LANGUAGE IDENTITY: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN AND CREOLE

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ABSTRACT

The study of relationship between language and society is the thrust of sociolinguistics. Language is the product of a social group; which helps to concertize thought, and in turn shapes behaviour and group solidarity. Many language users perceive language as a block-building identity for representation. The way language is being used says a lot about us, our consciousness to identify with the common ideologies which is a function of shared experience, tied to linguistic similarities. So, the identity of every speaker of a language is inherently inseparable to his language. And as such every language act is an act of identity. The purpose of this paper is to examine the influence and the linguistic power of pidgin and creole in multilingual Nigeria. From the perspective of language-identity, the paper assesses what motivates a language user to switch to a particular speech style: as a way of reflecting his intentions (attitudes or values). Data was generated through library review, interview, inventories, and observation. The result showed that Nigerians especially the youth are embracing Pidgin because it helps them to be counted among the unique group. This is manifested in music, comedy and also in the language of the security agencies. So, it is a clarion call; also a call for action to activate our linguistic consciousness for identity.

Keywords: Language, identity, pidgin, creole

INTRODUCTION

Language is an attribute of man; man does not share it with any other animal. The concept of language has been of interest to scholars for a long time. As an organism, it is subject to growth, change and accommodation. Our assumption that language is simply the way of expression of thoughts and ideas, without realizing the fact that it is in itself a classification and arrangement of the stream of sensory experience of a given speech community which gives rise to certain value–system and world view. These "world orders" are easily expressible via the peculiar nature of the symbolic means the language uses (Whorf 160). The obvious fact is that our world is not solely objective nor is it socially overwhelmed as we ordinarily assumed rather; it is entrusted solely on a particular language, for a particular linguistic group and for the group's expressible thoughts and actions:

> It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means for solving specific problems of communication and reflection. The fact of the matter is that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality (Sapir 195).

Nothing is most treasured in a community other than language. It is a gift for expression of thought, culture and identity, which is central to the realization of the community's social identity. To be integrated to a group, one must be linguistically identified to such group, for proper assimilation and acceptability. According to Herfor (qtd in Holmes):

> …nothing benefits a country more than to treasure the languages and cultures of its various peoples because in doing so, it fosters intergroup understanding and realizes greatest dividends in form of originality, creativity and versatility (17).

In truth, language embodies the group social evaluations and expressible exhortations for social engineering of the community. Learning the categories of a language helps the user to learn the implicit and explicit "ways" of a given group; and along with the language the value–implicates of those "ways". Our behaviour and perception, our logic and thought come within the control ambit of a system of language. Along with language, we acquire a set of social norms and values" Mills (qtd in Macaulay 160).
Language, therefore, becomes paramount to individuals in identifying themselves in a particular social milieu, be it formal or informal and educated or uneducated. This guarantees total cultural and linguistic immersion into the group, for better understanding and association. Coupland and Jaworshi aver this further:

> Language is one of the important forms of human symbolic behaviour and is a key component of many group's social identities. Because people belong to different groups and have many potentials (sic) identified, different codes will serve as markers or even tools got forging these identities (323).

One striking thing is the multiplicity of languages in various societies or communities. Nigeria, apart from English, has over two hundred and fifty (250) indigenous languages. This implies language contact leading to bilingualism, diglossia, etc. To satisfy the need of such speech communities, there is always the need for a common language. In Nigeria, English was entrenched as a common language. However, many of her citizens are not versed in the language. Yet, the citizens are compelled to interact always among themselves. Pidgin becomes a necessity.

THE DEFINITION OF PIDGIN AND CREOLE

No scholar has explicitly traced the origin of the word pidgin, though speculations have been made. The emergency of pidgin came into been as a result of desperate demand for means of communication of trading groups whose languages are mutually unintelligible. So, pidgin and creole are the names given to such languages that do such function. In as much as, they are the same, they still have one common distinction that separates each other. Pidgins are used by the people who have had a language which is their primary language, whereas creoles are used by some people as their mother tongue. However, the distinction is harder to establish than it might seen (Macaulay 171).

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The origin is really quite controversial. That is why some scholars hazard that, there was an original simplified form of Portuguese in the fifteen century, during the Portuguese domination of Africa, which after all became the basis for the nautical language used by sailors from different climes, which was later modified accordingly. "The widespread use in English pidgins of words such as *savvy* "known" and *picaninny* "child" with apparent Portuguese origins is often cited as supporting evidence for this view" (Macaulay 171). Some posit that pidgin languages emerged as a result of the kinds of the simplification people usually make during speech production to young children or foreigners. A school of thought has it that it came from the Chinese mispronunciation of the English Word 'business'. Pidgin is traced to Portuguese 'ocupacao' which mean 'business' or 'pequeno' 'baby talk' or simply 'baby'.

The misconception of pidgins and creoles by earlier generations was an evidence in their very names: *broken* English, *bastard* Portuguese, *nigger* French, kombuistaaltjc (cookhouse lingo), isikula (cookie language). The cause of this contempt was the function of the earlier belief, that pidgin and creole languages "'were corruptions of higher' usually European languages, and in part from attitude toward the speakers of such languages who were somehow an affront" (Holm 1). One thing is clear, pidgin has to do with contact, either in trade, migration, etc between two or more hitherto linguistic/cultural set of people who need to comprehend one another in a simplified language. Initially, they are used primarily in trading or plantation situation (Femi Akindele and Wale Adegbite 54).

Speakers of pidgin as a second language usually communicate with the generation after them in this contact language. Such children tend to acquire pidgin as the mother tongue (MT). Being their first language, it is very natural therefore for them. Such is not pidgin but Creole. Technically, "it is a pidgin which becomes the first language of a group" (Montegomery 83). It becomes a standardized form of pidgin (Akindele and Adegbite 55), with native speakers. They usually resemble one of the original language from which it came from what has been seen, it can be said that a Creole comes into being when a pidgin language becomes the native language of new generation of children.

The English version comes the French Creole, which is cognate with the Spanish term Criollo and portuguesse "crioulo", all descending from the verb "criar" ('to breed' or 'to raise'), all coming from Latin "creare" (to produce, create). Being a first language/mother tongue in places like the Caribbean, etc., it is a language that has its own standard pronunciation pattern, rule of grammar, lexicon and meaning. Some English-based Creole languages are Nigerian pidgin, Sierra Leonean Krio, various Creole in the Caribbean, Tok Pisin etc. However, in this paper, pidgin would be used to represent or refer to creole.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Language is central to all forms of relationship, relationship among tribes, individuals, societies, etc. These relationships are perceived by partakers in different ways based on their attitudes. In Nigeria, pidgin is the most widely used language, yet it has not been accorded the status of official language or as the language of instruction in schools. Why is it that the English language which has fewer speakers than pidgin is assigned prominent role? This may be the function of the prevalent attitude of Nigerians to pidgin. Unarguably, there are bound to have consequences, since societal problems are linguistic problems. Notwithstanding its under-utilization in the nation, it will be necessary to find if there is intrinsic values attached to the language in terms of show the distinctive of Nigerians.

This study presents the particularity of the Nigerian Pidgin and Creole in a language context that is multilingual. This is hoped to widen the understanding of Nigerian about Pidgin and Creole in saying who they are. It focuses on the positive uniqueness of Pidgin and Creole to Nigerian speakers of the language. It looks at the identity the language gives speakers in the field of muse and comedy, education, military and paramilitary personnel.
This is a qualitative research design which was carried out by employing library review. Data were also got through interviews, inventories and observations. Descriptive and interpretative techniques of analysis were used.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory that underpins the study is language identity which reinforces solidarity relationship between the speaker and his group, through choice of language and subtle accommodation. The relationship between language and identity is social "closeness" (that is, social consciousness to the target group).

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Boix-Fuster and Sanz aver that languages are extremely ductile communicative tools and symbols which are inherent in identity and power. Besides, the linguistics codes are made to mark and construct identity. However, variation in speech depicts social meaning and conveys important information about the speaker's social identity (96). Therefore, if a language user uses a particular code, it becomes quite feasible for others to identity and as such categorize the user. Language identity enables one to identify people from their choice of linguistic code especially in the language contact between majority linguistics groups and minority to linguistic groups; the linguistic choice exposes their identity.

Language users manipulate freely through their linguistics resources to create identities, by imitating the linguistic patterns of the target group or individual, in which they want to be identified with. Linguists have done research on pidgins and creoles, and it was found that their users continuously make up identity acts through their language codes or "linguistic choices in prosody, morphosyntax and lexicon" (Le page and Tabouret-Keller).

The way an individual talks, his choice of words, etc, marks him out from others identity, whether it is on the individual, social or institutional level, is something which we are constantly building and negotiating through our interaction with others. Interaction comes with speech; language gives us an identity. Thomas and Wareing put it this way:

> One of the most fundamental ways we have to establish our identity, and of shaping other people's view of who we are is through our use of language (136).

CONCEPTUALISATION

The concept of Pidgin and Creole is of significance to sociolinguists since contact in whatever form influences one's choice of words and language. Again, pidgins are of considerable interest to sociolinguists because of the influence which society exerts on their forms (Abdullahi-Idiagbon 47). It serves as a tool of communication among speakers of two or more languages that do not have mutual intelligibility. That is, it is a contact language that came into existence as a means of communication among people and groups who do not share any common

language. Le-page (qtd in Akindele and Adegbite 54) explains that pidgin is formed when speakers of one language engage with speakers of another. It is a language of necessity in the face of language challenges, a contingent one.

Pidgin therefore does not belong to anybody, that is, it is not indigenous to any ethnic group. This affirms that it is an incidental communicative language within a multilingual setting which "is the native language of nobody" Decamp (qtd in Abudullahi-Idiagbon 42). It strives in a multilingual community where members of diverse tribes cannot comprehend themselves. Pidgin is mostly found in Africa, the Caribbean, part of Asia, etc. it is constructed impromptu in these places and elsewhere. Most of the forms in the lexicon of the new language come from of the languages in contact situation, called the lexifier (or sometimes the 'superstrate') – usually the language of the group controlling the area where contact takes place.

However, the and functions of the lexical forms, as well as the phonology and grammatical values are different to those of the lexifiers, and may sometimes resemble those one or more of the other languages in contact, usually referred as the 'substrate language' (Jeff Siegel 1). For many scholars like Thomas and Wareing (195), pidgin is not a fully-fledged language because it has no native speakers:

> It is a simplified form of language (both in terms of vocabulary and grammar) which arises when speakers of different languages need a common means of communication usually for trading purposes (195).

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In a bid to get across to Nigerians of diverse ethno-linguistic groups, contemporary musicians are ever increasingly singing in Nigerian Pidgin Tuface's "African Queen", Psqure's "Flavour" are few examples of tracks in pidgin. Dady Shokey, Ice Prince, Tiwa Savage, etc are among so many singers in pidgin. Earlier, "Sweet Mother" by Nico Mbarga took the Nigeria music industry by storm. It is aired by radio stations during Mothering Sunday and reported to have sold more than thirteen million copies. A stanza of the track goes thus:

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Sweet mother
I no go forget you
For the suffer
Wey you suffer for me

It was voted African favourite song by BBC readers and listeners perhaps because Nigerian's mothers identified with it. This may not be because of the theme of the music but the language which then can be comprehended easily. Following the examples of musicians, Nigerian comedian, have keyed in to pidgin. Concepts like Night of Thousand Laughs, Teju Baby Face do have renowned comedians like Julius Agwu, etc pulling crowns.

In the barracks, military or paramilitary, the language is pidgin. Policemen, soldiers and paramilitary personnel communicate always in that language to the public; and public or "civilian" wishing to identify with them resort to the language. In checkpoints terms like:

"Wetin you carry?", "where you come from?", "make I see", etc.

They are common amongst them. It bonds the personnel who come from different ethno-linguistic background. They no longer see themselves as Igbo policemen, Hausa soldiers, etc., but of Nigeria.

AIDS on dey show for face! This is a popular advocacy; to create awareness. It is targeted to the common folk, who constitutes the greater majority, who are more vulnerable to contracting the disease. So, they are being targeted using the *identifying* language that can activate their attention, to achieve the objective of the "advertizer". Pidgin has currency and frequency among the youth who are exposed to casual sex and therefore being at risk in contracting the ailment, the choice of the language is best preferred.

To be less formal, in order to douse the tension and cuddle the audience or listeners home, the former president Obasanjo used to rely on the use of pidgin. He exploited its use during his administration to curry favour and win the listeners' confidence. One of his most common expressions is: I dey kamkpe! The expression is to accommodate his audience to bring them relatively at par with him. This identifies the president with his subjects, linguistically.

PIDGIN IN NIGERIA

Pidgin is spoken across the length and breadth of Nigeria, perhaps more than any other language today. The language has come to stay; it is English-based. One can say that it serves as Nigeria's lingua franca especial in the south-south zone. The origin of Nigerian pidgin is traceable to contact made between the riverine communities of the Niger Delta and the Europeans, pioneered by the Portuguese. In the words of Uzoezie:

> …these language contact situation (Portuguese/English and the indigenous languages) gave rise to the emergence of an inter-language (pidgin) which was to be used by the colonizers and the native middle-men. The slave-trade of 17th and 18th centuries enhanced, not the spread of English in Nigeria, but also the emergence, development, and spread of the Nigerian pidgin (164).

Nigeria pidgin is a variety which has English as its 'superstrate' and Nigerian languages as its 'substrate' which Jibril exemplifies below:

S/N	Nigeria Pidgin	English
1.	If you no go help Nigeria, na your shame be dat.	If you won't help Nigeria, shame to you.
2.	If na rice own dey do you, chop di one wey we get, you hear?	But if you must eat rice, then eat Nigerian grown rice

The examples indicate that almost all the words are "derivatives" of English, but the sentences do not conform to English standard.

Nigerian-pidgin has different discernable variants – Bendel, Calabar, Lagos, Kano/Maidugiri and Port-Harcourt. Nigerian-pidgin is erroneously referred to as "Broken English" or "Broken", a term which is quite different. Broken English is spoken as a result of inadequate mastering of Standard English by non-native speakers or users. It has no substrate or superstrate; the English is inundated with errors in grammar, especially the syntax. The "Language may be defined as broken variety when it shows extreme deviation from the standard form especially the syntax" (Jowitt 54).

The surviving diary of Antera Duke kept in 1786 provides us with one of the earliest examples of the written form of Nigerian pidgin (Ayo Banjo 205). Although Spence and others see the language of the diary as unambiguously as English, others like Eligbe and Omamor see it as pidgin.

FUNCTION OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN

What started off as a language of international communication is now used largely for international communication. It is already creolizing in the Niger Delta axis of Nigeria (Banjo 204). Formerly, Nigerian pidgin was viewed as the means or language of communication by non-educated people, the poor and 'uncivilized' of society. In recent time, however, its use and acceptability has been on the rise across all strata of the nation. It is very popular among the youth, politicians, comedian, musicians, security agents etc.

The language is serving a lot of purposes in multilingual Nigeria. It is the lingua franca. Pidgin has spread far and wide throughout Nigeria. A lot of Nigerians live outside their ethnic homelands resulting in the mingling of ethno-linguistic groups, especially in large towns and cities (Jowitt 13). In the course of this, they imbibe pidgin so as to facilitate communication.

As well as English, Nigerian pidgin is the only language that is neutral from ethnicity. Hence, it is a national language – it is spoken all over Nigeria and is indigenous. One may not fully exhaust the functions of pidgin in Nigeria in a work of this nature. It is increasing ever in scope – it is used in the media, politics and in many informal setting for socialization.

Attitude

This goes a long way in defining language(s) in any speech community, which brings us to the concept of attitude especially as it relates to language. Thurstone defines attitude as "The sum total of man's inclination and

feelings, prejudices or bias, pre-conceived notions, ideas, fears, traits and conviction about specific topic" (351). According to Atkinson et al (qtd in Adekunle):

> Attitudes are likes and dislikes-affinities for and aversions to objects, persons, groups, situation, or any other identifiable aspect of the environment, including abstract ideas and social policies (59).

Attitude is made up of three components, which include belief, which accounts for disposition, which in turn leads to action or human behavaiour.

Language Identity

One of the fundamental ways we have of establishing our uniqueness, and of shaping other people's perception of who we are, is through our use of language. The sociolinguistic variables of gender, ethnicity, social class, profession, culture, age, literacy level, setting, etc and how they influence the linguistic behaviour lie within the scope of sociolinguistics. Through one or more of these factors, the social identity of a speaker is signaled. Everything about a culture, person or group is expressed through language. Identity, which is, who we are, how we perceive ourselves, how others perceive us, is not simply define by factors such as where one is born and up raised, who his parents are/were, and which socio-economic group he belongs to.

Identity, whether it is on an individual, social or institutional level, is something people are constantly building and negotiating all through their lives through interaction with others. Identity is multi-faceted. People switch into different roles at different times in different situation, and each of those require a shift into different conflicting identities for the people involved. One of the ways in which this shift is realized is through the language which we use (Thomas and Wareing 137). What this entails is that at the individual level, where one grows up, attends school, how wealthy (or not) one family were/is, will to some extent be displayed through the variety of language. No two person speak exactly in the same way.

People can construct their social identity by categorizing themselves (or being categorized by others) as belonging to social groups through particular type of representation. Linguistic choice plays a lot in the establishing group identity. Speech communities do share linguistic norms. It is not uncommon for people to guess our place of origin once they hear us speak. This is illustrated is the Bible's narrative of Peter's denial of Jesus from St. Mathew's account. After a little while the men standing there came to Peter "of course you are one of them" they said. After all, the way you speak gives you away!" (Mathew 26:73). Peter was identified with Jesus notwithstanding his denial due to his Galilean accent/dialect.

Social conflicts all around the world are not devoid of linguistic conflicts too, about the word use by each group, how words are used and about which terms are used which group of people to identify themselves and their opponents. Therefore, people work to identify their own identity categories, to name their particular social group, and stake their claim in owing their representation of themselves.

Any group that share the same linguistic identity belong to the same 'ingroup' while others outside are referred to as 'outgroup'. One's social identity is not something he can determine on his own. It is also bound up with how others perceive him. It would be hard to conceive identity as purely individual matter. One's perception of himself can only be in relation to others, and within his social group. This status can be constructed through language use in many ways (Thomas and Wareing 143).
As with other kinds of social codes which people use to display membership of social group, like dress codes, certain types of linguistic codes signal one's identity with a group, as well as his position within it. Being able to show that one can used linguistic terms accordingly to the norms associated with a particular group helps to establish ones membership of the group, the 'ingroup' and those outside it, the 'outgroup'.

Some varieties of language are more prestigious than others. It is realized through the activities of the 'ingroup' members over a long period of time. Thomas and Wareing give a typical example using the music industry in the early 1960s:

> When British Pop singers often produced sounds (such as the vowel sound in words like *dance*, *girl*, *life* or *love*) with stereotypical American pronunciation. One explanation that has been suggested for this is that because of long-standing American domination within the field of popular music. (sic) British singers were attempting to model their singing style on that of those who do it best who they admire most (142).

The trend declined as the status of British Pop music rose in the 1960s and 1970s. It all boils down to identity. People also position themselves in relation to others by the way they talk in different kinds of interaction. It has already been proven that people do not always talk in exactly the same way all the time. Variation in speech is usually referred to as style-shifting. One of the theories explaining this variation in style is that speakers take into account who they are talking to, and alter their speech accordingly (Thomas and Wareing 146). Sociolinguists refer to it as audience design. This is because, according to Thomas and Wareing, "people are mainly seeking to show solidarity and approved in their dealing with others, and one way that speakers can do this is through linguistic convergence" (146).

Whenever a choice is made between two different languages, the issue of identity is marked, especially when the choice is sound up with national and political status of a language. Since language rights are often important issues in socio-political conflicts all around the world. Nigeria is not an exception.

Fifty-six years into post-independence, the English language remains the official language of the Nigeria state. It is the official language: the language of instruction in schools, of government, of commerce, etc. It is a unifying language in the midst of more than two hundred and fifty indigenous languages. However, most Nigerians are not versed in the language, in addition some see it as a language of imperialism. Nigerian pidgin is the language Nigerians can call theirs. In the same vein, it is observed that Nigerians would consider the adoption of any indigenous language as the official state language as the imposition and domination of that ethno-linguistic group over others. Enaharo in Colman (qtd in Baldeh) warns:

> As one who comes from a minority tribe, I deplore the continuing evidence in this country that people wish to impose their customs, their language, and even their way of life upon the smaller tribes (7).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Pidgin functions as a means of identification of Nigerian. That is, it shows the "Nigerianness", as opposed to their ethnic identity. The language is neutral to all and sundry, therefore it belongs to everybody and nobody in particular. This fosters unity in a multilingual Nigeria. Whoever speaks the language is first seen as a Nigerian. It shares with English the feature of being the only ethnically neutral language in Nigeria (Bamgbose 291). Pidgin is spoken across the length and breadth of Nigeria. It is a lingua franca in Nigeria. Due to difference in Mother Tongue (MT), it is used habitually by Nigerians in order to facilitate communication among them. It is mass oriented, used by people from different strata of society.

Pidgin is popular among undergraduates of tertiary institutions. Although the English language is the officially recognized language of instruction in tertiary institutions of Nigeria, pidgin is used by lecturers and students for jocular effects so that lectures will not be boring (Abdullahi-Idiagbon 46). Youth, naturally, exhibits exuberance. Talks about parties, music, relationships take a large chunk of students' time. Such issues are usually discussed in informal settings using pidgin.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that Pidgin and Creole come into existence as a result of language contact. It emerged due to the compelling need to communicate among people from different ethno-linguistic background. In Nigeria, the language is unique because of its 'Nigerianness' more than any other language in the nation. Therefore, the youths and many other citizens are identifying with it.

Recommendation

The paper is restricted to pidgin and identity in the entertainment industry, security agencies. The work did not look at sports, media and many other fields. It is hoped that this will be looked into in future.

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