THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ADOPTING PIDGIN/CREOLE AS A VEHICLE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Andrew Ndiwe Amadi
School of General Studies, Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo – Ohaji

Abstract
The Nigerian multilingual situation has made it difficult for an indigenous national language to emerge. Apart from the English language, the Nigerian Pidgin English has, therefore, arisen as a necessary bridge to fill the communication gap amongst the various ethnic groups. Since Pidgin has been creolized, and has gone beyond its social responsibilities, some linguists have called for its official adoption as the language for teaching and learning in our schools. This article explored such possibilities and the attitude of Nigerian students to the use of Pidgin English in education. Using the survey research approach, one hundred and fifty students of Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo, Ohaji, were sampled in the study. The findings revealed that Nigerian students employed the use of Pidgin English for both social communication and classrooms instruction. In recognition of the present National Policy on Education and in view of the fact that Pidgin English has somewhat become a mother tongue in some parts of the country, the paper concludes that Pidgin English should be used as a medium of instruction in our educational system. It further recommends that government should mount orientation programmes aimed at changing the erroneous perception about Pidgin by the Nigerian populace.

Key words: significance, Pidgin/Creole, vehicle, teaching and learning.

Introduction
The Nigerian multilingual situation has continued to draw the attention of Nigerian linguists to the issues of both national language choice and the language for education. Pidgin/Creole has, as a matter of fact, become a viable option in this regard. Thus, it is pertinent to begin this work by ex-raying what Pidgin and Creole are.

Pidgin, in a broad sense, refers to a language which arises when people of originally diverse languages meet, and have needs to communicate with one another. Fromkin et al. (2011, p.464) confirms that Pidgin develops when “speakers of mutually unintelligible languages have been brought into contact under specific socio-economic and political conditions”. While answering the question “why do Pidgins develop?” Holmes (2013, p.85) notes that “A Pidgin is a language which has no native speakers. Pidgins develop as a means of communication between people who do not have a common language”. The point made here is that no particular person, community or nation can claim ownership of a pidgin language. This feature marks the difference between Pidgin and other languages. Equally, Pidgin varies depending on the contact European nations and Africans. Perhaps, this accounts for the various versions of Pidgins used in different countries such as Jamaica, Cameroon, China, Guinea, to name a few. It is not the subject of this paper to distinguish among these varieties of Pidgin, yet each of them plays significant roles in the countries where they are used.

On the other hand, Creole, according to Holmes (2013, p.90), “is a Pidgin which has acquired native speakers. Many of the languages which are called Pidgins are in fact now Creole languages”. The implication of the above is that no Creole can exist without Pidgin, although, the metamorphosis of Pidgin into Creole takes time. As Décamp (1971, p.16) notes, “the only way a pidgin may escape extinction is by evolving into a Creole, i.e. the syntax and vocabulary are extended and it becomes the native language of a speech community”. This feature is apparent in the Nigerian situation.

In Nigeria, Pidgin has existed for a very long time, and has even acquired native speakers, especially in the states of the South-South Nigeria. Despite the fact that the interlingual contact which gave rise to the Nigerian Pidgin language has gone, the social needs for the language subsist. It would, thus, not be an overstatement to posit that Nigerian Pidgin has already been creolized. Creolization is, according to Fromkin et al. (2011, p.455), “the linguistic expansion in the lexicon and grammar of existing pidgin and an increase in the context of use”. On a daily basis, percentage calculation, there are more Pidgin/Creole speakers than any of the indigenous languages.

Given the above background, we shall henceforth use Pidgin to also refer to Creole language. This work, therefore, sets to explore the possibilities of using the Nigerian Pidgin as a means of instructions (teaching/learning) in our educational circles. It will equally explore the benefits of
otherwise of such venture. In the mean time, let us properly situate the Nigerian Pidgin vis-à-vis education.

Nigerian Pidgin Language and Education

We have earlier seen that Pidgin language arises when people with diverse languages are brought together under specific socio-economic and political conditions. Indeed, such circumstances gave rise to the emergence of Nigerian Pidgin English. This began from the earliest contacts with the Portuguese, then, Dutch, and English traders and the Nigerian Coastal areas, and continued till today since there is still lack of a mutually intelligible language amongst the various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria.

Elugo and Omambor (2007, p.2) have observed that “for any Pidgin to be worth the name ... the condition that gave rise to it must be sustained”. It is obvious that the Nigerian Pidgin English has been sustained because of the inherent different ethnic languages in the country. This language differences pose communication problems whenever people from these diverse groups come in contact. Since this situation is sure to persist, Nigerian Pidgin English will indeed continue to survive. It thus, becomes imperative to look beyond it as a mere language of social interaction for people in need, its usage should extend to teaching and learning.

Already, Nigerian students at the tertiary level enjoy the use of Pidgin in their daily activities as Kirk-Green (1971, p.143) notes: “Even at the university, the preferred linguistic lowest common denominator of students speaking amongst themselves is Pidgin”. Beyond using Pidgin by the students at social gatherings, some lecturers occasionally use it in lecture halls for jocular effects. As Abdullahi-Idagbon (2007, p.209) observes, lecturers who use Pidgin in the classrooms for one effect or the other are adjudged by the students as those who have good teaching methods. Even among the teachers of all levels of education can be found the use of Pidgin for communication. In like manner, Jowitt (1991, p.12) notes that Nigerian Pidgin has attained the feat of dignity to both the literate and illiterate members of the society.

Despite these obvious acceptance of Pidgin English in Nigeria, we are yet dragging our feet to its official introduction in the educational circles. The questions here remain: What should be the place of Pidgin in Nigerian education? What other benefits can be derived if Pidgin English is elevated to the status of a National language in Nigeria?

Methodology

The following approaches were used in this research:

Population: A population of one hundred and fifty (150) undergraduates of the Imo State Polytechnic, Ogbia – Ohaji, was used in this study. Attention was not paid to their sex or age. We considered that irrelevant to our study since we were not comparing the attitude of women or men/old or young to the use of the language. However, we observed that these students had various Nigerian languages as their source languages. Since that was a tertiary institution, it provided another multilingual environment, a major factor which makes Pidgin English to thrive. The students’ levels ranged from ND I to ND II. It was difficult to concentrate on a particular level since we adopted a survey research approach.

Duration: It took six weeks to conclude this study. We were able to achieve our aim within the short period because of our testing method.

Research questions: two research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. To what extent are the students at all level comfortable in the use of pidgin in communication and for academic purposes?
2. To what extent would Pidgin English be useful in our educational system, if adopted by the Nigerian government?

Testing: We adopted the use of both oral interviews and questionnaires. The questions were structured in a manner that would reveal how comfortable or otherwise the students were with the use of Pidgin for communication in both social gatherings and for academic purposes. They also sought their opinions on why Pidgin was relegated and its prospects if adopted by the Nigerian government as a medium of instruction (teaching/learning) in our schools. Examples of such questions include:

(a) How often do you use Pidgin English in your daily activities including in the lecture halls?
(b) How do your mates and others view such usages?
(c) Do you think that Pidgin English is stigmatized in Nigeria?
(d) Who are mostly involved in this act?
(e) Would you in any way require the official use of Pidgin for teaching in Nigerian schools? etc.

Method of Analysis: We are not giving tables and the responses of the students. Our method is to
present our findings based on the responses of our sampled population. The mean rating was adopted in answering the two research questions. Nevertheless, we invite colleagues to test these out in their own ways and join in the efforts to make Pidgin get its proper position in the national language plan.

Findings/Discussions
Wedgwood (1951, p.113) has observed that the major reason for the objection to the use of Pidgin English in education is its perception by some people as “marginal languages”, and as such cannot be considered adequate educational media. But our findings were quite revealing. First, it was discovered that the erroneous negative connotation attached to Pidgin by some people - associating it with European colonial empires - should no longer be so seen. The result of Table 1 of the responses showed that the mean rating responses of the students (3.05) is greater than the expected (2.50). This is an indication that students are comfortable with the use of Pidgin, mainly in academic purposes which may be as a result of the ease in understanding it, as against the public perception of it. This confirms Craig’s (2008, p.598) position that the stigmatization of Pidgin stems from the subjective rejection of the fact that:

If the attitudes of the speech community and national convenience permit the use of a Creole language in education, there is no reason to believe that the Creole language will be in any way inadequate as a vehicle for thought and expression.

Our sampled population believes that such stigmatization was no longer necessary. To them, and we share their views, Pidgin English in Nigeria has come a long way and can no longer be jettisoned for any reason.

Secondly, our research revealed that the use of Pidgin English for both communication and in our education would provide the required/necessary administrative convenience and unity which the country is in dire need of. Table 2 of the researcher’s work showed that the mean responses (2.75) is greater than the expected (2.50), an indication that Pidgin would be useful if adopted by the Nigerian government. Craig (2008, p.598) made an important point when he raised such issue as “national convenience”. In Nigeria, national convenience is part of the reasons why Pidgin should be used as a medium of instruction in our educational circles.

Above all, to address the question of whether Pidgin should be used in education or not, Gani-Ikala (1990, pp:219-27) was succinct here. His answer was an emphatic “Why Not?” He maintained that Pidgin cannot and should not be ignored. It can and should be used, even if only in the initial years of Primary School, if education is to be meaningful to our Pidgin-speaking children.

Indeed, our findings revealed that students are much at home with the use of Pidgin English for teaching and learning. They maintained that they would understand the lecturers faster with the use of Pidgin than with the use of English for teaching. It enabled them to convey their real thoughts to one another, just as they do with their mother tongues. In fact, Pidgin, according to them, is similar to their mother tongues and they cannot afford to think in their mother tongue and be taught in a foreign tongue.

Chumbow (1990, op.63-4) has pointed out the major advantages of using the mother tongue in education. Our students are sure to benefit from these if Pidgin is used in education, and our country will be better for it.

Conclusion
With reference to our population of study and secondary materials (library research), it is obvious that Nigerian Pidgin language has come to stay. It is already playing a major role in national unity and integration, (which is the interest of every Nigerian government). There is no state in the country (Nigeria) where Pidgin is not spoken, no matter how little. Even in the Police and Army, it is the language for communication. This is a feat which no Nigerian language has attained nor will ever attain in the years to come.

Given the above background, and the fact that Nigerian students are already enjoying the use of Pidgin, as studies have proved, (cf. Kirk-Green (1971), Gani-Ikala (1990), to name a few), one cannot but advise that Pidgin be given the status of the national/official language. It should also be used as a medium of instruction (teaching and learning) in our educational circles.

We are aware of the impending challenges of implementation, and the claims of the opposing opinions. Yet, the advantages of adopting Pidgin in teaching and learning by far surpass the opposing arguments. The pertinent questions are what do we do and how do we go about it? The “what” and “how” are presented in the recommendations.
Recommendation

Fromkin et al. (2011, p.457) advise that Pidgin should now be seen as that language which "reflects human creative linguistic ability". Of course, Nigerians should look beyond sentiments and embrace the use of Pidgin as a means of instructions in our schools. Moreover, as Chumbow (1990, p.62) attests, "Education and training, in whatever form it (sic) may take, requires imparting knowledge and skills... and developing the intellectual potential of the learner". Truly, the effectiveness of the educational/training programmes depends on effective communication between the teacher/master and the learner/apprentice. This is where language plays an important role.

Even though the National Policy on Education (2004, p.16) recommended the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the early primary stage, and further stated that "from the fourth year English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction", it is our view that Pidgin English be used side by side with the mother tongue at the early primary stage. Thereafter, Pidgin should immediately take over from the senior primary level. This should continue to the secondary level until the use of Pidgin is established at all levels of our education. Such systematic approach, if begun now and sustained, would ultimately launch Pidgin in all our educational levels within two decades.

On the above note, therefore, the researcher finally recommends that:

1. Government should mount orientation programmes aimed at changing the erroneous perception about Pidgin by the Nigerian populace.

2. Pidgin English should immediately be introduced for teaching and learning from the early primary level and progressively continue to other levels of education.

3. Pidgin (like the English and French languages) should be institutionalised by the Nigerian government and Curriculum designers. A department in every Nigerian tertiary institution should be created to teach it. Where this is not possible, courses in Pidgin could be created and taught in the departments of Linguistics.

4. In view of 1-3 above, there is urgent need for a legislation that will enshrine this important unifying language into the Nigerian constitution so that its use becomes officially legalised.

5. Further research should delve into proper means of developing the materials — textbooks, teachers, etc. — required for an effective implementation of this programme.

It is noteworthy that in a situation where there is mutual suspicion and latent hostility, the adoption of any of the major Nigerian languages as a lingua franca would only lead to disunity. This would be so because there would be obvious arrogance by the favoured tribe/group. The rest of the cultures (over four hundred of such) would definitely fight the system. Sofunke (1990, pp.31-49) has, for instance, ex-rayed why most of the Nigerian languages, including the WAZOBIA cannot be adopted as a national language. He nevertheless proposed Igalagala, which may not equally be acceptable to other tribes. Pidgin indeed fills this gap because of its neutrality. Therefore, Nigerian Pidgin English cannot remain, as Elugbe (1995, p.284) puts it, "Pidin we no get papa bot evironbi de sen am mesej". Let us warmly possess it and send it on this particular educational errand. The earlier we accept and use it in our schools, and even in our official circles, the best for our educational system and national unity.
REFERENCES


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