
Effect of Pidgin on Students' Fluency in English Language

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ABSTRACT

This study was to assess the effect of pidgin on student's fluency in English language. Pidgin English was originally a trade language jargon developed in the 19th century, but now commonly and loosely used to mean any kind of 'broken' or 'native' version of the English language. It is generally learned as a second language and is used for communication among people who speak different languages. Some Pidgins originated as a language that is made up of foreign language and the local language. It was originated as a result of the need for communication among people living in towns and cities from different ethnic groups who have no common language. There are just two reasons for the development of Pidgin and they are: a dire need of the sailors to communicate with the slaves and since they didn't understand their local languages they had to use Pidgin. The other reason was that the slaves needed pidgin to contact and interact among themselves. Pidgin English "then spread all over the world, pursuing sailors and shipping lanes. The study concluded that Pidgin English is indeed a language with unique characteristics; it can be used by everyone without educational disparity. Finally, the study concluded that pidgin has remarkable effect on student's fluency in English. The study recommended that English language teachers should be proficient in oral and written English language so that learners can emulate them as models. This is true because learners copy the language their teachers use in class, meaning that what students use and write in class is a replica of what they hear and see in class.

KEYWORDS: Pidgin, English, Student, Fluency, English Language, Tertiary and Institution

Introduction

The term pidgin is used to refer to a language which develops in a situation where speakers of different languages have a need to communicate but do not share a common language. Once a pidgin has emerged, it is generally learned as a second language and used for communication among people who speak different languages. Language is the most creative and

unlimited instrument for social communication and it helps us to understand the deep-seated social relevance, culture involvement and the human relatedness of language.

The expression of pidgin is used and refer to a language which is created in a circumstance where speakers of various dialects have a need to impart yet don't share a typical language (Fatma, 2014). Once a pidgin has developed, it is commonly learned as a substitute language and utilized for interaction among individuals who communicate in various dialects. Language is the most innovative and unlimited instrument for social interaction and it causes us to comprehend the profound situated social pertinence, culture contribution and the human relatedness of language (Linton, 1982).

The teaching and learning of language especially English have become large when learners find the use of that same language easy but in a funny way. Learners of English who like to speak pidgin almost in all their interactions definitely find it a problem to efficiently do so. Pidgin English was originally a trade language jargon developed in the 19th century, but now commonly and loosely used to mean any kind of 'broken' or 'native' version of the English language. Pidgin is essentially a second language used to replace a native language for restricted public purposes. Pidgin refers to the non-standard use of English language by students to communicate with their peers. Usually, a pidgin language is a rough blend of the vocabulary of one dominant language with the syntax or grammar of one or more other dependent groups (Salifu-Asuro, 2015).

Pidgin is a language system that is developed among people that do not have a common language to share, it is a language of contact situation where there is no common language to use. Todd (1974) defined pidgin as a marginal language which arises to fulfil certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language. Secondly, the purpose of its development is to have a common language among the contact people. It is obvious to say that the contact condition brought pidgin into existence and the purpose of having common language among people that keeping or maintaining its existence.

Statement of the problem

Over the years, Pidgin English has been identified as on the popular languages used for communication in business, preaching, quarrel, discussion and many more. The proliferation of pidgin has not only affected the adult people but mostly on children. It is demoralizing to note that proliferation of Pidgin English has caused a lot of havoc on our students in many ways including tertiary institution then level of fluency in speech and academic performance in English languages. It has become evident that due to the negative effect of pidgin English, our student in tertiary institution not only in Akwa Ibom State but in the whole country, it is on this premise that this study is camel out to evaluate the extent of damage caused by pidgin English to student in tertiary institution.

Concept of pidgin language

Pidgin language has been defined differently by various scholars and linguists based on the direction of researchers. Holm (1980) defines Pidgin as a reduced language used by groups with no language in common who need to communicate for trade or other purposes. It can also be seen as a language which arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people

who have no common language (Todd, 1974). From these two definitions, we see Pidgin English as a language that is been used to communicate between groups of people that have no common language.

Pidgin is a type of simplified language which came into existence as a result of contact between two or more languages in order to find a means of communication. This situation mostly occurs in trade, plantation and colonization. Pidgin is said to be language with simplified syntax, word order, because it is constructed in an unplanned way, or it is given birth or been developed by unintelligible languages, Bickerton (1984). It is not all simplified languages are pidgin. It is not native to anyone but learnt as a second language by many people. Other definitions are: Pidgin and creole are developed languages in need of communication among people who do not have single language to use Jeff (2008). Pidgin is a language system that is developed among people that do not have common language to share, it is a language of contact situation where there is no common language to use.

Todd (1984) also observes that Pidgin English are simpler than Standard English (SE) in that they are more systematic and thus easier to learn. They have abandoned morphological and syntactic irregularities but they have not sacrificed the ability to communicate precisely and unambiguously the linguistic needs of their speakers. It was noted that because pidgin and by extension the Nigeria pidgin (NP) is acquired as an auxiliary language, it does not need to fill as many roles as a unique mother tongue. In addition, it is perfectly adequate to the linguistic roles in which it is used and can be expanded as the communicative needs of its users increase. Thirdly, although, a pidgin's vocabulary is less extensive than that of SE, it can convey similar types of information with fewer words often expressing abstractions by means of metaphorical extensions of basic vocabulary items like belly, eye and hand.

Pidgin languages sometimes form in contact situations where a means of communication is urgently needed between groups lacking a common code. They are typically less elaborate than any of the languages involved in their formation and in comparison to those reduction characterizes all linguistic levels. The process is relatively uncommon, and the life span of pidgins is usually short most disappear when the contact situation changes, or when another medium of intergroup communication becomes available. In some rare cases, however, they expand (both socially and structurally), and may even nativize, i.e. become mother tongues to their speakers (when they may be re-labelled “creoles”).

Origin of Nigerian Pidgin Language

Nigerian Pidgin, originated as a lingua franca for trade purposes amongst the Nigerians and the Portuguese merchants during the 17th century. It is broken English like Patois and Creole, spoken along the coast of West Africa and it has extended to the diaspora, due to Nigerian migrants. After the departure of the missionaries, this lingua franca did not go with them but remained and is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria today compared to English. There are still Portuguese words present in the Nigerian Pidgin such as: “Sabi (to know) and Pikin (child)”. Nigerian Pidgin is regarded as a bastardization of the English language used by the non-literates, though it is highly spoken in Nigeria by every individual starting from an early age. In the country, both the literates, such as the president, campaigning politicians, lawyers, doctors,

and non-literates speak and understand pidgin, though it is mostly used in informal situations and English is used for official purposes and the medium of education.

Nigerian Pidgin is the most widely spoken language, it is not a native language of any tribe in Nigeria but the only language everyone understands and regards as the easiest form of interaction amongst the population. The Federal Republic of Nigeria has three major languages namely: Igbo in the (East), Yoruba in the (South) and Hausa in the (North) having English as the official language alongside other 500 different spoken dialects. Indeed, Nigerian Pidgin is considered as a bastardized language as it is yet to have a standard written form. University in Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, department of English and Drama are now offering it as a course and many struggles are being put up for Nigerian Pidgin to be considered Nigeria's official language as it is highly used by the masses, high school students, postgraduates and undergraduates, politicians and business people.

According to Briney (2012), some Pidgin English originated as a language made up of foreign language and the local language. It also originated as a result of the need for communication among people living in towns and cities from different ethnic groups who have no common language. It is the most effective means of interaction among the illiterate servants of the learned masters, the market women, and several other groups of people. Apart from using Pidgin English for advertisements on radio and television, some billboards disseminate their information using the Pidgin English to communicate to their readers.

As generally understood, a pidgin is a hybrid 'makeshift language' used by or among people (especially among slaves of various backgrounds), and between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of Asia, Africa, and Americas, especially during the prime of European expansion (17–20c). Formed from numerous languages and influences, Pidgin is a wide term covering a range of regional hybrids, which evolved through historical events such as the spread of Empires, settlement, migration and international trade. Briney (2012) opines that although the first lingua franca that developed during the Middle Ages was first considered a Pidgin, the term developed originally out of contact between Europeans and people in the countries they visited in association with trade, plantation agriculture and mining.

Mufwene (2002) asserts that some Pidgins have expanded into regular languages, especially in urban settings, and called 'expanded Pidgins'. In the view of Mufwene (2001), Creoles and Pidgins developed in separate places in which Europeans and non-Europeans interacted differently, i.e. periodically in trade colonies which produced Pidgins, but regularly in the initial stages of settlement colonies where Creoles developed. The term 'Pidgin' was coined in 1807, about two years after the term 'Creole' was used in reference to a language variety (Akhimien, 2004). The linguistic status as well as social acceptability of pidgin as a form of language has changed dramatically over the century. A language-form once held as bastardized (Holm 2000), and for that reason unacceptable, disapproved, and shunned in so many spheres of society, would appear to have eventually shed its dark cloak and emerged as a people's linguistic.

This state of affairs finds corroboration in the preponderance of research that has suffused the academic terrain on Pidgin (in Nigerian and other similar contexts). According to Holm (2000), an introduction to Pidgins and Creoles, attempts a comprehensive evaluation of important aspects of Pidgin and Creole languages ranging from the relationship over time between the

languages, on the one hand, and linguistics (the branch of learning whose object ought to be the study of languages from an analytical, empirical and scientific point of view) to such other fundamental aspects of the language as the intricacies of terminology and the development of theory. This remarkable interest attests to the newfound friendship between linguistics and pidgin languages. Globally, several social or socio-cultural factors have also culminated in the proliferation of varieties of pidgin and Creole languages in the wider world. Consequently, other linguistic aspects of the pervasive pidgin phenomenon such as Lexicosemantic, Phonology and Syntax are now flourishing.

Pidgin as a Type of Language

According to Osondu, Alozie, and Etaruwak (2019), in grammar, the word "pidgin" describes a condensed type of a language elaborated with local language terms, used for contacting and interaction between two or more people who do not have the same or ordinary language. "Pidgin" is said to be a Chinese word for the word "company" which indicates the pidgin-trade relationship sourcing from etymology. Pidgin English is associated with the slave trade, especially in the movement of West Africans all across the Atlantic from various countries and tribes. Until the transfer of the slaves, the Europeans did make sure the slaves were clustered in a very way that they can always never speak the same or similar language or have recognized one another. They used this tactic to stop the slaves from causing chaos and creating traffic problems. Therefore, the only way to interact and contact each other was to speak Pidgin. They are just two reasons for the development of Pidgin English and these two reasons are: the sailors needed to communicate with the slaves and since they did not understand their local language, they had to use Pidgin and the slaves also needed it to contact and interact among themselves. Pidgin English "then spread all over the world, pursuing sailors and shipping lanes. An unmistakable part of it is found in Papua New Guinea and its neighboring islands". According to Todd (1974), Pidgin language is not only centered on the English language; there is Pidgin French and Pidgin Portuguese, etc.

Across the century, the linguistic prestige and public acceptance of pidgin as a type of language have significantly changed. A language-form originally regarded as supplanted (Holm 2000), and thus undesirable, rejected, and disowned in so many realms of society, would gradually seem to have shed its oppressive shell and emerged as the language the people enjoy speaking the most. This current situation is substantiated by the plethora of Pidgin's work that has infused the academic environment. Holm (2000), for example, *An introduction to the Creoles and Pidgins*, proposes a systematic examination of essential aspects of Pidgin and Creole languages, ranging from the connection among languages across history, on the other side, and linguistics (the field of studying whose purpose should be the analysis of languages from an objective, theoretical and scientific point of view), to other essential aspects of the language such as vocabulary intricacies and the development of theory. The newfound collaboration between linguistics and pidgin languages relates to this extraordinary interest. Many technological or socio-cultural factors worldwide have also resulted in the explosion of pidgin and Creole linguistic features in the larger world. As a result, other linguistic facets of the omnipresent pidgin paradigm like Lexicosemantic, Phonology, and Logic are now thriving.

Holm (2000) comments that "what more established ages consider pidgin and Creole dialects is very obvious from their very names: broken English, Bastard Portuguese, Nigger French,

Kumbuuistaaltje ('cookhouse language'), Isikulu ('cool language')" and so on. He further concedes that, at first, the evident "hatred" towards pidgins "now and then" stemmed to some extent from the inclination that pidgins and Creoles were defilements of 'higher', generally European dialects, and to a limited extent from mentalities towards the speakers of such dialects who were regularly seen as semi-savages whose incomplete obtaining of socialized propensities was some way or an insult". The following quote from Aleksandra (2009) is present in order to corroborate Holm's argument in the debate on the initial perceptions towards pidgin and Creole languages: The investigation of pidgin and Creole wonders has to a great extent been entranced in etymology. The postulation picked up considerably in the late 1960s. Already they were known as "minimal dialects" (Reinecke, 1938). The dialects referenced were known as slave talk [di Patwa or patois] (Patrick, 1995), uncultured dialects over an extremely extensive period, and hence should be overlooked.

Effect of pidgin on student fluency in English language

The importance of English language being under-estimated since it is the official language of communication, administration and commerce. In recognition of this importance, the government of many countries had made it a mandatory subject in our schools. It forms the stepping-stone for proficiency in other subjects taught in schools hence its knowledge is very important both for educational, economical and national development. It is not uncommon to see people measuring one's level of intelligence, by his or her fluency in English language (Pipkins, 2004). It is obvious that the main function of education is for people to be able to read and write in English and also communicate in it. This is because the average educated person is expected to read and write well in English language and also to communicate in it well enough. So regardless of the individual's level of intelligence in other fields, failure to speak good English is a big issue, especially in the formal sector (Rupp, 2013). In the process to attain proficiency in the subject, certain conditions can enhance the learning process, whereas certain factors may rather impede its learning, for which we must strive to address. One of such factors is the issue of pidgin in our society.

There have therefore been arguments and discussions as regards the impact of the use of Pidgin by students. One school of thought holds that Pidgin English negatively affects the performance of students in examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), but another school of thought holds a contrary opinion (Rupp, 2013). In this context, the question to consider is what underlies this behavior? This has been the subject of recurrent debate. Educational authorities typically feel that Student Pidgin reflects the fact that the standard of English in our secondary schools and universities has fallen. There is the need therefore to interrogate the effect pidgin possess on the teaching and learning of Standard English in schools.

Omari (2010) conducted a research to determine the impact of the use of pidgin on students' use of English Language. The research is considered as part of an on-going search to find the correlation between the speaking of Pidgin English and performance in examinations especially the WASSCE. Apart from the link that may be established between performance in examinations and the speaking of nonstandard English or Pidgin English, problems may be rife in the secondary schools where most students do not perform well in examinations, more especially in English language papers. There is the need therefore to find the factors that cause students in secondary schools not to perform well in examinations. For the study, five hundred students, one

hundred and eighty teachers, and two hundred parents were selected, using the random sampling technique by which respondents were selected without any format, that is, they were picked at random. The research findings did not clearly establish a link between performance in examinations and the speaking of nonstandard English or Pidgin English.

Rupp (2014) also looked at the function of student pidgin. The data upon which the study is built come from research conducted at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Ghana between August 2011 and November 2012. The research consisted of a quantitative analysis of a questionnaire that was distributed to 191 UCC students: 106 male students and 85 female students. The empirical analysis of the questionnaire was followed up by a focus group interview with 17 students and supported by qualitative ethnographic data involving diary entries and short recordings made by three students. Omoniyi (2015) also examined pidgin as a national language in some African countries. The paper aimed at lending more weight to the efforts of the Pidgin positivists. The study reflected on the language situation in Africa, revisited the concepts of lingua franca, Pidgin and Creole, and paid attention to the use of Pidgin in Nigeria and Ghana as models of its briefs. The study further reviewed some hurdles peddled against the adoption of Pidgin, such as, the issues of stigmatization, attitudes, cultural base, indigenous status and low-level development in terms of corpus and status planning.

According to Ankrah (2018) his article contends that with the at the grassroots level, the increasing functions and domains of its use in many sectors of the society, the gradual and positive attitude being garnered, especially among the literate populations, all the hurdles are surmountable. The paper concluded by calling upon national governments in the respective African countries to officially recognize Pidgin and plan for its corpus and status development in order to enhance its official use. It also called upon all the positivists and other stake holders to mount up aggressive awareness, conferences and programmes in all the concerned African nations for the purpose of sensitising governments and the literate populations on the need to develop Pidgin. Furthermore, Amuzu and Asinyor (2016), errors on students' written English. The paper highlights the situation in our society (and most likely also in Cameroon) where English is learned and used as a second (and official) language alongside varieties of an English-related pidgin and where the speaking of the pidgin is routinely blamed for errors that learners of English, especially those in secondary and tertiary institutions, commit in their speech and writing. Specifically, the paper investigates the justification for attributing errors that educated ones commit in their written English to the School Pidgin English (SPE) some of them speak.

A case study was carried out in a diploma awarding institution. Two groups of students, students identified as speakers of SPE and students identified as non-speakers of SPE, were asked to write an essay on a given topic and the grammatical and spelling errors they committed were identified and scrutinized. It emerged that none of the types of errors identified was exclusively committed by the SPE speakers, a finding which suggests that there is hardly a definite causative relationship between speaking SPE and committing the errors. Rather, it is found that the errors are more directly related to some grammatical features of the students' mother tongues and to certain writing systems they use on electronic media platforms. The logical conclusion drawn is that the learning of English (and most likely also in Cameroon) may improve if teachers are guided by these more plausible causes of their students' problems when they try to help them.

Conclusion

Pidgin English is indeed a language with unique characteristics; it can be used by everyone without educational disparity. However, with the fast rate of student's acculturation and maintenance of a closer social distance with Pidgin English, the English language will gradually become unfamiliar to the Nigerian society. This situation as explained in the paper is of little or no benefit to Nigeria as regards the recent trend of globalization. Moreover, to calm these contentions, the English Language should still maintain its official status.

This study contributes to restoring the unsatisfactory poor performance of students in English language, which is vital to both their success and progress in education. The government, parents and teachers will achieve greater value from their investments, in both human and material resources, made on education when the teeming population of students passes the all-important English language examination. Teachers of English need to be equipped with necessary provisions to enable students overcome the pressures of their massive exposure to Nigerian pidgin in the society. This call for a review of the teaching of English language is expected to enhance better returns on teachers' efforts.

Recommendation

1. English language teachers should be proficient in oral and written English language so that learners can emulate them as models. This is true because learners copy the language their teachers use in class, meaning that what students use and write in class is a replica of what they hear and see in class.
2. English language teachers should create a classroom environment that will motivate learners to practice new skills in English language to supersede pidgin as this will help improve their level of fluency in English language.

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