PIDGINS AND CREOLES:
A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

Lateef Iyanda Kugbayi

Abstract

Language is among the most unique and complex gifts nature has bestowed upon man. The phenomenon is so dynamic and productive that it has been efficient in assisting humanity to achieve diverse communicative roles in myriad situations. Nonetheless, these communicative roles could seemingly be hindered in some circumstances, especially when communicators do not share the same linguistic codes. Meanwhile, instead of being a setback, this has been cause for the emergence of "new" languages called pidgins and creoles. Rather than acknowledging the essence of these emerged languages however, they are mostly considered marginal, substandard to existing languages and belittling to use. This work therefore studied the concepts of pidgins and creoles to establish the circumstances surrounding their emergence, their spread, linguistic and social importance and status in selected linguistic communities.

Keywords: pidginisation, creolisation, decreolisation, monogenetics and polygenetics.

Introduction

The goal of every human interaction has mainly been attached to the possibility of having the involved individuals express their feelings to one another, and to achieve meaningful understanding of the feelings as well. A process as that is dependent upon a system of language that is intelligible to the group of individuals who are participants in such an interaction. However, experiences have proved that certain situations could arise where people who do not share the same system(s) of human language have to, as a matter of necessity, interact and express their thoughts and feelings. In essence, either by compromise or otherwise, the affected interactants advertently create a "new" language called Pidgin.

Surprisingly, this form of language, in earlier times, suffered some contempt, being termed as a corruption of a "higher" language. On that basis, pidgins generally have had a long poor relation among other world language families. They are "relegated to the kitchen or the field, thought to be devoid of cultural potential, and inadequately understood" (Todd 1974:95). Pidgins as well as creoles – which are advanced products of contact – are consequently not regarded as full-fledged languages. Rather, they are considered marginal and disdainful. However, the narrative has changed in recent times. Concerted efforts have been put into studying pidgins and creoles. The studies have since covered the social and linguistic applicability of the languages, considering their theoretical, social and educational issues. Evaluation of pidgins and creoles according to such processes systematically brings to bear unique properties that set them apart from other languages as illustrated in this chapter.

Etymological Description of Pidgin

It has been difficult to trace the etymology of pidgin to a specific source because of the multifarious words the term has been associated with by different authors. In one sense, pidgin is claimed to have been derived from the English word, "business" according to its pronunciation in Chinese Pidgin English when referring to transacting business. It is also stated that pidgin is a modification of the Hebrew word, "pidjom" which is interpreted as "exchange," "trade" or "redemption." In addition to the two sources, pidgin has been traced to the Portuguese word, "occupacao," to suggest occupation, trade or job from a morphological explanation of the language. To Kleinecke (1959), pidgin is derived from "padians," a Yayo word for "local Indians." In another form, "pidgin" is connected to the Portuguese word, "pequeno" which means "little" or "child" to suggest that it is related to the "baby talk" theory. Beyond those descriptions, Todd (1984) considers it as a variant form of "pigeon" since it is similar to pigeon's utterances in simplicity. Pidgin is therefore, more or less, an imitation of bird "language." Although

those contributions are undoubtedly worthwhile, none of them has been universally accepted as the actual source of pidgin. They are however relevant to the description of Pidgin as a reduced language that is formed through an extended contact between speakers of different linguistic backgrounds.

Definition of Pidgin

Like several other linguistic related phenomena, pidgin is somewhat difficult to define. One of the reasons for the complexity is the divergent views various linguists have about it. That notwithstanding, the individual definitions touch down on at least one of the points: the circumstances in which pidgin has developed, the purpose for its development and its structure. According to Todd (1974:1), a "pidgin is a marginal language which arises to fulfil certain restricted communication needs among people who do not share a common language." This underscores contact and communication as the circumstance and the purpose for the development of pidgin respectively. Romaine (1988:224) combines the purpose and structure of pidgin in the definition that the phenomenon is "a language which has been stripped of everything but the bare essentials necessary for communication." That is, the language is greatly simplified. This "simplified form of speech developed as a medium of trade, or through other extended but limited contact between groups of speakers who have no other language in common" (Matthews 2007:303).

In another way, the emergence of the pidgin language could be traced to each contact group's unwillingness to learn the native language of the other group. However, the unwillingness attitude is usually upturned by the extended contact and the essentiality of communication. Thus, the group with less power (that is, the substrate language) seemingly becomes more accommodating and uses words from the language of the group with more power (that is the superstrate language). In effect, the emerging language takes the superstrate language as its basis as in pidgin English, pidgin French,

pidgin Arabic, and so on. However, the speakers of the substrate language, by virtue of their linguistic background, inadvertently influence the pronunciation, meaning and form of the accommodated words while the speakers of the superstrate language adopt a great deal of those changes during interactions. The two groups therefore cooperate with each other to form an incipient language that can be used to fulfil their linguistic needs for the period of the contact.

Meanwhile, Pidgin, the emergent language from the contact, steadily grows and becomes a system better than a jargon. It is eventually sustained by some semantically, phonologically and structurally governed rules which are subconsciously assimilated by its users; thereby making it assume a stabilisation status.

Characteristics of Pidgin

Aside their grammatical, lexicon and semantic uniqueness, pidgins are generally set apart from other languages by the following characteristics.

- Pidgins do not have native speakers.
- Pidgins are partially targeted or non-targeted second languages.
- Pidgins develop from simpler to more complex systems as communicative requirements become more demanding.
- Each pidgin has small vocabulary.
- A pidgin is operated upon within a limited stylistic range.
- They have less complex structures and marked phonological segments than those of the languages in contact.
- A pidgin is a hybrid derived from a contact between at least two unintelligible language types.

Etymological Description of Creole

Like "pidgin," the source of "creole" is beclouded with diverse opinions. According to Holm (2000), Latin word, "creare," which means "to create" became Portuguese word, "criar," having the interpretation, "to raise" someone like "a child." "Criado," the past participle form of "criar," is used as a reference to "(someone) raised

or a servant born into one's household" while "crioulo" with a diminutive suffix is interpreted as African slave born in the New World in Brazilian usage. By extension, this connotes Europeans born in the New World. Eventually, creole, which emerged from the morphological modifications, refers to the customs and speech of Africans and Europeans in the New World with varieties like Spanish criollo, French créole, Dutch creools and English creole.

Definition of Creole

Crystal (2008:122) states that creole is a "term used . . . to refer to a pidgin language which has become the mother-tongue of a speech community." His definition corroborates De Camp's (1976:16) view that it is the native language of most of any native language, large enough to meet all the communication needs of its speakers. According to the time a creole emerges, Muysken and Smith (1994:3) consider it as "a language that has come into existence at a point in time that can be established fairly precisely." In essence, it is not enough to describe a creole as a pidgin that becomes a first language of a new generation as a result of being born at the place where the pidgin is used (Wardhaugh 2006). It is also important to consider the possibility of ascertaining, to a certain extent, the time the transition occurred, since this is seemingly impossible to achieve in the case of world standard languages.

Therefore, creoles, despite their having native speakers and being maximally expanded to fulfil communication needs of their users, can be distinguished from earlier existing languages. They emerge as a result of a break in the natural development of at least two earlier existing languages to the disruptiveness of a natural transmission of the existing languages from certain generations to another, resulting in a kind of linguistic violence. This suggests that the developmental histories of creole languages are basically traceable both linguistically and socially. Going by such historical description of language, it is possible that standard languages were initially creoles. However, owing to the fact that evidences of a notion as such are somewhat in obscurity, that is practically not defendable.

Relationship between Pidgins and Creoles

Since a creole is a pidgin that has become stable and learnt by children of a speech community as a mother-tongue, it will suffice to propose that both (pidgin and creole) are not only interrelated but also share similar characteristics, particularly in relation to morphological and phonological simplicity; well organised linguistic systems, vocabulary loans from some earlier existing languages and theoretical descriptions. This does not mean that the two languages are necessarily the same. They can be distinguished on the basis that: a pidgin, as a simple language, arises to bridge communication gaps between groups of people with unintelligible languages while a creole is a native language of a group of speakers; a pidgin is usually learnt together with at least a mother tongue while a creole is mostly the sole native language of those who use it. Meanwhile, this can be difficult to determine because it is possible for a pidgin to serve the two purposes – a second/contact language for adults and mother-tongue of children of the same community. It seems justifiable therefore to treat both pidgins and creoles as related concepts, especially that both are products of different contexts of language acquisition (Gani-Ikilama 2005).

Theories of Pidgin and Creole

One of the major studies of pidgins and creoles focuses on concerns with various theories about the origins of the concepts. De Camp (1971) categorises them under monogenetic and polygenetic theories. When the former theory recognises a single origin for pidgins and creoles, the latter considers varied sources for their development. Meanwhile, Todd (1974/84) identifies five theories of monogenetic/relexification, baby-talk, independent parallel development, nautical jargon and language universal as briefly discussed below.

Monogenetic/Relexification Theory

The theory, as championed by Thompson (1961), claims that world pidgins are offshoots of a Portuguese proto-pidgin which was also a relic of an old language of wider communication called Sabir

during the medieval period. The language was used by the Portuguese along the African coast during this period. Hence, it is claimed that through the contact with the Portuguese the proto-pidgin must have undergone a process of relexification by the influence of the languages the people in the coast came in contact with after the Portuguese popularity in the region had waned. This consequently gave rise to new colonial languages – Pidgin French, Pidgin Spanish, Pidgin Dutch and Pidgin English – of which vocabularies supplanted the vocabulary of the Portuguese based pidgin. This theory promotes a view that pre-existing languages are not products of a piginisation process, since they have been in existence before the relexification period. In addition, the theory does not explain reasons why the vocabulary items of a particular language had to be exchanged for those of some other languages.

The Nautical Jargon Theory

The theory of nautical jargon was initiated by Reneicke (1937). It claims that the basis for all the world pidgins and creoles is the jargon used by members of crews on ships who were of different nationalities. The sailors adopted the jargon as a common means of communication and later passed it on to the continents across the globe, including Africa. It therefore formed the basis for the emergence of pidgins and creoles that were later developed in different regions of the world. Although this theory explains the reasons for similarities among world pidgins and creoles, it does not expatiate on the cause(s) of the structural simplicity common to the languages.

Baby-Talk Theory

This theory holds that each world pidgins and creoles arose as a result of the reduction of the superstrate language by its users to a childlike language so as to be mutually intelligible to the speakers of the substrate language. The process allows elimination of inflections and grammatical irregularities as well as limitation of vocabulary

items. In the same vein, the substrate groups imitate and further simplify the language of the superstrate groups. The imperfect language use and learning through *imitation-errors* and *deliberate simplifications* of linguistic complexities lead to the rise of pidgins and creoles.

Theory of Language Universals

This theory looks into the similarities that exist among different languages all over the world. It specifically emphasises that pidgins and creoles are genetically inherent languages; an idea that promotes knowledge of language universals. The theory also explains the universally shared notions of how an individual can simplify his/her language whenever situations demand. This view is in line with generativists' idea of a genetically programmed language acquisition device built in the brain of every normal human child which enables the capacity to acquire any human language the child is exposed to before the lateralisation of the brain.

Independent Parallel Development Theory

The theory holds that regardless of the fact that both pidgins and creoles emerge as relatively separate linguistic forms, they are similar to a certain extent. This is substantiated in the point that both of them share common linguistic material for their creation and rise which also occur in similar physical and social conditions. Like some of the other theories, the theory of independent parallel development is relevant to only pidgins that emerged in the coastal areas of the world where the contacts that led to their emergence had to do with Indo-European languages, thereby reducing to the background the idea about the existence of pidgin languages before the period and in inland places.

Selected Samples of Pidgins and Creoles

There are many pidgins and creoles around the world and different authors have given divergent opinions about their actual

number. While Meillet and Cohen (1978) put the number at two hundred, Romaine (1988) is of the opinion that ascertaining the number of the world pidgins and creoles seems impossible, since speakers of a good number of the languages, for avoidance of inferiority, claim that they are speaking standard languages. Whether it is possible to ascertain the total number of the world pidgins and creoles or not, it is a fact that most of the pidgins are found in coastal areas rather than on inland places (Özüorçun 2014). This is attributed to trade activities that took place in those areas between the natives and foreigners whose languages mostly form the bases for the pidgins and creoles as in the case of the following selected languages.

S/N	Language Base	Pidgin/Creole	Country
1.	Afrikaans	Oorlans	South Africa
2.	Arabic	Arabic, Sudanese Creole	South Sudan
3.	Dutch	Dutch Creole	US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico
4.	English	Krio	Sierra Leone
		Nigerian Pidgin English	Nigeria
		Tok Pisin	Pupua New Guinea
5.	French	French Guianese	French Guiana
		Kaldosh	New Caledonia
		Haitian Creole French	Dominican Republic
6.	German	Unserdeutsch	West New Britain, Papua New Guinea and South-eastern Queensland, Australia
7.	Portuguese	Crioulo	Bijagos Islands, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Cape Verde Islands and Gambia
		Fa D'ambu	Equatorial Guinea
		Indo-Portuguese	India
8.	Spanish	Chavacano Palenquero	Philippians and Malaysia Colombia
9.	Swahili	Cutchi-Swahili Settla	Kenya Zambia
10.	Xhosa	Fanagalo	South African and Zimbabwe

Adapted from Rickford (1991).

An Overview of Selected Pidgins/Creoles

Three of the pidgins/creoles are purposely selected and reviewed below.

Fanagalo

Fanagalo (also called Fanakalo) is a Xhosa-based pidgin spoken in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The pidgin draws elements of English,

Afrikaans and Zulu with 24 percent, 6 percent and 70 percent vocabulary items supplied by the three languages respectively. As Mesthrie (1992) states, Fanagalo had initially existed as a jargon for about ten years before it was later stabilised through the contact between the Indians and their South African indentured workers, because of its "easy-to-learn" value. The pidgin was not only learnt. It was also taught to new comers, specifically in South African mines, and eventually became useful in communicating with Zulus, English men and Afrikaners in Natal (that is, KwaZulu-Natal). It is therefore used widely in towns, plantations and mining areas along with English and Afrikaans.

Linguistic Features of Fanagalo
According to Mesthrie and Surek-Clark (2013), Fanagalo, like other pidgins, could be described according to its phonology, structure and vocabulary as briefly presented subsequently.

Phonology
    Fanagalo basically has five vowels: [i], [e], [a], [o] and [u] together with some lengthened penultimate vowels like [bu:ga] "see" and [bugI:le] "saw" and two diphthongs: [aI] and [au]with click velar [k] (Mesthrie (2006). Certain deictics are also identified through tonal distinctions as in:

- o   *lò* "this," *ló* "that" and *lo* "the."
- o   *làpha* "here," *lápha* "there" and *lapha* "in."

The final voiceless vowels of Zulu are usually dropped as in *az* "to know" instead of *–azi* and *hash* "horse" instead of *ihashi*.
     The language has 23 consonants which are equivalent to the conventional consonants except for [ɬ] or [ɲ] and [lʒ] or [ʒl] which are common to Zulu. The others are [b], [t] [d], [t], [dʒ], [k], [g], [m], [n], [f], [v], [s], [z], [ʃ], [h], [l], [r], [w] and [j]. At the level of syllable, the pidgin has CVCV structure which is also peculiar to Zulu and some consonant clusters like [st], [sk], [sp], [gw] and [kl] as in *gwai* "tobacco" and *klina* "to clean" Mesthrie *et al.* (2013).

Syntax

Although not rigidly, Fanagalo is of SVO structure both in main and subordinate clauses as demonstrated in:

    (Subj.)   *(Verb)*

- **Yena**   **hamb-ile**
  She travel-past (simple structure)
  Meaning: She has travelled/she went away.
  (Subj.)   *(Verb)*   *(Obj.)*
- **Yena**   **nzile** **lo**   **into**
  She did   **the**   **thing** (simple structure)
  Meaning: She did it by herself.
  (Subj.)   *(Verb)*   *(Obj.)*
- **Yena**   **baza** **noko** **wena-z' hamba**   **lapa**   **stolo**
  She ask   **if**   **you-FUT**   **go**   **LOC**   **store**
  (complex sentence).

Meaning: She asks if/whether you go to the store. Mesthrie *et al.* (2013).

Vocabulary

      Usually, the bulk of a pidgin's vocabulary comes from an Indo-European language. However, in the case of Fanagalo, 70 percent of its lexis is drawn from Ngugi (Zulu) language while 24 percent and 6 percent are supplied by English and Afrikaans respectively. The following are examples of Fanagalo words from different sources.

Fanagalo Word	English Translation	Language Source
akha v.	Build	Zulu –*akha*
phuza v.	Drink	Zulu –*phuza*
vula n.	Rain	Zulu –*imvula*
stelleg adv.	strongly/very/a lot	Afrikaans *-sterk* 'strong'
melek n.	Milk	Afrikaans –*melk*
senga v.	to milk	Zulu –*senga*
skaf n.	Food	English –*skoff*
stimela n.	Train	English *-steam* via Zulu
picannini n.	Child	Portuguese *-pequeninho* 'small child'

Mesthrie *et al* (2013)

Despite the linguistic features of Fanagalo and its potential usefulness among peoples of different linguistic backgrounds in South Africa, the pidgin has lost a great deal of popularity, especially in recent time. Several moves have been made to ensure that it is phased out owing to its negative emblem as a language of exploitation and cheap labour. This has affected its development and recognition by the government, making it systematically give way for English Language which is widely becoming particularly acceptable to the younger generation (Mesthrie *et al* 2013).

Tok Pisin

This is an English-based pidgin of Papua New Guinea with a creole status. It is also known as Melanesian Pidgin English. When compared with other pidgins, it could be considered more favoured, since it is among the most known and studied pidgins around the world. It has a standardised orthography and widely used informally, officially and in the media.

Linguistic Features of Tok Pisin

Phonology

As Boer and Williams (2017) describe, Tok Pisin comprises five simple vowels: [a], [e], [I], [o] and [u] with two allophones [i] and [ʊ]. It also has the equivalent of English consonants: [ʃ], [ʒ], [ʧ], [dʒ] and [z]. In addition to these are some contrasts between Tok Pisin phonology and the core consonantal phonology in which [f] is substituted with [p], [l] substituted with [l], [ɵ] with [h] and [ʧ], [ʃ] and [dʒ] with [s], leading to:

i.   transformations like:

[f] > [p] (e.g. forgive > pogivim)
[ʧ] > [s] (e.g. chalk > sok; change > sens)
[ʃ] > [s] (e.g. shock > sok)
[dʒ] > [s] (e.g. change > sens; pidgin > pisin)

ii.   devoicing of voice stops in final position as in:
rub > rap
bed> bet (Smith 1998).

Syntax

Tok Pisin has its own grammatical rules which set it apart from other languages. Among the rules are:

i.   placement of **"ol"** before a noun instead of **"s"** after it as a plurality marker, e.g.
Mi lukim dok "I saw the dog."
Mi lukim ol dok "I saw the dogs."

ii.   being specific about tense, aspect or things like ability by using different short words which can occur before or after the verb as in:
Ben i bin wok asde "Ben worked yesterday."
Ben bai i wok tumora "Ben will work tomorrow."
Ben i wok i stap nau "Ben is working now."
Ben i wok pinis "Ben is (has) finished working."

Ben i ken wok "Ben can work (he is allowed to)."
Ben inap wok "Ben can work (he has the ability)."

iii. two sets of non-singular pronouns: "inclusive" and "exclusive" which represent the English "we" as in:

(a) *Fred i bin singautim* **yumi** *long pati* "Fred invited us **including you** to the party."

(b) *Fred i bin singautim* **mipela** *long pati* "Fred invited us **but not you** to the party."

Note: "**yumi**" *stands for* "**we** *or* **us**, **including you**" while "**mipela**" *stands for* "**we** *or* **us**, **not including you**" *with* "**-pela**" suffix attached to show plurality. (Siegel 2012).

Vocabulary
Since Tok Pisin is English-based, majority of its lexical items are loan words from English Language. Many of such words, apart from having localised pronunciation forms, have undergone a semantic shift to indicate different or additional meanings as exemplified in:

passim *"to close" (fasten)*, meaning **"to pass"** *(e.g. exam).*
spak from *"spark,"* meaning **"drunk"**
kilim from *"kill him,"* meaning **"hit"** *or* **"beat"** as well as **"kill"**
pisin from *"pigeon,"* meaning **"bird"** in general
gras from *"grass,"* meaning **"gras"** as well as **"hair," "fur"** and **"feather"** *(Siegel 2012).*

Tok Pisin, unlike many of the world pidgins and creoles, has assumed a favourable status. It is the lingua franca of the people of Papua New Guinea. The language has gone through a standardised process, thereby having a standardised orthography and its dictionary. It is not only used in informal situations. It is also the language of the media, government and religion, having the New Testament of the Bible translated in it.

Nigerian Pidgin English

Years before the emergence of Nigerian Pidgin through the contact between Nigerians and the Portuguese in the country's coastal areas, the inhabitants of the geographical areas later called Nigeria had, in different ways, been interacting with one another regardless of their linguistic uniqueness. It is therefore presumed that some forms of pidgin, like the pidginised Hausa in markets around Lake Chad, would have existed during this period (Faraclas 2005). Eventually, through ousting of the Portuguese representatives by the Europeans, an English-based pidgin with inputs from several Nigerian languages emerged.

Linguistic Features of Nigerian Pidgin English

Phonology

Based on their investigation of the pidgin in the Delta area of the old Bendel State which is now Delta State, Elugbe and Omamor (1991) identify twenty five consonants for the language. These are [m], [n], [ɲ], [ŋʷ], [p], [b], [t], [d], [ʧ], [dʒ], [k], [g], [kp], [gb], [l], [ʒ], [ɬ], [j], [w] and [h] with some nasalised variants of [j] and [w]. They also recognise seven vowels /i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u/ of the pidgin. These represent several of other vowels of English language as in:

/ɪ/

/ʃɪp/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"ship"** /ʃɪp/ (English equivalent).
/ʃɪp/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"sheep"** /ʃɪːp/ (English equivalent).

/ɛ/

/bɛd/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"bed"** /bed/ (English equivalent).
/bɛd/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"bird"** /b3ːd/ (English equivalent).

/a/

/kat/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"cat"** /kaet/ (English equivalent).
/kat/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"cart"** /kaːt/ (English equivalent).
/tam/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"term"** /t3ːm/ (English equivalent).

/ɔ/
/lɔk/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"lock"** /lɔk/ (English equivalent).
/lɔk/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"luck"** /lʌk/ (English equivalent).
/kɔl/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"call"** /kɔːl/ (English equivalent).
/kɔl/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"curl"** /kɜːl/ (English equivalent).

/uː/
/puːl/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"pool"** /puːl/ (English equivalent).
/puːl/ (Pidgin pronunciation) for **"pull"** /pʊl/ (English equivalent).

Consonants like /Ɵ/ and /ẟ/ are also naturalised to have /trIː/ for **"three"** and /dis/ for **"this."**

Syntax
     The structure of Nigerian Pidgin English is simple and unique in the following ways:

- avoidance of redundant inflections, e.g. A *go bai <u>tu</u> got*   *(NPE)*
  I shall buy <u>two</u> goats *(English)*

- generalisation tense, e.g.
  i. *A <u>go</u> (NPE); I go (English)*
  ii. *I <u>go</u> (NPE); He goes (English)*
  iii. *A bin <u>go</u> (NPE); I went (English)*
  iv. *A don <u>go</u> (NPE); I have gone (English), and so on.*

- absence of possessive inflection, e.g. *Na Mary buk (NPE); It's Mary's book (English).*

- SPCA word order, e.g.
         S   P   C   A
      John bit Peter welwel(NPE)
     John flogged Peter mercilessly (English)

Note: Auxiliary verbs like "do" and "does" do not occur. Thus questions are formed from statements through:
- preceding the statement with a question introducing word like:
  Wai yu bin bit am? "Why did you flog him?"
  Wia you de go? "Where are you going?"
  Wetin yu wan do? "What do you want to do?"
- uttering a statement in different tones – rising tone for a question; falling tone for a statement as in:

  Yu don chop ↘   "You have eaten."

  Yu don chop ↗   "Have you eaten."

- use of varied negation markers, e.g.
  A go chop "I will eat" (positive).
  A no go chop "I will not eat" (negative).
  A don chop "I have eaten" (positive).
  A never chop "I haven't eaten (negative).

(Gani-Ikilama 2005)

Lexical Feature

Many of the vocabulary items of Nigerian Pidgin English are sourced from English language. However, because of its expansion, the pidgin has been greatly influenced by the sociolinguistic landscape of Nigeria through linguistic elements that Mensah (2011) identifies as:

i. Borrowing: Some of the words borrowed into the pidgin include,
    - *maintain* "be calm" from English.
    - *palava* "problem/trouble" from Portuguese.
    - *bókú* "plenty" from French.
    - *upstair* "storey building" from Nigerian English.
    - *biko* "please" from Igbo.
    - *walahi* "believe me/I swear" from Hausa.
    - *tokunbo* "a fairly used item" from Yoruba.

ii. Reduplication, e.g. *sharp sharp "fast," small small "gently," potopoto "mud,"* and so on.

iii. Affixation, e.g. *black + y = blacky "a dark person"* and *sweet + y = sweety "a dear person."*

iv. Metaphorical extension, e.g. *water don pass gari "a bad situation," yellow fever "a traffic warden."*

v. Compounding, e.g. *long throat "glutton"* and *stronghead "stubbornness."*

vi. Clipping, e.g. *naija "Nigeria"* and *bros "brother."*

Based on these characteristics, Nigeria Pidgin English is unique and should be a language in its own right. It is intelligible only to those who are familiar with it because of its sociolinguistic complexity. The language, like other world languages, has its varieties according to the region where each of the varieties is spoken in the country. Therefore, a speaker of English Language who is not exposed to it may find it unintelligible and will have to learn it to be able to use it effectively and for meaningful communication. Apart from its uniqueness, the pidgin has been useful in many ways. It is serving as a unifying factor in a country of extremely marked ethnic and religious diversities through its lingua franca capacity. The pidgin is widely used as a language of the media and, to some extent, religion. Several literary works also have elements of the language in them while many plays are predominantly acted in it. The Nigerian entertainment industry benefits a lot through the service of Nigerian English Pidgin. Businessmen and politicians resort to the language for far reaching jingles. In fact, the pidgin bridges the gap between the lower and the upper classes in the country. Going by those features and functions, many authorities have suggested the review, standardisation and adoption of the pidgin as a national language though the possibility of

achieving such a feat seems to be a mirage for little or no serious attention has been recorded in that regard.

Related Pidgin and Creole Terms

Pidginisation: The emergence of a pidgin is not instantaneous. It involves a process called *pidginisation*. According to Todd (1980), this process, which is essentially oral, begins when people who do not speak the same language come into contact. In order to maintain and possibly sustain the essence of the contact, the process is further extended through simplification of the contacting languages and exploitation of common linguistic denominators shared by them. The process is therefore characterised by the use of base words, a reduction or complete elimination of case endings, inflections and prepositions. Pidginisation also encourages a simply unified way of indicating temporal markers, negation and interrogation as well as semantic reinforcement of verbal communication through alternation of speech tones and gestures. Owing to its gradual development, it is possible to identify it even at an early stage. This is the stage it occurs as a jargon or prepidgin continuum when it is expected to have only 50 to 300 words with much reliance on extensive use of circumlocution (Rickford 1991).

Creolisation: This is a process by which the structure and use of a pidgin is expanded to the extent that it could be compared with existing languages both in form and function. Through the process, a pidgin is gradually developing to become a creole – a mother tongue of a group of people in a speech community. According to Fromkin and Rodman (1978), series of creolisation development processes may account for both a reduction in the number of languages around the world and much of the world linguistic diversity.

Decreolisation: Against what it appears to be, decreolisation is not a direct opposite of creolisation. Rather, it is a process by which a creole is progressively absorbed and operated upon as a standard language.

Through this process, a creole is promoted to be a regional variety of an existing language as in the case of the English Creole of the West Indies which has been assimilated as a Standard English (Matthews 2007). Meanwhile, a new name, *metropolitanisation*, has been suggested by sociolinguists as a substitute for the term to avoid mistaking it for the reverse of creolisation (Crystal 2008).

Conclusion

This work has studied pidgins and creoles with specific on their morphological origin, theoretical etymology and the characteristics that set them apart from standard languages. Their status in selected linguistic communities is also a concern. Generally, individual world pidgins and creoles are proved to be closely related and unique through their simplicity of forms and lexical capacity which makes them appear substandard to already existing languages. These claims notwithstanding, there are evidences that pidgins and creoles are languages in their own right. They are capable of fulfilling most (if not all) of the functions standard languages perform if they are so recognised. After all, the so-called marginal languages are lingua franca in many of the places they are used all over the world, thereby having greater number of speakers than the number of those who use the acclaimed individual standard languages in the heterogeneous linguistic societies where they are found.

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