The Prevalence of Nigerian Pidgin as a Medium of Communication among Nigerian University Undergraduates: A Study of Nigerian Pidgin usages among the Undergraduates of University of Nigeria Nsukka

JohnKenedy Azubuike Ozoemena
The Use of English Unit, School of General Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Email Address johnkenedy.ozoemena@unn.edu.ng
08064766753

Livina Nkeiruka Emodi
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu
University Igbariam Anambra State
Email Address livinaemodi@yahoo.com

Walter Osundu Ugwuagbo
The use of English Unit, School of General Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Email Address walter.ugwuagbo@unn.edu.ng

Abstract
The use of Nigerian pidgin, popularly known as broken or Pidgin English, is gradually but consistently gaining upper-hand of usage among university undergraduates in the southern part of Nigeria, over the English language which should be the linguistic model in institutions of higher learning. This study used the undergraduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as a case study to verify the reasons why university undergraduates prefer the use of pidgin to the use of Nigerian English during conversations, and the possible effect of this overt linguistic behavior to the spoken and written English of the undergraduates. In doing this two research questions were generated and data collected from fifty undergraduates from different faculties and departments of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, through a twenty item questionnaire. This was done using a random sampling technique. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents and their responses analyzed through Pearson Moment Correlation Formula. The result of the analysis showed that one of the reasons why the undergraduates prefer the use of pidgin is because it is easier to speak, and also makes conversation interesting and enduring. On the effects of Nigerian pidgin on the English language the respondents agreed that the use of Nigerian pidgin can have a negative effect on the written and spoken English of the undergraduates.

Key Words: Prevalence, Nigerian undergraduates, Pearson moment correlation, spoken English, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, pidgin, broken English, English language.
INTRODUCTION, HISTORY AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH.

The importance of language as a medium of communication, instruction and social interaction in every sphere of the society cannot be over emphasized; this involves the spoken and written medium of language. The students of tertiary institutions in the Southern part of Nigeria unlike their counterparts in the northern part of Nigeria are engulfed in the overt linguistic behavior of using the pidgin as a dominant medium of communication rather than using the English language demanded of than by the virtue of being in an academic environment or better still the language of their immediate environment with students that share the same linguistic background with them, as in the case of students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where more than eighty percent of the students are of Igbo extraction. This study therefore investigates the reasons why these undergraduates indulge in this overt linguistic behavior, and its effects on their written and spoken English, using the students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka as a case study.

The origin of Pidgin English can be traced back to the contact between multilingual coastal communities in Nigeria and their earliest trading partners the Portuguese at the wake of 1469, which brought about a Portuguese based pidgin known as “Negro-Portuguese”. The Portuguese based pidgin was short lived with the ousting of the Portuguese traders by the other European traders and missionaries. The French, then briefly the Dutch and finally the English among those European interest groups. The British trade contact which started from the beginning of the 17th century metamorphosed into an English based pidgin which was developed along the coast. Jowitt (2000) stated that the Nigerian pidgin English served as a language of trade and communication between Englishmen and Nigerians living along the Nigerian coast. Pidgin was useful because it would be learned easily by both races in the oil rich Niger Delta. Nigerian pidgin has developed into creoles as most of its population use it as their first language. In some areas it is used as a second language while to the rest of Nigerians it is a lingua Franca. Ihemere (2006) reveals that Nigerian pidgin has creolized into the native language of about 3 to 5 million of Nigerians and as a second language for at least 75 million people.

Jubril (1995) opines that among the existing Nigerian languages, today Nigerian Pidgin English has the highest numbers of speakers. Like other pidgin languages around the world, NPE is made up of substrate and superstrate languages, Edith (2014). For the dominant role, and in the fusion of what evolved as NPE, English is the superstrate while the indigenous languages are the substrate languages, because of the linguistic diversity of the substrate situation different dialects of the NPE emerged.

It is assumed that pidgin all over the world evolve from contact situation, in spite of its Universality as an aspect of popular speech, the origin of pidgin remains very controversial, according to Todd (1974), Mantras (2009), they stated that pidgin is a language which arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language. This definition maintains that pidgin do not have native speakers, but begin their life circle as a makeshift medium thus creating a makeshift linguistic repertoire to which all participants contribute. In West Africa pidgin was accepted as the defacto language of blue collar trade and merchants, in some West African countries, the trappings of the contact with Europeans promoted the use of pidgin and relegated the use of indigenous languages. Holm (2000) avers that because of its nationwide currency English based pidgin is now used in the media and the house of assembly in paupau new Guinea. Yule (1996) is of the opinion that pidgin is a variety of a language which was developed for some practical purposes, such as trading among groups of people who has a lot of contact, but do not know each other’s language. According to Opara (1999) pidgin in Nigeria originated as a trade language that is made up of foreign language and the local languages. It also originated as a result of the need for communication among Nigerians living in towns and cities from different ethnic groups who have no common language.

Spencer (1971) opines that Nigerian Pidgin English developed as a result of inter-tribal marriages. Obiechina (1984) classified the NPE into five varieties these are:

1. Bendel pidgin
2. Calabar pidgin  
3. Kano/Maiduguri pidgin  
4. Lagos pidgin  
5. Port Harcourt pidgin  

So many studies have been carried out on Nigerian pidgin some have surveyed its origin, structure and ethno-linguistic and sociolinguistic relevance, some of them sampled people’s attitudes towards its use in either formal or informal settings, for instance Mann (2001) conducted a survey of people’s attitudes towards its use in southern Nigeria. Mansah (2011) studied its lexicalization. Jalaludeen, Ibrahim (2016). studied Nigerian pidgin multi-prepositional functionality of “fo” among Nigerian staff of CES in Manchester.

The use of pidgin English popularly known as Nigeria pidgin has become so popular among Nigeria undergraduates, especially those from the southern part of Nigeria, and this has made it almost impossible for these undergraduates to communicate or converse in Nigeria standard English without bringing in chunks of Nigerian pidgin into the conversation even during formal conversation, this study therefore investigates the reasons why these undergraduates prefer the use of Nigeria pidgin during conversation. And its possible effect on their spoken English.

using undergraduates of the University of Nigeria Nsukka as a case study.

SOME PIDGINS UTTERANCES OF NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES

1. If the lecturer no won come me I dey go home.  
2. You go come class today?  
3. Abeg try come o! because we fit write test today  
4. You don see your result for 301?  
5. I bi like say that girl don quarrel with im boyfriend.  
6. Lecture don start ?  
7. The lecture go hold today?  
8. The lecturer don dey come o!  
9. Babe ibi like say the lecturer no dey come again.  
10. The time for this lecture don dey ova o!

STANDARD ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE PIDGIN UTTERANCES

1. If the lecturer doesn’t want to come I will go home.  
2. Would you be in the class today?  
3. Please try and come because we may have test today.  
4. Have you seen your result for 301?  
5. It appears that girl has quarreled with her boy friend.  
6. Has lectures started ?  
7. Would the lecture hold today ?  
8. The lecturer is coming.  
9. Babe it appears the lecturer will not come again.  
10. The period for this lecture is almost over.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were asked in line with the above specific objectives of the study:

1. Why do Nigeria undergraduates especially those from the southern part of Nigeria prefer the use of Nigeria pidgin to the standard Nigeria English.  
2. To what extent has this overt linguistic behavior affected the standard Nigeria English Usage among Nigerian undergraduates.
RESEARCH DESIGN
This study used the simple random sampling method, as the study involves social group, in it fifty undergraduates of the University of Nigeria Nsukka were sampled as a representative of students from southern Nigeria.

POPULATION: The population of this study covers all the undergraduates from universities in southern part of Nigeria.

SAMPLING AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE
Fifty questionnaires were issued out to the respondents the researcher distributed the questionnaires to students during lectures and gathered back the questionnaires during the next lecture period, at the end all the questionnaires were completed and all the fifty questionnaires were returned.

Table 1.1 Shows the names of departments and number of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Number of questions</th>
<th>Number of questionnaires returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agriculture economics</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Political science</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION
The principal instrument for data collection in this study as earlier mentioned is the questionnaire; the questionnaire had two sections, section A, used six items to elicit information on why the undergraduates prefer the use of pidgin to the standard Nigeria English during conversations. Section B used six items to elicit information on the extent to which the use of pidgin has affected the Standard Nigerian English usage. The respondents were made to agree or disagree with the statement in a four points rating scales: Strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES
The study involves the undergraduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka fifty questionnaires were distributed to the students and all were returned. The copies were distributed during lectures and were collected during the next lecture period.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS
The data were collected and analyzed according to the responses of the subjects of the research to the research questions in sections A and B of the questionnaire statements. The section mean rating (x) and Standard deviation (SD) frequencies were rated in this manner.

Strongly Agree (SA) - 4 points
Agree (A)  - 3 points
Disagree (D) - 2 points
Strongly disagree (SD) - 1 point

The decision rule adopted in the analysis of the data in this section was that a mean rating of 2.5 and above/implied that the stated factors are highly significant, and a mean rating of between 2.0 and 2.49 implied that the factors were of high significance where as a mean rating of 2.0 and below indicates low significance.

© 2021 British Journals ISSN 2048-1268
Research question 1
Reasons why undergraduates prefer the use of pidgin to the Nigerian Standard English.
A. Pidgin is easier to speak
B. Pidgin is understood by all and sundry
C. Pidgin makes conversation/interesting and enduring.
D. Pidgin makes one more fluent during conversation
E. Pidgin does not have wrong usages
F. Jokes are better made in pidgin

Table 2.2 shows subject response to the question reasons why undergraduates prefer the use of pidgin to the Nigerian Standard English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of subjects</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>SA 4</th>
<th>A 3</th>
<th>D 2</th>
<th>SD 1</th>
<th>Total score</th>
<th>( \bar{x} ) mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>20(80)</td>
<td>20 (60)</td>
<td>5 (10)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>20 (80)</td>
<td>25(75)</td>
<td>2(4)</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>30(40)</td>
<td>10(30)</td>
<td>10(20)</td>
<td>10(10)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>10 (120)</td>
<td>10 (30)</td>
<td>15 (30)</td>
<td>15 (15)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>30 (120)</td>
<td>15 (45)</td>
<td>10 (20)</td>
<td>5 (15)</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>20 (80)</td>
<td>15 (45)</td>
<td>10 (20)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Going by the decision rule adopted for analyzing the response of the respondents the factors ABCDE each recorded above a mean score of 2.5 implying highly significant while factor F recorded 1.5 showing low significant. This implies that the students prefer the use of pidgin to Nigerian Standard English because:
A. Pidgin is easier to speak
B. Pidgin is understood by all and sundry
C. Pidgin makes conversation/interesting and enduring
D. Pidgin makes one more fluent during conversation
E. Pidgin does not have wrong usages

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO
TO WHAT EXTENT HAS PIDGIN AFFECTED THE NIGERIAN STANDARD ENGLISH USAGE AMONG NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES.
G. Many undergraduates cannot distinguish between pidgin and Nigerian Standard English.
H. Many undergraduates can no longer speak fluent Nigerian Standard English without mixing it with Nigerian pidgin.
I. The use of pidgin has negative/influence on the written and spoken English of Nigerian undergraduates.
J. The use of pidgin has affected the spoken English of Nigerian undergraduates.
K. The use of pidgin can lead to total extinction of Nigerian Standard English.
L. Most Nigerian undergraduates cannot communicate in formal setting without switching and mixing the Nigerian Standard English with the Nigerian pidgin.
Table 3.1 Below shows the respondents response on the effects of the Nigerian pidgin on the Nigerian Standard English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of subjects</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>SA 4</th>
<th>A 3</th>
<th>D 2</th>
<th>SD 1</th>
<th>Total score</th>
<th>(x) mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>3(12)</td>
<td>2(6)</td>
<td>1(1)</td>
<td>2(2)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
<td>10 (40)</td>
<td>20 (60)</td>
<td>10 (20)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>15 (60)</td>
<td>10 (30)</td>
<td>20 (40)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J</td>
<td>20 (80)</td>
<td>15 (45)</td>
<td>10 (20)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K</td>
<td>2 (8)</td>
<td>2 (6)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>20 (80)</td>
<td>15 (45)</td>
<td>10 (20)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above data it can be seen that the respondents accepted that the use of pidgin has negative influence on the written and spoken English of Nigeria undergraduates.

They however disagreed that the use of Nigerian pidgin can lead to the extinction of the standard Nigerian English.

**Discussion of findings**

From the analysis of the data shown in the foregoing statistics as regards to research question I which sought to know the reasons why undergraduates prefer the use of pidgin to the use of Nigerian Standard English. The respondents accepted all the reasons from A to E. As the factors that made the Nigeria undergraduates to prefer the use of pidgin in their conservation.

In respect to research question 2, which sought to identify the extent to which the use of Nigerian pidgin had affected the standard Nigerian English the respondents accepted factors G and K, as factors that affect the written and spoken English of the undergraduates, they however rejected factors H, I, J, L as factors that affect the Nigerian Standard English.

**Conclusion.**

This study has successfully ascertained why University undergraduates in Nigeria mostly from the southern part of Nigeria prefer to converse with one another in pidgin or broken English, rather than the English language which supposed to be the linguistic model in an academic environment, and the effects of this linguistic behavior on their spoken English. The study concludes that among others the reason why the undergraduates prefer the use of pidgin is because pidgin is easy to speak and doesn’t have wrong usage as it lacks grammatical structure. On the effect of pidgin on the spoken English of the undergraduates the study concludes that the use of pidgin has a negative effect on the spoken English of the undergraduates, this is based on the fact that most of the under graduates cannot differentiate between pidgin and English, this can affect the written and spoken English of the undergraduates negatively.

**RECOMMENDATIONS.**

This study recommends that the use of pidgin English among University undergraduates as a medium of communication must be discouraged owing to the fact that pidgin is a bastardized form of English language and did not portray the undergraduates as educated people, and people that are in an academic environment hence pidgin is associated with the illiterate class.
References


