The Sociolinguistic Impacts of Language Contact on Nigerian Pidgin Usage
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ABSTRACT
The global spread of the English language is one of the linguistic phenomena that has brought about linguistic concepts like language code, language contact, language expansion, language change and language variation. These changes further created an avenue that gave rise to such designations as world English, New Englishes, American English, Indian English, Nigeria English and many others. We also have varieties such as the Nigerian Pidgin which is prominent in almost all spheres of human interaction especially among students within Nigeria. This paper therefore explores meaning and development of Nigerian Pidgin and the impact of language contact on the Nigerian Pidgin variety, based on sociolinguistic principles. The paper concludes by advocating for the need to elevate the Nigerian pidgin to the height it has attained based on its usability, expansion and simplicity in the communication trends of the Nigerian University students and the society. This paper asserts that pidgin should be seen as a new language that fills the gap created by standard English usage in communication.

KEYWORDS
Nigerian Pidgin, Sociolinguistics, Language Contact, Language Usage, Language Expansion

1. INTRODUCTION
The study of languages in contact is very important in the study of linguistics especially with the increasing impact on globalization on “lesser” languages. In the past, research in Nigerian Pidgin constituted a focal point of interest to linguists and teachers of English language in Nigeria. These linguists and teachers have directed their debate on the question which seeks to unravel if Nigerian Pidgin (henceforth NP) is a language or a dialect of the base language which contribute its vocabulary.

These linguists considered certain criteria which brought an acceptable conclusion that Nigerian Pidgin is a full ‘fledged’ language because it has its separate lexicons, morphological systems, syntactic structures and phonological elements. A pioneer work by Mafeni (1971) entitled “Nigerian pidgin” (36) brought fame and excitement into the study of pidgin language. The description given to NP by Mafeni (1971) and some other researches, eroded the previous belief that ‘pidgin’ of any form was a debased, inferior, uncivilized and marginal form of language variety. Thus, pidgins are not wrong versions of other languages but rather a new language (Njemanze 2014).

Nigerian Pidgin thus, becomes one of the sociolinguistic outcomes of contact which emerged as a result of the need to fill some communication gaps in places where there is no common language between the Europeans and Nigerians. It was prominent during the trade contact between Nigeria and the Portuguese and later the British. NP is therefore, produced from combination of the Nigerian indigenous languages, some borrowed languages and the English language. Pidgins are products of language contact while language contact is a product of interaction between speakers of different languages.

Nigerian pidgin is used in various contexts and by various categories of people irrespective of their educational status. This view is supported by Akande (2008) who noted; “the sociolinguistic reality in Nigeria today is such that NP is spoken by university graduates, professors, lawyers and journalists. It has also been demonstrated that NP is not used only in informal settings but also in formal settings” (37).

This claim that NP is mainly used by the non-literate is not valid because NP is used by so many educated people who can use, “both the Standard English and NP proficiently” (Akande, 2008:37).

Similarly, Faraclas (2004) noted that, “NP is spoken, today, by millions of people especially the younger generation representing various linguistic areas of the Nigerian society” (828). This has further changed the negative perception of NP by the society. It is now seen as an indispensable tool for communication.
which is easier to learn, less complicated and with lesser foreign inclination than the English language.

Concerning the numerical strength of NP speakers in Nigeria, Faracleas (2004) says; “well over half of the 140 million inhabitants of Nigeria are now fluent speakers of the language (NP), making Nig P (NP) the most widely spoken language in Nigeria, as well as the indigenous African language with the largest number of speakers. Given the rapid spread of Nig P (NP) among younger Nigerians, this proportion should increase to cover over seventy or eighty percent by the time the present generation of children reaches adulthood” (828).

The use of NP within Nigeria has led to the growing status of this language in the country. It is obvious that NP is gaining wider vitality in Nigeria despite its unofficial recognition. It is used by Nigerians who have no common language. It is proudly used by every person in Nigeria especially the Nigerian university students. Nigerian university students converge at the students’ common rooms, rally grounds, viewing centers and other meeting points where they relieve themselves of their academic routines. At these meeting points, they converse proudly using the Nigerian Pidgin. It could therefore be said that NP reflects national identity in Nigeria.

However, many linguistics and scholar have called for the official recognition of NP, but such requests have been turned down by the government; (see Awonusi 1990:116; Elugbe and Oramor 1991:28; Mann 1996:97; 460; Egbokhare 2001:82; and more). Although, in recent times, the NP functions has expanded and is constantly used to get close to the masses through Jingles, posters, government campaigns for national awareness and is being appreciated by the government, because they now allow such broadcasts. This is because it does not defame either the NP or the English language.

The objective of this paper, thus, is to examine the influence of language contact on Nigerian university students use of the NP based on sociolinguistic principles. The subjects of this study are the students of Federal University of Technology Owerri. This school is a federal institution located in a sub-urban village outside the Imo-state capital territory which admits students from all parts of the country and even beyond. These students come from different ethnic groups in Nigeria and they must understand themselves outside their official settings.

Although the English language is the officially recognized medium of communication in Nigerian university environments, students and staff often use the Nigerian Pidgin in almost all their communicative domains. Also, the type of Pidgin spoken by most Nigerian students is not the type that is prevalent among touts, ‘area boys’ and motor park attendants.

This paper therefore examines the concept of sociolinguistics, brief explanation of the meaning and development of Nigerian Pidgin, impacts of language contact on Nigerian Pidgin and survey of selected examples of FUTO students’ Nigerian Pidgin usage.

2. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Sociolinguistics is a branch of language study which is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and society. Sociolinguistics is a collective term used in describing researches and findings from linguistics and other social sciences and the study of language in the society.

Sociolinguists are therefore interested in the study of the various social, cultural and linguistic situations within a given speech community, in order to understand the impacts of contact languages on language use, choice, change, code, expansion, choice and variation in relation to the community’s cultural beliefs and values. Social factors affecting language use in Nigeria includes; Bilingualism, Multilingualism, Diglossia, extinction, Code-Switching, etc. Also, sociolinguistic factors like age, gender, sex, environment etc., have influenced current developments in attitudes, functions and domains of any language use.

Language being an important feature of human communication plays a vital role in any given society, in the lives of people and the society at large. This portrays language as an organized activity which uses words to accomplish its designated function. (Njemanze, 2012). Again, language is highly dynamic; it changes and grows as it adapts to new environments and different users. To the linguist, language is a code; a set of elements which can or cannot occur or combine in various appropriate ways. Language interacts and changes with its environment. It is not static but dynamic.

Language is attached to humanity because it considers human beings (users), human language, the human society and their communication needs. This is evident in Stephen Pinker (1994) describes language as being “so tightly woven into human experience in such a way that it is scarcely possible to imagine human life without it,” (17). Language depends largely on the people and their culture.

In the description of culture by Geortz, (1975) it is, “a network (transmitted historically) of meanings embedded in symbols, a system of ideas inherited and expressed in form of symbols which people communicate, perpetuate and stretch their knowledge.
Language, society and culture are issues which are concerned about humanity, social identity and communication. The environment that people live in can have surprising effects on how the people interact and interpret their environment. In other words, as the environment changes, the culture and the language equally respond by evolving new approach to their existence and terminologies to match the change. This paper therefore examines the impacts of language contact on Nigerian Pidgin.

3. IMPACTS OF LANGUAGE CONTACT ON PIDGIN

Language contact is a dynamic and complex issue in linguistics. It can simply be described as the combination of and use of more than one language in the same environment, and at the same time. Language contact thus, manifests itself as individual, institutional or state bilingualism. This level of bilingualism begets a linguistic level known as ‘semi-lingualism’ or ‘interlingua’. An instance is in a university environment where the best hair stylist is from a different ethnic group from that of the student whom she/he is dressing the hair; since both cannot understand each other; they must also communicate ‘somehow’, because language contact most often involves face-to-face interactions among groups of speakers.

The essence of public communication concerns the creation of awareness which may require communication modification. This often induces positive interaction among people, especially in a country such as Nigeria which is marked by both individual and societal multilingualism. Multilingualism can transcend all barriers and bring about a unifying force even in the ‘face’ of diversity.

This involves those who speak more than one language in an environment or locality. There is an emphasis on equity and single common citizenship in multilingual Communication which creates interrelationship between culture, language, plural identity attachments and community relationship. In Nigeria, words are borrowed to make up for the communication pressure mounted on the people (Nigerians) because of British colonization and their reluctance to use another people’s language (See Njemanze, 2014).

Language contact are rated differently and could bring; extreme language mixture (resulting in pidgins, creoles and bilingual mixed languages) language death and language change. Most common among these features is language change which exists largely due to influence on one of the speaker’s language(s), dominated by the influence of borrowed words. Language contact thus begets such linguistic constructs such as, linguistic divergence, language convergence and (or) shift. This has enhanced multilingual literacy in Nigerian environments’ (see Njemanze, 2014) especially through the Nigerian Pidgin usage.

Linguistic divergence according to the description of Michie, (2011) is a deliberate attempt by speakers to maintain or increase their linguistic difference. A speaker uses accents to distance him/herself from his/her conversation partner, a deliberate attempt to ‘purify’ a speaker’s language. This desire is predominant among youths who adopt special styles of communication as in ‘slangs’ in order to prove their independence. These groups of speakers deliberately change their speech pattern as well as reduce the effects of borrowing on their language.

Language convergence is created as result of increase in similarity of features between neighboring languages mainly due to various process of language mixing. Language convergence is peculiar to;

- Contact between two language communities who are eager to retain their native language and can only borrow relevant items to aid their communication.
- Contact between speakers of adjacent languages over a prolonged period also facilitate the gradual process of language convergence
- Again, contacts as a result of inter marriage or family-mixing between speech communities facilitates language convergence.

Contact between ethnic groups may compel one group to abandon their native language. This process of language mixing prompts language shifts. Language shift results when immigrants learn the native language of their new environment. This is induced by the desire to communicate in their new environment. Issues raised above are peculiar to Nigerians, especially youths who have greater need for communicative expediency. Nigerian Pidgin which is
a product of language contact was borne out of the desire to communicate is thus, examined below.

4. DISCUSSION: NIGERIAN PIDGIN ASSESSMENT
The present socio-historical and linguistic situation in Nigeria brought about the combination of a myriad of ethnic groups which had common communicative needs. A pidgin is a simplified language that is created out of communication between two or more groups that do not have a common language. The word ‘pidgin’ formally spelled ‘pigion’ derives its origin from a Chinese Pidgin English pronunciation for business.

Nigeria Pidgin came on board through the Portuguese merchants who were the first Europeans to trade on pepper and slaves from Nigerian coastal areas. These Portuguese first arrived in Benin (city) at the end of the 15th century. The British, however, took over the trade as partners from mid-16th century. Because of the importance of this European trade and the reluctance of the Europeans to learn other languages, the people interacted through substitution of European words for Nigerian words also to ease communication.

Thus, Holms (2000) defines pidgin as: “a reduced language that results from extended contact between groups of people with no language in common; it evolves when they need some verbal communication …” (5). The grammar of most Nigerian pidgin is coined from each speaker’s native language and it assumes roles other than what it was expected to be.

Decamp (1987) pidgin as an incidental communicative language within a multilingual setting which, “is the native language of nobody” (175). In other words, Pidgin is a combination of foreign or superstrate language and the indigenous or the substrate language.

Pidgins are emerging to be a great area of study to sociolinguists because of its influence on the society. Hudson (1980) confirms that; “each pidgin is of course specially constructed to suit the need of its users which means that it has to have terminology and construction, needed in whatever kind of context” (62). Similarly, Jowitt (1991) remarked that, “the pidgin has attained the feat of dignity not only among the illiterates but also the literate members of the society” (13). In another contribution, Adegbija (1994) advocates for the utility of Pidgin and even proposes its elevation to a national language, (26). This is largely based on its neutrality and easy acquisition. It is also geographically spread all over Nigeria and it is spoken by Nigerians of different ethnic origins.

The current sociolinguistic factors that have influenced the current developments in the attitudes, functions and domains of Nigerian Pidgin usage are such that

- Pidgins generally emerge from trading contact between Europeans and indigenous people living in coastal areas which later spread to other areas outside the coastal regions.
- Pidgins share the same socio-historical, sociolinguistic and structural similarities that make it a distinct variety.
- It is used by substantial number of speakers who use the language in almost all occasions.

Thus, the sociolinguistic situation in Nigeria is such that English and Arabic are the exogenous languages while Nigerian Pidgin (used widely by Southern regions in urban contexts), Hausa language (used in the north), Igbo language (used in the east) and Yoruba language (used in south west) serve as a unifying language in the various ethnic regions and other smaller ethnicities.

Nigerian Pidgin usage has gained increased population of users and it is used in many communicative domains such as; education; which could be formal or informal, mass media; administrative works; formal and informal, religion; commerce; literary work and entertainment. The number of literate populations do not limit NP usage; rather it is used by both the educated and the non-educated population in the country. It is also evident that only few domains are restricted for Standard English usage in Nigeria.

Pidgins enjoy widespread use in informal and formal contexts. This statement is backed-up with examples through numerous participant observation at different times and places such as; listening to News broadcast, jingles, among literates who can also write the language and more.

Prominent evidence is the WAZOBIA FM 95.1 radio station established since 2007 in Lagos State, and other locations in Nigeria, which broadcasts news in Nigerian Pidgin. This Radio station devised its own writing style for NP in order to fill the lapse in orthography and has both educated and non-educated audience. This achievement depicts wide acceptance and recognition. Below is a sample of WAZOBIA news;

Example 1 Topic: Election
‘Nigeria pipul don dey congratulate we presido Muhammadu Buhari for im win for the last week vote. Dey don tok am sey na May 29, 2019 him go waka enta for new presido chair…” (WAZOBIA FM 95.1 News of 26th May 2019).
Example II  Topic – Boko Haram
“mak dis pipul kom do dia noncens bomb 4 Naija Delta mak we tel dem say ...militants and Boko Haram no be mates; ... l-a-y-e. we go roast dem ... fri dem. Dem no say militants senior dem. So mak dem relax…” (WAZOBIA Facebook Discussion Board assessed 1st August 2018).

Nigerian Pidgin English is also prominent in our church songs; thus, it is common to hear gospel songs such as:

• ‘Dis kin God –o, I never see your kind-o, dis kin God-o, u-ar a miracle God.’
• ‘Abi you no know sey Jehovah na God...?’
• ‘People dey ask me say, na wetin dey mak me fine, I just dey tell dem say, na Jesus dey make me fine...’
• ‘Satan daw fall for guter, matcham matcham ...
• ‘Ben low, Ben low, ben low...’

However, the desire to communicate in a familiar environment is peculiar to everyone; the younger generation of Nigerians especially students in tertiary institutions have the greater urge to embark on such communications, especially when they are in a new environment. Thus, this paper takes a survey of NP usage among FUTO students.

4.1 Result: A Survey of FUTO Students NP usages
All the features of language contact and NP discussed above are peculiar to NP usage in FUTO and other Nigerian universities. Within FUTO environment, these are seen in an NP writing survey conducted in a class of 40 students. Nigerian Pidgin is used as follows:

• To announce campus events; parties film shows concerts etc
• To make requests and express basic needs
• To talk about ladies; ‘womanize’
• For general interpersonal/private discussions
• For casual greetings
• In songs and more

These usages are induced by the desire to deliberately change one’s linguistic pattern to suit his/her environment and not that these users are not competent in English language usage.

Here are selected examples of usages in announcing campus events;

• ‘Runs dey 750 cap dis weekend’, (There will be a party at 750 capacity Hall this weekend).
• ‘All those boys wee dey kolo 4 class go dey for de jive dis night; (All those rascals in our class will be at the musical show this night).
• ‘jive dey for cafe’ – (There is a musical show at the cafeteria).

• ‘Dbanj, p-square an dem brother musicians go tanda for campus next week; (Dbanj, p-square and other popular musicians will perform in the school next week)

The following examples are NP used in making requests by FUTO students;

• ‘A beg make I go grub, make man no kweme/quench, (please I want to go and eat so that I will not collapse).
• ‘I wan go titrate, my bladder don full’ –(I want to go and urinate, I am pressed).
• ‘Make I come wak?; (can I come and eat?)
• ‘Tell my mumsy say I need some fibre’, (Tell my mother that I need some ‘pocket’ money).

Discussions about female students (ladies) are often predominant in student’s conversations. Here are selected examples;

• ‘Omoge you dey –O’, (Lady, you are beautiful).
• ‘De girl we mike wan scup no get data’, (The girl that Mike wants to date/court is not prominent on campus).
• ‘This oldie na her aristo’, (This old man is her intimate friend; ‘sugar daddy’)
• ‘This one na cowbell’, (This lady is endowed big-chest)
• ‘She wan make you tear im wrapper?’, (Does she want you to sleep with her?).

Again, Nigerian pidgin is generally used for interpersonal/private discussion, some examples are;

• ‘Dem neva see black man bifor?’ (Have they not seen a black man before?)
• ‘Na dis man be de builder?, (is this the builder/Civil engineer?)
• ‘Ejoo comot for road, see me see wahala’ (please excuse me, what is your problem)
• ‘The bobo dey come so?’, (is the boy coming?).
• ‘You don see de G.S lecturer today? (Have you seen our General studies lecturer today?)
• ‘E be like say una get xtra workload for una department’, (It is like you have extra work load in your department).
• ‘My roommate na krai krai baby’, (my roommate is always sulking).

Certain Pidgin English are used in casual greetings as in;

• ‘Ai troway salute’, (am extending my greetings).
• ‘Long time no see’, (It has been long since I saw you).
• ‘Fashy de guy, haw far? (Neglect the boy/girl, how are you?)
• ‘What’s up’, (How is it?).
• ‘You dey live –o’ (you are in enjoyment).
Most musical renditions in Nigerian university environments are expressed in NP like the palmwine drinkers club (Kegites) and other social groups. Also, proverbs are said in Pidgin language such as:
Trouble no dey blow whistle (Trouble does not ring a bell)
Fowl wey crow for afternoon don chop winch (A fowl that crows in the afternoon should be killed, it’s a taboo)
Oba no dey go transfer (A king cannot be transferred to another kingdom)
When yawa don gas inside market, nobody dey tell cripple wetin im go do (When trouble erupts in the market, no one tells the crippled what to do).
The use of Nigerian Pidgin in Nigerian university campuses is an indication of the communicative intimacy that exists in the university environments, and not that the speakers cannot speak intelligible English.

5. CONCLUSION
This paper examined the various domains, use and development of Nigerian Pidgin among Nigerian university students. It is imperative that the emergence of Nigerian Pidgin as a form of language is largely as a result of languages coming into contact and influencing each other. This also marked the birth of a new language which has the potential to develop, spread or go into extinct, if the communication needs which prompted its usage should cease to operate.

The uniqueness of NP usages among Nigerian university students in Federal University of Technology Owerri and beyond is such that these students have contributed in creating and sustaining positive attitude toward NP usage. This is because it is the only neutral language in the Nigerian environment that can be used by everyone irrespective of his/her ethnic group and academic attainment.
Nigerian Pidgin is used to express every situation and there is no English word that does not have the Nigerian Pidgin equivalent thus it is ethnically balanced. Despite these qualities of NP, the Nigerian governments are still ‘very’ reluctant to accord it any specific position. The spread of NP in Nigerian society into more formal domains is so prominent that, even in the ‘face’ of stigmatization by some people, they cannot stop people from using Nigerian Pidgin.

This paper therefore recommends that, because of the continuous use of NP especially in Nigerian university environments and its influence on the communicative trends of the younger generation (university students), there is need to accord the NP, the befitting position which it has attained.

Finally, one obvious point that should be recognized is that; language users have the domineering power over the spread, expansion or even death of any language. NP has come to stay in Nigerian environment and beyond; thus, it should be appreciated by both the government and the citizens.

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Her flair for research and writing has given her more than fifty published articles in reputable academic journals. There are also literary works, edited books and chapter contributions credited to her efforts in writing. Her areas of academic interest are sociolinguistics; Linguistic Landscape Studies, literacy studies, language re-vitality and gender studies. She belongs to many professional and academic bodies.

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