

Nigerian Pidgin in the 21st Century: Any Hope of surviving the Opposition from English, Nigerian Languages and Foreign Languages?

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's multilingual background provides a veritable ground for the emergence of pidgin-(abridge language for inter-ethnic communication and interaction), as a formidable National language. However, several growing opposing forces tend to make the realization of such dream in the 21st century a fantasy rather than reality. This paper set out to x-ray the developmental strides of the Nigerian pidgin in the late 20th Century to the first decade of the 21st century, research interest in some aspects of Nigerian pidgin, efforts by organizations for the promotion of Nigerian pidgin as well as factors that tend to work against further growth of the Nigerian pidgin. Our findings are that government policy thrust, growing mother tongue consciousness occasioned by the need to avoid language death or extinction, language endangerment, promotion of English language and other foreign languages such as French and Arabic as well as other sociolinguistic realities in the Nigerian speech communities may stifle if not stop completely the growth and influence of Nigerian pidgin in the 21st century.

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin, 21st Century, Surviving, Opposition.

INTRODUCTION

Many have applauded the growth and development of Nigerians pidgin over the years. According to Esogbue in Osuagwu(2010:3),

the language (Nigerian pidgin) is growing and the idea once held that the language is a language of the illiterates is fast ending and gradually getting replaced as the unique language of Nigerian as even national team football of the country use the language as means of communication on the pitch.

To further attest to the growth, reference is made to the extensive research that have been carried out on the Nigerian pidgin especially in the last decade of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st century. Appreciating these research efforts on Nigerian pidgin, Basse (2008:25) states that "all these research effort made on the pidgin point to the fact that pidgin is fast in growth like any full fledged language". The enthusiasms, expectations, research interest on pidgin at this period were such that it was expected to becoming the national language, thereby,, resolving the lingering National language question. According to Agbeyisi 1983 in Okon (2010), the use of Nigerian Pidgin has become a more widely spread phenomenon. Furthermore, the past two decades may be well regarded as the period of

emancipating a language in Nigeria. Pidgin is being appreciated as a potential language for communication in the typically multi lingual and poorly integrated and urbanising communities. However, this paper set out to reveal a declining research interest on Nigerian pidgin at this period of the century. It will also show several other factors that pose a serious challenge to the growth and development of Nigerian pidgin. It posits that ignoring these factors and the challenges they present tend to suggest that the Nigeria pidgin may not be able to survive the 21st century.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Formal

Ordinarily, the word “formal” is used to refer to education or training received in a school, college or university, with lesson, exams etc. rather than gained through practical experience. In this work the term “Formal” in respect of research activities on Nigerians pidgin, is not used in the broad sense. It is used strictly to refer to the research activity carried out in the university or higher institution as part of the requirement to qualify for the award of a degree, diploma or certificate.

Informal

The term informal is generally used to reflect education or training received outside school, college or university or gained through practical experience without exams, lessons etc. In this paper, Informal research is used to refer to any research on Nigerian pidgin whether in school, college, university or not, that is not evaluated as part of the requirement to qualify for a degree, diploma or certificate.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hudson’s (2001) theory of solidarity and accommodation (Hudson’s 2001:23) posits that solidarity relationship is probably the most important of all several relationship, at least as far as language is concerned. This is because it is the relationship that reflects shared experience which is necessarily tied to linguistic similarity. Hudson maintains that solidarity is expressed through a host of ways including, “choice of language”. It is on this framework that this paper seeks to establish the choice of language that will play a more significant role to the point of a possible adoption as a national language in the 21st century Nigeria. The alternatives are between Nigerian pidgin, Nigerian languages and foreign languages as well as English language. The emergence of a more vibrant, great role assigned dominant, national, regional language out of a plethora of languages tend to be more influenced by the linguistic solidarity, rule governance and history rather than mere rhetorics and wishful thinking and academic recommendations.

Furthermore, Krippendorff (1998s) recursive theory of human communication suggest that language is a pre-requisite of understanding communication as a social phenomenon. According to Osuagwu (2010:5) Krippendorff’s theory stems from the fact that language as an internal phenomenon to its speakers, depends on rules and histories to account for relationships among its speakers. There are both historical and sociolinguistic paradigms or rules that significantly determine a code’s elevation in status, such as codification or graphization, standardization, elaboration of function etc. Historically for example, the elevation of the English language in the world today is partly linked to the history of British colonial experience culminating in the British Commonwealth countries. This is further expressed by Iwuchukwu (2011:170) “the socio-political cultural and military influence of the

United States of America as the unofficial “policeman” of the world has also in no small way benefited the English language and projected its influence among languages of the world”

Nigeria’s Socio-Linguistic Climate

Nigeria’s multi lingual background provides a veritable ground for the emergence of Nigerian pidgin as a formidable national language. Nigeria has as estimated 400-500 languages Gital(1998). From independence, English language aided by British colonial rule had gained numerical strength not only as a second language but also as the official language. It presently confers its speakers with a large and impressive number of uses that signify a standard language as well as with prestige, self confidence and power Essien(2003). Out of the number of indigenous languages given above, three; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are the major languages also referred to as decamillionaire (Brann 1993). Some are main or millionaire and the smallest ones are the small grouped or centimillionaire languages. It took nearly two decades of writing, talking a lot, experimentation, mobilizing of people, influencing decisions and action on matters of language policy, planning and management, Jun aid (2008) before the three major languages were elevated to the states of national languages. Jun aid (2008:7) further explicated the fragile nature of the Nigerian socio linguistic climate as he clearly spelt out the provision of the national policy on education (NPE) reversed in 1988, 1999 and 2004 as follows:

- ❖ Use of the mother tongue (MT) or language of the immediate community (environment) as medium of instruction at first (3) years of primary education.
- ❖ Teaching of the native tongue as a core subject: primary, JS3 and SS3 levels.
- ❖ Teaching of French as core subject: primary and JSS level and elective subject at SS level.
- ❖ Teaching of Arabic as elective: primary, JSS and SS levels.
- ❖ Learning of any of the three (3) major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba by non-native speakers as second language l2 at JSS level.

The policy reveals a keen contest between Nigerian languages, English and foreign languages. It can be argued that if it took so much people, time, and concerted effort for the three (3) major languages to attain their current status, Nigerian pidgin which no concerted effort is being made towards its status elevation nor any dedicated voices working on its behalf tends to have a slim chance of survival. Even greater recognition and status is still sought for Nigerian languages in a proposed new national language policy. The policy thrust of the government tend to favour this with committed advocates of these languages as part of the policy formulation group and these all constitute odds against Nigerian pidgin. In the light of the above, several challenges, rules and oppositions must be surmounted to make the realization of pidgin surviving the 21st century Nigeria a reality rather than fantasy. We will examine some of these other challenges in details in the next subsection.

Research In Nigerian Pidgin From Late 20th Century To 2010

One of the greatest challenges confronting the Nigerian pidgin in the remaining part of the 21st century is that of stimulating and enhancing research activities in it. Research is a careful study of a subject, especially in order to discover new facts or information about it. The potency, vitality and vibrancy of a language can be linked to the extent of research interest shown and carried out on it. Several world languages enjoy robust research activities on them, which open them up for empirical analysis at the level of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics as well as the application of these knowledge to solving societal (language related) problems etc.

A cursory look at research activities in Nigerian pidgin from 1980 – 2010 is worrisome. At the informal level, some appreciable work was done, especially towards the end of the 20th

century and the first decade of the 20th century. It is at this time that some of the scholars made impact on pidgin research at the informal level. By formal level here, we refer to the research carried out within the confines of a tertiary institution strictly under supervision for the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates and the informal refers to the researches made outside or inside the formal settings but not qualifying one for a degree, diploma or certificate. This may be articles in journals, books, or chapters in books etc., such works include Mafeni(1972) Ifode(1984):Faraclas(1983, 1996) Elugbe and Omamor(1991, 1995), Munzali (1995), Okon (1997, 2003).Egbohokare (2001),Essien (2003). Igboanusi andPeter (2005), etc.

It is the works of these scholars that have enabled us to have insight into not only the origin, development and geographical spread of the Nigerian pidgin but also to a little extent into the structure. Even at this level, it can still be said that there is paucity of research, considering the extent of research correspondingly done on the other languages competing for relevance in the country. There is still need to unveil the details of the structural analysis of Nigerian pidgin, the morpho-syntactic analysis, the phonetic properties as well as the sound patterning etc. There is still need to capture the emerging new varieties of Nigerian pidgin such as the Ikom/Ogoja and Ugep varieties in the northern and central parts of Cross River State respectively. The issue of documenting Nigerian pidgin appears to be ignored in the much talk and research on documenting languages.

The “formal” aspect of research tends to present a gloomier picture. The table presented below on the “formal” research activities on Nigerian pidgin, Nigerian languages, Foreign languages, English language as well as some African languages may provide a better explanation. It is taken from the Department of linguistics of Nigerian s premier university; the University of Ibadan. We decided to use a period of three decades (1980--2010) and covered the BA, MA/M.phil and PhD programmes.

TABLE 1
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA
BA, MA, OR Ph.D. THESES: 1980—2010 Department of linguistics

BA	NIG. PIDGIN	NIG. LANG.	FOREIGN LANG.	ENGLISH LANG.	AFRICAN LANG.
1980		14			
1981		09			
1982		15			
1983		16		2	
1984		21			
1985		13		2	
1986	2	22		5	
1987		27		5	
1988		37		2	
1989		28			
1990		26		1	
1991		30		4	
1992		26		4	
1993		05		1	
1994		34		1	
1995	1	30		6	
1996					
1997		26		3	
1998		20			
1999		46		1	
2000	1	61		9	
2001	4	69		6	
2002	1	38		3	
2003					
2004	3	65		10	
2005		12		2	
2006		06		1	
2007	1	16		6	
2008		37	1	4	1
2009		23		4	
TOTAL	13	816	1	90	1

Ph.D	NIG. PIDGIN	NIG. LANG.	FOREIGN LANG.	ENGLISH LANG.	AFRICAN LANG.
1980				1	
1981		3			
1982					
1983					
1984					
1985					
1986					
1987		2			
1988		2			
1989					
1990		3			
1991					
1992					
1993					
1994					
1995		4			
1996		1		1	
1997					
1998		2			
1999				1	1
2000		2			
2001		1			
2002		2			
2003		3		1	
2004		4			
2005		5			1
2006		4		1	
2007		1			
2008					
2009					
2010					
TOTAL		40		5	2

MA	NIG. PIDGIN	NIG. LANG.	FOREIGN LANG.	ENGLISH LANG.	AFRICAN LANG.
1980		04			
1981		01			
1982		07			
1983	1	13			
1984		08			1
1985		10			
1986		11			
1987		11			
1988		04		1	
1989		02+01M. Phil			
1990		16			
1991		04			
1992		05			
1993		05			
1994		02			
1995		10		1	
1996		01			
1997	1	07			2M.Phil in Cameroon Lang
1998		12+2M.Phil			1
1999		24			
2000		06		1	
2001		06		1	
2002		12			
2003		07			
2004		19		2	
2005		29+3M.Phil		3	
2006		28		4	
2007		12		2	
2008		16		3	
2009		07		3	
2010					
TOTAL	3	215		21	4

**Summary Of 'Formal' Research Work On Languages in Nigeria For Three Decades, 1980-2010
(University of Ibadan -Nigeria)**

RESEARCH TYPE	NIG. PIDGIN	NIG. LANG.	FOREGIN LANG.	ENGLISH LANG.	AFRICAN LANG.
UNDERGRADUATE	13	816	1	90	1
MASTERS	3	215	NIL	21	4
Ph.D	NIL	40	NIL		

As can be seen from the table, in three decades, there were only (13) research projects carried out on the Nigerian pidgin at the undergraduate level compared with that of 816 on Nigerian languages and 90 on English

At the graduate level, first, the M.A/M.Phil programme, at the corresponding period, we have only three theses compared with the 215 on Nigerian languages and 21 on English language. At the Ph.D level, for three decades, there was no singular dissertation on Nigerian pidgin while there has been (40) dissertation on Nigerian languages.

It should be noted that the fact that one BA project is noticed in 2008 in Foreign languages and none else at the Masters and PhD levels throughout the period, does not suggest the extent of research on foreign languages. The implication of that is, that additional research is done on foreign languages in the Department of Linguistics because they still have a separate department where almost exclusively, research is carried out in and/on any of the foreign languages like French, German, Spanish, etc. From the undergraduate to the PhD expectedly, English language enjoys the same added research advantage more than the mentioned foreign languages. What is observed in the table is in addition to what is done in a separate Department of English where most research focus is on English language and literature at all levels.

What is apparent from the above scenario, taken into cognizance the relevance of research (both formal and informal) briefly mentioned above, is that Nigerian pidgin is fundamentally not well placed to compete, let alone surviving the Nigerian languages, English language and foreign languages in this 21st century except the trend is reversed. Our next research report, will take a more comprehensive appraisal of the formal research situation in several other higher institutions in Nigeria.

Society for the Promotion of Nigerian Pidgin

Closely related to the issue of increased research activities on Nigerian pidgin, is the relevance of a coherent and vibrant organization(s) for the promotion of Nigerian pidgin. The need and importance of stimulating research and development of pidgins and creoles across the world, must not be far from the objectives of the society for pidgin and Creole linguistics (SPCL0. While this society is non-existent in Nigerian institutions or non-functional, it underscores the need for a formidable organization or association to champion the promotion of Nigerian pidgin if it must be relevant in the 21st century. Many Nigerian linguists and Nigerian pidgin enthusiasts lament on its marginalization in the Nigerian sociolinguistic space, asserting that Nigerian pidgin is not just a corrupt form of English but a language on its own right as stated by Okon (2003:404) quoting Wardhagh (1986:55) "Pidgin is not seen as a "bad variety of any language, but a language or variety of language with its own legitimacy, i.e. its own history, structure, array of function...

Most other languages in Nigeria including the foreign languages have socio-cultural groups/organizations that champion and promote the course of such languages. Such organization/s should be peopled by speakers of Nigerian pidgin and/or the Creole, Nigerian pidgin enthusiasts as well as scholars and researchers. There are societies for the promotion of Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, etc languages and culture, Ibibio writers Association, Linguistic Association of Nigeria champions the promotion, and research on all Nigerian languages. The English language Association of Nigeria, British Council, etc, are all promoters of standard Nigerian English (SNE) French language and other foreign Languages are not left out. Such groups which can also be described as pressure groups mount pressure on either the Federal or State government to encourage speaking, teaching and learning of the language. They promote advocacy which may lead to the adoption of such a language as a medium of instruction in schools as well as being used in other media.

One of the most significant input of language based socio-cultural organizations is the harmonization of different varieties of the language in order to arrive at an acceptable standard form, sponsoring and seeing to the provision of a standard orthography for the language. The absence of such a group in the case of the Nigerian pidgin, denies the Nigerian pidgin such intrinsic benefits. For example, one of the bane of the growth and development of Nigerian pidgin, is the lack of an orthography or writing system. It is only a fantasy, not a reality, for a language without an orthography in the 21st century to compete for the position of „National language or even seek for more relevance in a country with languages having standardized orthographies and also metalanguages. The dearth not only on literary works in pidgin but also written works is not unconnected with the absence of a standard orthography. According to Brann (2006: 632).... “whereas NPE (Nigerian Pidgin English) is used almost wholly for speech and comparatively little in writing”. In reviewing Munzalis article on the elaboration of function of Nigerian pidgin, he identified a poem by Ken SaroWiwa – „Dis Nigeria Self as one of the few literary works in Nigerian pidgin. Literature in a language attracts interest, readership and scholarship (literary critics) to that language. This, the Nigerian pidgin lacks. A language such as Nigerian pidgin or its creolising form, though wholly used in speech by a sizeable number of people but without a written code, vibrant literature, intense research and used in pedagogical instruction; possesses traces of endangerment and possible extinction.

The Opposition From Nigerian / Foreign Languages

In the 21st century, Nigerian pidgin is operating in a fragile sociolinguistic climate comparable to the depletion of the ozone layer. The Nigerian languages, Foreign languages and English language are not leaving anything to chance in the quest for more relevance, official recognition and possible adoption as a national language. The Nigerian languages especially the major and main languages (Essien 1995) backed up by their linguistic and socio cultural groups as well as some of their politicians are strategizing for this. The languages are being repositioned, expanded, digitalized with strong advocacy and pressure for the government, especially Federal to upgrade the role already given to them in the national policy on education, which is considered inadequate. The Universal Basic Education programme recognizes the major Nigerian languages and the Languages of the immediate environment as one of the core subjects in the junior Basic certificate examination. As pointed out in Iwuchukwu(2011:176); “there is a seeming renaissance in the African language study, scholarship and development in the late 20th and 21st centuries”. The table presented earlier in this work corroborates this point. Every aspect of some Nigerian languages is being subjected to scientific, sociolinguistic and all other aspects of inquiry comparable to English and other foreign languages. They are being projected in the Nollywood films, arts, and cultural exhibitions, with an increasing global mother tongue consciousness occasioned by the fear of endangerment and /or death of dormant languages.

A national language policy is being formulated. There is no doubt that the pressure groups and scholars championing the course of Nigerian languages will have a better bargain from the policy when completed. This will put them in a vantage position to compete with other languages. The foreign languages are not relenting either For English language, which can be said to have reached the peak of language development, but for advocacy and aggressive campaign by its promoters; the British Council in Nigeria, the American Embassy etc, the dominant status as a second language, official language and language of pedagogical instruction would have been reduced or replaced by the Nigerian languages. The competition is keener in the remaining part of the 21st century. There is a clamour for establishment of a Nigerian English language village.

Other foreign languages such as French, German, etc are abreast with the linguistic climate in Nigeria especially in the 21st century. A German language school has been established in Lagos with various incentives like scholarship to woo more Nigerians. Both the Government of France, French Language Association, etc are mounting pressure that French be made the second official language in Nigeria. Very recently, a representative of the Honorable Minister of Education, spoke in a public function that

“Nigeria is on the verge of joining the organization of French-speaking countries.”

This implies that Nigeria will soon adopt French as a second official language which will also be used for pedagogical instruction. Already, there is a Nigerian French village in Badagry. There is also a growing interest in Arabic due mainly to its connection with Islam, a religion of a significant proportion of the Nigerian population. A Nigerian Arabic village is already established in Maiduguri.

All the above are clearly challenges that the Nigerian pidgin is faced with in this century. It does appear that the Nigerian Pidgin and the promoters lack the aggressiveness, tenacity political connection and enough self will employed by others to withstand these challenges. Okon(2003:404) citing Elugbe(1995) made reference to the attitude of disdain towards the Nigerian pidgin as follows, “One meets highly placed government officials who speak Nigerian pidgin but do not believe it should be allocated a role in language policy in Nigeria”. We are of the opinion that this assertion is not only true of Nigerian government officials but also Nigerian Academics and other elites. Most of the Scholars that route for the advancement of Nigerian pidgin and its further development to the status of a National language, are avowed promoters of their own indigenous languages, which they seek to be assigned the same role. While they speak with their mouths for Nigerian pidgin, their hearts (commitment) tend to be after their mother tongues. This appears to explain why it is difficult to have a group or Association whose sole interest is the promotion of Nigerian pidgin. Essien (2003:37) tend to be an exception when in his national language policy recommendation, he clearly spelt out that:

Nigerian Pidgin (NP), or Nigeria National Language
Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba regional language for the North
East and West respectively. Ibibio, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Edo,
Ejagham, Efik, Urhobo/If sekiri, Tiv/Idoma ,Jaw, Nupe etc should be state languages.

However, he has remained the doyen of Ibibio language and linguistics development.

The LAN Contention and Connection

The linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) mentioned earlier in this work is an academic association dedicated to the promotion of the study of linguistics and Nigerian languages in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. LAN is specially highlighted in this paper not just as a formidable body whose influence, activities and connection favour Nigeria languages that Nigeria Pidgin and the promoters have to contend with for survival in the 21st century Nigeria, but more also to present a model for enthusiasts and promoters of Nigeria pidgin to adopt if they are to fast track its growth, development and relevance in this century. The LAN has consistently held conferences on the various aspects of teaching and research in Nigerian Languages. Such conferences are always a harvest of intellectual inquiries into several topical areas of language and Nigerian languages in particular. They also have their Annual

General meetings (AGM) where they map out strategies for the promotion and survival of these languages in all spheres of life. They engage in advocacy and sensitization of relevant stake holders on the need to use the languages and to enhance their status. They dialogue with the policymakers and make inputs to their educational and language policies. Their festschrift series is another intellectual harvest which is dedicated to very seasoned linguists who have contributed significantly to the growth of linguistics, Nigerian languages study and development. The Festschrift is being adopted by several Academic Associations in Nigeria. It should be mentioned also that, pockets of works on Nigeria pidgin are also observed in both the LAN conferences and the Festschriften, sometimes by the same people. However, it need to be pointed out that it may not be appropriate and efficiently workable for the same organization working for the growth and development of Nigerian languages, to be the one also canvassing for the promotion of Nigerian pidgin without satisfying and carrying on with one and leaving the other behind. Even if this is to be possible to some extent in terms of theorising on pidgin, projecting Nigerian pidgin as an independent language accorded a pride of place among other competing in a multilingual complexity like Nigeria; is a different thing altogether, requiring a distinct approach and methodology.

LAN's contention and connection for the development of Nigerian languages translates into the provision of more orthographies for more Nigerian languages, documentation of endangered languages, development of metalanguage, stimulation of Vigorous research, making input to policy formulation etc. These language engineering processes are basically fundamental for any language aspiring for enhanced status without which such aspiration becomes only a fantasy not a reality.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at the Nigerian Pidgin in the 21st century: Any hope of surviving the opposition from English, Nigerian Languages and Foreign Languages. Anchored on Hudson's theory of solidarity and accommodation which recognizes that language choice and preference is one of its manifestations as well as Krippendorff's recursive communication theory which identifies that language depends on rules and history to account for relationships among its speakers. We see that the choice, of which language will survive in the complex Nigerian sociolinguistics climate in the 21st century, must not be unconnected with the historical facts about the language as well as adherence to the sociolinguistics procedures.

We observe that while Nigeria's multilingual background with about 400 languages, a dominant second and official language as well as a number of foreign languages is a historical fact that favours the emergence of Nigerian pidgin as a National or official language, having an enhanced status in the 21st century; several other rules or criteria that could facilitate the actualization of this are either non-existent or insignificant compared with other competing languages. It does not have any standard orthography or writing system, only very few works done at the informal level and almost a non-existent formal research activities with an average of 0.43 per year at the undergraduate level for thirty years.

For three decades, there was no PhD dissertation on Nigeria pidgin using our Institution of reference. There is not only little literature in Nigerian pidgin but there is little in writing generally. It is not used for pedagogical instruction at any level of education in Nigeria. Furthermore, we discovered that there is no academic or social-cultural group dedicated to the promotion and development of Nigeria pidgin. Our findings further reveal that, Nigerian languages, English language and other foreign languages like French, having almost all that Nigeria pidgin lacks are in stiff contention for survival and more recognition, mobilizing every resources at their disposal.

Our submission is that the Nigerian sociolinguistic climate in the 21st century is fragile comparable to the depletion of the ozone layer. If urgent steps such as being taken to remedy the effect of the ozone layer depletion, is not taken to develop, promote, revitalize and sustain the Nigeria pidgin, it will not survive the opposition from the competing languages.

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