

NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH AS A MEANS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN THE FACE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication is very important for both the government officials and the general public in the time of crisis such as Covid-19 pandemic and insecurity. Though English language is the lingua franca (Official Language), it is mostly accessible to those who have attained a certain level of education. Among the rural populace, comprehension of National address in the time of crisis and insecurity becomes futile if it is not brought down to the language of understanding, especially to the rural and unlearned in the citizenry, in Nigeria which is a multi-lingua State. The employment of Nigeria pidgin English, as a contact language that is used by the people of all ages and all class across the nation by all works of life for communication and business makes for easy passage and dissemination of information to the citizenry. In the face of insecurity and Covid-19 pandemic crisis today, not just for peaceful co-existence but for effective communication and for the safety of lives of the Nigerian Citizens.

KEYWORDS : Effective, Communication, Peaceful, Co-existence, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Pidgin English originated as a result of the trade contact between the British and the local indigenes in the seventeenth century. It is also a continuum of English Pidgins and Creoles spoken among other West African countries such as Cameroon, Sierra Leone and Ghana. In the past, the use of Nigerian Pidgin English was linked to non-educated people and perceived by the non-educated ones with negative attitude. In recent years, it has gained entrance into different ethnic groups and is linked to the urbanization process, so the educated and non-educated use it. The use of Nigerian Pidgin English now is increasingly popular among the young people, writers, politicians, mass media, and musicians and educated. Nigerian Pidgin non-attachment to a particular ethnic group qualifies it as a language generally used in the country by all class, age or group. Though no official status has been granted to Nigerian Pidgin English yet it is the easiest language and the commonest language for communication between the educated and the non-educated people from different ethnic groups, language of business and trade and the language of the media in the country. Based on the independent parallel development theory and the neutralist perspective, this study concludes that the Nigerian Pidgin English contributes to the building of Nigeria as a Nation because it is used for communication and is a major instrument for cohesion in the country.

History Of Pidgin In English SH In Nigeria

European (Portuguese) traders and explorers visited Nigeria in the mid 15th (Fifteenth) century. The Portuguese were the first group of Europeans that visited the region now known as Niger-Delta. They started trading with the people of the region from 1469 AD (Esizimeter and Francis, Egbokhare). They established strong diplomatic ties between some of the great kingdoms of the region and Portugal. They established schools and churches where they taught Portuguese and Christian Doctrine, this brought their language close to that of the Niger Delta. When the Portuguese left the region, the Dutch came and traded for half a century followed by the French traders till after 1650 AD where the English arrived to take control of trade in the region. The introduction of English into Nigerian environment, the existing Portuguese based pidgin of Niger Delta started evolving in the new direction of the language of new political dominated group the English with time, English language supplanted Portuguese as the major lexifier of Nigeria. By 1960 when Nigeria gained independence, English became the commonly spoken language and later the lingua franca.

Nigerian pidgin is classified as an indo- Exogenous language in Nigeria (Adegbija, 2001) because it is the bridge between English which is the exogenous language in Nigeria and numerous indigenous languages of Nigeria. The bulk of Nigerian Pidgin's

vocabulary is derived from English, but its structure and function are closely affiliated to Nigeria's indigenous language with 3 to 5 million native speakers and more than 75 million second language speakers (Ehigbe 1995, Faraclas, 1996, Egbokhare 2001). The speakers of Nigerian Pidgin in Nigeria cut across geographical location, age, education, socio-economic status mainly because it is ethnically neutral. It is spoken in cities and urban centers, campus of tertiary institutions, military and police barracks, bus and taxi stations across the country. The variety of pidgin spoken in various geographical regions and social groups vary from cities like Benin, Sapele, Port Harcourt and Warri where it has creolized and has become mother tongue. It is used for both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic communication (Elugbe, and Omamor 1991).

The use of Nigerian Pidgin English in different facets of life, is not a product of legislation, rather it is because of its communicative potentials in the Nigerian speech community where Nigerian Pidgin English is part of the socio-cultural nuances of the people (AcheonEmike 2019: 720).

Features Of Nigerian Pidgin English

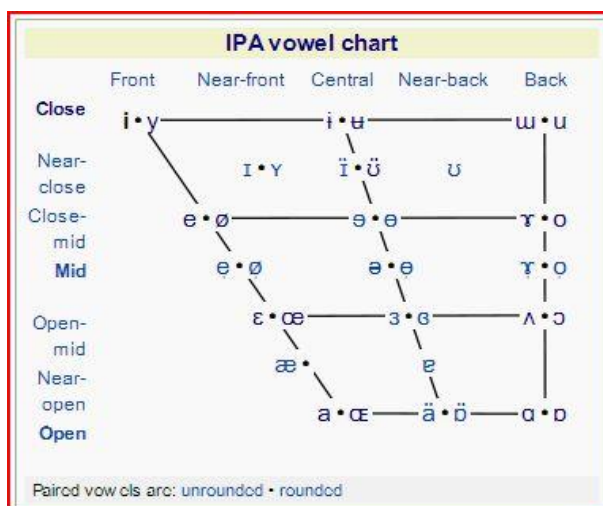
Phonology: The Nigerian Pidgin English over time has developed a sound system that cut across its users (Mafeni 1971, Oyabede, 1983 and Elugbe and Omamor 1991) in their works admit that the sound system most of the indigenous languages have are insufficient, but the combination of the indigenous languages with the English language have given rise to the growth of Pidgin in Nigeria. Nigerian Pidgin has seven vowels according to /e, a, o, u/

| Vowel | Nigerian Pidgin | English word |
|-------|-----------------|--------------------|
| I | /sid/ | Sit, seat, seed |
| E | /tebul/ | Table, snake, bait |
| A | /had/ | Hat, heart, Hard |
| Ɔ | /hɔt/ | Hot, hurt |
| O | /gol/ | Goal, gold |
| U | /fud/ | Food, Foot |
| E | /ben/ | ben, ten, bet |

Vowels of Nigerian Pidgin (Table 1)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|--------|----|----|----|---|----|---|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| | i: | i. | e: | æ | a: | a | ɔ: | U | U: | ʌ: | ɜ: | ə: |
| Ijaw | I: | i. | E | a | - | - | - | - | U: | - | - | - |
| Hausa | i | I | E | a | - | - | - | U | U: | - | - | - |
| Urhobo | I | - | e | a | - | - | - | U | - | - | - | - |
| Yoruba | i | - | e | a | - | - | - | U | - | - | - | - |
| Igbo | i | I | E | a | - | - | - | U | u | - | - | - |

English pure vowels and vowels of the five Nigerian languages (Table 2)



Cardinal Vowel Chart. (Table 3)

Tables, 1 & 2 and figure 3 indicate that Nigerian pidgin has less pure vowels than English. It has the same number with the five Nigerian language represented in Table 2.

The illustration above confirm that Nigerian Pidgin English as a language has its own sound system with identifiable phonetic potentials, which is different from any Nigerian language or English language. Nigerian Pidgin Language have identifiable diphthongs according to Oyabade 1983 and Elugbe and Omamar, 1991) such as /ai/, /au/, /iɛ /, /iɔ/, and /ɔi/. some of the diphthongs vary among speakers depending on their linguistic background. For example, the less Anglicized articulations of /ai/ and /ɔi/, /æ, ao/ and /ɔe/. Nigerian Pidgin English has about twenty five consonant sounds: /m, n, ŋ, nw, p, b, t, d, ts, dz, k, g,

kp, f, v, s, z, I, ʒ, ʌ, j, w, h /. Most of these sounds occur in English except / kp, gb and gw/. /kp and gb/ occur in nigerian language especially the igbo language such as igbe (box), akpa (bag) and in pidgin we have kposa (openly), the sound / ɲw/ and /ɲ / are realized as /ɲwin/ for English ‘win’ and /ɲas/ ngash for English “Buttocks”. (Ekpenyong 2010).

Morphology

The pidgin English in Nigeria is simplified that the morphology of the contact languages are relieved of inflection and derivation. It has separate article expressing tense case and numbers, For instance:

= The bobo de kom- The boy is coming

= I go kom – I will come.

There is an element of reduplication in Nigerian Pidgin English as its words developed from the phonological adaptation of borrowed English words such as:

| Word(S) | Word class | Meaning |
|-------------|------------|---------------|
| Ben-ben | Adjective | Full of bends |
| Bie-bie | Noun | Beard |
| Krai-krai | Adjective | Likes crying |
| Wel-wel | Adverb | Very well |
| Fek-fek | Adjective | Fake |
| Kpata-kpata | Adverb | Totally |
| At al at al | Adverb | Not at all |

Challenge

The Nigerian pidgin exists basically in spoken form, though has managed to sustain a vital oral literature as it has become a vehicle for songs, folk tales, work chants, language of the media and the language of communication among colleagues and different classes of people in the society. Gospel singers use Nigerian pidgin English in their music's like:

- 1) I don do am again, in a big way
- 2) Satan don fall for gota, machammacham

Nigerian pidgin English is yet to have an orthography to direct the spelling, writing and translation, the government is yet to accord it a recognition as a major language though it is the language with the highest number of speakers across the nation. The Nigerian Pidgin English is fast becoming a lingua franca in Nigeria. It has been well, employed in social and informal programs (Esimimelor 2004:202). There is a need to indigenize, domesticate, acculturate so the Nigerian Pidgin English so that both the Educated and non-educated can use it .

Functions Of Nigerian Pidgin English

The Nigerian pidgin English evolved in Nigeria as a contact language, at the moment it is an official language described as a contact trade language (Elugbe&Omamor 1991:1). It is the language that comes in place when there is a need for communication between two people who have no common language in

a Nigerian setting. The Nigerian pidgin English is also termed a trade language because people of different language background often brought together for business reasons use it for communication. The Nigerian pidgin English is a neutral language that cuts across the six geographical zones in Nigeria, though containing foreign language as its make up and cannot truly express any of the Nigerian culture (Marchese&schukal 1982). The use of Nigerian pidgin English in different facets of life, is not a product of legislation

The role Nigerian pidgin English performs unconstitutionally in Nigeria implies that if the roles of the language is spelt out via legislation, and developed via corpus and status planning, it will play vital roles in Nation building, its corpora have to be developed and standardized. (Acheoah 721).

The Place Of Nigerian Pidgin In English In National Cohesion (Building)

Nation building is the major need of every nation. It is a cross facet (Political, economic, technological, educational, etc.). growth/development and it is informed by conscious efforts (Acheoah,2019). Without national cohesion or integration, national development or national building cannot be sustained. Politically, the value system is expected to develop before it can be said that a nation is making political progress, in this era of global insecurity any language

that unites the people of a country can be explored for peaceful co-existence of the country (Acheoah,2019). Nigerian pidgin English contributes to the building of Nigeria in different ways such as National cohesion, population of speakers, a linking language, cross domain function.

National Cohesion : Peace and safety of the Nation's citizenry and their property is the prerequisite for national building, because there is no good governance in a state that is full of chaos and insecurity. Language is therefore used in sensitizing, educating and uniting the people. Nigerian pidgin English as a language promotes national integration. It is the language used to sensitize brotherhood through radio and television programs. Nigerian pidgin English provides the decorum, national cohesion, peace, justice, solidarity and brotherhood which Nigeria is in need of at the moment.

Population Of Speakers

Nigerian pidgin is spoken across all domains in the country. It is becoming the language of communication in various fields. It has become a product of inter-regional, mutual trade relations and this makes it stand to function as the national language. According to Esizimeter and Egbokare,2002, "Current estimates show that around 5 million people speak naija as first language while over 75 million, people use it as a second language in Nigeria. Diaspora communities in Europe, America and other parts of the world. The implication of having very many speakers of Nigerian pidgin English is that a large number of the productive age speak it and translate the use of the language into nation building in their various endeavors (Acheoah). Pidgin English in Nigeria is fast becoming the

language used among students in the higher institutions. It is used for all unofficial gatherings and for communication. Nigerian graduates find themselves code-switching from the Standard English to the Nigerian pidgin, even civil servants and top business ranking men use it as the easiest means of communication among contemporaries and between learned and unlearned.

A linking Language: The complicated nature Nigerian Pidgin English helps it link various ethnic groups in the country with socio-cultural values that define the day-to-day lifestyle. Nigerian Pidgin English derives most of its vocabulary items from the major Nigerian languages (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) and Portuguese language that makes it easy for it to function as he means of communication and linking language in the country.

Although Nigerian pidgin English is often stereotyped and described as "Pidgin English" or Broken English, it is accepted by most people as a very useful language for public entertainment, campaigns, radio and television programs, inter-ethnic communications, commercial and advertising, sitcoms, stand-up comedies, popular music, religious music and for conducting everyday business transaction in many parts of the country (Acheoah, 2019). Terms that are not understood in English are expressed in Nigerian pidgin English to facilitate the dissemination of information for national building.

According to Obi Edith Ifeyinwa's report on radio programmes in Nigerian pidgin English in some radio stations in Nigeria plus additional ones by researcher, we have the following.

| RADIO/TELEVISION STATION | TOWN | PROGRAMME |
|------------------------------------|-------|---|
| WazobiaFm (95.1) | Lagos | All programs are broadcast in pidgin, no other language is used |
| BBC, media station (Nigeria radio) | Abuja | News, Jokes, Politics , Situational and social commentaries |
| Radio Faji | Lagos | News, Jokes & political Issues |
| Purity FM | Awka | Jokes and public interactive programs. |
| Metro FM | Lagos | News, Jokes and political issues |
| Lagos state Television Station | Lagos | News, sports and social commentaries |
| Dream FM (92.5) | Enugu | Situational, social commentaries and Jokes. |
| Independent Television stations | Benin | Jokes, political, situational and social issues |
| Delta Broadcasting Service(DBS) | Asaba | News, sports commentaries, political & social issues. |
| Brila Radio Station | Enugu | Uses pidgin in sport commentaries |
| Rivers State Broadcasting Station | PH | News, sports commentaries and |

| | | |
|---------------|---------|--|
| | | social issues |
| Unizik FM | Awka | Jokes and interactive programs |
| Vision Africa | Umuahia | Jokes, Sports commentaries, social and situational issues. |

Programmes and broadcasts in Pidgin on some radio Stations in Nigeria

Pidgin English As Agent Of Peaceful Co-Existence In Nigeria

The rate of spread of Nigerian Pidgin English has made it one of the indigenous languages in the country. It has the highest number of speakers (Jibril 1995). The Nigerian pidgin English is used across the country for social interaction, trade and commerce, literary composition and education, advertisement and propaganda as well as language of media (Alobo 2015). Being a language widely used in the country for various vital purposes, Nigerian pidgin English can function as an agent of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Nigerian pidgin English is a non-native language to any group of speakers, one of the threats to peaceful existence in Nigeria today is ethno-centrism. Nigerian pidgin English is capable of eliminating ethnocentrism because it has no native speakers but spoken by all across the nation Nigeria as nation is multi-lingual with about 395 major and minor languages (Hansford et al., 1976). It is Nigerian pidgin English that makes it possible and easy for people from these diverse linguistic backgrounds to relate and interact cordially and peacefully. Nigerian Pidgin English promotes harmony and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians.

Nigerian pidgin English also described as trade contact language facilitates trading activities among Nigerians from diverse regions and linguistic backgrounds. Cultural differences aside, Nigerians trade peacefully using Pidgin. It promotes mutual understanding, peace and unity in the market area and the business industry. Nigerian pidgin English promotes inter tribal marriages among the people of different ethnic backgrounds. Igbo can marry Yoruba, Hausa marry Idoma and so on and they live peacefully and communicate through the use of Nigerian pidgin English which is the common language of communication in the country. This has promoted peace and unity among the various tribes, thereby reducing inter-ethnic rivalries and crisis.

Nigerian pidgin English is used by music artists and literary writers to express peace and unity. Works such as Ken Saro-Wiwa's poem 'Dis Nigeria Sef' were written in pidgin. Music artists such as Osadebe, Fela Anikulapo, movie industry (Nollywood) has adopted Nigerian Pidgin English in acting all the movies are combined with English, Nigerian pidgin English and native language to appropriate communication among the various class and entertainment. Comedies are also done through Nigerian pidgin language, for instance Jenifa's diary, the Johnsons, tinsel, hustle, and isibaye

all use Nigerian Pidgin English. Health sector use Nigerian pidgin English in educating the masses over the radio and television (Mekuna wash your with soap and water to avoid jabs). Mekuna de sleep inside the treated mosquito net to prevent mosquito net to prevent malaria). Media houses such as NTA, AIT, radio house etc. use Nigerian pidgin English as a medium of educating, entertaining and preaching peace and unity. They do not only entertain the masses but communicate and at the same time promote peaceful coexistence in the country.

Pidgin English As means of Peaceful co-existence In Nigeria

1. The elites see Nigerian Pidgin English as the language of the down trodden, so they refuse to identify with it. It discourages the less educated from using Nigerian Pidgin English thereby forcing themselves to speak English even when they cannot.
2. Pidgin has a limited vocabulary so it cannot be used for academic discourse. Scholars see it as a makeshift or an auxiliary language (Alobo 308).
3. Nigerian pidgin English has no native speakers, so it is seen as nobody's language and a language without root, it is therefore difficult to make it grow to a national Standard.
4. Nigerian pidgin English has an inadequate literature. The known comprehensive text is the one written by Elugbe E. C and Omamor. A. P entitled 'Nigerian Pidgin (Background and prospects). Nigerian pidgin English is still lacking in phonology, grammar, syntax, semantics, morphology and vocabulary. These and more hinder the development of Nigerian pidgin English and its teaching.
5. Nigerian Pidgin English has no teachers and instructional facilities. The speakers are mostly oral users and cannot write it as they acquired it by contact and association.
6. Leaders and Nigerians do not recognize the unifying role of Nigerian Pidgin English, though it is playing a vital role as big as that of a lingua franca in the country. Various ethnic groups in the country today tend to understand themselves and live peacefully with their neighbors of diverse language with the use of Nigerian pidgin English as means of communication, interaction and trade.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Nigeria pidgin English should be viewed as a distinct language like any other language in the country. Government elites and masses should see it as such and not as language of the illiterate.
- 2) Linguistic scholars should be commissioned to write standard texts to enhance the development of Nigeria pidgin English.
- 3) Since Nigeria pidgin English is spoken by all and sundry in the country, it should be made the lingua franca in place of non-availability of an indigenous lingua franca.
- 4) Teachers should be trained to teach Nigeria pidgin English at various levels of learning
- 5) Teaching resources should be made available by government and non governmental organisations.
- 6) Nigerian pidgin English's role in unifying the nation and peaceful co-existence should be encouraged by government.

CONCLUSION

Communication in Nigeria which is a multi-lingual state, with only the indigenous languages, will prove abortive, if it is in English alone. To provide understanding of information being passed in the midst of insecurity in a society such as Nigeria, a language that everyone no matter the age and status can understand and how with, hence the introduction and avocation of the use of Nigeria pidgin English for communication. It has been discovered that indigenous language pushes for the need for a general or commonly preferred language, which gave rise to the emergence and acceptance of Nigerian pidgin English which every indigenous language has found a means to communicate with other persons of different languages, as a result communication is enhanced, friendship built, disputes are solved, threats, killings and insecurity could be easily reported by persons of indigenous languages without the knowledge of English. There is need for adoption of Nigerian pidgin English as a means of unifying language as a means of effective communication. The rate of insecurity in Nigeria is alarming, coupled with the trending covid-19 pandemic, ravaging the world currently, so there is a need for effective means of communication amongst the masses, between the Government and the people and people of different ethnic groups. Going ahead to teach all citizenry English language may not be very easy or possible as Nigeria is a multilingual society. But the adoption of an already existing means of communication across the country as a means for reach the people makes dissemination of information and warnings easy. Nigerian Pidgin English is the only language that fits into that position. For unity to be maintained, security sustained, masses reached with

information through mass media, the adoption of Nigerian Pidgin English should be considered (Patuck 2006) (Akanda 2008).

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