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SPOKEN ENGLISH AND THE NIGERIAN IDENTITY: A STUDY OF THE VARIETIES OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH-BASED PIDGIN

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Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which the spoken English in Nigeria has undergone modifications through the use of pidgin. It observes that the spoken English is gradually becoming indigenous from the emerging phenomena of Nigerian English-based pidgin and the Nigerian English. The theoretical Framework employed in this study is the Ethnography of Communication. It identifies mother tongue interference in the spoken English as a contributing factor to the Nigerian identity and concludes that the spoken English in Nigeria has assumed a dimension borne out of the desire to ease articulation, communication with the teaming illiterate population and create an identity unique to the Nigerian environment.

Keywords: Nigerian identity, spoken English, Nigerian English, Nigerian English-based pidgin, mother tongue interference.

Introduction

A lot has been written on the definition and description of Standard Nigerian English and studies have been carried out to explain the difficulty which Nigerian speakers of English have with the structure of the language. The spoken English has undergone series of modifications in order to pave way for effective Information and communication Utin (2016) among all categories of people in the country. The multilingual nature of Nigeria is probably the major cause of the extraneous modifications, which have led to the emergence of the Nigerian English-based pidgin (NP) and Nigerian English (NE) spiced with mother tongue interference. The spoken English in Nigeria has become indigenous from these emerging phenomena and a Nigerian identity is inadvertently being carved as a result (Enang, E and Urujzian, V. 2013a).

The spoken English includes the Nigerian English-based pidgin and the Nigerian (standard) English. A great feature of these varieties stems from influences from the local Nigerian languages. Both the Nigerian English-based pidgin and the Nigerian Standard English are varieties of the Nigerian English which emerged as a result of languages in contact. Odumuh (1987) points out that in contact situations a variety of varieties are bound to emerge that differ from that of British English which is the English language model for Nigeria. The spoken forms of English which are identified in Nigeria are peculiar to Nigeria, hence the use of Nigeria as adjective for them.

Nigerian English-based Pidgin (NP)

A pidgin evolves when people from different language backgrounds need a means of verbal communication. It is used to ease the communication barrier, which should have existed

among the speakers of the various mutually unintelligible indigenous Nigerian languages, Hansford et al.(1976) and Crozier and Blanch (1992) point out that there are about 394 languages in Nigeria. The investigation as to the actual number of indigenous Nigerian languages is ongoing. A pidgin differs from a normal language both in terms of function and structure (Kamwangamalu 2000) and (Enang, E. and Urujzian, V.2013b). A pidgin is used mainly for inter-ethnic communication in almost informal manner. It has a limited vocabulary, which is subject to expansion, and a simplified grammar. According to Enang (2009:3):

> *These very factors have given the Nigerian English its distinctive features. These constraints are nonexistent in the first language L_1 (MT) or in Nigerian Pidgin English because it is a compromise language between English and the indigenous languages*

There are no tense markers and inflectional morphemes. The pronouns are not marked for gender. The Nigerian English-based pidgin, which emerged along the coastal regions of Nigeria as a result of the commercial activities between the European traders and their multilingual Nigeria hosts, has over the years metamorphosed into a major medium of communication in Nigeria. Utin, (2016). The use of the Nigeria pidgin cuts across regions, ethnic groups, educational levels, professions and ages. It is a household name in Nigeria. In villages, towns and cities the Nigerian English-based pidgin is spoken among the highly educated and among the non-educated in the society. It is spoken mostly in churches, mosques, markets, schools, on the streets and in most less formal social gatherings (Enang, E. & Utin, I. 2021).. The pidgin has also assumed regional 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 English-based pidgin are mutually intelligible (Enang, E. and Urujzian, V.2013b). The Nigerian English-based pidgin is extensively used in all the towns and villages of Nigeria.

Nigerian-English Based Pidgin is spoken by Nigerians of all works of life. Enang (2009) and Aziza (2003) noted that:

> *NP is spoken almost anywhere and everywhere by illiterates and by university graduates, the young and the elderly etc it is used in the home, on the streets, on the market place, in the church and mosque in social as well as political gathering in the mass media in the government offices and even in the classroom*

The Nigerian English-based pidgin, which was considered the language for the uneducated has now become an all corners affair. It has become so elaborate that the speakers are capable of expressing the whole range of human experiences through lexical expansion. In the Niger Delta region, the Nigerian English-based pidgin is fast becoming a Creole as it displays the kind of rapid linguistic changes associated with mother tongue acquisition. It is spoken even in a seemingly monolingual setting, among people of the same family and as a means of informal instruction in homes. The pidgin spoken in this region has its peculiarity due to the fact that some of its lexical items were influenced by languages other than English and local words. Words like “sabi” and “dash” are from the Portuguese language; “sabi” from “sabier” meaning 'to know' and “dash” from “das” meaning “to give.”

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the Ethnography of Communication as its framework for the analysis. It was initially proposed by Dell Hymes (1972b) as the Ethnography of Speaking. This is an approach to discourse analysis that is based on anthropology and linguistics. Ethnography of Speaking is also known as Ethnography of Communication. This is due to the fact that it takes into consideration the non-verbal communication features. This approach deals with cultural and sub-cultural patterns of speech variation in the different social contexts.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Table 1: Forms of Nigerian Pidgin in the Delta Areas

S/N	Niger Delta Pidgin	Meaning	Examples in Sentences	
			Nigerian Pidgin	Standard English
1	Kpeme	Die	The Man don Kpeme	The man is dead
2	Give step	To see somebody off	My broad give me step reach park	My brother saw me off to the park
3	Church mind	Discretion	Make them take their church mind settle the case	They should settle the case with discretion
4	Yawa gas	Big trouble	When mama komyawa gas	There was trouble when mother arrived
5	Kawa	Go/move	I don Kawa	I have gone
6	Denge	Show off	Tamunosabidenge	Tamuno knows how to show off (a lot)
7	Alam	Hunger/state of penury	Alam don blow for my belle	I am (very) hungry
8	Dash	Give (without a fee)	I dash am five naira	I give him/her five naira
9	Well well	Very much	I like salad well well	I like salad very much
10	Before before	Initially, in the past	Before before, I dey get 'A' now I no even fit get 'B'	Initially, I used to pass with credit now it's difficult to even have a 'B'
11	Dey bam	Feel good	I want to go somewhere and dey bam with my friends	I want to go to somewhere and have a good time with my friends

The variety of the Nigerian English-based pidgin spoken in the Delta areas of Warri, Urhobo, Izon, Itsekiri, and Port Harcourt are shown on table 1. The lexical items single out the Niger Delta pidgin. They have been extensively incorporated into the Nigerian pidgin to the extent that the items are used and understood in all the regions making up Nigeria. Note, however, that the items are influenced by the local language in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, the Portuguese in 8;

and the English in 2, 3 and 7, 9, 10. In the Western part of Nigeria, the pidgin spoken there is a mixture of English and the local languages of the area.

Table 2: Nigerian Pidgin in the Western Nigeria

S/N	Western Nigeria Pidgin	Meaning	Examples in Sentences	
			Nigerian Pidgin	**Standard English**
12	Bad belle	Wickedness	Dem bi bad belle people	They are wicked
13	Ashawo	Prostitute	Dat girl naashawo	That girl is a prostitute
14	Koko	Main points	Tell me the koko	Tell me the main points
15	Kparakpo	Dialect (the word originally mean gathering of people)	You too speak kparakpo	You speak your dialect (language) too often
16	KabuKabu	Unregistered taxi cab	You dey drive KabuKabu	You are driving an unregistered taxi cab
17	Bambam	Perfect/healthy	I deybambam	I am in good health
18	Arrange yourself	To be prepared	Arrange yourself before you kom di party	Get yourself prepared before coming to the party
19	Area boys	Jobless boys (gangsters)	Di area boys cause katakata	The jobless boys were involved in a social unrest
20	Ajebota	A weakling	Dat girl na Ajebota	That girl is ajebota weakling
21	Christmas goats	One who sweats unnecessarily	See how you dey sweat like Christmas goat	See how you sweat unnecessarily

The lexical items in Table 2 are a mixture of English words, Yoruba words, direct transfer (transliteration) and coinages. "bad belle', 'arrange yourself, 'area boys and Christmas goat' are direct transfer from Yoruba to the Nigerian English-based pidgin (NP) with their attendant loan shift. Kabukabu", ashawo, kobo, 'kparakpo', and 'ajebota' are Yoruba words that are used in the Nigerian English-based pidgin. Their meanings are as expressed in the Yoruba language. Bambam and a lot of other words not captured herein are coinages, which serve the purpose of translation in the socio-cultural situation of the natives into words.

The Eastern Nigerian pidgin (ENP) has the same characteristics of being landed with words from English and Igbo There are also coinages and loan shifts that give the Eastern Nigeria pidgin the touch of the east. However, as already pointed out, the various types of pidgin are now interwoven into what is generally called Nigerian pidgin.

Table 3: Nigerian Pidgin in the Eastern Nigeria

S/N	Eastern Nigeria Pidgin	Meaning	Examples in Sentences	
			Nigerian Pidgin	**Standard English**
22	Agaracha	Waywardness	Dat girl na agaracha	That girl is wayward
23	Chop	Eat/food	I chop yesterday	I ate food yesterday
24	Awoof	Free and unexpected gift	Dat one naawoof	That one is for free
25	Backyard	Buttocks	I beat an for im backyard	I gave her a smack on the buttocks
26	Nna men!	(Exclamation)	Nna men! Di tori fine well well	Whoa! The story is interesting
27	Wayo	A cheat	Dat one nawayo man	That man is a cheat
28	Kampe	Healthy	I deykampe	I am healthy
29	Dig am out	Struggle/fight	I go dig am out without you	I will fight with you

From the above table it is observed that the ENP consists of words from English, Igbo and coinages Examples (22&24), (27) and (28) are Igbo words while examples (23), (25), and (29) are English words. It should be noted that however, the English words as used above have undergone the process of loan shift, example (26) is a coinage. These examples are only a figment of items that constitute the Eastern Nigerian pidgin. The pidgin variety spoken in the North also has a touch of Hausa, Fulfude, Arabic and English. Another striking feature of the Nigeria pidgin spoken in the North amongst the peasants is the use of double first person singular to indicate the first person singular pronoun in the subject position and the use of the firm person singular in the subject position, for example:

i. Me I dey sell am for rice…. meaning "I sell rice"
ii. 1 dey vex for me? Meaning 'Are you annoyed with me?

Tab**le 4: Nigerian Pidgin in the Northern Nigeria**

S/N	NNP Lexis	Meaning	Examples in Sentences	
			Nigerian Pidgin	**English language**
30	Walaihi	Truly	Walaihi, I dey sell am for nama	Is it true that I seel meat
31	Jaki	One who works tirelessly	Dat one bi jaki	That man works tirelessly

32	Wahala	Trouble	Dem no get wahala	They have no problem
33	Haba!	(Exclamation)	Haba! Why you do that	Why did you do that
34	Mumu	Fool	Ekaettenamumu	Ekaette is a fool

The Nigerian pidgin with its varieties remains the exclusive preserve of Nigeria. Wherever it is spoken, it is identified with Nigeria as it has been nativized. Jibril (1995) and Enang (2009) consider the Nigerian pidgin (NP) as a language native to Nigeria. It has in a way been indigenized to meet the communicative needs of the generality of Nigerians in a multilingual and multicultural setting and has become so extensively developed that most radio and television stations and the print media in the country regard it as 'special English. Fawehinmi (1987:p. 81) and Enang, E. and Urujzian,V.(2013b), Enang & Utin(2021) assert that "the potential communicative values of pidgin in the fields of entertainment, social interaction and mass communication must be fully acknowledged".

The Nigerian English

Odumuh (1993) and (Udoka,S.,Enang, E. & Utin, I. 2018), recognise the Nigerian English (NE) as one of the new Englishes and points out that there exists at the moment a single superordinate variety of Standard English in Nigeria, which can be regarded as Nigerian English. The English language spoken in Nigeria by the elite constitutes a number of heterogeneous grammatical structures common to Nigerian usage with varying pronunciation peculiarities. There are a lot of modifications in the English spoken in Nigeria that the existence of a Standard Nigerian English (SNE) is not negotiable. Based on the above situation, Enang, E. and Urujzian,V.(2013b) and Kachru (1992) point out that societal penetration has resulted in the development of different sub-varieties, depending on the geographical, cultural and linguistic contexts. The sources note that the features that vary include elements from phonology, grammar, lexis, collocations, idioms, discourse and style. In the same vein, Ogu (1992) and Enang (2009) note that the variety of English spoken by Nigerians, have enough features in common to mark off a general type which may be called Nigerian English'. Data drawn from free speeches, idioms, proverbs, figurative expressions point out some of the features that differentiate Nigerian English from British English. Nigerian-based pidgin transcends every facet of language use including the proverbs, oral literature of the indigenous people and in the ideophones (Enang, Utin, and Udoka 2014:247-262)

Lexical Level

At the lexical level, there are lexical items transferred from the local languages such as indigenous food, traditional beliefs, music and clothing. It is observed that most of the lexical Indicating music, clothing, health and food are left in their original or substrate forms. Consider the following examples:

35. DJ, play etighi for the children.
36. Tonia has so changed, she dey kampe
37. His tokunbo car is becoming too old for him.
38. I prefer ekpang nkukwo to garri.

39. Joy's mother dances etighi like a teenager
40. He likes coming to the exams hall with microchips
41. Is my bunky in the room?
42. Her aristo came and took her out.
43. Na wa for una, you no go come class?
44 Is that lekpa class rep, still collecting the assignments?

In example 35. "Etighi" is used to express the type of music that the DJ should play, "etighi" is an Efik word meaning "okro', which in recent times has been used for a specific type of music and a specific dance step.

Example 36, the expression "she dey kampe" is a pidgin expression which means, she is healthy, or she's looking good. Consequently, in the above context, the change in Tonia is as a result of her health status

"Tokunbo" in example 37 is a Yoruba word for "second hand". Hence, it is used to describe the type of car bought and the state of the car in question. In example 38, "ekpang nkukwo" is a type of food that is mainly eaten by the Efiks and Ibibios. It is usually made from a combination of cocoyam and water yam. In example 39 "etighi" is used to express the type of dance that Joy's mother dances. "Etighi" is an Efik word for "Okro". In recent times, the term "etighi" is used for both a dance style and a kind of music. In example 40, the term "microchips" means written materials used for examination malpractice. The context of the usage results from the fact that very tiny handwritings and scripts are involved in the process. In example 41, "bunky" is a term used to describe a bunk mate in the hostel. It should be noted that the term is peculiar to the female students. In example 42, the term "aristo" is used to describe an elderly man that goes after young girls. In example 43, the expression "Na wa for una" could be used to describe a situation where people behave or do things unexpected of them. Also, the expression "Na wa for una, you no go come class" is a pidgin expression code-mixed with Nigerian English. In the last example 44, the word "lekpa" is used to describe a very slim or slender person. (Enang, Utin, and Udoka 2014:247-262)

Communicative Strategies

The communication Utin (2016) strategies in Nigerian English (NE) are different from those in British English. At this level, there are a lot of local features which are transferred from the local Nigerian languages into English Language (EL). Among Nigerians, in all their linguistic and cultural diversity, there is what is commonly called communicative etiquette. It is not culturally and socially right to address people directly, especially where the discussants are not of the same age bracket (Enang, E. & Utin, I. 2021). Nigerians have respect for age and status. This is shown in the communicative strategies employed by the speakers of English in Nigeria Consider the following:

45. Nnena: Mummy, they are calling you
Mum: Who?
Nnena: Papa Ngozi

In this context, the child uses "they" for Papa Ngozi who is a much older person. Following etiquette, the child could not address an older person by name or by a singular pronoun. The use of Sir/Ma, father (baba/papa), mother (mama) is not used in Nigerian English in the same

restrictive sense as in English (Enang, E and Urujzian, V. 2013a). Theyare used an exclusive to include all elderly and women, older relatives and non-relatives consider the following
46. Free speeches Old woman: where is your mother?
Stella: She no dey Ma
Old woman: Thank you my daughter, tell her to call me the moment she comes back
Stella: I will Ma, thank you
47. Mfoniso: Did you go to the market?
Uwakmfon: No, Sister
Mfoniso: Please hurry up to the market so that I can prepare the food before mummy comes back.
Uwakmfon: okay, Sister
Uwakmfon (to her friend): Tonia Abeg, follow me go to the market, we'll be back soon
48. Nurse: Mama, have you taken your medicine this morning?
Patient: My pickin, I don take am
Nurse: Sorry Mama, let me check your Bp.

In the dialogues above, different communicative strategies are employed. These are typical of the English spoken in Nigeria. In example 46, Stella addresses the old woman as though she were her mother. And, the woman in turn addresses Stella as her daughter, whereas, she is neither Stella's biological, step or foster mother (Enang, E. & Utin, I. 2021). In example 47 Uwakmfon could not address her elder sister by her name but calls her sister as a mark of respect. She, however, called her friends name when she communicated with her. In their interaction, Uwakmfon employs a code mixing of the Nigerian English (NE) with the Nigerian English-based pidgin (NEP) with her friend. This sort of expression is mostly found among peers in the Nigerian context while respect is accorded an elder person during communication. The choice of words depends on the interlocutors. In example 48, the nurse requested to know if the patient had taken her drugs for the morning, addressing her as "Mama" despite the fact that they are not related. The patient in turns addresses the nurse as my “pikin” meaning “my child”. The above examples remind us of the discourse patterns existing in Nigerian English. To add to this, when one uses the words "wife and husband", "brother and sister in-law one in the Nigerian context he/she does not necessarily refer to these words in the strict sense as the British does. These categories of words are used both in the inclusive and exclusive senses. (Enang, Utin, and Udoka 2014:247-262)

Morpho-syntactic Level

At this level, the Nigerian English expressions are English at the surface code mixed with mother tongue structures. This situation is referred to by Sridhar (1982-P. 298) and Enang, E and Urujzian, V. (2013a) as "cultural bound speech patterns". The vocabulary at this level is English but the syntax is from a substrate language. These strategies include reduplication, translated local proverbs and idioms as well as short witty sayings and serial verb construction. Consider the following free speeches contextually:
49. Affiong: My father is always talking and talking.
Edet: If your father talks nko, is it not to advise and advise you?
50. Tony (to John); Has your wife come down?
John: My wife is yet to put down
51. Ken: Walaihi, I couldn't get the job but John got it.
Mike: I know John now, he has long legs

52. Character is like pregnancy, it cannot be hidden
53. Papa: My son, I told you this house cannot contain the two of us.
Son: I am sorry papa.

In example 49 the repetition observed is for emphasis. Example 50 contains the expressions "come down and 'put down, both meaning 'give birth to a child'. In 51 the use of long legs is idiomatic meaning for “connections”"supporters' or 'sponsors'. This is an idiom with Igbo undertone. Example 52 is an idiom which is transferred directly from Igbo, while in 53 'this house cannot contain the two of us is the result of a transfer from indigenous Nigerian languages into English Some common idioms in the indigenous Nigerian languages are transferred and used in Nigerian English with English words. Consider the following examples in Ashiple (1999) and (Enang, Utin, and Udoka 2014:247-262)

54. A man who deliberately keeps rotten meat in his parlour should not wince his face when flies begin to usurp his visitors' seat (p.25)

55. A man who gathers palm nuts in his compound should be ready to receive ants (p.4).
56 A child who is sent by his parents to steal does not go like a thief but like the owner of the ware (p.43)

The Nigerian Identity

Jibril (1992) argues that Nigerian English does not have to possess a common linguistic feature to qualify as Nigerian, since even the British English has local variations and dialectal features. In the same vein, Odumuh (1987) provides some features that distinguish the variety from other forms of the English language in other parts of the world. Odumah categorizes these features into lexical, syntactic and phonological usage at both the spoken and the written levels of the Nigerian English. To further strengthen this argument, Jowitt (1991:47) and Enang, E and Urujzian, V. (2013a) points out that the English spoken and written by Nigerians consists of standard forms and popular Nigerian forms." The standard forms, he notes, are the basic features which make the language English and the various indigenous Nigerian languages are the "lexical markers" which Nigerianize the English spoken in Nigeria. The spoken English in Nigeria has peculiar features which make the language Nigerian.

The Nigerian English, consisting of the Nigerian pidgin and the standard Nigerian English developed as a result of the apparent need for an identity in the global perspective (Enang, E. & Utin, I. 2021). It developed inadvertently from languages in contact and has given way to a variety that is associated with Nigeria, to the extent that a Nigerian speaker of English can be identified as a Nigerian anywhere in the world. The modifications which had taken place in the spoken English in Nigeria made the language indigenous. Any language that is indigenous to a group of persons is said to be the people's identifying medium. Nothing less can be said of the English spoken in Nigeria

Conclusion

The spoken English in Nigeria has been influenced, according to Ajani (2007) "by the local languages, customs, belief systems and cultures, enough to give it a flavor and characteristics that could be distinctly identified as Nigeria". The argument has been that, in the past, languages evolved from other languages. Latin for instance, was the source of the present day

Roman languages (Italian, French, Spanish, & Arabic) which gave birth to the various dialects in North Africa and the Middle East. Today, we hear of Egyptian Arabic, Algerian Arabic and Tunisian Arabic. So, the spoken English in Nigeria is a manifestation of a normal and natural linguistic process which took place and is still taking place in an atmosphere of languages in contact. To this end, it would be proper to say that the spoken English in Nigerian is Nigerian, having been nativized, pidginized and acculturated to suit the Nigerian situation and to express peculiar concepts indigenous to Nigeria. The Nigerian English-based pidgin, the standard Nigerian English and various regional Englishes within the country are varieties or dialects of the Nigerian English that are spoken by Nigerians. The spoken English in Nigeria can invariably be used to carve a Nigerian identity, as it has assumed a Nigerian status.

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