

New Approaches to Literary and Linguistic Analysis

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LANGUAGE CHOICE AND THE USE OF PIDGIN AMONG EDUCATED MULTILINGUALS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR

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INTRODUCTION

The essence of communication is to pass on information and regulatory instructions or comments from the speaker to the hearer. For this purpose, language is an important element in the communicative process. The language may be a natural one or some other form of language, including pidgins. By its nature and characteristics, a pidgin is a language created from known natural languages and developed in regions of intensive language contact. When two groups of people speaking different languages that are not mutually intelligible come in contact with each other, the need arises to communicate in one way or the other. Sometimes this need is so strong that a pidgin is created, from the languages in contact. As the two languages come together, the influence of one on the other occurs at the different linguistics levels, namely, phonological, syntactical, lexical and semantical (Weinreich, 1974). Among certain communities in Africa and some other parts of the world, pidgin has evolved as a distinct language recognised by linguists. It has developed to "fulfil certain restricted communicative needs among people who have no common language" (Todd, 1974:1).

Pidgin, as a language, is categorised into "restricted" and "extended" types. The "restricted" type results from a situation of marginal contact. This pidgin performs the role of a trade language. On the other hand, the "extended" pidgin serves functions beyond its original commercial purpose. The "extended" pidgin is the one that is widely used in Nigeria's multilingual settings. It is of immense importance because of its usefulness in providing a medium of communication for the different linguistics groups which do not share a common understanding of the English language.

However, there is a new development in Nigeria. Contrary to the situation described by Todd (1974:1) as favourable to the creation of a pidgin, well educated bilinguals or multilinguals on University campuses in Nigeria now tend to choose pidgin for interpersonal communication. Their choice of pidgin is not compelled by the absence of a mutually intelligible language.

Indeed it is observed, for one thing, that this group of people share a common level of understanding of the English language. For another, some members of the group even speak the same mother tongue. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to examine the curious choice of pidgin as a popular language of communication in Nigerian University campuses, where English or other indigenous languages would have been expected to play that role.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The University of Calabar campus was used as a case study. Its ethnography consists of students and staff from various ethnic groups, predominantly from the Southern and Middle Belt States. It is interesting to note that these staff and students come from areas where pidgin is widely spoken. But they are also able to use the English language as a common medium of oral communication in informal and formal settings.

The method used was the administration of a questionnaire on the students and staff of the University of Calabar for the 1996/97 session. One hundred and twenty copies of the questionnaire were administered. Of these 100 copies were returned, giving 83% return rate.

Each questionnaire had sixteen items to be responded to by the subjects. Most of the items tested for the respondent's use of pidgin on campus. Other items sought information on the attitudes of the respondents to pidgin and on its acceptability as a lingua franca. Items 1,2,4,5 and 10 were about informal settings, whereas items 3,6,7 and 9 dealt with formal situations. Note that item 14 was used as an "acid test" for items 1-10. For, while 14 ranked the domains for the use of pidgin on the campus, 1-10 gave the responses per item tested.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by five major research questions, namely:

- (1) How often and where do students use pidgin for communication among themselves?
- (2) How often and where do staff use pidgin for communication among themselves?
- (3) How often do students and staff use pidgin in their interpersonal communication?
- (4) In what situations and settings do students and staff use pidgin for communication?
- (5) What is the general attitude of students and staff to pidgin as a medium of communication?

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis considered four variables, viz: age, sex, attitude and profession.

RESULTS BASED ON PROFESSION

Item 1 asked the question: "Do staff communicate with you in pidgin on campus?"

84% of the respondents affirmed the use of pidgin in official communication. The responses indicate indeed that pidgin is used in communication by both students and staff while on Campus. Though a great majority said that pidgin was used occasionally, it was clear that it was indeed a language of communication most commonly used among the students and staff of the University of Calabar.

Item 2 asked the question: "Would you like pidgin to be used in all social gatherings on campus?"

The responses, as shown on table 1, indicate that 96% of the subjects are in support of the use of pidgin during social gatherings. In support of the above result, the responses to item 14 show how the following places are ranked in order of where pidgin is used:

- 1st: Hostel
- 2nd: Canteen/Cafeteria
- 3rd: Football field
- 4th: Corridors (of departments and the administrative block)

Of the 10 domains listed and ranked in Appendix III - item 14 - the Medical Centre and offices were ranked as 9th and 10th respectively. The reason is that both places portary a formal atmosphere and the choice of language use must conform to standard English.

In contrast, some items tested the choice and use of standard English for communication on campus. Item 3 shows that for formal situations, the choice and use of standard English supercedes the use of pidgin. Items 6,7 and 9 adduce that the choice and use of standard English is appreciated for lectures. For instance, item 9 specifically compares the use of pidgin in standard English for lectures. The responses show that 98% agree on the use of standard English, whereas the remanding 2% think that pidgin should be used for lectures. This 2% is found only among students and therefore does not make any significant impact.

RESULTS BASED ON ATTITUDE

To test the attitudes of students, academic and non-academic staff, item 11-13 were used. Item 11 tested the acceptability of pidgin as the linguafranca. It reads: "I observe that since pidgin is used on campus it should be made the linguafranca".

Based on Table II - the three professional categories appeal to have a positive attitude to the adoption of pidgin as the linguafranca. 70% of the subjects responded positively. The choice and use of pidgin would help to solve some of the sensitive issues on the choice of any Nigerian language as a linguafranca in the opinion of the respondents.

For item 4 - "can pidgin be completely eradicated in our campuses where standard English is taught and used as medium of instruction". Item 12 best provided the answer to this question. It stated - "since the University is meant for degree programmes, Standard English should be the only medium of communication".

The responses to item 12 show that 81% of the respondents have a positive attitude to the use of Standard English as the only medium of communication on campus. The writer is in support of the 81% because there are different social classes and social situations that affect the choice of language. The imposition of Standard English as the only medium of communication would appear to be artificial because social settings influence the choice and the use of language.

RESULT BASED ON SEX

With respect to gender, the female respondents were found to prefer the use of pidgin to Standard English, as the following precentanges show.

Item 1 =	58%
Item 2 =	64%
Item 4 =	67%

From these results more than 50% of the female respondents studied indicate preference for the choice and use of pidgin on the campus of the University of Calabar.

RESULT BASED ON AGE

With regard to age as a variable, four categories were regrouped into two. 67% of the younger group covering age 17-29 wanted pidgin in University campuses, whereas only 33% of the older group of 30 years and above wanted pidgin. This shows that the younger generation's penchant for the use of pidgin for interpersonal communication is greater than that of the older generation. The reason for this preference is that the younger people are afraid of being ridiculed when they do not use Standard English appropriately. In essence the constant use of pidgin for communication by the younger generation makes them more

competent and more confident in this medium.

CONCLUSION

This paper worked on the premise that pidgin is commonly used as the language of communication by educated multilinguals in University campuses. As it happened, this hypothesis is confirmed by the responses of the students and staff of the University of Calabar.

The findings reveal that educated multilinguals prefer the use of pidgin to Standard English in informal situations. There were situations in which the use of pidgin and standard English were in competition, as in item 9, but the result shows that pidgin could be used. The majority prefer Standard English for lectures. This result confirms Gani-Ikilama's (1990:222) observation that "in education English is more far-reaching than pidgin". This writer agrees with Elugbe and Omamor (1991) that in spite of its relegation to informal situations, Nigerian pidgin is widely used by the elite and non-elite in the Nigerian society. It may be that the choice of pidgin as one of the languages in use in Nigeria has a significant role to play in resolving the problem of a lingua franca in Nigeria.

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APPENDIX 1

TABLE 1: SHOW RAW SCORES OF RESPONSES

ITEMS	OFTEN						OCCASIONAL						NEVER					
	ACADEMIC		NON ACADEMIC		STUDENT		ACADEMIC		NON ACADEMIC		STUDENT		ACADEMIC		NON ACADEMIC		STUDENT	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1	1	3	4	4	2	3	9	13	6	8	13	18	2	2	3	3	2	2
2	5	7	7	8	9	10	8	10	4	9	5	10			1	1	1	1
3	10	18	12	15	17	20	1	1	2	1	2	1						
4	2	4	4	9	3	2	11	13	7	10	12	19					2	2
5	4	3	4	5	2	3	10	11	6	11	11	17	1	1	1	1	4	5
6							1	1	1	2	1	3	11	17	12	15	14	20
7	13	17			14	21					2	2			13	17	3	5
8	5	3	4	7	9	10	12	8	6	11	8	8	1	1	1	1	3	4
9					1	1	2	1	3	5	5	7	12	15	10	12	9	17
10	1	2	3	5	2	2	12	12	8	13	9	17		2	1		7	5

APPENDIX II

TABLE II - RESPONSES ON ITEMS 11-13

ITEMS	ACADEMIC				NON-ACADEMIC				STUDENTS			
	POSITIVE		NEGATIVE		POSITIVE		NEGATIVE		POSITIVE		NEGATIVE	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
11	6	13	6	5	10	13	5	2	13	15	7	5
12	2	2	12	14	5	2	10	13	5	3	14	18
13	10	13	4	3	9	12	4	5	14	14	9	3

APPENDIX III

UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR CALABAR

Dear respondent,

I am conducting research into "Language Choice and the Use of Pidgin among Educated Multilinguals in the University of Calabar. I shall therefore, be very grateful if you could respond frankly to the statements below. Your responses would be treated in strict confidence.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Indicated by (✓) whether: Student U

Academic

Non Academic

Please tick ✓ the box that best represents your view on each statement/question below. A questionnaire on how often staff and students use Nigerian Pigin on Campus.

SECTION A

S/No	ITEMS	OFTEN	OCCASIONAL	NEVER
1	Do staff communicate with you in Nigerian Pidgin on Campus?			
2	Would you like Nigerian Pidgin to be used in all social gatherings on campus?			
3	Do you communicate with each other in English (Standard)?			
4	I like using Pidgin on campus			
5	Do you communicate with each other in Pidgin?			
6	Would you want lectures to be presented in Pidgin?			
7	Do you communicate with students in English (Standard)?			
8	I like the use of Pidgin in Religious activities			
9	Would you prefer lectures to be given both in Pidgin and Standard English?			
10	Do you communicate with students in Pidgin?			
11	I observed that since pidgin is used on campus, it should be made the lingua franca			
12	Since the University is meant for degree programmes, Standard English should be the only medium of communication			
13	I enjoy listening to people communicate in Pidgin rather than in standard English on campus			

14. The following are the places (domains) where Pidgin is used on campus. Rank them in order of importance.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|----------------|
| (a) | Hostel | (f) | Football field |
| (b) | Medical Centre | (g) | Corridors |
| (c) | Lecture Room | (h) | Offices |
| (d) | Laboratories | (i) | Library |
| (e) | Cafeteria/canteen | | |
| (j) | Religious activities (fellowship) | | |

15. **Age**
- | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| 17 - 23 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24 - 29 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30 - 35 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 36 and above | <input type="checkbox"/> |

16. **Gender:** Female
Male