

Full Length Research Paper

In defense of Nigerian pidgin

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This paper attempts to argue that Nigerian Pidgin is a fully developed language with its own rich lexico-semantic and syntax, which have evolved like any other language through contact and modification. It argues that the semantic and lexical veracity of Nigerian Pidgin cannot be vitiated in spite of its serious marginalization. This position is established based on the outcome of an empirical study carried out on the perception, use and attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin in formal and informal settings. The data and analysis presented in this paper are based on samples of spontaneous speech collected in a formal setting, like school, and in informal settings such as market, church and private homes. The paper points out that Nigerian Pidgin is not an inferior language, nor a plague-ridden linguistic system, when compared to other well-described languages of the world. Rather, it is a second language that reflects productivity, simplicity, acceptability and understanding among Nigerians. Though highly marginalized, Nigerian Pidgin is actually a lingua franca because it is a variety that serves broad spectrum of Nigerian inhabitants, whose divergence transcends ethnic, religious and class boundaries. Given the crucial inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic communicative functions of Nigerian Pidgin in various social strata of the people's life, the paper concludes suggestively, that Nigerian Pidgin should be accorded official recognition.

Key words: Nigerian Pidgin, lexico-semantics.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian Pidgin, as a contact language, is currently witnessing ambivalent shift in status. As a result of diachronic development over the years, the use of Nigerian Pidgin is becoming popular among many speakers than before. Nigerian Pidgin has undergone a lot of modifications and re-modifications over the years by drawing its rich lexicons from various Nigerian indigenous languages as well as the contact language (English). The historical contact of the indigenous languages with English language has metamorphosed into what we know today as Nigerian Pidgin. The dynamic and generative capacities of Nigerian Pidgin to create from a finite set of lexical items have continued to foster communicative process and interaction among Nigerians. It has also afforded mutual interest and understanding between indigenous citizens and foreigners. In a multiethnic state like Nigeria of over 130 million inhabitants (Central

Intelligence Agency, 2008), with over 400 indigenous languages (Bamgbose, 1971), Nigerian Pidgin has emerged as the most widely spoken language of inter and intra communication among Nigerians and across diverse ethnic groups that do not share a common language. However, one notes with utmost dismay, the unfavourable attitudinal dispositions, condemnations, and marginalization some people have towards this language. Whether such dispositions are bereft of substance or not remains a matter of high intellectual debate, subsequent to discussion in the latter part of this essay. This paper seeks to provide an overview of Nigerian Pidgin. It aims at showing and analyzing sampled Nigerian pidgin expressions among its speakers in formal and informal settings. Part of the objective of the study is to find out the respondents' perception and attitude to the usage of Nigerian Pidgin and the basis of

their rejection of Nigerian Pidgin, if any. Against such objections, this paper intends to defend Nigerian pidgin from possible criticisms raised by the respondents. It also seeks to analyze some sampled Nigerian Pidgin expressions.

The study discovers that 80% of the reasons for the derogatory qualifications and consequently, the marginalization of Nigerian Pidgin stems from a fundamental confusion of Nigerian Pidgin with broken English by the respondents. On this, the rest of the discussion in this paper begins from a conceptual standpoint by clarifying and providing an overview of Nigerian Pidgin.

An overview of Nigerian pidgin

Nigerian pidgin is a term used to denote an English-based pidgin; a marginal language used among Nigerians to facilitate communication needs in certain interaction contexts. Like any other pidgin language in other cultural climes where the language is not native to its users, Nigerian pidgin is contact language that emerged from the fusion of indigenous languages and foreign language (English). Supporting this view, Elugbe and Omamor (1991), in their attempt to define pidgin, see it as “some kind of a marginal language that arises to fulfill specific communication needs in well-defined circumstances.”

The above definition shows that pidgin is not an official language, but a marginal language used for communication especially by people who do not speak each other's language. Writing further, Elugbe and Omamor, quoting Hall (1966), stated two conditions for a language to be qualified as pidgin. In their submission, for a language to be pidgin, “Its grammatical structure and its vocabulary must be sharply reduced; secondly, the resultant language must be native to none of those who use it” (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991).

In consonance with the above position, Rickford (1998) said:

A pidgin usually combines elements of the native language of its users and is typically simpler than those native languages in so far as it has fewer words, less morphology, and a more restricted range of phonological and syntactic options.

Rickford's excerpt to some extent is contextually applicable to Nigerian pidgin in the sense that its phonological, morphological and grammatical structures are basically restricted compared to any other standard language. In addition to this, its social communicative functions are usually limited to the verbal and informal settings. Though scholars like Rickford (1998) are of the view that “a pidgin is sharply restricted in social role, used for limited communication between speakers of two or more languages who have repeated or extended contacts with each other, for instance through trade, enslavement

or migration,” such position on pidgin is not generally applicable to all pidgins.

The sociolinguistic reality in Nigeria today reveals that Nigerian pidgin is not used only in informal settings, but also in other formal settings (Akande, 2008). There are quite a number of negative perceptions of Nigerian pidgin. Such perceptions have culminated in a string of derogatory definition of Nigerian pidgin as a mark of bastardization of English. Nigerian pidgin has come to be understood as: ‘adulterated language,’ ‘an inferior language,’ ‘substandard and lesser language,’ ‘a deviated language form,’ ‘a marginal language,’ ‘a bad language,’ ‘a language with no history and no native,’ among others. Also, it is seen as a language used by the uneducated and above all, less important language. These derogatory qualifications probably inform the reason why its use in the past was limited to jokes, cartoons, and entertainment in general.

It is probably because of the biases above that its functions have been restricted to the verbal forms of communication alone. It has equally been seen as the language of slaves of heterogeneous backgrounds who came together to the plantations and had to communicate among themselves. In view of all these appellations, could we still say that Nigerian pidgin has a future prospect? Perhaps, before providing answer to this question, we should ask, what is the historical genesis of Nigerian Pidgin?

The origin of pidgin generally is not very clear; though a lot of scholarly speculations be referred to. A source has it that ‘Pidgin’ (especially in West Africa) arose from the contact between the Chinese and the European traders and such was a mispronunciation of the word “business” by the Chinese (Naro, 1973). Another account has it that it came from the Portuguese word ‘OCUPACIAO,’ which means ‘occupation.’ Pidgin is also said to resemble or closely related to a Hebrew word *Pidjom* which means ‘barter’ (Rickford, 1998). It is of particular interest to note that pidgin has to do with trade or business, contact or migration between two hetero-cultural sets of people.

In the Nigerian context, colonization is a key historical factor responsible for the emergence of Nigerian Pidgin. Nigerian Pidgin can be historically traced to the trade contact between the British and local people in the seventeenth century. According to Illah (2001), Nigerian Pidgin was developed from the negative attitude of the European colonial masters who felt they could not allow their colonized people-Nigerians to speak the same language with them. In other words, Nigerian pidgin was a product of the inferiority attitude the colonizers had towards the colonized. Owing to the historical contact of Europeans and the Africans, the language of the former became prominent among the latter, though the correct usage of the English language of the colonizers by their colonized did not witness complete success. The resultant effect of their attempt to catch up with the new and prominent language gave rise to broken English.

This is the foundational developmental stage of Nigerian pidgin. But as a result of diachronic development over the years, the features, lexico semantics and syntactic of Nigerian Pidgin began to emanate and got documented. This stage marks the departing line of Nigerian Pidgin from broken English (Faraclas, 1996).

Elugbe and Omamor make distinction between Nigerian Pidgin and Broken English, and Special English or deliberately incorrect English (Bamgbose, 1995; Igboanusi, 2001). Broken English, on the one hand, is the type spoken as a result of inadequate mastering of standard English Language by non-native speakers of the language. It is different from Nigerian Pidgin. Special English, on the other hand is the type that is spoken with a deliberate attempt to manipulate the rules of English. It is used in most cases to create humour. Such is associated with characters like Zebrudaya of the television Soap Operas 'Masquerade'. Elugbe and Omamor (1990) refers to this form as a 'Pseudo Pidgin.'

However, Nigerian Pidgin was denied, disallowed and rejected by the Europeans as official and proper English language, especially within the realms of education, administration and politics. Illah therefore concluded that it was the inferiority presuppositions of the Europeans towards their colonized that made them not to accept the colonized pidgin or respect the colonized.

Illah's position can be substantiated with some relevant theories on the origin of pidgin language. Baby talk theory, for instance, sees pidgin originating from a similar effort, which a child has when s/he is trying to master a language. It is claimed that in doing this, the child will first master the content words as opposed to the functional words (Hall, 1966). Baby talk theory shows the attempt of Nigerians at speaking their superiors' language, which resulted in their getting the less superior form of the language. This theory may after all not be a plausible explanation to account for the history/origin of Nigerian pidgin. For one, the theory takes pidgin language to be an incorrect language subject to modification and as an actual language-in-making process. However, contrary to this perception, the language as experientially used by its adherents is neither meant to satisfy modification purposes nor re-modification essences. But rather, it is an established language.

There is also Independent Parallel Development Theory. This theory is rooted in the notion that languages are having a common ancestor of Indo-Europeans because they share some similarities. Likewise, it is noted that because some pidgins share some common features, they can, therefore, be traced to a common ancestors of Indo-European language. Also, most of their speakers are drawn from West Africans who share many things in common. This theory has been faulted by its attempt to 'overstress' the similarities that exist among different pidgins of West Africa and more importantly, it has been noted that some pidgins are not based on European languages. For example, scholars like Banjo

(1996) have totally rejected Nigerian pidgin being classified under the Indo-European languages. He would rather classify Nigeria pidgin alongside the indigenous languages of Nigeria. Banjo has also refuted the claim that Nigerian pidgin is a dialect of English, though he does not deny the fact that they are related in many ways, especially in terms of their importance.

But a more fundamental factor in tracing the origin and necessity of Nigerian pidgin is the linguistic ecology of Nigeria. Akande and Salami (2010) have underscored and documented this. According to them, Nigeria is a highly multilingual and multi-ethnic setting with ancestral language ranging between 400 and 500. Only three out of these languages are recognized as major languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, while the rest are regarded as minor languages (for example, Igede, Egun, Angas, Kamuku, etc.). The classification of Nigerian languages into major and minor is based on factors including, politics, geographical spread and numerical strength. On the basis of numerical strength and geographical spread, each of the major languages is spoken by well over 18 million people in the country and is spoken in at least five states of the federation (Akande and Salami, 2010). But for the minor languages, none has such numerical strength or has geographical spread in more than one or two states out of the 36 states making up the Nigerian state including Abuja, the capital.

The Nigerian linguistic reality is therefore such that the majority of speakers of minor languages tend to learn one of the major languages (sometimes in addition to English), especially the language that is dominant in where they live or work. For majority of those who speak any (or all) of the major languages as their native language, they also acquire English, Nigerian Pidgin English or another language of the country (Akande and Salami, 2010). Therefore, the vast majority of Nigerians are bilingual (Akindele and Adegbite, 1999), and for many of these bilinguals, Nigerian pidgin is one of their languages. It is a language that cuts across different ethnic and regional boundaries; it is not native but a language that emerged as a consequence of the necessity of inter-intra-ethnic and regional communications.

It is important at this juncture to make some clarifications concerning the developmental stages of language. Such an analysis, we believe, will enable us understand better the origin as well as the lingua status of Nigerian pidgin. The developmental stages of language have been recognized to include: Sole Official (SO) language for example, French in France; Joint Official (JO) language co-equal with at least one other for example, English and French in Cameroon, German, Italian, Romanian in Switzerland; English, Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo in Nigeria; Regional Official (RO) language, for example, Yoruba in Southern Nigeria, Ibo in Eastern Nigeria, Hausa in Northern Nigeria; Promoted Language (PL), lacking in official status but made use of by government agencies for example, Wape in

Cameroon. Though this language is not official, it is an important medium of communication between the government and the citizens particularly in face-to-face encounters and radio programmes on community development, health agriculture and so forth. Lastly we have toleration language (TL) which existence is recognized but ignored.

Nigerian Pidgin language can be regarded as both Promoted Language (PL) and Tolerance Language (TL) based on the features described above. The ability and extent to which a society can accommodate and experiment pidgin language shows the level of development such a country has attained (Mafeni, 1971). Also, any seemingly developed language today has got its own process of development. Nigerian Pidgin has not been assigned any official recognition in the language policy of the country, but it is inadvertently recognized even by the various federating unit of the Nigerian State. It has been the dominant language of public broadcast, jingles and orientation as well as information in social media. Deuber (2005) notes this in his remark that:

Although, a major lingua franca, it has no official recognition; even without any policy statements, it performs a growing range of functions, including, for example, that of a medium of public broadcasting, but no efforts have been made to develop it in order for it to be able to cope with these functions, as has been done for the major and to some extent also for minor indigenous languages.

In a way, we can say that Nigerian pidgin is a toleration language because its existence is publicly recognized but only officially ignored. In the words of Akande and Salami (2010):

Lately the government has come to recognize the vital role that NPE (Nigerian Pidgin English) plays in helping to get close to the masses. Jingles, posters, stickers and government campaigns for national awareness and mutual co-existence are now prepared in NPE and broadcast in the same languages.

Nigerian Pidgin is a promoted language as well because it reflects national identity in Nigeria through its use in the propagation of national ideas, values, political and socio-economic development peace and unity. Because virtually every class and creed identify with it Akande says Nigerian Pidgin is "a marker of identity and solidarity. It is an inter-ethnic code available to Nigerians, who have no other common language" (Akande, 2008).

Each of the 250 or more ethnic groups in Nigeria can communicate in this language, though they usually have their own additional words. For example, the Igbos added the word, "Nna" at the beginning of some sentences to add effect to the meaning of their sentence. For example,

"that test was hard" becomes "Nna men, dat test hard no be small". This same additional effect can be found among the Yorùbás, who normally added the words 'Şe' and 'Abi' to their own dialect of Nigerian Pidgin. Such native words are often used at the start or end of an intonated sentence or question. For example, "You are coming, right?" becomes "Şe you dey come?" or "You dey come abi?" (<http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com>).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used the interview-questionnaire approach in an attempt to elicit the attitudes and opinions of respondents on the use and status of Nigerian Pidgin in their communications. 100 respondents were randomly sampled; 50 from the formal setting and 50 from the informal setting. Ibadan Polytechnic was used as a formal setting pilot where the sampled subjects consisted of students and members of the academic community. The research instrument was also distributed to a total of 50 respondents in the informal setting. The two places used as pilots were Sango market, Ibadan and the St. Andrew Catholic Church, Agbowo, Ibadan. The sampled subjects in each of the settings were stratified along age and sex delineations as shown in Table 1 and mother tongue as shown in Table 2.

In administering the structured questionnaire, containing 16 items that focused on the respondents' use and attitudes to Nigerian Pidgin, the sampling targets the criteria of having respondents from diverse linguistic backgrounds, both from the formal and informal sectors of Nigeria.

The respondents' dispositions to and use of Nigerian pidgin were inferred from the responses they have towards the language and some of their sampled Nigerian pidgin expressions. Their responses were thereafter calculated in percentages as reported in Table 3.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Section A in Table 2 shows that 74% of the respondents in the formal setting claim that they use Nigerian Pidgin while only 26% of the respondents say they do not. The case is different in terms of degree in the result of respondents from the informal sector. 98% of the respondents claim to speak Nigerian Pidgin while only 2% do not. This state of affair suggests that people in the informal setting tend to use Nigerian Pidgin more than people in the formal setting who more often than not adopt the official language of English as the main mode of communication. The availability of literature in a language is a catalyst (and an indicator of) to the development of the language. The results revealed that 39% of respondents from the formal setting and 25% of respondents from the informal setting read materials written in Nigerian Pidgin. Dearth of written materials in Nigerian Pidgin may be responsible for this low percentage of readers and may not necessarily be due to lack of interest.

In both the formal and informal settings, the results showed that there is degree of variation in the way respondents from the formal background use Nigerian

Table 1. Respondents by age group and sex.

Settings	Sex		Age group (20-30)		Age group (30-40)		Total
Formal	Male: 25	Female: 25	Male: 12	Female: 17	Male: 13	Female: 8	50
Informal	Male: 25	Female: 25	Male: 19	Female: 16	Male: 5	Female: 9	50
Total	50	50	31	33	18	17	100

Table 2. Linguistic background of respondents.

Mother tongue	Formal	Informal
Yoruba	35	22
Bini	2	1
Hausa	1	5
Igbo	10	19
Itsekiri	2	3
Total	50	50

Table 3. Respondents' use of and perceptions of Nigerian Pidgin.

Section A formal settings	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)
Attitudes	Should Nigerian Pidgin be used as the language of instruction in class?	60	40
	Is Nigerian Pidgin a variety of English?	57	43
	Should Nigerian Pidgin be adopted as an official language in Nigeria?	70	30
	Should Nigerian Pidgin be taught as a subject in Nigerian educational system?	54	56
	Is Nigerian Pidgin Broken English?	70	30
Use	Should there be more books and social media strictly in Nigerian Pidgin?	52	48
	Do you speak Nigerian Pidgin on campus?	74	26
	Do you read materials written in Nigerian Pidgin?	49	51
Section B informal settings	Do you speak Nigerian Pidgin only with people that do not understand your native language?	55	45
	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)
	Does Nigerian Pidgin express any area of your thoughts and feelings?	97	3
	Should there be more radio and television programmes in Nigerian Pidgin?	90	10
	Should religious activities and trade be communicated in Nigerian Pidgin?	93	7
	Should Nigerian Pidgin be adopted as an official language in Nigeria?	98	2
	Is Nigerian Pidgin Broken English?	90	10
Use	Do you speak Nigerian Pidgin?	98	2
	Do you speak Nigerian Pidgin with people that either understand your native language or do not?	95	5
	Do you read materials written in Nigerian Pidgin?	45	55

Pidgin when compared to those from the informal setting. 95% of respondents from the latter speak Nigerian Pidgin with all categories of people that either understand their native language or not as a matter of trade necessity or as a means of disseminating religious values, doctrines and teachings (Reinebeck, 1964). Nigerian Pidgin here serves in the capacity of a second language to majority of people in the informal setting. Only 55% of respondents

from the formal background speak Nigerian Pidgin only with people that do not understand their native language. It is clear from the foregoing that in both settings, the use of Nigerian Pidgin for various communicative purposes is high.

On the perceptions of respondents from the formal setting on whether or not there should be more text written in Nigerian Pidgin, and if the language of social

media should be Nigerian Pidgin based, the result revealed that 52% of the subjects are favourably disposed to it, while 90% of respondents from the informal sector agree more to the encouragement of television and radio programmes in Nigerian Pidgin.

The gap in this percentage of result is explainable on the ground that the attitude of the respondents is such that Nigerian Pidgin is more spoken by non-literates and semi-literates rather than the literates. Similarly, 93% of subjects from the informal locale share the expectation that religious services should be conducted in Nigerian Pidgin for the sake of easier understanding. This may be understandable in view of the fact that the religious setting used for the pilot study is a Catholic church with different ethnical composition. Indeed, on whether Nigerian Pidgin is a variety of English language or not, 57% of respondents from the formal sector see it as such while 43% do not agree.

70% of respondents' perception of Nigeria Pidgin in the formal setting is that it is a broken language, while 90% of respondents in the informal setting take Nigerian Pidgin to be Broken English. In either, there is still a huge wrong perception of Nigerian Pidgin as a Broken English as it is popularly called.

Nigerian pidgin: current use and attitudes

Having reported above the outcome of this paper's empirical study especially the yes/no aspect of the structured questionnaire, there are also some selected sampled expressions that are worthy of analysis in order to show the functional relevance of Nigerian pidgin. Nigerian pidgin serves as a convenient form of communication, in reaching targeted audience in the informal setting. Let us take the advert world as an instance. Advertising agencies use Nigerian Pidgin more than native or English language in advertisement. For example:

As you dey cook, pepper go pour you.
Oil go pour oyu many things go pour you.
Na this new omo I take wash them.
E no dey change color (Omonzejele, 1998:62)

In English translation:

There is the tendency of being stained while cooking.
It could be oil stain
Some other stains may also be experienced
Omo detergent is the key to cleansing stains
It does not fade.

The rhythmic value of Nigerian Pidgin gives it a poetic form. In the informal setting, Nigerian Pidgin is also the language of religious slogan, praise and worship as noted in the following excerpts:

If god be for mi...dis god na helele
Jesus na mai papa. Na so so wonder
Jesus dey do o.

In English translation:

A supporting God is a great God
Jesus is my father
Jesus does wonderful things

It is quite interesting that in the formal setting, campuses for instance, students and even lecturers make use of Nigerian Pidgin extensively. A research conducted by Okon (1995) even shows that members of university community tend to use it excitedly, for example:

Femi, o boy which lecture we get now
Na ENG 309
One no kuku sabi whether di man go come.

In English translation:

Tunde: Are we having lectures now?
Femi: Yes, we are having ENG 309.
Tunde: Are you sure the lecturer will be coming?
FEMI: No, I am not sure.

Such expressions as we have above make Kirk-Green (1971) to retort: "Even at the university, the preferred linguistic lowest common denominator of students speaking among themselves is Pidgin."

The vocabulary of Nigerian pidgin is based on the language of the dominant groups, that is, the native speakers. Hence, this makes it easy to speak and learn. Moreover, pidgin is the language of political campaign. To reach and catch the attention of a vast number of people, politicians resort to Nigerian Pidgin. For example:

Winner ooo, winner. /2ce
Obasanjo you done win o, winner
Patapata you go win forever, winner (TV jingle
on political campaign)

In English translation:

It is good to win.
It is good to be a winner.
Winning is desirable.
Obasanjo is a winner.

This shows that to get across to many people, Nigerian pidgin tends to capture better peoples' audience. This is because it is usually down to earth and as such, many people are motivated and carried along. Nigerian pidgin is also the language of business, public enlightenment; language of cartoon and entertainment, art, music of all kinds and language of broadcasting (Reineleck, 1964). It is a very rich language, which enjoys variability and can

be used by all categories of people: illiterate, elite, educated or the uneducated to communicate.

In the entertainment industry, pidgin permeates the deeper feelings and emotions of fans, and serves as a very good entertainment when used for comedy, drama and films, music and concerts (Chinvure, 2012). Also, sensitive issues of national and international interest are carefully and jocularly passed across to people using this medium. This has been observed in the music of such people as Yellow Man, Peter Torsh, Bob Marley, Raskimono, Fela Anikulapo Kuti and Femi.

Pidgin is commonly used in Nigeria soap operas. Notable among such operas are 'Hotel de Jordan,' 'Village Headmaster,' 'Koko-Close,' 'Why Worry,' 'Inside Out,' 'Masquerade,' 'Papa Ajasco,' and a host of others. Today, broadcasting in Wazobia F.M., a popular Nigerian F.M. radio station, is strictly done using the Pidgin language. In the realm of poetry, the use of pidgin is also noticeable. For instance, there exist two anthologies of Nigerian Pidgin poetry today. These are the Vatsa (1981) and Aig-Imoukheuder (1982).

Based on its wide functional utilization in different strata of life, some scholars like Elugbe and Omamor (1991) have suggested that Nigeria Pidgin should be used in Nigeria instead of continuing the blind search for a National language. This paper does not support Elugbe and omamor's recommendation since we cannot totally lay claim to Nigerian Pidgin as being native to Nigeria. But we can save ourselves the embarrassment of the language heterogeneity and have Nigerian Pidgin as a lingua franca, which will be a unifying force among people of different tongues as ours.

There has been a wide array of criticism against Nigerian Pidgin based on its orthography, that is, the representation of Nigerian Pidgin into writing. This relates to the best way to write it and what to be the base language; is it the European language or the indigenous language? Some scholars like Elugbe and Omamor (1991) have suggested a new modern orthography, which will be based on the principles of modern orthography. Against this suggestion, Nigeria pidgin is alleged for not having a generally acceptable model. For example, the tense-agreement as we have it in English is absent as shown below:

I am coming – I dey come
He is coming – He dey come
We are coming – we dey come

The above sentences show that tense is not indicated whether in relation to time, or in relation to agreement unlike the formal English. Also there is no gender distinction in pidgin. In most cases, the objective case 'im' can be used for both genders as in:

Na im born the pickin – She is the mother of the child.

Also, the subjective pronoun 'he' is also used in the same

way but for the modification in its form whereby 'e' has gradually replaced the English 'he' over time:

E don com – S/he has come.
E go eat am – S/he will eat it.

Furthermore, the spelling system is not uniform. This, of course, may be traced to the recent development of a standard orthography. Moreover, repetitious phrases are also present in Nigerian Pidgin, such as, "koro-koro", meaning "clear vision", "yama-yama", meaning "disgusting", and "doti-doti", meaning "garbage".

It is in the light of the above linguistic shortcomings that Nigerian pidgin has received different derogatory appellations, such as: menial language for the uneducated, substandard language, among others.

One major reason responsible for the marginalization of Nigerian Pidgin is its confusion with Broken English. In view of this, there is the tendency of looking down on its users as lacking proficiency in the Queen's language of our erstwhile colonizers. We seem to have elevated and extolled European culture and language beyond the ordinary. The castigation of Nigerian pidgin is more or less a physiological problem than a linguistic one.

Such psychological relegation has culminated in various negative perception and criticism of Nigerian pidgin. It has been alleged that Nigerian pidgin is an inferior language meant for the semi-illiterates and low status members of the society (Agheyisi, 1971). Nigerian pidgin, as a consequence, has been marginalized. Besides not being recognized officially at the local, state or national level, it has received limited attention in printed or electronic forms. Politically, Nigerian pidgin has equally been marginalized in its non-recognition in Nigerian constitution like other major languages in Nigeria and English. Educationally, Nigerian pidgin has been marginalized in Nigeria's curriculum. Unlike the English and the major languages in Nigeria that are studied as a discipline in the secondary schools and higher institutions in the country, Nigerian pidgin despite its wide coverage and usage, has not received such disciplinary attention.

Scholars are wont to argue that such marginalization is explainable on the ground that while English and other three national languages are codified and can be studied, Nigerian pidgin is not (Akande and Salami, 2010). Such criticism as this is no longer tenable. For instance, a detailed descriptive and analytic treatment of the syntax, morphology and phonology of Nigerian pidgin as well as account of the lexicon and semantics of the language can be found in the works of scholars like Nicholas Faracia's *Nigerian Pidgin*, Apostle Roy Okonkwo (who translated the entire bible into Nigerian pidgin using the standardized Nigerian Pidgin Orthography and wrote Nigerian Pidgin Language Primer (2003) (<http://www.mercy-christian-ministry.org/Nigerian-pidgin-language-alphabet.html>).

It should be noted that the Europeans cannot be allowed to determine what should be given a full linguistic

status and what should not, since language itself retains its dynamism by borrowing from different languages over ages. Thus, even the base of the Nigerian pidgin we have today is not totally English and is not totally European fused, but there are borrowings from some West African Languages for example, 'wayo,' 'banza,' 'suya,' 'yamutu,' 'pafuka' are words from Hausa; 'Awuf', 'potopoto' are from Krio; 'sabi' (know) 'pickin'(child) 'dash', (to give to a person) 'palava' – (problem) are of Portuguese origin. Also, the word 'beaucoup' translated as 'boku' (Plenty) is of French origin while from Yoruba language we have words like 'ole,' (thief) 'kobokobo,' (a stranger) 'aje' (witch) which different tribes in Nigeria have borrowed into their own pidgin.

Despite all its problems, Nigeria Pidgin has a wider acceptability due to its simplicity. Thus, the language should be given enough recognition. Nigerian pidgin is gradually gaining upper hand in some Nigerian societies like Benin, Edo, Delta, Rivers, Lagos, Port-Harcourt, Abuja, etc. Nigerian Pidgin varies from place to place. Dialects of Nigerian Pidgin may include the Lagos, Onitsha, Benin City, Warri, and Ibadan dialects. For example, in these parts of the country, it is gradually assuming the status of a lingua-franca. This recent development of pidgin to a Creole where it has acquired native speakers, more elaborate and modified vocabulary and grammar has given it a linguistic standard above its former level (Chinvure, 2012). Though some scholars have argued that Nigerian Pidgin is not a Creole language because most speakers are not native speakers, some others are wont to argue that it is, because many children do learn it early (Gbala, 2009).

Nonetheless, we agree with Gbala that "Nigerian Pidgin can be spoken as a pidgin, a creole, or a decreolised acrolect by different speakers, who may switch between these forms depending on the social setting" (Gbala, 2009).

The importance of Nigerian Pidgin as a contact language cannot be over emphasized. It should therefore be allowed to thrive and given free hand to operate without any prejudice or sentiment attached to it or to the people who find it suitable to use in order to satisfy their varying communication needs.

Language planners in Nigeria should work towards improving the status of pidgin by borrowing from the experience of Papua New Guinea and Tanzania where Pidgin has become the official language used in parliament (Tok, 2012). Even in Cameroon, pidgin language is very popular, though it is not an official language. By implication, if Nigerian pidgin could be allowed to improve upon its present status of Promoted Language (PL) and Tolerance Language (TL), with the passage of time, it is a reasonable possibility that it could assume the status of Sole Official (SO) language. Of course, critics may view this position we are envisaging as utopian. But cognizance needs to be taken of the fact that language itself is dynamic, and susceptible to evaluation, regulation, alteration and improvement. Given this, Nigerian pidgin

stands the benefit of proving its worth among other languages in Nigeria.

Conclusion

So far, our argument in this paper has been in defense of Nigerian pidgin. Rather than positing mischievous attacks and discrepancies over whether or not Nigerian Pidgin is standard or below standard, efforts should be on top gear in developing Nigerian Pidgin. It should be developed to a full-fledge language to enhance effective communication. We envisaged for its recognition and promotion as a lingua franca in Nigeria; thus, serving as a unifying language in a multi-lingual country, Nigeria. Its use should not be limited to trade, jokes, cartoons, religious teachings, news broadcast and advertisement purposes alone. It should be given a free hand to operate and serve wider coverage.

In order to attain this height, it is strongly suggested that language planners must work on its codification, which will assist it in serving wider part of the populace, since it is not ethnically bound. When language planners and government indicate practical interest, the attitude of different people towards Nigeria pidgin will change drastically. To gain the proposed ground, it will be pertinent to include it in the National Policy on Education. The National Orientation Agency, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education will also play significant roles in propagating, mobilizing and re-orientating the populace on its imports and rationale. In conclusion, in view of the various potentialities of Nigerian pidgin, it will amount to injustice if Nigerian pidgin is not given a prominence. Its general acceptability by the majority of the Nigerian populace makes its recognition inevitable and is capable of enhancing its speedy progress.

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