



Attitude Regarding Nigerian Pidgin English among Nigerian Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

It is quite interesting to note that Pidgin which essentially began as a demanded language between the white importers, who later turned colonial masters, and their black traders has now become a campus language-spoken of the majority of the population among the Nigerian students in advanced institutions of learning. Nigerian Pidgin English evolved as a result of language contact with the British colonialists. This study seeks to assess the use, and also determine the recognition of Pidgin English among Nigerian postgraduate students in Universiti Putra Malaysia. Questionnaires were administered on selected students in the university in an attempt to elicit the attitude and usage of the informants to Nigerian Pidgin English. The results were calculated in percentages. It was found that the attitude of Nigerian students regarding the Nigerian Pidgin English in UPM is positive. To conclude, in the next few years, Nigerians are expected to use Nigerian Pidgin English in all situations when they communicate.

Keywords: Pidgin, Nigerian Pidgin English, language contact

1. Introduction

Nigeria is certainly one of the linguistically diverse nation with a projected 516 languages (Gordon, 2005), each one has an important function and a significant role in the society wherever it is in use. It is exciting to know that Pidgin separately exists from several local languages which constitute the mother tongue or second language of Nigerians, foreign languages such as English, French, and Arabic, similarly exist. English has become an official language, and for most people a second language in Nigeria. On the other hand, Nigerian Pidgin English, with possibly the largest number of speakers, has also developed as an outcome of contact of English alongside the native languages (Dada 2007:87). Language conduct implicates social meanings relative to social customs in an identified speech community. Language attitude study is not only a way of understanding how language is used, for example, as a symbol of identity or in-group membership, but also helps to inform the social importance of a given code or language (see Adegbija, 1994; Ihemere 2006; Salami 1991). Therefore, attitudinal studies of language are important to linguistics because they could help to explain language maintenance and shift, which is distinctly influenced by the change or maintenance, which is favored or disfavored by members of the speech community (Mann 1993; 1998).

In Nigeria, Pidgin English (NPE, henceforth) is seen commonly like the language of the uneducated as well as a bastardisation of English and its usage. Consequently, it measured as a sign of the level of one's competence in English. For example, Agheyisi (1971) claims that the normal speakers of pidgin are persons who have minor or no proper schooling. However, as Akande (2008:37) has distinguished, the sociolinguistic experience in Nigeria currently is such that university graduates, instructors, solicitors and newscasters use Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). The situation has also been proven that NPE is not used only in unofficial settings but also in workplaces and further official situations (Akande 2008). In other words, this claim that NPE is the language of the uneducated does not appear to earn rationality, because there are so many knowledgeable users in Nigeria who can practice both Standard English and NPE competently (Akande 2008).

Moreover, NPE has assumed an important function in communication in Nigeria, particularly among cultural groups

that do not have the same language. The situation has also attained some prestige that originates since the functions that it performs in Nigerian. In addition, it can be claimed that NPE has enriched the increase of nationwide ideas, socio-cultural, linguistic and administrative improvements as good as harmony plus unity in the nation since it is the one language that all the knowledgeable and the unschooled, regardless of their cultural background, can recognize with (Akande, 2008:38). Thus, this study examined positions and attitudes of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) among Nigerian students in Universiti Putra Malaysia.

1.1 Problem Statement

The rate of use of Pidgin English in Nigeria is considerably alarming amidst Nigerian language policy which favors the use of Standard English language in formal or official communication (Onjenwu & Okpe, 2015). For instance, the medium of instruction in teaching and learning in upper secondary school and in tertiary institutions is Standard English. Many at times students are encouraged and sometimes cautioned to make use of Standard English while communicating with their lecturers with a view avoid overtaken by Pidgin English. Nevertheless, one may note with highest disappointment, the negative attitudinal characters, condemnations, and disregard of some people have toward this language. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to evaluate the attitude of students and usage toward Nigerian Pidgin English among Nigerian students who are currently enrolled in postgraduate programs at UPM.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to:

- 1- Assess the use, and also determine the recognition of Pidgin English among Nigerian students in UPM.
- 2- Find out the degree of NPE usage among Nigerian students who are currently studying in UPM

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be viewed from this perspective; Nigerian Pidgin English is a promoted language because it reveals national identity in Nigeria. Akande (2008) states that Nigerian pidgin is “a marker of identity and solidarity”. It is an inter-ethnic code available to Nigerians, who have no common language” (Akande, 2008). Therefore, this study is important to find out if Nigerian Pidgin English among Nigerian students of UPM serves as a national identity. This study will in a long way help Nigerian language policy planners to know the extent of the use or preference of Nigerian Pidgin English by Nigerian students so as to be able to plan the best policies that suit the demand of the nation in general, education inclusive.

2. Literature Review

Holmes (2001) views that so many years ago; the word “sociolinguistics” appeared to have a little importance. Sociolinguistics could be satisfactorily expressed to be the field of rapport concerning linguistic and civilization (Hudson 1990, and Holmes, 2001). This means that as quickly as one starts the analysis of why people communicate in a community, it means that he/she is now inside the territory of sociolinguistics. Therefore, sociolinguistics concerns are comparable to gender, prestige, literateness, experience, background, habits and socio-cultural viewpoints, and in what way they impact the linguistic conduct lie in the range of sociolinguistics (Adeyanju, 1998). Within some or other of these features, the societal personality of an utterer or a language group is marked.

Every society is well implicit and fostered within its language since language functions by way of a reflection towards society and its traditional performances. Brooks (1964) perceives thus:

It is through the magic of language that man comes eventually to understand to an impressive degree the environment to which he lives and, still more surprising, gains an insight into his own nature and his own condition.

Decamp (1987) explains pidgin as a supplementary communicative language in a society with many languages, he says, “it is the innate language of nobody”. The terminology of pidgin according to Decamp, remains contributed through the social and administratively major language “in the original contact situation”, more specifically, alongside British colonialist. Pidgin English in Nigeria is thus a combination of native, imported or superstreet languages and also the original language. Stockwell (2002) notes that for the tremendous foreign extension of British colonial dominance, “Around a quarter of all pidgins and Creoles have English as component”. In his views, Quirk (1987) acknowledges that being different from the Creole, Pidgin sometimes interchanges indigenous language within a society with different languages. This entails that pidgins are constrained to a limited concrete problems or occurrences. Holmes similarly approves that pidgins stand to be expressed more for an affective purpose.

2.1 Nigerian Pidgin English

In a multilingual country like Nigeria with a population of approximately 150 million people (Central Intelligence Agency, 2008; Danladi, 2013), covering about 356,669 square miles (daily almanac 2009), with over 500 indigenous languages (Bamgbose, 1971; Gordon, 2005; Danladi, 2013), Nigerian pidgin has developed as the most widely spoken language of interaction among Nigerians and across different ethnic group that do not share a common language.

Thus, Obiechina (1984), Elugbe (1995) and Egbokhare (2001) agreed in their views that the Nigerian contact emerged through the coastline. Nigerian Pidgin, also called Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) is an English-based pidgin, spoken as a kind of lingua franca across Nigeria. It is referred to as “Broken English” or simply ‘Broken’ (Onjenwu & Okpe,

2015). Its superstreet is English while any of the three major languages i.e. Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are used as substrate languages. Ihimere (2006:296) says that, Nigerian pidgin has developed into the native language of about 3 to 5 million of Nigerian population and a second language for at least another 75million.

In Nigeria, Pidgin English is regarded as a language variety of non-literate and by extension a demoralization of the use of English. In line with these claims, Agheyisi (1971:30) argued that typical speakers of Nigerian Pidgin English are those who virtually have little or no formal education. However, it is noticeable that in Nigerian linguistic situation, NPE is spoken not only by non-literate, but also educated elites such as University graduates, lawyers, Professors, and journalists (Akande, 2008; Onjenwa & Okpe, 2015).

Akande, & Salami, (2010) conducted a study that reported and analyzed attitudes to, and use of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) among students. The researchers conducted the study in two different universities namely; University of Benin and University of Lagos both in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to find out the degree of NPE usage among the students of the tertiary institutions, and also to account for the student's attitudes towards the NPE. The researchers used a sample of 100 students, which were purposively selected from the two schools identified. Data were gathered through an interview questionnaire. After an analysis of the data, it revealed that the attitude of students from the University of Benin was more favorable compared to that of the students in university of Lagos, This shows that the NPE vitality is higher among the university of Benin students.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample selection and size

20 Nigerian postgraduate students who's their average age are 35 years old have been selected to participate in this study. All the participants are students from Universiti Putra Malaysia, which serves as the setting for this work. Although the students have been selected randomly from different disciplines, the sample selection technique used in this study is purposive sampling where the subjects have been stratified according to sex (10 males and 10 females).

3.2 Instrumentation

In this study, the researcher used interview-questionnaire adapted from Akande (2008) in an attempt to illicit the attitudes and usage of the informants to NPE. The interview-questionnaire has two sets of questions. First, 10 YES/NO questions where the participants were required to answer by saying YES or NO. Second, 4 questions required more than saying YES/NO responses. Regarding this set, the participants responded by one or two words to describe their attitude.

3.3 Data collection

The data were collected by face to face interaction. The informants attitude to NPE were gathered from the responses they have towards the language. Then, their responses calculated in percentages showing their behavior in terms of attitude towards NPE.

4 Findings and Discussions

In this section, the data analysis is presented. The types of YES/NO questions concerning the students' attitude to NPE which reflected in the questionnaire distributed to the respondents as well as their responses are treated in table 1 below. However, responses to questions that demand more than YES/NO answers are treated separately for the sake of clarity.

Table 1. The responses to yes/no questions on the attitude of students toward NPE

S/n	Questions	Yes	No
1	Do you use Nigerian Pidgin English	85%	15%
2	Do you use materials written in NPE	90%	10%
3	Should NPE be used to conduct Nigerian student meetings in UPM	90%	10%
4	Is NPE a language?	80%	20%
5	Do you think it is a variety of English?	90%	10%
6	Should NPE be taught in schools?	35%	65%
7	Should NPE be one of the mediums of communication among Nigerian students in UPM?	100%	0%
8	Should NPE be adopted as an official language in Nigeria?	65%	35%
9	Does NPE have the capacity to express all our thought and feelings?	100%	0%

Table 1 illustrates that 85% of the students said that they use NPE while only 15% of the respondents said they do not. From the data, it can be seen that the percentage of students who use NPE is greater than those who do not. Furthermore, since the genuineness of a language can also be enhanced by the availability of literature in it, it was sought to find out if the students read materials written in NPE. The result shows 90% of the students indicated YES to reading materials in NPE while only 10% indicated NO.

As shown in the above table, 90% of the respondents agree that NPE should be used whenever there is Nigerian students' meeting in UPM, while only 10% says NO, and that Standard English should be used. Regarding the YES

percentage, it can be concluded that most Nigerian postgraduate students are willing to encourage the use of NPE among them. On whether NPE is a language or not, 80% of the respondents considered NPE as a language while 20% did not agree with it. Similarly, 90% of the respondents say NPE is a variety of English while only 10% say otherwise. In addition, only 35% of the respondents believe that NPE should be taught as a subject in schools while 65% say it should not be taught since even without any formal education NPE could still be learned easily. 100% of the respondents say NPE is fit to be a medium of communication among all Nigerian students in Malaysia because it is easy and also we will still maintain the mode of communication that is used by majority of the population in our country. On adoption of NPE as an official language, 65% of the respondents say YES while only 35% say NO because we need to learn the standard English that is used all over the world for a better communication with the international countries. Finally, on the capacity of NPE to express all our thoughts and feelings, 100% responded YES because NPE can be used to communicate in all aspects of social life.

The responses of the participants on the questions that require more than YES or NO are represented on the tables below.

- a) When did you start learning NPE?

Table 2. Where NPE started to be used.

Childhood	30%
Primary school	25%
Secondary school	45%
University	0%

Table 2 presents statistical results related to commencement time of NPE use. The result reveals that the duo of childhood and primary school (at their younger ages) have 30% and 25% respectively. This signifies that majority of them acquired Pidgin at their younger ages and by implication there is every possibility for students to face the problem of fossilization when using Standard English language at their older ages.

- b) How often do you speak NPE?

Table 3. The frequency use of NPE.

Often	70%
Occasionally	20%
Seldom	10%
Rarely	0%

Table 3 above shows that the huge number or majority of the participants frequently use Pidgin English in most of their communication which justifies that use of Pidgin English is still on the increase among Nigerians. The alarming rate of use of Pidgin can have an implication which shows that Pidgin as variety will still survive, although not having native speakers, but it is free from facing endangerment.

- c) Where do you normally use NPE?

Table 4. Context of use of NPE by Nigerian UPM students.

Home	40%
Social gathering	10%
Classroom	10%
All of the above	40%

Considering the table 4 above, it can be deduced that since only in the classroom and social gatherings the participants use Pidgin English minimally, and the fact that the duration students spend in these areas are quite limited compared to home, hence it signifies that Pidgin English may interrupt if not dominate or overtake the use of Standard English language.

- d) What category of people do you think speak NPE?

Table 5. Perception of users of NPE by UPM Nigerian students

All categories of people	65%
Non literates and semi literates	15%
Literates	20%

5. Discussion

In a general note, the finding demonstrates that the percentage of Nigerians students who use Pidgin English in their day-to-day interactions is obviously high. More significantly, the attitude of Nigerian postgraduate students in Malaysia regarding Pidgin English is considerably positive. This may have resulted from the fact that Pidgin does not belong to any particular region among various regions in Nigeria, which facilitates its acceptability as a lingua franca of all. Hence, this empowers unity among Nigerians in diaspora (Nigerian students in Malaysia). Considering the result illustrated in the tables above, it can be concluded that Pidgin is not only peculiar to non-literate individuals, but also practicable by educated elites. The finding is in congruent with Akande, (2008) and Onjenwa & Okpe, (2015). Therefore, UPM students as literates are not excluded as the result reveals that use of Pidgin has been on alarming rate despite students interact with their lecturers and the international students who come from different linguistic background, and the medium of communication is standard English language, they still maintain their romance to Pidgin English. Predictably, in the next few years, Nigerian Pidgin English will be used in various domains of communication such as students meetings, interaction with each other in campus and other social gatherings. Conversely, the finding contradicts Akinmade & Oladipo (2010) whom their reveals a negative attitudes toward Nigerian Pidgin English. This is not far away from the fact that setting of the study may influence the finding. Virtually all the past and present regimes of Nigeria did not encourage the development of Pidgin English especially in schools. In fact, it is not officially recognised. Such study is conducted in Nigeria amid negative attitude on Pidgin English from Government itself. Perhaps, it is hypothesised that frequent use of Pidgin English would corrupt the learning of Standard English which is considered the government's priority.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the students' preference to Nigerian Pidgin English as a lingua franca among Nigerian students is related to its simplicity, easement, acceptability and indeed unity facilitation among Nigerians studying in Malaysia. Despite its non-standard language status, students' attitudes to Pidgin English remain positive. It is also noticeable that Nigerian Pidgin English is not only favored by non-literate individuals, but also serves as a medium of communication among literates in diaspora.

6.1 Limitations and recommendations

The main limitation of this study lies on the small number of participants selected. Only 20 postgraduate students may limit the generalization of the findings. For further studies, it can be recommended that such future research should involve as many participants as possible from different ages and educational backgrounds. By doing so, a strong claim could be made, and generalization can also be drawn based on the findings of the study.

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