

Nigerian Pidgin as a National Tool for Communication

Abstract

The research hinges on the national adverts created with the use of Nigerian Pidgin. Nigerian pidgin has always been a language frowned at, mostly when used among the literates. However, it has become a language used for national adverts in order to disseminate information that is meant for all, both the literates and illiterates. Some of these adverts are as follow: family planning, registration of voter's card, prevention of corona virus and security. From the findings, in other to communicate effectively to the people due to the multi-ethnicity of Nigeria, Nigerian pidgin has been used to checkmate over-population which exposes youths to various vices, curbing of electoral disenfranchisement and fraud, educating people on the safety measures to prevent contracting of Corona virus and how to help government in protecting the lives and properties of the people by reporting anything that is unusual within the community. This simply means that Nigerian Pidgin has gained a whole lot of ground. Thereby, it has become a suitable language of communication that cuts across all walks of life and people of different ethnicities. Since Nigerian pidgin is gaining ground in Nigeria, it is recommended that some of the linguistic items should be look into in order to make it a more functional and acceptable language by all.

Introduction

The study of language contact addresses the dynamics and outcomes of bilingual and multilingual interaction in a society. It cuts across some branches of linguistics like sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and psycholinguistics. It also extends to micro-linguistic investigations like phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Language contact is also a major factor in language change. Language contact often occurs along borders or as a result of migration. Contact with other languages and dialectal varieties of one language can result to alternative pronunciations, grammatical structures and vocabulary. Prolonged language contact gives birth to the following offspring in the study of sociolinguistics: bilingualism or multilingualism, code switching, code mixing, pidgins, language death, among others. However, this work concentrates on one of these offsprings which is pidgin as it relates to national communication through visual adverts.

The term *pidgin* was said to be first recorded in English in 1807, as English was adopted as the business and trade language of Canton (Guangzhou), China. At the time, the term *business English* was often written as *pigeon English*, a spelling that reflects the local pronunciation. The necessity of communication in order to have an effective trading between the English and Cantonese led to the development of Chinese Pidgin English. As the

trading increased, it became so obvious that interpreters were few among the local Cantonese traders and their European counterparts. Many local traders applied whatever little English they learned from the little contacts they made with the people that spoke English more fluently. This brought about various varieties of Standard English in Canton. As it relates to Nigeria, the trade contact between the British and the local people led to the advent of Nigerian Pidgin in the seventeenth century. However, recently, Nigerian Pidgin has been tagged as an urbanization process; therefore, it is now evident across urban areas among the literate and illiterate and people from different ethnic groups for communication. Holm (1988, p.4) defines pidgin as “a reduced language that results from extended contact between groups of people with no language in common”. Pidgin is also sometimes regarded as a reduced variety of a normal language (Wardhaugh, 2010, p.58). For instance in Nigerian, English serves as a lingua franca and so many speakers of other Nigerian languages till date find it difficult to embrace this foreign language, mostly the illiterates. Therefore, in the process of finding a soft landing during communication with people of different cultures and walks of life, they use Nigerian Pidgin. Nigerian Pidgin is described as a combination of indigenous languages like Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, among others and English. Pidgin constructions can be structured or unstructured unlike other full-fledged languages. This simply means that there are no strict rules governing pidgin utterances. The term Nigerian Pidgin and not Pidgin English is now widely used and acceptable because other languages alongside English language contributed to the lexical stock. It will be, therefore, unfair to the other donor languages to insist on epithet English after Pidgin. Nigerian Pidgin has become an everyday language of communication that cuts across all ages, both young and old. It is also a popular communicative means among most Nigerians as it is a language which blends together the relationship between the educated and uneducated. It has permeated into the Nigerian society so much lately that it is now used in some national adverts. The use of Nigerian Pidgin has become a common phenomenon to people in various walks of life in the quest of communication. It is the language most frequently used as a means of inter-ethnic communication in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. Communication is fundamental to the existence and survival of humans. It is a process of creating and sharing ideas, information, views, facts, feelings, and so on among the people to reach a common understanding. During communication, if the recipient(s) does not understand the content of the message, then communication has not taken place. The coming together of people of various cultures led to language contact and the quest for communication brought about pidgin which is one of the

realisations of language contact. Therefore, this work examines national communication via adverts using Nigerian Pidgin.

Review of Concepts

The study of language contact centres on different individuals that alternate two or more languages and this alternation of languages gave birth to the Nigeria Pidgin. Therefore, this section takes a look at various views of language contact and pidgins.

Language is an expression of human activity. People use language in everyday conversations, like in transacting business, vacations, debating, politics and so many others. This leads us to Clark's (1996, p.125) view on language and communication which says, "All speech, written or spoken is a dead language until it finds a willing and prepared hearer". It is impossible to talk about language without communication because language and communication play a vital role in the society. Language is seen as either a facilitator or hindrance to communication, but when it is used appropriately, it can exert powerful control over people's thought and actions to make them desire to have what they do not have and do things they would ordinarily not think of doing (Okolo & Ezike- Ojiaku, 1999,p.2). This is where the need for pidgin as an appropriate language for national communication comes in due to the multi-ethnicity of Nigeria in order to reach out to people of all walks of life. The coming together of these people of different languages brings about language contact. Holm (2004, p.21) considers language contact to be nearly as old as language itself. To support this idea he points out that in ancient Egypt there was a trade language developed among several Hamito-Semitic languages in contact in the Nile Valley, which can be considered a pidgin. A pidgin or pidgin language is a simplified version of a language that develops as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common. It is most commonly employed in situations such as trade, or where both groups speak languages different from the language of the country in which they reside. Furthermore, pidgin language is said to be a variety created by combining two or more existing languages through the process of 'pidginization'. When people need to communicate but speak different native languages, they may combine their own languages to create a new 'pidgin language'. This language is then transferred by word of mouth to others and becomes the acknowledged way for the different speaking communities to communicate. Winford (2003) examined different types of language contact and claimed that different outcomes emanate from different social situations. In other words, language contact focuses on the situations in which they were formed. The following are the different contact outcomes mentioned in the work: language

maintenance, language shift, and language creation. From the aforementioned, it shows that different circumstances and different levels of contact intensity bring about slight differences in linguistic results within these general outcomes of which pidgin is inclusive and can be classified also under language creation. Furthermore, Thomason (2001, p.1) defined language contact as “the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time”. Moreso, that the most common result of language contact is a change in languages in a way that one language may affect the other. In summation, she is of the view that languages in contact lead to a hierarchy in language classification which starts from contact-induced language change, extreme mixture of language (represented by pidgin, Creole, and bilingual mixed languages), and language death. Fishman (1989) portrays the three possible resolutions of language contact. Here, the immigrant language is the “intrusive” language, while the host language is the “indigenous” language. Therefore, when both come into contact the following are likely to be the possibilities. The first possibility is that when the indigenous language comes in contact with the intrusive language, the intrusive language is lost. The second possibility or resolution happens when an indigenous language interacts with an intrusive language; here, the indigenous is lost. The third is that when an indigenous language comes in contact with an intrusive language; both languages are preserved. This last resolution is the theoretical foundation used in its study where the indigenous language (Syriac) is used side by side with the intrusive languages mainly the current dominant language (Arabic) through its long history.

In the study of pidgin, various people viewed pidgin from different perspectives. Pidgin is defined as a contact language and is sometimes called a “makeshift”, “marginal” language, or “mixed languages” (Crystal, 1987, p. 334). Malmkjaer and Anderson (2001, p.81) listed sources for the term pidgin. Some of these sources indicated that it is a Chinese corruption of the English word “business”. On the other hand, that it may be derived from the two Chinese characters, *Pei* and *tsin* meaning “paying money”, or from the South American Indian language, Yago, whose word for the people is ‘Pidian’. Pidgin is also defined as, “... a variety of a language (English) which developed for some practical purpose, such as trading among a group of people who had a lot of contact, but who did not know each other’s language” (Yule, 1996, p.233). Furthermore, he pointed out that, “When a pidgin develops beyond its role as a trade language and becomes the first language of a social community, it is described as a Creole” (Yule, 1996, p.234). Pidgin can also be seen as a marginal language which arises to fulfil certain restricted communicative needs among people who do not share a common language.” This means that pidgins are simple forms of languages commonly used

for limited communication between people with no common language and that pidgins are more generally the result of any situation of language contact.

Practically, Farooq (2010) compares the relationship that exists between Pidgin, “broken English” as well as the "Nigerian English". He says that Broken English is somewhat a pejorative label used by native speakers of the English language to describe the often hysterical violations of the basic rules of standard English syntax by non-natural speakers of the language while Pidgin, on the other hand, is seen as a technical term in linguistics that refers to a "contact" or "trade" language that emerged from the fusion of foreign languages and indigenous languages. Akande (2008, p.38) argues that Pidgin could be regarded as a marker of identity and solidarity. It is an inter-ethnic code available to Nigerians, who have no other common language. It is also a mixture of the languages of the world use for things like trade, migration empires and historical movement. In addition to the above stated, pidgin is sometimes a lingua franca; that is, a simplified bridge language evolving through necessity, as a result of extended contact between languages. It is formed from numerous languages and influences. Pidgin is a wide term covering a range of regional hybrids, which evolved through historical events such as the spread of empires, settlements, migration and international trade. The origin of pidgin in Nigeria can be traced to trade contact between the British and local people in the seventeenth century. It is part of a continuum of English pidgin and Creoles spoken in other West African countries like Cameroon, Ghana, Benin republic, Sierra Leone, etc. In the past the use of pidgin in Nigeria was mainly identified with non- educated people, i.e. people that speak pidgin then were either undetected or deemed to be uneducated. However lately, the use of Nigerian pidgin is now more rampant; even the educated people of the country use it to communicate where it is used among people belonging to different ethnic groups; the majority are seen in the southern parts of Nigeria. Shaibu (2013) describes Nigerian pidgin as a combination of indigenous languages and English. It basically uses English words mixed into Yoruba, Benin or Igbo grammar. Nigerian pidgin used to be seen mainly as the code of non-literate as well as a bastardization of English; therefore, it was considered as indicative of academic proficiency in English. However, Akande (2008,p.4) notes that the social linguistic reality in Nigeria today is such that Nigerian pidgin is now spoken by university graduates, professors, lawyers and journalists. The study carried out by Akande and Salami (2010) opine that the urban characters of the university environments are strong factors influencing the students’ use and attitudes to Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). That is, apart from their education, living within the university communities, the students are likely to enact more urban networks that are usually made up of multilingual and

multicultural contents. On this note, the university communities have a large number of users of the Nigerian pidgin. Basically, it could be argued that Nigerian pidgin plays a unifying role among its users, as it is the language of the educated and the uneducated irrespective of their linguistic backgrounds.

The origin of pidgin language dates far back into history. Hall (1966, p.25) states that the earliest pidgins that have a direct record are those which European crusaders and traders spoke in the eastern end of the Mediterranean during the Middle Ages. Another linguist, Valkhoff (1966, p.1) observes that in the Middle Ages, commercial relations between the Romantic traders or seamen, Turks and Arabs in the eastern and southern Mediterranean gave rise to a kind of auxiliary or emergency language. Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p.1) explain that “The one fact about pidgin languages all over the world is that they arise from contact situations. In particular, such contact situations must be those in which the groups in contact have no common means of communication”. Therefore, the convergence of people from different linguistic environments result to language contact and the quest for language for communication leads to the birth of pidgin in which this study is based on. Therefore, this study portrays some of the national adverts created with Nigerian pidgin for effective communication that will cut across people of all walks of life.

Nigeria Pidgin for National Advert

Nigerian pidgin has been receiving greater attention lately because of the socioeconomic benefits it offers to both the literate and the illiterate in the country. There is a growing data that give evidence to the increasingly important role which users have accorded Nigerian pidgin in social interactions in which advertisement is inclusive. Intrinsically, adverts consist of persuasive words and images used to convey messages to target audiences. For this reason, there is need for a language that will be suitable for every advert meant for a particular audience in order to achieve its goal. National advert is not group specific; therefore the choice of language becomes paramount. Nigerian pidgin plays an important role in uniting people of various linguistic backgrounds; it is a language for communication. It makes communication in the environment easy as both the literate and illiterate are able to use it to interact with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Also, when there is need for communication among individuals of different backgrounds, a simplified language from two or more languages may arise and such resultant language is called a pidgin. Therefore, pidgin is a simplified language made up of parts of two or more languages, like Nigerian pidgin used as a communication tool between speakers who do not have a common language and this

helps to sustain interaction in a community. In spite of the negative attitude towards Nigerian pidgin, it still flourishes, even in national advertisement as a way to communicate to the masses of all walks of life in things concerning health, security, politics, and election, among other things as demonstrated in some of the national advertisement stated below.

Advert on Family Planning

Mi people, una get to sabi de main de main tin wey dey for family planning. Na differen differen metod na I dey:

Speaker one- Me be hairdresser and I don already get two pikin but I won wait small before I go bon anoda one.

Na correct method, I dey for u.

Speaker two- We jus marry and we wan settle down well well before we go start family Correct metod, I dey for una.

Speaker 3- I neva marry, I wan face my fashion design and until I do my freedom.

Correct metod dey for you sef

Speaker 4- As you dey see me so, baba God don bless me wit plenty pikin and I no wan bon anoda one.

Correct metod dey for you sef

Eh! So where una come dey go now?

We dey go do family planning oo!

If you won do family planning or na infomat wey you wan, waka go any clinic wey get de blue, yellow an orange logo wey dem dey call 'Get it together'. Na Edo ministry of health bring una dis 'Get it together' campaign.

Nigeria at some point became over-populated with a huge mass of poor people, albeit, it has not improved lately. Also, not minding the poor economic challenges Nigeria is facing, you will still find some parents that are economically handicapped giving birth to anumber of children they cannot manage, which in turn results to exposing these children to so many vices like robbery, prostitution, internet frauds, and so on. The incessant abortion and child birth among the youth has become the order of the day too. Therefore, in order to checkmate these ordeals that the country is experiencing, the government created an advert on family planning using Nigerian pidgin in order to educate people on various ways unwanted pregnancy can be prevented.

Advert on Registration of Voters Card

Beta don land for our country.

Time don reach wey we go do correct election wey no go get magumagu at all.

One man, one vote

One vote only

Na im make INEC call on men and women way don reach 18 years and above make dem go regista for dis voter's registration wey dey come on de 15th January reach 29th January, 2011.

The one way don regista befo, make I jus tell you, I no mean anytin an na de place wey you go vote na de place wey you go regista oo

If you notice magumagu anywhere, INEC don get special number way you go jus send message. De number na 4632.

Wetin I call am?

4632

Na na I do finish. I talk am before, I no dey take time. Dis na my card. If you no holam, you no go fit vote, so for me, I go keep am well well.

The above advert is also meant for national consumption because during election period, you hear some people complaining of being disenfranchised, unable to vote due to loss of voter's card, not having a voter's card at all or due to relocation from the area where the voter's card was obtained as an excuse for their candidate's loss in an election or the election not being justified. Therefore, the advert is to inform the masses on the available opportunity through which they can carry out their civic duties and enlighten them too on how to checkmate all kinds of electoral fraud in the country, as well as the authority they can report to in case the need arises. This advert was also created using language for all which is the Nigerian pidgin.

Safety Measures on Corona Virus

Mi people, una don hear about dis new deadly disease wey dem dey call Corona virus?

Wetin go shele wen person don catch am?

Corona virus fit spread from everytin wey we fit touch; weda na table, weda na door, money or anytin at all. De virus dey follow spread pesin wey get am touch you or you use your hand touch your eye, nose, mouth or even your ears join. The symptoms wey corona virus dey take waka na dry cough, fever and wen I dey hard for you to breath. De people wey get corona virus, dey fit dey alright but if na old pesin or somebody wey get sickness before for body, I fit dye.

Corona virus dey dangerous pas cough and catarrh. Only one pesin fit spread de virus fiam reach plenty people one time. Corona virus no get cure as we dey so. As we dey so, we

suppose arrange ourself make sure we no get and we no share am give people. I dey very important to make sure say you use soap and water wash your hand well well. Wash like say you touch hand with pepper. Anoda tin wey you fit do na beta marking from anybody wey don get am or wey dey sick.

No shake anybody

No hug anybody

Hold your sef

If you fit dey for house, dey

Make people wey sabi wetin to do help us find solution. Mi people, de solution dey our hands so. Make we respect ourself do de right tin. If you get any of de symptoms, fever, dry cough and wen I dey hard for you to breath, abeg call this number so.

Dated back late last year, the whole world started experiencing a pandemic known as Corona virus or covid-19 which has handicapped all. Various adverts were put up to educate the masses on how to manage the ugly situation that is ravaging the world. Definitely, the adverts have to be fashioned in such a way that the audience will understand the message and the main tool for disseminating the message is language. This message is meant for all; therefore the use of pidgin is to be able to communication to both the literate and the illiterate in order to enlighten them on how to avoid this deadly virus and the steps to take if it is accidentally contracted.

Advertisement on Security

Nigerians, una sabi wetin be Improvised Explosive Device wey dem dey call (IED)? IED dey come for different size dem. Dey fit hide am inside bag dem, box or different kinds of container dem. Dey fit put IED for inside mineral bottle and de big IED fit dey inside boot for moto.

IED dem dey dangerous oo!

IED dem fit dey anywhere anytime!

Make una look ground wello for package or moto wey dey pack leave for road or anywhere wey dey one kind. So therefore, shine your eyes, no play with your security at all at all o. Report anywhere you suspect or object or konkere movement to police or oda security agents dem. De security of our nation na for all of us o, plus including me and you. Nigeria make we unite against terrorism.

Na federal ministry for information and culture bring you dis message.

Nigeria has been facing the challenge of insecurity from time immemorial but it has reached its climax recently due to the careless detonation of bombs here and there, claiming as many lives as it did during Biafran war. In the quest of curbing this incessant killing of the masses, an advert was created in order to educate people on how to help the government in securing lives and properties. This is another instance of national advert that involves all masses both the literate and the illiterate. Therefore, the use of language which will aid in achieving the goal of the advert is needed, and that is the Nigerian pidgin.

Conclusion

Language is used for the purpose of communication between individuals. When a common language is lacking, communication becomes a problem. Initially, the use of Nigerian pidgin was attributed to illiterate people and perceived by the educated ones with negative attitude; but due to social-interactive function of the Nigerian pidgin, it is now considered as a lingua franca for many and as a mother tongue for some families in certain areas. So recently, the use of Nigerian pidgin has cut across both literate and illiterate people and now seems more Nigerian than the full-fledged English. Indeed, using Nigerian pidgin is increasingly popular now among young and old people, many writers, politicians, actors, musicians, students, lecturers and in Nigeria adverts on which this work is based. The fact that it is not attached to any ethnic group may likely be one of the reasons why it is widely spreading. In addition, the simplicity and absence of sophisticated English terminologies, an illiterate can easily understand the information the advert is trying to portray; thereby, achieving the stated goals for the advert.

Recommendation

Nigeria is a country that comprises of people from different ethnic groups with different languages for communication. It is on this ground that the advent of Nigerian pidgin emanated from because communication must take place for various activities. Since Nigerian pidgin is fast gaining ground in order to communicate with the masses over certain issues that will be of benefit to individuals and community at large, proper measures are recommended for proper structure of this fast gaining language, Nigerian pidgin. For instance, consistency of lexical and having a definite markers for plural words and tenses.

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