used to describe a brave-heart	Used to hail or eulogize an individual who has done well. It can also be used derogatively via tone or with grimace.	Supportive, appeals to the person's ego. Negatively, it simply ridicules or mocks

<p><i>Choi!</i> <i>Chai!</i></p> <p><i>Cheii!</i></p>	<p>They are all exclamation sounds</p>	<p>Choi-used to show surprise or unbelief Chaii – show sympathy or empathy Cheii is used to express fear, amusement and unbelief</p>	<p>Generally used to express feelings of surprise, fear, sympathy, compassion</p>	<p>They can serve as rejoinders during conversations. They also show emotions</p>
<p><i>Obula</i> <i>small thing</i> <i>ooo</i> <i>Obula</i> <i>chaiss</i></p>	<p>It's not a small thing</p>	<p>It announces magnitude or feat. It signals importance or great achievement or even problem</p>	<p>It emphasizes on the status of a thing/matter. It helps to classify an issue or situation. It simply magnifies</p>	<p>It can be used to relay an experience and announce the situation of an issue. It is a mild way of narrating a serious issue.</p>
<p><i>No be</i> <i>chọchọchọ</i> <i>No be</i> <i>mouth</i></p>	<p>It is not lip service. It's not just about bickering or releasing empty words chọchọchọ is an onomatopia for bickering or flippantry</p>	<p>It's a call for seriousness. A call to do the talk. It's an accusation on A speaker can also say this to inform his listeners of his plans</p>	<p>Dares the person ushered to do to talk and not make empty boast. The person referred to is expected to show action after the talk. It may be seen as an indirect test</p>	<p>This may sound provocative to an opponent. May sound disrespectful if said to an older person. It signals lack of confidence in the person probably due to antecedents. It is face saving as it is indirect.</p>
<p><i>No be</i> <i>wowowo</i></p>	<p>Wowowo is an onomatopoeic description of the word "braggadocios". It's not about bragging</p>	<p>A call to order or a reminder that it is not about being empty vessel</p>	<p>Mocks the person by announcing that his talk is baseless and will end as a noisy boast.</p>	<p>used in open confrontation When used around friends, it signals a subtle mockery or slight irritability. But</p>

				if used for an elder, it will sound disrespectful
<i>Mayna me naa</i>	Buy a drink for me please. Fetch some liquor for me and pay for it please	Give me a special treat	Bear the cost of giving me a treat. Foot my liquor bills	Mostly used within a close circle. Used among friends or peers.
<i>Make dem hold you ooo / Make dem beg you ooo</i>	They should hold you! They should resist you!	It is a call to order, more like saying “Be guided”. It’s a call to apply resistant in order not to escalate issues	It is a warning for someone to restrain an offender. Depending on the tone, it may imply a playful caution to cease from.... or a strict warning	Mostly used among peers or age mates. But mostly used by elders to juniors who may be over stepping their bounds
<i>Make your eye reach ground</i>	Let your eye see the ground on which you stand. It believed that one does not slip or fall if he is looking at the ground while walking	It is a precautionary expression. It simply is an advice to be alert and careful. It can also be a warning to be vigilant in order not to get deceived.	Depending on the context, the expression could imply a loving advise or a harsh counsel after several mistakes.	The expression used comes from elders or superiors to juniors or subordinates who want to venture into new task or line of action.

<i>E get as e be</i>	There is a way it is	It speaks of complicating situations or issues with twists. It is used when embarrassing situations are given a blanket covering	Used to describe unpleasant situations. It is an euphemistic tool in language where unpleasant situations are covered	For describing embarrassing, shameful and complicated situation
Slangs by Reduplication of Lexis in Ikwere and English				
<i>See-le oo</i>	See-look!	Used to show surprise at some one especially if the person acts surprisingly above expectation. It is a kin to a satirical praise	It signals high performance from someone written off. The expression announces amazement and unexpected, performances by a low breed	Often times the one referred to realizes how low he/she was classified.
<i>Ite-pot</i>	Cooking pot - cooking pot	Satirically, it refers to tiny cooking pots. When it is so called it mean it is almost two smalls to be placed on the fire place	Simply makes caricature of an item due to its miniature nature	
<i>Aznu-fish</i>	Fish-fish	Satirically refers to a fish that is not worth eating. Expresses sarcasm and mockery of the particular fish	If you say he bought Aznu-fish it means he bought an unrepresentable fish	

<i>Bia-come</i>	Come-come	It is a soft request and not a command used to entreat and it is mostly used for negotiations	Friendship. It speaks of agreement	It is used by elders to juniors or peers but will be wrong for a junior to use for an elder
<i>Iwo ochi trouser</i>	Trouser - trouser	A caricature of a trouser that may be outdated. It is a sarcastic description of a funny looking trouser.	It describes an out of fashion appearance. It mocks.	

Three Categories of Ikwere based slangs

1. Direct expressions used in modern speech

Slang	Literary Meaning
a. Iwai zi la	There is no money
b. Nyerishi	Head man, leader, Boss
c. Obu'n'onu	It's no just about talking and boasting
d. Chonii	exclamation sound for expressing surprise, fear
e. Chaii	exclamation sound for expressing pity, empathy
f. Cheii	exclamation sound for expressing pain, sorrow, regret
g. Enyi	friend, acquaintance
h. Badnu	a worthy person

2. Ikwere Words Embedded into Pidgin

Slangs	Literary Meaning
a. Obula small thing ooo	It's not a trivial matter, it's no mean issue
b. No be chochocho	It's not just as bickering and flippancy
c. No be wowowo	It's not just about being boisterous
d. O bula chais	It's not a joke, not for kids



Bia-come	Come-come
Aznu-fish	Fish-fish
Iwo ochi-trouser	Trouser – trouser

Ikwere slangs encode communalism, respect for elders, conflict avoidance, social loyalty, signals inclusion, serves as a call to order a medium of human as tension relief. For Ikwere slangs, meaning is less about words and more about who is speaking, to whom when and why.

In a nut shell, from a pragmatic perspective, Ikwere based slangs function as social tools, not just vocabularies but depend heavily on context, tone and shared norms, it also helps speakers manage power, politeness, identity and emotion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that studying Port Harcourt slang pragmatically is justified and timely. The existing literature provides a strong foundation but also highlights clear research gaps, which this study aims to address. The study contributes by: documenting local slang expressions and their meanings; showing how youths use slang pragmatically to perform social actions; linking digital, media, and urban influences to slang usage; highlighting the role of context, identity, and urban sociolects in shaping language. It enables youths to express identity, solidarity, and creativity, and often functions as a form of in-group communication. Slang words like “e choke” and “japa” are not just playful, they perform social actions, signal belonging, and reflect local urban culture. The strength of these study lies in demonstrating that slang is socially meaningful and context-dependent. However, they often focus on university settings or general southeastern Nigerian cities, neglecting city-specific dynamics such as those found in Port Harcourt. Urban slang is shaped by local socio-economic factors, youth culture, and digital media, which these studies only partially capture. In the context of slang, understanding words requires knowledge of cultural norms, tone, and social roles. For example, in Port Harcourt, saying “no wahala” can express reassurance, solidarity, or humor, depending on the situation.

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