Language Variation and Style in the Film *Selina Tested*: Implications for Translation

Christopher Chinedu Nwike
cnwike@noun.edu.ng
Department of Linguistics, Foreign and Nigerian Languages,
National Open University of Nigeria
&
Augustina Ngozi Eze
augustina.ngozi@unn.edu.ng
Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
&
Utah Nduka David[1]
Utah2011@gmail.com/nutah@noun.edu.ng
Centre of Excellence in Migration and Global Studies
National Open University of Nigeria

Abstract

This study explores the intersection of communication, language variation, and stylistic choices in the Nigerian action web series "Selina Tested", with particular attention to the implications for translation and subtitling. The study is guided by four specific objectives: (a) to identify and categorise the different forms of language variation used in Selina Tested Season One; (b) to analyse the sociolinguistic functions of these variations in the film's narrative and character development; (c) to examine how such variations challenge translation and subtitling; and (d) to propose translation strategies suitable for preserving linguistic authenticity and meaning in similar Nigerian films. The study adopts a **qualitative descriptive research design,** *using* **textual and linguistic analysis**. *Data were collected through purposive sampling of key*

*scenes from Episodes 1 to 12, transcription of dialogues, identification of language features (Pidgin, slang, idioms, code-switching), and comparison with existing subtitles to evaluate shifts in meaning. The analysis is anchored on **Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory,** which prioritises conveying the original message's intended effect over literal accuracy. Findings reveal that the film's dialogue is dominated by Nigerian Pidgin, code-mixing, dialectal variation, and character-specific idiolects, each performing sociolinguistic functions such as asserting masculinity, street identity, and resistance. These features, however, pose translation challenges like idiomatic loss, subtitle condensation, and cultural opacity. The study proposes creative translation strategies including situational equivalence, gloss subtitles, multilingual subtitle tracks, and collaborative subtitling. It concludes by advocating for culturally informed approaches that preserve the stylistic richness and communicative force of indigenous urban cinema.*

Keywords: Language Variation, Nigerian Pidgin, Subtitling, Sociolinguistics, Translation Strategies

1. Background to the study

Language functions not merely as a conduit for communication but as a potent emblem of identity, socio-economic stratification, and cultural alignment. In linguistically and culturally heterogeneous contexts such as Nigeria, the dynamics of language deployment, particularly within audiovisual media, reflect intricate sociolinguistic structures that encode societal hierarchies, patterns of interaction, and identity construction. A particularly salient exemplar of this linguistic complexity is the 2021 Nigerian web

series *Selina Tested*, a high-octane action-drama predominantly rendered in Nigerian Pidgin English and distinguished by its deployment of vivid street vernacular, gang-related jargon, and emotionally charged expressions.

The exploration of language variation within audiovisual texts such as *Selina Tested* offers a fertile ground for interrogating how stylistic and linguistic choices fulfil both narrative and ideological functions. As elucidated by Holmes (2013) and further reinforced by Nwike and Eze (2024), language variation is conditioned by an array of sociolinguistic variables including geographic provenance, socio-economic class, age, gender, and situational context. In cinematic discourse, such variation is often a deliberate construct, designed to imbue characters with verisimilitude, articulate power asymmetries, and convey culturally embedded meanings.

In *Selina Tested*, the deliberate use of Nigerian Pidgin and the stratified stylistic repertoires across characters, ranging from protagonists like Aboy and Chiboy to rival factions and gang leaders, serve as semiotic mechanisms for asserting authority, performing identity, and navigating existential precarity within a volatile urban milieu. However, the intricate stylistic and sociolinguistic textures embedded in such productions pose formidable challenges when subjected to interlingual transfer, particularly via subtitling. Subtitling, a spatially and temporally constrained form of audiovisual translation, necessitates a delicate balance between semantic fidelity and formal economy, frequently resulting in reduction, simplification, or even distortion of source-text meaning (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). As Nwike (2023:117) cogently observes in his study on Igbo film subtitling, "subtitlers are often confronted with the dual task of preserving both the semantic

content and the sociocultural richness of dialogues, which may not always have direct equivalents in the target language."

This translational dilemma is further exacerbated when the source language comprises non-standard, idiomatic, or culturally saturated varieties, as is the case with Nigerian Pidgin in *Selina Tested*. Theoretical debates within translation studies, particularly those advanced by Venuti (1995), foreground the tension between foreignisation, retaining the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the source text, and domestication, adapting the text to conform to the norms and expectations of the target audience. In the context of *Selina Tested*, this dichotomy becomes critical: should the raw, inventive, and street-wise vitality of Nigerian Pidgin be preserved at the risk of alienating the TL audience, or should it be domesticated into a more palatable but culturally diluted Standard English?

From a sociolinguistic perspective, *Selina Tested* operates as a condensed reflection of Nigerian urban youth culture, replete with distinctive lexical, syntactic, and stylistic features. The language used transcends mere plot progression; it actively constructs a socio-cultural universe, enunciating the norms, ideologies, and power dynamics within the fictional world. This positions the series as a significant artefact for examining the role of stylistic variation within specific sociolects, and the degree to which such variation can be faithfully and effectively rendered across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Given the growing transnational reach of Nollywood and grassroots digital series like *Selina Tested*, it becomes imperative to critically examine how linguistic variation and stylistic nuance are negotiated in translation. Accordingly, this study seeks to bridge the disciplinary domains of sociolinguistics and translation studies by analysing the construction of linguistic style in the source text and evaluating the translational implications, particularly within the

constraints of subtitling, for preserving the sociocultural and stylistic integrity of the original.

1.1 *Selina Tested* Web Series: An Overview

Selina Tested is a widely acclaimed Nigerian action-drama web series created by Lightweight Entertainment, first released on YouTube in 2021. Set in a gritty, fictionalised urban environment in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, the series captures the intense realities of street life, focusing on the lives of two childhood friends, Aboy and Chiboy. Growing up in a violence-ridden neighbourhood, they are eventually drawn into the criminal underworld, where they confront rival gangs, betrayal, shifting loyalties, and moral dilemmas. The series skilfully weaves themes of brotherhood, revenge, survival, and ambition, offering a raw and compelling narrative that resonates with viewers.

One of the most striking aspects of the series is its linguistic richness. *Selina Tested* makes extensive use of Nigerian Pidgin English, urban slang, and coded street expressions, which authentically portray the socio-economic realities and linguistic identity of marginalised youth. The dialogue not only enhances realism but also reflects deeper issues such as class, power, and street credibility. These elements make the series an important case study for sociolinguistic analysis, especially in exploring how language functions in marginalised communities.

The show's low-budget production is compensated by high-energy editing, stylised action, and the charismatic performances of characters like Aboy, Chiboy, Sibi, Odogwu, and Tallest. It has built a strong fanbase, especially among Nigerian youth and diaspora audiences, thanks to its originality and cultural relatability. Academically, *Selina Tested* holds value across several disciplines. For translation studies, it presents challenges in subtitling or

adapting Nigerian Pidgin and idiomatic expressions for non-native speakers. In sociolinguistics, it explores the intersection of language, identity, and urban power structures. In media and cultural studies, it offers insight into contemporary African storytelling, youth masculinity, and grassroots digital cinema.

1.2 Contextualised definition of terms

This section of the study discusses different subheadings based on their peculiar senses as used in this study.

a. **Language Variation:** This refers to systematic differences in language use among individuals or within a single speaker, influenced by social factors like age, ethnicity, or status, (Nwagalaku, Obiora & Nwike, 2021). According to Labov (1972), such variation is socially meaningful. In *Selina Tested*, language variation manifests through **street slang, code-mixing, regional influence,** and distinct speech styles that reflect the characters' identities and social roles.

b. **Stylistics**: Stylistics studies the linguistic choices that shape tone, mood, and characterisation in texts (Nwike, 2023). As Wales (2014) notes, it connects **linguistic analysis with literary aesthetics**. The film employs stylistic variation through **coded street language and exaggerated expressions,** which are crucial for character development and cinematic atmosphere, elements important in translation.

c. **Nigerian Pidgin (NP):** NP is an English-based creole used widely across Nigeria for informal communication. As Akande & Salami (2010) observe, it **transcends ethnic boundaries** and reflects cultural identity. In *Selina Tested*, NP is central to expressing **street culture and youth identity,** though its informal and context-specific nature poses **challenges for subtitling and translation.**

d. **Subtitling:** This is the audiovisual translation of spoken dialogue into readable on-screen text, requiring attention to timing, brevity, and cultural accuracy (Nwike, Olaide, & Obiora, 2021). While *Selina Tested* is primarily in Pidgin, **subtitling it for wider audiences can dilute stylistic richness and local colour**, an issue this study critically engages.

e. **Code-Switching**: Code-switching involves alternating between languages or dialects in conversation to reflect identity, authority, or emotion (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Eze et al., 2023). In *Selina Tested*, characters switch between **Pidgin, English, and indigenous languages** for rhetorical effect, adding **stylistic complexity** and translation difficulty.

In summary based on the discourses, the key terms - language variation, stylistics, Nigerian Pidgin, subtitling, and code-switching are central to understanding how *Selina Tested* constructs meaning, identity, and street credibility through language. Language variation and code-switching reflect the characters' social roles, affiliations, and emotional states, while stylistics captures the expressive, hyperbolic, and culturally coded nature of their speech. Nigerian Pidgin serves as the primary medium, embedding local identity and informal communication, though its fluid and culture-bound nature poses challenges in subtitling. Subtitling, in turn, must navigate the tension between readability and stylistic preservation, often simplifying expressions that carry layered meanings. Collectively, these concepts reveal how linguistic choices shape the series' narrative depth and sociolinguistic realism.

1.3 Objectives of the study
The main aim of this study is to explore implications for translation of the language variation and style in the film *Selina Tested*. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

a. To identify and categorise the different forms of language variation used in *Selina Tested* Season one.
b. To analyse the sociolinguistic functions of these variations in the film's narrative structure and character development.
c. To examine how these language variations pose challenges for translation, especially in subtitling.
d. To propose translation approaches that can better handle the stylistic and sociolinguistic complexities of similar films in the Nigerian context.

1.4 Scope of the study

This study is limited to Season 1 of the Nigerian web series *Selina Tested*. It focuses specifically on the language variation used by major and supporting characters within this season. The analysis is strictly linguistic and sociolinguistic, with emphasis on the stylistic use of Nigerian Pidgin English, street slang, code-switching, and other markers of variation. Furthermore, the study examines how these elements affect the translation process, particularly subtitling, while also reflecting on broader implications for audiovisual translation in Nigerian media.

Overview of Newmark's Communicative Translation (1981 & 1988)

Peter Newmark introduced *communicative translation* in his influential works *Approaches to Translation* (1981) and *A Textbook of Translation* (1988). This approach aims to reproduce the same effect on the target language (TL) audience as the original had on its source audience. It focuses on naturalness, clarity, and emotional or psychological resonance rather than literal accuracy. Communicative translation is especially effective for texts that are spoken, persuasive, emotional, or context-driven, such as political

speeches, advertising slogans, or informal dialogue. The key features include its audience-oriented nature, use of idiomatic and fluent TL expressions, and attention to the illocutionary force (e.g., commands, warnings, jokes). It also allows for cultural adaptation, substituting culturally specific terms in the source language (SL) with familiar equivalents in the TL to maintain the intended effect.

A major strength of communicative translation lies in its ability to render culturally embedded and informal speech, such as urban dialects or oral narratives, in a way that preserves pragmatic meaning and communicative intent. It is particularly well-suited to translating Nigerian Pidgin English into Standard English, as many Pidgin expressions carry performative functions, such as threats, boasts, and affirmations, and depend on tone, slang, and cultural context. Examples like *"I go drill you wotowoto"* or *"Your face show, your shoe shine"* can be effectively rendered in English using equivalent expressions that capture their emotional force and context.

However, while communicative translation allows cultural adaptation, the translator must avoid excessive domestication that could erase the unique rhythm and inventiveness of the source language. Overall, its fluency, flexibility, and functionalist orientation make communicative translation an ideal model for handling expressive, street-level language like Nigerian Pidgin.

2. Review of related studies

This section reviews scholarly works relevant to the study of language variation, translation, and subtitling. Here, Eze and Nwike (2024) examined the **'sociolinguistic factors in translating Igbo proverbs into English,'** focusing on those directed at children. Using a qualitative descriptive design and data from bilingual texts, oral sources, and interviews, they analysed translation strategies

such as **literal rendition, dynamic equivalence, and paraphrasing,** showing how these affect cultural meaning and social intent. They concluded that sociolinguistic awareness is essential for effective translation of culturally rich texts.

Nwike (2023) studied **subtitling in selected Igbo films,** highlighting how idioms, proverbs, and tonal expressions are difficult to translate into English without losing cultural depth. He argues for more **culturally sensitive subtitling strategies** to preserve stylistic and sociolinguistic texture. While focused on Igbo, his findings support the present study on **Nigerian Pidgin,** which also poses unique translation challenges due to its informal, hybrid nature. Akande and Salami (2010) explored **attitudes toward Nigerian Pidgin among university students,** finding it serves as a **symbol of national identity and informal bonding,** especially among youth. Though not focused on audiovisual media, this study helps explain the popularity of Nigerian Pidgin in youth-centred content like *Selina Tested*.

Eme and Mbagwu (2011) investigated **language use in Nollywood films** and its impact on audience accessibility. They noted that the mix of English, Pidgin, and indigenous languages complicates subtitling for non-local audiences, making translation vital. However, their study is more general and does not delve into **stylistic variation or deep linguistic analysis.** Ohiaraumunna (2019) studied **translation problems and strategies for Nigerian Pidgin,** especially in written texts and film dialogue. He highlighted issues such as **untranslatability, loss of humour, and cultural references,** recommending strategies like **creative equivalence and annotation.** While highly relevant, the study is broad and does not focus on **specific films or stylistic variation,** but it directly informs the present research's translation component.

In line with the above discourses, none of the reviewed studies fully analyses the intersection of language variation, street style, and its implications for translation in a contemporary urban Pidgin-heavy web series like *Selina Tested*. This study fills that gap.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design, using textual and linguistic analysis. This approach allows for the detailed examination of dialogue, style, variation, and subtitling practices within *Selina Tested* season 1. The primary data is *Selina Tested* season one, (1–12 episodes approximately). Purposive sampling was used to select key episodes and scenes that contain rich examples of language variation, code-switching, slang, and culturally dense expressions. The data collection procedures are as follows:

   a. Transcription of selected scenes' dialogues from Season 1.
   b. Identification and categorisation of language features: Pidgin forms, idioms, slang, code-switching, and marked stylistic features.
   c. Comparison of original dialogues with available subtitles.
   d. Note translation shifts, loss/gain of meaning, and impact on narrative tone.

4. Presentation of data

Below are the notable phrases and statements from the characters in *Selina Tested* Web series season one. These statements are primarily in Nigerian Pidgin English, reflecting the unique linguistic styles of each character into the English language. The English translation is presented using **Newmark's Communicative Translation of 1981 and 1988.** Again, these translations aim to capture the essence of the

original Pidgin expressions. The context provided is based on common usage and the characters' personas within the series.

S/N	Pidgin English	English Translation	Contextual meaning
1	E clear!	It is clear.	A situation where something is obvious
2	I dey rugged and tested.	I am tough and experienced.	A self-description highlighting resilience and street credibility, as well as readiness for challenges.
3	I go drill you wotowoto if you challenge me.	I will deal with you severely if you challenge me.	Similar to Sibi's usage, indicating a serious threat or action.
4	I go drill you wotowoto.	I will deal with you thoroughly.	Similar to Aboy's usage, indicating a serious threat or action.
5	I go knack you shot, no body punu.	I will shoot you; no one will intervene.	A threat indicating decisive action without interference.
6	Heis! Kpogide, rabbers come board (RBS)	Hello! There is some money, come over.	Calling the attention of the concerned persons due to the availability of some money.

7	Lap my unit ngwangwa	Quickly come to my side.	When there is an urgent information
8	Who goes you?	Who are you?	Situation of identity revelation when one is new in an area.
9	Tanana me your eleven digit	Give me your phone number	Request for a phone number
10	My Facebook show for the ama, put calls	My face is recognised in the street, ask questions.	A challenge or threat to face someone head-on.
11	I go make you respect street.	I will subject you to the authorities of the street	Forcing someone to align to the rules of an area.
12	I go match you go upland.	I will confront you directly.	A challenge or threat to face someone head-on.
13	I go put am for your body wotowoto.	I will deal with you thoroughly.	A threat indicating that the speaker will take serious action against someone.
14	I go show you say I no be your mate.	We are not of the same level.	Measurement of class system
15	I no dey cap careless.	I do not talk carelessly.	An assertion of speaking with intention and seriousness.

16	I no dey comprison your caprison.	I do not understand what you are saying.	A dismissive statement, showing disinterest in someone's issues.
17	I no dey fear anybody for this area.	I do not fear anyone in this area.	An assertion of dominance and fearlessness.
18	I no dey fear die.	I do not fear death	A challenge or threat to face someone head-on.
19	I no dey play with my trigger.	I do not play with my gun	A serious threat to act or kill
20	I no dey run from wahala.	I do not fear problems	A challenge or threat to face someone head-on.
21	If dem born you well, cross this line.	If you are truly brave, cross this line.	A direct challenge to an adversary, questioning their courage.
22	No be who first pull trigger dey win fight. Na who get mind.	It is not about who shoots first; it's about who has courage	Aboy emphasizes that bravery and mental strength are more crucial than impulsive actions in confrontations.
23	We dey loyal!	We are loyal!	A declaration of allegiance, possibly to a group or cause.

24	Wetin dey sup?	What is happening?	A common greeting or inquiry about current events.
25	Your face show, your shoe shine.	You are recognised and respected.	A street slang used to acknowledge someone's prominence or style.
26	You go learn the hard way.	You will learn through tough experiences.	A warning that someone will face consequences.

4.1 Data analysis

This area addresses the different specific objectives of the study using the data in the table above, while adopting the precedents of the research objectives:

4.1.1 Identification and categorisation of language variation in *Selina Tested* – implications for the study

The identification and categorisation of language variation in *Selina Tested* are crucial for unpacking the sociolinguistic and stylistic dynamics of the series. These variations, ranging from Pidgin English to character-specific idiolects, not only reflect linguistic diversity but also contribute to characterisation, narrative intensity, cultural authenticity, and translation complexity. The implications of recognising and analysing these variations go beyond mere classification; they reveal how language functions as a tool for identity construction, group affiliation, and performative expression in the world of *Selina Tested*. Each category has unique implications for subtitling and linguistic analysis.

a. Pidgin English

Nigerian Pidgin serves as the linguistic foundation of the series, functioning as a neutral, street-level lingua franca that enables communication across ethnic and social lines. Its use in expressions such as "I dey rugged and tested" or "Wetin dey sup?" marks the dialogue as informal, expressive, and culturally rooted. The implication is twofold: first, it establishes a sense of realism and relatability for Nigerian audiences familiar with Pidgin; second, it challenges translators to preserve meaning, tone, and cultural flavour in subtitles without flattening the vibrancy and rhythm of the original dialogue.

b. Code-mixing and code-switching

The alternation between Pidgin, English, and indigenous expressions, e.g., "Lap my unit ngwangwa" or "My Facebook show for the ama" demonstrates the linguistic hybridity typical of urban Nigerian speech. These shifts serve rhetorical and stylistic purposes, signalling emphasis, modernity, or street credibility. Their identification highlights the need for subtitlers to not only translate but interpret why a switch occurs, often requiring creative solutions to reflect such layered speech dynamics. This variation reflects the multilingual reality of Nigeria and embeds socio-cultural depth into the dialogue.

c. Colloquialisms and slang

Colloquialisms like "wotowoto" or playful constructions like "Tanana me your eleven digit" function as markers of group identity and in-group solidarity. They intensify emotional expression, compress meaning, and often introduce rhythm or humour. Such slang carries strong connotative meanings and is often untranslatable in direct terms. Its recognition in the study

underscores the stylistic complexity of the dialogue, as well as the sociolinguistic bonds it creates among characters. For subtitlers, this raises the challenge of balancing intelligibility with cultural retention.

d. Dialectal variation

Expressions such as "I no dey comprison your caprison" showcase deliberate phonological and lexical distortions that mimic regional dialects or speech errors for comic or stylistic effect. These distortions contribute to the texture and playfulness of the language, while also serving as characterisation tools. Their inclusion in the categorisation draws attention to the performative and theatrical nature of the series' dialogue, where sound and rhythm are part of the communicative act. Translators must consider how much of this local colour can or should be preserved in subtitled English without rendering the text obscure.

e. Idiolect/character-specific usage

Phrases like "If dem born you well, cross this line" go beyond general Pidgin usage to reflect unique character traits such as bravado, masculinity, or defiance. These idiolectal patterns serve as linguistic signatures, distinguishing characters and reinforcing their psychological or social roles. Identifying such patterns is vital in subtitling, as these expressions carry character identity and narrative significance. A flat or generic translation would erase these distinctions, reducing the emotional and stylistic depth of the scene. From the above discourses, the identification and categorisation of language variation in *Selina Tested* reveal the intricate relationship between language, identity, and storytelling. These forms of variation are not merely decorative, they are fundamental to the series' stylistic design, cultural grounding, and communicative

power. So, recognising and analysing them enhances both linguistic scholarship and the practice of subtitling, providing insight into how multilingual urban Nigerian identities are voiced and visualised on screen.

4.1.2 Sociolinguistic functions in narrative and character development in *Selina Tested*

The language variation in *Selina Tested* performs critical sociolinguistic functions that go beyond communication; it becomes a tool for shaping narrative, identity, and social commentary. The film's intense use of Nigerian Pidgin, urban slang, and stylised expressions reflects not only linguistic creativity but also deep social meaning. Each category of language use contributes to character development, interactional dynamics, and the representation of socio-political realities in Nigeria's urban ghettos. Below is a critical discussion of how five key sociolinguistic functions operate in the narrative and character construction of the series.

a. Character identity and social class

Language serves as a primary marker of character identity and social positioning in *Selina Tested*. The use of Pidgin and stylised street slang is not incidental, it is a conscious representation of characters' ghetto upbringing, marginalisation, and resistance to formal institutions. For instance, the expression "I no dey fear anybody for this area" not only asserts physical dominance but also signals the speaker's embeddedness in a harsh urban environment where authority is negotiated through defiance. This linguistic identity aligns with their anti-establishment stance and positions them within a lower socio-economic class that values toughness, autonomy, and street credibility. Thus, language becomes an index of class identity,

functioning to differentiate characters based on their social experience and worldview.

b. Solidarity and group belonging

Slang expressions like "We dey loyal" illustrate how language fosters ingroup solidarity and emotional bonding. Within the gang and peer networks portrayed in the film, shared language codes become a badge of membership and a performance of group allegiance. This use of language reinforces communal values such as loyalty, protection, and mutual respect. The recurring linguistic formulae serve as both performative acts and emotional affirmations of gang unity. From a sociolinguistic perspective, such language reinforces social cohesion and identity formation within subcultures, showing how speech can signal belonging while excluding outsiders.

c. Power dynamics and threat display

The language of *Selina Tested* is saturated with expressions of threat, dominance, and verbal aggression, e.g., "I go drill you wotowoto." These utterances serve as ritualistic displays of power, functioning like linguistic weapons in the performance of street authority. Characters assert control, intimidate rivals, and position themselves within the hierarchy of urban masculinity through stylised threats. This ritualisation of violence through language mirrors real-world street cultures where talk serves not only to warn but to negotiate respect and fear. Such language choices signal dominance, readiness to retaliate, and a refusal to be undermined, essential features of the sociolinguistic construction of power in ghetto narratives.

d. Resistance and urban masculinity

Phrases like "I no dey fear die" encapsulate a hyper-masculine persona that values fearlessness, aggression, and emotional stoicism. These utterances are not just character traits; they are sociolinguistic reflections of resistance to vulnerability in socio-economically deprived environments. The language of fearlessness is performative and symbolic; hence, it challenges the precarity of life in neglected urban centres by embracing danger and asserting psychological superiority. Through this lens, the language of *Selina Tested* becomes a discourse of urban resistance, whereby characters linguistically construct a masculine identity shaped by survivalism, defiance, and strength. This also highlights broader societal failures, such as lack of access to social mobility or justice, which characters combat through symbolic and actual violence.

e. Creativity and humour

Amidst the intensity, the series also thrives on linguistic creativity and street humour. Expressions like "Your face show, your shoe shine" showcase not only metaphorical play but also aesthetic street poetry. These phrases often carry layered meanings, one literal, one idiomatic, and one contextual, which create humour, relatability, and emotional levity. The playful use of metaphors, rhyme, and reduplication adds entertainment value while also demonstrating the expressive richness of Nigerian Pidgin. This creativity is essential for audience engagement, reflecting how even in violent or gritty contexts, language retains its aesthetic and cultural vitality. It also functions as a softening device that humanises characters and adds depth to their personalities.

Summarily, the language of *Selina Tested* is not a mere vehicle for dialogue, it is a core narrative strategy that encodes identity, power, resistance, and humour. Through varied sociolinguistic functions,

characters are not only differentiated but also situated within a symbolic world governed by street codes and survivalist logic. This makes the series linguistically rich and culturally resonant, but also poses significant challenges for subtitling and translation. A sociolinguistic lens reveals how language use in the series reflects broader issues of class, masculinity, social belonging, and creative expression in urban Nigerian life.

4.1.3 Translation and subtitling challenges in *Selina Tested*

Translating and subtitling a linguistically dynamic and culturally loaded series like *Selina Tested* presents a unique set of challenges that go beyond conventional language transfer. The film's heavy reliance on Nigerian Pidgin, urban slang, and playful linguistic devices demands a translation strategy that can preserve both meaning and style, a near-impossible task within the technical constraints of subtitling. Each identified challenge points to broader tensions between fidelity, clarity, and cultural representation, all of which shape how the series is experienced by wider audiences. Below is a critical discussion of four major translation and subtitling issues encountered in the series.

a. Loss of meaning and register

One of the most persistent challenges in subtitling *Selina Tested* is the loss of meaning and register when attempting to translate Pidgin and idiomatic expressions into English. Many expressions in the film carry layered cultural and affective meanings that are difficult to replicate. For instance, the term *"wotowoto"* is not merely a synonym for "severely" or "thoroughly" it also conveys a rhythmic intensity and emotional force that is uniquely Pidgin. English equivalents often fall short in capturing this aural impact, stylistic exaggeration, and social nuance. As a result, translations risk

sounding flat or sterile, undermining the tone, identity, and communicative intent of the original. This reflects a core issue in audiovisual translation: the inability of the target language to fully replicate register-specific and culturally embedded expressions, particularly those rooted in oral or informal speech traditions.

b. Condensation due to subtitle constraints

Subtitling imposes technical constraints related to time (speed of reading) and space (character limits per line), which often force translators to condense rich utterances into simplified versions. This is particularly problematic in *Selina Tested*, where dialogue lines carry not just meaning but philosophical or moral undertones. A phrase like "No be who first pull trigger dey win fight. Na who get mind." conveys not just a street aphorism, but a coded moral philosophy about courage and psychological strength. However, subtitle versions of such lines often reduce them to less evocative forms, such as "It's not about who shoots first, but who has courage," which, though accurate, acks rhythm, local wisdom, and rhetorical power. The condensation process, though necessary, often sacrifices stylistic richness, narrative layering, and emotional intensity.

c. Retention of cultural nuance

Another significant challenge lies in retaining cultural nuance, especially when expressions are deeply rooted in Nigerian street culture and require contextual familiarity. For example, the line *"Tanana me your eleven digit"* a metaphorical request for someone's phone number relies on cultural awareness of local slang for phone numbers and flirtation codes. A literal translation may confuse foreign viewers, while an overly simplified or domesticated rendering ("Give me your number") loses the playfulness, coded

reference, and cultural charm of the original. Subtitlers are often caught between faithfulness to source culture and accessibility for global audiences, and striking this balance requires high creativity, cultural competence, and sometimes unavoidable compromise. Without careful handling, such translations may erase the sociolects, humour, or identity performance integral to character portrayal.

d. Untranslatable humour and wordplay

The film's dialogue is rich in linguistic play, including rhyme, rhythm, onomatopoeia, and culturally coded puns, many of which are untranslatable in concise English subtitles. Words like *"ngwangwa"* (implying urgency in a rhythmic, emphatic tone) or *"kpogide"* (a stylised call to action, often performative) carry sound symbolism and emotional colour that are hard to replicate in English without losing brevity or clarity. Additionally, the humour derived from sound patterning, playful metaphors, and streetwise wordplay often defies direct translation. Attempts to translate these literally may confuse viewers; paraphrasing them may strip away their aesthetic and comedic value. This results in cultural flattening, where the humour, rhythm, and expressive identity of the original are significantly diminished in the subtitles.

Summarily, the challenges of translating and subtitling *Selina Tested* highlight the broader tension between linguistic fidelity, cultural representation, and technical feasibility in audiovisual translation. The series' rich use of Pidgin, slang, metaphors, and stylised expressions resists reduction into short, easily readable subtitles without significant loss. These challenges demand not only linguistic skill but cultural intuition, creativity, and sensitivity. Ultimately, the task is not just to translate words, but to recreate the

mood, style, and social meaning of a dynamic, identity-rich street culture for audiences who may have no cultural point of reference.

4.1.4 Proposed translation approaches

To effectively address the stylistic and sociolinguistic complexities presented in *Selina Tested*, several translation strategies are proposed. First, creative or situational equivalence should be prioritised over literal translation. This approach involves capturing the intended function, tone, and emotional weight of the original expression rather than translating word-for-word. For example, the line *"I go drill you wotowoto"* can be rendered as *"I'll mess you up real bad"* a version that conveys both the severity and colloquial intensity of the source language.

Second, the use of gloss subtitles is recommended, particularly for local or regional releases. This method involves adding brief bracketed explanations within subtitles to aid comprehension of culturally embedded phrases. For instance, *"Tanana me your eleven digit [give me your phone number]"* offers both a literal and contextual meaning, helping viewers unfamiliar with the slang to follow the dialogue without compromising the stylistic essence.

A third approach is the inclusion of multilingual subtitle tracks, which provide both Nigerian Pidgin and Standard English subtitles. This is especially beneficial for Nigerian audiences, as it preserves the authenticity and linguistic richness of the original while maintaining accessibility for viewers with varying levels of Pidgin fluency.

Furthermore, pre-subtitling collaboration between translators, screenwriters, and actors is essential. Such collaboration ensures that the subtitler fully understands the nuances, symbolic meanings, and performative intentions behind slang and idiomatic

expressions, thus improving the accuracy and cultural fidelity of the translation.

Lastly, the use of paratextual aids, such as subtitle footnotes, glossaries, or companion booklets, is recommended for academic screenings or high-context audiences. These aids provide additional cultural and linguistic information that enhances viewer comprehension without disrupting the on-screen experience.

In summary, the language of *Selina Tested* is deeply rooted in Nigerian street culture, identity, and power performance. It functions as a powerful narrative tool but presents serious challenges for translation due to its dense use of slang, idioms, and sociolinguistic signalling. Therefore, a blend of creative equivalence, culturally sensitive subtitling, and audience-adaptive strategies is essential to render the film effectively in translation while preserving its thematic force, stylistic integrity, and cultural authenticity.

5. Summary of findings

The analysis reveals that *Selina Tested* employs a rich tapestry of language variation deeply rooted in Nigerian urban street culture. Key findings include:

Diverse Language Variations: The film's dialogue features Nigerian Pidgin, code-mixing and code-switching, colloquialisms, slang, dialectal variations, and distinct idiolects. These variations enhance authenticity, reflect sociolinguistic realities, and intensify narrative tone.

Sociolinguistic Functions: Language use in the film performs critical functions in character and plot development. It communicates identity, social class, solidarity, masculinity, power dynamics, and resistance. For instance, expressions like "I no dey

fear die" reflect urban masculinity and defiance, while group phrases such as "We dey loyal" foster in-group cohesion.

Translation and Subtitling Challenges: Translating *Selina Tested* poses significant challenges due to:

a. Non-equivalence of Pidgin and street slang in English.
b. Subtitle space constraints limit expressive depth.
c. Cultural specificity and humour that may be lost on foreign audiences.
d. Wordplay, rhythm, and onomatopoeia that resist direct translation.

Thematic and Stylistic Importance: The film's language choices are not arbitrary but central to its message and appeal. They reflect themes of urban struggle, identity performance, and socio-political resistance.

5.1 Conclusion

The linguistic style of *Selina Tested* is a deliberate artistic and sociolinguistic device that gives voice to marginalised urban realities. However, these same features pose formidable translation challenges. A nuanced, culturally aware, and creatively adaptive approach to subtitling is crucial in preserving the film's communicative force and cultural richness in translation.

5.2 Recommendations

To address the complexities of translating *Selina Tested* while preserving its thematic and stylistic power, the following approaches are recommended:

a. **Creative and situational equivalence:** Instead of literal translation, subtitles should capture tone and function. For example, "I go drill you wotowoto" could be rendered as "I'll mess you up real bad" to retain intensity and informality.

b. **Gloss subtitles:** In domestic or hybrid subtitle tracks, explanations can be inserted unobtrusively, e.g., "Tanana me your eleven digit [give me your phone number]" to enhance clarity without diluting meaning.

c. **Multilingual subtitle options**: For diverse audiences, especially within Nigeria, providing both Pidgin and Standard English subtitle tracks can retain authenticity and increase accessibility.

d. **Pre-subtitling collaboration:** Translators should engage directly with screenwriters, actors, or local speakers to grasp the contextual meanings and sociocultural nuances embedded in the dialogue.

e. **Use of paratextual aids:** For educational or culturally sensitive screenings, footnotes, glossaries, or brief cultural notes can enhance audience comprehension of slang and idioms.

References

Akande, A. T., & Salami, L. O. (2010). Use and attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin English among Nigerian university students. *Ibadan Journal of English Studies,* 7(1), 93–112.

Díaz-Cintas, J., & Remael, A. (2021). *Subtitling: Concepts and practices*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429559561

Eze, A. N. & Nwike, C. C. (2024). Sociolinguistic factors in the translation of Igbo proverbs into English. *Journal of Chinese*

& *African Studies* (JOCAS), Vol. 5 No. 1, 2024 (ISSN: 2782-7879)

Eze, N. J., Nwigwe, N., Azubuike, U. P. (2023). A sociolinguistic survey of communicative competence in code-switch in the sermon language in some selected Pentecostal churches in Ebonyi State. Ugo *Jọnalụ Amụmamụ* (UJAI): *Journal of Centre for Igbo Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.* Vol. (1) https://www.unn.edu.ng/centre.igbostudies https://www.icvc-cis-unn.org

Eme, C. A., & Mbagwu, N. R. (2011). Language use in Nollywood films and the question of audience accessibility. *Journal of Linguistic Association of Nigeria,* 14(2), 101–110.

Holmes, J. (2013). *An Introduction to sociolinguistics* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns.* University of Pennsylvania Press.

Myers-Scotton, C. (1993). *Social motivations for code-switching: Evidence from Africa.* Oxford University Press.

Newmark, P. (1981). *Approaches to translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Nwagalaku C., Obiora, H. C., & Nwike, C. C. (2021). Linguistic variation and change in Nawfija speech community. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 12, No. 5, pp. 741-749, September 2021, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1205.13, ISSN 1798-4769

Nwike, C. C. & Eze, A. N. (2025). Punctuation in subtitling: A study of Igbo Nollywood films. *Odezuruigbo Journal*: Volume 9, NO. 1, 2025 (ISSN: 2672-4243)

Nwike, C. C. & Eze, A. N. (2024). Translating social identity: A sociolinguistic analysis of code-switching and politeness strategies in multilingual subtitling. *Journal of Chinese & African Studies (JOCAS)*, Vol. 5 No. 1, (ISSN: 2782-7879)

Nwike, C. C. (2023). *Subtitling in selected Igbo films* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka].

Nwike, C. C. (2022). A study of some selected Igbo movies subtitling. *Journal of Chinese & African Studies* (JOCAS), Vol. 3 No. 1, 2022 (ISSN: 2782-7879)

Nwike, C. C., Olaide, O. & Obiora, H. C. (2021). Subtitling as a Didactic Tool for Relating Exactness of Information and Cultural Preservation: The Igbo Language Mediascape Example. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol.* 11, No. 8, pp. 901-909, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1108.05

Ohiaraumunna, T. C. (2019). Translation of Nigerian Pidgin into English: Problems and strategies. *Global Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (GJHSS-G): Linguistics & Education,* 19(3), 45–52.

Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation.* Routledge.

Vermeer, H. J. (1989). *Skopos and commission in translational action.* In A. Chesterman (Ed.), Readings in translation theory (pp. 173–187). Oy Finn Lectura.

Wales, K. (2014). *A dictionary of stylistics* (3rd ed.). Routledge.