

## **PIDGIN-CREOLE A TOOL FOR NIGERIAN NATIONAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*Considering Nigeria as a multilingual nation and her problem of adopting one of the indigenous languages without any bias as her national language, this paper addressed the issues on Nigerian Pidgin and Creole as the only panacea to have the long awaited common national language in the present day Nigeria. The data collected were analysed with concept of descriptive method analysis and translations. The work used accommodation theory as the theoretical framework, and concluded with affirmative recommendation on a wakeup call to the government, in other to salvage the situation.*

**Keywords:** Pidgin, Creole, National Language, Government, Nigeria.

### **Introduction: Nature of Language in Nigerian Context**

Nigeria is a nation with various languages that made her a multilingual nation; spanning over three hundred and fifty languages: Igbo language used in the land area of the eastern Nigeria; Hausa mainly in the northern region; Yoruba in the western part; southern part with her languages such as Ijaw, Warri, Bini languages etc. and other minor languages that cut across the nation. Although Britain colonised Nigeria area so English was fused into the nation as a common language which settled the problem of linguistic diversity. Portuguese arrived before the English language but it appeared that the earlier language could not capture the territory linguistically which the later was able to achieve, and of course today, the English language is assumed to be one of the greatest assets to the nation.

Language has been the powerful artefact of any given nation and also the dominant instrument for upholding people's culture. Linguistically, Nigeria is a nation with divergent and diversified languages. It also does not exist in a vacuum but in a particular environment and society. The other contexts where language exists in Nigeria are the gender, social class, identity etc.

## **Language and National Policy**

Policies have been put in place in Nigeria for a common codified language to serve as a medium of unifying the other languages of our nation, nevertheless the English language has been serving this purpose. It has served the purpose as the language of Nigerian government, in education, commerce, law, industry and other minor and major institutions. On the other hand, it has maintained its position as the target, official and unresolved national language of the nation. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with Amendments 2011 states thus on the issue of languages, "the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof" (LL47). It also incorporates the dictates on language issue in the state assembly thus:

The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve. (LL63)

The question begging for answer is when will an ordinary state assembly come to the term of using any of the indigenous languages peculiar to their state or one of the local languages to bind the national interest of the nation? To foster the unity in a nation, one of the national languages other than the English language has to take the centre stage in our national day-to-day business activities. It is evident that nobody is ready to allow another person's language to be given the privilege of dominance. Thus, the existing state of affairs still stands. Take for instance, a State like Delta with its various languages would not condescend so low as to choosing other peoples' language or accepting it. This implies that things must be done to salvage this situation of using English that is not our local language for official purposes.

Government has proposed various policies in education on language environment, Sofunke considers the situation thus:

The Government is fully aware that the trend the world over is to have a national language which is a means of preserving the people's culture. Although the adoption of a lingua franca in Nigeria is a task which cannot be achieved overnight, Government is of the view that a beginning should be made as soon as possible and considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child

should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages in Nigeria other than his own vernacular. (38)

The issue of Wazobia has taken the centre stage and some earlier school of thoughts kicked against it. The Wazobia framework which was a coinage that originated from the pulling together of the translation of the English word *come* among the major languages was totally ruled out by some people over some political, religious, ethnic etc. bias and other factors that militated against using one of the indigenous languages as a national language. Osaji presented some factors that affected the choice of any of the native languages as the national language such as:

- Population of speakers, with age, occupation and class distribution;
- Location: geographical, political and social boundaries;
- Present status: any evidence of change in status e.g. decline, increase, age shift, geographical extension, etc.
- Literature: oral and written traditional, use in educational institutions and in political, religious and other organisations: mass media using language, such as newspapers radio, television;
- History of any specialised use of the language including education, history of social and religious pressure groups, and history of any relation with other languages of the area concerned;
- Economic strength: method of finance, state or private or national, staff recruitment and training facilities, availability of teaching materials, foreign aid and technical assistance requirements;
- Administrative, commercial and mass media requirements in terms of cost for changing languages;
- Adult education facilities and literacy campaigns.

Considering the above factors enlisted by Osaji, it is assumed that a lot of homework needs to be done with some factors in other to have at least a particular language which can serve the purpose of a national language for the nation.

Some other school of thought suggested the use of one of the minority language. This is prior to the unresolved struggle among the three major languages as none

wants to surrender to the other in the course of being used as the national language. It is suggested that Igala should be adopted as the national language since it is the only language that cuts across some speech communities in the north, east and southern parts of Nigeria. Another thought recommended Idoma, even Ijaw considering the people that speak the language and areas they covered. These areas are so minimal to be considered enough reason to place them as the national language. Also, the vast teeming population of Nigerian nation with the multi-nature of the political terrain, sociological differences, linguistically maps and other factors will hinder the progression of any of the indigenous languages as the national language.

The majority of the languages do not have adequate manpower that can teach the language to others if accepted; every of the language has a particular region that is dominated for it, leaving behind the others. In other to avoid imposing any of the major or the minor languages that can bring about common bickering, another language should be developed to serve this purpose of national language and this paper seeks to proffer Nigerian Pidgin-Creole as the answer.

### **Pidgin and Creole the Nigerian Perspective**

Pidgin and creole have long standing recognitions in linguistic environment with various discrepancies on their acceptability by a particular speech community. This is based on the assumption and impression that they are languages that are debased, second handed, and mainly meant for the third class citizens because they are usually spoken by servants, maids and generally the uneducated. The language arose to breach the gap in communication among various societal classes. Pidgin came up earliest and once it is widely used creole is developed for that community. Todd considers pidgin to be a language that 'arises to fulfil certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language' (1), while creole 'arises when a pidgin becomes the mother tongue of a speech community' (3).

Such language has existed in Nigeria and still triumphs in certain areas without giving it the much accolade needed with various varieties and acceptability in some quarters. It is highly recognised without adequate proper attention given to it, but it is an everyday language among various classes. The language was assumed a contact language during the English colonial era but clear observation will note that during the Portuguese voyage to coastal areas of Nigeria there was a contact language, that is, a language that eases their communication with the people on ground. The Antera Duke's diary is clear example which Bamgbose

opines that 'contact English is often illustrated by the famous entries in Anterra Duke's diary of events in Calabar between 1785 and 1788' (12). Elugbe and Omamor write:

The language of Antera Duke's diary does sound more like some kind of substandard usage of English than a pidginised or even simplified form of English. Describing the language of Antera Duke's diary as kind of substandard English is not in any way equivalent to a claim that it does not represent some stage in the tortuous journey of NP from its proto-form, whatever the latter may have looked or sound like. (31)

In Nigeria, some areas have developed to the extent that creole is used as their first language or mother tongue, like in Niger-delta area of Nigeria and some other areas pidgin is still being reckoned with.

### **Pidgin and Creole the Panacea for Nigeria's National Language**

Pidgin-Creole has come to stay, breaking various grounds on linguistic barrier among the multilingual Nigerian's nation. There have been existing proposals on the choice of a national language, which were categorised into two major aspects: the unilingual and the multilingual methodologies. The unilingual approach comprising the pidgin language, artificial language form from the amalgamation of the three indigenous languages: Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba making up the Wazobia, or Guosa; any of the minority languages like Igala, Idoma, Ijaw etc.; any of the major indigenous languages: English; or any of external Pan-African languages like: Swahili, Zulu. On the side of the multilingual approach is where the three major languages will be recognised as national language concurrently while the English language retains its official status. Soyinka 1977, Olagoke 1982, Jowitt 1995. The second approach was also supported by the Federal Government, in line with their stand on language issues for the business of national assemblies and national policy on education.

On the existing various criticisms against the various approaches above: that is power of exclusion on the other languages, English is not a native language, and using any pan-African language is also on the same category of English and worst of it is that nobody speaks the language in our national lives. Upholding one of the minority languages will pose a greater problem, bearing in mind the manpower and limited available resources to compare the major languages covered capacities.

So, this paper seeks to advocate acceptance of Pidgin-Creole as the major language of the Nigerian's national language, due to its wider acceptability in all spheres of Nigeria, and in all her regions. Pidgin-Creole has gained wider acceptance in everyday life, politics, business, education, economy and social well-being.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria had had its rough side on the ability to choose a particular language for national language. So many ethnic bickering arise once national language is mentioned, while the English language will never be accepted as the national language despite its wide dominance.

### **Research Questions**

1. How would Pidgin-Creole serve as Nigeria's national language?
2. To what extent will Pidgin-Creole go in taking the pride of the national language?
3. To what extent has Pidgin-Creole developed to serve this purpose?
4. What international importance in areas of business, education, politics, media etc. do Pidgin-Creole possess in Nigeria?

### **Review of Relevant Scholarship**

#### **Conceptual Framework**

Nigeria and her linguistic issues could have been a resolved matter if needful and palliative measures or approaches were attended to before now. Despite her multilingual nature, every quarter could have shelved their ethnic interest and come to a roundtable to foster formation of a particular language that can serve the purpose of a national language. If Pidgin-Creole was given a clear negotiation and preference, Nigeria could have overcome the problem of having a national language. In view of the general origin and acceptance of the Pidgin-Creole, that has no locus or attachment to any particular nation or other indigenous languages could have been adopted as a language that will serve the

purpose of the national language, then, some needed structure, orthography and other things could have been developed.

### **Pidgin-Creole in National Development**

Developing a nation demands a language that will boost other areas of the nation and for a country to develop linguistically, certain measures are needed to be put in place and since no indigenous language wants to assume the outright position of national language development, Emenanjo as quoted in Jowitt discusses that development needs to be fostered by deliberate language engineering, which assumes five major forms:

- Graphisation (designing and standardising the orthography) Pidgin-Creole needed to be graphised with current trends in Nigerian contextual norms.
- Standardisation (the evolution of a standard dialect) Pidgin-Creole of a Nigerianise dialect needed to be developed with a leaf from indigenous language, like *tatafo* (gossip), *oga* (master or sir)
- Modernisation of the numeration system (by the incorporation, for example, of the decimal principle); upgrading Pidgin-Creole in Nigerian context of numeral systems.
- Creation of metalanguage (so that a language can function as a medium of study and instruction); areas in Niger-Delta region has started developing the Pidgin-Creole for teaching and learning in that area, which is needed in other regions too.
- Production of materials related to each of these.

Jowitt considers that other signs related to a particular language functions include the use of language in radio and television broadcasting and in creative writing (41). Rickford extends that once formed, a marginal pidgin may develop into an extended pidgin or creole, and may eventually decreolise into a continuum of post-creole “dialects” (497).

### **Pidgin-Creole in National Politics**

The general relationship between Pidgin-Creole and national politics is seriously gaining ground in Nigerian context, Elugbe and Omamor stress that it is curious that Nigerian Government, both at the State and at the Federal levels, simply

never mention NP. It is as if it does not exist. And yet, if the population of those who do speak NP in one form or the other is a metre stick for determining what a major language is, then NP is definitely a major Nigerian language (143-4). It seems that the majority of educated Nigerians in politics will not want to associate themselves with inferiority of the said Pidgin-Creole language. It is observed that government are yet to develop the acclaimed three major languages to the national level due to some political factors, but developing Pidgin-Creole will go a long way to eschew all form of disunity, because the language has no particular dominated language over it. Jowitt supports this claim that the result is that, "advocacy of the promotion of a particular to some kind of 'national' status is viewed with suspicion by those who do not fall in the category of L<sub>1</sub> speakers of that language, and a government policy that appeared to favour it would encounter serious, and potentially most damaging opposition" (42).

### **Pidgin-Creole in Language Policy on Education**

Language policy on education requires a situation whereby Pidgin-Creole needed to be incorporated in educational policy of our nation. The language has gone a long way in permeating into some major cronies of the users among the high and the low in our nation, if given a chance the language can as well function well in teaching and learning in our schools.

National Policy on Education requires that:

In addition to appreciating the importance of a language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considered the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

The above policy and the rest were made in 1977 and since then a lot of dynamism has taken the centre stage in language policy of our nation; given Pidgin-Creole a chance this time around as a language of instruction to some extent at the early stages will project the language policy to a greater limelight. Due to the ground the English language has gained, observation has it that some teachers in southern region of Nigeria usually resort to Pidgin-Creole when there is a crack in communication or that teacher lacked the actual semiotics for the particular situation in English. As Todd discourses:

To instil in teachers while they are in training Colleges the knowledge that the occasional use of the pidgin or creole might well be sound pedagogical practice – for example in supplying the local equivalent of an unknown English word or phrase – might have the effect of reducing unnecessary classroom tension. A teacher who does not have to worry unduly about the linguistic performance might be more sensitive to the type of language most useful in encouraging individual pupils to participate in classroom work .... As far as oral behaviour is concerned, the aim should be to facilitate the pupils' manipulation of a wider range of varieties, ultimately in his ability to control English language. (83)

Since the essential tool for education is the communication and to communicate effectively the appropriate language should be employed. At the tertiary level once the gap arises instead to mix the language with the indigenous language of the environment, one should employ the services of Pidgin-Creole, to fill up the gap, because everybody understands this particular code; and if the Pidgin-Creole is well recognised in that area, the paper thinks that nothing should stop Pidgin-Creole in advocating its place of national language.

### **Pidgin-Creole for Nation on Lingual-Cultural Trends**

Nigeria being a nation with multicultural strands needs a national language that will help her various ethnic groups to transmit their culture to other ethnic nations. Akindele and Adegbite concur that "language does not exist in a vacuum. It is as a vehicle of culture and that language functions as an instrument of human development." (91)

They proffer that a lingual-cultural policy for national development recognises three fundamental needs of nationhood:

- i. The identification and positive development of the linguistic resources of a nation:
- ii. The identification and positive development of the cultural resources of a nation:
- iii. An integrative (rather than separated) development of both the linguistic and cultural resources. (92)

The above three varieties can serve these areas of monolingual society with one principal language and culture and there is no society with the absolute

mono; bilingual society with two principal dominated the society or using only the two languages and cultures over other languages; and lastly multilingual society where the Nigerian nation belongs, with multiple languages and cultures.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theory of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was applied in this paper which was developed by Howard Giles. Turner and West argue that when people interact they adjust their speech, their vocal patterns and their gestures, to accommodate others. (1) Also using convergence and divergence for the national interest and integration in the national language. Giles and Smith state that convergence refers to the process through which an individual shifts his or her speech pattern in interaction so that they more closely resemble the speech patterns of speech partners. (46) While the divergence is a linguistic strategy whereby a member of a speech community accentuates the linguistic differences between one and one's interlocutor.

### **Methodology**

The paper explains the design of the research, how the data were collected and the analytical approach that was followed.

### **Design**

The paper was purely a library research based with examples lifted from already existed work on Pidgin-Creole language in those texts.

### **Population**

The population was mainly Pidgin-Creole existing structure, words, plural formations, question tags, and they were analysed through descriptive method of analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Pidgin-Creole basically is the language of business and used daily at any environment where the people involved are bilinguals:

Hawu mochi?

What is the price?

I wan bai fuud stofs

I want to buy food stuffs

Mek I kukuma enta maaketi

Let me quickly go to market

Some words on particular indigenous languages are now accommodated in Pidgin-Creole of Nigerian context for examples

Abeegi or Ejoor or Doo etc. meaning Please

Elugbe and Omamor state that Pidgin-Creole has only one negation *no* which is realised as *no* in the speech of some. There also appear to be speakers for whom the choice between *no* and *no* depending on the nature of the vowel of the verb or the auxiliary item in the sentence. For such speakers the negator takes the form *no* if the appropriate vowel is an open vowel, and *no* if this vowel is a closed vowel. This is the category of speakers who say:

A no go; an a no tel mai papa sef – I did not go; and I did not tell my father.

A no go kom tumoro – I will not come tomorrow

Dem no gri rait di leta – They refused to write the letter

Plural formation strategies in Modern Pidgin-Creole, Aziza gave some examples as follows:

- i. Di draivas de kom – Di draivas dem de kom – “The drivers are coming”
- ii. A no si di tishas – A no si di tishas dem – “I did not see the teachers”
- iii. Wi tel awa gads mek dem no it – Wi tel awa gads dem no it – “We told our guards not to eat”
- iv. Plenty shoshis de dis rod – Plenti shoshis dem de dis rod – “There are many churches on this road.” (Aziza, 12)

Orthography of some selected area of Pidgin-Creole as Elugbe and Omamor contribute in diverse parts of speech. (88-92)

Nouns in Pidgin-Creole: examples

<i>Pikin</i>	Child	<i>hausu</i>	house
<i>Chia</i>	Chair	<i>pesin</i>	person
<i>Oga</i>	Sir/Master	<i>abro</i>	brother
<i>Draiva</i>	Driver	<i>Penta</i>	painter

Noun with reduplication or by compounding: examples

<i>Sansan</i>	Sand	<i>boiboi</i>	houseboy
<i>Longatrot</i>	greed	<i>switmaut</i>	gluttony

Pronoun derivation in Pidgin-Creole, Aziza suggests that “in modern NP pronouns, number gender and case are differentiated in such a way that makes them more similar to English than in the past, i.e. they appear to be decreolising.”(13)

Subject	Object	Possessive
a “I”	mi “me”	mai “my/mine”
yu “you (sg)”	yu “you”	yọ “your (sg.)”
i “he/she/it”	am “him/her/it”	im “his/hers/its”
wi “we”	wi/ọs “us”	wi/awa “our/ours”
una “you pl.”	una “you”	una “your/yours”
dẹm “they”	dẹm “them”	dẹm “their/theirs”

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

If Nigeria must get it right now on the issue of national language it is high time we shove every sentiment and come to a round-table and keep every personal interest and forge this nation ahead with the adoption of Pidgin-Creole as her national language. Aziza asserts that “It is the single most spoken language in Nigeria with a population of over 80 million and still growing because, as a product of urbanisation and as more rural communities become urbanised due to more formal education and industrialization, the number of NP speakers is also growing” (16).

Although, Pidgin-Creole is yet to get full recognition in this nation, the paper recommends that government should brace up to a sincere responsibility and give the language a standardised position by involving the linguists, educationists, legislators, writers, journalists and other language developers to give the language a facelift in terms of quantum sponsorship, in other to develop a standard orthography for it.

Finally, government should promote and implement the language as one of the major languages to be studied at all levels of our educational system. “All in all, the field of NP studies promises us a lot of excitement in the coming decades.” (Elugbe, 435)

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