

THE NIGERIAN PIDGIN AS A LANGUAGE OF PRAISE, WORSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY

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INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Pidgin (NP) has gained popularity as a language of worship in recent times among all classes of people (literate and non-literate) in the Nigerian Society. The reason for this popularity is because it serves as a medium of communication in social discourse, trade and religion. It is observed that an interpreter may decide to bring down the grammatical preachings through the use of the Nigerian Pidgin in order to carry along all classes of people in the society (cf Mafeni 1972, Elugbe and Omamor 1991, Jibril 1995) among others. The Nigerian Pidgin is the combination of the English Language and some words from the indigenous languages.

For example, when one hears that this or that commodity "boku for marke", it simply means that the item is found in great quantity ("boku means "many"). In the same vein, when one says the blessings of God in his/her life "e don boku" it means the blessings are overwhelming or overflowing (group discussion).

This study looks at the Nigerian Pidgin as a language of praise worship (in songs) in the Nigerian religious scene. It is now a popular medium of singing by Christian musicians in an attempt to get the message across to both the privileged and underprivileged in Nigeria. Songs in the Nigerian Pidgin recorded on cassette tapes and Video CDs attract a very large number of buyers. This attraction cuts across the religious spectrum.

One of the researchers observed that while studying at the University of Ibadan, a record on the "healing of the woman with haemorrhag" as recorded in Mark's Gospel 5 : 25ff, was being played and the comment by one of the listeners was that, music in the Nigerian Pidgin, "apart from getting the message to the grassroots, shows the talent of the artists". This assertion has prompted this research into this study of the linguistic significance of the role of the Nigerian Pidgin in communicating religious values and in enhancing the spirituality of believers.

The justification for this study stems from the fact that songs in the Nigerian Pidgin have effect on a greater number of worshippers since more worshippers, because of their generally low standard of formal education, appreciate and understand better songs in Nigerian Pidgin than they do those in formal English.

The objectives of this study include:

1. To find out if the language used in worship has any effect on the way worship is conducted.
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2. To know the relationship between language and religion.

A set of twenty (20) item questionnaire was divided into two sections for data collection. Section 'A' dealt with questions that had to elicit responses on the use of the NP for worship. The questions tested specific objectives in the study. The respondents answered each of the items using a 4 - point scale of "strongly agree; agree; disagree; strongly disagree". Section 'B' dealt with the biodata of the respondents (see appendix 1). Of the one hundred and fifty (150) copies of the questionnaire distributed, all the respondents filled and returned the same. This number amounted to 100% return rate.

The respondents comprised people living within Calabar Town. The informants comprised people of different ages, levels of education, members of different churches categorized into Orthodox, Pentecostal and Spiritual. We also considered their professions and gender.

The Nigerian Pidgin and Worship

Songs that depict the abundance of God's blessings assume a more meaningful definition when it is presented in a language that the people can identify with. As stated before "boku" which means "many or abundance" becomes more meaningful when God's favours are portrayed in the Nigerian Pidgin as: "God don butter my bread and Him don sugar my tea

boku". This presentation shows how God has generously buttered one's bread and sugared the tea. This makes more sense than talking of God's loving-kindness being ever fresh. When Jesus is said to be our best friend, the only way to communicate this, especially to the non-literate is shown in the Nigerian Pidgin chorus below:

N.P. Jesus na my best friend
 I like to waka with him
 He no get time to play me wayo o o!
 I like to waka with him.

Translation: Jesus is my best friend
 I have confidence in going along with
 him
 He is not treacherous in his dealings with
 me
 I love walking with Him.

The distressed worshipper can easily identify with this chorus because in real life situation, there are a lot of deceit and treachery by friends, family members and at times business associates who fraudulently cheat others in their attempt to get on in life. The Nigerian pidgin chorus used as example above depicts Jesus as a trustworthy friend who would not deceive or disappoint those who exercise faith in him.

Worship and Spirituality through songs in the Nigerian Pidgin

To buttress points already made, Smith and Smith (2001 :359) assert that "music of one kind or

another had been part of Christian worship since the early days of the church." This statement is especially true of African Christianity whose early adherents were converted from the traditional religion. In African Traditional religion, worship and music were intertwined in such a manner that traditional seers went into ecstasy and trances when music was being played. Although early missionaries condemned anything African as part of the worship service, the mode of singing and clapping survived the onslaught. In recent times, songs have become not just a minor part of worship but has taken a central stage in the process of worship.

Worship songs in the Nigerian Pidgin have not been left out as their introduction seems to ignite a fresh impetus into the worship service. Songs that depict the supremacy of God are sung with great gusto as if the rendition is meant to shake the very foundation of the church building. More examples of songs in the N.P include:

N.P: Abi you no know say Jehovah na God?

Trans: Don't you know that Jehovah is God?

N.P: People dey ask me say, wetin dey make you glad,

I just dey tell dem say na Jesus dey make me glad.

Trans: People are asking me what makes you glad, and I tell them that it is Jesus that makes me glad.

N.P: Me I no go suffer, I no go beg for bread
God of miracle, na my papa o o

Trans: I will neither suffer nor beg for bread
Because the God of miracle is my father

N.P: I go praise Jesus, for wetin him do
I go praise Jesus, for wetin him do for me

Trans: I will praise Jesus for what he has done
I will praise Jesus for what he has done for me.

As soon as any of these NP songs is started by the soloist, the atmosphere in the worship service becomes charged. The songs are rendered with gratitude to God, especially from those who have experienced God's mighty intervention in their lives, businesses, and places of work or in their families.

In addition, there is commensurate activation of the spiritual aspect of worship when NP songs are sung. In congregations where the "speaking in tongues" as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is allowed, NP songs play a central role. When songs as in the following examples are sung, the worshippers will become actively and spiritually involved.

NP: Come-oo-Holy Spirit we dey wait here for you

Trans: Come Holy Sprit, we are waiting here for you.

NP: Paul and Silas, dey prayed dey sang, de Holy Ghost come down

Trans: Paul and Silas, they prayed they sang,
the Holy Ghost came down.

When these Holy Spirit songs get underway, the service begins to assume an air of spiritual expectancy in which worshippers begin to sway from side- to- side. Within a short time as the singing continues, those who want to pray will start their praying. Sooner than later the whole congregation will swing into the prayer session to give way to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

To say that NP songs increase the spirituality of the worshippers is to say the obvious. With tears of joy and sometimes of sorrow for convicted wrong doings, the worshippers leave the service very convinced of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the divine movement of God in the midst of the people.

As already stated, the NP is gaining ground in the preaching and singing aspects of the religious scene. Rather than copying the American and European mannerisms many Nigerian preachers would ask the audience:

Preacher: abi no bi so?

Congregation: Na so!

Trans: Is it not so?

Congregation: It is so!

The response from the congregation is usually overwhelming. Most times when one testifies about the goodness or greatness of God's dealings or intervention's in one's hopeless situation, the person bursts out in a song in the N. P. The audience

immediately joins the singer and are additionally blessed by the testimony.

The acceptability and popularity of the NP, as a medium of praise worship is enhanced by the fact that the NP cuts across ethnic and linguistic divides. It is a unifying factor in which the major and minor tribal groups forget their differences and for once sing in a language that is both uniquely Nigerian and does not seem to uplift any ethnic group as being superior or downgrade another group. The NP is therefore a language that promotes the spirit of unity in a multi-ethnic/multilingual society like Nigeria. For that reason, the NP plays a significant socio-linguistic and integrative function in Nigeria.

The NP makes the worshippers less conscious of the fact that they are using the language of the colonizing powers to worship God but rather something uniquely owned by the indigenes in praising God. In their estimation, God would be more relevant to their situation than the God that was brought from the Americas and Europe who only hears songs printed on the pages of hymn books which some of them cannot even read or understand.

From the foregoing, one can clearly see the relationship between language and religion. When one uses the NP to declare that God does not defraud anyone as shown below:

NP: "God no dey play anybody 419.

Trans: God does not defraud anyone.

This chorus makes meaning because '419' is a very common phenomenon connoting the defrauding of someone by another. If God does not defraud anybody, He is therefore one to be trusted absolutely. When Nigerians hear:

NP: God na helele, God na waya (2ce)
Nobody dey like am, Nobody dey like am
Ewoo Nwanem, God na helele.

Trans: God is superabundant, God is great. He has no equal.

Oh my brethren, God is Almighty .

The chorus above has some indigenous words incorporated into it to make it meaningful to the singers. All those who participate would not be bothered about which words are in what particular mother tongue. The relationship between language and religion, especially with reference to NP, eliminates ethnic or linguistic sentiments as stated earlier.

The different ethnic groups who do not agree with each other can sing using the NP, and momentarily forget their differences even if some of the words belong to the mother tongue of their enemies.

NP serves as a language that erases the lacuna between the English Language and the indigenous languages. It has been proved that Nigerians accept the use of the NP for worship irrespective of linguistic, educational, professional, cultural and religious backgrounds.

The NP as a language serves different functions in our society. There have been repeated calls by Okon (1997, 2003) and Essien (1998) for the governments to recognize the Nigerian Pidgin as one of its national languages.

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE CHORUSES IN THE NIGERIAN PIDGIN

People dey ask me say
Na wetin dey mek you fine
I just dey tell dem say
Na Jesus dey mek me fine
I dey fine, I dey fine (2ce)
I just dey tell dem say
Na Jesus dey mek me fine

My Papa dey bam-bam (2ce)
I no go sufer)
My Papa dey barn-barn) (2ce)

Jesus na my best friend
I like to waka with Him
E no get time to play me wayo-oo-oo
I like to waka with Him.

Jesus, you dey sweet – oo – oo –
You dey sweet – oo
Jesus you dey bam bam – oo
You dey bam bam – oo

SONGS IN THE NIGERIAN PIDGIN OGA JESUS

- (a) Oga Jesus you de sweet me belle
You do good for me
You dey make me wonder
Oga Jesus you de bless me Yafu, Yafu
How I for do O Jesus na waya
 Everyday (x2) You give me chop (x2)
 Everyday (x2) You give me chop (x2)
 You no de play me wayo O, Oga
 Jesus na you be better O, Na
 You I go follow, Forever Titillailai.
- (b) If you follow Jesus na better
If you follow Devil na your fault
Only Jesus na Him better O
Jesus yio na Him be super
 Onyeme : 30- 31.
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NA SO SO WONDER

Solo: Na so so wonder Jesus dey do

ALL: Na so so wonder Jesus dey do

He butter my bread

He sugar my tea

Na so so wonder Jesus dey do

WHY I NO GO MAKE NYANGA

Solo: Why I no go make nyanga

All: Why I no go make nyanga

God na my papa

All: Why I no go make nyanga

Solo: Jesus na my brother

All: Why I no go make nyanga

Solo: Holy Ghost na my comforter

All: Why I no go make nyanga

Onyeme : 3

RECORDED SONG IN PIDGIN GROUND CARGO

No de put your heart for ground cargo.

Saby say one day e go finish.

You go answer question na for God. Things for ground dem no de pay.

Every day you de drive na big motor, every day you wear na fine coat.

You no de member the man who he de make'm before you get power for waka.

When you de waka for road. When you de make nyanga.

My sister make man e no fool you. Saby say you go answer for God.

And that time. I beg e no go dey.

Now make you tell me.

Open your heart no hide secret.

When you go for church wetin you de find'em?

No be you de look na some man we you like'm?

Or you de look na some woman for that cona?

Or you de look na some cloth, shoes, hair style who you like'm?

Which side you keep God for that kinna time?

Things for ground dem no de pay.

Now make you tell God which kind meeting who you dey na member?
