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## RELEVANCE OF PIDGIN AND CREOLES AS REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*The major language problems in Nigeria are that of Language choice, Language maintenance and shift. (Yule 2009) Nigeria has a complex multilingual society with several different languages used within the private and public space. In planning an official indigenous language in Nigeria, government, legal and educational organizations will have to decide which variety or varieties of the languages spoken in the country are to be used for official businesses. In the selection process, the standard may be a variety that official had no native speakers in the country. (Jowitt 2009) For communication purposes, the indigenes of the Niger Delta had to learn the Portuguese based pidgin. Thus, the pidgin is accepted by many as a means of communication though English language remains the official language and the language of education. However, because different languages are used for different purposes, the need to keep up specific use of a particular language in one or more domains despite the regional variations might arise. Nigerian Pidgin may be considered Creole as creolization arises when a Pidgin develops beyond its role as a trade or contract language and becomes the first language of a social community and a useful means of communication. The paper recommends amongst others that; the Pidgin English should be developed and used as a second major language of communication in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Relevance, Pidgin, Creoles, Regional, Variations.*

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### **Introduction**

The vitality of any language depends on the communicative behavior of its speakers and language plays a central role in or mental and social life of its speakers. It is a unique endowment of the human species; especially in ethnic societies that are characterized by linguistic plurality; language

plays a major role in distinguishing one group of speakers from another. Thus, we identify the various linguistic groups in Nigeria, for instance; as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Idoma, Igala, Tiv, Urhobo, etc. However, language is intricately bound with culture; hence, we use the term Hausa culture, Igbo culture, Yoruba culture, etc to describe the totality of the traditional acts, beliefs, rituals, language, etc, which distinguish one group of Nigerians from the rest (Jowitt,1999).

Practically, all countries of the world are multilingual. Bakker (2003) noted that bilingualism is present in practically every country of the world, in all classes of society and in all age groups; it is not only odd to discover a country that is predominantly monolingual but multilingualism is a phenomenon that has existed since the beginning of language in human history. What this obviously means then is that monolingualism is an aberration. In Nigeria, the desire for a multilingual society has been a guide in the formulation of National Policy of Language Education as stated in the National Policy of Education (1984) which makes it mandatory for two Nigerian languages to be studied in schools in addition to learner's own Mother Tongue. This policy is intended to boost the vitality of the indigenous languages and sustain their use otherwise, attrition and endangerment may result.

Meanwhile, Nigeria has a population of more than 180 million people from United Nations estimate within its 923,768 square kilometers. The country is an ethnically diverse group of people with over 450 different languages.(Jowitt, 1999). European explorers and traders visited the country in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese were the first group of Europeans to visit and explore coastal Nigeria (Niger Delta region). For communication purposes, the indigenes of the Niger Delta had to learn the Portuguese based pidgin. After the Portuguese were the Dutch and French. The British were initially interested in trade but later religion and education.

Nigeria is a multi cultural and multilingual society with Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as the major indigenous languages. English continue to enjoy the pride of place as the official language of the country as there has always been problem of having an indigenous language as official language and when 'WAZOBIA' was proposed, there was also the problem of what

variety of language to use as each of the proposed languages had dialectical variations. With the multifaceted functions performed by English language in the Nigeria environment, we would agree that English promotes understanding and national unity in the country, because without English in a linguistically diverse culture like Nigeria, our environment would have another episode of tower of Babel where everybody but nobody understands anybody. (Ihemere, 2006).

English as second language in Nigeria, thus, remains the language of school instruction in addition to other functions in administration, media, and commerce. Inasmuch as the English language is wide spread, not many people can use it efficiently and effectively. There are errors here and there especially in the processing of the two languages. Learners begin to have negative attitude towards the target language and find it difficult to speak the other language in front of lots of people to be genuinely immersed in the target language or become fluent or super fluent in it.

It is true that Nigeria is a complex multilingual society with several different languages used within the private and public sectors. The Standard English as an idealized variety is accepted as the official language found in printed materials and widely used in the Mass media and is taught in most schools to learners of English as a second or foreign language (Igboanusi, 2008). The pidgin is equally accepted by many as a means of communication with existing regional variations. This is the existence of two (or more) dialects of a single language or two (or more) quite distinct and different languages. Inasmuch as the existence of different regional dialects is widely recognized and often a source of some humor for those living in different regions, and exists along a dialect continuum, according to (Yule, 2009), the Pidgin remains one language that would bridge and unify the status of all users within their various cultures.

There is no gainsaying the fact that, the understanding of a culture and its people can be enhanced by the knowledge of their language. Therefore, everyone's views are dependent on the culture which has influenced them, as well as being described using the language which has been shaped by that culture (Posner, 1997). Better still, language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next; Emmitt & Pollock (1997). According to Yule (2009), the particular

language we learn through the process of cultural transmission provides us with a ready-made system of categorizing the world around us and our experience of it. However, there can hardly be any meaningful exchange of ideas, values and relations where there is no common language. Thus, a common Language provides an important opportunity for to achieve relative peaceful co-existence.

### **Concept of Pidgin**

The concept of Pidgin has no definite definition; it is not a native or community language but a medium for inter ethnic communication that are learned with lexical and structural limitations. Although not universally used, Pidgin is a language with norms, like every other language, commonly referred to as Pidgin or Broken (Brokin), used in communication and does not require all the lexicon and grammatical devices that traditional languages would naturally have (Bakker, 2003). The vocabulary / lexicon of pidgin is derived from pre-existing languages and most of the time, the bulk of the vocabulary comes from one of such languages. The newly derived vocabulary is referred to as the 'Lexifer" and the other languages involved in pidgin genesis are called 'substrates'.(Hughes et al, 1979). The Nigerian Pidgin English is an English-based Pidgin and Creole language spoken by over 30 million Nigerians as a lingual Franca across Nigeria either as a Pidgin, or as a Creole by many speakers who can switch between these forms depending on the social setting. (Jowitt, 1999). Most communities belonging to different ethnic groups in Nigeria can converse in the language; and although each group may have their own additional words or varieties, the Nigerian Pidgin is spoken in Warri, Sapele, but widely spoken in the Niger Delta area where most of its people speak it as first language. Meanwhile, the variation of the Nigerian Pidgin is spoken in Equatorial Guinea, Ghana and Cameroon and extended to BBC special service in 2017.

### **Concept of Creole**

Creole is an English term that came from the French Creole. The term was coined in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the expansion of the European maritime activities that led to the establishment of European colonies to distinguish

the members of an ethnic group that were born and raised locally from those who migrated as adults; and in Brazil, between the blacks born in Brazil from African slave ancestors and those born in Africa. As time went, Creole lost its generic meaning and became the proper name of distinct ethnic groups that developed locally from immigrant communities. Although the Nigerian Pidgin English is an English-based pidgin and Creole language spoken as a lingua franca across Nigeria, it has some similarities with the Creole languages of West Africa as well as the Creole language of Caribbean and West Indies. The similarities between the Jamaica Creoles and those of West Indies are because most slaves taken to the new world are of West African decent. Such similarities are found in the reduplication or repetition of words or phrases such as; *bam-bam*, (complete); *koro-koro*; (Clear vision); *doti-doti* (garbage); *yama-yama* (disgusting) (Bakker, 2003).

However, there are also similarities of the Nigerian Pidgin to the Portuguese Creole. This is also because both tribes lived together and interacted during the slave trade. Like the Caribbean Creole, the Nigerian Pidgin English has no official status and is used in an informal situation. Also, all English homophones are pronounced the same way in the English Creole as well as in the Nigerian Pidgin English for instance the word 'thing, tin, thin' is pronounced as 'tin' (Ekpe, et al 2010).

### **Language Choice, Maintenance and Language Shift**

Receptive language involves understanding what people mean when they speak while Expressive language concerns speaking in such a way that others would understand. The study of society multilingualism is incomplete without a discussion on language choice. When a person speaks more than one language, effort is made consciously or unconsciously to make a choice in different situations. Certain factors such as the setting, the participants, the topic and function of the interaction can each or all play a part in determining language choice as outlined in Fishman (1965), Rubin & Shuy (1973), Fishman & Cooper (1972) and Ullmann (1964).

A choice could be made between two or more languages depending on who the interlocutor is. The situation could refer to a wide variety of things

including location, formality or informality etc. According to Ervin-Tripps finding concerning immigrant Japanese women who had married Americans, use English when talking to their husbands, children and neighbours about things pertaining to American ways of life but Japanese is used to discuss personal concerns. The reason for the dichotomy as explained in Fishman (1965) might be that some topics are better handled in one language than another. In Nigerian context, many Nigerians cannot discuss Science and Technology or foreign issues in their indigenous languages because of the subject matters involved. Another factor, which is a function of interaction, deals with the goal of using particular language as reported in Rubin (1973), one purpose has to do with status raising or desire to include or exclude another person in the pattern of interaction. This has led to the development of variants of English language; a fall out of the linguistic consequence of English language in Nigeria emanating from its sociolinguistic consequence leading to the emergence of Pidgin English.

In Nigeria, this brand of Pidgin English is supposedly used by the not-so-educated class to interact with other people, mostly in a multilingual environment but this form of English has also gained wider usage so much so that even the highly educated people use it especially, in informal forums. According to Ullmann (1964); Rubin (1973), certain factors can promote or hinder language maintenance or shift; these are: the number of speakers, their educational attainment, and the status of the language economic and cultural values attached to the language(s). However, in multilingual society, like Nigeria, where different languages are used for different purposes, the need to keep up specific use of a particular language in one or more domains might arise.

In the same vein, Language shift involves moving partly or wholly to the use of another language. According to Fishman, (1964), a more usual case of language shift involves some community members, belonging by birth right to one linguistic group changing their linguistic affiliation and moving wholly or partly into another linguistic group. One of the language groups ultimately would have fewer speakers, using the language in fewer domains and the other group gains more speakers and sometimes with additional functions. While the combination of these may lead to either

maintenance or shift, social variables like religious attachment clearly promote language maintenance. Other reasons for language shift may include the prestige of using a particular language and the advantage of using a particular language of wider communication. Other reasons for shift could be migration, industrialization and its attendant economic opportunities, governmental policy decisions as well as the prevailing attitude of the community of language users. In the case of Nigeria, some of the conditions for language shift exist towards pidgin to the disadvantages of others.

The emergence of this variant (pidgin) is because of the functions which English language performs in the Nigeria society. There is no agreed upon definition of what a pidgin is but a pidgin is not a native or community language but a medium for inter ethnic communication and has to be learned though lexically and structurally limited. The Pidgin English has norms because it is a language like every other language used in communication but because it is not a language used universally, it does not need all the lexicon and grammatical devices that traditional languages would naturally have (Hughes et al, 1979).

Therefore, the Nigeria Pidgin English becomes a simplified language that developed as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common; in situations such as trade and social interaction. In a heterogeneous and linguistically diverse environment like Nigeria, it becomes readily handy as a means of communication because of its simplicity in grammar. Its simple structure arises from its tendency to borrow its components from the English and the indigenous language and restructures them in line with the rules of the new emerged language called 'pidgin'. Pidgin English is functional in area like education, print media, broadcasting, political campaign, advertisement, information, technology, and commerce.

The Pidgin is commonly referred to as Broken (Brokin) and spoken in many parts of the country. However, the pidgin in Nigeria has developed beyond this limit and yet they are still widely referred to as Pidgin. This will explain the notion that pidgin do not automatically become a Creole. The Pidgin does not have long life-span and most pidgin words disappear when the situation where they exist changes or when another medium of

intergroup communication becomes available. To indicate this are some pidgin examples coined from the communities where the European explorers visited and their meanings: (<https://www.hawaii.edu/definition/naija>)

From English	From Edo/Delta	From Hausa	from Igbo	From Yoruba
Chop 'to eat	kpangolo - container	dabaru - to destroy	biko- please	Adire -tie & die
Doti - dirtkpekere - plantain-chips	gworu - cola nut	okrika -2 <sup>nd</sup> hand	she - hope	

Following these examples, Agheyisi (1971) explained that Nigeria pidgin was in the past regarded as the language of the uneducated but has become widespread and has come to be accepted and used by educated people too.. This view was also reinforced by Quirk, Greenbeaun, Leech, and Svartvik, who, at various instances, describe Pidgin as the traditional interference used chiefly by the prosperous and privileged sections of the community, also by the unskilled and illiterate class of society”

### Differences between Pidgin and Creole

As already mentioned, Nigeria is a multilingual nation with over 500 indigenous languages (with high rate of mobility), in addition to English language selected as part of the national languages (CIA Worldfacebook, 2011). This number implies a conglomeration of different ethnic groups, culture and dialects. English language thus becomes the predominant language used as the language of unification among the educated people and the un-educated ones who find themselves in the township. But among these languages can be found another form called Pidgin or Pidgin English as the locals call the variant.

The distinction between the Pidgin and the Creole are difficult. There may be slight differences but perfect boundaries/distinctions are not possible. Pidgin and Creole are the result of the blend between two or more languages. Pidgin is the first generation shift between native speakers of two different languages. The Creole is a second generation of speakers who are handed the first generation language to formalize it and fortify it into a robust structure. Creole is a pidgin with native speakers. As Hudson (1980) states:



Each pidgin is of course, specially constructed to fit the needs of the users which means that it has to have the terminology and constructions needed in whatever kinds of contact that normally arise between the communities, but need not go beyond these demands to anticipate the odd occasion on which other kinds of situation arise.

However, the Creole fills in the blank of any language aspect missing in Pidgin version and notwithstanding the fact that language is not static and thus there exists often a ton of vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation changes that occur during the first 20 – 30 years of Creole formation. Similarly, the pidgin in Nigeria has developed beyond this limit and yet it is still widely referred to as Pidgin.

### **The Relevance of Pidgin English in Nigeria**

The emergence of this variant (pidgin) is because of the functions which English language performs in the Nigeria society. English language performs more functions in the Nigeria environment than the indigenous languages. It is the language of education, the language of instruction in school, the language of educational evaluation, politics, commerce and industry, international relation, law and legal drafting, social interaction, and social placement. With these multifaceted functions performed by English language in the Nigeria environment, we would agree that English promotes understanding and national unity in the country; without English in a linguistically diverse culture like Nigeria, our environment would have another episode of tower of Babel where everybody but nobody understands anybody (Ihemere, 2006)

However, the importance of English Language whose command has proved tough amongst the recipient society have led to the development of variants of the language; a fall out of the linguistic consequences of English language in Nigeria; emanating from it sociolinguistic consequence, leading to the emergence of pidgin English (Agheyisi, 1971). According to Jowitt (2009), this brand of English is mostly used by the not-so-educated class, who are not competent in the use of the Standard English, to interact with other people, mostly in a multilingual environment like Nigeria.

Meanwhile, this variety of English has permeated the media, both the electronic and the print media, hence it wide usage in advertisement. There

is a radio station in Lagos (Wazobia FM) that airs its entire programme in Pidgin English and special programmes (including phone-in programmes), in Pidgin by most Radio stations across Nigeria. The wide use of Pidgin; its simplicity and its functionality just as the English Language, many Nigerians are of the opinion that the Nigeria pidgin be adopted as the nation's national language (Ekpe, et al 2010).

Pidgin English is functional in areas like education, print media, broadcasting, political campaign, advertisement, information, technology, and commerce. In all aspects, the Nigeria Pidgin English is a simplified language that developed as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common, in situations such as trade and social interaction. In a heterogeneous and linguistically diverse environment like Nigeria, it becomes readily handy as a means of communication because of its simplicity in grammar. Its simple structure arises from its tendency to borrow its components from the English and the indigenous language and restructures them in line with the rules of the new emerged language called 'pidgin'.

Agheyisi (1971) observe that "most Nigerians who can speak Standard English effectively may choose to use Nigeria Pidgin English in either formal or informal setting, depending on the relationship between interlocutors", people use pidgin euphemistically and metaphorically at instances when the topic of discussion is embarrassing, vulgar or when they want to diffuse tension during discourse. It is now a mark of identity and 'swag' among youths who use it to show style and belongingness to the modern trend. It has even become a mark of 'Nigerians' which may be one of the reasons the educated masses use it. Health workers and other governmental bodies use pidgin for sensitization activities. The government, politicians and music makers now incorporate pidgin in their speech and their lyrics to reach out to the vast majority at the grassroots who use it. Pidgin also serves as a mark of class identification among the uneducated ones. Many illiterates speaks pidgin partly because they cannot speak the standard form and partly in defiance of the standard form of English which they consider elitist while some would gladly be speaking it as an expression of affinity to one's social class (Ekpe, 2010).

## Conclusion

This paper has established that pidgin is specially constructed to fit the needs of the users which mean that it has to have the terminology and constructions needed in whatever kinds of contact that normally arise between the communities; but need not go beyond these demands to anticipate the odd occasion on which other kinds of situation arise. On the other hand, Creole is an English term that came from the French Creole; coined in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the expansion of the European maritime activities. Like the Caribbean Creole, the Nigerian Pidgin English has no official status and is used in an informal situation. Agheyisi (1971) explained that Nigeria pidgin was in the past regarded as the language of the uneducated. This view was also reinforced by Quirk, Greenbeaun, Leech, and Svartvik, who describe it as the traditional interference used chiefly by the prosperous and privileged sections of the community; also by the unskilled and illiterate class of society". But pidgin has become widespread and has come to be accepted and used by educated people too.( Lyons, 2009); and in Nigeria, Pidgin is widely used because it is simple in diction and syntax and therefore easy to learn. (Hudson, 1980). This paper establishes and concludes that because language is the verbal expression of culture, the Pidgin language will best serve as a language of value education and cultural integration.

## Recommendations

This paper makes the following recommendations:

- The Pidgin does not naturally have long life-span because most words disappear when the situation where they exist changes or when another medium of intergroup communication becomes available. To facilitate effective communication, a lot of collaboration, working together is required to facilitate respect for one another and trust among the various ethnic groups through the use of Pidgin English.
- It is almost impossible to develop an indigenous local national language because of the diversity of languages in Nigeria and the functionality of the Pidgin same as the standard English Language, the Pidgin can be adopted as the nation's national language.

- The structure of the Pidgin is simple and as such can be developed to a Standard Pidgin that may be used by all irrespective of the varieties that already exist and used as a second major language of communication in Nigeria.

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