

THE STATUS OF "KOM" AND THE TIME, ASPECT-MODALITY SYSTEM OF ANGLO-NIGERIAN PIDGIN.

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ABSTRACT

Anglo-Nigeria Pidgin (ANP), a variety of English-based Pidgin/Creole is a modern urbanised phenomenon. Though it is widely believed that children of mixed families use ANP as their first language this research shares the view that a growing number Nigerians born in large cities even to parents sharing the same language and who have spent substantial number of years in those areas may infact be using ANP as a first language. In addition to these are those speakers who use it as a second or third language in the entire country.

Our research reveals that though ANP's tense-aspect-modality (TA) system shares many similarities with Bickerton's proto-creole TAM system, creolisation in Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin seems however to be pulling the language nearer to Nigerian languages by its unfoldment of an overt realis modality marker (KOM). While this research shares the views of Agheyisi (1988) and Faraclas (1987) to some extent it however, contrasts in many ways with their conclusions.

ANP's tense-aspect-modality system, Creolisation, children and adolescent and Nigerian languages.

KEYWORDS:

1.0 BACKGROUND

Anglo – Nigerian pidgin (hereafter referred to as ANP) is a variety of the English – based pidgin / Creole spoken in several Anglophone countries of West Africa, particularly in parts of Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroun¹. It is predominantly used as a second or third language in Nigeria ; it draws its speakers, mainly the young from diversified regional, ethnolinguistic and social – economic sectors of the Nigerian community. However, ANP registers a growing population of first language users in Edo, Delta², Bayelsa and Rivers States of Nigeria (Shnukal and Marchese 1983, Donwa-Ifode 1983, Agheyisi 1988, Faraclas et al 1983, Faraclas 1987 and Simire 1993).

While it is true that Nigerians who speak ANP as first language are usually of mixed families, this research shares the view that a growing number of Nigerians who are born in Warri, Sapele, Benin City and Port-Harcourt, to parents sharing the same language and who have spent quite a substantial number of years in these towns may be using it as a first language. Most often, these people as children "pick up" a language as easily as they "drop it" due to many factors. To those who are fairly familiar with the African nay, Nigerian household, you will find that the average child often hears and learns at the same time, two to four languages spoken around him. In fact, he normally interacts by means of two to four languages. In multilingual environments, such as the towns cited above, it may in fact be difficult to specify which of the languages in focus was learnt first. An overall typology of language influence on the Nigerian child of the

primary age-group may reveal much about this phenomenon.

Essentially a modern urbanised phenomenon in the country, Anglo – Nigerian pidgin is nevertheless actively restricted to the Southern States. In some states, not only does it serve as a medium of newscasting and public enlightenment on radio and television, and as an unofficial medium of instruction in some urban schools, it is also a popular medium of entertainment in the entire country. Nonetheless, it remains a normal component of the linguistic repertory of the immigrant population that reside in the Northern States (Mafemi, 1971). The actual population of its users is unknown, though this can be attributed to the absence of reliable population figures with regard to language use. However, it ranks amongst the highest, exceeded perhaps only by that of Hausa. One can add that ANP is the closest thing to real "lingua franca" in the country. In fact, in its nativised form, it serves as a marker of social identity and it is fast becoming the next best thing to ethnic vernacular in constructing personalised / intimate rapport in the kinds of interaction that might otherwise keep those interacting rather distant. This point is clearly witnessed in official and informal transactions between Nigerians of diversified ethnic background.

1.1 Methodology

This work is primarily based on data obtained from field work conducted between January and March 1990, that of June to August 1991 as well as that of October-December 1999 in five urban areas of Southern Nigeria : Benin City, Warri, Lagos, Port Harcourt and

Sapele. The processes for data collection and analysis were in conformity with those developed by Tabouret-Keller and le Page (1970), DeCamp (1971), Labov (1972), Samarin (1967) as well as those in Rickford (1979, 1983). The research consists of interviews (spontaneous and controlled) held with fifty informants³ selected on the basis of age, sex, ethnolinguistic, educational and socio-professional backgrounds. Each speaker was interviewed for one hour thirty minutes, followed by group discussions of thirty minutes. The latter was usually arranged among friends in each of the towns visited. Each informant was interviewed on the following modules: Demographic and Family information, School, Leisure and games, Work, Boy/girl relationship and marriage, fights, Sickness, Accidents, Death and Armed robbery. Taped recordings of these were transcribed phonetically⁴ and the data was then subjected to an analysis designed to identify and differentiate patterns of regional and social variation in the Southern states of the country⁵.

2.0 The Data

2.1 Tense – Aspect – Modality in ANP.

The invariant ANP verb can be given any time-tense meaning. Its meaning is usually determined by the context in which it is used; relying mostly on auxiliaries, adverbials as well as other contextual factors. While the tense-aspect-modality (TAM) system in ANP shares many similarities with the proto-creole TAM system posited by Bickerton (1975:28-30), the analysis of data collected however, reveals that stativity may not be a lexical notion in the Basilect. This may explain why unmarked stative verbs do have a past-before-past meaning in the basilect, when used with the anterior tense auxiliary *bin*. Generally, in ANP, the use of this auxiliary seems optional and rare since many speakers prefer to use either the verb stem and the adverb *bifɔ* or the verb stem accompanied by the completive auxiliary *ɔn* as well as *bifɔ*. However, ANP has an irrealis modality *gɔ* which is one way of showing unreal time (future, conditionals, etc.). *ɛ* is another auxiliary which indicates conditionals. *Dɛ* (a progressive aspect marker) indicates futurity in some contexts. In addition to these, Anglo-Nigerian pidgin uses two completive auxiliaries *ɔn* and *fini*, and several modal verbs or auxiliaries of modality. In fact, generally, no one specific particule can be consistently used to indicate either one tense or one aspectual meaning. The position assumed here contrasts in many ways with those held by Agheyisi (1988) and Faraclas (1987).

Nevertheless, the latter has revealed a new development in the tense-modality of ANP. He identifies from narrative and procedural texts the auxiliary use of *kɔm* as signalling reference to past events. He differentiates its use from the main verb *kɔm* (a verb of motion). This signifies that *kɔm* as used in the former case cannot be given the above interpretation. Rather, it would seem that *kɔm* in some cases is a part of a coordination construction with another verb in the deep surface structure. This would be shown shortly, it is however difficult to agree with his conclusions in their totality. Aspects of disagreement will be shown in 2.5.

2.2. Regional and social varieties of Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin.

Analysis of the data reveals that ANP is divisible into regional and social dialects. For the convenience of description, ANP may be divided into three sets of social dialect: the acrolectal (decreolised) varieties, which show significant influence from other Nigerian languages beside NSE, and mesolectal (creolised) varieties typifying the speech of Nigerians who might have learnt ANP as their first language. Regarding the regional varieties and contrary to the general opinion amongst renowned linguists (Agheyisi, Donwa-Ifode, Faraclas and Mafemi), they do not necessarily correspond to the erstwhile four political regions viz; Midwestern, Eastern, Western and Northern regions of Nigeria.

Rather, we observed a sort of similarity between the varieties of pidgin spoken in and around Port Harcourt (extreme South) and those spoken in Benin city and Lagos (South West), especially with the latter. On the other hand, similarity was also observed between the varieties spoken in Warri and Sapele (South West). The latter varieties do in fact share a common vocabulary most of which are unknown to ANP users non-resident in both towns. While it is true that varieties of ANP spoken in towns like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Benin City, seem to be more accented and reflecting lexical items borrowed from dominant languages like Yoruba and Igbo. The Warri and Sapele varieties seem purer and less accented, with many lexical items drawn from some minority languages such as Urhobo, Itsekiri etc... In fact, similarities and differences between these varieties are phonetical, lexical and syntactical in nature. These are well documented in Simire (1993).

2.3. The main verb use of *kɔm* vs the auxiliary use of *kɔm* (KA)⁶ in narratives and indirect discourses.

We present below the various uses of the morpheme "kɔm" in ANP 's narrative and procedural accounts (descriptions): In sentences 1, A, B and C below *kɔm* appears to function as a verb of motion meaning "to come".

- 1 A } /... nà in faò kɔm se nɔ bi in ,
 Foc it hen come say Neg it
 na tɔtis im fren na im kari
 Foc tortise it friend FOC it Carry
 am kɔm // UKASTAP-12, sp:5//65a/2
 it come

"The hen denied that it was her,
 that she was brought there by her
 friend, tortoise"

- B) //...di fɔloin déj tɔtis kɔm kɔm// DAFSTOHS-18,
 sp.:9//19a/1

the following day tortoise come

"The tortoise came the next day"

C) // as a kɔm dé bed a kɔm sé a gò kɔm go
As I is bed I come say I prosp. Come go
tek inzéʃɔn ...// DAFSTOHS-18. Ci: 11//24d/2

take injection

"As I laid on the bed I decided to go and take injection..."

But in 1 B above this morpheme seems to function as one of the preverbal particules listed in 2.1 above. Nevertheless, numerous ambiguous cases could be mentioned such as in 2 A & B below.

2-

A) //... nà in den kɔm howl faò // UKASTAP-12, sp: 5//65b/2

Foc it they hold fowl

"So, they held the hen".

B) //... den kɔm báj sɔm mèdisin fɔ
they buy some medecin for
mi // DAFSTOHS-18, ci:12//25a/2
me
"They bought me some drugs"

In these examples, it is possible to either give it a KA interpretation or, see it as a verb in a serial construction (Ofuani, 1984)⁸

Instances of KA-like interpretation seem very possible in sentences 3 A B C below, probably due to the speaker's descriptive style:

3-

A) // lajk na bɔj bin dè wàka fɔ
like now boy ANT. PROG. Walk for
rowd, in kɔm si wan gél dè wàka...//
TOGSTOGP-11, sp: 10//2/24c/5
road he see one girl PROG. Walk

"Such as a boy is trekking along the road, he saw a girl who is also trekking along the same road..."

B) //dén kɔm dè luk iʃɔda// TOGSTOGP-11,
sp: 13//2/24d/5
They PROG. look each other"

"They started looking at one another"

C) //di gél kɔm rajt lèta go
the girl write letter go
giv àm...// TOGSTOGP-11, sp:14//2/25a/5
giv him

"The girl wrote him a letter (after)"

In fact, these cases seem to contrast with the use of "kɔm" in sentences 4 A & B below:

4-

A) //ɔ in go tɛlifòn kɔm giv
or she PROSP phone give
di bɔj...// TOGSTOGP-11, sp: 14/2/25b/5
the boy

"or, she would phone the boy".

B) //... èhm, afta di bɔj ò kɔm go
Exclam after the boy IRREALIS go
fɔ di gél pèrén haws-//TOGSTOGP-
11, sp:16/2/25e/5
For the girl parent house

"... After the boy would go and visit the girl's prents...."

It is observed that ANP users, especially the young aged between 7 and 24, are heavy users of kɔm (KA) in narrative and indirect discourse. In ANP, the accentuated use of the morpheme kɔm (KA) in making reports, is further illustrated in sentences 10 – 14, as extracted from the data.

10.

//nà wàn gél kɔm sèn in sistà, mék (i) kɔm bit àm//
MBSTIBS 5/1d/2

It's one girl send her sister, that (she) beat her.

"It was a girl who sent her sister to beat her up" (i.e. she was sent by her sister to beat her up).

11.

//i bigin fajt àm, dén pipòl kɔm stɔp di fajt, bífɔ i
he begin fight him them people come stop the fight,
before it
gò kɔm dé tu blɔdi // WILSTIGP-24, sp:7/150a/3
be too bloody

"He started fighting with him. Then, people came and stopped the fight; before it became too bloody".

12

//wétin kɔm mék mi hét tʃɔtʃ
what make me hate church,
na wétin dén dè du // OSAMECBB-17, sp: 1/14a/1
t's what they PROG do

"what made me to dislike the church is due to their actions".

13.

//hi kɔm ʃawt nà ɪm pipòl kɔm kɔm awt/ bífɔ
she shout:it's people came out: before
dén gò kɔm nà / dl tif dɔn go: / UKASTAP-
12, sp: 3/55c/2
they will come now:the thief COMP go

"She shouted, people them came out (of their rooms). Before they could come out, the thief had fled."

14.

//wétin a nɔ lajk fɔ Nigeria nà im bi
 what I Neg. like in Nigeria it's is
 wè dèm kɔm dè tif
 that they PROG steal
 nà im a kɔm hɛt// OSMECBB -17; sp:1/17a/1
 that it I come hate

"what I don't like in Nigeria is the fact that they (people) continue to steal, it is a fact I dislike." (i.e. what I dislike most in Nigeria is the dramatic increase in theft cases.)

From sentences 10 to 14, *kɔm* is used by the respective speakers to accentuate the positive truth value of the reported information.

2.4. *Kɔm* (-KA) as ANP 's Tense-Aspect-Modality marker

In 2.3 above, the typical modes of usage of the morpheme *kɔm* and its attendant problems of interpretation were examined. To what extent can it now be said that *kɔm* functions as a tense, aspect or/ and modality marker in ANP?

Generally, the semantic interpretation given to auxiliaries in languages spans the tense aspect and modality categories. Repeatedly, the semantic interpretation associated with one of these may be more important in a given context. According to J. Lyons (1970 : 233-242), tense analysis sees reality in terms of the temporal or sequential relationship of one event to another or to some fixed or moving point of reference while aspect sees reality in terms of structure of an event. Modality is known to organise reality in terms of how the speaker uses language to exert control over events or how events themselves exert control over the speaker.

The morpheme *kɔm* (KA) refers to events which had occurred before the moment of speaking, at some indefinite time without reference to the moment of speaking at all, in some sentences put simply, this morpheme has little or no role in temporal sequencing. Rather, it is used in anchoring events with respect to each other (in actual order of their occurrence). See for example sentences 2b above, 15, 16, 17 and 18 which are presented below wherein attention is focused on the internal and external structure of the events under discussion via the use of KA.

- For example, the beginning point:

15 // léta in di ivnin a kɔm sé
 Later in the evening I
 mék a wàka...// DAFSTOHS-18, ci:14//45a/3
 make I walk

"Later, in the evening, I decided to go strolling".

16 //...às di dévu dèm kɔm ritɔn...
 as the devil plu. return
 nà den kɔm dè
 Foc they PROG
 luk itjɔda //UKASTAP-12, sp:6/65c/2

"As soon as the devils returned they started looking at one another"

- duration:

17. // às in kɔm de láf nàw
 as it PROG laugh now
 nà im den howl fao //UKASTAP-12,
 sp:7//65d/2
 Foc they hold hen

"Just as it started laughing they held the hen"

- end point:

18. //dèm kɔm rost fàò fini|
 they roast hen COMP.
 den kɔm hang fɔ ɔp //UKASTAP-12,
 sp:7//66a/2
 they hang for up

"They roasted the hen completely (and) they hung it"

As indicated in 2.1. above, adverbials, auxiliaries, as well as other contextual factors, are strong determinants of the time-tense meaning given to sentences in ANP. From the data, it is quite clear that the presence or absence of KA does not add or delete from the basic aspectual meaning given to it. Nonetheless, it is observed that KA combines freely with the auxiliaries *dè* and *gò* and *fini|*. See 1c; 3b; 11; 13, 14, 15, 18 respectively. No instances of KA combining with *dɔn* or *bin* is registered, though its combination with the latter is possible in ANP. In this case, the ambiguous interpretation of KA is erased. It seems, therefore, that it is the absence of *bin* that gives KA the same aspectual status as the latter.

What then is the real semantic interpretation of KA? It was earlier stated that modality views reality in terms of how the speaker uses the language to exert control over events or how events themselves exert his power over his listener as in commands and polite requests. In addition, it reveals the actual attitude of the speaker with respect to the information being delivered (Lyons op. cit. 235-236). Modality, therefore, seems to convey more meaning than the actual information content of the signal.

Comrie (1976) defines aspect as "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation". More recent linguists such as Radford (1997:494) see aspect as denoting the duration of an event by a verb, in other words the verb describes the event as being on course or completed.

KA could be classified as an auxiliary of objectivity wherein a speaker asserts the positive truth value of his assertions (Faraclas op. cit.). Its use by ANP users, especially by children and adolescents in storytelling and indirect discourses, could be said to be idiomatic and stylistic. Faraclas (op. cit. 47-56) clearly shows the existence of KA-like markers in most Nigerian languages spoken in the southern part of the country. In fact, the intensive use of KA may be equated to the

"intensive" or "emphatic" use of verbs of motion revealed by Labov (ms: 66); Heine and Reh (1984: 78) as the first stage in the grammaticalisation process which eventually transforms such verbs into auxiliaries.

2.5. KA usage as a Child/Adolescent Speech Phenomenon

Faraclas (p. 47) states that the increased use of KA is not a child speech phenomenon since "NPL2 children (...) show frequencies similar to those of NPL2 adults and since NPL1 adolescents (...) use KA at about the same rate as NPL1 children"⁹ He later concluded that "while the use of KA increases dramatically from NPL2 speech to NPL1, there is no corresponding increase or decrease in the use of any of the other auxiliaries (...)".

The results of our analysis contrast however, with those of Faraclas. Table 1 shows the total frequencies of KA and other auxiliaries, as well as the frequency score for each of these auxiliaries recorded by individual speakers in the data. Generally, ANPL1 speakers use the auxiliary KA more often than ANPL2 speakers; but there are exceptions in this category: WILSTIGP-24, MATROHW-32, ADOBWBL-54 and SIMSCORB-71. How does one account for these deviant cases?

In addition, it is difficult to say precisely that ANPL2 adolescents i.e ADSTYOL-14 and OSAMECBB-17 show frequency scores identical to those of ANPL2 adults like ADASOHL-27, AYOTROHS-65 and OKOFAOHW-70. Nevertheless, a similarity in the frequency scores of ANPL1 children/adolescents (ex. UKASTIBP-11, MBSTIBS-14 and EBSTITSW-16) and those of ANPL1 adults (ex. EFECOHS-32 and OKOMHESW-43) is clearly seen.

From histogrammes obtained by the calculation of standard deviations of these raw scores according to the binomial principle (as proposed by Charles Muller), it is quite evident that children and adolescents, between 11 and 24 years actually register dramatic increases in their use of KA (kɔm) and gò showing deficiency only in ɔ (see histogramme 1), histogrammes 2-4 show the relative performance of the various age brackets in the data. A comparison of the results obtained for each group of speakers shows clearly that child/adolescent speech tends to differ from that of adults by the former's accentuated use of (kɔm) KA, gò and dè coupled with a relative decrease in its use of ɔ (See histogrammes 5-7; 8, 9 and 10 and note their respective correlation scores).

The reliability of this observation was tested by an examination of the speeches of children belonging to the primary school age group (6-10 years). Irrespective of the limited time during which these children were recorded (30 mins in each of the three towns visited – Sapele, Warri and Benin-City) no dramatic increase in their use of KA (kɔm) is observed. Rather their KA usage tends to conform with the observed pattern in the speeches of children and adolescents within the 11-20 years age group.

CONCLUSION

In addition to children born of mixed families residing in urban cities, this paper has clearly identified children born to parents sharing the same language and who have always lived in large cities right from birth not only as Anglo-Nigerian pidgin's first language speakers but also as frequent and heavy users of the language.

Furthermore, our paper has demonstrated through examples 1-18, extracted from spontaneous and controlled elicitations (Oral productions) of interviewees not only the use of "kɔm" (KA) in narrative and descriptive discourses but also the possible interpretations of it in diverse situations.

While "kɔm" (KA) could be classified as an auxiliary of objectivity wherein a speaker asserts the positive truth value of his assertions its use by ANP's children and adolescents in storytelling and indirect discourses, could be said to be idiomatic and stylistic; in the same manner as functional KA - like markers in most Nigerian languages spoken in Southern Nigeria.

Consequently, the role of the substrate languages in the evolution of Creoles and Pidgins cannot but be recognised by all scholars. Even Bickerton, who was later to deny such influence altogether, repeatedly did so in Bickerton (1975: 9, 22, 44, 58 etc...).

As a matter of fact, almost all the Kwa-family Nigerian languages spoken in the southern states of the country have the auxiliary-like reflexes of the verb "to come" which everybody uses irrespective of the languages he learnt first in life. The use of KA in ANP almost parallels this. Children and adolescents have actually transformed and accentuated its use both in story-telling and indirect discourse. It is suspected that at the earliest stages of creolisation, children and adolescents make considerable use of KA and this, however, may not be totally suppressed by older members of the community. As Faraclas (1987: 53) concluded: "Rather than moving the ANP system into closer conformity with Bickerton's proto-creole system, creolisation in ANP seems to be doing the exact opposite by its evolvment of an overt realis modality marker."

FOOTNOTES

1. While Cameroun is a bilingual country using French and English as its official languages, pidgin English is a language of widespread usage in the Littoral and Eastern provinces of that country
2. Edo and Delta states constitute the erstwhile Bendel state.
3. From amongst these, twenty- seven informants were finally selected for our present study.

4. Our phonetic transcription is based on guidelines as spelt out by Claire Blanche – Benveniste / Colette Jean "Le Français parlé", Paris INALF 1986.
5. As a matter of convenience and to ease our listeners'/ readers' comprehension, we have adopted the term KA as used by Faraclas (1987: 46) in referring to the auxiliary use of korn as opposed to the main verb use of korn.
6. According to Jansen et al (1978), cited in J. Holm (1988: 183), serial verbs "consist of a series of two or more verbs having the same subject and not normally joined by a conjunction ("and") or a complementizer ("to") as they would in European languages."
7. Faraclas' informants are within the 4 and 60 years age bracket; while our informants are situated between 6 and 71.

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