

Article

'She dey studio; Dem dey for road': Locative Constructions in Radio Discourse of Nigerian Pidgin Varieties

Damilola Oyeyipo¹, Adebola Adebileje²

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria

Correspondence: **Damilola Oyeyipo**, oyeyipo16023@run.edu.ng

Abstract

This study investigates locative constructions in live radio discourse from the Warri and Lagos Nigerian Pidgin (NP) varieties using a corpus-based, mixed-methods, descriptive design. The dataset comprises 42 hours of spontaneous radio broadcasts (21 hours per region). The study integrates M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Adele Goldberg's Construction Grammar (CxG) to account for both the functional realisation and constructional patterning of locative meaning, further framed by the typological Basic Locative Construction (BLC). Data are analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Frequency distribution of NP spatial prepositions shows that for occurs 820 times (36.6%), followed by of (466; 20.8%) and to (189; 8.43%), highlighting the grammatical centrality and multifunctionality of for in NP discourse. Focusing on locative constructions built on the stative/existential verb dey, distributional analysis reveals regional variation. Lagos NP strongly favours the bare locative construction (NP + dey + LOC; e.g., she dey studio), accounting for 57 of 75 tokens (76%), whereas Warri NP exhibits greater constructional diversity: 24 of 66 tokens (36.4%) are bare dey forms and 18 (27.3%) are dey for (NP + dey + for + LOC; e.g., dem dey for road), alongside prepositionally stacked forms (dey for inside, dey inside, dey ontop, dey on). A chi-square test on the collapsed bare-vs-marked construction contrast confirms that the regional distributional difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 22.55$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). The findings indicate that, while both varieties share a common locative strategy anchored on dey, Warri NP shows higher productivity of prepositionally marked and stacked constructions – a difference of constructional entrenchment and productivity rather than structural divergence. The study contributes to descriptive Pidgin linguistics, corpus-based variation studies, and theoretical discussion of microvariation in contact languages.

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin, Locative constructions, Radio discourse, Corpus linguistics, Construction grammar, Regional variation

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with over 520 indigenous languages spoken alongside English, reflecting centuries of migration, trade, and cultural contact (Akindele, Oladepo, & Akano, 2022). In this multilingual environment, Nigerian Pidgin has emerged as a widely used lingua franca, enabling communication across ethnic, social, and educational boundaries (Nlem & Epepe, 2025). Although the exact number of native speakers is difficult to determine, studies suggest that over half of the Nigerian population can communicate in Pidgin (Ihemere, 2006; Faraclas, 2008). Far from being a simplified form of speech, Nigerian Pidgin exhibits systematic patterns in syntax, morphology, and discourse, functioning as a productive linguistic system capable of encoding complex meanings (Motanya, Toro, & Nasir, 2025). Varieties of Nigerian Pidgin have emerged over the years, influenced by the communities that use them. Substrate influence contributes to the categorisation of these varieties: where the Edo language influences Nigerian Pidgin in Edo State, there is an Edo NP variety; Yoruba influences the NP spoken in Lagos, giving the Lagos NP variety; and Urhobo, Itsekiri, and Ijaw languages

influence Warri Pidgin, while Hausa similarly influences the variety spoken in northern Nigeria.

Despite the attested widespread use of NP, some regional varieties remain underrepresented in linguistic research. Though Lagos Nigerian Pidgin has received substantial scholarly attention (Deuber, 2005; Osoba, 2015), its comparison with varieties spoken in the Niger Delta, such as Warri Nigerian Pidgin, has been largely overlooked in corpus-based grammatical studies (Okitikpi & Obobolo, 2025). Warri, a major urban centre in Delta State, is characterised by intensive multilingual contact, where speakers frequently navigate among indigenous languages, English, and Pidgin. This contact environment has produced a variety that is highly expressive and socially salient, particularly influenced by the Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ijaw languages (Okitikpi & Obobolo, 2025). Its reputation as a "deep Pidgin" makes Warri an ideal site for examining locative constructions in natural discourse.

Lagos NP shares some contact characteristics with the Warri variety, as Lagos is also a cosmopolitan and heterogeneous city. The Lagos variety is characterised by its adaptability and lexical borrowing from English and indigenous languages, particularly Yoruba. Lagos Pidgin has emerged as a dynamic sociolect influenced by the city's multiculturalism, technological integration, and vibrant youth culture. As a lingua franca among Lagosians of diverse linguistic backgrounds, it serves both practical and identity functions, combining intelligibility with social resonance. Studies on NP (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Faraclas, 1996) have generally characterised it as a language of the street and popular culture possessing distinctive features that reflect the city's metropolitan complexity.

Radio broadcasts are particularly valuable for corpus-based studies because they capture authentic, spontaneous speech produced in communicative situations. Warri and Lagos radio programmes, including news segments, talk shows, and listener call-ins, provide high-frequency, context-rich examples of Pidgin in use. Unlike elicited data, broadcast discourse reveals recurrent constructional patterns in real time, exposing both preferred usage and subtle variations across speakers and contexts.

Several studies (Bobuafor, 2013; Dorvlo, 2008; Levinson & Wilkins, 2006; Ameka et al., 1999) have contributed significantly to the analysis of locative constructions. Levinson and Wilkins (2006) define basic locative constructions as the forms typically employed to answer a "where" question, thereby performing a core locative function. In other words, they are the linguistic expressions used to indicate the location of an entity when its position is being queried; that is, locatives indicate location or spatial relations (e.g., "in," "at," "on"). In NP, however, locatives are not expressed through a distinct grammatical case as in English and some other languages; they are realised through prepositions, copulas, and serialised verbs – for example, *Dem waka go market buy fish* 'they walked to the market to buy fish'. Examples include NP + *dey* + locative NP (e.g., *dem dey for road*) and motion verbs with locative complements (e.g., *comot for house*). The structure *comot for house* consists of a verb and a prepositional phrase (PP): *comot* is a lexical verb (V) meaning 'move out/exit', while *for house* is a prepositional phrase functioning as a locative complement, illustrating how verbs, particles, and noun phrases combine into single functional units (Mensah, 2012). Examining these constructions offers insight into how grammatical structure emerges from usage and aligns with functionalist and usage-based principles. This study therefore aims to explore

how locative constructions are realised with the copula *dey* and spatial prepositions in the NP radio discourse of the Warri and Lagos varieties.

Research Questions

The study is guided by three research questions:

1. What are the most frequent spatial prepositions in the locative constructions of the Lagos and Warri NP varieties?
2. How are locative meanings realised in the Lagos and Warri NP varieties?
3. Are there divergent locative constructions between the Lagos and Warri NP varieties?

Literature Review

One of the most comprehensive descriptions of the NP copular system is offered by Mazzoli (2013), whose corpus-based analysis of modern Western NP shows that locative and existential meanings are realised by the copular form *dey*. Drawing on a spoken corpus collected in Lagos, Mazzoli demonstrates that the copular *dey* is distributionally distinct from the equative and ascriptive copulas (*be* and *na*), and that *dey* governs locative arguments, prepositional phrases, and intransitive existential contexts. This work provides essential grammatical evidence for how locative meaning is systematically expressed in NP and offers an empirical basis for analyses of locative clauses such as *she dey studio* and *dem dey for road* found in everyday discourse. While Mazzoli's (2013) thesis does not focus exclusively on locatives as a standalone category, its categorisation of *dey* as the verb encoding location and existence directly situates locative constructions within the broader NP grammatical system and establishes the predicate mechanisms central to locative meaning.

Structural variation in NP copula usage has also been documented in studies of spoken corpora. Agbo and Plag (2020) analyse copula constructions in the International Corpus of English, Nigeria (ICE Nigeria) and highlight the distribution and variation of NP copulas, including locative forms, across speakers. Although their focus is on the relationship between Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin, their findings consistently show that the NP copula *dey* functions as a locative predicator and occurs with spatial complements, confirming the central role of these constructions in real speech data.

In addition to copular analyses, comparative and creolistic research offers relevant insights into the nature of locative constructions in contact languages that share structural parallels with NP. Essegbey (2005) explores the basic locative construction (BLC) in Gbe languages and Surinamese creoles, showing that invariant locative predicates combined with spatial complements are typologically characteristic of creoles and contact varieties. Although that study does not directly focus on NP, its analytical framing provides a useful typological benchmark for understanding how locative meanings are realised in English-based pidgins and creoles more generally, including strategies for encoding location in the absence of inflectional case marking. This comparative backdrop is taken up in the present study's application of BLC to NP locatives (see Theoretical Framework).

Another strand of research examines locative markers beyond the core copula. Corum's (2012) componential study of locative *for* in West African Pidgin English varieties shows that prepositional locative markers such as *for* have grammaticalised functions in spatial expressions, contributing to subtle locative meaning. While Corum's work spans West African pidgins generally rather than NP exclusively, it underscores the productivity and semantic breadth of prepositional locative markers in pidgin/creole contexts and offers comparative evidence for how NP locatives might behave in discourse.

Descriptive studies of NP grammar, such as Faraclas (1996), further confirm that locative/existential copula forms are distinguished in NP and can occur with a variety of complement types, including locative adverbials and prepositional phrases. These descriptive accounts support the view that NP locative constructions are systematically realisable in spoken and written discourse and that they exhibit a range of structural configurations depending on the spatial relations being encoded.

This body of research establishes that locative meaning in Nigerian Pidgin is encoded through a combination of predication (via an invariant locative copula) and spatial complements (often realised through prepositional forms or location phrases), and that these constructions are represented in both introspective and corpus data. Importantly, although direct studies focusing solely on locatives in NP remain limited, the copula literature and comparative locative analyses provide a robust framework for descriptive work examining how locative meanings are produced in natural discourse, such as radio speech across different regional varieties of NP.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Construction Grammar (CxG), complemented by the Basic Locative Construction (BLC) framework, to analyse the realisation of locative meanings in the Lagos and Warri varieties of Nigerian Pidgin.

Systemic Functional Grammar. Developed by M.A.K. Halliday, SFG views grammar as a resource for meaning-making in context. Clause structure is organised around three metafunctions – experiential, interpersonal, and textual. Of particular relevance here is the experiential metafunction, through which language encodes processes, participants, and circumstances. Locative meanings are typically realised as Circumstances of Location, which specify the spatial setting (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This perspective allows the study to examine how clauses in Lagos and Warri Nigerian Pidgin structurally encode spatial reference, particularly through the stative/existential verb *dey* and associated locative expressions.

Construction Grammar. While SFG explains how locative meaning functions within clause structure, CxG provides a complementary account of how such meanings become conventionally encoded. Construction Grammar, associated with Charles Fillmore and Adele Goldberg, treats grammar as a network of conventionalised form–meaning pairings (constructions). Under this view, recurrent patterns such as NP + *dey* + LOCATIVE or NP + *dey* + *for* + LOCATIVE constitute constructions because they systematically pair morphosyntactic form with locative interpretation. Although both constructions are available in the shared NP inventory, a usage-based reading of CxG predicts that they differ

in productivity and entrenchment across speech communities depending on frequency of use (Goldberg, 2006) – a prediction the present corpus directly tests.

Basic Locative Construction. Beyond grammatical description, the semantic and typological aspects of locative constructions in NP can be examined through the BLC framework formulated by Levinson and Wilkins (2006). According to this theory, languages encode the "where" question through constructions that signal spatial relations between a figure (the located entity) and a ground (the reference location), often realised as a predicate complemented by a locative NP or prepositional phrase. BLCs have been documented in a wide range of languages, both creoles and non-creoles, and are recognised as a cross-linguistically stable means of expressing basic spatial meaning. Applying this framework to NP, the invariant copula *dey* functions as the locative predicate, while locative complements such as *studio* or *road* serve as the ground. Prepositions such as *for* may optionally mark the ground, yielding constructions like *dem dey for road*, whereas zero-preposition constructions (e.g., *she dey studio*) reflect a simplification pattern common in contact languages. This aligns with cross-linguistic observations that creoles and pidgins often favour analytic strategies over morphological marking to encode location (Levinson & Wilkins, 2006; Essegbey, 2005). Framing NP locative constructions within the BLC framework allows a systematic, typologically informed account of how spatial meaning is encoded in spoken NP discourse, including radio broadcasts from Warri and Lagos.

The integration of these three perspectives enables the study to examine how locative constructions in Warri and Lagos Nigerian Pidgin encode spatial reference, how these constructions differ in frequency and distribution across varieties, and how repeated usage contributes to their conventionalisation within each speech community (Mensah, 2012; Ekpenyong & Sunday, 2024).

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses of locative constructions in the Lagos and Warri Nigerian Pidgin varieties. The goal is to examine how locative constructions in Warri and Lagos NP radio speech are realised and to determine the level of divergence between the two varieties. Employing a 21-hour corpus of transcribed radio recordings per region (collected 3 hours per day), and using both quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative functional interpretation, the study identifies recurrent constructions, examines their formal and functional properties, and highlights their conventionalised status within the two varieties.

Corpus Design and Data Collection

The corpus consists of 42 hours of Warri and Lagos Pidgin radio recordings – 21 hours for each region – gathered from four purposively selected radio stations:

1. **Kpoko FM 100.5 (Warri):** Known for broadcasting entirely in NP.
2. **Crown FM 89.9 (Warri):** Known to include NP in its programming, particularly during entertainment and talk shows – an ideal choice for studying everyday, colloquial Pidgin in a region where it is the main mode of informal communication.

3. **Wazobia FM 95.1 (Lagos):** Lagos, the economic and cultural hub of Nigeria, hosts a diverse population. Wazobia FM Lagos broadcasts in NP, highlighting how Pidgin is influenced by the city's multitude of languages and cosmopolitan nature.
4. **Naija FM 102.7 (Lagos):** Broadcasts many of its programmes in NP, one of the key reasons the station has become so popular in Lagos and across Nigeria.

These stations feature news segments, talk shows, and listener call-ins. All recordings were transcribed verbatim, following established orthographic conventions for Nigerian Pidgin.

Warri data. At Kpoko FM 100.5, data were collected from 5 hosts and various callers on the programme; at Crown FM 89.9, from 4 hosts and various callers. Because the network connection for these two stations was weak due to the researchers' distance from the city, the researchers used recorded live broadcasts streamed on Facebook to avoid obtaining inaccurate data. Recordings were conducted for 3 hours per day for 1 week at each station, totalling 21 hours.

Lagos data. At Wazobia FM 95.1, data were collected from 5 hosts and various callers; at Naija FM 102.7, from 3 hosts and various callers. Recordings were conducted 3 hours per day for 1 week at each station, totalling 21 hours. An equal number of hours ensures a balanced dataset.

The corpus compilation supports analysis of: (1) spatial preposition uses in spontaneous NP radio discourse; (2) high-frequency patterns of locative constructions; and (3) variations across speakers, contexts, and programmes.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative analysis, frequency counts and collocation patterns were generated using the corpus analysis tool AntConc 3.5.9 (Anthony, 2023). For the qualitative analysis, locative constructions in the two varieties were examined using SFG and CxG principles to identify spatial reference patterns and how these constructions differ in frequency and distribution, and the functional interpretation of each construction (semantic, pragmatic, and discourse-related) was based on the BLC principle and on Halliday's Circumstance of Location.

Statistical analysis. To test whether the observed regional difference in constructional preference is statistically reliable rather than an artefact of raw counts, the seven construction types were collapsed into a binary contrast – bare locative (NP + *dey* + LOC) versus prepositionally marked locative (all forms introducing a preposition) – and analysed with a chi-square test of independence. The collapsed test avoids the unreliable small expected cell counts that arise when all seven categories are cross-tabulated separately.

Presentation of Data and Findings

This section presents results addressing the three research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1: What are the most frequent spatial prepositions in the locative constructions of the Lagos and Warri NP varieties?

Using the compiled corpus of the Warri and Lagos varieties, all prepositional tokens were extracted and quantified using AntConc and manual coding. Frequency counts were normed and ranked in order of occurrence.

Table 1. Most frequent spatial prepositions in the Lagos and Warri NP corpus

Preposition	Warri	Lagos	Combined	Percentage (%)	Rank
<i>for</i>	408	412	820	36.60%	1st
<i>of</i>	270	196	466	20.80%	2nd
<i>to</i>	96	93	189	8.43%	3rd
<i>from</i>	58	116	174	7.76%	4th
<i>as</i>	92	79	171	7.63%	5th
<i>on</i>	89	77	166	7.41%	6th
<i>before</i>	41	42	83	3.70%	7th
<i>inside</i>	33	43	76	3.39%	8th
<i>at</i>	24	28	52	2.32%	9th
<i>by</i>	14	29	43	1.91%	10th
Total			2,240	100%	

Results from Table 1 show that *for* is the most frequent preposition in the corpus, with a combined raw count of 820 (408 in Warri, 412 in Lagos), representing 36.60% of the most frequently used prepositions in the two varieties, followed by *of* (20.80%), *to* (8.43%), *from* (7.76%), *as* (7.63%), *on* (7.41%), *before* (3.70%), *inside* (3.39%), *at* (2.32%), and *by* (1.91%). Although the dataset includes other prepositions, the items above are the most frequent for the purposes of the research question.

The dominance of *for* is not surprising. In Nigerian Pidgin, *for* is multifunctional: it can indicate location (*I dey for house*), the benefactor of an action (*she buy am for me*), or purpose (*I dey do am for your wellbeing*). The dominance of *for* in NP thus reflects its grammatical multifunctionality, encoding locative, benefactive, purposive, and even causal relations.

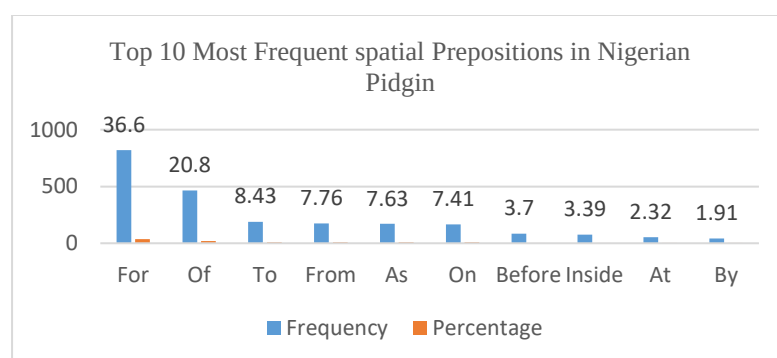


Figure 1: Most frequent spatial prepositions in NP

Figure 1 presents the top 10 spatial prepositions in the Warri and Lagos Nigerian Pidgin corpus. 'For' is the most frequent preposition (820 occurrences, 36.6%), followed by 'of' (466 occurrences, 20.8%), followed by 'to' (189 occurrences, 8.43%), followed by 'from' (174 occurrences, 7.76%), followed by 'as' (171 occurrences, 7.63%), followed by 'on' (166 occurrences, 7.41%), followed by 'before' (83 occurrences, 3.7%), followed by 'inside' (76 occurrences, 3.39%), followed by 'at' (52 occurrences, 2.32%) and last but not least, 'by' (43 occurrences, 1.91%). The data show a clear dominance of 'for' and 'of', reflecting their multifunctional usage in locative, directional, and abstract constructions in Nigerian Pidgin. Prepositions like 'inside' 'at' and 'bny' are least frequent, indicating lower functional load.

Research Question 2: How are locative meanings realised in Nigerian Pidgin in Lagos and Warri?

Locative constructions are linguistic forms that encode spatial location and typically answer a "where?" question. Following Halliday, locative meaning is realised within the experiential metafunction as a Circumstance of Location, specifying the spatial setting in which a Process unfolds. In Construction Grammar, following Goldberg, such meanings are encoded through conventionalised form-meaning pairings – recurrent constructions linking morphosyntactic patterning to spatial interpretation.

This section examines how locative meanings are realised in the Lagos and Warri varieties, focusing specifically on constructions that collocate with the copular/existential verb *dey* and the preposition *for*, as these constitute the most frequent structural environments for locative encoding in the corpus. Selected representative examples are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Selected locative constructions with copular *dey* in the Warri and Lagos NP varieties

Warri (<i>dey</i>)	Lagos (<i>dey</i>)
1 We dey Warri now	Bros dey here
2 Or you dey town	As we dey here
3 When we dey Libya	Motor dey Lagos
4 Them dey workshop	Kids fm dey there
5 She... dey inside the studio	Na who dey there
6 Their main office dey for St Peter	She dey inside the studio
7 Dem dey always dey inside bush	E dey for this our side
8 That story dey for page 19	That time I dey for East
9 E dey for inside page 2	E dey for Nigerian constitution
10 That one dey for inside page 25	And we dey ontop chuk mouth station

Distributional patterns of *dey* collocates. Counting all *dey* + locative collocation instances in each corpus yielded 66 such tokens in Warri and 75 in Lagos. Table 3 presents the frequency distribution of *dey* collocates (or their absence) in realising locative meaning in each variety.

Table 3. Distributional locative construction patterns with *dey* in Warri and Lagos

Construction	Warri: n (% of 66)	Lagos: n (% of 75)
<i>dey</i> (bare NP locative)	24 (36.4%)	57 (76.0%)
<i>dey for</i>	18 (27.3%)	7 (9.3%)
<i>dey for inside</i>	7 (10.6%)	1 (1.3%)
<i>dey inside</i>	6 (9.1%)	6 (8.0%)
<i>dey on</i>	7 (10.6%)	1 (1.3%)
<i>dey ontop</i>	3 (4.5%)	3 (4.0%)
<i>dey into</i>	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
Total	66 (100%)	75 (100%)

It is immediately evident that the two varieties differ in their preferred locative strategy. In Warri, bare *dey* accounts for 24 of 66 tokens (36.4%), while prepositionally marked and stacked forms together account for the remaining 42 tokens (63.6%): *dey for* appears 18 times (27.3%), *dey for inside* 7 times (10.6%), *dey on* 7 times (10.6%), *dey inside* 6 times (9.1%), *dey ontop* 3 times (4.5%), and *dey into* once (1.5%). In Lagos, by contrast, bare *dey* overwhelmingly dominates at 57 of 75 tokens (76.0%), while *dey for* (7; 9.3%), *dey inside* (6; 8.0%), *dey ontop* (3; 4.0%), *dey for inside* (1; 1.3%), and *dey on* (1; 1.3%) occur at markedly lower frequencies, and *dey into* does not occur at all.

Statistical confirmation. Because several construction types occur with very low cell counts, a chi-square test was applied to the collapsed bare-versus-marked contrast. In Warri, 24 of 66 tokens (36.4%) were bare and 42 (63.6%) prepositionally marked; in Lagos, 57 of 75 (76.0%) were bare and 18 (24.0%) marked. The test confirms that this regional difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 22.55$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the claim that the two varieties differ reliably in constructional preference rather than merely in sample noise.

Locative Meaning as Circumstance: The Role of *dey*

Across both varieties, *dey* functions as a stative/existential process introducing a locative relation between a Figure (typically the Subject) and a Ground (location). Clauses such as *Bros dey here*, *We dey Warri now*, and *Nation dey here* exhibit the pattern

(Participant) + dey + (Circumstance, i.e., Location)

Here the locative phrase functions as a Circumstance of Place. However, the structural realisation of that Circumstance differs across the two varieties. From a Construction Grammar perspective, these patterns instantiate a **Stative Locative Construction** – (NP + *dey* + LOCATIVE) is a regular NP structure used to express that someone or something is located in a particular place (Levinson & Wilkins, 2006: a BLC whose predicate is *dey* and whose complement is the ground).

Comparative Functional Interpretation

Warri variety. In the Warri data, locative meaning is realised through a relatively balanced distribution between the bare locative construction (NP + *dey* + NP; 24 tokens) and prepositionally marked forms (*dey for*, *dey for inside*, *dey on*, *dey inside*, *dey ontop*; 42 tokens). Warri NP thus exhibits what may be called a network of competing locative constructions:

- **Bare Stative Locative Construction:** *we dey here, we dey Libya;*
- **Prepositional Locative Construction:** *these people wey dey inside bush, their main office dey for St Peter;*
- **Stacked / Complex Prepositional Construction:** *e dey for inside page 2.*

The relatively high occurrence of *dey for* suggests that the preposition *for* is productive in spatial encoding in Warri NP.

Lagos variety. In contrast, the Lagos data overwhelmingly favour the bare locative construction, with 57 instances of *dey* directly preceding the locative expression (e.g., *Bros dey here; Motor dey Lagos; Kids fm dey there*). The use of *dey for* is significantly reduced (7 instances), and complex forms such as *dey for inside* occur minimally. Functionally, this suggests that in Lagos NP locative meaning is most frequently realised through direct juxtaposition of *dey* and the locative noun phrase, without an intervening preposition. Constructionally, it indicates that the Bare Stative Locative Construction is the dominant form-meaning pairing in Lagos NP: (NP + *dey* + NP) = spatial location. The prepositional construction remains available but peripheral.

Functional level (meaning). In both varieties, locative meaning is primarily realised as (1) a Circumstance of Location (Place) and (2) introduced by the stative process *dey*. Thus both varieties rely on *dey* as the core functional resource for encoding spatial existence or presence.

Constructional level (form).

Table 4. Constructional (form) contrasts between Warri and Lagos NP

Warri NP	Lagos NP
Greater reliance on prepositionally marked and stacked constructions (<i>dey for, dey for inside</i>) alongside bare forms.	Strong preference for the zero-marked bare locative construction.

Table 4 summarises the two varieties' preferred constructional encoding. This suggests that locative meaning in NP is not encoded by a single grammatical rule but by a network of constructions whose relative frequencies vary by region. The varieties differ in the strength and productivity of particular locative constructions within their constructional inventories. We may conclude that locative meanings in Lagos and Warri NP are realised primarily through stative locative constructions built around *dey*, which encodes existential presence and introduces a Circumstance of Location.

Research Question 3: Are there divergent locative constructions between the Lagos and Warri NP varieties?

The analysis above establishes the structural mechanisms through which spatial reference is encoded in each variety; this section determines whether those mechanisms reflect systematic regional divergence.

Table 5. Differences in the structural realisation of Warri and Lagos NP

Warri Nigerian Pidgin

Employs both bare and prepositionally marked locative constructions, with substantial use of *dey for* and related stacked complex prepositional forms.

Lagos Nigerian Pidgin

Overwhelmingly favours the bare *dey* + locative construction, with reduced reliance on overt prepositional marking.

Although both varieties employ a shared inventory of locative constructions centred on *dey*, their relative constructional preferences differ. From a Construction Grammar perspective, divergence does not necessarily entail the presence of entirely distinct constructions; it may instead manifest as differences in the productivity, frequency, and entrenchment of competing form–meaning pairings within a shared grammatical network.

The corpus analysis confirms that Warri NP demonstrates greater productivity of prepositional and stacked locative constructions, such as *dey for* and *dey for inside*, while Lagos NP overwhelmingly favours the bare stative locative construction (*dey* + locative). The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 22.55$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that this contrast is statistically robust. This indicates that the divergence between the two varieties is primarily distributional rather than structural: both share the same core constructions, but they differ in constructional preferences and degrees of entrenchment within their respective speech communities.

Discussion of Findings

The corpus evidence indicates that Lagos and Warri Nigerian Pidgin share a set of locative constructions built around the stative/existential verb *dey*, including bare (NP + *dey* + LOC) and prepositional/stacked (NP + *dey* + *for* + LOC; *dey for inside*) forms. Although these constructions are present in both varieties, their relative productivity differs: Lagos favours the bare pattern, while Warri shows greater use of prepositional and stacked constructions. This distribution reflects usage-driven divergence rather than distinct grammatical categories.

From a Systemic Functional Grammar perspective, *dey* encodes the Circumstance of Location, marking the Ground of locative relations (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In BLC terms, *dey* is the invariant locative predicate and the complement is the Ground; the two varieties differ only in whether that Ground is overtly marked by a preposition (*for*, *inside*, *ontop*, *on*) or juxtaposed directly. Construction Grammar accounts for how these forms become entrenched: high-frequency bare constructions in Lagos indicate conventionalisation in a cosmopolitan context, whereas Warri's prepositional productivity suggests either substrate retention or local grammaticalisation of *for* (Goldberg, 2006). The statistical significance of the bare-versus-marked contrast strengthens the claim of differential entrenchment rather than mere performance variation. Corpus examples illustrate these patterns: bare constructions in Lagos often occur in rapid, telegraphic discourse, whereas Warri speakers frequently use layered forms, reflecting a preference for explicit locative marking.

Two explanatory pressures may account for the regional difference. First, Lagos NP, as a metropolitan sociolect in sustained contact with Standard English and official media registers, may favour the more compact, preposition-less bare construction that maximises

economy in fast-paced broadcast speech. Second, Warri NP's higher prepositional productivity may reflect substrate retention, as the surrounding Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ijaw languages make systematic use of overt locative marking; this hypothesis, however, requires dedicated comparative work (see limitations below).

Historical and comparative work positions these patterns within broader West African pidgin typology. The presence of the *for* construction aligns with creole and pidgin antecedents shaped by Atlantic contact and local substrate patterns (Corum, 2012). Corpus studies comparing Warri, Lagos, and Edo varieties (Oyeyipo & Adebileje, 2025; Okitikpi & Obobolo, 2025) confirm that regional frequency differences are robust and likely influenced by urbanisation, contact with Standard English, and local sociolinguistic norms. The present study extends this line of work by demonstrating the distributional nature of the divergence within a single matched radio corpus.

These findings carry three main implications. First, regional divergence in locative constructions is a matter of usage frequency and entrenchment rather than categorical grammar change — both varieties operate within the same constructional inventory. Second, differential productivity aligns with cognitive and social pressures on speakers, illustrating how constructional patterns are shaped by both frequency and social context. Third, further research should examine social variables such as age, register, and education to clarify how urban contact and substrate retention interact to shape constructional preferences.

Limitations and future directions. Three limitations temper the strength of the conclusions. First, the corpus is confined to radio speech (news, talk, call-ins); findings may not extend to informal face-to-face interaction. Second, the small number of callers and hosts per station means that individual speaker idiosyncrasy could inflate apparent regional differences; a study with more unique speakers would confirm the aggregate pattern. Third, the substrate-retention account of Warri's prepositional productivity is advanced provisionally, pending direct comparative data from Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ijaw. Subsequent research should also apply the same constructional analysis to written NP, to a broader speaker sample, and to a third variety (e.g., Edo NP) to test the generality of the entrenchment-gradient account.

Collectively, these patterns reinforce the view of Nigerian Pidgin as a single linguistic system with subtle regional specialisations, highlighting both its shared grammatical core and locally emergent variation.

References

- Agbo, F., & Plag, I. (2020). The relationship of Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin in Nigeria: Evidence from copula constructions in ICE Nigeria. *Journal of Language Contact*, 13(1), 351–388.
- Akindele, O., Oladepo, T., & Akano, A. (2022). Linguistic diversity, Nigerian indigenous languages, and the choice of English for national sustainability. *Journal of Language and Society in Africa*, 15(2), 101–118.

- Akinlotan, M. (2022). Wetin una dey yan: Variation in the use of copula *dey* in Nigerian Pidgin English. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 40(3), 288–305. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2022.2058568>
- Ameka, F. K., De Witte, C., & Wilkins, D. P. (1999). *Picture Series for Positional Verbs: Eliciting the verbal component in locative descriptions* (MPI manual). Nijmegen: Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.
- Anthony, L. (2023). *AntConc* (Version 3.5.9) [Computer software]. Waseda University. <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>
- Bobuafor, M. (2013). *A grammar of Tafi* (Doctoral dissertation). LOT (Landelijke Onderzoekschool Taalwetenschap), The Netherlands.
- Corum, M. (2012). On the origins of locative *for* in West African Pidgin English: A componential approach. Available via ResearchGate.
- Deuber, D. (2005). Nigerian Pidgin in Lagos: Language contact, variation and change in an African urban setting. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jpcl.22.2.12>
- Dorvlo, K. (2008). *A grammar of Logba (Ikpana)* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Leiden University, Netherlands.
- Ekpenyong, A., & Sunday, I. (2024). Nigerian Pidgin as a bridging language in formal and informal settings. *Journal of African Sociolinguistics*, 6(1), 77–91.
- Elugbe, B. O., & Omamor, A. P. (1991). *Nigerian Pidgin: Background and prospects*. Heinemann Educational Books.
- Essegbey, J. (2005). The "basic locative construction" in Gbe languages and Surinamese creoles. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 20(2), 229–249.
- Faraclas, N. (1996). *Nigerian Pidgin* (Descriptive Grammar). London: Routledge.
- Faraclas, N. (2008). Nigerian Pidgin English: Morphology and syntax. In R. Mesthrie (Ed.), *Varieties of English: Africa, South and Southeast Asia* (Vol. 4, pp. 340–367). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Faraclas, N. (2013). Nigerian Pidgin. In S. M. Michaelis, P. Maurer, M. Haspelmath, & M. Huber (Eds.), *The survey of pidgin and creole languages* (Vol. 1, pp. 176–184). Oxford University Press.
- Fillmore, C., Kay, P., & Lakoff, G. (1988). Regularity and idiomaticity in grammatical constructions: The case of *let alone*. *Language*, 64(3), 501–538. <https://doi.org/10.2307/414531>
- Goldberg, A. E. (1995). *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure*. University of Chicago Press.

- Goldberg, A. E. (2006). *Constructions at work: The nature of generalization in language*. Oxford University Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Ihemere, K. (2006). A basic description and analytic treatment of noun clauses in Nigerian Pidgin. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(3), 296–313.
- Levinson, S. C., & Wilkins, D. P. (2006). *Grammars of space: Explorations in cognitive diversity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mazzoli, M. (2013). *Copulas in Nigerian Pidgin* (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Padua.
- Mensah, J. (2012). Constructional approaches to Nigerian Pidgin: Encoding meaning in context. *Journal of West African Linguistics*, 18(2), 123–145.
- Motanya, C., Toro, M., & Nasir, A. (2025). A study of syntax of Nigerian Pidgin and Creole. *Interdisciplinary Journal of African & Asian Studies*, 14(2), 51–68.
- Nlem, E., & Epepe, M. (2025). Nigerian Pidgin as a lingua franca: Patterns and functions in everyday communication. *International Journal of African Linguistics*, 9(1), 45–63.
- Okitikpi, M., & Obobolo, V. (2025). Influence of social variation (age) in the use of Nigerian Pidgin: A survey of selected cities (Warri and Port Harcourt) in Nigeria. *Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies*, 13(1), 60–69.
- Osoba, J. B. (2015). Analysis of discourse in Nigerian Pidgin. *Journal of Universal Language*, 16(1), 131–159. <https://doi.org/10.22425/jul.2015.16.1.131>
- Oyeyipo, D., & Adebileje, A. (2025). A corpus-assisted sociolinguistic assessment of preposition use in selected varieties of Nigerian Pidgin radio programmes. *Humanus Discourse*, 5(7), 1–25.
- Yakpo, K. (2024). West African Pidgin: world language against the grain. *Africa Spectrum*, 59(2), 180–203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00020397241263364>