Nigerian Pidgin in Nation-building: Prospects and Constraints

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Abstract

This study examines the prospects and constraints of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) in nation-building. In this regard, the instrumentality of Nigerian Pidgin in domains such as administration, media, politics and education, is brought to the fore. Language is a vital tool, not just for communication, but also for development. The use of Nigerian Pidgin in communication demonstrates the culture-driven nature of language, and its essence in the human race. This view corroborates Buraimoh, O. Olawunmi (2017, p. 100) who reports 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 ..." The theoretical framework of the study is Mogan's Speech Community Theory. The study concludes that Nigerian Pidgin can foster national development if its corpora are developed and used alongside English in crucial spheres of nationhood, with constitutional backing.

Keywords: *Nigerian Pidgin, prospects, constraints, nationhood, Mogan's Speech Community Theory.*

1. Introduction

Nations all over the world deploy different strategies towards growth and development. Language is one of the instruments for the building of nations, and Nigeria, being a developing nation, should not ignore the instrumentality of Nigerian Pidgin in its overall development. In a speech community, languages and language varieties abound for the purpose of helping language users to cope with the dynamics of social structures and stratifications which are essentially about how language communes with society. M. S. Abdullahi-Idiagbon, cited in Ayodabo et al. (2016, p. 390) opines that "the interference between language and society has long been established. Thus, classification of language into regional, dialectal and discourse varieties are indicative of the sensitivity of language to differences in the society. In view of this, sociolinguists assert that human society is stratified along linguistic and social indices. Language is, thus, seen as a potent apparatus applicable to account for the correlation between social structure and language behaviour." Nigerian Pidgin is one of the linguistic codes linking humans with the socially realistic phenomena in the Nigerian speech community.

This study examines the position of Nigerian Pidgin in national development, as the language tries to wriggle out of the suffocating menace of language attitudes in the country.

2. Language Planning in Multilingual Nigeria

Scholars contend that language policy and planning in Nigeria are not planned and implemented with satisfactory focus and tenacity, leading to poor results, particularly in failing to achieve the much-needed national cohesion. Proper planning in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country like Nigeria, is worthy of attention. According to Dada (2010, p. 418), "the recent 2005 Ethnologic Data listed 521 languages for Nigeria. Of these, 510 are living languages, 2 are second languages without mother tongue speakers, and 9 are extinct. Research submits that Nigerian languages are grouped as major languages, state languages and local languages based on their status as dominant languages, their territorial spread and the population that speak them." Language policy is a legislative framework targeted towards language, for the good of society. While it has yielded good results in some countries, it has not yielded expected results in other countries. Bamgbose 1991, p.111 asserts that "a language policy may be defined as a programme of action on the role or status of a

language in a given community. In a multilingual situation, a language policy decision necessarily involves the role or status of one language in relation to other languages." Policy frameworks on the status of Nigerian Pidgin in Nigeria are therefore sensitive to the relationship between Nigerian Pidgin with other languages in the country, particularly English, which is the national language. Fasold (1984, p. 77) comments on what a national language is:

> (a) The emblem of national oneness and identity;
> (b) Widely used for some everyday purposes;
> (c) Widely and fluently spoken within the country;
> (d) The major candidate for such a role, since there is no equally qualified alternative language within the country;
> (e) Acceptable as a symbol of authenticity; and
> (f) Having a link with the glorious past."

In Nigeria, language planning is not completely successful, partly because of political inclinations. This view corroborates Pattanayak (1981a, p. 44) who notes that "language politics is intimately connected with resources planning. Unless resources are so developed that culture groups get equal opportunities for their creative fulfillment, language is bound to be used for divisive purposes. Planners in general and language planners in particular have to bear this in mind." However, English is still more favoured than other languages in Nigeria, due to the actions of language planners. Akere (2006, pp. 5-6) identifies five factors which inform the success of English in Nigeria:

> (a.) English can be described as a product of linguistic imperialism bestowed by colonialism;
> (b.) The introduction of certification system in Nigeria's educational programmes, with ordinary pass and Credit pass in English, as a measure of adequacy for higher education (Even to read French or Hausa or Yoruba or Igbo in any Nigerian University, at the Bachelor level, you must have a Credit pass in English);
> (c.) A good working knowledge of English language is considered a prerequisite for obtaining government jobs;
> (d.) Establishment of educational institutions and the introduction of English as a subject of study, and a medium of instruction;
> (e.) The establishment of the British Council in 1935, and charter in 1940 to promote a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the English language abroad."

Scholars contend that language policy and planning in multilingual Nigeria are not satisfactory, even in the aspect of implementation. Lack of focus and tenacity in language planning in the country, has resulted in poor results, particularly in failing to achieve the much-needed national cohesion. According to Brain cited in Dada (2010, p. 418), "the recent 2005 Ethnologic Data listed 521 languages for Nigeria. Of these, 510 are living languages, 2 are second languages without mother tongue speakers, and 9 are extinct. Research submits that Nigerian languages are grouped as major languages, state languages and local languages based on their status as dominant languages, their territorial spread and the population that speak them.". The failure of language policyin Nigeria reflects on the National Policy of Education which scholars' fault for obvious reasons. Dada (ibid. p. 421) presents the following as flaws of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria:

i) Don't the statements on language constitute just a statement of intent rather than a serious programme for implementation?
ii) If the mother tongue (MT) or the language of the immediate community is considered so important at the pre-primary level as an integral part of the child's culture and the link between the home and the school, why should it be "principal" and not "solely" used at this level?
iii) How do people identify the language(s) of the immediate community in pluralistic settings like urban centres or international communities like universities?
iv) Aren't the pronouncements on the three major languages vague and effeminate?
v) Further on the choice of language, by whom and at what level is the choice of one of the three languages to be made? By the Federal, State or Local Government? By the parents, the school, or the pupils?
vi) If the government is serious about implementing the policy, shouldn't there be a definite program for all states to follow in the implementation of the language provisions couched in cautious escape phraseology: "subject to the availability of teachers"?
vii) If the government considers the learning of the three crucial for national integration, where are the legal and other sanctions for defaulting Federal, State and Local Governments or their agencies?
viii) Practically, all Nigerian languages can be used as mother tongues or language(s) of immediate communities. Is it pedagogically feasible to organize initial literacy in 400 odd languages?
ix) How do just three or the major languages serve the need of the educational process and become the media for preserving the people's cultures?
x) The total number of teachers required in 1988 for the three major Nigerian languages was 55, 237. Only 6, 383 or 11.6 % of these were available. How and where are the remaining 48, 854 teachers to be produced? Is the recruitment or training of these teachers to be by chance or to a coordinated programme involving all agencies concerned[1]?

4. Nigerian Pidgin

Nigerian Pidgin is a regional pidgin spoken in the Nigerian speech community. It is distinct from other pidgins in discrete levels of linguistic analysis (e.g. phonologically). Fuller (ibid. p. 120) submits that "pidgins are conventionalized systems of communication, not idiosyncratic production. A pidgin can itself be a target language, that is, something which a speaker is trying to learn. However, both pidgins and interlanguage have a substrate influence (i.e., influence from the speaker's native language). Although it is often recognized that some similar linguistic and cognitive processes are at work in second language acquisition and pidginization, the distinction has been made between the development of an interlanguage spoken by an individual and the sociolinguistic process involving communication between various individuals speaking a second language which forms a pidgin." Pidgins are assigned insignificant functions in nations, being considered mixed languages. Wardhaugh R. and Janet M. Fuller (ibid. p. 114) reports that "among the many languages of the world are a few that have been assigned a somewhat marginal position in the study of linguistics: the various lingua francas, pidgins, creoles, and so-called mixed languages. Such languages have apparently existed since time immemorial, but we know less about them than we know about languages that have a long history as standard languages spoken by a dominant group. The history of serious study of such languages goes back only a few decades. Until recently, pidgins and creoles have generally been viewed as uninteresting linguistic phenomena, being notable mainly for linguistic features they have been said to lack (e.g., articles, the copula, and grammatical inflections) rather than those they possess, and those who speak them have often been treated with disdain, even contempt. A major issue in contact linguistics today is the status of such languages …" The literature is replete with divergent perspectives on the term "pidgin" and its associative notion "creole". For example, Wardhaugh R. and Janet M. Fuller (2015, p. 121) assert:

> Scholars studying pidgin and Creole languages have moved away from using the terms "pidginization" and "creolization". Winford (1997) has pointed out that these terms cover a wide variety of phenomena that are not well understood. He suggests pidgin formation and creole formation as alternatives so that investigators focus on the specific linguistic input and processes that are involved: 'we should be asking ourselves … which kinds of linguistic processes and changes are common to all … and which are not, and how we can formulate frameworks to account for both the similarities and differences in types of restructuring found in each case' (1997a, 138). A further issue with the term "creolization" is pointed out by Bakker (2008, 146), who notes that it is used to mean the process of becoming a mother tongue and the process of structuring elaboration, which, … do not necessarily happen in tandem.

> Mufwene (2008, 461) also adds a political dimension to the problems with these terms when applied to varieties developed from European languages in contexts of colonization or slavery, saying 'Usage of the terms creolization and indiginization to identify their divergence from the European languages from which they developed reflects both a colonial franchising attitude towards the populations speaking them and ignorance among linguists of the role that contact has always played in language diversification'."

From the time it originated in Nigeria till date, Nigerian Pidgin is known to be a child of communication necessity. This justifies the view that the language possesses enough vitality to gain attention in legislation. Okafor Amaka Yvonne 2022, p. 1 asserts that "the word pidgin was first reported in English in 1807, when English was accepted as Canton's (Guangzho's) industry and commerce language. Business English was commonly written as Pidgin English at the time, a spelling that reflected the local sound. The need for communication in order for English and Cantonese to trade effectively led to the formation of Chinese Pidgin English. As commerce grew, it became clear that translators were in short supply among local Cantonese businessmen and their European counterparts. Many local traders put what little English they had from their brief interactions with others who spoke English more fluently to good use. This brought about various varieties of Standard English in Canton. As it relates to Nigeria, the trade contact between the British and the local people led to the advent of Nigerian Pidgin in the seventeenth century." Commenting further on pidgin, Wardhaugh R. and Janet M. Fuller (ibid. p. 123) avers that "pidgin and creole languages are distributed mainly, though not exclusively, in the equatorial belt around the world, usually in places with direct or easy access to the oceans … Consequently, they are found mainly in the Caribbean and around the north and east coasts of South America, around the coasts of Africa, particularly the west coast, and across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. They are fairly uncommon in the more extreme northern and southern areas of the world and in the interiors of continents. Their distribution appears to be fairly closely related to long-standing patterns of trade, including trade in slaves."

5. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored by Morgan's Speech Community Theory which is presented below as cited in Sola Timothy Babatunde and Moses Adebayo Aremu (2017, pp. 99-100):

> Morgan's (2003) view is that a speech community does not simply focus on groups that speak the same language but rather that the concept takes as facts the notion that language represents, embodies, constraints and constitutes meaningful participation in society and culture. Morgan sees the study of the speech community as being central to the understanding of human language and meaning-making because it is the product of prolonged interaction among those who operate within shared beliefs and value system regarding their own

culture, society and history as well as their communication with others. In his view, these interactions constitute the fundamental nature of human contact and the importance of language, discourse and verbal styles in the representation and negotiation of the relationships that ensue. Morgan goes further to submit that the concept of speech community (which a global language indexes) does not simply focus on groups that speak the same language but that it connotes that the common language represents, embodies, constructs and constitutes meaningful participation in a society and culture. Similarly, to Morgan, a homogenous community presupposes the existence of a mutually intelligible, symbolic and ideological communicative system among members."

6. Prospects and Constraints of Nigerian Pidgin in Nation-building
This section of the paper examines the prospects and constraints of Nigerian Pidgin in nation-building.

6.1 Prospects of Nigerian Pidgin in Nation-building
6.1.1 Autonomy
Nigerian Pidgin is unique from other languages in linguistic features, even though its corpora reflect English (hybridization). As a unique language, the grammatical categories and processes of Nigerian Pidgin are not the same as those of English. A non-autonomous linguistic code should not be a candidate for codification. There are many Nigerian English vocabulary items that are not "hybridized". For example, I do not think pikin (child) is derived from any word in the English lexicon. So long as language evolves as things or phenomena are generated in society, more Nigerian Pidgin expressions can be created and added into its lexicon. The autonomous attribute of Nigerian Pidgin makes it deserve implementation within the framework of the language development tips proposed by linguists. James Andokari Zaki, cited in Ayodabo et al. (ibid. p. 75) submits that "linguists like Nahir (2003), Gibson (2006), Dona (1998) and Fishman (1977) recognized eleven language planning goals namely:

1. Language Purification – Prescription of usage in order to preserve the linguistic purity of language, protect language from foreign influence and guard against language deviation from within.
2. Language Revival – The attempt to turn a language back into normal means of communication especially one with few or no surviving native speakers.
3. Language Standardization – The attempt to gather prestige for a regional language or dialect, transforming it into one that is accepted as a major language or standard language of a region.
4. Language Reform – Deliberate change in specific aspects of language like orthography, spelling or grammar.
5. Language Reform – Aims to increase the numbers of speakers of one language at the expense of another.
6. Lexical Modernization – Word creation and adaptation.
7. Terminology Unification – Development of unified terminologies, primarily in technical domains.
8. Stylistic Simplification – Simplification of language usage in lexicon, grammar and style.
9. Interlingua Communication – Facilitation of linguistic communication between members of distinct speech communities.
10. Language maintenance – Preservation of the use of groups' native language as a first or second language where pressure threatens or causes a decline in the status of the language.
11. Auxiliary Code Standardization – Standardization of marginal, auxiliary aspects of language such as signs for the deaf, rules of transliteration and transcription.

6.1.2 Vitality
When a language is potent in informal interaction which is the dominant day-to-day communication that people across social class engage in, it is said to possess vitality. Nigerian Pidgin is immersed in the socio-cultural nuances of the Nigeria speech community. This explains why it is commonly used by movie stars, musicians and celebrities. The vitality of the language is also revealed in its use in jokes by comedians. In as much as Nigerian musicians, comedians and celebrities have many fans (followers), Nigerian Pidgin will continue to retain its vitality. It is not a feeble, redundant language. It is lively, relevant, and operational.

6.1.3 Widespread Speakers
Nigerian Pidgin is spoken by many of the inhabitants of Nigeria. In this regard, fluency is important. Scholars believe that fluency in Nigerian Pidgin is demonstrated by an appreciable large number of the population. Regardless of the fact that there are intra-regional "Nigerian Pidgins" in the country (e.g. Warri Pidgin and Lagos Pigin), the corpora of Nigerian Pidgin are similar. When fluency in a language is appreciably much, planning in the language is meaningful and less difficult. If majority of the population of a country are fluent speakers of a language, the chances of the language in the assignment of roles in crucial spheres of nationhood, is enhanced.

6.1.4 National Cohesion
Native speakers of a language are often victims of the negative connotations of their language. Ethnic stigmatization in language transcends phonological features as in when certain wrong pronunciations of English words are associated with certain tribes or ethnic backgrounds. The ways native speakers of English are regarded (hostile, proud, accommodating, etc.) determine attitudes towards English by non-native speakers. Being a language that is not traceable to the ancestral origin of any ethnic group in Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin is able to foster national cohesion and development.

6.1.5 Non-elitist Language
An elitist language such as English, is class-based. Many Nigerians can neither write nor speak English proficiently. English isolates those who think it is only for the wealthy and educated people in multilingual Nigeria. An elitist language is not all-inclusive in the speech community where it is used for restricted purposes in restricted domains. Positive attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin are possible if the language is developed according to the established standards for national languages. Fishman (1972, pp. 18-22) posits that "four attributes determine language attitudes: standardization (codification and acceptability of the norms of a given language as defined by a given speech community); autonomy (the unique attributes of the language); historicity (the language's ancestral origin); and vitality (the potency of the language in communication)."

6.1.6 Cross-class Language
The prospects of a language are not only tied to the population of speakers, but also to the categories of speakers. Nigerian Pidgin is spoken by the literates and illiterates, the old and young, the rich and poor (people in the country). Therefore, it is an all-embracing language fit for attention in language policy and planning.

6.2 Constraints of Nigerian Pidgin in Nation-building
6.2.1 Sub-standard Language
Nigerian Pidgin is not a standardized language. Its non- recognition in critical domains of nationhood is therefore not surprising. A standard language is fit for literary works, international diplomacy, administration, formal education, media and legislative proceedings. A non-standard language, Nigerian Pidgin is not codified. Its orthography has not been developed, and this is a major constraint to the future of the language in Nigeria. A codified language has a lexicon which contains its writing systems. The lexicon does not only give it international intelligibility, but also guarantees general acceptability.

6.2.2 Alien Ancestry
In Nigeria, English is considered a symbol of colonialism because of its alien origin. This situation should enhance the accommodation of Nigerian Pidgin in nationhood. However, negative attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin are worsened by the common belief that it as an offshoot of English. Like English, pidgin is not one of Nigeria's indigenous languages, even though its positive sides make it more endeared to many Nigerians than English. The clamour for the enthronement of one of the major Nigerian languages as a national language is informed by the displeasure over the alien ancestry of English, a language that is not traceable to the origin of speakers of Nigerian languages (indigenous langages). Effective language planning can change the mindset of Nigerians toward Nigerian Pidgin, and make more people "shift" towards using it (language shift). James Andokari Zaki, cited in Ayodabo et al. (ibid. p. 74) rightly note that "the goals of language planning differ depending on the nation or organization but generally they include making planning decisions and possible changes for the benefit of communication, security and transformation. Planning or improving effective communication can also lead to other social changes such as language shift or assimilation …"

6.2.3 Unofficial (Casual) Functions
When a language is used only for casual communication, it is despised by its speakers in a country. Nigerian Pidgin has for long, been subjected to little or no regard, especially by the elite. The number of the Nigerian elite who speak Nigerian Pidgin is reasonable enough to rescue the language from relegation and neglect. Any proposal for the use of Nigerian Pidgin in official communication, presupposes the codification of the language. This is because, an official language has to be standardized. James Andokari Zaki, cited in Ayodabo et al. (ibid. p. 72) posit that "language planning in the national domain is perceived as a political and administrative activity for solving the problems of the society. The language chosen to fulfil the role of medium of instruction should satisfy certain criteria e.g.: unity, neutrality, modernity, etc." The fact that Nigerian Pidgin is restricted to informal/casual communication, implies that it is not operational in two core domains of nationhood: education and administration[2].

6.2.4 Absence of Constitutional (Legislative) Backing

Language policy and planning are products of legislation. Wardhaugh R. and Janet M. Fuller (ibid. p. 401) asserts:

> Corpus planning seeks to a variety of a language, usually to standardize it, that is, to provide it with the means for serving every possible language function in society. Consequently, corpus planning may involve such matters as the development of an orthography, new sources of vocabulary, dictionaries and a literature, together with the deliberate cultivation of new uses so that the language may extend its use into such areas as government, education, and trade. Corpus planning has been particularly important in countries like Indonisia … India, Pakistan, and Papua New Guinea.

> Governments sometimes very deliberately involve themselves in the standardization process by establishing official bodies of one kind or another to regulate language matters or to encourage changes felt to be desirable. One of the most famous examples of an official body established to promote the language of a country was Richhelieu's establishment of the Académie Francaise in 1635.

Without constitutional backing, a language cannot be promoted towards becoming a national language. It is the government of country that appoints language planners, formulate policies through its agents or agencies and implement the codification and standardization of any language that is a candidate for the status of a national language. Policy frameworks on language and language-based issues are only binding if they are given constitutional backing.

6.2.5 The "Non-language" Perspective

Some people do not view Nigerian Pidgin as a language. The perspective that Nigerian Pidgin is not a language, is not justifiable. A unique and potent language, Nigerian Pidgin communicates the socio-cutural nuances of its speakers; that is, it possesses "vitality". There is a form of pidgin that is even mother tongue to its speakers (creole), and this accentuates the view that Nigerian Pidgin is a language. A major constraint in the continually held view that Nigerian Pigin is not a language is that it will neither be developed nor given functions in critical domains of nationhood. The feeling that Nigerian Pidgin is a language is essentially about "people thinking that it is part of their history". Nigerian Pidgin is indeed, historically rooted in Nigeria[3].

7. Conclusion

This study examines the prospects and constraints of Nigerian Pidgin, as the language operates with other languages in multilingual and multicultural Nigeria. Language attitudes determine the fate of languages in any country, and Nigeria is not an exception. Negative attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin have lingered for long, and such attitudes are unleashed by the government a well as the governed (the people of Nigeria). Given the communicative potentials of Nigerian Pidgin, it is a good candidate for development in terms of orthography. Unfortunately, its candidature is relegated to the background. Proposals for its development and functionality remain mere intellectual discourses. People contribute meaningfully towards the development of their country when the "language of the people" (Nigerian Pidgin) is used for effective mobilization and participation in governance. Nigerian Pidgin is socially relevant, being a language that is used for day-to-day communication by people of all social classes and age ranges. In Nigeria, attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin are a front-burner issue in language research. If the language is developed and used alongside English, it has significant roles to play in fostering national development.

Notes

[1.] According to Dada (ibid.), the following are the strategies employed by the Federal Government for the implementation of the National Policy on Education:

- L1 Primary School Curricula (NERC, 1982-3);
- L2 and L1 JSS Curricula (NERC, 1982-4);
- L1 SSS Curricula (NERC, 1975-6);
- L1 TTC Curricula (NTI 1986);
- Primary Science Terminology (NLC, 1980-3);
- Legislative Terminology (NLC, 1980-88);
- Metalanguage for the three major Nigerian languages (NERC, 1981);
- Braille Orthography (NERC, 1981-4);
- Orthography Manuals and Pan-Nigerian typographic resources (NLC, on-going);
- L1 Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba SSC Exam Syllabus (WAEC, 1985-6; 1991)."

[2.] James Andokari Zaki, cited in Ayodabo et al. (ibid. p. 76) notes that "the century-long debate over language planning in education is to be carefully approached because the education system is the place where the nation's language integrity is maintained. Policy-making should be backed with prompt implementation. Language policy in education should be void of sentiment, bias, political intrusion among others. Parents should consciously or unconciously enhance or assist

vested authorities in the quest of attaining the basic foundational duty of teaching children their mother tongue in order to preserve the culture and achieve the stated policy in National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004).”

3. Wardaugh R. (ibid. p. 38) submits that “historicity refers to the fact that a particular group of people find a sense of identity through using a particular language: it belongs to them. Social, political, religious, or ethic ties may also be important for the group, but the bond provided by a common language may prove to be the strongest tie of all.”

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