The Nigerian Pidgin as a Variety of Language Use for Informal Communication among Students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education By

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Abstract

The Nigerian Pidgin English which is considered the language for the illiterate group in the society has now become an all-round affair, It has become so popular that the speakers are capable of expressing the whole range of human endeavours and experiences through lexical expansion. It is on this note that this paper is aimed at investigating the Nigerian Pidgin English as a variety of language use for informal communication among students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. This, by extension describes the varieties of the Nigerian Pidgin in the campus. The use of opinions, discussions, observations, experience were employed for the collection of data. The Fisherman's theory of domain analysis was employed as a framework of analysis. Some of the factors that influence the language used by students were also highlighted. They include; the topic, role relation and locale. This work has also been able to provide answers to such questions as who speaks Nigerian Pidgin, to whom, where and for what purpose. The outlines were discussed as a way of analyzing the data collected. The status of Nigerian Pidgin English and the overview of Nigerian pidgin were explicated in the work.

Keywords: Language, Pidgin, Pidgin English, Informal Communication.

Introduction

Pidgin English has in the past been regarded as an illiterate variety of the English language, but today, the concept is currently being studied and major issues being

addressed by such studies. An investigation into the use of Pidgin English in Nigeria is essential in a bid to understand clearly the social structures of the society and their attitude towards the language. In Nigeria particularly, pidgin recently has attained the level of dignity not only among the uninformed group but also the literate members of the society.

In some cases, Pidgin English is used by elites who have attained a certain height in academics to crack jokes with their counterparts especially in an informal gathering. A pidgin comes in, when people from different language backgrounds need a means of verbal communication so as to understand themselves. It is used to eliminate the communication barrier which should have existed between the native speakers of various unintelligible indigenous Nigerian languages. In a nutshell, the use of the Nigerian Pidgin revolves around regions, ethnic groups, educational levels, professional and ages. It is a variety of language spoken mostly in the village and towns among the highly educated and the non-educated in the society. It is often spoken in churches, mosques, markets, schools, on the streets and in gatherings that are less formal.

The pidgin has also assumed regional status. This is true because, we have the Niger Delta pidgin, the Eastern Nigerian Pidgin, the Western Nigerian Pidgin, and the Northern Nigerian Pidgin.

Statement

Fisherman (2000) stresses that the saying no language is inferior is aptly logical. This is because where two languages of communication come into contact, a lingua franca or common languages of communication emerge. The emergent language can serve as a substrate or auxiliary to main or superstrate one or serve as just a means of business transaction or even rise to become an international language.

It is imperative here to explain 'base language and substrate', vis-à-vis, the Nigeria situation, For instance, in Nigeria, the base of Nigerian pidgin English is the English Language for it supplies a good number of vocabularies and the substrate are the various indigenous languages. Hence, this could be best expressed through some examples:

1. Wetin dey happen - what is happening?
2. Come chop - come and eat

3. No dey yam okpas for hia - stop talking non-sense here.
4. I don pay yo - I have paid you.
5. No wahala - no problem
6. This your stori get k-leg - your story is suspicious
7. You no sabi wetin you dey yarn - you don't know what you are talking about.
8. Make we gist - let's talk
9. That kia subject e get as e be - that kind of subject is hard to understand etc.

Unlike the standardized English; Pidgin English has no rules, no lexis and structure; it is flexible and very easy to speak. Having this n mind, this work therefore aims at investigating the major problems associated with discourses when conducted in relation to the social setting obtained and the social relation between two people in a discussion.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the Nigerian Pidgin. English as a variety of language use for formal communication among students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. Specifically, the study intends to:

(i) Find out the relevance of Pidgin English as a substrate to Nigeria's lingua-franca.
(ii) find out if Nigerian pidgin English will be inculcated in the educational curriculum
(iii) Inculcate an unbiased spirit into the minds of pidgin English users

Significance of the work

This study is important because its results will go a long way in creating a space for the recognition of Pidgin English as a substrate language of communication in Nigeria. It will also be a guide to the federal government in planning for effective educational system.

Concepts

Nigerian Pidgin English

Nigerian Pidgin English is indeed becoming very popular in Nigeria, especially in the universities, public functions as well as in the offices. It is a lingua-franca for

social integration among different ethnic groups in the country. It has developed to the extent that it is used for literary communication. Some of the notable writers in Nigeria employed Nigerian pidgin as a medium of expression in their works. Some of the works include: "dis Nigeria sef" a poem written by Ken-Saro-Wiwa, "No food No country", a play by Tunde Fatunde, and "Grip Am" a play by Ola Rotimi. Nigerian Pidgin has come to stay as the major lingua-franca adopted for communication among the many different speakers in Nigeria.

According to Jowitt (2000): The situation today is that pidgin flourishes as a medium of inter-ethnic communication, especially in the south, and in the large cities with many non-indigenous residents (Bendel, Benin, Port Harcourt, etc) or throughout states with small many ethnic groups.

The language does not only evolve but also has its origin from a mixture of other languages. Experiences have proved that among the students' for which this work was conceived. Nigerian Pidgin English has gained a wider audience in all areas of the economy especially the educational sector.

No one speaks the same way all the time and people constantly exploit the meanings of the languages they speak for a wide variety of purposes. The consequence is a kind of paradox, hence the formation and use of slangs, jargons, argots and to mention but Jew. Sociology of language is one of the several approaches to the study of the patterned co-variation of language and society. It is a term which views society as being broader than language, and therefore, as providing the context in which all languages behaviour must ultimately be viewed.

Sociolinguistics is the relationship existing between languages, culture and tradition as well as the politics of a particular community. It is a discipline which assigns functions to various languages which exist in a community, and such functions may suggest that a language be used as a mother-tongue, another as a second language and yet another as a foreign language. Sociolinguists, also examines the interaction between the use of language and the social organizational behaviour. It tries to explain why and how this organization and behaviour have become selectively different in the same social networks of communities on two

different occasions. For example, it explicates why one particular group addresses a semi-literate audience in Pidgin and another audience, an elite one, in impeccable English.

The basic notion underlying sociolinguistics is quite simple: language use in interactions. The notion is simple, but the ways in which language reflects behavior can often be complex and subtle. Again, the relationship between language and society affects a wide range of encounter from the broadly based international relation to narrowly deemed interpersonal relationships. For instance, the present study focuses on sociolinguistic investigations of English-lkwerre bilingual code-switching patterns and social motivations.

Aziza (2003) emphasizes that: Nigerian pidgin is spoken almost everywhere and anywhere by illiterates and by university graduates, the young and the elderly, etc. It is used in the homes, on the streets, in the market places, in the churches, mosques, in social as well as political gathering, in the mass media, in government offices and even in the classrooms.

The Nigerian Pidgin which was initially regarded as the language for the unenlightened group has now become so broadened that the speakers are capable of expressing the whole range of human experiences through lexical expansion. The pidgin spoken in Niger Delta region has its peculiarity in the fact that some of its lexical items were influenced by languages other than English and local words. Words like “Sabi” and “dash” are from the Portuguese language: “sabi” from “sobier” meaning “to know” and “dash” from “dos” meaning “to give”.

The university linguistic situation is one in which many languages co-exist in the community. There is the indigenous language - lkwerre which functions as language of the environment in conjunction with other Nigerian languages spoken by different individuals. There is also English which is Nigeria’s language of communication (Lingua-Franca). Because of the mixed population consisting of people with various professions and educational backgrounds ranging from the sachet water hawkers, cleaners, messengers and to the lecturers. Thus, this work is aimed at investigating the role of pidgin /English in an informal gathering of students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt

The Origin of Nigerian Pidgin English

In the Nigerian context, colonization is the major historical factor responsible for the emergence of Nigerian pidgin. It can be historically traced to the transaction between the British and local people in the seventeenth century.

According to lliah (2001), Nigerian pidgin was developed from the negative attitude of the European Colonial Masters who thought they could not allow their colonized people Nigerians to speak the same language with them. In another development, the Nigerian pidgin was a product of the inferiority attitude the colonizers had towards the colonized. Though, the correct usage of the English language of the colonizers by their colonized did not witness all round success. The outcome of their attempt to catch up the new and prominent language gave rise to broken English.

Status of Nigerian Pidgin English

It simply stresses on the relative position of Pidgin English with special reference to Nigeria. It is interesting to note that if there is any language to be pointed out for adoption as a lingua franca (national language) in Nigeria; the current popularity of Nigerian Pidgin has made it the only one.

According to Elugbe (2001), he stressed that: It is certain that no other language, be it indigenous, or foreign, has the number of speakers that Nigerian pidgin has. It is clearly the most widely spoken language in Nigeria today.

The wide coverage and popularity of Pidgin English in Nigeria is not only overwhelming but convincing, such that, among many Nigerians especially in rural areas where communication could have become a big challenge; it is spoken and understood considerably. In such areas like Edo, Rivers, Delta, Enugu, etc.; Nigerian Pidgin English is used commonly as indigenous language. It is, however, surprising that notwithstanding the relevance of Pidgin English in a heterogeneous and multi-lingual nation like Nigeria; a lot of people still do not recognize it. The situation is clearly expressed by Elugbe, thus; Even those who helped to sustain it by speaking it refused to recognize it: a situation that exists even today. One meets highly placed government officials who speaks Nigerian

pidgin but do not believe it should be allocated the role in language policy in Nigeria.

Nigerian pidgin is like a child nobody wants to claim but who is sent on an errands by everybody (287-288,).

Whatever the situation, Nigerian Pidgin English is generally becoming prominent in written discourse, despite its low social rating.

The Overview of Nigerian Pidgin English

Like any other pidgin language in other cultural backgrounds where the language is not native to its users, Nigerian Pidgin is a language that originated from the combination of indigenous languages and foreign language (English).

Rickford (2003), stressed that: A pidgin usually combines elements of the native language of its users and is typically simpler than those native languages in as much as it has fewer words, less morphology, and a more restricted range of phonological and syntactic options.

Rickford's excerpt to some extent is contextually applicable to Nigerian pidgin in such a way that its phonological, morphological and grammatical structures are primarily restricted compared to any other standard language. Again, its social communicative functions are usually restricted to the verbal and informal settings. However, scholars like Rickford (2003) are of the opinion that 'a pidgin is sharply restricted in social role, used for limited communication between speakers of two or more languages who have repeated or extended contracts with each other.

Today, the sociolinguistic reality in Nigeria reveals that Nigerian pidgin is not used only in informal settings, but also in other formal settings. Though, there are quite a number of negative perceptions of Nigerian pidgin. Such perceptions have regarded Nigerian pidgin as a mark of bastardization of English. This variety of language has come to be understood as "adulterated language", "an inferior language", "substandard and lesser language", "a deviated language form", "a marginal language", "a language with no history and no nature, among others.

This negative assumptions inform the reason why its use in the past was limited to jokes, cartoons, and entertainment.

Perhaps, because of the bias above, that its functions have been restricted to the verbal forms of communication alone. In respect of all these titles, could we still say that Nigerian pidgin has a future prospect? However, we should ask what the historical genesis of Nigerian pidgin is, before answering the questions.

Theoretical Framework

Based on Fisherman (2000): "Domain" is a socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationship between communicators, and locales of a communication, in accord with the institution of a society and the area of activity of speech community in such a way that the individual behavior and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related lo each other.

Therefore, the languages sued by people can be influenced by many factors. (topic, role relation and locale). He says that topic can be a regulator of language use in a multilingual setting. For instance, someone changes his or her language to the interlocutor's language when discuss certain topics.

Marjohan (1988) says that role relation means that languages you are using are determined by the interlocutors you speak with. For instance, father speaks to mother, child speaks to mother, and mother speaks to child. He states that locale means that the places where the conversations take p\lace influence the languages you are using.

Given the multiple varieties of language available within the communicative repertoire of a community in a multi-lingua nation like Nigeria; the subset of varieties available to its sub-groups and individual speakers must select the code and interaction strategy to be used in any specific context. This paper is an attempt to investigate the use of Pidgin English in an informal gathering among speakers. Fishermen's "domain analysis" asks the questions **who** speaks **what** language, to **whom**, **when** and **why**. These are the questions that the investigation is out to answer. He uses the term "domain" to mean institutional context in which one language or a language variety is more likely to be appropriate than another.

Fishermen defined "domain" as: A socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communications and locales of communication, in line with the institution of a society and the sphere of activity of a speech community.

Pidgin develops to serve a very narrow range of functions in a very restricted set of domain. It has a simplified structure and a very small vocabulary compared with fully developed languages.

Conclusion

So far, the argument in this paper has been in favour of the Nigerian pidgin as a variety of language use for informal communication among university students. Instead of positing unnecessary attacks and discrepancies over whether or not Nigerian Pidgin is standard or between standard, effort should be made seriously in developing Nigerian pidgin. It should be developed properly to a greater extent to enhance effective excommunication. Having recognized Nigeria as a multi-lingual country; the use of Nigerian pidgin should not be limited to trade, jokes, cartoons, religious teachings, news broadcast and advertisement purposes alone but should be given a free hand to operate and serve wider coverage.

For this dream to be actualized, language planners must work on its codification which will assist it in serving wider part of the society since it is not ethnically bound. If the language planners and government indicate interest, the notion of different people concerning pidgin English will automatically change. In order to actualize this proposed vision, it will be imperative to include it in the National Policy on education. The National orientation agency, the National commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non- Formal Education will also play important roles in mobilizing, re-orientating and sensitizing the populace who had been based on this.

Finally, in view of the various potentialities of Nigerian Pidgin, it will amount to injustice if Nigerian pidgin is not given greater attention. Its general acceptability by the greater population of the Nigerian populace makes its recognition inevitable and is capable of enhancing its speedy progress.

Recommendations

Considering the impact Pidgin English is creating in our homes, schools, offices, market places, motor-parks etc, I will not regret to make the following recommendations:

1. That pidgin English should be given a place in the school curriculum.
2. More text books and written materials on Nigerian pidgin should be encouraged.
3. Government should make pidgin English a compulsory subject in the schools

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