

## Debranding through Prevarication in the Linguistic Market Place: A Study of Selected Products in Onitsha

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Mfon Ekpe,<sup>1</sup> Kajang Joshua,<sup>2</sup> Timothy Ellah<sup>3</sup>

Department of Linguistics & Nigerian Languages, University of Calabar,  
Department of Marketing, University of Calabar,  
Department of History & International Studies, University of Calabar,  
[mbekpe@unical.edu.ng](mailto:mbekpe@unical.edu.ng)

### Abstract

This article investigates the ways cloners debrand products through prevarication. Prevarication is a feature in human language used in misinforming people. Cloners debrand products in the linguistic market place to deceive buyers. The study aims to examine linguistic strategies employed in cloning products taking into account morphophonological processes and phonotactic positions of sounds. It also evaluates buyers' perceptions of these products. Schmitt (2012) consumer brand model and Bourdieu (1991) linguistic market theory provided the theoretical contexts for the study. Survey design was used in selecting Onitsha as the area of study. The work employed market survey method and four markets were randomly selected for the study. Data were collected on products such as T-Shirts, shoes, sandals, canvass, face caps, belts and wrist watches. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used for the data analysis. Findings showed most cloned products were T-Shirts, Face Caps, Shoes and Canvas, Sandals, Belts and Watches. The analysis shows the activation of morphophonological processes such as insertion, deletion, substitution and metathesis in facilitating brand identity theft, and findings attested to phonotactics of segments. The study concludes that because debranding weakens trademark protection and undermines a company's credibility, adequate policies should be put in place by the government to eliminate distrust in the market environment.

**Keywords:** Phonotactics; Marketplace; Prevarication; Cloning; Branding; Identity

### Introduction

As a means of communication, human language has basic design features such as semanticity, total feedback, arbitrariness, discreteness, reflexivity, learnability,

displacement and prevarication (Yule 2006, p.10). Prevarication is one of the design features of human language that makes it possible for one to potentially use language to misinform, misdirect and create lies. This feature of human language has been manipulated by producers of counterfeit product who clone brand names and logos in order to penetrate a market they do not belong. According to Lukose et al. (2024), brand linguistics is the academic investigation of knowledge on the constitution of brand identity and about its perception through language. Brands are identification markers of certain products or services which make it possible and easier for a consumer to easily identify their favourite products. Every well researched and quality product is given brand names to distinguish and keep the product protected from potential hackers who may fake the original brand in order to penetrate the market and take consumers of the original brand away. Brands on products represent a major kind of intellectual property, as they support identification and distinction amongst products or services. The creation of brand names by companies on their products gives authenticity and generates goodwill for the company on the basis of its products and/or services. The recognition enjoyed by brands also gives a reputation to products or services marketed under the brand names in the minds of consumers. The act of patronising branded goods and services by customers is as a result of the long-standing trust and expected quality level the brand owner maintains on the products.

The cloners tactfully manipulate brand labels to deceive, lie and misinform people in the linguistic market place. They achieve this mainly by adopting phonological manipulation to juxtapose, delete, insert and substitute the graphemes (letters) of the brand names. As a buyer reads a brand name, he or she adopts saccadic eye movement by paying attention to the first and last letters of the brand name, without taking cognisance of the letters in-between the text. It is these in-between letters of the alphabets that the cloners usually twist by changing its graphophonological content to deceive and misinform the prospective buyer to patronise the cloned version of the original brand. On the strength of this background, the thrusts of the research are to investigate the most cloned products, examine the morphophonological processes used in cloning, analyse the phonotactic positioning of the look-alike substituted sounds, letters or syllables used by the cloners and find out whether the buyers know that these products are cloned.

Counterfeiting is so prevalent in Nigeria, mostly Onitsha. *Ezeanochie et al (2024, p.1) confirms that Nigeria is bedevilled with the proliferation of illicit and substandard goods. They add that, there is a relative unchecked mechanism to fight the continuous influx of the goods in the Nigerian market which has to large extent affected the economy. In this case, there is no doubt that there are no government institution thrust with the responsibility of*

*ensuring that fake, illicit and substandard product have no place in the Nigerian market. This may not be so, rather the Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON), is not effective and efficient enough in their duties. It for this reason that Ezeanochie et al submitted that SON's fight against substandard goods has not meaningfully impacted on the Nigerian economy. Based on the above, they suggested that the Nigerian government should endeavour to improve the agency's thrust with the responsibility of ensuring standard of consumable products through the provision of basic logistics, personnel and infrastructures needed to fight against or wage war against the proliferation of the economy with substandard goods. The proliferation of counterfeit and lack of quality control in Nigeria is detrimental to the Nigerian economy as well as the well-beings of consumer (Abel 2021, p. 273).*

This study is urgently desired because debranding has deprived the owners of the branded names of their products and finances. This also has adversely affected the patronisers of cloned branded products as they ended buying products of low quality. It equally deprived the government from the internally generated revenue as these cloners do not register their business with the Corporate Affairs Commission and they do not pay any form of tax to government. Cloning of branded products affect the owner of the brands, being that the market for the brands is shared, depriving the brand owners of their legitimate sale value and foreign exchange. This may eventually lead to the shutdown of the branded products' company and loss of jobs. If this could happen to apparels of wears that can be easily dictated, then one imagines the enormous damages debranding has caused to the health of the consumers of orally and intravenous faked products, such as baby's foods, noodles and medicines.

This study is significant to the government in that it would help to trace the channels where these debranded products come from. This would help the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) to trace and seized these fake products from their warehouses and the markets. It would also guide the patronisers of these debranded products to decipher which of products are the original brands and the fake ones, and teach them the need to invest their hard earned money wisely. It would direct the local and the international law systems on how to harness copy-right laws and brand names to protect brand owners.

## Literature review

### Product counterfeiting and the linguistic marketplace

Brands represent a major sort of intellectual property, as they support identification and distinction between products and services of companies and thus allow the creation of a particular goodwill for the company, its products or services. Brands are catalysts for the psychological association between the consumer and the company. It may inspire a product to become a phenomenon and can also lead to the rise and fall of an entire company. A brand is a mark of identification of a certain product or service; therefore, two distinct companies should not use the same brand mark. This provision tends to protect the identity of the brand and to protect customers, who might be confused and misled if two products or services are marketed under the same or a similar brand name. Customary laws of different countries might also provide means of brand protection as certain brands may become legalised trademarks as a matter of law. Trade mark and brand names are interrelated. According to Osei-Tutu, (2018, p.10),

a trademark is any word, name, symbol, device, or any combination thereof that identifies and distinguishes a seller's goods and indicates the source of the goods. The elements of a brand can be trademarks (but must be more than just trademarks).

The mediating nature of brands within economic environments can be employed within other complex economic zones. The right granted to each trademark holder is determined by the nature of the underlying trademark, which again is determined by the specific brand in question and by the environment the brand inhabits. Another important aspect of the regulatory role of a trademark is the need for specific, stable legal balance across time (Resai, 2012). Debranding by the 'cloners' or 'counterfeiters' is done in order to reduce the quality of visual elements, twist the fonts and reduce or over blow colour palettes and use linguistic strategy called 'prevarication' to penetrate the original brand market. Fakers debrand to distort the original visual identity of an organisation and rebrand to twist corporate identity of the organisation it is fraudulently copying. These fakers prevaricate by twisting the brand names of the original product in order to deceive potential buyers to patronise them. They tactfully manipulate 'prevarication', by using this linguistic strategy to deceive, lie and misinform in the linguistic market place.

Egbokhare (2006, p.207) argues that, "faking or cloning of consumable products is so ubiquitous in our environments". These faking do not spare any products, the worst being foods, creams and drugs which have caused unexpected ailment and untimely deaths of

many people. After an organisation has invested much in securing trade name, brand name, carried out research and a particular product is produced, some faceless cloners would create a look-alike of the products. They share in the marketing of the product and profit illegally without paying taxes to the statutory authority. In achieving their aims, the brand cloners invade the linguistic market place and adopt different strategies to deceive the unsuspecting buyers, capitalising on prevarication, Most of the counterfeiting are done by invading the linguistic marketplace, particularly by twisting the language of the brand owner inscriptions. The dynamic and multidisciplinary nature of linguistics relates linguistics and other activities in different domains of human activities, thus the concept “*Linguistic marketplace*”. Linguistic marketplace is a symbolic location where linguistic exchanges take place. At this spatial location, various linguistic varieties are assigned market values and various places, which could be positive or negative. The products in the linguistic market are assigned prices called ‘*linguistic capital*’. The value of the linguistic capital is dependent on how standardised the speech form is, its functionality and ethical principles. It is for these reasons that Nadeem (2017, pp.766-767) quips that,

businesses must proactively adopt ethical guidelines and practices to build trust, mitigate risks, and foster sustainable relationships with their stakeholders...however, unethical marketing practices, such as misleading advertising, exploitative targeting, and irresponsible use of consumer data, can lead to distrust, regulatory scrutiny, and long-term reputational damage”. Therefore, businesses must proactively adopt ethical guidelines and practices to build trust, mitigate risks, and foster sustainable relationships with their stakeholders.

It is these goodwill principles that buyers keep faith with and brands are promoted. Doyle (2001, p.214) adds that, “brands are at the very heart of marketing”. This is believed to be so because every buyer wants to be identified with a brand name, logo or pallets. Baker (2005, p.4) adduces that, “marketing’s aim is the identification of target markets and the satisfaction of these customers, now and in the future”. When a company creates a strong brand, it attracts customer’s preference and builds a defensive wall against competition”. It is this defensive wall that the cloners are out to break and deceitfully “compete” with the original brand owners.

Ahulu (1999, p.36) affirms that, “for a language to be standard, it must pass through a filter...., usages are not labelled merely because they are used and found acceptable by native speakers”. For a speech form to attract *linguistic capital* in the linguistic marketplace such speech must be standardised. A standardised speech, according to Hudson (1996,

p.33), “must attain certain criteria such as selection, codification, elaboration of function, acceptability (by the educated class) and intelligibility (international), *before it can gain linguistic capital in the linguistic market*” (*italicized, mine*). Considering all the world’s languages, which Pereltsvaig (2023) argues, Chinese Mandarin has the largest population of speakers, followed by Spanish, then English. Though the English language is at the third position, it is the most widely used language in the world. For this reason, it gains the highest value in Nigeria linguistic marketplace and most branded products’ inscriptions in Nigeria are inscribed in English, as it is the official language within government circles and other sociolinguistic domains.

The wider use of English has evolved many varieties such as Nenglish (Nigerian variety of English). English in Nigeria has been domesticated to suit the Nigerian environment. According to Adegbija (2004, p.20), “the term ‘domestication’ in the context of English in Nigeria, connotes “home-grown,” “made native,” “adapted and tamed to suit the Nigeria environment.” Ekpe (2006, p.29) calls it ‘glocalization’, Bamgbose (1982) says it is ‘nativization’ and Chilwa (2002, p.95) tags it ‘Nigerianness’. Nigerian English is an interference variety as it takes over the features, forms and structures from the local languages and an autonomous variety. As a norm developing variety, it displays new and innovative forms and structures with internal linguistic creativity”. It is this aspect of internal linguistic creativity that the fakers capitalise on and manipulate the phonological and morphological structures to clone the desired products. The manipulation of the phonological structure results in several phonological processes such as assimilation, elision, concatenation, linking, intrusion, spoonerism or metathesis, to deceive unsuspecting buyers to patronise the cloned products.

### **Language and brand identity**

Empirically, researches have been scanty in the area of debranding in the linguistic market place. Musonda et al. (2025) investigated on “the impact of language on branding: a comprehensive analysis”. They advised that in an era where consumers are presented with vast choices of brands, effective communication is of utmost importance for brands that desire to establish meaningful connections with consumers and show a strong presence in the market. Their study explored the multifaceted relationship between linguistic elements and brand identity, focusing on how strategic linguistic choices play an important role in shaping consumer’s behaviour and enhancing brand engagement and visibility. The primary objective of their study was to examine the impact of language on brand perception. The paper aimed at providing insights into how brands could leverage language to strengthen their market position and resonate with target audiences. The study employs

a mixed-method approach. This involves combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative explains the different linguistic strategies as found in the collected data, qualitative handles the statistical tables, calculations of frequencies/percentages and charts. These approaches provide empirical evidence on consumer preferences and perceptions related to branding language. In analysing linguistic strategies and their effectiveness in enhancing brand identity and consumer loyalty, the research was guided by a semiotic theory, which examined how signs and symbols conveyed meaning, and social identity theory which explored how language shaped group dynamics and brand affiliation. The findings of the investigation showed that the strategic use of language in branding helps brands to make meaningful connections, convey their values effectively, and adapt to changing market dynamics which ultimately lead to greater branding success. The study provides actionable insights for brands aiming to cultivate a compelling and resonant brand narrative and differentiate them in an ever-evolving competitive market.

Lukose et al. (2024), researched on landscape at the juncture of branding and linguistics. They maintain that branding has emerged as a multidisciplinary concept with complications conveyed by integrated digital technologies, AI, and rich linguistic approaches. They used VOSviewer, Biblioshiny, and CiteSpace in pinpointing key trends, themes, and collaboration networks. Drawing on data collected from Scopus, the study investigated the shifts in traditional branding strategies caused by technologies of machine learning, sentiment analysis, and social media platforms. It highlights the contributions made by leading authors, major publication sources, and patterns of international collaboration in influential works. They also added that, thematic and co-occurrence analysis showed significant movement into data-based and computational approaches. They equally pointed out some research gaps in the field of digital branding's long-term effects, ethical considerations of AI-photo strategies, and multilingual branding approaches that will provide a useful basis for future research and practical application innovation in the field of branding.

Carnevale et al. (2017) conducted a research on brand linguistics: a theory-driven framework for the study of language in branding. According to them, a conceptual framework examines how language influences the way consumers interact with brands. They built on a review of two decades of research in the field and their framework drew on Schmitt's model of the consumer psychology of brands (2012) and integrated the language-related disciplines of psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and semiotics to convey a novel interdisciplinary perspective to brand-related managerial concerns. According to them, the framework defined the domain of *brand linguistics*, the study of language effects on



consumers in brand-related settings. They argued that brand linguistics differs from the traditional disciplines associated with linguistics in that, it focuses on the consumer as a unit of analysis and utilises an interdisciplinary approach to theory. They adduced that the framework recognizes the implicit emergence of brand linguistics as a sub-discipline of consumer behaviour, which is in turn, is a sub-discipline of marketing. While integrating extant knowledge on the subject, they argued that *brand linguistics* generates new insights into research propositions and provides concrete suggestions for both academics and practitioners. Moreover, they concluded that well-established findings within fundamental domains of branding might vary once an integrative approach is adopted.

Phau et al. (2015) worked on devil continued to wear 'counterfeit' Prada: a tale of two cities. The study examined the influence of social and personality factors on attitudes towards counterfeiting of luxury brands and purchase intention between China Chinese and Taiwan Chinese consumers. Data were collected through a mall intercept approach in downtown Shanghai and Taipei. A self-administered questionnaire was developed and back-translated from English to Chinese and distributed. They used structural equation modeling to analyse the data. Findings showed that collectivism has a positive relationship with attitudes towards counterfeiting of luxury brands for the China Chinese but not for the Taiwan Chinese, personal gratification was found to have a negative relationship with attitudes towards counterfeiting of luxury brands. Integrity and status consumption were found to have a positive relationship with attitudes towards counterfeiting of luxury brands for both the China Chinese and Taiwan Chinese consumers. According to their findings were limited to comparison between China Chinese from Shanghai and Taiwan Chinese from Taipei; as such, the results might not be generalisable across all Chinese consumers or international consumers.

Egbokhare (2006) worked on copying the master: an appraisal of the linguistic strategies employed in imitating brand naming. She said that, in recent times the need to gain a considerable share of the market has continued to motivate product manufacturers and the end users to engage in aggressive and strategic marketing drives. She added that with cloning, people deliberately create a look-alike of a product in order to confuse the buyer at the point of purchase. She affirmed that counterfeiting is, especially, common in developing countries. Her objectives of the study were to investigate the kind of alteration available to 'copycats', and examine the linguistic strategies employed to make this possible and to find out the position of the word that is favoured. Her findings showed that there are two major kinds of alterations which are visual and auditory. In addition, the major elements of a brand include the logo, trade names, trademarks, trade colours, product design and packaging. She added that when the change is auditory, a sound or more is



altered, making the imitation sound like the original. The visual according to her, involves a change of symbol, colour, package or graphics. She reiterated that the imitation shares a very strong resemblance with the original product such that the change may be imperceptible.

Tom et al. (1998), investigated on counterfeiting with their focus on the supply side. According to them, research on counterfeiting had concentrated on supply side, thus their shift of paradigm to consumer demand for counterfeit goods. Their major purpose for the research was that the anticounterfeiting efforts would benefit from the identification of the segment(s) of consumer counterfeiting accomplices, consumers who knowingly purchase counterfeit products. The population of study focused on flea markets and malls, in attempting to identify consumer accomplices. The objectives of the study were to investigate pre-purchase factors, examined on factors active during purchasing, and find out post-purchase factors. The results showed the existence of a typology of consumer accomplices, sly shoppers who purposely purchase counterfeit goods to demonstrate their consumer shrewdness and economically concerned shoppers whose intentional purchase of fake goods is driven by economic concerns.

### **Theoretical review**

Schmitt's (2012) consumer brand model and Bourdieu's (1991) linguistic market theory are adopted as the theoretical frameworks for the work. Schmitt's (2012) model of the consumer psychology posits that consumers engage with brands at different levels (object-centered, self-centered and social) through five key processes: identifying, experiencing, integrating, signifying, and connecting. The framework examines how language influences the way consumers interact with brands. It also defines the domain of *brand linguistics*, the study of language effects on consumers in brand-related settings. It recognises the implicit emergence of brand linguistics as a sub-discipline of consumer behaviour, which is in turn a sub-discipline of marketing. These processes help consumers form emotional connections with brands, ultimately influencing their attitudes, attachments, and relationships with the brand.

Bourdieu's (1991) linguistic market theory emphasises on sociolinguistic idea where language value and influence vary according to social, economic and cultural considerations, just like normal goods in an economic market. This theory views language as a symbolic market where different linguistic varieties (e.g., dialects, accents) are assigned different values and "prices" based on their perceived legitimacy and social

desirability. Just as in a traditional marketplace, certain language features are deemed more valuable and prestigious, influencing social and economic opportunities. Some of the values in linguistic market theory are symbolic linguistic capital, legitimacy/prestige, social and economic consequences and power dynamics. In symbolic value, the theory stresses that language varieties, like products, have symbolic value and can be exchanged for social and economic benefits. **The theory compared linguistic capital to** individuals who accumulate capital for business, but in linguistics it is a type of cultural capital, through their mastery of language and communication skills. This capital can be used to gain access to desirable social positions and opportunities. Linguistic market theory emphasised that for **legitimacy and prestige**, certain language varieties are deemed more legitimate and prestigious than others, and this is often based on historical or institutional factors. Bourdieu in his linguistic market theory brought in the concept of ‘habitus’ which refers to the ingrained habits, dispositions, and practices that individuals develop based on their social class and environment.

In all the previous studies on imitation of brand names and debranding, no attempt has been made empirically to investigate how prevarication has been manipulated by fakers to debrand branded products in the linguistic market place, especially in Onitsha geolinguistic area on these products of research: T-Shirts, Shoes, Sandals, Canvass, Face Caps, Belts and Wrist Watches, thus the need to fill in the gap.

## **Methodology**

Onitsha is located on the eastern bank of the River Niger, in Anambra state in the South-eastern Nigeria. It has the biggest business hub in West Africa (Ochia 2022, p. 50). Market Survey Method (MSM) was adopted to randomly select 4 markets (Main market, Ochangi, Relief and Awka). The study area was digitally captured from the Satellite and Terrain with digital UTM Geo mapping GIS tools. The bearing was set at between 2-5m. The area of study was grouped into 4 cells: Cell 1: Onitsha Main market located by the bank of River Niger in Onitsha North. Cell 2: Ochangi market situated at Onitsha South. Cell 3: Relief market cited at Onitsha express way and Cell 4: Awka main market is in the state capital located along Azikiwe Avenue. 4 (four) of the original and (4) four of the cloned products were selected and bought from each cell (T-Shirts, Shoes, Sandals, Canvass, Face Caps, Belts and Wrist Watches), totalling 8 (eight products) and making a total of 32 (thirty two products), both the cloned and the branded from the selected markets. The investigated products were photo-snapped and uploaded to Google lens, a set of vision-based computing software tool, to find out the quality of the original brand and the counterfeited

equivalents. Google lens compared objects in the picture as snapped and ranks those images based on their similarity and relevance to the objects in the original picture. This was achieved by snapping the images of the faked product and placing it on Google lens for authentication.

Observation method was used for a period of over two months, in each cell. People in these markets and outside these markets who wore these products were politely and tactically approached to find out whether they could identify the imitation and the original. 200 (two hundred Research Questionnaires were given out to patronisers of the investigated brands to find out their reason(s) for buying brands, and to seek their knowledge of whether they know about the authenticity of these brands. The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, data were presented on tables, and calculation carried out by the use of simple percentage. These were transferred to Microsoft spreadsheet for statistical annotation. Qualitatively, description were made on what were found on the field and analysed.

### Data presentation and analysis

**Table 1: Products that were mostly cloned**

	T-Shirts		Shoes		Sandals	
	Branded	Cloned	Branded	Cloned	Branded	Cloned
	Zara	Zaria/Zarla	Gucci	Gucgi (GG)	Zara	Zarla
	Balenciaga	Balenciaca	Balenciaga	-	Crocs	_
	Chanel	channel	Choo	Chuo	Chanel	Channel
	Versace	Versase	Versace	Vesace	Versace	_
	Puma	Poma	Puma	Poma	Puma	Poma
	Adidas	Abidas	Adidas	Abibas	Adidas	Adidas
	Givenchy	Givinchy	Givenchy	-	Givenchy	_
	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitton
Total	8	8 =100%	8	6 = 75%	8 =	5 = 62.5%

**Table 2: Other cloned products**

	Canvas		Face Caps		Belts		Wrist Watches	
	Branded	Cloned	Branded	Cloned	Branded	Cloned	Branded	Cloned
	Puma	Pomo	Zara	Zaara	Zara	-	Cartier	
	Nike	Nikke	Balenciaga	Balenciga	Yves Saint Laurent– (YSL)	-	Rolex	-
	Converse	-	Chanel	Channel	Chanel	Channel	Chanel	Channel
	Vans	Vaans	Versace	Vesace	Versace	Vesace	Prada	-
	Superga	Supega	Puma	Poma	Puma	Poma	Gucci	Guegi
	Keds	Keds	Adidas	Abidas	Adidas	Abidas	Dior	-
	Skechers	Skecers	Givenchy	Givanchy	Ralph Lauren	-	Audemars Pigue	-
	Deckers	Dekers	Louis Vuitton	-	Louis Vuitton	-	Ralph Lauren	-
Total	8	6 = 75%	8	7=87%	8	4=50%	8	2 = 3%

**Products that were mostly cloned**

Items that appear in Table 1 contain cloned products such as T-shirts, shoes and sandals, while those in Table 2 are face caps, belts and wrist watches. In Table 1, ‘i’ is Zara, a popular T-shirts brand preferred by many Nigerians. Zara is a popular brand for men, women and children clothing. Majority of Zara customers are found between the ages of 15 and 45. Zara home products are domiciled mostly in European stores. It is not generally considered a luxury and so expensive brand, it is affordable and considered to belong to the fast fashioned category, when compared to other brands such as Balenciaga, Chanel, Versace, Valentino, Christian Dior, Givenchy, Louis Vuitton, Prada, Adidas, Puma, just to mention but a few.

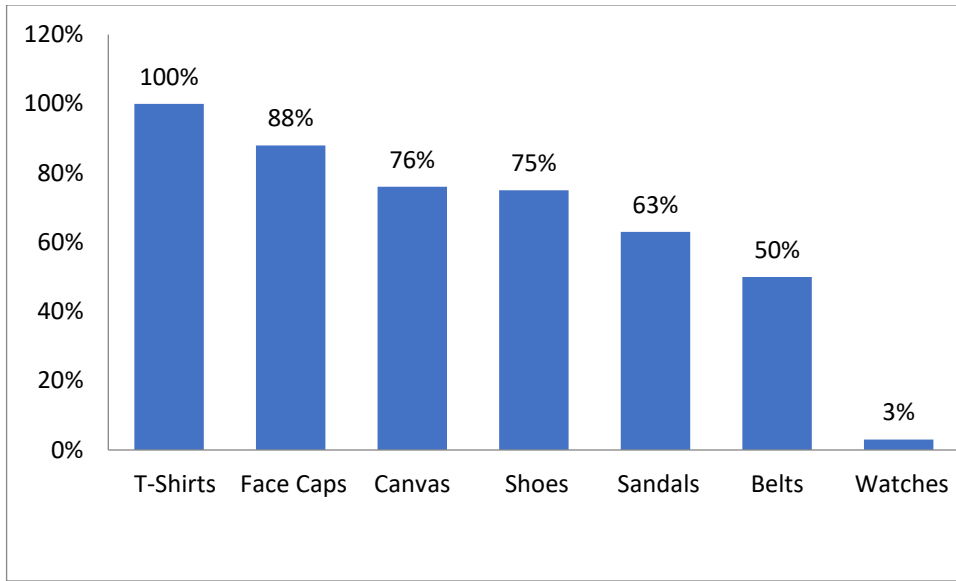
Among the investigated cloned products (T-Shirts, Shoes, Sandals, Canvass, Face Caps, Belts and Wrist Watches, T-shirts), Tables 1 & 2 above show that T-Shirts are the most

cloned with brand with 100%, followed by Face Caps 87.5%, (88% by approximation), then Shoes and Canvas 75% respectively, Sandals 62.5%, (63% approximately), Belts 50% and the least being Wrist Watches 2.5% (3% approximately).

**Table 3: Statistical representation of most cloned products**

<b>Product</b>	<b>%</b>
T-Shirts	100%
Face Caps	88%
Canvas	76%
Shoes	75%
Sandals	63%
Belts	50%
Watches	3%

The statistical Table above is represented by the clustered cylindrical chart in Figure 1 below to authenticate the cloned brands in the linguistic market in Onitsha.



**Figure 1: Clustered cylindrical chart of most cloned products percentage**

**Table 4: Morphophonological processes used in cloning T-shirts**

	T-Shirts		Processes
	Branded	Cloned	
i.	Zara	Zaṛịa/Zaṛḷa	insertion
ii.	Balenciaga	Balencịạ	substitution
iii.	Chanel	chaṇṇel	insertion
iv.	Versace	Verṣạce	substitution
v.	Puma	P̣ọma	substitution
vi.	Adidas	Aḅiḍas	substitution
vii.	Givenchy	Giṿiṇchy	substitution
viii.	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitṭj̣on	insertion

**Table 5: Morphophonological processes used in cloning shoes**

	Shoes		Processes
	Branded	Cloned	
i	Gucci	Gucgi	substitution
ii	Balenciaga	-	-
iii	Choo	Ch <u>u</u> o	substitution
iv	Versace	Vesace	deletion
v	Puma	P <u>o</u> ma	substitution
vi	Adidas	Ab <u>i</u> bas	substitution
vii	Givenchy	-	-
viii	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitt <u>i</u> on	insertion

**Table 6: Morphophonological processes used in cloning sandals**

	Sandals		Processes
	Branded	Cloned	
i	Zara	Zarla	insertion
ii	Crocs	-	-
iii	Chanel	Chan <u>n</u> el	insertion
iv	Versace	-	-
v	Puma	P <u>o</u> ma	substitution
vi	Adidas	Ad <u>i</u> bas	substitution
vii	Givenchy	-	-
viii	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitt <u>i</u> on	insertion

**Table 7: Morphophonological processes used in cloning canvas**

	Canvas		Processes
	Branded	Cloned	
i.	Puma	Pomo	substitution



ii.	Nike	Nikke	insertion
iii.	Converse	-	-
iv.	Vans	Vaans	insertion
v.	Superga	Supega	deletion
vi.	Keds	Keds	-
vii.	Skechers	Skecers	deletion
viii.	Deckers	Dekers	deletion

**Table 8: Morphophonological processes used in cloning face cap**

	Face Caps		Processes
	Branded	Cloned	
i	Zara	Zaara	insertion
ii	Balenciaga	Balenciga	deletion
iii	Chanel	Channel	insertion
iv	Versace	Vesace	deletion
v	Puma	Poma	substitution
vi	Adidas	Abidas	substitution
vii	Givenchy	Givanchy	substitution
viii	Louis Vuitton	-	-

**Table 9: Morphophonological processes used in cloning belts**

	Belts		Processes
	Branded	Cloned	
i	Zara	-	--
ii	Yves Saint Laurent– (YSL)		-
iii	Chanel	Channel	insertion

iv	Versace	Vesace	deletion
v	Puma	Poma	substitution
vi	Adidas	Abidas	metathesis
vii	Ralph Lauren	-	-
viii	Louis Vuitton	-	-

**Table 9: Morphophonological processes used in cloning wrist watches**

	Wrist watches		Processes
	Branded	Cloned	
i	Cartier	-	-
ii	Rolex	-	-
iii	Chanel	Channel	insertion
iv	Prada	-	-
v	Gucci	Gucgi	substitution
vi	Dior	-	-
vii	Audemars Pigue	-	-
viii	Ralph Lauren	-	-

### **Morphophonological processes used in cloning**

There are several morphophonological processes used by the cloners through prevarication to misinform the unsuspecting buyers to patronise fake products in the linguistic market place. Morphophonological processes are the forms letters or sounds change to, different from what it ought to be. The change could be triggered by a nearby letter/sound in a natural language. Table 4 contains different popular original branded T-Shirts such as Zara, Balenciaga, Chanel, Versace, Puma, Adidas, Givenchy and Louis Vuitton, the cloners employ different phonological processes such as insertion and substitution to deceive the buyers to buy. As such i. Zara was cloned to \*'Zaria/Zarla', that is, the vowel sound 'i' was inserted in-between 'r' and the 'a' to derive \*'Zaria' and in another instance the same brand name 'Zara' was changed to \*'Zarla' by inserting 'r' and 'l' within the same phonological context, which resulted in consonantal cluster /CC/ 'rl in a syllable boundary. The same

insertion processes were attestable in other original brands such as Chanel which changed to \*‘Channel’ and Louis Vuitton changed to \*‘Louis Vuittion’.

On the same Table 4, some original branded products such Balenciaga, Versace, Puma, Adidas and Givenchy were subjected to substitution processes where ‘g’ in Balenciaga was substituted with ‘c’ and the T=shirt cloned to \*‘Balenciaca’ (‘g’ for ‘c’). In Versace, substitution process was applied where ‘c’ was changed to ‘s’ \*Versase. The ‘u’ in Puma was substituted with ‘o’ in the first syllable to have the cloned version as \*‘Pomo’. Then in Adidas, the consonant ‘b’ was substituted with ‘d’ to cloned \*Abidas’ etc. In Tables 5-10 all used basically substitution and insertion, similar phonological processes to those in Tables 4. Cloning was not prominent in watches because they were not common as other apparels of wears and the process of faking in watches is tasking when compared with those of other products. Secondly original branded watches were expensive when compared to the researched products. For example the price of original branded Rolex watch is currently \$30,000 (thirty thousand pounds) only which at the current exchange market rate of N1500.00 is N45,000.00 (forty five thousand naira) only. So, the cloners do not find this item profitable to debrand and may not readily find buyers even when it is cloned it.

**Table 10: Phonotactic position of substituted sounds**

S/N	Brand Names	Cloned Variants	Sound change
i.	Zara	Zaria/Zarla	∅ → ‘i’ / ‘l’
ii.	Balenciaga	Balenciaca	‘g’ → ‘c’
iii.	Chanel	channel	∅ → ‘n’
iv.	Versace	Versase	‘c’ → ‘s’
v.	Valentino	Velentino	‘a’ → ‘e’
vi.	Christian Dior	Christine Dior	‘a’ → ‘i’/‘e’
vii.	Givenchy	Givinchy	‘e’ → ‘i’
viii.	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuittion	∅ → ‘i’
ix	Prada	Preda	‘a’ → ‘e’
x	Loewe	Leowe	‘oe’ → ‘eo’
xi	Adidas	Abidas	‘b’ → ‘b’

xii.	Tommy Hilfiger	Tummy Hilfigar	'o'/'e' → 'u'/'a'
xiii.	Red Bull	Redd Bull	∅ → 'd'
xiv.	Hermes	Hermas	'e' → 'a'
xv.	Miu Miu	Mui Mui	'i/u' → 'u'/'i'
xvi.	Giorgio Armani	Giogio Amani	'r' → '∅/∅'
xvii.	Tom Ford	Tom Fard	'o' → 'a'
xviii.	Nike	Nikke	∅ → 'k'
xix.	Red Bull	Redd Bull	∅ → 'd'
xx.	Celine	Celina	'e' → 'a'

Phonotactics deals with language specific rules which spell out combination of sounds in that language. It is the set of rules in a language that determine how sounds can be arranged and combined to form syllables. These rules decide which sound combinations are allowed and which are not in a particular language. Being that the cloners use the language of the brand owner to clone, mostly English, they have to abide by the phonotactic rule(s) of the brand designers. In the brand name 'Zara' with two syllables of consonant-vowel, the last syllable of CV/CV was cloned to CV<sub>1</sub>V<sub>2</sub> resulting in \*Zaria. Phonotactically, an un-existing sound in the original brand was brought in by the fakers to confuse the buyers. The phonotactics deployed by the cloners is /∅/ → /i/. Other cloned brands that are on these formats are: iii. Chanel \*Channel, /∅/ → /n/, viii. Louis Vuitton \*Louis Vuittion, xix. /∅/ → /i/, xix. Red Bull \*Redd Bull /∅/ → /d/, and Nike \*Nikke /∅/ → /k/.

Another phonotactic is in 'ii' Balenciaga, with the cloned version as \*Balenciaca, where 'g' is being cloned to, thus the phonotactic is /g/ → /c/. In Versace the alphabet 'c' is replaced with /c/, /c/ → /s/ resulting in \*Versace. Other cloned brands that that maintained this phonotactics are: Valentino \*Velentino /a/ → /e/, Givenchy \*Givinchy /e/ → /i/, Prada \*Preda, /a/ → /e/, Adidas \*Abidas /d/ → /b/, Tommy Hilfiger \*Tummy Hilfigar /o/, /e/ → /u/, /a/. Hermes \*Hermas, /e/ → /a/. Tom Ford \*Tom Fard, /o/ → /a/. Celine \*Celina, /e/ → /a/.

Also attested in the process of debranding by phonotactics is metathesis or spoonerism. The segment permissible format allows letters/segments to be juxtaposed within a particular phonological context as found in ‘x’ and ‘xv’ in the above table. Metathesis rule allows already permissible units 1+2+3 to change to 1+3+2. In ‘x’ in the above table, Loewe is cloned to \*Leowe. The letters arrangement is 1+2+3+4+5 and has been cloned to 1+3+2+4+5. In ‘xv’ above Miu Miu is metathesized to \*Mui Mui. The formula of spoonerism in this instance is 1+2+3+4+5 changes to 1+3+2+4+5. With this permutation, an unsuspecting buyer would not be conscious of the changes.

Deletion of segment is also found as the technique used by fakers in the linguistic market place in debranding of products. In this process, the already existing segment on a branded product is omitted or removed. This is as shown in ‘xvii’ where Giorgio Armani, the original brand is debranded to \*Giogio Amani. The segment ‘r’ is deleted from the two words, creating a null slot in the faked version, /r/ → /Ø/.

**Table 11: Buyer’s opinion on branded and cloned products**

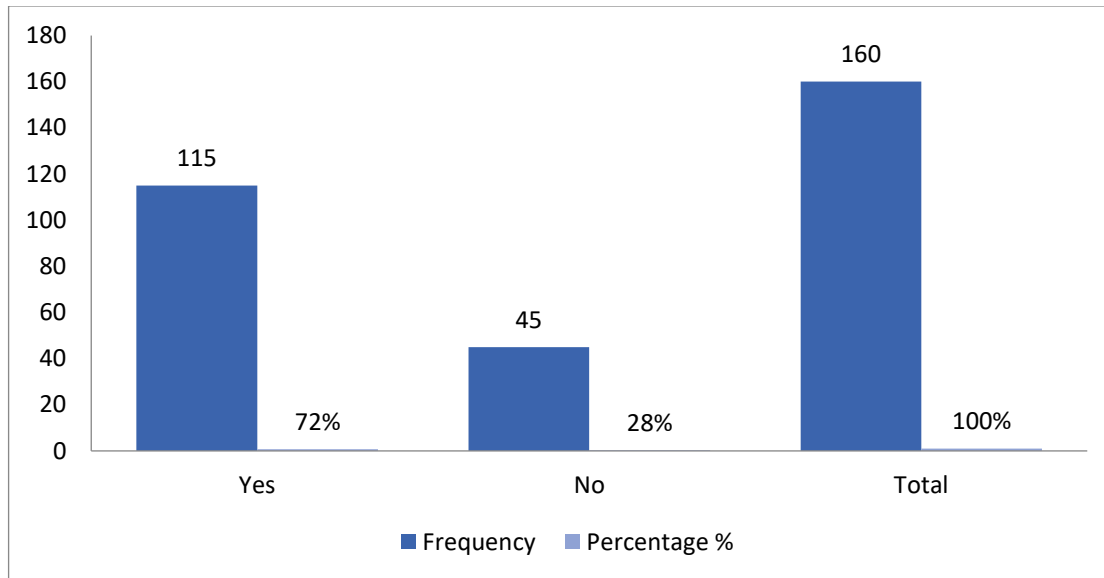
**Table 4.4.1: Buyer’s opinion of branded/cloned products**

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	115	72%
No	45	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>

A total of 200 questionnaires were given out to patronisers of the investigated brands to find out their reason(s) for buying brands, and seek their knowledge of whether they know the difference between the original brands and the fake counterparts. These questionnaires were distributed not only to people in the markets but also out of the markets. Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed to the respondents, 160 were retrieved. Responses from those who claimed they know what they bought were fake were 115 amounting to 71.85%. Those who admitted that they did not know these products were faked were 28%.

Many buyers adapt saccadic (left to right) eye movement of reading without minding the in-between letters/sounds. Once their eyes have picked the first letter/sound of the products, they do not bother about the letters/sounds in-between. The cloners often change the in-between letters/sounds believing that once a prospective buyer’s eyes catches the first and the last letters of the graphics they do not bother about the in-between

letters/sounds. The graphic representation of whether the buyers know that these products were cloned or not are presented in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2: Buyer’s opinion on branded/cloned products**

### Discussion

The thesis of this research is on debranding through prevarication in the linguistic market place, a case study of Onitsha. Prevarication as one of the designed feature of human language makes it possible for one to use language to lie, deceive and misinform people. This work investigated the choice(s) of language preferred for use in linguistic market place by the cloners to lie, deceive and misinform people to patronise their fake products. In the research, we assumed that cloning and debranding a product, which an intellectual right has been secured, is a serious crime. The objectives of the study were to investigate which of these products are mostly cloned, examine the morphophonological processes used in cloning these products, analyse the phonotactic position of the substituted sounds/letters, and find out whether the buyers of these products actually know that these products are cloned or not. In all the previous studies on imitation of brand names and debranding, no attempt has been made empirically to investigate how prevarication has been manipulated by fakers to debrand branded products in the linguistic market place, especially in Onitsha geolinguistic area on these products of research: T-Shirts, Shoes, Sandals, Canvass, Face Caps, Belts and Wrist Watches, thus the need to fill in the gap.

Schmitt's (2012) model of the consumer psychology posits that consumers engage with brands at different levels through five key processes: identifying, experiencing, integrating, signifying, and connecting. This emphasises how language influences the way consumers interact with brands in Onitsha. The domain of *brand linguistics* makes buyers to be emotionally attached to a particular brand design because of its prestige, despite that they are aware these brands have been debranded. Consumer psychology frame proves that the consumers consciously form emotional connections with brands, which ultimately influence their attitudes, attachments, and relationships with the brand. Bourdieu's (1991) linguistic market theory emphasises on sociolinguistic idea where language value and influence vary according to social, economic and cultural considerations.

This theory views language as a symbolic market where different linguistic are assigned different values and "prices" based on their perceived legitimacy and social desirability. The theory stresses that language varieties, like products, have symbolic value and can be exchanged for social and economic benefits. This is evident in popular brands like Gucci, Givenchy, Zara, Chanel, where buyers patronised to be identified with the products and brand names. This is in line with Bourdieu's habitus which is a reflection of ingrained habits, dispositions, and practices which buyers of cloned brands develop based on their social classes and environments.

Findings revealed that the most cloned of the investigated apparel of wears are the T-Shirts with 100%, followed by the Face Caps 88%, Shoes and Canvas 75% respectively, Sandals 63%, Belts 50% and Watches 3%. In addition, the findings showed that the morphophonological processes used in cloning these products involve several processes morphophonological processes such as insertion, deletion substitution and metathesis.

Phonotactically, it was found that an un-existing sounds/letters in the original branded products were brought in by the fakers to confuse the buyers. The brand name 'Zara' with two syllables of consonant-vowel (CV), the last syllable of CV<sub>1</sub>+CV<sub>2</sub> was cloned to CV<sub>1</sub>+CV<sub>1</sub>V<sub>2</sub> resulting in \*Zaria, using phonotactic principle /Ø/ → /i/, . Chanel to \*Channel, /Ø/ → /n/, Louis Vuitton \*Louis Vuittion, /Ø/ → /i/, Red Bull \*Redd Bull /Ø/ → /d/, and Nike \*Nikke /Ø/ → /k/. Another phonotactic application was found in Balenciaga, with the cloned version as \*Balenciaca, thus the phonotactic /g/ → /c/, Versace /c/ → /s/ resulting in \*Versase, etc. Also, phonotactic applied rule where segment permissible format allows letters/segments to be juxtaposed within a particular phonological context where segments ordered as 1+2+3+4+5 in Loewe, metathesized to



1+3+2+4+5 \*Leowe. Miu Miu metathesized to \*Mui Mui. The formula of spoonerism in Miu Miu which is 1+2+3-1+2+3 was reordered to 1+3+2-1+3+2. With this permutation, an unsuspecting buyer would not be conscious of the ordered rule changes.

Finally, the response from those who claimed they knew what they bought were fake is 115 amounting to 72%, while a meagre number of 45 respondents which is 28% said they did not know these products were fake.

## **Conclusion**

The work researched linguistic strategies of debranding through prevarication in the linguistic market place of Onitsha. Prevarication is a design feature of human language, which makes it possible for one to use language to misinform others. Cloners debrand popular products in the linguistic market place to deceive unsuspecting buyers to patronise their product or services, thereby depriving not only the owners of the brand names of their products and finances, but also robbing the government of revenues. The objectives of the study were to investigate which of these products are mostly cloned, examine the morphophonological processes used in cloning these products, analyse the phonotactic position of substituted sounds, and find out whether the buyers of these products actually know that these products were cloned.

Schmitt (2012) consumer brand model and Bourdieu (1991) linguistic market theory were adopted as the frames. Schmitt's (2012) model of the consumer psychology posits that consumers engage with brands at different levels through five key processes: identifying, experiencing, integrating, signifying, and connecting. This emphasises how language influences the way consumers interact with brands in Onitsha. This makes buyers to be emotionally attached to a particular brand design because of its prestige, despite that they are aware these brands have been debranded. Buyers consciously form emotional connections with brands, which ultimately influence their attitudes, attachments, and relationships with the brand. Bourdieu's (1991) linguistic market theory emphasises on sociolinguistic idea where language value and influence vary according to social, economic and cultural considerations. The theory stresses that language varieties, have symbolic value and can be exchanged for social and economic benefits. This is evident in popular brands like Gucci, Givenchy, Zara, Chanel, where buyers patronised to be identified with the products and brand names. This is in line with Bourdieu's habitus which is a reflection of ingrained habits, dispositions, and practices which buyers of cloned brands develop based on their social classes and environments.

Findings showed that most cloned of the investigated products were T-Shirts with Face Caps, Shoes and Canvas, Sandals, Belts, and Watches. Findings also revealed that the morphophonological processes used in cloning these products involve several processes as insertion, deletion, substitution and metathesis. The findings attested to some phonotactic rules of segments permutation in the cloning patterns within a phonological context. Furthermore, responses from the questionnaire showed that most buyers knew these products were faked, while some patronise these products out of ignorance. Onitsha was selected as the area of study being that it is the economic hub for commerce and it hosts the largest market on the products investigated in terms of geographical size and volume of goods. Market Survey Method (MSM) was used to randomly select 4 markets for the study which were Main market, Ochangi, Relief and Awka, because the markets are daily sale markets and deal with the products under investigation. The study areas were digitally captured with UTM Geo Map; a simple mapping and GIS tool, which made it easier to generate and capture the location of study area in real time and with accuracy. Google lens, a set of vision-based computing software tool, was used in authenticating the quality of the original brand and that of the faked products. Google lens was used to compare objects in the picture as snapped, to other images, and rank those images based on their similarity and relevance to the objects in the original picture. The lens utilises other useful signals, such as scripted names, words, language, and other metadata on the image's host site, for authentication. Data were presented statistically on tables and taken to Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet for graph plotting. Analyses were done qualitatively and quantitatively.

Debranding through prevarication in the linguistic market place, has adversely affected the patronisers of cloned branded products as they ended up buying low-quality products. This equally deprived the government of its expected internally generated revenue as cloners do not register their business with the Corporate Affairs Commission and they do not pay any form of taxes to the government. This action of cloning of branded products affect the owner of the brands, being that the market for the brands is shared, depriving the brand owners of their legitimate sale value and foreign exchange. This might eventually lead to the shutdown of the branded products' company and loss of jobs. The study recommends that government should take action by looking out for these cloners and the products seized where ever they are found. The work suggests that product awareness campaign should be intensified to educate the public about cloned products. The producers of the cloned products should be identified and prosecuted. Training workshops should be held for these cloners for them to be bold enough to produce these products locally with local contents

rather than cloning of one's else's products, as these invariably affect Nigeria's foreign exchange negatively.

The Consumers of these fake brands should be encouraged to patronise products with good local contents instead of patronising foreign fake products at the detriment of Nigeria produced brands. It is believed that if the findings and recommendations of this research are adhered to by the authorities, cloning would be drastically reduced to the barest minimum, intellectual property owners would have cause to smile; lives and properties would be saved. The findings of this research would benefit the government in terms of tax returns and registration of companies at Corporate Affairs Commission. This would lead to creation of employments, protection of consumers of these products from waste and increase internally generated revenue to the government.

This research was limited to four markets in Onitsha, Southeast of Nigeria being that it is the economic hub for commerce. Onitsha hosts the largest market on the products investigated in terms of geographical size and volume of goods. It is suggested that, further research be carried out in the area of orally and intravenously consumed products as its negative impacts would be more devastating than that of apparel of wears.

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Mfon Ekpe iD <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7684-7449>

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