

Nigerian Pidgin English in Nation-Building

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DOI: [10.36348/sjhss.2019.v04i11.006](https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2019.v04i11.006)

| Received: 14.11.2019 | Accepted: 21.11.2019 | Published: 24.11.2019

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Abstract

The population of Nigeria is not only large, but is also expanding by the passage of time. It is therefore significant that many Nigerians speak Nigerian Pidgin English. This study examines how Nigerian Pidgin English contributes to the development of the country as it gains recognition and operates across facets of nation-hood. When language is used to impinge on the value-system of society through the transmission of information and consciousness, then nation-building is in operation. The literature is replete with critical perspectives on the position of Nigerian Pidgin English in multilingual Nigeria. Hinging on the Independent Parallel Development Theory and the Neutralist Perspective, this study concludes that Nigerian Pidgin English contributes to the building of Nigeria as it is used to convey useful information for national integration and sustainable development.

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin, nation-building, Independent Parallel Development Theory, Neutralist Perspective sustainable development, multilingualism.

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INTRODUCTION

The literature of sociolinguistics elucidates the significance of language to human existence. For example, Charles Chukwuma Montanya [1] notes that “one of the most important differences between man and animals is man’s ability to speak and make others understand him. Language is the only means through which this is achieved in man’s life. Language is the medium or vehicle for conveying ideas, a system of arbitrary vocal symbol based on social cooperation; the totality of meaningful utterances in a given society ...” This study examines the roles of Nigerian Pidgin English in the building of the Nigerian nation. The study makes an overview of multilingual Nigeria to locate how Nigerian Pidgin English is placed in terms of recognition, acceptability and functions.

Nigerian Pidgin in Multilingual Nigeria

The Education Ordinance of 1882 entrenched English as the language of instruction in Nigeria, and in 1896, the Certification System was introduced. Thus, Credit Pass in English became a compulsion in schools. The Article 114(1) of the Littleton Constitution legislated English as an Official Language. People had to obtain certificate in English to thrive in their careers. Although arguments for the use of Nigerian Pidgin English as Nigeria’s National Language abound in the

literature, English continues to dominate other languages in the country as far as significant spheres of nationhood is concerned. The use of Nigerian Pidgin English in different facets of life, is not a product of legislation. Rather, it is because of its communicative potentials in the Nigerian speech community where Nigerian Pidgin English is part of the socio-cultural nuances of the people.

Attitudinal problems have for long bedeviled the prospects of Nigerian Pidgin English in terms of legislative positions on its functionality in nationhood. Since Nigerian Pidgin English can facilitate the integration needed for development, it is necessary for language planning in Nigeria to explore the language for nation-building by legislating roles for it in important spheres of nationhood: education, administration, media, etc. It is through sincere, goal-driven language planning that the developmental potentials of Nigerian Pidgin English can be explored maximally for nation-building. This view corroborates Koul [2] who opines that language planning is “a deliberate attempt in resolving language-related problems necessary for the development of a particular language.” For Akindele and Adegbite cited in Egwuogu [3] language planning is “a set of deliberate activities systematically designed to select from,

organize and develop the language resources of a community in order to enhance the utilization of such resources for development. Language planning is necessitated by the multilingual states ... to integrate the region or country and promote encompassing development.” The present roles that Nigerian Pidgin English performs unconstitutionally in Nigeria implies that if the roles of the language is spelt out via legislation, and developed via corpus and status planning, it will play vital roles in nation-building. For Nigerian Pidgin English to perform extensive roles in nation-building, its corpora have to be developed and standardized. Commenting on corpus and status planning, Egwogu Chinyere [3] submits that “language planning can be done at two levels: status and corpus planning. While status planning deals with assignment of roles to either broaden or narrow their scope, corpus planning deals with language development. It ensures standardization and codification. Therefore, some features include:

- Graphization i.e. standization of the writing system;
- Modernization i.e. formation and inclusion of new vocabulary to keep pace with new discoveries, inventions and innovations.”

According to David Esizimotor and Francis Egbokhare [4] “Nigeria has a population of more than 162 million people (July 2011 United Nations estimate) scattered across its 923,768 square kilometers of swamps, forests and savannahs. The country is an amalgamation of ethnically diverse groups of people speaking well over 500 different languages.” David Esizimotor and Francis Egbokhare [4] also note that “The Portuguese were the first group of Europeans to visit and explore coastal Nigeria, especially around the area now known geographically as the Niger Delta. They started trading with the people of the region from as early as 1469 AD. They established strong diplomatic ties between some of the great kingdoms of the region and Portugal. They established schools and churches where they taught Portuguese and the doctrines of Christianity in the region. And this brought their language close to languages of the Niger Delta for an extended period of time. This, of course became crucial to the evolution of the Naija, which started out as a Portuguese-based pidgin in the Niger Delta” NP is so dominant in certain parts of Nigeria; it is creolized in some parts of the country. There are no evidences that less use of NP in certain parts of Nigeria has made such parts develop more than other parts. The use of Nigerian Pidgin English in different facets of life in Nigeria essentially makes communication easier and more effective. Nigerian Pidgin English is getting better recognition in Nigeria as noted by Jalaludeen Ibrahim [5] who posits that “in the past, NPE was regarded as “unruly jargon”. “Vulgar” and “broken English” mainly associated with a socio-economically deprived set of people. The reason for this negative perception was in connection to its origin as mainly a trade language

which distanced its speakers from the speakers of language of the educated class, the lexifier English. This implies that the typical speakers of NPE were those who had little or no formal education.”

Theoretical Anchorage

This study hinges on bipartite theoretical frameworks in contending that Nigerian Pidgin English plays vital roles in the growth and development of the nation (nation-building): the Neutralist Perspective; and the Independent Parallel Development Theory. According to the Neutralist Perspective, Nigerian Pidgin should be a National Language due to its neutrality, communicative potential in casual discourses and potency in national cohesion. The Independent Parallel Development Theory on the other hand, postulates that the common ancestry which languages have is a facilitator of their functions in terms of national cohesion and societal transformation. According to the theory, languages have common Indo-European ancestry given their corpus similarities. The theory views the socio-cultural affinity of African countries as an evidence of the compatibility of Nigerian Pidgin among Africans [5].

The Instrumentality of Nigerian Pidgin in Nation-building

Nation-building is essentially the development of a nation or country. It is a cross-facet (political, economic, technological, educational, etc.) growth/development, and it is informed by conscious efforts. But without national cohesion or integration, national development or nation-building cannot be sustained. Politically, the value-system is expected to develop before it can be said that a nation is making political progress. In this era of global insecurity, any language that unites the people of a country can be explored for peaceful co-existence of the country. Nigerian Pidgin English contributes to the building of Nigeria in different ways. Consider the following:

National Cohesion

Peace and security of life and property are prerequisites for nation-building. Governance cannot thrive in an atmosphere of chaos and insecurity. It is on record that West Africa is among the world’s most unstable regions. Nigeria and other African nations have been plagued by so much insecurity that nation-building has become elusive. Language has to be used to sensitize, educate, and unite war-torn nations. Within the context of this paper, Nigerian Pidgin English promotes national integration. In the different crisis that plague Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin English is used to sustain brotherhood via different radio and television programmes. The Niger Delta crisis was not an exception. The crisis in the Niger Delta lingered until 2009 when Presidential amnesty was granted to the militants in the Niger Delta. Through Nigerian Pidgin English Programmes in radio stations in Nigeria, physical, emotional, psychological and religious

violence were curbed. This is essentially nation-building. Nigerian Pidgin English provides the decorum, national cohesion, peace, justice, solidarity and brotherhood which Nigeria is in dire need of.

Population of Speakers

Many Nigerians contend for the institutionalization of Nigerian Pidgin English as National Language because its use across domains of national life is becoming widespread. It is not surprising that the language is becoming more and more communicatively potent in the Nigerian speech community; it is a product of inter-regional, mutual trade relations, and this empowers it with the potency to perform integrative functions in society. Indeed, integration is the source of sustainable development in any society. Temitope Abiodun Balogun [5] also submits that “a source had it that ‘Pidgin’ (especially in West Africa) arose from the contact between the Chinese and the European traders and such was a mispronunciation of the word “business” by the Chinese [12]. Another account has it that it came from the Portuguese word ‘OCUPACIAO,’ which means ‘occupation’. Pidgin is also said to resemble or closely related to a Hebrew word Pidjom which means ‘barter’ [13]. It is of particular interest to note that Pidgin has to do with trade or business, contact or migration between two hitherto cultural sets of people.” Concerning the population of speakers of Nigerian Pidgin English, David Esizimotor and Francis Egbokhare [4] submit that “Current estimates show that around 5 million people speak *Naija* as first language while over 75 million people use it as a second language in Nigeria and in Nigeria Diaspora communities in Europe, America and other parts of the world ...” The implication of having very many speakers of Nigerian Pidgin English is that a large number of the productive age speak it and translate the use of the language into nation-building in their various endeavours. Temitope Abiodun Balogun [5] submits that “a research conducted by Okon [14] even shows that members of university tend to use it excitedly, for example:

Femi, O boy which lecture we get now?
Na ENG 309
One no kuku sabi whether di man go come

In English translation:

Tunde: Are we having lectures now?
Femi: Yes, we are having ENG 309.
Tunde: Are you sure the lecturer will be coming?
Femi: No, I am not sure.”

A Linking Language

The extrinsic features of Nigerian Pidgin English enables it to link the various ethnic groups in the country with the socio-cultural values that define their day-to-day lifestyle. We hold the view that Fishman’s parameters for language classification [6]

succinctly captures the extrinsic (socio-pragmatic) features of Nigeria Pidgin English:

- Vitality – seen in the existence of a living community of its speakers. This is a criterion often applied to distinguish languages that are alive as against some others that are described as dead ...;
- Historicity – as seen in the existence of a group of people who, in addition to their social, political, religious or ethnic ties, also see their language as the bonding medium of their common ancestry ...;
- Autonomy – the subjective feeling (when strongly assertive) by a people that their language is unique i.e. different from some other language whatever contrary scientific view a linguist may hold concerning their speech form ...”

Apart from deriving its vocabulary from English, Nigerian Pidgin English derives many of its vocabulary items from the major Nigerian languages (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) and from the Edoid group of languages. This makes it easy for it to function not only as a linking language, but also as a means of communication across domains in Nigeria. Indeed, Portuguese also contributes to the lexicon of Nigerian Pidgin. Consider the list below which shows Nigerian Pidgin English words and their sources [4]:

From English:

- chop	‘to eat/to consume’
- domot	‘door mouth area’
- doti	‘dirt’
- pesin	‘someone’
- trowe	‘throw away’
- tok	‘to speak’
- waka	‘to walk’

From the Edo:

- kpangolo	‘container’
- kpekere	‘plantain chips’
- okada	‘motor-bike’
- ororo	‘vegetable oil’
- ozeba	‘a big problem’

From Hausa:

- dabaru	‘to destroy’
- dogo	‘a tall person’
- gwora	‘cola nut’
- koboko	‘horse whip’
- suya	‘spicy grilled meat’

From Igbo:

- akamu	‘corn starch/pap’
- biko	‘please’
- obodo	‘land/country’
- okrika	‘second-handed items’
- ogbanje	‘a water spirit’
- ugu	‘pumpkin leaves’

From Yoruba:

- adire 'tie and die'
- agbo 'herbal medicine'
- ashawo 'a prostitute'
- shakara 'show-off'
- she 'hope'
- shele 'happen/take place'

From Portuguese:

- kpalava 'trouble'
- pikin 'child'
- sabi 'to know'

David Esizimeton and Francis Egbokhare [4] also note that "Naija always has many words from English that came into the language in their plural forms. Among the most widely used are:

- bins 'beans'
- machis 'matches'
- skul fis 'school fees'
- soks 'socks'
- twins 'twins'."

Cross-Domain Function

Although Nigerian Pidgin English is often stereotyped and described as 'Pidgin English' or 'Broken English', it is accepted by most people as a very useful language for public enlightenment campaigns, radio and television programs, inter-ethnic communication, commercial advertising, sitcoms, stand-up comedies, popular music, religious music and for conducting common everyday business transactions in many parts of the country ...

The fact that Nigerian Pidgin English is commonly used in radio programmes, is a positive development. Through the cross-domain functions of Nigerian Pidgin English, goods and services are enjoyed by Nigerians. For example, the language is used for presenting information for the use of medical and household products. Without such information, private and public lives will be in jeopardy. Many terms that are not understood in English are expressed in Nigerian Pidgin English to facilitate the dissemination of information for nation-building. Obi Edith Ifeyinwa [7] presents radio programmes in Nigerian Pidgin English:

	RADIO/TV STATIONS	TOWNS	PROGRAMME OF THE STATIONS
I	Wazobia FM (95.1)	Lagos	All programmes are broadcast in Pidgin. No other language is used in this station.
Ii	BBC Media Station (Nigeria Story Story Radio)	Abuja	News, jokes, political, situational and social commentaries
Iii	Radio Faji	Lagos	News, political issues, jokes and social commentaries
Iv	Metro FM	Lagos	News, jokes and political issues
V	Purity FM	Awka	Jokes and public interactive programmes
Vi	Lagos State Television Station	Lagos	News, sports and social commentaries
Vii	Dream FM (92.5)	Enugu	Situational, social commentaries and jokes
Viii	Independent Television Station	Benin	Jokes, political, situational and social issues
Ix	Delta Broadcasting Service (DBS)	Asaba	News, sport commentaries, political and social issues
X	Brila Radio Station	Enugu	Uses Pidgin in sports commentaries
Xi	Rivers State Television Broadcasting Station	Port-Harcourt	News, sport commentaries and social issues
Xii	Unizik FM	Awka	Jokes and interactive programmes

LITERARY POTENTIALS

Literature is an asset to society because its educative and corrective roles cannot be quantified. Nigerian Pidgin English is emerging in the literary canon. In this regard, it fosters nation-building; in the sense that committed art speaks to society for the good of society. While the status of the language has improved tremendously as a language that can be used for serious purposes, only a small body of literature exists in it. There are ongoing efforts among local linguists and writers to see that this aspect of the language is developed especially since 2009 when the Naija Language Akedemi (NLA) proposed a harmonized orthography for writing the language and adopted Naija as the name for the language that was hitherto known as Nigerian Pidgin [8]. Jalaludeen Ibrahim [8] also submits that "the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) now recognize NPE in its members literary works as many

books and poetry volumes have been published in NPE. Some of the notable works include: Eriata Oribhabor's *If Yu Hie Se A De Prizin*, Ezenwa-Ohaeto's *I wan Bi President*, Tunde Fatunde's *No Country* and Ola Rotimi's *Grip Am*." It is obvious given the issues discussed in sections 4.1 to 4.5, that Nigerian Pidgin English cannot be isolated from nation-building in the Nigerian context.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although the roles which Nigerian Pidgin English plays in the cohesive building of Nigeria, are not entrenched via legislation, they are incredible and worthy of scholarly and legislative attention. This study views nation-building as a multi-faceted paradigm shift that is sustained for the good of the populace. Nigerian Pidgin English is so potent in conveying messages that

its relegation in certain spheres of nationhood, is unacceptable.

It seems illogical to advocate for the use of Nigerian Pidgin English in education, administration, international diplomacy and other significant domains given the fact that literacy level in it is not satisfactory. However, it should be noted that the developmental potentials of Nigerian Pidgin English cannot be fully realized if literacy level in it is not enhanced. It takes adequate literacy (people's proficiency in reading, writing and speaking) in Nigerian Pidgin English to entrench it in nationhood. In Nigeria, literacy level in English is higher than literacy level in Nigerian Pidgin English, and this sociolinguistic situation gives English edge over Nigerian Pidgin English. It is not difficult to attain satisfactory literacy level in Nigerian Pidgin English because its internal structure is simple, as noted by scholars. For example, Obi Edith Ifeyinwa [7] cites Yule who listed the following as the common linguistic features of English-based Pidgins:

1. Absence of any complex grammatical morphology and a limited vocabulary;
2. Inflectional suffixes such as -s (plural) and -s (possessive) on nouns in Standard.
3. English are rare in Pidgins, for example, 'a lot of cars' is translated as 'plenti plenty car'.
4. Functional morphemes often take the place of inflectional morphemes found in the source language. For example, instead of changing the form of 'you' to 'your' as in the English phrase, 'your book', English-based Pidgin uses a form like 'book bilong you'... Again Pidgin language usually uses reduplication as intensifiers or modifying adverbs. For instance, in Standard English (SE) 'The soup is very palatable' is translated in Nigerian Pidgin (NP) as 'The supu swit well well (reduplication)."

Nigerian Pidgin English, like languages in general, is important to society. Dada [9] submits that "language is a unique property that belongs to the human race. It is a means of communication between two or more people and to a very large extent, the development of man politically, socially, economically, etc., depends on the use of language. Indeed, language permeates all aspects of human endeavor. Language is an integral part of culture, a reflection of many features of a given culture thus, like culture itself, it is a leader of behavior, which can be enhanced through direct or indirect contact. The formal and functional complexity of language is such a distinctive human trait that many scholars think the designation "homo loquat" (man the speaking animal) to be a better way of identifying the species than any other simple criterion (Such as tool using) that has been suggested." Some vital roles which Nigerian Pidgin English plays in Nigeria have been discussed in this paper. Therefore, negative attitudes towards the language should be discouraged. Scholars contend that language attitudes impinge on the status

and functions of a language. For example, Adegbija [10] submits that "attitudes towards languages are motivated by several factors including their socio-economic value, their status-raising potentials, their perceived instrumental value, their perceived esteem, their perceived functions or roles in the nation, their numerical strength, the perceived political and economic power of its speakers, their use in the official domains, their educational value, etc. Generally, positive attitudes, covert or overt, are developed towards a language that is perceived to have value in all these different areas ... Conversely, negative attitudes, overt or covert, develop towards a language in proportion to its lack of function or narrowing or narrowing of its distribution in registers."

Nigerian Pidgin English fosters nation-building because of its esteemed position in the psyche of many Nigerians – the natives of the environment where Nigerian Pidgin English originated. Language interacts with its environment. Thus, English cannot dislodge the functions which Nigerian Pidgin English performs in the country. This submission corroborates Einar Haugen's view cited by Leena Vanha's [11]. According to Einar Haugen, ecolinguistics or language ecology is "the study of interactions between any given language and its environments..." For Leena Vanha "an ecological perspective asserts that the learner's environment is full of potential meanings that slowly become available for the learner through interaction with and within the environment." Indeed, Nigerian Pidgin English embodies the speakers' routine. This being the case, the language is a credible candidate for building the nation in different ramifications.

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