A STUDY OF SYNTAX OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN AND CREOLE

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian Pidgin is indisputably the most efficient means of inter-ethnic communication among the densely, culturally and linguistically heterogeneous people of Nigeria. Nigerian Pidgin has nativized and expanded in some parts of the country. In these areas, it has creolized and become the first language of some speech communities. These languages have been viewed as inferior languages that do not have regular pattern in terms of syntax. This paper therefore adds and agrees to existing studies that Nigerian Pidgin does have syntax. Data were generated mostly from a library research, while few others were got randomly from a daily observation of Nigerian Pidgin used by students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study is based on the systemic-functional grammar. The findings of the research proved that Nigerian Pidgin does have pattern in sentence formation. It is recommended that Nigerian Pidgin be accorded the respect of a fully fledged language.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Language Shift: It is a social phenomenon, whereby one language replaces another in a given society. It is also referred to as language replacement or assimilation.

Language/Code Alternation: It is the union of two sets of strings or patterns ie language A and B in speech situation.

Diglossia: It is a situation in which two languages (or two varieties of the same language) are used under different conditions within a community often by the same speakers.

Language Death: It is a process that affects speech communities where the level of the linguistic competence that speaker possess of a given language variety is decreased, eventually resulting in no native or fluent speakers of the variety.

Bilingualism: It refers to the existence of more than one language in an individual or community.

Substrate/Substratum: It is a language which has lower power or prestige than another.

Superstrate/Superstratum: It is the language that has higher power or prestige.

INTRODUCTION

Language is no doubt one of the most valuable assets endowed man by God. Language is used to mark man's identity, express his thoughts, and preserve his culture. A famous Nigerian linguist Adetugbo asserts that "all human societies and institutions are made possible only by man's possession of language. In short, it is language that defines man's humanity" (1). Due to the insatiable nature of man and the need to survive in a highly competitive world, there became need for his interaction with one another. This interaction is usually possible through language.

It is a well-known sociolinguistic fact that when two or more languages come in contact, different kinds of sociolinguistic chemistry take place. Sometimes a diglossic situation may result, or language shift, or even language death. In some other instance, it can lead to formation of a pidgin, a creole or even birth of a new language altogether (Sebbaqtd. in Ajani 2). Other phenomena that could result from languages coming in contact with one another are: bilingualism, borrowing, code alternation, etc. This paper is interested in the study of pidgin and creole with emphasis on the syntax of Nigerian Pidgin.

Many people have already put out some quantity of literature on the subject of pidgin, trying to trace its origin, structure, ethnolinguistic and sociolinguistic relevance. People like Hall, Hymes, etc have all written good survey works on different aspects of pidgin and creoles. In Nigeria, such writers as Banjo, Agheyisi, Mafeni have concentrated on Nigerian Pidgin.

Pidgin was once, and still is in some places, thought of, as the language of the uneducated, of those who could not make it to school. This perhaps arose partly because of its origin and the fact that it once had its speakers mostly among the lowly in society-artisans, office messengers, cooks, drivers, petty traders, etc. Pidgin has been variously defined by linguists, some from a positive view, others from a parochial, prejudiced point of view. These diverse views about pidgin and its resultant creole, especially that which sees pidgin as an inferior language that lacks syntactic structure, are what this paper intends to clear.

THE ORIGIN AND DEFINITION OF PIDGIN

Opinions differ on the origin of the word "Pidgin". Edwards traces the word "pidgin" to Portuguese "Ocupacao" which means "business" or "pequeno" meaning "babytalk" or simply "baby". He says that the word could as well be linked to the Amerindian "pidian" which means "people". He concludes by defining pidgin as "a baby-like and rather superficial repetitions associated with trade communications" (42). Holmes refutes the above assertion saying that "pidgins and creoles are real languages not baby talk, they are used for serious purposes" (81).

Todd sees pidgin as a marginal language which arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language. She further says that "pidginization, takes place whenever and wherever people of linguistically different backgrounds are brought together in contact" (1). Decamp describes pidgin as an incidental communicative language within a multilingual setting which "is the native language of nobody". Its vocabulary, according to Decamp, is denoted by the socio-politically dominant language in the original contact situation,

most especially, with the European imperialists. Pidgin is therefore an amalgam of the main, foreign and superstrate language and the indigenous or substrate language.

For the researcher, a pidgin is a language which developed as a result of the need for communication between the Europeans and Africans in the early fourteenth century. A pidgin has no native speakers but it is used as a medium of communication between people who are native speakers of other languages because it is simplified with reduced vocabulary and grammatical structure. A pidgin is influenced by the society where it exists. As such, it is fashioned in ways it can reflect the ideals and world view of the society. This is the case of Nigerian Pidgin.

THE PROBLEM

Pidgin and creole are languages that are created through contact situation. These languages are mostly seen as debased, sparse and intellectually inferior languages rather than full languages that serve special communicative purposes.

To worsen the situation, some believe that pidgin and creole constitute haphazard admixtures of linguistic elements. In essence, they believe that the languages lack convention on how lexical items are arranged to make meaning. This research paper has been embarked on to investigate Nigerian Pidgin with regard to syntax.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to prove that Nigerian Pidgin and creole are full languages that should be accorded respect. Also, the study is to prove that the two languages have syntactic structure contrary to speculation by some people that the languages rely on haphazard placement of linguistic elements.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study will be limited to the following aspects of syntax of Nigerian Pidgin: number markings in nouns, number, gender and case in pronouns, and question formation.

METHODOLOGY

This research is basically a documentary research because most materials were gathered from books. Speech extracts were gathered using random sampling from students of NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka. The researchers made use of the descriptive and interpretative technique to analyse the data gathered.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nigerian Pidgin is frequently described as a ‘marginal’ language, an inferior language used by people who need to communicate for certain restricted purposes. This language is functionally very important and has served various communicative purposes in literature, business, entertainment industry, tertiary institutions etc. The use of Nigerian Pidgin or a variety of language must take into consideration the ‘context’ of its use for it to yield maximum intended meaning.

Studying language in this perspective is a functional approach, which finds its place in the systemic functional theory.

The term "systemic" refers to the view of language as a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning. The term "functional" indicates that the approach is concerned with the contextualized, practical uses to which language is put as opposed to formal grammar, which focuses on compositional semantics, syntax and word classes. The model reviewed is context oriented and hinged on the functional use of language; correctness or well-formedness is not a matter here. The social theory of meaning as expressed in the systemic theory of language is therefore the most appropriate language theory for this study since the choice of Nigerian Pidgin is context based.

CREOLE

The English term creole comes from French creole, which is cognate to the Spanish term criollo and Portuguese crioulo, all emanating from the verb criar ("to breed" or "to raise") all coming from Latin creare ("to produce, create"). The specific sense of the term was coined in the 16th and 17th century, during the great expansion in the European maritime power and trade that led to the establishment of European colonies in other continents. The term passed through a semantic shift to refer to customs and language of those in the colonies and later to any language derived from a pidgin based on a European language; typically English, French, Portuguese, Spanish or Dutch. Now the term refers to any language of this type, irrespective of what the input language has been.

A creole is believed to arise when a pidgin, developed by adults for use as a second language, becomes the native and primary language of their children through a process of nativization. The development of creole arises basically under two basic situations. One is where speakers of pidgins are put in a situation in which they cannot use their respective tongues. This has arisen in the course of slave trade (in the Caribbean and the Southern United States) where speakers were deliberately kept in separate groups to avoid their plotting rebellion. They were then forced to maintain the pidgin which they had developed up to then and passed it on to future generations as their mother tongue, thus forming the transition from a pidgin to a creole.

A second situation is where a pidgin is regarded by a social group as a higher language variety and deliberately cultivated; this is the kind of situation which obtained in Cameroon and which does still to some extent on Papua New Guinea. The outcome of this kind of situation is that children of such speakers who use pidgins for prestige reasons may end up using the pidgin as a first language. This situation renders the pidgin a creole with the attendant relinquishing of the native language of their parents and the expansion of all linguistic levels for the new creole to act as a fully-fledged language. As for the researcher, creole is a one-time pidgin which has become the mother tongue of a speech community.

PIDGIN AND CREOLE

Pidgin and creoles are new language systems which are created with amazing rapidity. Very often, they arose as the distinctive by-product of European colonial exploits, though it should be stressed that there is a whole range of possible situations which might stimulate this kind of language formation. A paradigm case of pidginization arose with the transportation of slaves from a variety of linguistic backgrounds to an isolated plantation, under the domination of the white masters. The resultant linguistic chemistry created the need for a shared lingua franca, especially as the opportunities for learning a fully-fledged second language became severely limited.

The pidgin created under these conditions is the native of no one, although it does draw on the linguistic resources of both the (superstratum) European language and the various (substratum) non-European languages. A common pattern has emerged, whereby the vocabulary originates largely with the superstratum language, while the phonology and syntax normally derive from the substratum languages. The process of creolization is normally described as an expansion in the linguistic potential of the pidgin: the phonology, morphology, lexis and syntax of an emerging creole all show signs of elaboration from the original pidgin. Furthermore, the children of pidgin-speaking parents can acquire a creole as a native language.

Many pidgins and creoles have developed independently, in disparate regions of the world, yet, remarkably; they often bear a strong resemblance to one another in terms of their underlying grammatical organization. Creole languages are said to develop in situations where the adults in a community speak mutually unintelligible native languages and must rely on a pidgin to communicate with each other. As children acquire the pidgin, they use it with playmates. Such situations often arose on slave plantations in the Americas, where Africans from linguistically diverse backgrounds could only communicate in a pidgin. Their descendants began to use pidgin as a first language, and from this sort of development came such creoles as Haitian Creole (based on French), Gutt and other creoles. Pidgins and creoles have proven to be highly systematic. This is evident on the usage. The Languages have been used in good literature by the likes of Ezenwa Ohaeto, Wole Soyinka, Aig-Imoukhuede etc. They have also been employed in broadcasting news in some radio stations in Nigeria. Consequently, we must reject the superficial view that they constitute corruptor or haphazard admixture of linguistic elements.

NIGERIAN PIDGIN

Nigerian Pidgin, like most pidgins spoken in different places all over the world, came about from the contact between Nigeria and their colonial masters, (Britain). Due to the initial trading contacts between Nigerians and the Portuguese in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin has elements from the Portuguese language; such words include, “dash”, “palaver”. Mafeni has it that,

> Nigerian Pidgin is essentially a product of the process of urbanization. While its origin lies historically … on the coast, its development and spread is the result of contacts between Africans (Qht in Elugbe and Omamor 15).

Akindele and Adegbite, speaking on Nigerian Pidgin, said that the language is a blend of the indigenous languages of the West African coast and those of foreign traders. They also believe that the language is a lingua franca used in Nigeria. Jowitt concurs with the above view with a

slight modification that Nigerian Pidgin is a lingua franca in higher institutions. Of the over four hundred indigenous languages spoken by Nigerians, only Nigerian Pidgin enjoys the privilege of being spoken by people from all walks of life and social strata. It is no longer restricted to small talk; it is no longer the language of the uneducated but has gained currency among the educated Nigerians. It has attained the status of language of literature, business and music. Jowitt supporting the above said:

> The use of pidgin thus bristles with potential symbolism and it is not surprising that its resources have been exploited by Nigerian writers, such as Achebe … and Soyinka … (14).

Nigerian Pidgin has become partly indispensable in Nigeria as Elugbe said that "it is certain that no other language in Nigeria, be it indigenous or foreign, which has the number of speakers that Nigerian Pidgin has … (288). In summary, Nigerian Pidgin shares with English the unique feature of being the only ethnically neutral language in Nigeria. It is spread all over Nigeria and spoken by Nigerians of different ethnic origins; it is indigenous to Nigeria because it originated, sustained and expanded in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The greatest accusation of Nigerian Pidgin and pidgin world over is that they are over "simplified" and that they have no syntax that can be formally learnt or taught. This of course is not true because there is no language however primitive its speakers are, that is just a mere throwing of words haphazardly to form sentences. In essence, Nigerian Pidgin follows certain definite pattern to form sentences otherwise it will not make meaning. The syntactic features of Nigerian Pidgin under investigation in the study are: number marking in nouns, number and gender marking in pronouns and the derivation of Yes/No and wh-questions.

1.1 Number Marking in Nouns

According to Mafeni "… the grammatical categories of English do not necessarily fit the patterns of pidgin" (110). He explained that the derivation of the plural form of a count noun can only be done by placing the independent plural marker 'dem' after the noun. This implies that the structure of a plural noun is N+dem. Worthy of note here is that 'dem' is also the word for the third person plural pronoun. The following data correspond to Mafeni's point:

Pl. → Plural
Neg.→ Negative
Aux. → Auxiliary
Loc. → Locative
Perf.→ Perfective
Sg, → Singular
Prog.→ Progressive

1a. Di kapintadem de kom.
the carpenter pl aux.come
"The carpenters are coming"

b. A no see the bricklayer dem.
I neg. see the bricklayer pl.
"I did not see the bricklayers".

The data reveals that the plural form of a noun is realized at N + S (+dem). This means that the plural kapinta is either kapintas or kapintasdem. The N+S is similar to English. Other examples from the data gathered include:

Wi tel awa draivas mek dem no come.
We tell our drivers (pl) make they neg. come
"We told our drivers not to come"

Tri bosisdem don lodwaka
Three buses (pl.) perf. loadwaka
"Three buses have been loaded and have left"

Plentiorengisdem de disfrij
Plenty oranges (pl.) loc. this refrigerator
"There are many oranges in this refrigerator".

Other points about 'dem' that follows a noun in a noun phrase is that it is generally regarded as just a plural marker but Ndimele (2013) conceives it as a totaliser in the sense that it can be used to express an accompaniment. His examples are: De gaildem don mari.
Pita dem don mari.

From what has been stated in literature, the researcher believes that the 'dem' that follows a noun and is itself followed by a verb phrase can also be analysed as an optional concord marker (subject or object). Analysing 'dem' in this position as a concord marker is supported by the fact that it is possible to have a sequence of 'dem' occurring in the same sentence: 'dem' as plural marker and also as a concord marker, for instance:

Frank demdem don mari "Frank and his group are married"
All impikindemdem de Legos "All his children live in Lagos"

1.2 Number, Gender and Case in Pronouns

In modern Nigerian Pidgin pronouns number, gender and case are differentiated in such a way that makes them more similar to English. They appear to be decreolizing. The forms in
(1) below are the standard Nigerian Pidgin forms from Elugbe and Omamor while those in
(2) are the modern Nigerian Pidgin forms from the data gathered.

1.

Subject	Object	Possessive
a “ i ”	mi “me”	mai “my/mine”
yu “you(sg)”	yu “you”	yo “your(sg)”
i “he/she/it”	am “him/her/it”	in “his/hers/its”
wi “we”	wi/os “us”	wi/awa “our/ours”
una “you pl”	una “you”	una “your/yours”
dem “they”	dem “them”	dem “their/theirs” (90)

2.

Subject	**Object**	**Possessive**
a/ai “I”	mi “me”	mai “my/mine”
yu “you(sg)”	yu “you”	yo “your(sg)”
i “he/it”	am “him/it”	in “his/its”
shi “she”	ha “her”	ha “hers”
wi “we”	os “us”	wi/awa “our/ours”
una “you pl”	una “you”	una “your/yours”
dem “they”	dem “them”	Dem/dia “their/theirs”

In the forms in (1) the first person plural object pronoun has two variants: wi and os that are used interchangeably but in the data collected, all the subjects used only the “os” variant which is like the English ‘us’. Also in the data, the third person plural possessive pronoun has two variants, ‘dem and dia’ which are used interchangeably. In addition to the above, gender is distinguished in the third person’s singular pronoun in all three cases by modern Nigerian Pidgin speakers. Below are juxtaposed utterances in both standard Nigerian Pidgin and modern Nigerian Pidgin. Worthy of note is the decreolizing forms in (ib and d) are more similar to English than those in (1a and c).

	Standard Nigerian Pidgin		**Modern Nigerian Pidgin**
1a	mai papa giv wi moni. My father give we money “My father gave us money”	1 b	Mai dadi give us moni. My father give us money
1c.	wi don giv dem dem bol. We perf. give them their ball “we have given them their ball	1 d	wi don giv dem dia bol. We perf. give them their ball.

1.3 Question Formation

The investigation here covers the derivation of both the Yes/No and wh-questions. Data reveals that the derivation of the Yes/No question remains the same as has been reported in the literature, that is, it differentiated the statement form by a rising intonation on the final syllable of the statement. In (1) below, there are some statements while the forms in (2) are their Yes/No question counterparts.

1 a	Yu de slip.	"You are sleeping"
b .	wi go go di shoo.	"We will go to the party".
2a.	Yu de slip?	"Are you sleeping".
b .	We go go di shoo?	"Are we going to the party?"

As for wh-questions, in the Standard Nigerian Pidgin variety, these are introduced by wh-phrases as has been aptly described by Elugbe and Omamor and exemplified in the forms in (1a, b and c). However, in the Modern Nigerian Pidgin variety, they are introduced by wh-words similar to those of English as exemplified by the forms in (1d, e and f).

1a	Wich ples wi de go? Which place we prog. Go	d.	Wie wi de go? "Where are we going?"
b.	Wich taim u tek kom? Which time you take come.	e.	Wen u kom? "When did you arrive?"
c.	Wetin mek dem chop di fud? What make they eat the food?	f.	Wai dem chop di fud? "Why did they eat the food?"

From the data presented, it is obvious that Nigerian Pidgin is not a marginal language as speculated but a fully-fledged language with an organized pattern of word arrangement.

CONCLUSION

Pidgin and creole are similar as creole is a well developed Pidgin which serves as a people's first language after a process of nativization. Nigerian Pidgin is not a debased, sparse and intellectually inferior language rather a fully fledged language with a systematic sequence of word arrangement to form sentences.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that Nigerian Pidgin is a fully fledged language with its own pattern of syntax. In essence, it should be accorded the respect of an independent language.

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