

## The Effect of Pidgin in the Teaching and Learning of Standard English in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *This study was aimed at investigating how the Pidgin variety of the English language, otherwise known as “Brokin”, has influenced the teaching and learning of the Standard English variety in Nigeria. Having adopted the English language as was introduced by the British as Nigeria’s lingua franca for over four decades, one would have expected a thorough mastery of its usage but the reverse is the case. It is quite obvious that the world has turned into a global village with the English language still gaining wide spread usage having several other peculiar varieties: the Nigerian English, the American variety, the British English and the Pidgin English to mention a few; which in themselves have other varieties. Relatively evident, is the fact that both students and teachers grapple to gain mastery of the Standard English and this has brought about a limitation in their competence and performance; the Nigerian graduate still finds himself code-switching from the Standard English to the Pidgin and this may negatively affect both his spoken and written English. This paper surveyed the origin of the Nigerian Pidgin and its features, made semantic comparisons with the Pidgin and Standard English. It also x-rayed the extent to which Pidgin has influenced the teaching and learning of the Standard English. It was recommended among other points that teachers be trained to understand the pedagogy of the language and, a concerted effort should be made to carry out on the job training because once their skill is improved, it will positively affect students at all tiers of the educational system.*

**Keywords:** *Lingua franca, Pidgin English, Standard English and Brokin.*

### INTRODUCTION

The English language to a large extent functions as a second language in Nigeria. Although Nigeria is believed to have more than four hundred (400) languages (Brook, 1996) with over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups (wikipedia,2014), the English language is the only language used for all forms of official transactions, business, science and technology and, language of instruction in the school system. Oluwole (n.d) posits that it is the ticket for gaining admission into all tiers of the educational system.

Apart from being the language of instruction, the English language is also taught as a separate subject. In many tertiary institutions in the country, it is studied as single and combined honours degree course and, a prerequisite into other education courses. Thus, we have graduates with Bachelors of Arts (B.A.) in English, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) in English and sometimes Bachelor of Arts (B.A.Ed.) in education which includes the English language.

According to Ajibola (2013), the main concern of adopting the English language as a second language ( $L_2$ ), which was actually pioneered by the British colonial administration, was to help people communicate or interact with each other without the native language posing a barrier. In recent times, the English language has made national and international communication possible. However, there are certain limitations that speakers of the English language have which according to Olatunji (2012), is because the English language is not a native language in Nigeria; whereas Ihemere (2006) in Wikipedia (2014) reports that the Pidgin variety is, "... the native language of approximately 3 to 5 million people and is a second language for at least another 75million."

As a result of the prolonged use of the English language as the language of communication, many Nigerians understand and can speak the English language to some extent but sadly fail to read or write it proficiently. The English language is occupying an invaluable position in Nigeria. In the words of Ajibade, Adeyemi and Owopetu (2012) , "The English language, a foreign language in Nigeria, enjoys the status of a second language." As lofty as its position is, the maintenance of standard English as was introduced by the British is becoming a mirage as the days go by because of the presence of the Pidgin and several other varieties, which not only affects the students but the teachers as well. According to Olatunji (2012), "people of different socio-economic status and age commit unparadonable ... blunder in their day-to-day use of the language."

Suffice it to say that many teachers whether of the English language or other subjects are products of other indigenous teachers in various local institutions who themselves are deficient at various levels of the English language. These Nigerian teachers ultimately transfer their deficiencies unto their students. In addition, teachers of other subjects make themselves culpable by either intentionally or ignorantly failing to recognize the errors made by their students. Some of them appear to focus their attention on the content rather than usage. Thus, they look out for correct answers based on their marking schemes and not on the language in which the answers are written.

Although Karahari (2002) and Kperogi (2010) in Olatunji (2012) opine that, "a native-like command of a language in an  $L_2$  situation is almost impossible and that no Nigerian who studied at home can avoid speaking or writing the varieties used among the populace either consciously or unconsciously". we should not lose sight of the fact that the world is gradually becoming a global village; consequently, it will be baseless to introduce varieties that would not result in mutual intelligibility as far as global communication is concerned. As a result of global communication many parents force their children to learn the English language over the Pidgin and even their own languages because of the belief that it will give the later an added advantage in the global community (Li, 2003).

The question then is, to what extent has the pidgin variety influenced the teaching and learning of the Standard English? Also, what measures can be recommended and employed to help in maintaining the Standard variety of the English language despite the existence of the Pidgin? This is the focus of this paper.

### **THE ORIGIN OF PIDGIN ENGLISH IN NIGERIA**

The name Pidgin otherwise known as contact language is so called because it is usually created spontaneously; out of a mixture of other languages as a means to achieve information sharing between speakers of divergent speech communities. According to Wikipedia (2014), “the pidgin language is a simplified language that develops as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common.” It went further to say that, “it is most commonly employed in situations such as trade, or where both groups speak languages different from the language of the country in which they reside....” Etymologically, the word Pidgin is derived from the Chinese pronunciation of the English word business.

Generally, the origin of Pidgin is traceable to poor use of a language either by the speaker or receiver. In Nigeria, Pidgin emerged in the Niger Delta as a contact language which served the need for communication and interaction (Ajibade et al, 2012). It should be noted that Nigerian Pidgin varies from place to place and has several peculiar varieties. Obiechina (1984) meticulously discussed the variants of the Nigerian Pidgin by identifying five varieties namely: Bendel which includes: Abraka, Warri, Isoko, Sapele, Agbor, Itsekiri, Effurun, Agbaraha-Oto, Urohobo and Ewu; Calabar which includes: Calabar, Cross River, Akwa Ibom and the Kalabari regions; Lagos variant which includes: South West, Eastern Part and South-Central; Kano/Maiduguri variant which includes: North-East, North-North, North-South and North-West; and Port Harcourt which includes: Port Harcourt and the Regional Suburbs.

It must be noted also that despite the need to gain mastery of the Standard English, the Pidgin is fast evolving to the degree of being a national language. It serves as a lingua franca in higher institutions and even to some extent, among graduates. In fact, the Nigerian Pidgin started as a language of non-literates as Bamgbose, Banjo and Thomas (1995) put it. In their further descriptions they stated that, “not everyone had access to school and the process of acquiring English was decidedly longer and more tedious than that of ‘picking up’ Pidgin. It [therefore] remains a hall mark of the Nigerian Pidgin that its speakers use it with a lot of freedom and creativity.” Suffice it to say that the Nigerian Pidgin is identified as a language in its own right, with all the characteristics and potentialities of a natural language( Elugbe, B.O. and Omamor, A.P. ,1991).

### **FEATURES OF THE NIGERIAN PIDGIN**

The construction of the Pidgin English is either impromptu or by convention by interlocutors within a speech community. According to Wilson, Fasingha and Gomba (2003), “the Pidgin

English may be built from words, sounds or body languages from multiple languages and culture. There are no rules attached to its usage as long as the parties involved are able to understand each other.” Looking at the common traits among various pidgins, Wilson et’al, (2013) posit that:

It is a fundamentally simpler form of communication and that the grammar and phonology are usually as simple as possible consisting of:

- Uncomplicated grammatical structure.
- Reduction of syllabus codas.
- Reduction of consonants clusters.
- No tones, such as those found in West Africa and Asian languages.
- Separate words to indicate terms usually preceding the verb.
- Reduplication to represent plurals, superlative and other parts of speech that represent the concept being increased.
- A lack of morphemic variation.

In the same vein, Decamp (1971), Hymes (1974) and Hudson (1990) in Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2014) give a synopsis of the characteristics of Pidgin as follows:

- Elimination of grammatical devices like inflections, plural possessives and tenses.
- The use of reduplication as intensifiers.
- Ability of a word to have semantic extension i.e. expanded meanings.

### **SEMANTIC COMPARISONS OF SOME NIGERIAN VARIANTS, PIDGIN AND STANDARD ENGLISH**

Worthy to note is the fact that the morphological and syntactic features of the Pidgin variety will hinder mutual intelligibility which may likely affect negatively the spoken and written forms of the Standard English. Below are some comparisons made of the Nigerian variant (NV), Pidgin and the Standard English and, their semantic implications.

<b>NV</b>	<b>PIDGIN</b>	<b>STANDARD ENGLISH</b>
1. Go slow	Go slow	Traffic Jam
2. She has delivered	She don born	She has been delivered of a baby
3. Go far far	Go front front	Go further
4.	I dey go	In am going
5.	I no sabi	I do not know
6.	How far?	What is happening?
7.	Wetin?	What?

8.	Tey tey	Long time ago
9.	Fall hand	Disappointed
10.	O'boy	Friend
11.	Wahala	Trouble
12.	Waka-waka	Whore
13.	Like play-like play	Jokingly
14.	Wozam slap	Give him a slap
15.	Do quick quick	Be very fast about it
16.	How e de do you?	How are you feeling?
17.	Your brain de shake?	Are you deranged?
18.	De your lane	Mind your own business
19.	You de yarn opata	You are saying nonsense
20.	Mumu	Fool
21.	It's you that knows	You know best
22.	Domot	Balcony
23.	Comot for there	Leave that place
24.	Beat him on his head	Hit him on his head
25.	I should come?	Should I come?
26.	The man don kpai	The man is dead
27.	Make I troway am?	Should I throw it away?
28.	Dress	Shift
29.	Buy yawa	Never mind
30.	Free me	Let me be
31.	You de kolo?	Are you crazy?
32.	Ma le	Mother
33.	Pa le	Father
34.	Park well	Behave yourself
35.	I de gbaski	I am alright
36.	Which one be your own?	What is your problem?
37.	I don hammer	I am rich
38.	Pepper no de	No money

### THE INFLUENCE OF PIDGIN ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF STANDARD ENGLISH

The Pidgin English has no doubt influenced the teaching and learning of the Standard English negatively. It makes it quite impossible for teachers, students and even graduates to speak the Standard English correctly. Living in a world that can best be described as global village, this act would impede effective communication. The use of the Pidgin English to a large extent tends to

diminish peoples' effort at mastering the Standard English. (Obiechna, 1984; Akinnaso, N.F. 1989).

Because Nigeria is a part of the global community, she cannot do without the use of the Standard English because it dominates both national and international affairs. However, what is observed is that the understanding of the Standard English is faulty because of the influence of the Pidgin English and this creates dissonance, especially in the face of so many Englishes – American, British, Nigerian, etc. Consequently, the morphological and syntactic features of the Pidgin variety will hinder mutual intelligibility which may likely affect negatively the spoken and written forms of the Standard English.

The English language is one of the requirements for gaining admission into various levels of the educational system. As it stands, many new intakes at the various levels of the educational system fall short of the required standard to be able to engage in a meaningful academic work.

Nigeria is experiencing a high level of confusion in the adoption of an appropriate language policy. For instance, it is contained in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria enacted law that the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, Hausa and Yoruba...; giving rise to the acronym WAZOBIA. The crux of the matter is how many Nigerians speak the English language fluently? What percentage speaks Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba? The policy appears to be confusing and posing a serious setback in terms of achieving the proficiency in the English language by Nigerians.

Many authors like Adegbija (1994) are clamoring for the acceptance of Pidgin English as a lingua franca. According to him, 'Nigerian Pidgin English has a far much larger number of speakers than what has been referred to by Bamgbose (1980) as 'Standard Nigerian English.' Had they known the limitation it could pose globally, they would not have done so. It is well known in recent times that the craze for the acceptance of pidgin as a lingua franca, has led radio and some television stations to broadcast solely in Pidgin English. This is taking its toll on the Nigeria populace because apart from the fact that the variety of pidgin being used is not understood by everybody, it is also impairing students' command of the Standard English language. We should also not lose sight of the fact that these students' whose command of the Standard English is not masterful yet, are potential ambassadors of the Nigerian nation. If they happen to occupy elevated positions on the international scene, they will no doubt be compelled to speak the Standard English. What would then become of them?

The emergence of several varieties of the English language is also posing a limitation on the mastery of the phonology of the Standard English. This is because the phonology of the various Pidgins spoken is at variance with that of the Standard English. According to Akinjobi in Egwuogwu (2002), "a sender and receiver should be knowledgeable in the sounds of the language in which information is encoded; they must share the same knowledge of pronunciation

before communication can be effective.” More often than not there is a transfer from the local variety to the standard form of the language. Although, the English language may share some similarities in respect with some Nigerians languages, its phonological system differs considerably from those of the indiginous languages, the pidgin English inclusive. (Egwuogwo, 2012).

In the Nigerian school system, many teachers of the English language appear to have limited knowledge of the English pronunciation. They are also deficient in the proper pronunciation and identification of the sounds. To avoid an embarrassment from their inabilities, they simply substitute the tonal and stress patterns of the English language with the tonal features of their mother tongues.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE INFLUENCE OF PIDGIN ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF STANDARD ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

The significance of the effect OF Pidgin on the Standard English discussed in this Paper have far reaching implications for the competence and performance of our educated elites as far as international business is concerned. Pidgin could affect the communicative ability of Nigerians in effective communication. Nigerians could be easily excluded from international business and transactions. There is, therefore, the need for educational planners and administrators who conceive, formulate and implement educational policies to ensure that Pidgin do not impinge on the ability of the Nigerian nation to engage in global communications.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is quite obvious that the Pidgin has negatively influenced the teaching and learning of Standard English. This negative influence of Pidgin and its different varieties has affected the acquisition of the Standard English Language. However, this could be minimized if teachers of the language are competent and, perform well in the pedagogy of the language.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To help the teachers to be proficient in the English Language, a concerted effort could be made to train them on the job. Once their skill is improved, it will positively affect pupils and students at all tiers of the educational system. All aspects of the Standard English should be taught quite early too. The Four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, should be taught at all the tiers of the school system. Teachers of the English Language should be trained and retrained in the English language skills. Non-English Language teachers should also be made to undergo in-service training in these language skills. The grammar of the English Language including its phonology should be taught exhaustively. Both the State and Federal Government should get involved in planning Cross-posting, where teachers of the English Language will go to Britain and those of Britain would come to Nigeria to teach.

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