

Emerging trends in Nigerian Pidgin: Focus on radio talk-exchanges

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Abstract

Pidgin, as a medium of communication, has been performing interactional needs of its users. Due to its vibrancy, it has been the object of study of sociolinguists who continue to carry out various studies on it. Pidgin has been described as marginal, rudimentary, makeshift and fit for informal talk by different linguists. This work is designed to find out if this description still holds in the Nigerian Pidgin. By so doing, it determines the emerging trends therein. To achieve this objective, the study was designed to carry out an analysis of Nigerian Pidgin as used in live radio talk-exchanges: “Wetin Mega” on Radio Nigeria, Purity 102.5 FM, and “Otigba Junction” on Solid 100.9 FM. This work is framed with the theory of conversation analysis, while the data were collected through tape-recording of the live radio programmes. The result of the analysis shows that Nigerian Pidgin is no longer a nadir language. The conversations were ordered even as the language was used to discuss burning national issues. The study therefore recommends that Nigerian Pidgin, in addition to the English Language, be used in public gatherings, especially non-academic ones so as to carry everybody along in the proceedings.

Introduction

The need to find out if Nigerian Pidgin (NP) as currently used in Nigeria can still be regarded as marginal and banal is the motivation of this study. Among other things, it looks at the topics of the discussions, and the adherence of the discussions to laid-down normal conversation features as established by linguists.

Language is a human endowment and an important feature of human life. It is a tool of human communication consisting of sounds and symbols. The ability to communicate in a language is intrinsic in man. Consequently, he can learn any number of languages and use them for communication.

Linguists believe that when two languages come in contact, they will rub off on each other (Weinreich 1). Different kinds of linguistic phenomena come into being when this happens. Examples are borrowing, code-alternation, interference, birth of pidgins, and so on. This study centres, however, on the phenomenon of pidgin – a trade language used by people who do not understand one another's language.

Many linguists have made propositions as to the definition of pidgin taking into account how it comes into existence. A pidgin develops from human contact. A pidgin is a language that grew among people who come in contact often usually traders, but who do not know each other's language (Yule 247). On his part, Jowitt notes that it is "a compound of an extraneous language and some indigenous languages... used for a limited range of purposes, especially trade, in communication between two races" (12).

Going further in the explanation, Anita Herzfeld says that, usually, when speakers of different languages come in contact often, it is likely that the subordinate group will give up its

language while the superordinate group will establish its language as the language of communication among the groups. Continuing, she notes that, in the scenario above, the coming together is not always under neutral emotional conditions. As such, conflicts usually occur leading to the dominance of one group over the other (75). Supporting the above view, Faraclas observed that due to the reluctance of the Europeans to learn Nigerian languages, and the high importance attached to the European trade by Nigerians, European words were used more than Nigerian words to facilitate communication (4).

This leads to the emergence of the superstrate language and the substrate language. The superstrate language is the dominant language which contributes most of the vocabulary of pidgin. It is also called the lexifier, while the less-dominant language is called the substrate language, and contributes the structure of the language. So, for Nigerian Pidgin, which is English-based, English is the superstrate language, while Nigerian languages are the substrate languages.

Moving to a more complex definition of pidgin, Reinecke says pidgin is “a minimum or makeshift language (arises) when men of different speech are thrown into contact and must reach an understanding” (qtd. in Elugbe 284). Pidgin has also been described as “a marginal language that arises to fulfil specific communication needs in well-defined circumstances” (Elugbe and Omamor 45). Being described as temporary and rudimentary (Denham and Lobeck 48), marginal, minimal, and makeshift suggests that pidgin is not a full language because its grammatical structure and vocabulary are greatly reduced.

Having considered the various definitions of pidgin, one can then conclude with Denham and Lobeck that pidgin is known by the following characteristics:

- a. It has no native speakers;
- b. It is a combination of two or more languages ;
- c. It has a simplified grammatical system of its own ;
- d. Its vocabulary is borrowed from contributing languages;
- e. It has a traceable origin (48).

Nigerian Pidgin

Nigerian Pidgin started from the trade-contact situation between Nigerians living along the coastal areas and Europeans. The first of the Europeans were the Portuguese, who came in the 15thC but their stay was short lived. Then, came the British in the 17th century and a form of English-based pidgin developed. However, with the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century, and the resultant scramble for West Africa, Nigeria became a colony of Britain.

With this consolidation of power over Nigeria by the British, western education and religion were introduced. More Nigerians, apart from traders, came in contact with the English Language, hence consolidating the pidgin as a means of communication. More English words came to be used in the pidgin. However, with the introduction of formal education in Nigeria, many Nigerians began to get schooled in Standard English. According to Jowitt, one way of showing off this form of education was by speaking the Standard English. Consequently, Nigerian Pidgin began to be seen as a debased form of Standard English and its speakers denigrated (13).

The above scenario may be what prompted Agheyisi to describe speakers of Nigerian Pidgin as "...generally made up of unskilled labourers in government agencies... petty traders, store keepers, market women, taxi and lorry (truck) drivers, etc, (qtd. in Elugbe and Omamor 50).

Characteristics of Nigerian Pidgin

According to Mafeni (qtd. in Elugbe and Omamor 53-4; 76-109), Nigerian Pidgin is known by some of these features:

- a. Use of re-duplication to intensify meaning. E.g. De girl fine well well (The girl is very beautiful).
- b. It has no inflectional affixes. E.g. for "walk" : I bin waka go school (He walked to school); I dey waka go school (He walks to school).
- c. Number is indicated by using a numeral, while the item remains unchanged. E.g. Im buy 2 orange (He bought 2 oranges). Or through the use of 'dem'. E.g. De capenter dem don come (The carpenters have come.)

Research questions

1. What issues are discussed using Nigerian Pidgin?
2. How structured are conversations in Nigerian Pidgin?
3. To what extent has Nigerian Pidgin expanded?

The concept of Conversation Analysis (CA)

At the initial stage, conversation analysis (CA) focussed on casual conversations, but subsequently, its techniques began to be used in more task-and-institution-centred interactions as those

occurring in courts, doctors' offices, educational setting, and the mass media. According to Hutchby and Wooffit, conversation analysis is the study of recorded, naturally-occurring talk in interaction (qtd. in Olateju 13). Olateju, on her part, points out that conversation analysis is based on ethnomethodology, which studies the connection between what people do in interaction and what they 'know' about interaction. She further said conversation analysis is concerned mainly with "the structure of talk which produces and reproduces patterns of social interaction" (13). So, it could be said that the main thrust of the analysis of talk-exchange should be to find out how people take turns in conversation, how they open and close it, how a new topic is launched, old one closed, and so on.

At this point, it is pertinent to look at the two forms of social interaction there are - the interactive, and the non-interactive forms. In the interactive form, two or more people take turns to share ideas on one or more topics. This is typical of conversations. Sharing a common context, the interlocutors cooperate between them to achieve a successful interaction. In the non-interactive form, there is a speaker who dominates the talk. This speaker, constrained by the situation, determines who speaks, when they speak, and how they speak in a talk-exchange. This form is typical of public lectures, sermons, and media discussions ("Languages in Contact" 94).

As human beings, nay, language users, we share some form of conversational rules that help us to communicate spoken and unspoken messages. These rules are necessary for there to be a successful exchange of information. Not knowing these rules can lead to a breakdown in communication. (Denham and Lobeck

332; McCarthy, Matthiessen, and Slade 60; Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams 203).

A set of rules for a successful communication is Paul Grice's Cooperative Principles. According to the principles, speakers and listeners should speak cooperatively by observing some shared rules so that their communication can be successful. The principles are encapsulated in four maxims known as the Gricean maxims. They are:

- a. Maxim of quantity: Make your contribution informative, not more informative. If one is asked what is one's name, one should not go ahead to also give the parents' and siblings' names, too.
- b. Maxim of quality: Give adequate evidence; do not lie.
- c. Maxim of relevance: Say relevant things.
- d. Maxim of manner: Avoid ambiguity, be clear (Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams 204).

The summary of the maxims is that speakers should make a sincere effort to collaboratively exchange information. Flouting the maxims intentionally or unintentionally can convey a different meaning than what is literally spoken. This is seen when one uses a language figuratively.

Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (699 -701) in one of their studies found out that turn-taking operates in conversations. One party talks at a time, and though speakers change, the transitions are well-coordinated. Among other things they found out were that talks can be continuous or discontinuous; a current speaker may select a next speaker (like when he addresses a question to another party), or even parties may select self by beginning to

talk. Speakers know how to detect when one's turn is over and the next turn begins. There are also turn-repair mechanisms as in when two parties begin to speak at the same time, one of them will stop, thereby repairing the trouble.

Other cooperative activities in conversation

- a. **Opening:** Conversations can begin by using attention-getters like Hello, Excuse me, Hey, or even a greeting.
- b. **Closing:** Normal conversations do not end abruptly. It is brought to an end. Usually, there is a pre-closing sequence and a closing section. The pre-closing can be something like 'We-ell, we'll see another time'; while the closing can then be 'Ok. Bye.
- c. **Adjacency Pairs:** This is an aspect of turn-taking where utterances occur one after the other especially between two participants. What one says necessitates what the other will meaningfully say. Instances of adjacency pairs are question-answer, offer-acceptance/rejection, greeting-greeting, compliment-thanks, apology-acceptance, etc.
- d. **Overlap:** This means simultaneous speech. If a speaker begins his speech without waiting for the end of the last speaker's turn, then, an overlap has occurred. There are two types of overlap – intended overlap and unintended overlap. Intended overlap means to cut in in a conversation. It is an interruption, and usually happens in arguments. Unintended overlap is where the new speaker comes in where he anticipates the last speaker to end. There may be simultaneous speech here or not.

- e. **Back Channel:** This is a listener-response that shows that the listener is following the conversation and is signalled by such expressions as ‘right, mhm, uhuh, yeah.

All these activities help to ensure a smooth and cooperative conversation.

Methodology

The approach adopted for this research was ethnomethodology. The data for the study were recordings from conversations in the radio phone-in programmes – *Wetin Mega* on Radio Nigeria, Purity 102.5 FM, Awka, Anambra State, and *Otigba Junction* on Solid 100.9 FM, Enugu, Enugu State. Though this research will not conduct a conversation analysis in its strictest sense as stipulated by Sacks et al (699-701), it will, nevertheless, take a cursory look at the structure of the talk-exchanges. However, the major intent of this work is to examine naturally occurring conversations in Nigerian pidgin so as find out if the definition of pidgin as a language that is marginal, rudimentary, makeshift and fit for informal talk can still hold for it. The population was made up of participants (presenters and callers) in the programmes. The recordings were transcribed to the utmost capability of the researchers. As there was yet no uniform and officially-recognised orthography for Nigerian Pidgin, most of the words were transcribed using Standard English spelling.

Data presentation and analysis

As stated the data for the study are conversations from two radio phone-in programmes, *Wetin Mega* and *Otigba Junction* on Radio Nigeria, Purity FM, Awka and Solid 100.9 FM, Enugu

respectively. The notations used in annotating the data are as follows:

---: incomplete utterance or a fresh start

[]: overlapping (simultaneous speech)

(): recording unclear

from (Olateju 88)

Others are:

==: unintended overlap (interruption without simultaneous speech)

^^: yielding the floor

...: portions not included due to space constraint

Wetin Mega on Radio Nigeria, Purity 102.5 FM (1st April, 2016)

Female Presenter: (1) ... Or say they don hear but they no know say na so e bi, na also dis program we take dey rub mind together. Again, we dey say welcome to *Wetin Mega* for Purity 102.5 FM. I still be your country sister Roseline Adechenaye. And you remember say no be only me o dey waka come here. I get e--my own brother wey --don tanda for ground sake of say make things dey waka [well

Boy Presenter: (2) I bin] think say you no go o call me (Rose laughs) because country man na woman for just vex^^^

Rose: (3) How I no go call ... Person no dey forget im own naa. You know say even if you forget, you no go forget your own. Na im make say I no go forget you but u know say-- u go just take am jeje. Na jeje naa I just

take am because e--this new day wey be say d first
[for

Boy: (4) mhm] for for April, I know say some people now go don
dey don () finish ==

Boy: (5) They, they, they do me April fool before I come here,
na im make my face dey like dis (laughter from Rose)
you think say you wan do me April fool make I no
follow you dey dis program (general laughter). My
country man and woman, make e no be say--I go leave
my name. My name still remain una country
brother, Frank Telefe, aka bobo ==

Rose: (6) You know say I dey think of how we wan take do
country man April fool, (smacks lip), but e--e I no, [I
no

Frank: (7) I go do] person (general laughter)

Rose: (8) Sure? U sure say u go do? But [but

Frank: (9) no worry] country man, make una no do us o. Na only
we, na only we, na we go do na. Abeg, for this
programme, no try do us April fool o, abeg, because
the one wey person just do me na ee, I never im full
recover for am (laughter).^^^

Frank: (10) You know what? It is because the matter wey we go
carry come for una today, we no need make una just
dey flash us

Rose: (11) ... while they dey one place dey jollificate. Anyway,
that matter no be de matter wey we carry come. We
still dey salute you, you wey be say u be business man,
business woman anyone wey you dey do, including

we brothers, you you know say, we get one brothers wey we wan salute. We wan salute them e for for this week wey be say na e e their week but na specially we go salute them. E don tey wey people dey talk about them mmm sometimes people go say, they go say, hail, sometimes you go see people () they go tell you say make you no mention them for where dem dey, say those people, e e (smacks lips) abeg make you no try. But all the same o, you know say person no dey bad finish for everything.^^^

Frank: (12) Yes naa. You know say they talk say na e e na one thing n aim dey spoil other people, na one bad egg wey dey for inside crate of egg n aim go do one bad thing wey go make them say we don paint all of una bad ...

Rose: (13) So, corruption, this corruption I dey. Na im make --- make we no forget, bobo, you know say e get people wey we dey talk about before we come dive naa dey go to all these one. And, ask me which people wey benthat^^^

Frank: (14) Ehmm, me I don ask you before, oya, na which people be that?

Rose: (15) Na police o (prolonged general laughter)

Otigba Junction on Solid 100.9 Fm (6th April, 2016)

Male Presenter (MP): (16) As I hear am, me me personal... me ma, I happy to hear that say e go end today. If finally say e go end today,

ah-ah, Glory be to God^^^

Female Presenter (FP): (17) E go end today for Lagos and Abuja.
But by the end of the week, e go end
for other [states

MP: (18) In the] case of light==

FP: (19) and e get another clause wey dey on top wetin dem talk.
They talk dey wan privatise, dem dey consider to
privatise the petroleum industry, wey be say operators go
dey allowed to source for funding and the running of the
industry, while government work go be to regulate the
price.^^^

MP: (20) Hm, you know==

FP: (21) So they wan do am as them do this power sector==

MP: (22) Make I, May I==

FP: (23) to privatize am so you go dey get your fund by yourself.

MP: (24) Mei (make) I tell you eh, if they privatise that thing, to
me o,==

FP: (25) Mhmm

MP: (26) Heeee heee, You know say nep --- as light, as power, as
power, eeh eh, things be dey naa, immediately dem
commot am from wey im dey before come carry am
enter the other way, u know say as light thing dey be
today^^^

FP: (27) But even at that, I feel say the power sector, they don,
they don increase. As dem privatise am, for some places,
dey don increase^^^

MP: (28) Eh .

FP: (29) There is one thing --- like privatising something, like na, u dey own dat thing, so u go make sure say that thing dey up and running^^^

MP: (30) Yeah.

FP: (31) But government something, na everybody. This one, dem get this lackadaisical attitude, nonchalant attitude in that thing. I no wan do am. Who go do am? ... But then we go open up we lines make you wey dey for house talk your mind ... U fit go facebook. Our facebook page na Solid 100.9 ...

FP: (32) Hello, good evening.

Caller: (33) Good evening.

MP: (34) Good evening brotherly. Wetin be your name, and where you dey call us from?

Caller: (35) Na prophet. I dey call you from Imo State.

MP: (36) Oga prophet, ride on.

Prophet: (37) How una dey there?

MP: (38) We dey gallant, we dey fine.

Prophet: (39) Ok, for the first matter, that oga, im say na Aluko abi or Iku, I don't know the one that is his correct name==

MP & FP: (40) Aluko

Prophet: (41) He should tell us, whether aluko or whatever his name is. [I was watching

MP & FP: (42) Aluko] I was watching him on AIT ... May God help us. Thank you and God bless us

FP: (43) Alright [thank you

MP: (44) Thank you] prophet ...

MP: (45) Hello. Aloo^^^

FP: (46) Oga Gabriel Ani. Good evening^^^

Caller: (47) Ehee. Na me. Better pikin (prolonged bantering)
Oga Gabriel (OG): (48) There is one thing wey I wan to remind
una there o. Last time, u come with this
fuel matter. Tmoro no be 7th April?
(short silence) answer me naa^^^

MP: (49) We dey hear you^^^

OG: (50) Kachikwu say na tmor the whole thing go end ... What I
am saying is that ... If they are not capable to be there ()
) If you see yourself that you are not capable to do
something, resign from there. For instance, myself, I've
taught Geography good 11 years. If I'm not capable to
do that () make government look for another teacher to
handle the subject, eh, but I'm capable because that was
what I read in the university...

The analysis

The data clearly reveal four dimensions which account for the Nigerian Pidgin as a language in all the ramifications of what justify a language. They are:

a. Weighty topics

The data to support this are found in (13) which talks about corruption; while (15) is about the police force. In (19), the topic expressed as privatisation of the petroleum industry. *Wetin Mega* on Radio Nigeria, Purity 102.5 FM dwelt on corruption in the police force; while *Otigba Junction* Solid 100.9 FM discussed the perennial power outage, privatisation of the petroleum industry, and fuel scarcity. These are current burning national issues in Nigeria. The participants aired their views on the issues showing

that Nigerian Pidgin, as used nowadays, can sustain discussions on weighty matters, and not just trade transactions.

b. Structured and smooth conversations

Having a smooth conversation is a result of the language in use performing not just a transactional function, but also an interactional function. There were established features of conversations in the radio phone-in programmes which were conducted in pidgin. Some of them are:

Introduction of topic: In (13) and (15) tell us that the issue to be discussed is corruption in the police force; while (19) talk about privatisation of the petroleum industry.

Opening: In lines (1), the female presenter introduces herself, while the male presenter does his in line (4). In (32), (45-46), there is the greeting – greeting.

Exit/closing: In (42-43), the caller uses a pre-closing before closing, and it is accepted by the presenters.

Turn-taking (yielding the floor): (2), (9), (11), (13); (16), (19), (26), (27), (29), (46), (47), (49), etc. In these portions, normal yielding of floor occurred.

Overlapping (simultaneous speech): At the end of (1) & (2), Rose said ‘well’ as Frank was saying ‘I bin’. Others cases of overlapping are seen at the end of (8) & (9); (17) & (18) and (27) & (28).

Back-channelling: In (3), the MP used ‘mhm’; while in (25), the FP also used the same vocative.

Turn-repair: This is found in (18).

A language which is described as marginal, debased, rudimentary cannot be used to maintain and sustain a smooth conversation. That is to say that the pidgin currently spoken in Nigeria has transcended the primordial type. Callers, after hearing the matter to be discussed, started phoning in to make their input. In their interaction, they exhibited competence in the use of Nigerian pidgin, that is, they were able to participate in the conversation because they not only understood but also spoke the pidgin used by the presenters. There was also progression in the radio discussions because the participants observed the principles of turn-taking and adjacency pairs, thereby giving the discussions a structure. And based on the topics of discussion (corruption, power outage, fuel scarcity), they were able to make meaningful input, thus making the conversations a unified whole.

Based on this, Nigerian Pidgin cannot be said to be marginal or rudimentary any longer. It should be considered a full-fledged language which can be used effectively in speech exchanges of whatever subject matter, and so, should be accorded the respect and status it deserves as an independent language.

c. Expansion of domain of use

To start with, Nigerian pidgin was used throughout the time allocated to the two radio programmes. And from the data under study, the presenters and the callers come from different parts of the country, and each has his native language. There was no trade

situation involved here, but they all used Nigerian Pidgin to communicate with one another in the radio programmes. This is an indication of the expansion of the domain of use of pidgin, though without the abandonment of the local languages. As part of the expansion, a creole develops. The development can occur in two ways: First, a pidgin becomes a creole when it becomes the mother tongue (or first language) of children whose parents speak pidgin to each other (Herzfeld 72). Rickford and McWhorter call it nativization (243). Pursuing it further, Marchese and Schnukal highlighted that creole is a pidgin that has acquired a speech community (qtd. in Elugbe and Omamor 47). As such, Warri and Sapele towns in Edo State have generally come to be associated with Nigerian Pidgin. Some other pidgin speech communities can be found in Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Lagos, and Cross River States of Nigeria.

Second, apart from nativization, a pidgin develops into a creole through a wider expansion of social domain of usage. Usually this expansion is as a result of its “high usage among speakers of mutually unintelligible substrate language, rather than being superstrate and substrate speakers (Rickford and McWhorter, 244). From the archetypal definition of pidgin as a trade language, one would tend to assume that after the trade situation that brought it into existence has ceased, the language would die. This is not however, the case of Nigerian Pidgin as its domain of usage has expanded (244). The English-based pidgin spoken in Nigeria is said to be the most widely spoken language in Nigeria (Faraclas 2). Due to the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society, Nigerian Pidgin has come to be seen as a *lingua franca*, especially in informal settings. Even among the educated

class, mostly undergraduates, pidgin also thrives between peers (Jowitt 14).

Decreolisation as an emerging trend in Nigeria Pidgin

Another emerging trend in Nigerian Pidgin is decreolisation. This phenomenon is evident in (10), ‘it is because’; (17), ‘but by the end of the week’; (19), ‘allowed to source for funding and the running of the industry’; (24), ‘if they privatise that thing’; (29), ‘there is one thing’; (31), ‘lackadaisical attitude, nonchalant attitude in that thing’; etc. These do not reflect simplified lexis or syntax.

Decreolisation is defined as “the process by which a creole becomes more like the standard language from which most of its vocabulary comes” (Richard and Schmidt 158). That is to say that the creole comes to be like the superstrate language. This corresponds to what Munzali posited on the pattern of development of pidgin : from pidgin to creole and from creole to a decreolised form (238). For instance, in (10), the ‘unadulterated’ pidgin should be ‘na because’; (17) should be ‘for weekend’; and (31), “e get one thing”, etc.

A lot of factors contribute to the decreolization of a creole. It occurs when the superstrate language is seen as a prestige language, and is also taught in schools in the region where the creole is spoken. The higher the level of one’s education, the more likely one is to use the decreolised form of creole. In Nigeria, English Language is a prestige language. It is taught in schools as a subject, and also, as the medium of instruction. It is also the official language of the nation. Hence, everybody, educated and uneducated alike, aspires to be proficient in the language. As a result, when the highly-educated Nigerians speak

Nigerian Pidgin, it tends towards the decreolised form, and the not-so-educated ones try to emulate them. So, it can be said that the pidgin-creole spoken in Nigeria is tilting towards the decreolised form.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this work, it would be seen that what is called Nigerian pidgin is no longer a pidgin in the technical sense of the word. It is no longer rudimentary or marginal. People of diverse social and educational background use it. More so, because more Nigerians are becoming literate in English language, the pidgin is also tending towards decreolization.

These researchers, therefore, recommend that Nigerian Pidgin should no longer be discriminated against in Nigeria as it has developed beyond the primeval stage.

In addition, since the major aim of discussions is to pass across a message, and then, to maintain social relations, this paper is of the opinion that, in non-academic public gatherings, official and unofficial, Nigerian Pidgin should be used, in addition to other local languages so as to carry everybody along in the proceedings.

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