

PIDGINIZATION AS A BILINGUAL CONCEPT: ITS ROLES IN EDUCATION AND NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

This paper investigates the nature of Nigerian Pidgin and its roles in the nation. Pidgin English currently performs many important functions in the country via; unification of the people, improved literacy for the average Nigerian, enhanced communication among people with different native tongues / educational levels, and increased linguistic opportunity for all to participate in socio – political and economic programmes. This is not unconnected to its current status as the only parlance which is mutually intelligible by members of almost all the various speech communities across the nation. The study which is descriptive in nature ex- rays divers experts' views on the acceptability and functionality of pidgin and its contribution to development within the different sectors of the country. The work equally recommends that the Nigerian Pidgin be standardized and regarded as a major Nigerian language owing to its contributions to the nation's advancement so far.

Keywords: Language, development, pidgin, bilingualism, grammaticalization

Introduction

Pidgin English has gained unprecedented acceptability in the nation and is fast becoming a lingua franca with a wider population of speakers than English (Faraclas, 2004 cited in Akande and Salami, 2010). Similarly, Taiwo (2011); Douglas (2012) aver that younger Nigerians, many of whom are secondary school and tertiary institution students employ pidgin in their day to day conversations than adults. They tend to feel more comfortable using the pidgin than their native tongues or English. Also, many Nigerian communities like some part of Warri in Delta state and Port Harcourt, Rivers state now pass on the Nigerian Pidgin to their children as a native language. Obviously, the Nigerian Pidgin has come to stay in the nation as a medium of communication, as the language of politics and government businesses, language of journalism, law and religion (Mensah, 2011). It is therefore necessary to examine the nature of pidgin in general, the nature and status of the Nigerian pidgin in particular and its roles in the development of Nigeria as a nation.

Development: This represents all forms of progress in different aspects of people's lives. It refers to periods of visible and positive physical, cultural, socio - political, technological and economic growth experienced by individuals and nations (SID, 2021). This implies that development is an all embracing phenomenon representing increase and advancement noticeable in the general welfare of people and their environment. Development is people oriented. It can be personal, societal and national.

Bilingualism: This refers to the employment of two different languages by a speaker during discussions. Hence, a bilingual person is one who has acquired and uses two languages in conversations. According to Holmes (2013) cited in Akinola (2015), the two languages are often employed by the user(s) based on the participants in the speech event, the discourse situation itself, the status(es) of the participants and the level of familiarity. However, Deibert (2010) citing Myers-Scotton (2006) claims that the bilingual may have more than two languages at his/her disposal from which s/he chooses desired codes as the occasion demands.. However, it is noteworthy to state that the pidgin English has gained unprecedented acceptability in the nation and is fast becoming a lingua franca with a wider population of speakers than English. As a matter of fact, Faraclas (2004) cited in Akande and Salami (2010) views Nigerian Pidgin as the most widely spoken language in Nigeria.

What is Pidgin? A pidgin is a simplified means of linguistic communication. It is constructed impromptu or by convention, between individuals or groups of people who do not have a language in common (Wikipedia.org). According to Britannica.com, pidgin is originally a language that developed from sporadic and limited contacts between Europeans and non-Europeans in places outside the European shores from around the 16th till the early 19th century in association with issues like trade, religion, agriculture and colonization. In the same vein, Lyons (2009) describes it as a mixed or blended language used for a very restricted range of situations and correspondingly, both in vocabulary and grammar. Hence, a pidgin is a product of different languages, often a European language and one or more indigenous / non-European languages. It is limited in vocabulary and grammar and as such a word with only a specific meaning in a lexifier language may acquire a completely new or extra meaning in the pidgin. Pidgins are historically regarded to as a form of ‘patois’ or simple versions of their lexifiers with low prestige particularly when compared with other languages. A pidgin often has its own norms of usage which its users must learn for proficiency (Wikipedia.com).

Pidgin as observed by Wikipedia.org originated from a Chinese pronunciation of the English word business from about 1807. In about 1855, the term pidgin English, also known as ‘business English’ referred to language while by the 1860s, the word pidgin alone referred to pidgin English in the general sense. For a pidgin to develop and adequately play the needed roles, some or all of the following must have occurred. There must have been at some point:-

- a) Prolonged regular contact between the various language communities
- b) A desire to communicate between the affected communities,
- (c) An absence of a generally accessible inter-language.

Types of Pidgin: Pidgins that have some form of documentation include, English based pidgin, French based pidgin, Portuguese based pidgin etc.

Status of Pidgin: Pidgin languages initially possessed low linguistic status or prestige, they were and are still being viewed as ridiculous (languages) particularly by those who do not speak them. They were described as mongrel jargon, macaroni lingos, broken English, kitchen kaffir etc. They were particularly regarded as the debased forms of their lexifiers /

superstrates (Holmes, 2013). However, the parlance has over the last few decades ‘assumed elaborate roles and functions, gaining new grounds in different sociolinguistic domains as a result of its sustained social expansion’ (Mensah, 2011). Pidgin currently plays significant communicative roles in Nigeria as a nation particularly between language users from different ethnic groups where entirely different languages are spoken. Additionally, it is a parlance which both the educated and the uneducated Nigerians have come to identify with despite their ethnic, socio-political and religious affinities owing to its neutrality, simplicity, popularity and learn ability (Mensah, 2011).

The Differences between Pidgin English and Broken English

Broken English represents grammatical inaccuracy as revealed for instance through the choice of the wrong tense as in the sentence “he had to *told* her his mind” instead of “he had to *tell* her his mind” and the question “how *is* your children?” rather than “how *are* your children?” Pidgin English is the combination of accurate English with a local dialect to form an intermediary language that is neither English nor the local dialect. The pidgin English being spoken by both the literate and the illiterate in Nigeria, and which is actually acceptable even in high standard literature work as that of Chinua Achebe is a typical example of Pidgin (Robert, 2019).

Additionally, Robert (2019) states further that broken English can be employed by anyone whether or not they have received formal education since it simply reveals lack of proficiency in English, but pidgin English, though informal, reveals an individual’s status / social class as exemplified by Dogo, the one-eyed stalwart of Chief Nanga in Chinua Achebe’s *A man of the people*. Pidgin has been grammaticalized, has generally acceptable varieties which are used by government and non government officials and can be used figuratively (Mensah, 2011; Umera - Okeke & Ahaotu, 2018). A good example of the figurative usage of Pidgin is seen in the following synecdochial utterances: “Shine your eyes,” (meaning: be very vigilant /observant) and “body dey inside cloth,” (meaning: 1 am fine since 1 can still dress up and walk about.)

Nigerian Pidgin English: Nigerian pidgin English is an English based pidgin spoken by Nigerians to facilitate communicative interactions in

different contexts (Balogun, 2013) cited in Umera Okeke & Ahaotu (2018). It is a language of contact which originated from a combination of Nigerian indigenous languages, Portuguese, English language and French basically as a result of slave trade, agriculture and colonization (Mensah, 2012). Currently, there are about five major varieties of Nigerian Pidgin English namely; Bendel variety, Calabar variety, Kano variety, Lagos variety and Port Harcourt variety. Nigerian pidgin English has been grammaticalized appreciably and as such is intelligible to all its speakers no matter the variety they speak. Below is a discussion on the grammaticalization of Nigerian pidgin.

Grammaticalization in Nigerian Pidgin: Grammaticalization is the internal development of a language which involves assigning grammatical roles to lexical items and other constructions within the sentence. Some of these roles can be nominal, verbal, subjective and objective roles. In the development of Nigerian pidgin, a lot of sentence elements from the superstrate language, English, underwent changes in form, use, meaning and function. For instance, some verbs underwent changes from lexemes, to auxiliaries and complementizers while some pronouns changed from objective to subjective. Other verbs reveal mainly relationships between the elements of a sentence, a role not originally played by verbs. Some forms of grammaticalization in Nigerian pidgin are treated below:

‘Me’, a first person singular objective pronoun playing subjective roles, for

Example: me wan go pis (‘me’ as subject).

*‘We’ – a first person plural subjective pronoun functioning as object.
Example. Una no dey follow we.

*‘Bin’ – a ‘noun’ representing ‘container’ functioning as auxiliary past tense marker. For example I bin kom your offis before (‘bin’ is helping the verb ‘kom’)

* The letter ‘e’ functioning as a third person singular pronoun (he/she).
Example: Oga say e wan see you.

*‘Say’:- a verb of communication playing the role of the pronoun/complementizer ‘that’. Examples: Dem tok say e don marry. (‘say’

as an obligatory complementizer usually follows the verb it complements in Nigerian Pidgin.

Grammar in Nigerian Pidgin: Hornby (2010) defines grammar as the rules in a language for changing words and joining them into sentences. It involves all forms of word formation, inflection and arrangement in order to achieve meaningful sentence structures. It refers to the whole system and structure of a language in general usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflecting) and sometimes also phonology and semantics (Murthy, 2007). The grammar of Nigerian pidgin therefore includes all the linguistic items employed by Nigerian speakers of the Pidgin English during communications. It entails the organization of these items that is, signs, sounds and words to form sentences and other structures that are uniquely pidgin. Umera-Okeke & Ahaotu (2018); Faraclas (2011) view the parlance as ‘a distinct variety with its own phonological, morphological, and semantic features. Features which are peculiar to the Pidgin’s grammars are evident in the Nigerian varieties and they shall be discussed below.

Nigerian Pidgin Phonology: The Phonology of Nigerian pidgin has different varieties just as there are different varieties of the Language. For instance, the pidgin word ‘chop’ which means eat is pronounced /tsop/ by the Igbo users of English since the English voiced dental sound /S / is present in Igbo and Hausa languages. However, a Yoruba user of Pidgin pronounces the word as /sop/ because the /ts/ does not exist in Yoruba language. Yoruba speakers of English will also pronounce the Pidgin word ‘Vex’ which means ‘to be annoyed’ as /feks/ due to the absence of the labiodental fricative /v/ in Yoruba Language. There are however some common features of the Nigerian Pidgin Phonology which are shared by all its varieties. Umera-Okeke and Ahaotu (2018) observes that there is no distinction between short and long vowels in Nigerian Pidgin. Hence, the Standard English words ‘seat’ and ‘sit’ are both pronounced as /sit/ or at times /si/.

Nigerian Pidgin’s Phonology also reveals adequate use of tone particularly in homonymous cases. Pitch levels often become the distinguishing aspect of meaning (Umera-Okeke & Ahaobu (2018). Below are instances. ‘Baba (/High/High Tone) means Barber, Baba (High/low tones) – Father.

Similarly Fada (Mid/high tones) – ‘a Catholic Priest, while ‘Fada’ (Mid/Mid tones) – ‘Father Christmas’ (Yoruba Pidgin variety). It is noteworthy to state that Nigerian Pidgin has only five vowel sounds /a,e,I,o,u/ while many other varieties of Pidgins have the following consonants; N,w,p,b,t,d,ts, dz, k,g,kp,f,v,s,z,l,z,^, w, j, (Umera-Okeke and Ahaotu 2018).

Syntax in Nigerian Pidgin: Syntactically, Nigerian Pidgin is viewed as having simple features and structures . Mafer (1971) in Uwaechina (2016) claims that Nigerian pidgin’s word order follows, SVO Pattern which makes pidgin sentences usually short and simple. For instance, the parlance employs the following sentences and more: i)Dey bin chop the food – Dey(S) +bin chop(V) + the food(O): (they ate the food), I wan tok the tori – I(S) + wan tok(V) +the tori(O): (I want to tell the story).

Achieving negation in Nigerian Pidgin is done through the use of the word ‘no’ as in the following examples, I no con laik am: (I don’t like it), Dem no tell me what they wan: (they didn’t tell me what they wanted. Plurality in Nigerian Pidgin is expressed using the Pidgin marker ‘Dem’, a third person plural pronoun which is placed after the noun head which must be preceded by the articles or a determiner like ‘dis, dat, or dos’ as in the following examples. Di man dem: (the men), Dis pikin dem: (these children), Des geh dem: (those girls). The past tense is expressed using the words ‘bin’ and don, while the future, tense is revealed using the verb ‘go’ as used in the following examples. I bin tok am before: (I said it before), E don bigin make shakara (He has become proud / arrogant)

Nigerian Pidgin Lexicon: Nigerian Pidgin just like other varieties of pidgin is a contact parlance. Hence, its vocabulary is sourced from different languages, Words like ‘Sabi’ (to know) and Pikin (Child) are from Portuguese, ‘Clinic (bed bug) and ‘Wey’ (generic Pronoun) are from Spanish. ‘Boku’ (Plenty) and ‘Vex’ (to be angry are from French,) ‘Way’ (trick / trickster) and Wahala’ (trouble) are from Hausa while ‘Una’ (‘You’ second person singular/ plural) and ‘na’ (‘It is’ or ‘that is’ are from Igbo). ‘Shakara’ (To show off) and ‘Tokumbo’ (Fairly used items) are from Yoruba language while ‘Amebo’ (gossip) and Okada, (Commercial Motorcycle are from Edo Language) (Umera-Okeke & Ahaotu.)

The vocabulary of Nigerian Pidgin is indeed smaller than that of English yet the semantic field it covers is in no way reduced although speakers

often rely on the context or speech situation for the meaning of words. This is because in pidgin words may have a number of equivalents but in English, each of which is only applicable in a specific context. The word 'Sabi' for instance, means 'to know', 'to understand something', 'to be intelligent,' 'to be experienced' or 'to be skilled in doing something.'

Spelling in Nigerian Pidgin: Spelling in Nigeria in Pidgin can be regarded as unique and complicated but somewhat chaotic and simplistic. As the lexicon originated from different languages so did the spelling. Hence although there are different varieties of Nigerian Pidgin each with unique spellings, they have all contributed to the orthography of the language. English which is the lexifier or superstrate language contributed largely to the orthography of Nigerian pidgin, hence the presence of many English spellings in the language till date though many of them have been altered / pidginized. Other foreign languages like French and Portuguese also contributed to the development of its orthography as substrate Languages. Here are some examples of the input of other Nigerian languages in Nigerian pidgin spelling system.

Warri: Efizy (Style), Kawasaki (leave quickly), akata (an African American) and gbosa (loud noise), pale (father).

Ajgunle variety:- egunje (bribe) tokunbo (fairly used goods), orobo (an extremely fat person), lepa (a very thing person (usually a female), ashewo (a prostitute), and so on.

Onitsha variety: Nyankiri (a dish out transaction, buy market (to be in trouble) una (you), na (that is, this is).

Hausa variety:- toh (really, I see), wahala (problem), shikena (that's all).

Calabar variety: Incran (a stupid person), uton (mobile handset) misyarn (say the wrong thing).

Edo variety; Amebo (gossip), okada (commercial motorcycle).

Various linguists and scholars like Elugbe and Omamor, Faraclas, Semire, Mafene (1971) and Agheysi (1971) in Esizimotor (2010) have at one point or the other developed their own orthographies for Nigerian pigin leading to a multiplicity of orthographies with none accepted as standards, this study discovered some basic methods of spelling formation which are common to all.

Some Methods of Orthography Development in Nigerian pidgin:

1. **Reduplication:** One major method of arriving at new words/spelling in Nigeria pidgin is through reduplication. This presents a situation where a particular word is duplicated to form another. Examples are:- Krai Krai, (one who cries a lot). Well, well (very well), fight fight (a quarrelsome fellow), eati eati (a glutton) Umera-Okeke and Ahaotu (2018).
2. **Compounding:** Another method of word formation in Nigerian pidgin is compounding. This is a situation where two words are combined to form a new one. Examples of this are tear race (run) fear face (respect/undue apprehension), tear rubber (new) etc.
3. **Deletion and or Inclusion of Letters:** Word formation in Nigerian pidgin also involves omission of some letters of English words, to arrive at their pidgin equivalents. Examples are ‘wan’ (removal of the final ‘t’ in want). Villa (removal of the last two letters ‘g’ and ‘e’ in village). Drivin (removal of the last ‘g’ in driving). Tink (removal of the second letter ‘h’ from the word think). Don (removal of the final “e” from the English word done) .
4. **Borrowing:-** Words are also borrowed directly from foreign and indigenous languages into Nigerian pidgin with their original spellings intact. Examples are buy, just, pepper. back, mouth, lead, naked, minister, real, una, agbero, pale, wahala and so on.
5. **Simplification:-** This, according to Bikerton (1984) in Mensah (2012), is “an organic process of evolution which... (involves) notorious simplification or resetting to default” .Nigerian pidgin has many of such reset words and expressions. Examples are wetin, yarn, viam, nyam, belle, gree, wak, etc.
6. **Use of phonemic equivalent:** This involves the use of phonemic equivalents, of some foreign and indigenous words to spell pidgin words. Examples are dem, bikos, tok, tel, maket, skul, govano, pipul, evri-bodi, yu, mi, yu, mai etc (Esizimotor, 2010; Umera, Okeke & Ahaotu 2018)

Figurative Aspect of Nigerian Pidgin: The Figurative nature of Nigerian Pidgin cannot be over-emphasized as it is impressive. A figurative expression is a statement or phrase employed by writers to make their work more vivid, weighty and comprehensible. It is however not intended to be interpreted literally (Duru, 2014; Vocabulary.com). Such expressions can

be metaphorical, ironical idiomatic, proverbial, synecdochial, poetic, metonymical and so forth. Nigeria pidgin is replete with figurative expressions. Thus, figurative language use does not only make the parlance (Pidgin) intriguing and interesting, it is also a robust presentation of the Nigerian socio-cultural experiences. The following are examples.

Metaphor:

- i. Nigeria done become Mathematics (Nigeria is like Mathematics which is difficult and complicated).
- ii. The man na akamu (The man is a weak (Umera-Okeke and Ahaotu 2018))

Onomatopoeia:

- i. As everything don scatter scatter, everywhere don jagga, jagga. (There is confusion every where).
- ii. You dey ginger my swagger (You are getting me excited / inspired).

Synecdoche:

- i. Shine your eyes (Be very vigilant / Observant)
- ii. Body dey inside cloth (I am fine since I can still dress up and walk about)

Proverbs:

Lazy man no dey chop for Lagos. (You must be ready to hustle to be able to make it in Lagos).

Hyperbole:

You dey scatter my brain (What you are saying is too difficult for me to understand).

Having been so grammaticalized, accepted and is being employed by Nigerians of all ages as a native language, Nigerian Pidgin English now contributes greatly to the growth of the nation. These contributions are highlighted below.

Contribution of Nigerian Pidgin English to Development in the Nation

Nigerian Pidgin as observed by Taiwo (2011) now functions as a major lingua franca among Nigerians particularly when people of different ethnic groups who cannot or do not want to use English meet. This is a testament to the fact that the parlance has assumed a far greater worth than ever before and may in no time take over the functions of English in the nation as it is fast becoming a veritable tool for information dissemination

employed by all existing institutions across the nation despite its unofficial status (Akande & Salami, 2010).

It is noteworthy to state that Nigerian pidgin currently plays invaluable roles in the development of the country educationally, economically, socially and culturally. Mensah (2011) opines that ‘Nigerian pidgin...has assumed elaborated roles and functions, gaining new grounds in different sociolinguistic domains.’ The increase in the potentiality of Nigerian Pidgin is apparently not unconnected with its recent generally accepted status as a distinct language having the major features of a natural language, evolving native speakers and a vast majority of non-native speakers. Faraclas (2004) cited in Akande and Salami (2010) views Nigerian Pidgin as the most widely spoken language in Nigeria particularly with its unprecedented spread among the youths, as according to him, over half of the over 140 million Nigerians which was then the population of the country were speaking Pidgin fluently. It equally claims that the growth will further increase as this generation of young people reach adulthood.

In educational settings for instance, Nigerian Pidgin is a predominant parlance of expression. Osoba and Alebiosu (2016) contends strongly that the Nigerian Pidgin English is currently the medium of communication in many institutions of learning in Nigeria including primary schools especially within the Niger-Delta region, Lagos, many areas within the core North and the middle Belt. In the same vein, Douglas (2012); Taiwo (2011) attest strongly to the fact that most secondary and tertiary institution students currently speak Pidgin more than both their mother tongues and English. Even prominent writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Niyi Osundare, Cyprian Ekwensi and many others have extended the use of pidgin into literary texts (Osoba & Alebiosu, 2016; Umera-Okeke & Ahaotu, 2018).

According to Donwa-Ifode (1984) in Osoba and Alebiosu, (2016), a good number of published and unpublished texts have been written in Pidgin while others have remained in electronic forms on the internet. Some of such works are ‘Soza Boy’ by Ken Saro Wiwa, ‘My Pidgin Stew and Suffer head’ by Aig Imoukhuede and ‘Tori For Get Bow Leg’ a poem by Major General Mamman Vatsa. This in turn currently enhances the status of Nigerian Pidgin while at the same time improving literacy among Nigerian students. Akande and Salami (2010) opine that the parlance is

equally being employed by the elites including professors, legal and medical practitioners, journalists and other professionals mainly as a display of solidarity.

Economically, Nigerian Pidgin is used by manufacturers and marketers to promote their products and solicit for increased patronage from consumers through different kinds of television and radio advertisements. The language is equally gaining recognition in the media as news bulletins, news paper reviews and other programmes are recently being relayed in pidgin on many Nigerian radio and television stations. ‘Naija Palaver’ a daily Newspaper review programme by the Vision Africa Radio, Umuahia, in Abia State, ‘Talk your own,’ a public enlightenment programme on My Radio Fm, in Owerri, Imo State and ‘Pidgin 101’, a pidgin teaching and learning programme on Reach FM, Owerri are representative of the progressive rise in the employment of the Nigerian Pidgin English by the Media.

Politically too, government agencies and politicians now consider the Nigerian pidgin a valuable tool both for political campaigns, Douglas (2012) and for the transmission of government policies, party agenda and programmes particularly to the Nigerian populace. Socio-culturally also, pidgin is fast gaining acceptance as it appears to be the second major parlance used to transfer social and cultural ideals, beliefs and traditions from generation to generation. The entertainment industry is awash with all forms of artistic renditions via the Nigerian pidgin. This dates back to the early 1960’s when the late music legend, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti adopted Pidgin as the language of his Jazz music (Osoba & Alebiosu, 2016). The health sector has equally embraced the use of pidgin to deliver health related talks and seminars particularly in government owned hospitals and dispensaries.

Conclusion

Nigerian Pidgin English is a language of contact which originated from a combination of Nigerian indigenous languages, Portuguese, English language and French, basically as a result of slave trade, agriculture and colonization. It has been grammaticalized appreciably and as such is intelligible to all its speakers no matter the variety they speak. It currently plays invaluable roles in the development of the country educationally, politically, economically, socially and culturally.

Hence, given the recent rapidly increasing rate of the acceptance of Nigerian Pidgin, owing to its popularity, simplicity and neutrality and its attendant employment for the enhancement of Nigerian development in all sectors and for the promotion of her values, identity and literacy among the educated and uneducated Nigerians, it becomes evident that in the next couple of years, the parlance may replace the English Language in the country in usage and function in an incredibly increased manner in all sectors and institutions regardless of the citizens' ethno-linguistic affinities. Recommendations: The following recommendations were presented based on the discussions and evaluation of the nature, roles and prospects of the pidgin English as examined in the study.

- * Nigerian Pidgin English should be granted an official status and hence be recognized as the nation's fifth official language.
- * Nigerian Pidgin English should be better standardized and codified for enhanced usage by all stakeholders in the field of education, politics, religion commerce and indeed all socio-economic aspects of the nation.
- * Nigerian Pidgin English should thereafter be taught, and learnt as a major Nigerian parlance by pupils in all institutions of learning across the nation.
- * More attention should be accorded the study of pidgin, particularly the Nigerian variety, by linguists and other scholars in the field of language both in secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

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