

ELLIPSIS, COMPRESSION AND HYBRID SYNTAX IN NIGERIAN DIGITAL ESL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This study examines ellipsis, compression, and hybrid syntax in Nigerian digital ESL communication through the analysis of naturally occurring WhatsApp interactions among Nigerian undergraduate students. Situated within the theoretical domains of computer-mediated discourse and interlanguage studies, the paper investigates how digitally mediated communication reshapes syntactic performance within a multilingual second language environment. The study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic design using purposively selected online interactions drawn from academic, interpersonal, and social communication contexts. The findings reveal that Nigerian digital discourse is profoundly characterised by contextual ellipsis, syntactic compression, graphological reduction, and hybrid English–Nigerian Pidgin constructions shaped by interactional immediacy, processing economy, multilingual resource deployment, and discourse recoverability. The study further demonstrates that many digitally reduced structures arise not from outright grammatical incompetence but from performance-based adaptation to technologically mediated communication conditions. At the same time, certain structures reveal genuine instability involving agreement, tense morphology, article usage, and countability distinctions within Standard English grammar. Particularly significant is the pervasive influence of Nigerian Pidgin tense-aspect systems, negation patterns, focus constructions, and discourse particles within digitally mediated ESL interaction. The paper argues that Nigerian digital discourse constitutes a complex interactional domain in which multilingual competence, technological affordances, discourse pragmatics, and variable grammatical control converge in the shaping of syntactic production. The study contributes to scholarship on digital applied linguistics, computer-mediated discourse, Nigerian English, and multilingual second language communication.

Keywords: digital discourse; ellipsis; syntactic compression; hybrid syntax; Nigerian Pidgin

1. Introduction

The extraordinary proliferation of digitally mediated communication in the twenty-first century has inaugurated a profound reconfiguration of contemporary linguistic behaviour, particularly within the communicative practices of young adults whose social, academic, and interpersonal engagements are now substantially conducted through technologically networked platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. These digital environments have transcended their original utilitarian function as mere channels of information exchange and have evolved into sophisticated sociolinguistic ecologies within which discourse, identity, affiliation, persuasion, humour, conflict, and intellectual negotiation are incessantly enacted. Inevitably, such technologically conditioned communicative spaces have generated emergent linguistic formations whose structural and pragmatic properties increasingly diverge from the conventions traditionally associated with formal written English.

Among the most remarkable consequences of this digital transformation is the emergence of syntactic configurations characterised by ellipsis, compression, graphological reduction, pragmatic condensation, and multilingual hybridisation. Digital discourse, particularly within informal peer-mediated interaction, is

now widely recognised as exhibiting structural tendencies toward auxiliary suppression, truncated clause architecture, orthographic innovation, discourse fragmentation, interactional shorthand, and context-dependent recoverability (Crystal, 2001; Herring, 2001). Unlike conventional expository prose, which privileges syntactic explicitness, grammatical completeness, and rhetorical elaboration, digitally mediated interaction is fundamentally governed by immediacy, interactional fluidity, processing economy, and communicative efficiency. Consequently, users routinely suppress recoverable grammatical material, abbreviate lexical forms, compress syntactic projections, and rely heavily upon shared discourse knowledge for interpretive reconstruction.

Unsurprisingly, these developments have generated intense scholarly debate within applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and computer-mediated discourse studies, especially concerning the implications of digital communication practices for ESL grammatical performance and formal literacy development. A substantial body of scholarship has associated online interaction with increasing tendencies toward orthographic reduction, punctuation erosion, lexical abbreviation, and syntactic simplification among learners (Thurlow & Brown, 2003; Omoera et al., 2018). Such perspectives often interpret digitally reduced structures primarily as symptoms of declining grammatical vigilance and weakening formal writing competence. Yet, an equally compelling body of scholarship has challenged this deficit-oriented orientation by arguing that many digitally mediated forms constitute highly adaptive communicative responses to technologically conditioned interactional realities rather than straightforward evidence of linguistic deterioration (Crystal, 2001; Androutsopoulos, 2014). From this perspective, elliptical and compressed online structures frequently emerge from performance pressure, interactional immediacy, processing economy, discourse recoverability, and multimodal communicative adaptation rather than from complete grammatical incompetence.

Within the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment, however, the phenomenon acquires a far greater degree of structural and theoretical complexity. Nigerian digital discourse unfolds within an intensely multilingual linguistic ecology in which English exists in constant interaction with Nigerian Pidgin and numerous indigenous linguistic systems. Consequently, digitally mediated communication among Nigerian undergraduates frequently exhibits intricate syntactic hybridisation involving English lexical resources, Nigerian Pidgin tense-aspect marking, focus constructions, negation systems, discourse particles, and locally conditioned pragmatic strategies. The resulting discourse forms resist simplistic classification either as orthodox Standard English or as random linguistic deviation. Rather, they reveal complex patterns of multilingual syntactic negotiation operating within technologically mediated communicative environments.

Expressions such as *Assignment don choke*, *Na my cap I dey find*, *Why you no reply my message?*, and *SUG no dey function again* vividly illustrate this emergent syntactic ecology. Such constructions simultaneously exhibit ellipsis, structural compression, pragmatic condensation, multilingual layering, and discourse-dependent recoverability. In many instances, grammatically omitted constituents remain cognitively retrievable because interlocutors share immediate interactional context, sociolinguistic competence, and pragmatic orientation. Consequently, the apparent structural reduction of these utterances does not necessarily compromise communicative effectiveness. On the contrary, the discourse often achieves remarkable interactional efficiency precisely through compression, recoverability, and multilingual resource deployment.

Despite the rapidly expanding scholarship on computer-mediated communication and digital discourse practices, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the syntactic organisation of naturally occurring Nigerian ESL digital interaction. Existing Nigerian studies have focused predominantly on texting habits, orthographic reduction, social media influence on writing practices, and the general educational implications of online communication (Omoera et al., 2018; Ubong & Udofia, 2020). Valuable as such

contributions undoubtedly are, they seldom undertake rigorous syntactic interrogation of naturally occurring online discourse data. Consequently, critical phenomena such as contextual ellipsis, auxiliary suppression, interrogative reduction, aspectual simplification, focus marking, multilingual restructuring, discourse-conditioned recoverability, and digitally motivated syntactic economy remain insufficiently theorised within Nigerian applied linguistic scholarship.

More importantly, much of the existing discourse continues to evaluate nonstandard digital structures almost exclusively through paradigms of linguistic decline, thereby obscuring the intricate interaction between multilingual competence, psycholinguistic processing, discourse pragmatics, digital performance pressure, and communicative adaptation. Such approaches frequently fail to distinguish between temporary performance-induced reductions arising from interactional immediacy and more stable multilingual restructuring rooted in systematic interlanguage development and Nigerian Pidgin grammatical influence.

It is against this broader intellectual and sociolinguistic background that the present study interrogates ellipsis, compression, and hybrid syntax in Nigerian digital ESL communication through the analysis of naturally occurring WhatsApp interactions among Nigerian undergraduates. The study proceeds from the theoretical position that digitally mediated ESL discourse constitutes neither random linguistic degeneration nor merely playful linguistic experimentation, but rather a highly complex interactional domain within which processing economy, multilingual competence, discourse pragmatics, technological affordances, and variable grammatical control converge in the shaping of syntactic production.

More specifically, the study examines the recurrent forms and communicative functions of elliptical structures, compressed syntactic formations, and English–Nigerian Pidgin hybrid constructions within digitally mediated interaction. It further seeks to distinguish temporary performance-based reductions from stable multilingual restructuring and genuine competence-related grammatical instability. In so doing, the paper contributes not merely to the growing scholarship on computer-mediated discourse and digital applied linguistics, but also to broader theoretical debates concerning the reconfiguration of syntactic performance within multilingual second language environments increasingly conditioned by technologically mediated communication practices.

2. Digital Discourse, ESL Syntax and Multilingual Online Communication

The emergence of digitally mediated communication has precipitated one of the most significant linguistic transformations of the contemporary era. The rapid migration of interpersonal interaction from physical conversational environments to technologically mediated platforms has generated novel discourse practices whose structural properties frequently challenge traditional assumptions regarding the boundaries between speech and writing, formality and informality, as well as competence and performance. Within this evolving communicative landscape, language increasingly manifests forms characterised by syntactic reduction, graphological compression, pragmatic condensation, multimodal supplementation, and interactionally driven restructuring. Consequently, digitally mediated discourse has become a major site of scholarly interrogation within applied linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and second language studies.

Early scholarship on computer-mediated communication established that digital discourse possesses linguistic characteristics that distinguish it from conventional written communication. Crystal (2001), in his pioneering work on internet language, argues that online discourse constitutes an emergent communicative variety shaped by technological affordances, interactional immediacy, and the pressure for communicative efficiency. According to Crystal, the linguistic architecture of digital interaction frequently exhibits abbreviation, orthographic experimentation, syntactic truncation, and discourse fragmentation because users attempt to reconcile the speed of spoken interaction with the permanence of written communication. Consequently, online language occupies an intermediate communicative space between

speech and writing, borrowing structural properties from both modalities while simultaneously developing distinctive conventions of its own.

Similarly, Herring (2001) observes that computer-mediated discourse demonstrates remarkable hybridity in both structure and communicative orientation. Unlike traditional writing, digitally mediated interaction often privileges conversational sequencing, turn adjacency, interpersonal responsiveness, and contextual recoverability. Under such conditions, users routinely produce fragmentary constructions, auxiliary omissions, elliptical responses, and compressed syntactic forms whose meanings remain interpretable primarily because interlocutors share discourse context. Herring and Androutopoulos (2015) further contend that digital discourse cannot be evaluated adequately through the grammatical expectations of formal expository prose because technologically mediated interaction operates according to distinct communicative pressures and discourse logics.

Within digitally mediated environments, linguistic economy emerges as a particularly dominant organising principle. Online interaction frequently rewards brevity, rapidity, and communicative immediacy, thereby encouraging users to minimise syntactic elaboration wherever contextual recoverability permits interpretive reconstruction. Thurlow and Brown (2003), in their influential study of text messaging practices among young people, demonstrate that abbreviation, graphological reduction, and syntactic compression are not arbitrary manifestations of linguistic carelessness but adaptive responses to technological and interactional constraints. Such reductions often function strategically to increase communicative efficiency while preserving interactional continuity.

The psycholinguistic dimensions of digital discourse further illuminate these tendencies toward compression and ellipsis. Usage-based theories of language processing maintain that frequently repeated structures become cognitively routinised and increasingly accessible during real-time communication (Ellis, 2002). Similarly, Levelt's (1989) model of language production suggests that speakers operating under performance pressure frequently adopt economical formulation strategies that reduce processing load and accelerate message transmission. Within digitally mediated interaction, where users often compose responses under conditions of conversational immediacy, reduced monitoring and compressed syntactic sequencing become especially probable. Consequently, many digitally reduced structures may reflect performance adaptation rather than fundamental grammatical incompetence.

These issues acquire additional complexity within second language contexts, particularly where English functions within multilingual sociolinguistic environments. Second language learners engaging in digitally mediated interaction frequently navigate multiple linguistic systems simultaneously while also responding to the communicative pressures of online discourse. Consequently, digitally mediated ESL communication often exhibits intricate interaction between target-language structures, multilingual resources, discourse pragmatics, and performance-based reduction strategies.

Interlanguage Theory provides an especially useful framework for understanding these phenomena. Selinker (1972) conceptualises interlanguage as an evolving linguistic system occupying an intermediate position between the learner's target language and other available linguistic resources. Rather than constituting random collections of errors, interlanguage structures frequently exhibit systematicity, internal organisation, and developmental stability. Tarone (2018) further argues that learner language is highly variable across communicative contexts, particularly where performance pressure and interactional demands fluctuate. Within digitally mediated discourse, therefore, nonstandard structures may emerge not merely from incomplete target-language acquisition but also from performance conditions, multilingual transfer, and communicative adaptation.

The Nigerian linguistic environment presents a particularly fertile context for examining these dynamics because English operates alongside Nigerian Pidgin and numerous indigenous languages within a highly stratified multilingual ecology. Nigerian Pidgin, in particular, exerts considerable influence on informal communication practices across educational, social, and digital domains. Faraclas (1996) demonstrates that Nigerian Pidgin possesses stable grammatical systems involving tense-aspect marking, negation, focus constructions, pronoun systems, and discourse particles. Similarly, Mowarin (2008) observes that aspectual markers such as *don* and progressive constructions involving *dey* function systematically within Nigerian Pidgin grammar rather than as random deviations from Standard English.

These grammatical resources frequently surface within Nigerian digital discourse. Expressions such as *Assignment don choke*, *SUG no dey function again*, and *Na my cap I dey find* reveal syntactic organisation strongly influenced by Nigerian Pidgin tense-aspect systems, focus constructions, and negation patterns. Such structures are particularly significant because they challenge simplistic interpretations of digital discourse as merely defective English. Rather, they suggest complex multilingual restructuring in which users strategically deploy available linguistic resources for communicative effectiveness, social alignment, humour, emphasis, and interactional solidarity.

Recent scholarship on multilingual digital discourse increasingly recognises this phenomenon of hybrid online language production. Androutsopoulos (2014) argues that digitally mediated communication often facilitates fluid movement across linguistic systems because online interaction privileges expressive flexibility and identity negotiation. Similarly, multilingual digital discourse frequently involves translanguaging tendencies through which users combine lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic resources from multiple linguistic repertoires within single interactional sequences. Such practices are particularly pronounced within postcolonial multilingual societies where English coexists with highly productive contact varieties and indigenous linguistic systems.

Despite the growing international scholarship on computer-mediated communication, relatively limited syntactic research has focused specifically on naturally occurring Nigerian ESL digital discourse. Existing Nigerian studies have concentrated primarily on the influence of social media on students' writing habits, orthographic practices, and academic performance. Omoera et al. (2018), for instance, report that social media interaction contributes to increasing use of abbreviations and nonstandard spellings among Nigerian undergraduates. Similarly, Ubong and Udofia (2020) observe that WhatsApp discourse among Nigerian users frequently exhibits graphological reduction, unconventional spelling practices, and syntactic simplification.

Other Nigerian studies have also associated digitally mediated communication with weakening formal writing practices among students. Odekeye et al. (2023) report that extensive WhatsApp usage influences learners' writing habits and exposure to informal language forms. Mohammed (2024) similarly notes that digital messaging practices encourage syntactic reduction and orthographic compression among tertiary institution students. While these studies provide valuable insight into digital language behaviour, they often approach online discourse primarily through educational or literacy-oriented paradigms rather than through rigorous syntactic and discourse-analytic interrogation.

More importantly, much of the existing scholarship tends to collapse all nonstandard digital forms into broad narratives of linguistic decline without sufficiently distinguishing between performance-based reduction, multilingual restructuring, and genuine competence-related grammatical instability. Consequently, phenomena such as contextual ellipsis, auxiliary suppression, discourse-conditioned recoverability, hybrid tense-aspect marking, and digitally motivated syntactic economy remain insufficiently theorised within Nigerian applied linguistic research.

The present study seeks to intervene within this gap by foregrounding the syntactic organisation of naturally occurring Nigerian ESL digital discourse. Specifically, the study interrogates how ellipsis, compression, and hybrid syntax operate within WhatsApp interactions among Nigerian undergraduates. In doing so, the study adopts the position that digitally mediated discourse must be understood as a complex interactional domain shaped simultaneously by technological affordances, multilingual competence, discourse pragmatics, processing economy, and variable grammatical control.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic design situated within the broader methodological traditions of computer-mediated discourse analysis and applied syntactic inquiry. The qualitative orientation is considered appropriate because the study is concerned primarily with the structural organisation and communicative functions of syntactic forms in naturally occurring digitally mediated interaction rather than with statistical measurement.

The data consist of naturally occurring WhatsApp interactions produced by Nigerian undergraduate students. WhatsApp was selected because it constitutes a dominant platform for academic, interpersonal, and social communication among Nigerian undergraduates. The dataset was purposively selected based on its relevance to the core concerns of the study, particularly recurrent patterns of ellipsis, syntactic compression, graphological reduction, auxiliary omission, and hybrid English–Nigerian Pidgin constructions.

The excerpts analysed in the study were drawn from diverse interactional contexts, including academic discussions, peer-group conversations, institutional communication, requests, complaints, humour, advisory exchanges, and casual social interaction. The use of naturally occurring discourse rather than elicited data enables the study to capture authentic syntactic behaviour under real interactional conditions characterised by immediacy, informality, and performance pressure.

Ethical sensitivity was maintained throughout the analytical process. All identity-bearing information, including usernames, phone numbers, and profile details, was excluded in order to preserve participant anonymity and confidentiality.

The analysis combines elements of discourse analysis and applied syntactic interpretation. To facilitate structural examination, the study employs an adapted Leipzig-style glossing convention consisting of three analytical layers: the original digitally mediated expression, a morphosyntactic gloss, and the intended Standard English interpretation. The data were subsequently analysed for recurrent patterns of ellipsis, compression, multilingual restructuring, and competence-related grammatical instability within digitally mediated communication.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Ellipsis and Contextual Recoverability

One of the most recurrent syntactic phenomena observable in the data is ellipsis, particularly the suppression of grammatical material considered contextually recoverable within digitally mediated interaction. The prevalence of elliptical constructions in the corpus reflects the fundamentally interactional character of WhatsApp communication, where interlocutors frequently depend upon shared discourse knowledge rather than explicit syntactic elaboration for interpretive coherence. Unlike formal written discourse, which typically privileges grammatical explicitness and structural completeness, digitally mediated interaction often operates through pragmatic recoverability, conversational continuity, and processing economy.

From a syntactic perspective, ellipsis involves the omission of linguistic elements that are structurally expected but semantically inferable from context. Within online discourse, such omissions frequently affect subjects, auxiliaries, copular structures, predicates, complements, and entire clausal projections. Importantly, however, these omissions rarely render communication unintelligible because interlocutors rely heavily on interactional sequencing, shared background knowledge, and immediate discourse context to reconstruct intended meanings.

Consider the following example:

1. **Coming now**
 come.PROG now
“I am coming now.”

The expression omits both the subject pronoun *I* and the auxiliary *am*, leaving only the progressive lexical verb and temporal adverbial. In formal Standard English, the expected structure would require a fully projected clause: *I am coming now*. However, within digitally mediated interaction, the reduced structure remains entirely interpretable because the omitted constituents are pragmatically recoverable from the interactional context.

Psycholinguistically, the utterance reflects economy of formulation. The speaker minimises production effort by suppressing elements whose semantic contribution is already inferable. The expression therefore illustrates how digital communication privileges communicative efficiency over syntactic completeness. Importantly, the reduction does not necessarily indicate inability to produce the full grammatical structure; rather, it reflects interactionally conditioned performance adaptation.

A similar pattern occurs in the following response structure:

2. **Done already**
 done already
“It has been done already.”

Here, the expression omits the subject, auxiliary, and passive construction expected in formal Standard English. The digitally mediated form compresses an entire clause into a reduced participial construction. Nevertheless, the intended meaning remains highly accessible because the preceding conversational context supplies the omitted semantic information.

The structure demonstrates that digitally mediated discourse frequently privileges informational sufficiency rather than grammatical maximality. The communicative burden carried by the expression is relatively narrow: confirmation of completed action. Consequently, elaborate syntactic encoding becomes unnecessary within the interactional environment.

The following example demonstrates contextual ellipsis within interrogative interaction:

3. **Which tomorrow?**
 which tomorrow
“Which tomorrow are you referring to?”

This fragmentary interrogative lacks an overt predicate, subject, and auxiliary structure. Yet, within conversational sequencing, the utterance functions effectively because the omitted semantic material is supplied by the preceding discourse turn. The expression therefore exemplifies discourse-dependent syntax rather than sentence-bound grammatical organisation.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, the expression reflects adjacency-based interpretation characteristic of conversational interaction. The user does not construct an independent grammatical sentence because the utterance functions primarily as an interactional response rather than as a self-contained propositional unit.

Another revealing example occurs in the following emotionally loaded structure:

4. God abeg ooo

God please EMPH

“Oh God, please!”

At the level of formal syntax, the expression lacks a finite predicate and therefore does not constitute a canonical clause. Nevertheless, the utterance functions pragmatically as an appeal, emotional reaction, and expressive exclamation. The omitted propositional content is recoverable because the communicative function of the expression is affective rather than informational.

The form *abeg*, widely used within Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin discourse, functions not merely as a politeness marker equivalent to *please*, but as a broader interactional appeal marker capable of signalling desperation, frustration, persuasion, or emotional intensity. The elongated emphatic particle *ooo* further amplifies the pragmatic force of the utterance.

The expression therefore demonstrates that digitally mediated ellipsis frequently operates together with pragmatic intensification. Structural reduction does not necessarily weaken communicative effect; in many instances, compression actually enhances immediacy and emotional force.

Elliptical reduction also occurs within directive discourse:

5. Find am well ooo

find 3SG.OBJ well EMPH

“Look for it properly.”

The expression omits the imperative subject *you*, while simultaneously integrating the Nigerian Pidgin object pronoun *am*. The structure is therefore both elliptical and multilingual. The omission of the subject is structurally permissible because imperative constructions naturally allow subject suppression. However, the digitally mediated form further intensifies compression through pragmatic abbreviation and discourse emphasis.

Particularly noteworthy is the interaction between ellipsis and multilingualism. The sentence combines an English lexical verb (*find*), a Nigerian Pidgin object pronoun (*am*), and an emphatic discourse particle (*ooo*). The resulting structure reveals how digital discourse frequently integrates elliptical economy with multilingual syntactic adaptation.

Ellipsis also appears prominently within conversationally routinised expressions:

6. Me too

1SG too

“Me too.” / “I feel the same way.”

The expression is structurally incomplete when isolated from interactional context. Nevertheless, it functions efficiently as an affiliative response because the omitted semantic material remains inferable from

the preceding discourse. The utterance therefore demonstrates that digitally mediated communication often prioritises interactional alignment over syntactic elaboration.

The prevalence of such structures in the corpus strongly supports the argument that digitally mediated syntax is fundamentally discourse-conditioned. The interpretation of online utterances frequently depends less upon internally complete clause architecture than upon conversational sequencing, contextual recoverability, and shared pragmatic orientation.

Importantly, the findings challenge simplistic assumptions that elliptical digital structures necessarily indicate grammatical incompetence. In many instances, the reduced forms appear strategically motivated by interactional economy, processing efficiency, and communicative immediacy. The users often suppress grammatical material not because they lack access to standard syntactic structures, but because the digital communicative environment renders such elaboration pragmatically unnecessary.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that digitally mediated ellipsis differs significantly from ellipsis in conventional formal writing. In academic prose, elliptical reduction is typically constrained by strict structural and rhetorical conventions. Within WhatsApp discourse, however, ellipsis operates far more freely because the interactional environment tolerates high levels of contextual dependence and structural incompleteness.

The data therefore reveal that contextual recoverability constitutes one of the central organising principles of Nigerian digital ESL communication. Online interlocutors routinely depend upon shared conversational knowledge to compensate for suppressed grammatical material, thereby allowing highly compressed syntactic forms to function effectively within digitally mediated interaction.

4.2 Syntactic Compression and Digital Performance Economy

Closely related to ellipsis in the corpus is the phenomenon of syntactic compression, through which users minimise structural elaboration in order to sustain rapid interactional flow within digitally mediated environments. While ellipsis primarily involves the omission of recoverable grammatical constituents, syntactic compression refers more broadly to the reduction, condensation, or economisation of linguistic structure under conditions of communicative immediacy and performance pressure. The phenomenon is particularly prominent within WhatsApp interaction, where users frequently prioritise speed, efficiency, responsiveness, and conversational continuity over syntactic completeness.

The prevalence of compressed constructions in the data strongly reflects the psycholinguistic realities of online communication. Digitally mediated interaction often unfolds in real time, requiring users simultaneously to process incoming messages, formulate responses, monitor conversational development, and sustain interpersonal engagement. Under such conditions, linguistic economy becomes highly advantageous. Consequently, users frequently produce abbreviated, condensed, and structurally reduced expressions capable of transmitting essential semantic content with minimal processing expenditure.

One particularly revealing example occurs in the following structure:

7. No time explain now

NEG time explain now

“There is no time to explain now.”

The expression demonstrates severe syntactic compression. The existential construction *there is* is omitted entirely, while the infinitival marker *to* preceding *explain* is similarly suppressed. The resulting utterance consists essentially of lexical content stripped of much of its expected functional grammatical scaffolding.

Despite this reduction, the communicative meaning remains highly accessible because the semantic core of the utterance survives compression. The speaker's communicative priority is urgency rather than grammatical elaboration. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the structure illustrates how users operating under interactional pressure frequently prioritise informational transmission over syntactic maximality.

The utterance is especially significant because its semantic content explicitly references communicative limitation. The user effectively compresses the structure while simultaneously explaining the need for compression. This reflexive dimension reveals the extent to which digitally mediated syntax is shaped by processing constraints and interactional urgency.

A related pattern appears in the following example:

- 8. U don reach ishieke**
 2SG PERF reach Ishieke
“You have arrived at Ishieke.”

The sentence exhibits multiple layers of compression simultaneously. First, the graphological reduction *U* replaces the fully spelled pronoun *you*. Second, the perfective marker *don*, drawn from Nigerian Pidgin, replaces the more structurally elaborate Standard English perfect construction *have arrived*. The result is a highly compressed multilingual clause capable of conveying completed action economically and efficiently.

The structure demonstrates how compression frequently interacts with multilingual grammatical resources. Nigerian Pidgin aspectual marking provides a more economical means of encoding perfective meaning than the corresponding Standard English auxiliary-participle construction. Consequently, multilingual users strategically deploy the more interactionally efficient grammatical resource available within the discourse environment.

Another important example occurs in the following utterance:

- 9. My phone wan off**
 my phone want off
“My phone is about to go off.”

The structure employs the reduced modal-like marker *wan*, widely used in Nigerian Pidgin to indicate imminence or intention. Rather than producing the more syntactically elaborate Standard English structure *My phone is about to go off*, the speaker compresses the utterance into a shorter and interactionally more economical form.

The expression is particularly important because it demonstrates how digital compression frequently operates through grammatical substitution rather than mere omission. The speaker does not simply suppress grammatical material; instead, the utterance restructures the expression through the deployment of a more economical multilingual construction.

Compression is equally visible in the following interactional response:

- 10. We are coming up**
 1PL PROG come up
“We are on our way.” / “We are approaching.”

Although superficially more structurally complete than earlier examples, the expression remains semantically compressed because its interpretation depends heavily upon contextual knowledge. The phrase *coming up* functions as an interactionally condensed movement expression whose exact meaning derives from the surrounding discourse environment.

Within digitally mediated communication, such routinised compressed expressions often function as formulaic interactional units. Rather than constructing entirely new syntactic sequences during each communicative event, users frequently retrieve conventionalised discourse formulas that have become cognitively automatised through repeated exposure and usage.

This routinisation is even more evident in the following structure:

11. Abeg who dey win

please who PROG win

“Please, who is winning?”

The expression compresses the Standard English interrogative structure *Who is winning?* into a Pidgin-influenced progressive construction involving *dey*. At the same time, the discourse marker *abeg* softens the interrogative while preserving interactional informality.

The utterance reveals the extent to which digitally mediated compression often combines multiple processes simultaneously: auxiliary suppression, multilingual restructuring, discourse pragmatics, and processing economy.

The resulting structure is considerably shorter and interactionally lighter than its Standard English equivalent, yet it remains entirely communicatively effective within the online environment.

Compression also manifests through graphological economy:

12. Rn the audience no go understand am

right-now DEF audience NEG FUT understand 3SG.OBJ

“Right now, the audience will not understand it.”

The abbreviation *Rn* compresses the temporal adverbial *right now*, while the remainder of the sentence incorporates Nigerian Pidgin future marking (*go*) and object pronoun structure (*am*). The utterance therefore illustrates how graphological reduction, multilingual syntax, and structural economy frequently converge within digitally mediated discourse.

Importantly, many compressed structures in the corpus appear highly routinised rather than spontaneously improvised. Expressions such as *wan off*, *dey win*, *coming now*, *done already*, and *no wahala* recur repeatedly across online Nigerian interaction. Their recurrence suggests that digital communication gradually stabilises particular compressed constructions into socially recognisable discourse routines.

From a usage-based psycholinguistic perspective, repeated exposure strengthens the cognitive accessibility of such forms, making them increasingly available during rapid communication. Consequently, compression in digitally mediated discourse is not merely accidental reduction; it often reflects entrenched communicative practice shaped by frequency, familiarity, and interactional efficiency.

At the same time, the findings reveal that syntactic compression in Nigerian digital discourse is not uniformly competence-related. Many users who produce highly compressed online structures remain capable of generating more elaborate Standard English constructions within formal communicative settings.

This observation is particularly important because it cautions against interpreting all compressed digital syntax as evidence of deficient grammatical knowledge.

Rather, the findings strongly suggest that digitally mediated compression frequently represents performance adaptation conditioned by communicative environment. Online interaction rewards immediacy, responsiveness, and interactional continuity. Under such conditions, syntactic economy becomes communicatively advantageous. Users therefore strategically reduce grammatical elaboration whenever contextual recoverability permits semantic interpretation.

Nevertheless, the data also indicate that repeated exposure to compressed digital forms may contribute to the normalisation of reduced syntactic structures within everyday communication practices. As certain compressed expressions become increasingly routinised, the boundaries between temporary performance adaptation and stable linguistic restructuring may gradually become less distinct. This possibility raises important questions concerning the long-term relationship between digitally mediated communication practices and evolving patterns of ESL syntactic behaviour.

Overall, the findings reveal that syntactic compression constitutes one of the defining structural features of Nigerian digital ESL communication. The phenomenon emerges through the interaction of processing economy, conversational immediacy, multilingual resource deployment, routinised discourse practice, and technologically conditioned communicative adaptation.

4.3 Hybrid Syntax and Nigerian Pidgin Influence

One of the most linguistically significant phenomena observable in the corpus is the pervasive presence of hybrid syntactic structures arising from the interaction between English and Nigerian Pidgin within digitally mediated communication. Unlike purely orthographic reduction or performance-based compression, hybrid syntax involves the systematic integration of grammatical resources drawn from multiple linguistic systems within single interactional constructions. The phenomenon is particularly important because it demonstrates that Nigerian digital ESL discourse frequently operates through multilingual syntactic negotiation rather than through exclusive adherence to Standard English grammatical architecture.

The data reveal that Nigerian undergraduates routinely deploy Nigerian Pidgin tense-aspect markers, negation systems, focus constructions, discourse particles, pronoun structures, and pragmatic devices within predominantly English lexical environments. These forms are neither random intrusions nor accidental grammatical distortions. Rather, they exhibit considerable structural regularity and communicative functionality. Consequently, the findings strongly support the argument that digitally mediated discourse among Nigerian ESL users frequently reflects organised multilingual restructuring rather than mere linguistic deficiency.

One of the most recurrent features in the corpus is the deployment of Nigerian Pidgin aspectual marking, particularly through the perfective marker *don* and the progressive marker *dey*. Consider the following example:

13. Assignment don choke

assignment PERF overwhelm

“The assignment has become overwhelming.”

The marker *don* functions here as a perfective aspectual marker indicating completed transition into an intensified state. The expression therefore encodes a meaning roughly equivalent to *has become overwhelming* in Standard English. However, rather than relying upon the auxiliary-participle structure

required in Standard English perfect constructions, the utterance employs the more economical Pidgin aspectual system.

The significance of the structure lies in its grammatical organisation. The utterance is not a random simplification of English syntax; it follows a stable Nigerian Pidgin tense-aspect pattern in which *don* marks completed or resultant action. The verb *choke*, metaphorically extended to signify excessive burden or overwhelming intensity, further reflects contemporary Nigerian discourse usage.

The structure therefore demonstrates that multilingual users frequently select the grammatical resource most interactionally efficient and socially natural within the digital communicative environment.

A similarly revealing example occurs in the following utterance:

14. SUG no dey function again

SUG NEG PROG function again

“The SUG is no longer functioning.”

The structure employs the Nigerian Pidgin negative marker *no* together with the progressive marker *dey*. The resulting grammatical frame:

Subject + NEG + PROG + Verb

is highly characteristic of Nigerian Pidgin syntax. Importantly, the absence of the Standard English auxiliary *is* does not indicate random omission. Rather, the utterance reflects an alternative grammatical system within which aspectual meaning is encoded differently.

The structure is especially significant because it reveals stable multilingual grammatical organisation rather than temporary performance reduction. The expression is internally coherent within Nigerian Pidgin syntax, even though it diverges from Standard English grammatical expectations.

The following example further illustrates hybrid negation and multilingual restructuring:

15. I no suppose react abi

1SG NEG suppose react TAG

“Am I not supposed to react?”

The utterance combines English lexical material (*suppose*, *react*) with Nigerian Pidgin negation (*no*) and the discourse-confirmation particle *abi*. The resulting structure is neither wholly English nor wholly Nigerian Pidgin; rather, it represents a hybrid multilingual construction emerging from simultaneous access to multiple grammatical repertoires.

Particularly noteworthy is the role of *abi*, which functions pragmatically as a confirmation-seeking discourse marker roughly equivalent to *isn't it?* or *right?* in conversational English. Such particles are central to Nigerian interactional discourse because they facilitate solidarity, interpersonal alignment, and conversational negotiation.

The expression therefore demonstrates that hybrid syntax in Nigerian digital discourse extends beyond morphosyntactic restructuring into the domain of discourse pragmatics and interactional organisation.

Hybrid focus constructions are equally prominent within the corpus:

16. Na my cap I dey find

FOC my cap 1SG PROG look.for

“It is my cap that I am looking for.”

The utterance employs the Nigerian Pidgin focus marker *na* to foreground the noun phrase *my cap*. Structurally, the construction performs a discourse function similar to English clefting:

It is my cap that I am looking for.

However, rather than using the syntactically elaborate cleft construction of Standard English, the speaker employs the more economical and interactionally natural focus structure available within Nigerian Pidgin grammar.

The expression is particularly significant because it reveals that hybrid syntax in digitally mediated discourse often serves sophisticated information-structural functions. The speaker is not merely communicating propositional content but also organising discourse emphasis and pragmatic salience through multilingual grammatical resources.

A related example appears in the following structure:

17. Na there we go know who sabi work

FOC there 1PL FUT know who know work

“That is where we will know who is truly competent.”

The utterance combines multiple Nigerian Pidgin grammatical resources:

- the focus marker *na*,
- the future marker *go*,
- and the evaluative verb *sabi* (“know” or “be competent”).

The structure demonstrates highly organised multilingual layering. The expression is syntactically compressed, pragmatically emphatic, and interactionally expressive simultaneously. Importantly, the utterance does not appear structurally deficient; rather, it reflects efficient multilingual communicative adaptation.

The corpus also reveals widespread deployment of Nigerian Pidgin pronoun structures within English-dominant interaction:

18. Find am well ooo

find 3SG.OBJ well EMPH

“Look for it properly.”

The object pronoun *am* functions systematically as a third-person object marker within Nigerian Pidgin grammar. Its deployment within an otherwise English imperative structure demonstrates how multilingual users fluidly integrate grammatical resources across linguistic systems during online communication.

Similarly, the following expression reveals hybrid adjectival predication:

19. E no easy faa

3SG NEG easy EMPH

“It is not easy at all.”

The utterance omits the copular verb *is*, following Nigerian Pidgin predicative structure. The pronoun *E* corresponds to English *it*, while *faa* functions as an emphatic intensifier. The structure therefore demonstrates that hybrid syntax often involves not merely lexical borrowing but deeper grammatical restructuring.

Importantly, many hybrid constructions in the corpus appear highly routinised and socially conventionalised within Nigerian digital communication. Their recurrence suggests that users are not randomly alternating between linguistic systems but rather operating within stabilised multilingual communicative practices.

This observation aligns strongly with interlanguage perspectives emphasising systematicity within learner language. The digitally mediated hybrid structures in the corpus frequently exhibit internal grammatical organisation, predictable aspectual behaviour, stable negation patterns, discourse-conditioned focus marking, and pragmatic coherence. Consequently, they resist simplistic classification as grammatical “errors.”

At the same time, the findings reveal that hybrid syntax frequently serves important sociolinguistic and interactional functions. Nigerian Pidgin resources often enable users to:

- express solidarity,
- intensify emotional stance,
- increase conversational intimacy,
- reduce communicative distance,
- and achieve culturally grounded pragmatic effects difficult to reproduce through formal Standard English structures alone.

Digitally mediated communication therefore becomes a particularly fertile environment for multilingual syntactic hybridity because online interaction privileges flexibility, immediacy, expressiveness, and identity negotiation. Within such contexts, rigid linguistic compartmentalisation becomes increasingly unlikely. Users instead mobilise all available linguistic resources strategically in response to communicative need.

The findings consequently challenge deficit-oriented interpretations of Nigerian digital discourse that evaluate all nonstandard structures exclusively through the grammatical norms of formal Standard English. Many hybrid constructions in the corpus are not manifestations of linguistic breakdown but evidence of sophisticated multilingual communicative competence operating within technologically mediated interactional space.

Nevertheless, the findings also suggest that the increasing routinisation of hybrid structures within everyday communication may have broader implications for ESL syntactic behaviour, particularly in contexts where distinctions between formal and informal linguistic domains become increasingly permeable. The interaction between multilingual restructuring and formal Standard English competence therefore remains an important area requiring continued scholarly attention.

4.4 Performance-Based Deviations and Genuine ESL Instability

One of the most theoretically delicate issues in the analysis of digitally mediated ESL discourse concerns the distinction between temporary performance-based deviations arising from online interactional

conditions and more stable forms of competence-related grammatical instability. This distinction is particularly crucial because digitally mediated communication frequently produces surface structures that appear nonstandard but emerge from fundamentally different linguistic sources. Some structures result primarily from processing economy, interactional immediacy, graphological convenience, and reduced monitoring, whereas others reveal incomplete control of specific morphosyntactic systems within Standard English.

The failure to distinguish adequately between these categories has contributed significantly to the tendency within certain strands of digital discourse scholarship to interpret virtually all nonstandard online forms as evidence of grammatical decline. Such an approach is analytically problematic because it collapses performance adaptation, multilingual restructuring, orthographic reduction, and genuine competence instability into a single undifferentiated category of “bad English.” The present analysis therefore seeks to maintain a more rigorous distinction between digitally conditioned performance variation and deeper morphosyntactic instability.

Performance-based deviations are particularly visible within graphological reduction and interactionally compressed online writing. Consider the following example:

20. Gud mrng sir

good morning sir

“Good morning, sir.”

The expression exhibits graphological abbreviation through the reduction of *good* to *Gud* and *morning* to *mrng*. However, the structure remains semantically transparent and syntactically intact. The reduction operates primarily at the orthographic level rather than within the grammatical architecture of the utterance.

Importantly, there is little evidence suggesting that the user lacks competence in the standard spelling forms. Rather, the abbreviations appear motivated by speed, familiarity, interactional informality, and typing economy. The structure therefore exemplifies performance adaptation rather than competence failure.

A related example appears in the following expression:

21. Pls send d file

please send DEF file

“Please send the file.”

The abbreviations *Pls* and *d* reflect orthographic compression typical of digitally mediated interaction. Yet, the sentence retains its core imperative structure:

- imperative verb,
- object noun phrase,
- determiner relationship.

The grammatical organisation of the utterance therefore remains relatively stable despite graphological reduction. This distinction is particularly important because digital abbreviation is frequently mistaken for syntactic incompetence when, in reality, many users who employ such compressed spellings remain fully capable of producing standard orthographic forms in more monitored communicative settings.

Another revealing example occurs in the following expression:

22. Cumin now

come.PROG now

“I am coming now.”

The form *Cumin* represents phonologically motivated orthographic reduction based on pronunciation. Simultaneously, the structure omits the subject pronoun and auxiliary expected in formal Standard English.

Nevertheless, the utterance remains entirely interpretable because the omitted material is pragmatically recoverable. The expression therefore reflects the combined influence of graphological economy and interactional immediacy rather than deep grammatical instability.

Such structures are particularly characteristic of low-monitoring digital environments in which communicative speed and conversational continuity frequently take precedence over orthographic and grammatical precision.

In contrast to these performance-driven reductions, other structures within the corpus reveal more substantial instability involving Standard English morphosyntax. Consider the following example:

23. All these information are too much

all DEM.PL information be.PL too much

“All this information is too much.”

Unlike the earlier graphological reductions, this expression reflects instability within the English countability and agreement system. In Standard English, *information* functions as a non-count noun and therefore requires singular agreement. The structure consequently involves:

- inappropriate plural demonstrative selection (*these*),
- plural verb agreement (*are*),
- and unstable count/non-count noun categorisation.

The deviation therefore extends beyond temporary digital abbreviation or interactional compression. Rather, it reflects incomplete mastery of specific grammatical features within Standard English nominal structure.

A similar pattern emerges in the following example:

24. I've been to few seminars and conference

1SG-have been to few seminar.PL and conference.SG

“I have been to a few seminars and conferences.”

The structure exhibits multiple morphosyntactic instabilities simultaneously:

- omission of the article *a* before *few*,
- inconsistent plural marking,
- incomplete coordination agreement.

Unlike graphological reduction, these issues are not easily attributable solely to performance pressure or digital convenience. Rather, they suggest partial instability within the learner's control of English article systems and plural morphology.

The following expression further illustrates competence-related morphosyntactic instability:

25. My salary still hasn't drop

my salary still has-NEG drop

“My salary still hasn't dropped.”

The sentence demonstrates instability involving auxiliary-participle selection within the English perfect aspect system. Following the auxiliary *hasn't*, Standard English requires the past participle *dropped* rather than the base verb *drop*.

This type of deviation differs fundamentally from compressed online abbreviations such as *Pls* or *Gud mrng*. The issue here concerns morphosyntactic rule application rather than graphological economy.

Similarly, the following example reveals broader structural instability:

26. Is any of the quiz portal close?

be any of DEF quiz portal close

“Are any of the quiz portals closed?”

The sentence contains several interacting grammatical problems:

- instability in singular/plural agreement,
- inconsistent noun phrase projection,
- adjective-participle confusion,
- and problematic auxiliary selection.

The accumulation of these features suggests competence-related instability extending beyond temporary performance reduction.

Importantly, however, the findings indicate that the boundaries between performance adaptation, multilingual restructuring, and competence instability are not always entirely discrete. Certain expressions exhibit overlapping influences simultaneously. Consider the following example:

27. Ur message no go well bro

your message NEG FUT/go well brother

“Your message is not good, brother.”

The utterance combines:

- graphological reduction (*Ur*),
- Nigerian Pidgin-influenced negation (*no go well*),
- and informal discourse vocabulary (*bro*).

The resulting structure therefore cannot be explained adequately through a single analytical category. It simultaneously reflects digital abbreviation, multilingual restructuring, and interactional informality.

A similarly layered example appears below:

28. But rn the audience no go understand am

but right-now DEF audience NEG FUT understand 3SG.OBJ

“But right now the audience will not understand it.”

The sentence combines:

- graphological compression (*rn*),
- Nigerian Pidgin future marking (*go*),
- and Nigerian Pidgin object pronoun structure (*am*).

Such expressions demonstrate that digitally mediated ESL discourse frequently involves multiple interacting linguistic processes operating simultaneously within single utterances.

The findings therefore strongly suggest that online language cannot be interpreted adequately through simplistic binaries such as “correct” versus “incorrect.” Rather, digitally mediated syntax exists on a continuum involving:

- performance economy,
- multilingual restructuring,
- interactional adaptation,
- orthographic reduction,
- discourse pragmatics,
- and variable grammatical control.

This continuum is particularly important within multilingual second language environments such as Nigeria, where English constantly interacts with highly productive contact varieties and indigenous linguistic systems. Under such conditions, digitally mediated discourse becomes a site of ongoing syntactic negotiation rather than a domain governed exclusively by the grammatical norms of formal Standard English.

At the same time, the findings caution against romanticising all nonstandard digital structures as merely creative multilingual innovation. While many constructions clearly reflect interactionally efficient multilingual adaptation, others reveal genuine instability involving agreement, article systems, tense morphology, and countability distinctions. A balanced analytical position therefore requires recognition of both dimensions simultaneously.

Overall, the findings reveal that Nigerian digital ESL communication is characterised by a complex interaction between performance-based reduction, multilingual restructuring, and competence-related grammatical instability. The digitally mediated environment amplifies tendencies toward compression and economy, while simultaneously providing fertile space for hybrid syntactic experimentation and multilingual communicative adaptation.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined ellipsis, compression, and hybrid syntax in Nigerian digital ESL communication through the analysis of naturally occurring WhatsApp interactions among Nigerian undergraduates.

Situated within the broader theoretical domains of computer-mediated discourse, interlanguage studies, and applied second language syntax, the study interrogated the structural organisation of digitally mediated discourse in order to determine how online communication practices shape syntactic performance within a multilingual ESL environment.

The findings reveal that Nigerian digital discourse is profoundly characterised by elliptical reduction, syntactic compression, graphological economy, and multilingual hybridisation. Digitally mediated interaction frequently suppresses recoverable grammatical material, abbreviates orthographic forms, reduces syntactic projections, and reorganises clause structures in ways shaped by interactional immediacy, processing economy, and contextual recoverability. Expressions such as *Coming now*, *Done already*, *No time explain now*, and *Which tomorrow?* demonstrate that online communication often privileges communicative sufficiency over grammatical explicitness. Within such interactional environments, interlocutors rely heavily upon shared contextual cognition and discourse continuity for interpretive reconstruction.

The study further demonstrates that syntactic compression within Nigerian digital discourse is strongly conditioned by performance pressure and interactional urgency. Users operating within rapidly unfolding conversational environments routinely adopt economical formulation strategies capable of reducing processing demands while sustaining communicative flow. Consequently, many compressed online structures emerge not from absence of grammatical knowledge but from interactionally motivated performance adaptation. The findings therefore challenge simplistic deficit-oriented interpretations that treat all digitally reduced syntax as evidence of linguistic deterioration.

Perhaps most significantly, the study reveals the pervasive presence of hybrid syntactic structures arising from sustained interaction between English and Nigerian Pidgin within digitally mediated communication. The recurrent deployment of Nigerian Pidgin tense-aspect markers, focus constructions, negation systems, discourse particles, and pronoun structures demonstrates that multilingual grammatical resources play a central role in shaping online ESL interaction. Expressions such as *Assignment don choke*, *Na my cap I dey find*, *SUG no dey function again*, and *I no suppose react abi* reveal highly organised multilingual restructuring rather than random grammatical breakdown. These constructions illustrate that Nigerian digital discourse frequently operates through fluid multilingual syntactic negotiation in which users strategically mobilise available linguistic repertoires for communicative effectiveness, pragmatic intensification, and interactional solidarity.

At the same time, the study also identifies genuine areas of competence-related grammatical instability involving article usage, agreement systems, tense morphology, and countability distinctions. Structures such as *All these information are too much* and *My salary still hasn't drop* indicate that not all nonstandard digital forms are reducible either to performance economy or multilingual restructuring. Consequently, the findings underscore the necessity of maintaining analytical distinction between temporary performance-based reduction, stable multilingual restructuring, and deeper morphosyntactic instability within Standard English grammar.

Overall, the study argues that Nigerian digital ESL communication constitutes neither random linguistic degeneration nor merely playful linguistic experimentation. Rather, it represents a highly complex interactional domain within which technological affordances, multilingual competence, discourse pragmatics, psycholinguistic processing, and variable grammatical control converge in the shaping of syntactic behaviour. Digitally mediated discourse therefore demands analytical frameworks capable of accommodating multilingual hybridity, interactional adaptation, and performance-conditioned variation without collapsing all nonstandard structures into simplistic narratives of linguistic decline.

The study contributes to the growing scholarship on computer-mediated discourse, digital applied linguistics, Nigerian English, and multilingual second language communication by foregrounding the syntactic organisation of naturally occurring Nigerian digital discourse. More broadly, it contributes to ongoing theoretical debates concerning the reconfiguration of language structure and syntactic performance within technologically mediated multilingual environments increasingly shaping contemporary communicative practice.

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