

# A Sociolinguistic Implication of the Use of Nigerian Pidgin among Students of the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa

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## Abstract

This study examines the sociolinguistics implication of the use of Nigerian Pidgin among HNDII students of the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa. Pidgin emerges when people from different linguistic backgrounds need a means of verbal communication. Interviews and direct observation methods of investigation are used as means of gathering data for the study. Fishman's theory of domain analysis is employed as a framework of analysis for the study. The study discovered the presence of Nigerian Pidgin on campuses and how it affects to a great extent the teaching and learning of Standard English in Nigerian higher institutions. This study has also been able to provide answers to such questions as who speaks Nigerian Pidgin, to whom, where and for what purpose. The implication of the use of Nigerian Pidgin in academics was also explored. On the whole, this research concludes with the notion that Nigerian Pidgin is used as a means of informal communication among students on Nigerian campuses; as such, it has negative implications on the teaching and learning of Standard English in our educational process.

**Keywords:** Pidgin Nigeria, Sociolinguistic Implication, English.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationships between language and social structure. That is, it looks at how society influences language. Sociolinguistics concerned itself with the sociology of language, which defined the framework for the use of language in a given society. It also defines who speaks what language, to whom, where, and for what purpose. The sociology of language looks at how language influences society. In other words, it looks at society as being broader than language and therefore provides the context in which all language behavior must be viewed. Adeyanju (1994), examines such issues as language planning and standardization, multilingualism and national development, and so on, though this is not part of the focus of this paper.

This work centres on the sociolinguistic implications of the use of Pidgin English by selected students of the federal polytechnic Nasarawa. Pidgin evolves when people from different linguistic backgrounds need a means of verbal communication. It is used to ease the communication barriers, which should have existed among the speakers of various

mutually unintelligible indigenous Nigerian languages. For instance, Hansford *et al.*, (115) and Crozier & Blench (56) in Raphael (2007) point out that there are about 394 languages in Nigeria, and the investigation as to the actual number of indigenous Nigerian languages is ongoing. However, Pidgin differs from a normal language both in terms of function and structure, though, this is not part of the scope of this research paper.

In the course of this research paper, the researcher discovered that the use of Nigerian Pidgin cuts across ethnic groups, educational levels, professionals, and ages. It is a household name in Nigeria, in villages, towns, and cities. The Nigerian Pidgin is spoken among the highly educated and among the non-educated ones in society. It is spoken mostly in churches, mosques, markets, schools, on the streets, and in most less formal social gatherings. The Pidgin has also assumed dialectal status. We have the Niger Delta Pidgin, the Eastern Nigerian Pidgin, the Western Nigerian Pidgin, and the Northern Nigerian Pidgin. Interestingly, the various shades of Nigerian Pidgin are mutually intelligible.

### Statement of the Problem

This research paper is sociolinguistic as well as pedagogical in nature. It is sociolinguistic in the sense that, Nigerian Pidgin as a variety of Pidgin has in the past been regarded as a corrupted variety of the English language, but recent studies have proved otherwise. The concept is now being studied and major distortions are being clarified by such studies. Investigation into the use of Nigerian Pidgin is necessary to understand the social structures of the society and the language behaviour itself. This became important against the backdrop that, a great deal of human interactions is characterized by informal rather than formal use of language. This is mostly noticed if conversations are taken into account as in the case of expressing social relations, personal attitudes, and transacting businesses.

On the pedagogical aspect of the work, it will help the English language teachers in Nigerian tertiary institutions, especially those in polytechnic education to improve on their art of teaching and learning English as a language of formal instruction in their domain.

### Aims and Objective of the Study

The work is aimed at investigating some critical issues associated with the justification of Nigerian Pidgin as a variety of languages used for informal communication among selected students of the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa. Other objectives of this work are:

- a. To establish that Nigerian Pidgin has some implication on the use of Standard English among HNDII students of the Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa; and by extension on other students in the higher institutions
- b. To establish that Nigerian Pidgin is a language meant for informal communication among students and not a language for formal instructions.

### Conceptual Frameworks

Opinion differs on the etymological genesis of the term Pidgin. For instance, the earlier linguistics product between English and the Nigerian language was in all probability Pidgin. Edwards (173) first traced the word to the Portuguese 'ocupacao' which means business or 'Pequeno' which means baby talk. He said the word could as well be linked to the Amerindian Pidgin which means 'people'. However, Holmes refutes the assertion that Pidgin is baby talk. He emphasizes that Pidgin and creoles are real languages and not baby talk as opined by Edwards. As such, they are used for

serious business. Decamp, (175) describes Pidgin as an incidental communicative language within a multilingual setting which is the native language of nobody. Its vocabulary, according to Decamp, is dominated by the socio-politically dominant languages. Thus Pidgin is, therefore, an amalgam of the main, foreign, or superstrate language. Quirk et al, (1985) acknowledge that, unlike creoles, Pidgin is used to replace the native language in a micro speech community. This implies that Pidgins are restricted to a few practical issues or events. Holmes also agrees that Pidgins are spoken more for affective referential purposes.

In the words of Todd, (1984) defines Pidgin as a marginal language that arises to fulfill certain restricted communicative needs among people who do not share a common language. This could mean that Pidgins are more generally the result of any situation of language contact. Odumu, (1993) defines Pidgin as a language that has been stripped of everything but the bare essentials necessary for communication.

Thus, a Pidgin is a language with no native speakers; it is no one's language but a contact language. That is, it is the product of a multilingual situation in which those who wish to communicate must find or improvise a simple language system that will enable them to do so. Very often too, that situation is one in which there is an imbalance of power among the languages as the speakers of one language dominate the speakers of another language economically or socially. A highly codified language often accompanies that dominant position. That is why a Pidgin is, therefore, sometimes regarded as a reduced variety of normal language Aziza, (2003), Jibril (1995) Elugbe & Omamor, (1971). In line with this view, Holmes (2001) defines a Pidgin as:

*A reduced language that results from extended contact between groups of people with no language in common; it evolves when they need some means of verbal communication perhaps for trade, but no group learns the native language of any other group for social reasons that may include lack of trust or of close contact(4).*

Thus from the above definition, we then deduced that the process of Pidginization probably requires a situation that evolves at least three languages and one of which is clearly dominant over the others.

Consider the following expressions in Nigerian Pidgin:

Walahi I de sell am for nama-----it is true that I sell meat	}	Hausa
Dem no get wahala-----they have no problem		
Dat girl na agaracha----- that girl is wayward.	}	Ibo
Dat one na awoof-----that one is for free		
Dat girl na ashawo----- that girl is a prostitute.	}	Yoruba
Dat girl na ajebota-----that girl is a weakling etc.)		

**Theoretical Framework: Fishman’s Domain Analysis**

In the course of this work, the researcher discovered that, in any multilingual situation such as Nigeria in general and in various campuses in particular, speakers would select the code and interaction strategy to be used in any specific context. In other words, given the multiple varieties of language available within the communicative repertoire of a community like the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa, and the subset of varieties available to its subgroups and individual speakers must select the code and interactions strategy to be used in a specific context of the situation.

However, this work is aimed at investigating the implication of the use of Nigerian Pidgin among selected students of the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa. Fishman’s domain analysis would be used as a model of analysis. Domain analysis accounts for such questions as who speaks what language, to whom, when, and why. These are the very questions that our investigation is seeking answers to. Fishman uses the term ‘domain’ to mean ‘institutional context’ in which one language or a language variety is more likely to be appropriate than another. This concept of domain developed by Fishman (1997), is useful for both description and explanation of the distribution of means of communication. He defines it as “a socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the sphere of activity of a speech community”.

**Factors Affecting Spoken Nigerian Pidgin in Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa Exposure**

In a mixed society or community, whereas our research shows, there is a variety of forms of Nigerian Pidgin a learner is exposed to these varieties. Truly, such a person has no fixed model. It has also been established in this work that, non-formally educated Nigerians do not know the differences between Nigerian Pidgin and Standard English. Though, this is not obtainable on campus which is the focus of this paper.

Mixed population: the fact that people of various linguistic backgrounds on campus use Nigerian

Pidgin the way they know how does not help to ensure a stable form. In an environment where there are alternative languages, in addition to the indigenous *lingua-franca*- Hausa, for instance, speakers are not likely to be concerned with the alternative languages but the *lingua franca*. In other words, the non-Hausa speakers may be busy trying to learn Hausa, and so not bother about the Nigerian Pidgin.

**Hausa**

Another important factor that affects Nigerian Pidgin on campus is the presence of Hausa. Hausa is not only the indigenous language of Nasarawa but also a *lingua franca* throughout northern Nigeria. As such, newcomers into Nasarawa town are sometimes confronted with a situation to pick some words and expressions in Hausa to be able to relate to the indigenes and other northerners who live in the town. Therefore, the pressure to use Nigerian Pidgin is less, and of course, this is bound to affect performance in Nigerian Pidgin.

**Non-Governmental Recognition of Nigerian Pidgin**

The fact that Nigerian Pidgin is used across Nigeria and among Nigerian of different educational backgrounds; and yet not given official government recognition makes many people look at it as a joke and not language to be used when people are not serious or when what is being discussed is not considered important. The result of this is that people can be generally careless in their use of Nigerian Pidgin. Thus, we do not bother about the form, structure, and status of Nigerian Pidgin.

**Background of the Respondents**

Respondents to our investigations are drawn across the five schools within the Polytechnic: School of Basic and Applied Science, School of Business, School of Engineering, School of Environmental, and School of General Studies. The respondents are also of various sexes and marital statuses. We selected a number of students across various departments. A good number of them are from the Southern part of the country this was done deliberately as it is well-known fact that people from that part of the country are more associated with the use of Nigerian Pidgin.

## METHODOLOGY

The principal concern of methodology in this context is the study of how, in practice, linguists go about their work, how they conduct investigations and assess evidence, and how they decide what is obtainable in a particular language environment and what is not. Thus, in the course of this work, we decided to adopt the following procedures: oral interviews and direct personal observation for the collection of data.

The oral interview forms the first means by which we got the necessary details in handling this research work. We selected five (5) respondents each from the different Departments within the school and administered some selected questions to them on different occasions. We equally recorded on the handset the whole procedure as conducted with the students.

The second medium through which we gathered data for this research work was direct participatory observation. Observation seems to be the most interesting. Here, it was only the observer who seems to be guided toward a certain direction. The researcher found himself among people with whom he has never had any close contact. The researcher stationed himself in such places as corridors, orchards, kiosks, business centre, and students' common rooms, which he considered to be significant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

We have declared that this research paper is to investigate among other things the implication of the use of Nigerian Pidgin among students of the Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa; and to answer the fundamental questions of who speaks what language, to whom when, and why. Thus, the investigation reveals that students of the Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa speak Nigerian Pidgin to interact among themselves, especially on an occasion that is characterized by informality rather than formality use of language; and the speaking of Nigerian Pidgin English answers the question of what language.

The investigation also revealed that Nigerian Pidgin is found to be very popular among the youth, especially in schools. The study found out that the Nigerian Pidgin is used for informal communication among HNDII students of the Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa, and by extension other students of Nigerian higher institutions.

Also, using the interviews and direct observation methods of investigation, and Fishman's theory of domain analysis as a framework; the researcher discovered the presence of Nigerian Pidgin on campuses and how this affects to a great extent the teaching and learning of Standard English in Nigerian higher institutions.

The study also discovered Pidgin to be an out-of-classroom language in many places where it occurs. It is noteworthy that this research has revealed that many students use Pidgin English outside the classroom. This phenomenon is so rampant among students of higher institutions so much so that even at the University, the preferred language common among the students and which they speak among themselves is Pidgin. Thus Nigerian Pidgin is used as a language of relaxation when students want to be free from the formality that the English language constitutes for them.

### The Implication of Nigerian Pidgin on Academic

This work has raised an alarm that the existence of Nigerian Pidgin has come with its lexicon which is gradually adopted by Nigerian students into the art of formal writing and speaking situations. These students are or assumed to be the stakeholders of the English language, who either consciously or otherwise distorted the act of formal writing and speaking; and give way to the use of Nigerian Pidgin in not only an informal situation but also in the formal use of the language.

If Nigerian Pidgin is used among students and educated people who should have access to Standard English, then Nigerian Pidgin must be discouraged to pave way for the acquisition of Standard English which could also be used as a language of socialization. It has also been discovered that Nigerian Pidgin which is not taught inside the classroom is acquired easier than Standard English by children who come to school with no knowledge of either Pidgin or Standard English is a strong indication of its negative role in the educational process of Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

All the literature consulted by the researcher had shown that there is a unanimous acceptance of the fact that Pidgin in general originated as a result of coming into contact with people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. We have also come to the conclusion from our research findings that, Nigerian Pidgin does exist on campuses of the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa. It was also established that the Nigerian Pidgin is used on the campuses and is also used for informal communication among students of different linguistics backgrounds.

However, this research work concludes that, from all ramifications, the English language is found to be indispensable in our educational system. For one thing, it is the language of instructions, the textbooks used at all levels of education, to a large extent are written in the English language. Above all, all educational activities such as seminars, workshops conferences, research symposia, debates, laboratory experiments, and so on are conducted in the English language.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The teaching of the English language should not be left completely to the English teachers in the General Studies Department. This means that the teaching of oral 'performance' should be a task for all teachers in the Polytechnic system. It is therefore imperative for every teacher to have the awareness that no matter one's discipline, English remains its language, and it is only through the English language that the message of any discipline can be effectively conveyed and not in Nigerian Pidgin. Thus, the teacher must be a model and possess the ability to use the English language proficiently and should always frown at students' improper use of the Standard English language.

Ideally, the English language learnt up to the end of secondary school or better still to the National Diploma level should prepare students adequately for the demand of tertiary education. This implies that they would have acquired the basics and set for a developmental course in English at a higher level, instead of resorting back to the use of Nigerian Pidgin.

Also, as already mentioned earlier in this work, all the technical aspects of learning the English language, such as spelling, verb tense, and subject-verb agreement otherwise known as concord in grammar, should be used in conformity with the acceptable standard, both in written and spoken English. This means that mastering these technical areas mentioned above would help a great deal to discourage the use of Nigerian Pidgin in Nigerian high schools.

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