

# Pidginisation and Student’s Language Performance in the College of Education, Akamkpa, Cross River State, Nigeria

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**Abstract - The research was on the Pidginization and student’s language performance in the College of Education, Akamkpa, Cross River State Nigeria in particular, but recordings of student’s conversations in three other Colleges of Education in the South-South Zone were collected to ascertain the common language used in those Colleges. A hundred students’ in College of Education Akamkpa were randomly chosen from the population of NCE 1, II and III for the study. A questionnaire was drafted and distributed to illicit their responses. The qualitative responses were analyzed using the simple percentages to draw up the values. Fishman’s theory of domain was also tested to determine the validity and the correlation between the frequent use of Pidgin and academic performance. It was found that the use of Pidgin frequently in schools was an obstacle to good academic performance. It also showed that the frequent use of Pidgin affected the student’s proper use of Standard English. It was recommended that parents should be involved in the development process of their wards by discouraging the use of Pidgin at homes and that the Management of Schools should place notices on boards at strategic places to remind the students of the need to use standard English around the school environment.**

**Keywords:** Pidginization, Conversation, Domain.

## I. Introduction

The wide ruse of Pidgin in tertiary schools in Nigeria is quite worrisome. Its use has gone beyond pedestrian

conversation to an integral part of language use between and among the students in tertiary schools. It has consequently affected the use of Standard English which is the medium through which academic performances are measured.

English language is not just another subject studied in schools. It is the language of education in Nigeria. Being the language of education, it is used to teach and to assess academic competence and performances across all subjects and courses in Nigeria educational system. (Akindele and Adegbite, 1999) submit that the English language had been cultivated, domesticated and indigenized in a socio-cultural milieu like Nigeria.

(Adegbija, 1989) affirms that English is the linguistic alpha and omega in Nigeria, particularly as it relates to education in Nigeria. Perhaps this is why (Makinde, 2001) justified its introduction into the school curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria, because according to (Danladi, 2013), English language plays the vital role of unifying the people of Nigeria.

Despite its importance in Nigeria, particularly in education, its use in the College of Education, Akamkpa is very minimal. The dominant language in use in formal and semi-formal settings is the Pidgin language. Its frequent use by the students of the College has significantly affected their academic performance. This is evident in the results of year 1, 2 and year 3 students in the School of Languages from 2020-2023. This is shown in the table below:

**Table 1: Results of School of Languages from 2020-2023**

2020/2021 Second Semester

Course Codes	Total No. of students	Total No. of passes	Total No. of failures	No. of students with E & D
ENG 121	62	26 (41.94%)	36 (58.06%)	16 (25.80%)
ENG 122	92	51 (55.44%)	41 (44.56%)	29 (31.52%)

ENG 123	66	48 (73%)	18 (27%)	33 (45.83%)
ENG 221	72	53(74%)	19(26%)	18(25.00%)
ENG 222	63	44(69.84%)	19(30.16%)	31(49.20%)
ENG 223	66	60 (90%)	6(10%)	25 (37.87%)
ENG 224	65	54 (83%)	11(17%)	23(35.38%)
ENG 225	60	38(63.33%)	22(36.66%)	17 (28.33%)
ENG 322	92	48(52.17%)	44 (47.83%)	36 (39%)
ENG 323	90	51 (56.66%)	39 (43.34%)	30 (33.33%)
ENG 324	91	49 (53.85%)	42 (46.15%)	31 (34.07%)
ENG 325	89	48 (53.93%)	41 (46.07%)	28 (31.46%)
<b>2021/2022 second semester</b>				
ENG 121	60	40 (66.67%)	20 (33.33%)	36 (60%)
ENG 122	58	32 (55.17%)	26 (44.83%)	30 (51.73%)
ENG 123	60	29 (48.33%)	31 (51.67%)	32 (53.33%)
ENG 221	59	29 (29.15)	30 (50.85%)	35 (59.32%)
ENG 222	60	31 (51.67)	29 (48.33%)	32 (53.33%)
ENG 223	59	32 (54.24)	27 (45.76%)	30 (50.85%)
ENG 224	60	45 (75%)	15 (25%)	30 (50%)
ENG 225	58	47 (81.03%)	11 (18.97%)	28 (48.27%)
ENG 322	60	50 (83.33%)	10 (16.67%)	30 (50%)
ENG 323	59	35 (59.32%)	24 (40.68%)	31 (52.54%)
ENG 324	60 32	(53.33%)	28 (46.64%)	40 (67%)
ENG 325	60	38 (63.33)	28 (46.67%)	45 (75%)
<b>2023/2024 second semester</b>				
ENG 121	48	28 (58.33)	20 (41.67%)	31 (64.58%)
ENG 122	48	30 (62.5%)	18 (37.5)	32 (66.67%)
ENG 123	45	32 (71.11)	13 (28.89%)	35 (77.77%)
ENG 221	60	36 (60%)	24 (40%)	32 (53.33%)
ENG 222	55	38 (69.10%)	17 (30.90)	30 (54.55)
ENG 223	60	35 (58.33)	15 (25%)	31 (51.67%)
ENG 224	60	38 (63.33)	22 (36.67)	33 (55%)
ENG 225	43	20 (46.51%)	23 (53.49%)	30 (69.77%)
ENG 322	60	36 (58.33)	25 (41.67%)	31 (51.67%)
ENG 323	59	39 (66.10%)	20 (33.90%)	32 (54.24%)
ENG 324	60	35 (58.33%)	25 (41.67%)	29 (48.33%)
ENG 325	60	38 (63.33%)	22 (36.67%)	28 (46.67%)

Following the statistics presented above, one could see a consistent trend of weak performances in those English courses across the years. Where the students seem to perform marginally well, the percentage of passes showed bottom heavy, that is, the majority of the passes are in the lower grades of 'D' and 'E'.

It is based on this obvious weakness in their academic performances that there arose the need to embark on this study to determine the correlation of the students' use of Pidgin in the school and their poor academic performances.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

The research into the use of Pidgin by the students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is growing. Researchers are digging deep and asking questions as to why this trend is common.

(Aziza, 2003), (Jibril, 1995), (Elugbe and Omamor, 1971), have all written something on the use of Pidgin in Nigeria. Some have done a comparative study on the patterns of Pidgin in Nigeria, others on the sociolinguistic implications of its use and so on.

However, this study is centered on the use of Pidgin in the College of Education, in Akamkpa, Cross River State in

particular, to determine how its use has affected the academic performance of the students.

## 1.2 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to determine the implication of the use of Pidgin on the academic performance of the students in a tertiary institution.

The objectives of the research are to:

- i) Determine the causes of the use of Pidgin in the school.
- ii) Investigate the pattern of the Pidgin use.
- iii) Determine its effect on the academic performance of the students.

## 1.3 Theoretical framework

The language choice of an individual is a sociolinguistic phenomenon, which refers to the selection of language(s) for different purposes, and in various contexts. The framework for this study, is Fishman's (1965) Concept of Domain Analysis (CDA). It explains how language choice within multilingual groups is not simply random, rather that the usage dictates that only one of the theoretically co-available languages or varieties will be chosen by particular classes of interlocutors on particular kinds of occasions to discuss particular topics (P. 67-68).

The theory identifies five domains of language use: family, friendship, religion, education, and employment. The theory is further split into two categories. The family, friends and neighbourhood are categorized as "Low", (L) domain. In contrast, education, business and government, are categorized as "High" (H) domain. This means that interlocutors are expected to choose a prestigious language in the domains of education, business and government, and choose a less prestigious one for family, friends, and neighbourhood. However, Fishman presents that the choice of language is influenced by broader sociolinguistics factor such as status, age, etc.

## II. Literature Review

A literature review is carried out on the following themes:

- i) The Nigeria Pidgin
- ii) The place of Pidgin in contemporary Nigerian
- iii) Attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin English

### 2.1 The Nigerian Pidgin

Nigerian Pidgin (NP) is widely used in some states where minority languages are many, and no particular language is accepted as the major language. Some states in the South-

South geo-political zone are known for its wider use, because of the fact stated above. These states are Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Delta and to a lesser degree, AkwaIbom. This is because Akwalbom is a fairly homogenous state, but because of the influx of Nigerians of other origins to it lately, the state is also witnessing a rise in the use of Nigerian Pidgin.

(Todd, 1984), defines Pidgin as a marginal language that arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language. He goes further to say that Pidgin is a common language that has a fixed word order and is syntactically simpler than any other mother tongue variety of English.

Eghokare (2003), alludes that Nigerian Pidgin thrives in a linguistically heterogeneous environment like Nigeria with a total of about 436 indigenous languages. This position is also emphasized by (Bangbose, 1991), that the use of Nigerian Pidgin is a means of communication in Nigeria. Pidgin therefore, is a child of circumstance in Nigeria, bearing in mind that primarily, human beings must interact, must communicate with one another.

(Ugot, 2009), posits that NP has no standard grammar or model, no noun-verb agreement endings, and it is therefore not standardize in depth and usage from zone to zone.

The structure of the NP includes an absence of grammatical categories like gender, case, person, number, mood, and voice. There are also no inflections for plural possessive or derivational types.

(Todd, 1984), observes that Pidgin English are simpler than Standard English (SE), in that they are less systematic and thus easier to learn.

Although NP has ignored the morphological and syntactic irregularities inherent in Standard English, it has however, not sacrificed the ability to communicate precisely and unambiguously the linguistic needs of their speakers.

### 2.2 The Place of Pidgin in Contemporary Nigerian Society

At the turn of the 21st century, a larger influx of research on the subject matter (Pidgin) and what should be its place in Nigeria took a centre stage. At a closer look at the plethora of works on it, two clear directions are seen. One is the effort to emphasize or articulate the importance of Pidgin, a strong advocacy for its upgrading as a recognized lingua franca in Nigeria; and the second is the daring attempt to regularize its form and structure by subjecting it to rigorous linguistic analysis.

To support the first, (Abdullahi-Idiagbor, 2010), expresses the view that "over the years, Nigerian Pidgin has expanded,

stabilized and probably creolized". Using an example, he states that the word "Solo" introduced by the Nigerian youths on campuses swells-up the lexical register of pidgin typologies. Idiaghor (ibid), highlights the common functions of Pidgin expressions to include the following:

- i) To womanized or talk about ladies discussing their male friends.
- ii) To express basic domestic needs like eating and clothing and
- iii) For interpersonal/private discussions

(Jowitt, 1991); (Faraclas, 2008); (Eghokhare, 2003), all agree that Pidgin is not just some distorted' or 'bastardized' form of language, but that Pidgin is a complete language in its own right.

(Okafor, 2012), observes that Nigeria's multilingual background provides a veritable ground for the emergence of Nigerian Pidgin as a formidable National language, yet Nigerian Pidgin remains a marginal language. With the emergence of the Naija pop culture, Nigeria Pidgin has been able to grow much wider in size and content.

(Fasan, 2010), notes that Nigerian Pidgin is a predominant language of expression and a form of solidarity or mark of identity among the various multi-ethnic groups of young people who crave to create effective urban culture in their respective locations. The movie industry has also witnessed an unrestricted use of Nigerian Pidgin. Churches in urban and rural centres have also used Pidgin to bridge the differences in language.

The second is emphasized by Todd (ibid) who advocates for a more systematic re-engineering of its structures.

The implication of all of these is that if enough research that is in line with the rapid rate of growth is carried out; Nigerian Pidgin may well receive more audience from government in the nearest future.

### 2.3 Attitude towards Nigerian Pidgin English

(Fasold, 1984), identifies two approaches to the study of language attitudes. Cognitive and behaviourist. The former is concerned with the responses of language users to social situations in a language, while the latter views attitudes as an internal state of readiness used to predict other behaviours. Language attitudes possess a unique quality that sets them apart from other types of attitudes, namely their direct focus on language themselves and the way they shape individual and collective identities.

(Faraclas, 2008), expresses that even though most Nigerians speak Nigerian Pidgin English (literate and

illiterates), the attitudes of many Nigerians remain overwhelmingly negative towards it. Some still see it as a corrupt or inferior language (Mann, 1996). The views that NPE is a "broken form" of English language sit it negatively on the minds of many Nigerians. Although it plays an important role in the lives of Nigerians, it is seen as lacking the socio economic and psychological prestige of English.

(Igboanusi, 2008), argues that elementary schools should use NPE as a medium of instructions. This he believes may improve the perception of people towards it.

### III. Methodology of the Study

A random selection of forty(40) students of NCE III and 30 each from NCE I and NCE II making a total of one hundred (100) students will be given a carefully constructed questionnaire to respond to. The qualitative responses will then be analyzed using the simple percentage, and to assess the validity of Fishman's theory of domain.

#### 3.1 Population of the study

The population of the study is the students of the Department of English, School of languages, College of Education, Akamkpa. They are, NCE I, NCE II, and NCE III. Forty (40) students from NCE III & 30 each from NCE I and NCEII. They will be randomly selected to cover both male and female. Each student will be provided a questionnaire to respond to the questions. A total of one hundred (100) students will be used for the study. Recorded Conversations of students in three other Colleges in the South-South States of Rivers, Edo, and Delta will be secretly collected at different locations to ascertain their language pattern.

### IV. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data analysis is adduced from the responses on the questionnaire. The responses have been converted to simple percentages. This is required as the obtained data is qualitative. The four variables of SA, A, SD, D are subsumed into two; affirmation and disagreement. Therefore, the percentages of each pair will be calculated as one.

### Results

According to table 1, the respondents agreed that they use Pidgin because of peer pressure (55%). Secondly, that it gives them some form of social acceptability (57%) and thirdly, that they feel they are more Nigerian when they do. (70%).

The second reason is in line with Fishman's theory of domain which states that the choice of a language in a multilingual domain is influenced by a broader sociolinguistic factor such as status, age etc. The students' use of Pidgin in

this case is to draw up acceptability, or boost their status amongst their peers.

They rejected the reasons that they use pidgin because Standard English is difficult, (80%), and the fact that English is a foreign language (60%).

**Table 2: Determine the Causes of the use of Pidgin in schools**

S/N	Item	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	N	%
1	Do you speak Pidgin in school because standard English is difficult to use?	11	11%	5	5%	39	39%	41	41%	4	4%
2	Do you speak Pidgin because you feel English language is a foreign language?	10	10%	30	30%	35	35%	25	25%	Nil	0%
3	Do you speak Pidgin because of peer pressure?	20	20%	35	35%	10	10%	30	30%	5	5%
4	Does the use of Pidgin give you an acceptable social status/recognition in school?	35	35%	22	22%	15	15%	20	20%	10	10%
5	Do you feel you are a more Nigerian when you speak Pidgin?	40	40%	30	30%	20	20%	10	10%	Nil	0%

**Table 3: Investigate the pattern(s) of the pidgin use**

S/N	Item	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	N	%
1	Is the Pidgin you speak different from the one spoken by your friends?	20	20%	15	15%	34	34%	31	31%	Nil	0%
2	Does the Pidgin spoken by female students different from that of the males	13	13%	24	24%	36	36%	27	27%	Nil	0%
3	Is the pattern of Pidgin use in the school different from that use at home and in the church?	19	19%	21	21%	22	22%	28	28%	Nil	0%
4	When speaking Pidgin, do you mix some words and expressions in English?	28	28%	41	41%	16	16%	15	15%	Nil	0%
5	Do you use Pidgin with your elders?	38	38%	23	23%	20	20%	15	15%	4	4%

**Result**

It was to determine if there are patterns of the Pidgin they use, and if circumstances influence the use of such patterns.

From the results, it was found that they are no patterns of Pidgin in use between friends, (65%), secondly, that the Pidgin spoken by the males are not different from that of the females (63%), and thirdly, the pattern used in school is not different from the one used at home or in churches(61%). However, they agreed that they do code-mixing, (English and Pidgin) when they speak (69%), and secondly, that they rarely use Pidgin when they address or speak with their elders. (61%).

Fishman’s Theory of Domain presents that they are two categories of language use. That is, that language use is determined by a domain. These domains are ‘Low’ (L) and ‘High’ (H).Family, friends, and neighbourhood are classified under (Low) while business, government, and education are ‘H’. I will equally input that ‘elders’ fall under ‘high’, and therefore it agrees partly with the theory, that the use of language is influenced by a domain. However, it does not completely hold water, because ‘education’ is on the ‘H’ domain and it is where the students use Pidgin (which is seen as ‘Low’) the most.

**Table 4: Determine its effect on the academic performance of the students**

S/N	Item	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	N	%
1	Do you find yourself writing pidgin during examination?	16	16%	15	25%	37	37%	20	20%	2	2%
2	When you read the examination questions, do you try to reason in pidgin before you can understand?	38	38%	22	22%	19	19%	19	19%	2	2%
3	Do you believe its use in an obstacle to you academic excellence?	44	44%	41	41%	9	9%	5	5%	1	1%
4	The frequent use of pidgin has affected your use of standard English?	30	30%	35	35%	29	29%	4	4%	2	2%
5	It is normal to speak pidgin in the classrooms and around the academic environment	36	36%	32	32%	14	14%	16	16%	2	2%

**Result**

The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the frequent use of Pidgin in school is an obstacle to their good academic performance (85%). Equally, they also agreed that their frequent use of Pidgin has affected their proper use of Standard English (65%). They also agreed that it is a normal phenomenon to use Pidgin in the school (68%). The respondents also affirmed that they try to reason out the examination questions in Pidgin. (60%). However, they disagreed that they write in Pidgin in the examinations (57%).

The following are the recorded Conversations of students in the Colleges of Education in Rivers, Delta and Edo states respectively.

**Conservation 1**

**Setting: School Environment**

**Speaker 1:**

Ahh so I think na because koko don't come back na e make she... like who been offend her first first, na Blessing Senior sister?

**Speaker 2**

(Speaking in a low tone to a male friend):

Come inside na, English e no sabi. Anything for me? I get exam.

**Speaker 3:**

Who be SUG President?

**Speaker 4:**

Them change am yesterday, na elective people dey now.

**Speaker 5:**

Which assignment be that? You been submit the assignment?

**Speaker 6:**

Yes

**Speaker 7:**

Omo! Computer get children here oh!!!

**Conversation 2**

**Setting: School Canteen**

**Speaker 1:**

Please Sir, I want you to make a photocopy of these receipts, my school fee receipts, that is the payment.

**Speaker 1 (to speaker 2):** How far?

**Speaker 2**

Good afternoon ma

**Speaker 3**

Good afternoon

**Speaker 4**

You don open file?

**Speaker 1**

Yes, have open file

**Speaker 4**

Just one copy, one copy is fifty naira?

Jesus!

**Speaker 1**

Things too tough oh! How dem want make we dey survive for this school sef, we want go school, but Nigeria dey give our parents stress, I no understand common to copy receipt, N50. If you want do assignment na?

**Speaker 4**

My brother! Life no balance, dem say money deyPortna.

**Conversation 3**

**Setting:** School hall (preparing for practical exam – cultural display)

**Speaker 1:** Why you bin no comot run?

**Speaker 2:** how we go do with uniform on Monday?

**Speaker 3:** Na him we dey come so na

**Speaker 4:** (Female) for the conducting oh

**Speaker 5:** Me, I go wear suit

**Speaker 2:** am talking of ehhmehhm the material for cultural display

**Speaker 4:** Yes na no be something wey because we don talk that one since, na to buy material. Forget make person no..

**Speaker 2:** I hear (N1.500) now am hearing of two-kay (N2, 000)

**Speaker 4:** Two-kay (N2,000) for wetin, na N1,500 for that material

**Speaker 1:** Na wetinOgbene tell me na.

Throughout the three conversations, the students found it easier to address one another in Pidgin, except perhaps when **Speaker 1**(one) at the school canteen addressed the woman in the photocopier shop in **conversation 2**, that the speaker spoke in English. This is in line with their responses to the questionnaire that they rarely use Pidgin with older people. But when speaking with his colleagues, he switched into Pidgin. Pidgin was found to be the common language in use in all the colleges visited in the South-South Zone of the country.

**V. Conclusion**

From their responses, it is obvious that the students are aware of the damaging consequences of their regular use of Pidgin on their academic performance, but they may be influenced yet by another greater need, and which is to communicate with one another whose mother tongues are different from theirs. Their use of English language therefore may be seen by them as being unsuitable for communication in the schools. Their responses firstly, agree that domains do affect the use of language. And secondly, that the language in use is influenced by status or those you communicate with. The copious use of Pidgin by the students in schools, however, establishes the fact that communication among peers, or students is regarded as a lower domain, and the use of Pidgin suitable.

As well intentioned as this may be, its damaging consequences on the academic performance of the students should attract the concerns of all stakeholders to engineer some necessary strategies to discourage to a large extent, its common use in our schools.

**5.1 Recommendations**

1. The Management should place notices on boards at strategic places, reminding students of the need to use Standard English in schools.
2. Lecturers who find students using Pidgin in school should remind them to use Standard English.
3. Parents should play a role too by discouraging their children from speaking Pidgin. Rather they can encourage them to use their vernacular at homes.
4. Management may set out a day in the week as “English Speaking Day”. This is to sensitize their consciousness, and awaken their attention during their day to day use of Standard English.

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