

## The Pragmatic Use of Doings among Nigerian Youths

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the slang ‘doings’ as used by Nigerian youths in order to ascertain the different morphological realizations and nuances. The data for the study were collected through everyday conversations and interactions on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, and Twitter of Nigerian youths who are between the age group interval of 16 – 45 years. This age range covers young adults, and middle-aged adults who also use the slang. Adopting the descriptive approach for the data analysis, the findings of the study show that the word ‘doings’, which is the plural form of doing, denotes an action as well as social activities. However, when it is used as a slang in different social contexts by Nigerians, it refers to money, wealth, riches, blessings, generosity, extravagance, fame and partying, thereby taking on a new social and cultural reference of the lexical meaning of the word. The study concludes that the word ‘doings’ functions as a noun in all contexts of use, irrespective of its place of occurrence in the sentence, and the slangy use of ‘doings’ is facilitated by social media influencers and celebrities.

**Keywords:** neologism, slang, pragmatics, discourse, morphology, semantic extension

### 1.0 Introduction

The entrenchment of words in a society, perhaps in the minds of the speakers of a language might seem a bit difficult, but in recent times, entrenchment of words is far easier than what it used to be due to the advent of technology and the internet. The increasing use of social media makes it easy for new words to spread like wildfire. This is the case with slang expressions which is mostly used by young adult and middle-aged adult. Okafor (2023) notes that in recent times, slang is now used mostly by all, even among old people. For instance, slang expressions are used by students, lecturer/teachers, comedians, politicians, social media users and handlers, actors and actresses, musicians and many others. Some of these slangs are popularised by celebrities and social media influencers. Lawal (2022) notes that ‘doings’ was one of the most used slangs in 2022. He describes it as ‘an exclamation when an individual appears to live large or show off wealth’. It also could mean a man with a large heart and one who makes things happen. Since the slang ‘doings’ was popularised by a Nigerian musical icon named Okoli Chinedu, also called; Flavour N’Abania, after his release of ‘Flavour of Africa’ album in 2020, with the 8th track titled: *doings*, featuring a known crooner Phyno, and Zubby Michael, the slang has become so popular today so much so that, it is associated with various nuances of meanings when used in different contexts. This is in line with Chiemezie and Ojiako’s (2023) observations that the usage of certain slangs seems to overlap in the sense that different slangs may be used to express a concept; or a particular slang may be used in different ways reflecting different meanings. This is where context has a role to play.

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that investigates the ways language is tied to the contexts in which it is used (Slotka, 2020). Speakers and writers often mean much more than they say or

write and expect their hearers or listeners to understand them. They will generally assume that some aspects of meaning that are not expressed in words are deducible from the context. This assumption is based on their shared environment, values, social conventions, or world view, which guides them to interpret meanings beyond words or grammatical structures. Ultimately, the goal is to correctly interpret the speaker's intended meaning. The speaker's or writer's intended meaning is a very crucial element in the study of pragmatics. Traditional pragmatics is all about investigating the speaker/writer's intended meaning rather than what is expressed in words. This study is an examination and analysis of the nuances of 'doings' on social media by Nigerian youths in order to delineate its denotative and pragmatic usages. 'Doings' may not appear like a meaningful word in the English lexicon because of the plural marker 's'; however, the grammatical function of the word shows that it is a noun, and its category does not change in the different contexts of use. The study therefore brings to the fore the nuances of meanings that the slang 'doings' has taken on among Nigerians. Several works have been done to examine slangs from various perspectives in social interactions such as: (Chiemezie and Ojiako, 2023; Okafor, 2023; Lawal, 2022; Orji and Okoli, 2021; Ajayi 2019; Odogwu, 2018; Nkamigbo and Eme, 2011; and many others). Some of these studies mention 'doings' as a slang which form part of their data, but these studies do not present the various nuances as undertaken here. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap with the aim of examining the different contextual meanings and nuances of 'doings.'

## **2.0 An Overview of Neologism, Slang and Language in Context**

Language is dynamic, it grows; it dies, just like new words emerge, some words become obsolete overtime. On one hand, neologism refers to introduction of new words or new senses of existing words into a language. In other words, they are newly-formed words and expressions, or a new meaning of existing words or expressions that are in the process of entering mainstream usage (Cambridge English Dictionary online). The word "neologism" was first attested in English in 1772. It was borrowed from the French word "neologisme" in 1734. According to Baldwin (2021), there are three types of neologisms:

- i. **Derived Words:** this kind of neologism uses words from other languages, like Latin and incorporates them into English. For example, the word "villa" means house in Latin. Today, the word appears in "village" and "villager".
- ii. **Blend Words:** these are humorous words that use multiple words to create a new word. "Brunch" which is a combination of breakfast and lunch.
- iii. **Transferred Words:** those that are taken from another language and significantly altered into English.

All languages of the world have inherent and external mechanisms of extending their vocabularies in order to accommodate new ideas and inventions. These meaning changes could come in form of semantic changes such as semantic narrowing, meaning broadening, metaphor, metonymy, e.t.c, and/or through various morphological processes. Nevertheless, context contributes to meaning and plays a vital role in meaning change.

On the other hand, slang expressions have been described in the literature in the context of social identity, gesture, affiliation, and sociolinguistic factors such as age, class, and gender, e.t.c., just like Hashemi (2011:17) describes it as a language used by groups of people, such as youths or criminals as part of their social identity. Generally, Hartman and Stork (1972:76) define slangs as a variety of speech characterized by newly coined and rapidly changing vocabulary used by young or social or professional groups for 'in-group communication and tending to prevent understanding by the rest of the speech community ...' For Hartman and Stork, slang is used by young or social or even a professional body. Similarly, it is defined by Johnson and Shirley (2005:4) as informal, non-standard terms or phrases that typically have

their origins in subcultures within a community. Crystal (2007:53), explains that it is a colloquial departure from formal language; it is frequently inventive, colorful, and cunning in its creation, earning it the moniker “plain man’s poetry.” However, Jowitt (1991:6) avers that slang has lost some of its negative connotations, since it occasionally gives old terms new meanings, expanding the vocabulary of any given language. Harris (1994:7) defines slang phrases as words created by a social group or given new definitions in order to become fresh or conventional and to keep outsiders from participating in group conversations. It is important to note from the foregoing that both neologisms and slang expressions undergo morphological processes and they tend to enrich and expand the vocabulary of a given language.

### **2.1 Studies on neologism, Slangs and lexical innovations**

Several works on lexical innovations and slangs abound in the literature. Some of these scholarly works form part of the empirical review.

Ezeifeke (2018) examines the influx of ethnically skewed neologisms and nonce expressions in the Nigerian print and online media in the political “change” dispensation. She adopts a qualitative approach to the analysis of the samples obtained from print and online newspapers that contained relevant data for her study. In selecting the data, the utterances of apex ethnic leaders and stakeholders from five major ethnic complexes were taken into consideration. Her data was analyzed using Fairclough’s tri-dimensional framework of discourse analysis in line with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It was discovered from the study that the use of the neologisms identified foregrounds ethnic identity construction along the lines of division and exclusionism. The use of the neologisms also has the potential of threatening the peaceful national dialogue in Nigeria. The study concludes that Nigerians and political actors should shun these divisive propagandist neologisms in order to achieve lasting peace and unity in the country.

Warambo, Odero and Sulch’s (2017) study of neologism focus on Sheng language in order to test lexical pragmatic processes of broadening using Sheng data. The researchers employ a lexical pragmatic theory proposed by Blutner (1998) in their study. Stratified random sampling was also used to identify informants, and they were asked to provide an inventory of Sheng lexemes alongside their meanings as used in Sheng. One of the findings of the study show that Sheng neologism tends to be broad in meaning, which can be taken as a system of polysemy that hinders precision and makes communication problematic.

Kupolati, Adebileje, Adeleke (2021) carry out a sociolinguistic study of Nigerian English lexical innovations in the COVID-19 Pandemic, focusing on the expression “Someone has been coronated”. The study explores lexical innovations and variation in the lexemes of Nigerian English formed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study investigates some COVID-19 vocabularies and how factors such as region, social class, and situational contexts bring about linguistic variations in daily use. It identifies and compiles the lexemes as they are used, and also describes their contextual usages in Nigerian English. Using the descriptive survey design, the research findings show that Nigerian English speakers use diverse morphological processes to create new lexemes based on the COVID-19 context. The study also produced a COVID-19 vocabulary corpus that revealed Nigerian speakers’ linguistic and innovative ability of the English language, and the effect of social experiences on language use. The study concludes that the corpus will help to provide the correct contextual meanings of the new words related to COVID-19.

With regard to slang, Nkamigbo and Eme (2011) carry out slangs in Otu-Onitsha by highlighting its linguistic features, richness and unique use among Otu-Onitsha youths. The

study demonstrates certain Igbo slang terms and their diverse users and usage settings, and advocates that the slang expressions should spread to other different Igbo communities since it would benefit the various Igbo communities. Odogwu's (2018) sociolinguistic study of slangy expressions in Nigerian pidgin focuses on its use in Warri-Ughelli-Sapele axes of Delta State. The data was sourced systematically through participant observation of conversational discourses in everyday contexts amongst Nigerians living in the area such as discourses in football viewing centres, bukas (roadside food vendors), motor-parks, university campuses, the market, as well as slangy expressions used by presenters on private radio stations, and lyrics of popular songs. Using Referential theory of Richards and Ogden (1923) in the data analysis, it was observed that every speaker poses a variety of slangy expressions and tends to choose among them in accordance with the social situation that calls for their use, and these expressions are fully intelligible to the speakers. The study concludes that Nigerian pidgin slangy expressions are a product of social force and the creative use of language by Nigerians to satisfy their communication needs. Similarly, Chiemezie and Ojiako (2023) investigate the emerging slangs in Nigeria from the perspective of their source, formation and usage, and the different contexts that engender the use of the slangs and why. The findings of the study reveal the transformation of the slangs from their first mention to becoming a full-blown slang which were described in three ways such as direct transport, truncated and transformed mechanisms. The study concludes that the contextual use of the slangs by most Nigerians are used to soothe the effect of hardship on their psyche.

From the perspective of Anti-language, slang and cyber scam subculture among urban youth in Southwestern, Nigeria, Ayayi (2019) focuses on the linguistic strategies used by scammers during their interactions and operations. He notes that scammers employ linguistic strategies such as coinages, overlexicalization and relexicalization as anti-language features in their dealings. However, the author did not state whether these features are exclusive to crime slangy expressions or not. The foregoing simply shows how lexical innovations either by neologisms or slangs gradually become entrenched and enter the lexicon of its speakers following the morphological processes they undergo.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The data for the study were collected from observation of everyday conversations among Nigerian youths between the ages of 15 – 45 years, and interactions on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tiktok and WhatsApp by social media users, which encompass different geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The age group interval covers young adults, and middle-aged adults who also use the slang. The data were qualitatively analysed using the descriptive approach. The data analysis constitutes two parts: the first part is the discussion of the verb 'do' as a grammatical word and its morphological derivations, while the second part goes into the contextual nuances of 'doings'.

## **4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis**

### **4.1 The Grammatical Functions of the verb 'do'**

In this section, the various function of the verb 'do' is presented with its morphological derivations

'Do' is categorized as a verb, an auxiliary verb and a noun as captured in some English grammar books and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. For the purpose of illustration, only a few of the senses are shown in the subsections of (4.1.).

#### 4.1.1. 'Do' functioning as a verb

As a verb, it takes different morphological forms such as *do*, *does*, *did*, *done*, *doing* and it can be used to refer to actions that you do not mention by name or do not know about. Obviously, examples (1) & (2) demonstrate this.

1. What are you *doing* this evening?
2. What can I *do* for you?

There are other many senses of 'do' functioning as a verb such as to *behave*, *succeed/progress*, *task/activity*, *job*, *study*, *make*, etc. See (3) – (8) below:

3. The students are free to *do* as they please [=behave]
4. Chioma is *doing* very well at school [=succeed/progress]
5. Zara is *doing* the cooking [=task/activity]
6. What *do* you do? [=job]
7. He is *doing* English [=study]
8. Who is *doing* the food for the wedding reception? [=make]

Observe the different senses of doing as a verb in sentences (4), (5), (7), & (8) used to ask or talk about the 'success or progress of something or somebody', to talk about 'tasks or activity', to refer to 'learning or studying something', and to mean 'organizing and preparing something'.

#### 4.1.2. 'Do' functioning as an Auxiliary verb

When the morphological forms of 'do' such as *does*, *did*, *done* are used, it is used to indicate the following:

- Used before a full verb to form negative sentences and questions such as: *Does she speak English?*
- To make question tags: *You live in Nigeria, don't you?*
- To avoid repeating a full verb: *Emeka works harder than she does*
- When no other auxiliary verb is present, to emphasize what you are saying: *Chinwe did at least write to say thank you.*
- To change the order of the subject and verb when an adverb is moved to the front: *Not only does Emeka speak Chinese, he is also good with computers*

#### 4.1.3. 'Do' functioning as a noun

'Do' can be used informally to refer to a party or social event as exemplified in (9)

(9). Are you having a big *do* for your birthday?

(10). We threw a big *do* for Chioma after graduation

There are other idiomatic uses of 'do' such as *dos* and *don'ts* used to refer to rules that one should follow.

#### 4.1.4. The function of 'Doing(s)'

*Doings* is the plural form of *doing*. It is used to refer to the following:

- In a noncount context, it is the act of making something happen through your own action as in:

(11). It is the *doing* of the good deed that is important, not the thanks you receive

- Informal phrases like: '*take some doing*, *take a lot of doing*, *take a bit of doing*' are used to say that something is difficult to do and requires a lot of effort or work as shown in (12 a-c).

(12) a. Finishing the job on time may take a *bit of doing*

b. It will *take some doing* to win the game

- c. Getting the project done on time will *take a lot of doing*  
- If something is **your doing**, you did it. See (13) as exemplified:

(13) a. Is this mix-up your doing? [=did you cause the mix-up?]  
b. Chioma's surprise party was not *all her doing*; she had lots of assistance  
- The plural form of doing – doings, refer to things that someone does or things that happen. This is exemplified in (14):

(14) a. I have been reading about Obi Cubana's latest *doings* [=activities]  
b. There have been some strange *doings* [=goings-on, occurrences] lately.  
While example (14a) refers to things that one is involved in, example (14b) shows the goings-on and/or occurrences that happened.

#### 4.2. The Pragmatic Function of 'doings' as a slang

In this section, the various contextual uses of *doings* are discussed.

The word *doings* is used to refer to blessings, generosity/large-heartedness, extravagance, fame, money, wealth, affluence, partying in the following contexts:

- (15). It is the Lord's **doings** (blessings)
- (16). Obi Cubana is a man of **doings** (generous)
- (17). **Doings** starts and stops at Ibiza (lavish partying)
- (18). **Doings** has levels to it (extent of riches)
- (19). Do you have **doings**? (money)
- (20). Yahoo Boys and **doings** are 5 & 6 (lavish lifestyle)
- (21). **Doings** is abundant this December (partying/celebration)
- (22). Nigeria Super Eagles get **doings** (success/victory)
- (23). You can only be a man of **doings** if you have money (generous)
- (24). Jowizaza has **doings** more than E-money (extravagant)

- *It is the Lord's doings*

In (15), the expression conveys the conventional meaning of the Lord's blessings as expressed in example (13b). In this context, there is no conflict of ideology, belief or meaning. It is very obvious for any person to understand that it is referring to God's blessings as a great provider, since the Lord is great and does mighty and marvelous things. In other words, the word 'doings' describes the Mighty deeds of the Lord.

- *Obi Cubana is a man of doings*

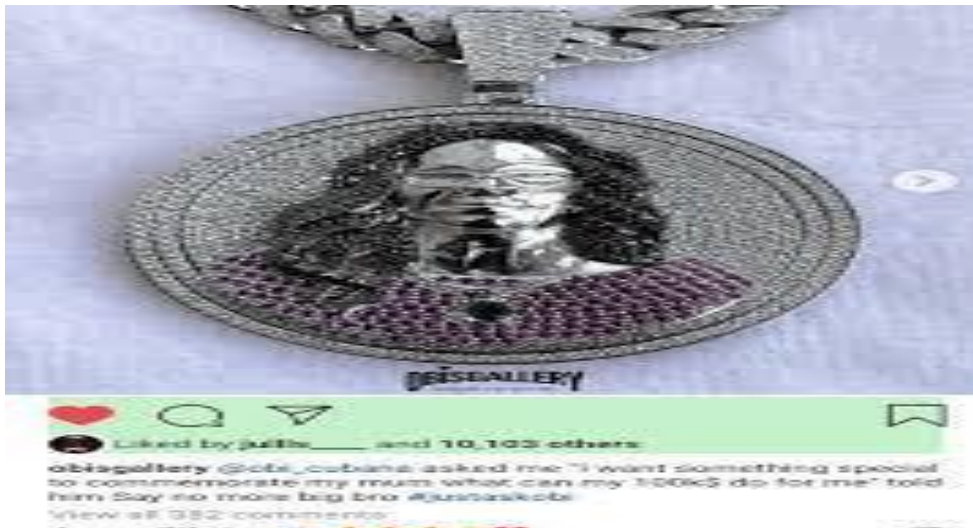
This expression is extracted from the social media and materialistic ideological school of thought. It is an offshoot of Zubby Michael's slang and what musicians like Flavour, Zubby and Phyno portrayed in their song, Instagram pictures and videos as 'doings'.

Observe in picture (1), a pictorial display of wealth during the burial of the late mother of a socialite and wealthy night club owner who is referred to as a man of 'doings' because of his materialistic show of affluence in Oba, Anambra State. In this context, he received over 400 live cows from friends and business associates. Bundles of money of different denominations were sprayed on him and other attendees at the carnival-like burial that lasted for days. Again, he is a man of "doings" because he held the social media space spellbound for up to two weeks, as almost all social media users were glued to their social media handles watching the event as it unfolded during the burial. It is also important to note that he is referred to as a man of 'doings' in this context because people from all walks of life attended the burial while he

empowered 300 Oba youths with ₦1,000,000 naira (one Million naira) each. Following this, it is clear that because of Obi Cubana's wealth and affluence, and how he was able to hold people spellbound through his show of affluence, the meaning of 'doings' and Obi Cubana, when used interchangeably, simply denotes the display of wealth. This meaning has become popular today among Nigerian youths.



Picture 1: Doings at Obi Cubana's Mother's Burial at Oba, Anambra State, 2021



Picture 2: USD100,000 Pendant by Obi Cubana in Memory of his Mother, depicting him as a Man of "doings".

- *'Doings' starts and stops at Ibiza*

Ibiza is a Night Club in Awka owned by a socialite. In the context of Nigeria's entertainment industry, a night club is a place where the rich come to flex their financial muscle as regards buying of expensive drinks which normally could be bought at a very cheaper rate in shopping malls. For instance, a drink that is sold for ₦40,000 (Forty thousand naira only) in a wine shop is sold at three to ten times the actual amount. This materialistic ideology in clubs like Ibiza, affords people, in some cases young people, the opportunity to display their wealth by buying expensive drinks at 10 times the normal amount, spraying wads of cash, and pouring up expensive drinks as a way of showing that they have arrived financially. The implication of 'doings' starting and stopping at Ibiza is that, if you do not have money, you are not expected to be at Ibiza because you cannot spend. So, 'doings' in this case, refers to money and lavish spending as shown in picture 1 as well as the way money is sprayed in the song 'doings.' Within the social media and entertainment circle, the meaning of 'doings' in Ibiza is well understood. In terms of the grammatical function, 'doings' functions as a noun.

- *'Doings' has levels to it.*

'Doings get levels' points to what one is able to own materially and financially. In this context, 'doings' denotes riches. Generally, what this slang expression means as it is the normal saying in the social circle is simply that; 'if your skin no full, no put body', that is if you do not have enough money to spend extravagantly, do not show up. In this context, it is about levelling up financially in the social circle. In some instances, one may be financially okay but does not have the money to waste; thus, the expression means that the person should avoid the big spenders in occasions, social gatherings and club houses, and it is strictly about showing social class in wealth. However, some rich people, who are also very comfortable, do not have the flair for throwing away and/or spending extravagantly on social media or social events for the sake of clout or popularity. So, for such wealthy people, their wealth is categorized differently.

- *Do you have 'doings'?*

Do you have 'doings' is a materialistic question which categorizes the poor and the rich, big spenders and small spenders, and people who are able to spray money at social events or buy expensive drinks at club houses, and those who cannot. In this context, the question is all about whether someone has the money to spend or not. In most cases, some people who do not have "doings" are the ones that cannot behave in a materialistic way because it's either they do not have, or do not have the mind and/or large heart to spend, even if the money is available. In the social media circle, having "doings" is all about lavish spending.

- *Yahoo boys and doings are 5 & 6, that is 'Yahoo boys and doings are synonymous'*

This is another pointer to what 'doings' entails in our society. It is important to note that in Nigeria, Yahoo boys are referred to as internet fraudsters who swindle both the locals and white people of their hard-earned money. Because they did not work hard for this money, they are prone to flaunting it in frivolities, most especially in social gatherings and club houses like in example (17). To say that Yahoo boys are 5 and 6 with 'doings', means that yahoo boys are known for showing materialism, wealth and spending so big on frivolities. This statement is therefore embedded in the materialism school of thought and ideology. They are known for exorbitant lifestyle, spending money lavishly anywhere they go, and making their presence felt and known by doing so. Put in another way, Yahoo boys and 'doings' being 5 and 6 simply refers to money, wealth and spending.

- *Doings just plenty this December; that is, 'Doings is abundant this December'*

This expression is used to refer to lots of partying and celebration during festivities like Christmas. Usually, Christmas period in Nigeria is a time when people mostly celebrate their successes by spending a lot from their coffers at social gatherings. So, 'doings' as used in this instance is influenced by the plethora of celebrations during this period, which is characterized by lots of eating, drinking and spending money.

- *Nigeria Super Eagles get doings; that is, 'Nigeria Super Eagles have doings'*

'Doings' is used in this context to denote some level of achievement which is not necessarily being wealthy. At the African cup of Nations, a social media influencer; 'Mazi Tunde Ednut' enthused that the Super Eagles have 'doings' due to the way they won the Egyptian national team. In other words, 'doings' is used to describe the level of achievement of the Super Eagles' team and the manner in which they defeated their opponent. If they had failed, such words would not appear in the way they were addressed. Thus, 'doings' refers to success and/or victory in this context.



- *You can only be a man of doings, if you have money.*

Most of the contextual meanings of ‘doings’ relate to money as explicitly shown in this context. It is also shown that what confirms any individual as a man of ‘doings’ is the amount of money one has and/or is available to spend extravagantly.

- *Jowizaza get ‘doings’ Pass E-Money; that is, ‘Jowizaza has ‘doings’ More than E-Money’*

This expression in Nigerian pidgin English simply compares two socialites: *Jowizaza* and *E-money* regarding their level of outspending each other especially in social gatherings. This comparison is based on their social status, and the fact that they belong to the same class, attend almost the same social event and the same club. Both are known to be big spenders at social events. However, the expression shows that *Jowizaza* is perceived as one who is lavish in spending more than E Money.

### 5.0 Summary and Conclusion

This study has shown the different nuances of *doings*. It has also demonstrated that the slang *doings* is gradually taking on new meanings in everyday conversation, and these meanings are generally being understood and accepted wherever it is expressed in the Nigerian context. The meaning of ‘doings’ arises from a new social and cultural reference of the lexical meaning of the word as a form of philosophical monism and materialism that is prevalent in the context of Nigerian entertainment and social media spaces. The instances discussed in this study show that *doings* has everything to do with wealth, riches and fame in social gatherings; and if one must be referred to as having *doings*, such a person must be rich and be disposed to spending lavishly at social events. In addition, *doings* as a grammatical category functions as a noun, and this category is unchanged in all the various contextual usages, irrespective of its place of occurrence in the sentence. Linking the meaning of ‘do’ with social event and the activities of a person in the society; in Nigeria, *doings* has taken on new meanings especially in social contexts such as money, wealth, riches, blessings, generosity, extravagance, fame, partying, especially when it is used pragmatically. The spread and impact of slang expressions is influenced and facilitated by its use by prominent figures, and social media influencers and celebrities in a society, as is the case in Nigeria.

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