TRANSLATING SOCIAL IDENTITY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF CODE-SWITCHING AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN MULTILINGUAL SUBTITLING

Christopher Chinedu Nwike, PhD[1]
Department of Linguistics, Foreign and Nigerian Languages
National Open University of Nigeria
cnwike@noun.edu.ng
&
Augustina Ngozi Eze, PhD
Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract
This study explores the sociolinguistic construction of social identity through code-switching and politeness strategies in the Igbo film Onye Bụ Nna M, with attention to how these features are represented in the film's English subtitles. The objectives are threefold: (a) to analyse instances of code-switching and politeness strategies in the selected Igbo film and examine their sociolinguistic functions; (b) to evaluate how these features are rendered in the English subtitles; and (c) to propose culturally sensitive subtitling practices that enhance the representation of social identity in multilingual African films. Findings reveal that code-switching and politeness strategies are deeply rooted in the characters' social roles, emotions, and cultural backgrounds. Code-switching is often used to mark emphasis, sarcasm, emotional shift, or social distance, while politeness strategies reflect respect, familiarity, or confrontation. However, the English subtitles frequently omit or simplify these nuances, losing meaning, tone, and cultural context. For example, emotionally charged or socially significant expressions are sometimes mistranslated or excluded, weakening the viewer's understanding of character dynamics and social identity. The study recommends consistent and culturally grounded subtitling that retains code-switched expressions where appropriate and accurately conveys politeness functions. Subtitlers should be trained in sociolinguistic sensitivity to ensure the preservation of cultural meanings and identities in African multilingual films.
Keywords: Code-Switching, Politeness Strategies, Subtitling, Social Identity, Igbo Film

Background to the Study
Language in film is more than dialogue; it is a cultural artifact, a performance of identity, and a reflection of the social dynamics that shape human interaction. In multilingual African societies, language use is inherently layered, reflecting variations in ethnicity, class, age, and power. This complexity is vividly captured in African cinema, where characters often engage in code-switching and employ politeness strategies that communicate intricate social meanings. When such films are subtitled into English for broader consumption, these sociolinguistic features often face distortion or erasure, raising questions about how social identity is translated across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Bilingualism, a common linguistic phenomenon, often results in code-switching, alternating between languages in a single conversation. This is widespread among Igbo-English bilingual speakers and presents unique challenges for translation. Influenced by sociolinguistic factors such as speaker intent and context (Myers-Scotton, 1993), code-switching raises issues of meaning transfer without loss of nuance. Common types include intra-sentential switching, e.g., *"I will come tomorrow, n'isi ụtụtụ...,"* and inter-sentential switching, e.g., *"Let's go. Anyị ga-ahụ ya echi."* Reasons include emphasis, identity expression, and emotional nuance. For instance, *"This life sef... anyị ga-emebi ya, or it will destroy us!"* A blend of Nigerian Pidgin and Igbo poses challenges for translators deciding whether to retain the mix or unify the register.

As Nwike's (2023) doctoral thesis, *Subtitling in Selected Igbo Films* observes, code-switching in Igbo cinema is more than a stylistic device; it is a marker of social identity, mood, class, and emotional intensity. He emphasizes that the erasure or neutralisation of such features in English subtitles flattens

character identity and social context. In *Paralinguistic Communication in Igbo Nollywood Subtitles* (Okorji, Eze, & Nwike, 2022), it was highlighted how tone, body language, and cultural etiquette are often lost in subtitle translations, even though they are integral to politeness and meaning-making.

African films such as *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019) and *King of Boys* (2018) depict characters fluidly switching between English, indigenous languages, and Nigerian Pidgin to negotiate formal, intimate, and street-level identities. However, subtitles tend to flatten this multilingualism into monolingual English, erasing the cultural and relational dynamics embedded in language choice. This concern is echoed in Nwike's (2023) *The Effect of Consonant Omission on Igbo Words*, which shows how even minor phonological features can carry semantic and identity-related weight in Igbo.
Politeness strategies, equally significant, are embedded in African languages. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, politeness involves expressing respect and mitigating threats to face. In Igbo, features such as indirectness, honorifics, and deference are central in intergenerational or hierarchical discourse. As illustrated in the South African film *Tsotsi* (2005), when respectful Zulu speech is translated into blunt English, much of its cultural significance is lost. Similarly, in *Issues and Challenges in Translating Legal Text from English to the Igbo Language* (Nwike, 2023), the author outlines how respect markers and culturally encoded politeness forms are often inadequately captured during translation.

In the article titled *Evaluating Machine Translation Performance in Literary and Biblical Texts* (Nwike & Okoronkwo, 2025), it critiques the inability of automated systems to render tone, identity cues, and cultural meanings present in bilingual or diglossic contexts, another insight relevant to subtitling practice. Nwike's (2021) study on '*An Intersemiotic Translation of Nkape Anya Ukwu* also explores how meaning is constructed across modes, speech, image, and gesture, reinforcing that subtitling must account for more than words alone.

Moreover, in *Subtitling in Selected Igbo Films* (Nwike, 2023) and *A Study of Some Selected Igbo Movies Subtitlings* (Nwike, 2022), he emphasizes that subtitling in Igbo films is often incomplete or domesticated, eroding the layered representation of social identity. Similarly, in *Cultural Encounters: Python and Bible as Symbols of Religio-Cultural Conflict in Achebe's Works* (Nwike & Okoronkwo, 2025), they demonstrated their commitment to cultural semiotics and translation ethics, particularly the transmission of indigenous epistemologies. Hence, subtitling in multilingual African films is not merely a linguistic task but a sociolinguistic and cultural act requiring bicultural competence. Yet, due to constraints such as time, space, and assumptions about audience knowledge, subtitles often oversimplify or omit identity-rich linguistic forms. Despite contributions from scholars like Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007), there remains a gap in understanding how subtitling affects the representation of identity, especially in African contexts. As Nwike's body of work demonstrates, accurate and culturally sensitive subtitling can contribute significantly to preserving the nuances of African languages, identities, and worldviews in global cinema.

Objectives of the study
The primary aim of this study is to explore how social identity is conveyed or altered through subtitling practices in African multilingual films. The specific objectives are to:
a. Analyse instances of code-switching and politeness strategies in the Igbo film used for the study, and examine its sociolinguistic functions.
b. Evaluate how these sociolinguistic features are rendered in the English subtitles.
c. Propose culturally sensitive subtitling practices that enhance the representation of social identity in multilingual African films.

Scope and delimitation
This study focuses on different scenes of the film *Onye Bụ Nna M* (Season One), a multilingual Nigerian film subtitled in English. It specifically examines instances of code-switching and politeness strategies in selected scenes and evaluates their sociolinguistic functions and representation in the English subtitles. The scope is limited to on-screen text in the original version of the film; dubbed versions, non-

English subtitles, and comprehensive linguistic transcription of the entire film are excluded. The study adopts a qualitative approach, prioritising the depth of sociolinguistic and cultural interpretation over broad generalisation. It also aims to propose culturally sensitive subtitling practices that more accurately convey social identity in multilingual African cinema.

Definition of terms
This section discusses vital terms as specially used in this study:

Subtitling: An overview
Subtitling is a vital mode of audiovisual translation (AVT) that involves converting spoken or written content in film, television, or other multimedia into written text, typically displayed at the bottom of the screen. It is both a linguistic and semiotic activity that operates under temporal, spatial, and cultural constraints. Subtitling transfers spoken dialogue into written text that appears on screen in synchronisation with the audio and visuals. It may also include translations of written texts on screen and relevant non-verbal elements such as signs, songs, or sound effects. According to Gottlieb (1992), there are strategies for subtitling. Gottlieb's strategies are among the most widely cited in AVT studies, and they are:
   a. Expansion: Adding information not in the original to clarify meaning, used when cultural or contextual information is essential.
   b. Paraphrase: Rewording the message to convey the same meaning, used when direct translation is awkward or too long.
   c. Transfer: A faithful rendering of the entire source text, used when literal translation fits subtitle constraints.
   d. Imitation: Preserving names or expressions in the original language.
   e. Transcription: Reproducing speech sounds (accents, dialects, speech defects).
   f. Dislocation: Replacing source elements with culturally similar ones, often for songs or jokes.
   g. Condensation: Shortening the message while retaining meaning.
   h. Decimation: Omitting non-essential dialogue under time pressure.
   i. Deletion: Omitting speech that is redundant or visually obvious.
   j. Resignation: Abandoning untranslatable content, replacing it neutrally.
In connection with the above, these strategies show how subtitlers navigate the tension between fidelity to the source text and accessibility for the target audience. They are useful for analysing subtitled media, evaluating translation quality, or devising subtitling approaches in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Style and stylistics: An overview
Style refers to the distinctive way language is used by a writer or speaker, marked by choices in vocabulary, syntax, figurative language, tone, and rhythm. Stylistics is the systematic and objective study of these stylistic features using linguistic tools to uncover meaning and literary effect. According to Wales (2014), stylistics studies how meaning is created through language in literature. In English literature, Charles Dickens's use of repetition and personification in *Bleak House* (1853), hence, "Fog everywhere. Fog up the river... fog down the river..." creates an atmosphere of moral and legal confusion. Similarly, Ezra Pound's minimalist imagism in *In a Station of the Metro* (1913) hence, "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough." thus shows how brevity and imagery evoke emotion and thought. In Igbo literature, style reflects indigenous aesthetics and worldview. For instance, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), proverbs are central stylistic features, for instance:
> *Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.*
This metaphor highlights the cultural value of indirectness and wisdom in Igbo speech, enriching narrative tone and cultural immersion. Similarly, Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* (1935), the first novel written in Igbo, uses idiomatic expressions and traditional sayings to establish character and moral lessons. An example is:
> *Onye kwe, Chi ya ekwe (If one agrees, his personal god agrees)*

This stylistic use of traditional philosophy reflects the communal and spiritual undertone of Igbo storytelling. However, stylistic features in both languages may include imagery, symbolism, repetition, code-switching, and tone shifts. In Igbo, the rhythm of language is often enhanced by song, chant, and call-response patterns, seen in oral and written traditions.

Related studies

This area focuses on translation, subtitling, sociolinguistics, or identity construction in audiovisual media, particularly within African or multilingual contexts. On this premise, Nwike (2023) studied *Subtitling in selected Igbo films*. This doctoral thesis investigates the completeness and accuracy of subtitling in Igbo films, analysing how linguistic and paralinguistic elements are rendered in English. Nwike finds that many Igbo cultural nuances, including code-switching, honorifics, and pragmatic markers, are often omitted or inadequately translated. His work provides a foundational methodological and theoretical framework for examining indigenous language subtitling. The emphasis on cultural and linguistic integrity directly supports your analysis of social identity loss in multilingual subtitles.

Baldry and Thibault (2006) studied *Multimodal transcription and text analysis: A multilingual approach*. This work explores how multimodal communication, gesture, intonation, and visual cues interact with linguistic choices in media. They argue for transcription methods that preserve language variation and socio-pragmatic meaning. Their analytical model can help uncover how subtitling preserves or flattens layered identity performances, especially in multilingual, multicultural films. This study is relevant to the analysis of politeness strategies and non-verbal cues in translation.

Ayoola (2013) examined *Code-switching as a stylistic device in Nigerian drama: A study of Ahmed Yerima's plays*. He explores how Nigerian dramatists use code-switching for realism, stylistic effect, and cultural representation. The paper shows how language shifts reflect changes in social context, power, and identity. It supports the argument that code-switching is an identity performance, not a random act. It reinforces the need to retain such switches in subtitling to preserve sociolinguistic richness.

De Linde and Kay (1999) studied *the semiotics of subtitling*. This pioneering work examines how meaning is conveyed or distorted through subtitling. The authors stress that language, social meaning, and visual context are interwoven, and subtitlers must make interpretive choices that shape how viewers perceive identity, tone, and relationships. The study offers a strong theoretical foundation for analysing how subtitling affects the understanding of interpersonal dynamics in multilingual or culturally layered texts.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive approach**,** drawing from discourse analysis and sociolinguistics within the framework of audiovisual translation (AVT). The aim is to analyse how interpersonal and identity-based meanings encoded in multilingual dialogues are preserved, modified, or lost in English subtitles. Purposive sampling of Igbo language films with English subtitles, preferably recent Nollywood films known for language hybridity. There was a transcription of spoken dialogues and their corresponding subtitles (from selected scenes that include code-switching or politeness expressions). Approximately 5 - 10 films subtitled utterances containing code-mixed or code-switched expressions were used. There was a sociolinguistic analysis. Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model was employed to analyse why speakers switch codes and what sociolinguistic meanings are conveyed. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) was used to examine how face-threatening acts are mitigated or expressed in subtitled utterances. The study adopted Gottlieb's (1992) taxonomy of subtitling strategies (e.g., transfer, condensation, omission) to evaluate how the code-switched/polite elements are rendered. In the discourse analysis, the study explored context, speaker intention, and audience interpretation by analysing how the interplay of language choice and translation affects meaning. The data analysis procedure was carried out in the following forms:
   a.   Step 1: Transcribe selected Igbo dialogue and corresponding English subtitles.
   b.   Step 2: Identify and tag instances of code-switching, code-mixing, and politeness strategies.

c. Step 3: Analyse how these linguistic features are translated or omitted in the subtitles.
d. Step 4: Interpret the sociolinguistic implications (identity, power, culture, formality).
e. Step 5: Evaluate subtitling consistency and professionalism based on theoretical models.

Presentation of data and analysis
This section of the study presents and discusses the different scenes in the selected film used for the study, in line with the objectives of the study.

Igbo Source: "Mba o, oge adịghịzị e ji eri nri. Oge agaala. A ga-aṅụzị obere ihe, ọ bụrụ *tea,* anyị a ṅụọ."

English Subtitle: "We will take something light. If it's tea, we drink."

From the above photo, the use of the English word *"tea"* in an otherwise Igbo sentence is a clear instance of intra-sentential code-switching, where a word from another language (in this case, English) is inserted into a native linguistic structure. In sociolinguistics, such code-switching often reflects:

a. Lexical gaps**:** The speaker may lack a precise Igbo equivalent or default to a more commonly understood English term. While Igbo has words like *"tii"* (adapted form) or phrases like *"mmanya ọkụ na-ekpo ọkụ"* (hot beverage), *"tea"* is more practical and widely recognised.
b. Prestige and modernity: The mention of "tea" may suggest a middle-class or modern domestic setting where English is symbolically associated with sophistication or globalised consumption habits.

This reflects the sociolinguistic reality of multilingual communities like the Igbo, where English often co-exists with indigenous languages and serves specific lexical, social, or symbolic functions. However, the original Igbo utterance employs negative politeness by indirectly declining a full meal:

c. *"Mba o…"* (Polite refusal)
d. *"Oge agaala…"* (Time has passed, justifying the refusal)
e. Then, offering a mitigated suggestion: something lighter, like tea.

In the subtitle, *"We will take something light. If it's tea, we drink."* This layered politeness is flattened. The indirect refusal strategy is lost, and the code-switched term "tea" is retained without explanation, assuming familiarity with the audience. However, the inclusion of *"tea"* in both the source and subtitle suggests that the term has become sociolinguistically naturalised even among Igbo speakers, further highlighting the fluid interplay of languages in postcolonial African societies.

Photo two

Source (Igbo-English mix): *"Anọghịzị m in the mood"*
Subtitled in English as: *"I am no longer in the mood"*

The phrase *"in the mood"* is an instance of intra-sentential code-switching**,** where an English idiom is embedded within an Igbo grammatical frame (*"Anọghịzị m..."* meaning *"I am not..."*). However, there are some sociolinguistic significances to this, hence:

   a. Lexical borrowing and cultural expression: "in the mood" is an English idiomatic expression with no direct Igbo equivalent that carries the same emotional or psychological nuance. This makes it a functional borrowing used for clarity or expressiveness.
   b. Urban and youth identity marker: Among younger or urban Igbo speakers, such English insertions reflect bilingual fluency and social identity. The use of "in the mood" signals emotional states in a modern, relatable way.

From the above discourses, the phrase *"in the mood"* serves as a politeness strategy, a way to express emotional unavailability or withdrawal without being direct or confrontational**.** It softens the refusal or disengagement, maintaining social harmony. In translation, the subtitle *"I am no longer in the mood"* retains this strategy, preserving the speaker's intention to avoid bluntness. It reflects negative politeness by appealing to internal states rather than placing blame or making a direct rejection.

Photo three

Source: *Nneka, ọkwa m sị gị thunder fire you now, ị sị na mụ akpọọ gị iyi*
Subtitle: *If I were to say, let thunder fire you right now, you will say that I have cursed you*

The phrase *thunder fire you now* is a direct English insult embedded in an Igbo sentence, a clear case of intra-sentential code-switching. This type of switch reflects how bilingual Igbo speakers use English to amplify emotional force or to emphasize aggression in confrontational speech. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this shows:

   a. Expressive function**:** English is used to intensify insults, especially in dramatic or emotional settings.
   b. Cultural hybridity**:** The mixture of Igbo and English reveals how language choice can reflect identity, education, or urban influence.

Again, the full expression uses ironic politeness:

   c. By saying *if I were to say…*, the speaker distances himself from the actual insult.
   d. This serves as a face-saving act**,** reducing the directness of the offense and showing social awareness.

So, the subtitle retains *let thunder fire you*, preserving the emotive and cultural tone**.** However, its literal rendering may be misread by non-Igbo audiences who may not grasp its rhetorical or figurative use in Nigerian English.

Photo four

Source: *A lot of things is (are) happening* (inserted into an Igbo conversation)
Subtitle: *Things are happening*

This English phrase *A lot of things are happening* appears suddenly within an Igbo discourse, marking a case of inter-sentential code-switching, where the speaker shifts from Igbo to English mid-conversation. This, however, has some sociolinguistic significance:

a. Marked emphasis**:** The switch to English signals a shift in tone, emphasizing seriousness, secrecy, or emotional intensity.

b. Stylistic elevation**:** Using English, especially a common phrase like *A lot of things are happening*, adds dramatic flair, a technique typical in Nollywood dialogue to highlight turning points or suspense.

c. Non-standard grammar (*"is"* instead of *"are"*) reflects Nigerian Pidgin influence**,** showing how localised English varieties are normalised in speech.

While not overtly polite, the switch avoids specifying troubling events. It uses strategic vagueness, a form of off-record politeness, to suggest tension without direct confrontation or blame.

Photo five

Source: *Eee! Oteela m try-wa number a, eri 3 days, ọ dịghị aga aga*
Subtitle: *Eehheeh! No wonder cos it's been long I was trying your line, since three days but it wasn't*
Correct subtitle: *Eehheeh! No wonder, cos it's been three days since I have been trying your line, but it wasn't...*

This phrase "try-wa number a, eri 3 days" is a classic example of intra-sentential code-switching**,** where English (*"try"*, *"number"*) and Igbo (*"wa"*, *"eri"*) are blended fluidly within the same clause with some sociolinguistic features:

a. "try-wa"**:** A hybrid verb phrase, blending the English verb *"try"* with the Igbo verbal suffix *"-wa"* (used here as a grammatical marker or emphasis), forming a localised construction common in Nigerian urban speech.

b. "number a"**:** The English noun *"number"* is localised with the Igbo demonstrative *"a"* (this), meaning *"this phone number."*

c. "eri 3 days"**:** Igbo structure meaning "for the past three days," showing time expression through indigenous syntax while discussing a modern issue (telecommunication).

These mixtures indicate a multilingual communicative competence**,** typical in urban Igbo settings, where code-switching is used to express contemporary realities while maintaining cultural authenticity. However, the speaker subtly justifies the absence or lack of communication**:**

d. Using *"try-wa number a"* and *"eri 3 days"* shows effort, mitigating blame.

e. This is a form of negative politeness, an attempt to preserve the hearer's face by showing concern and explaining delays.

f. Emotional exclamations like *"Eee!"* and *"Oteela"* (it's been long) also soften the message, expressing regret or concern.

Photo six

Source: *Ya bụ nwata nwanyị phone-ịa ka dị almost 50%, kama ọ ga-ahapụ nke m ka ọ charge-ịa*
Subtitle: *This very same girl who was busy with her phone, and still had almost 50% of battery*

In line with the above information, these utterances "phone-ịa, almost 50%, charge-ịa" are a strong case of intra-sentential code-switching, with Igbo grammatical framing of English lexical items, revealing rich multilingual competence typical of urban Nigerian speakers. This, however, has some sociolinguistic implications:

   a. "phone-ịa": A compound of the English noun *"phone"* and the Igbo possessive suffix *"-ịa"* (her), showing how English technology terms are adapted into indigenous syntactic structure. It signals linguistic dativisation, the integration of foreign terms into Igbo grammatical rules.

   b. "almost 50%": A direct borrowing of English numerical and percentage expressions, common in contexts where modern, technical, or metric concepts lack direct Igbo equivalents. This switch also reflects prestige borrowing and technological relevance.

   c. "charge-ịa": Combines the English verb *"charge"* with the Igbo possessive suffix *"-ịa"*, implying *"charge her phone"*. Like *"phone-ịa"*, this hybrid reflects how English verbs can be indigenized within Igbo speech.

These linguistic choices reveal a diglossic environment where Igbo is the base language, but English supplies terms linked to technology, modernization, or formality. The result is a code-switched blend used for pragmatic efficiency and identity performance. Again, the speaker complains indirectly about the denial of access to a charger, but does so using:

   d. Impersonal narrative (*Ya bụ nwata nwanyị…*) instead of directly accusing the girl

   e. Justification through logic: Citing battery percentage (*almost 50%*) makes the complaint appear rational rather than emotional

This reflects a face-saving politeness strategy, criticism softened with indirectness and justification, common in interpersonal Nigerian discourse.

Photo eight

Source: *Mmadụ abụọ nwee temper problem a na-anọ n'otu ụlọ?*
Subtitle: Does two people that with temper problem stay in one house?
Correct subtitle: *Do two people with a temper problem stay in one house?*

The phrase *"temper problem"* represents a clear case of intra-sentential code-switching, where an English phrase is embedded into an Igbo sentence structure. Although *temper* and *problem* are English words, their pairing reflects a Nigerian English expression common in everyday speech, especially when discussing emotional traits. So, the choice to switch to English for this specific term suggests that the concept may not have a direct or culturally equivalent expression in Igbo, or the speaker prefers the pragmatic force and immediacy that English conveys for such terms. However, this form of hybrid discourse is typical in Nigerian multilingual contexts where speakers fluidly navigate between languages to express complex or modern psychological and behavioural terms. "Temper problem" is a semi-formal register, a term likely borrowed from psychological or counselling discourse but domesticated in local usage. Again, its usage within an Igbo sentence indicates linguistic creativity and a blending of indigenous language with globalized English vocabulary.

Moreover, the question form (*Mmadụ abụọ nwee temper problem…*) suggests a face-saving strategy, indirectly discussing a potentially confrontational topic (anger issues) by generalising it. So, rather than accusing a person directly, the speaker uses a rhetorical question and a hypothetical "two people" to soften the criticism, an example of negative politeness, which avoids imposition. Summarily, the politeness strategy lies in the hypothetical framing, which masks personal judgment and maintains interpersonal decorum.

Photo nine

Subtitling error

S/No	Source information	Film's subtitling	Frequency
1	*point of correction*	-	50:58 – 51:09

Through subtitling, the speaker's message is visually presented on television or cinema screens to support language learners, the hearing impaired, entertainment viewers, and non-speakers of the source language. This investigation examined instances in Igbo films where source utterances, especially those featuring code-switching or code-mixing, were inconsistently or partially subtitled into English. A clear example is the utterance*: Ị sị gịnị, anụrụ m ihe ị kwuru nke ọma?* which was correctly subtitled, but immediately following the English expression *point of correction* was omitted from the subtitle. The next utterance, *ọ nwa m nwanyị, ọ bụghị nwa gị nwanyị,* was then subtitled. This inconsistency in rendering the speaker's full message on screen reflects unprofessional subtitling practice. In this context, the presence of English within the Igbo speech (code-switching) should not justify subtitle omission. Although one might argue that an English expression within the source utterance need not be subtitled into English, such reasoning is flawed. The subtitle should reflect the speaker's entire message for clarity and coherence. The selective omission of code-switched segments leads to meaning loss and misrepresentation. This practice aligns with what Gottlieb (1992) refers to as the strategy of deletion, but here it is misapplied. Deletion, as a subtitling strategy, must be systematic and contextually justified, not arbitrary. For instance, in another case, the code-switched expression *A lot of things is (are) happening* was subtitled as *Things are happening*. While seemingly correct, this editing simplifies and alters the speaker's tone, emphasis, and message, thus distorting the communicative intent. Therefore, such omission or alteration should not be viewed as a deliberate subtitling strategy but as a subtitling error arising from inconsistency and a lack of sensitivity to multilingual dynamics.

Photo ten

This image shows a young woman with a visibly upset or assertive facial expression, pointing her finger while saying, as subtitled: *My daughter. She's not your daughter.* The context, inferred from her expression and the firm tone implied by the subtitle, suggests a confrontational or emotionally charged interaction. Using Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, we can analyse this in terms of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Politeness Strategies. Again, the speaker uses a bald on-record politeness strategy to perform a direct face-threatening act, asserting her role and rejecting the other person's claim without any mitigation. The choice of language and delivery reflects both cultural dynamics and filmic strategy to amplify dramatic tension.

Summary of findings

This study examined *Onye Bụ Nna M* to investigate how code-switching and politeness strategies contribute to social identity construction and how these are represented in the English subtitles.

a. The analysis identified multiple instances of code-switching between Igbo and English within dialogues. These switches were context-dependent and often served sociolinguistic functions such as expressing emotion, asserting power, showing deference, or aligning with modern or urban identities. Politeness strategies, including indirect speech, honorifics, and culturally specific expressions of respect or confrontation, were also observed, reflecting Igbo social norms around age, gender, and kinship.

b. Evaluation of the English subtitles revealed inconsistencies. Many code-switched elements were omitted or simplified, and politeness strategies were frequently neutralized. This often resulted in a loss of tone, relational cues, and emotional nuance. For instance, expressions such as "thunder fire you" or "try-wa number a" were either mistranslated or omitted, weakening the intended impact and interpersonal dynamics.

c. Based on these observations, the study proposed subtitling practices that are culturally sensitive, encouraging subtitlers to preserve significant linguistic elements, especially code-switching that carries cultural weight, and translate politeness strategies contextually. Emphasizing sociolinguistic awareness can improve subtitling quality, ensuring that African multilingual films authentically reflect the social identities of their characters.

Recommendations

a. Ensure consistency in subtitling code-switched and code-mixed expressions.
b. Avoid omission of key phrases that carry sociolinguistic weight.
c. Train subtitlers on politeness strategies and cultural context to improve subtitle accuracy and viewer understanding.

References

Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann.

Adetiba, K. (Director). (2018). *King of Boys* [Film]. Netflix.

Aina, J. (Director). (2019). *Breaking Free* [Film]. Nollywood.

Ayoola, K. A. (2013). *Code-switching as a Stylistic Device in Nigerian Drama: A Study of Ahmed Yerima's Plays*. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(4), 92–101.

Baldry, A., & Thibault, P. J. (2006). *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis: A Multilingual Approach*. Equinox Publishing.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.

De Linde, Z., & Kay, N. (1999). *The Semiotics of Subtitling*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.

Díaz-Cintas, J., & Remael, A. (2007). *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.

Dickens, C. (1853). *Bleak House*. Bradbury & Evans.

Gottlieb, H. (1992). Subtitling – A New University Discipline. In *C. Dollerup & A. Loddegaard (Eds.), Teaching Translation and Interpreting: Training, Talent and Experience* (pp. 161–170). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Hood, G. (Director). (2005). *Tsotsi* [Film]. Miramax.

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

Nwana, P. (1935). *Omenuko*. CMS Bookshop.

Nwike, C. C. (2021). An intersemiotic translation of *Nkape Anya Ukwu*. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 12*(2), 245–251. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1202.11

Nwike, C. C. (2022). A study of some selected Igbo movies subtitlings. *Journal of Chinese & African Studies (JOCAS), 3*(1), 44–55.

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

Nwike, C. C. (2023). Issues and challenges in translating legal text from English to the Igbo language. *International Journal of Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture, 2*(6), 115–123.

Nwike, C. C. (2023). The effect of consonant omission on Igbo words. *The NOUN Scholar, 3*(2), 78–90.

Nwike, C. C., & Okoronkwo, M. E. (2025). Evaluating machine translation performance in literary and biblical texts. *Ékwé Jọnal Nke Ndị Igbo Scholars Forum for Socio-Cultural Advancement, 18*(1), 168–189.

Okorji, R. I., Eze, A. N. & Nwike, C. C., (2022). Paralinguistic communication in Igbo Nollywood subtitles: A case study of two Igbo films. *Arabic Language, Literature & Culture, 7*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.allc.20220701.11

Okoronkwo, M. E. & Nwike, C. C., (2025). Cultural encounters: Python and Bible as symbols of religio-cultural conflict in Achebe's works. *Ékwé Jọnal Nke Ndị Igbo Scholars Forum for Socio-Cultural Advancement, 18*(1), 44–68.

Pound, E. (1913). In a station of the metro. *Poetry*, *2*(1), 12.

Wales, K. (2014). *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (3rd ed.). Routledge.