

Translation, Nigerian Pidgin and Pedagogy: Critical Perspectives

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Abstract

Via the presentation of critical perspectives, this study proposes: the translation of school subjects into Nigerian Pidgin (NP); and the use of standard NP for teaching and learning in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the country. In terms of lexicon, grammar and literature, Nigerian Pidgin should be extensively developed. If the language is to be effectively used as medium of instruction alongside English, translation – which incorporates codification and standardization – is crucial. Indeed, NP should be introduced into the Certification System, so that learners will strive to attain proficiency in the language. Such proficiency will have long-term positive implications not only in terms of national cohesion and development, but also in terms of producing human resources (future competent teachers of the language in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions). Hinging on Stewart's parameters for language classification, this study concludes that the translation of school subjects into NP and use of NP as medium of instruction in schools can culminate into improvement of its corpora so much that the language can subsequently suffice as a functional language in important facets of nation-hood and can become suitable as a National Language in future.

Keywords: Translation, Nigerian Pidgin, English language, Stewart, pedagogy.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is very crucial to human existence. Nigerian Pidgin (NP), like any other language, embodies the speakers' socio-cultural realities. 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..." Nigerian Pidgin has not been given attention in language planning in Nigeria. Weinstein [2] defines languages planning as "a government authorized long term sustained and conscious efforts to alter a language." Koul [3] submits that language planning "denotes a deliberate attempt in resolving language-related problems necessary for the development of a particular language." Scholars have defined language policy in different ways. Language policy as Ekwogu notes, "requires a careful and systematic analysis to justify the reasons for choices made and functions assigned before the situation of a plan and implementation of all information regarding status, functions, population of

users, actual use in domains such as education, administration, publication of literary works..." The National Policy on Education 1977 which was revised in 1981 and 2004 legislated the use of the three major Nigerian languages alongside English at different levels of formal education. As far as legislation is concerned, Nigerian Pidgin has not been given the attention it deserves. In this study, translation of school subjects (or courses) into Nigerian Pidgin is viewed as a prerequisite for national cohesion, effective transmission of knowledge in schools and overall development of the nation. In this study, critical perspectives on language phenomena in multilingual Nigeria will be examined discursively as they relate to the thrust of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section of the paper, language issues in Nigeria are examined: the co-existence of English and Nigerian Pidgin, pedagogy and translation studies.

English and Nigerian Pidgin in Multilingual Nigeria

Temitope Abiodun Balogun [4] cites Elugbe and Omamor who "make distinction between Nigerian Pidgin and Broken English, and special English or

deliberately incorrect Broken English... the type that is spoken with a deliberate attempt to manipulate the rules of English. It is used in most cases to create humour. Such is associated with characters like Zebrudaya of the television Soap Operas 'Masquerade'. Elugbe and Omamor refer to this form as a 'Pseudo Pidgin'." Temitope Abiodun Balogun [4] also makes a comprehensive submission on Pidgin:

Baby Talk Theory for instance, sees Pidgin originating from a similar effort, which a child has when s/he is trying to master a language. It is claimed that in doing this, the child will first master the content words as opposed to the functional words [17]. Baby Talk Theory shows the attempt of Nigerians at speaking their superiors' language, which resulted in their getting the less superior form of the language. This theory may after all not be a plausible explanation to account for the history/origin of Nigerian Pidgin. For one the theory takes pidgin to be an incorrect language subject to modification and as an actual language-in-making process. However, contrary to this perception, the language as experientially used by its adherents is neither meant to satisfy modification purpose nor re-modification essences. But rather, it is an established language. The development stages of language have been recognized to include: Sole Official (SO) language for example, French in France; Joint Official (JO) language co-equal with at least one other for example, English and French in Cameroon, German, Italian, Romanian in Switzerland; Regional Official (RO) language, for example, Yoruba in Southern Nigeria, Ibo in Eastern Nigeria, Hausa in Northern Nigeria; Promoted Language (PL), lacking in official status but made use of by government agencies for example, Wape in Cameroon. Though this language is not official, it is an important medium of communication between the government and the citizens particularly in face-to-face encounters and radio programmes on community development, health, agriculture and so forth. Lastly, we have Toleration Language (TL)... recognized but ignored. Nigerian Pidgin language can be regarded as both Promoted Language (PL) and Tolerated Language (TL) based on the features described above...

Obi Edith Ifeyinwa [5] cites Yule who listed the following as the common linguistic features of English-based Pidgins:

- Absence of any complex grammatical morphology and a limited vocabulary;
- Inflectional suffixes such as -s (plural) and -s (possessive) on nouns in Standard English are rare in Pidgins, for example,

'a lot of cars' is translated as 'plenti plenty car'.

- 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).'

Obi Edith Ifeyinwa [5] makes further extensive submission on Pidgin:

Pidgin has limited vocabulary. The word 'well' could stand for 'fine', 'well', 'sick', 'good'. The following examples illustrate this assertion.

I am well. (SE) I dey well. (NP)

She is sick. (SE) She no de well. (NP)

She did it satisfactorily. (SE) She do am well well. (NP)

I am fine. (SE) I dee very well or

I dee well or fine [1]. (NP)

Given the growing use of Nigerian Pidgin in informal and formal settings, some scholars contend for its candidature as Nigeria's National Language. The literature is replete with different perspectives on the origin of the term Pidgin. According to Temitope Abiodun Balogun [4] "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 [18]. 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' [19]. 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."

Translation Studies

Translation is gradually being popularized in academic discourse. It is germane to multilingual speech communities like Nigeria. It cuts across different fields of scholarship as evident in the literature of translation. Jeremy Munday [6] gives the following insights on translation studies:

- "The practice of translating is long established, but the discipline of translation studies is new;
- In academic circles, translation was previously relegated to just a language-learning activity;
- A split has persisted between translation practice and theory;

- The study of (usually literary) translation began through comparative literature, translation ‘workshops’ and contrastive analysis;
- James S. Holmes ‘The name and nature of translation studies’ is considered to be the ‘founding statement’ of a new discipline;
- The present rapid expansion of the discipline is important;
- The term translation itself has several meanings: it can refer to the general subject field, the product (the text that has been translated) or the process (the act of producing the translation, otherwise known as translating). The process of translation between two different written languages involves the translator changing an original written text (the *source text* or *ST*) in the original verbal language (the *source language* or *SL* into a written text (the *target text* or *TT* in a different verbal language (the *target language* or *TL*). This type corresponds to ‘interlingual translation’ and is one of the three categories of translation described by the Czech Structuralist Roman Jakobson in his seminal paper ‘On linguistic aspects of translation’...

Jeremy Munday [6] presents Jakobson’s elaborate view on types of translation:

- Intralingual translation or ‘rewording’: ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language’;
- Interlingual translation, or ‘translation proper’: ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language’;
- Intersemiotic translation, or ‘translation’: ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal systems.’

Holme acknowledges that professional translators are resource persons in language planning and policies. Jeremy Munday [6] presents Holme’s framework in practical terms:

- Translator training: teaching methods, testing technique, curriculum design;
- Translation aids: such as dictionaries, grammars and information technology;
- Translation criticism: the evaluation of translations and the reviews of published translations.

Implications of Engaging Nigerian Pidgin in Translation and Teaching

If Nigerian Pidgin is engaged in translation and teaching, the implications will be very significant. Some of the implications are discussed below:

International Diplomacy and Global Scholarship

It will take time to make NP one of Nigeria’s medium of communication in international diplomatic relations, get its lexicon significantly applied in science and technology and make it operate in interdisciplinary research (translation). So long as the emergence of

societal phenomena determines the functionality or role of language, there is a glimmer of hope that NP can in due course, be able to cope with the challenges of international relations and scholarship.

Application of Nigerian Pidgin in Science and Technology

Many Nigerians do not think Nigerian Pidgin can ever thrive in this era of globalization. They view English language as the major language that can accommodate terminologies of modern science and technology. They fail to understand that the ease with which English language accommodates technical terms of science and technology evolved by the passage of time, through conscious efforts by English-speaking nations – engaging lexicographers in the expansion of the lexicon in line with societal dynamics. If NP is to be revived in similar direction as new phenomena or developments become part of society, new terms will have to be evolved to name activities, processes, phenomena, objects, etc. To make Nigeria Pidgin practically relevant in modern science and technology, positive attitudes have to be demonstrated towards the language by all stake-holders. This will be a good starting point in the journey to translate academic courses or subjects into NP. The growing use of NP in tertiary institutions means the language can be polished for scientific purpose.

Commenting on the spread of Nigerian Pidgin, Temitope Abiodun Balogun [4] submits:

“a research conducted by Okon [20] 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.”

Increased Literacy in Nigerian Pidgin

This study contends that Credit pass in Nigerian Pidgin should be linked with learners’ careers. With this, there will be the zeal to have literacy in the language. If the concept of language is clearly understood, language issues in multilingual Nigeria will be given the attention they deserve. Dada [7] 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.”

More Relevance in the Media

The various Nigerian Pidgin programmes on television and radio, show that the attitudes of the Nigerian media towards NP is incredibly positive. Obi Edith Ifeyinwa [5] is instructive as far as radio programmes in Nigerian Pidgin are concerned:

	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

Enhanced Attention in Tertiary Education

The translation of Nigerian Pidgin can be fostered within Acheoah's [8] proposal. Acheoah [8] proposes University of Nigerian Languages (UNLs) for all Nigerian languages. However, the framework shows that it can accommodate Nigerian Pidgin which some scholars like Banjo view as an indigenous (Nigerian) language. See Acheoah [8] for fascinating tips on the structure of the proposal as well as its prospects and initial hurdles. Acheoah [8] contends that the hurdles will eventually culminate into the rebirth of language nationalism and its attendant advantages (developmental implications) in the country. The gap between English and vernacular studies in Nigeria, is too wide for comfort. With UNLs in place, this gap will be made as narrow as possible. If Japan and China could develop with native language, then it is urgent to close the gap between English and Nigerian Pidgin. The lexicon of Nigerian Pidgin can be developed through the research efforts of linguists from UNLs towards evolving Standard Variety that can cope with the enormous challenges of globalization.

Indigenous Growth and Development

The fact that Nigerian Pidgin is deeply immersed in the socio-cultural nuances of the Nigerian speech community, implies that it can facilitate the teaching and learning of subjects or courses in educational institutions, if only adequate and appropriate steps are taken by government, schools and researchers to revive its corpora via translation. Scholars note that although Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was translated into 54 languages across the world, one does not know of any Nigerian language that the novel was translated into. Given the global

recognition of the novel, it would have been very significant to NP if the novel had been translated into it. Instead of relegating Nigerian Pidgin, language experts and governments should key into the potentials of the language in national growth and development [2].

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Despite the numerous years of paying attention mainly on English studies for national development, many educated Nigerians are still bereaved of competence in the language. Incompetence has resulted in various regional varieties that do not equate the “sanctity” of Standard British English (SBE). The inability of Nigerians to master an internationally intelligible corpora of English is partly informed by the fact that unlike Nigerian Pidgin, English is alien to Nigerians. According to Clement Gwion Omachonu *et al.*, [9], “the use of English as a global lingua franca requires intelligibility and the setting and maintenance of standards. On the other hand, the increasing option of English as a Second Language (ESL), where it takes on local forms, is leading to fragmentation and diversity. No longer is it the case, if it ever was, that English unifies all who speak it [21]. The competing trends will give rise to a less predictable context within which the English language will be learned and used.”

Owolabi cited in Morakinyo [10] presents some efforts already made to promote Nigerian languages, and it is logical to also promote Nigerian Pidgin in such ways, given the fact that Nigerian languages are components of Nigerian Pidgin:

- A Glossary of Technical Terminology for Primary Schools in Nigeria (henceforth,

GTTPSN); The GTTPSN comprises mathematical and scientific terms in Edo, Efik-Ibibio, Hausa, Igbo, Izon (a form of Ijo), Kanuri, Yoruba and Tiv. Areas covered by the work, which was sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education, are sets, numbers, operations, geometry, measurement, physical science and biological science;

- Metalanguage (henceforth, ML): There is ML for each of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba for the purpose of facilitating the teaching and learning of each of these three languages in its own medium. The terms cover various aspects of linguistics (e.g. phonetics, phonology, syntax, sociolinguistics, etc.) as well as stylistics, literature (including culture) and methodology. The project was sponsored by the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC), now (NERDC);
- A Quadrilingual Glossary of Legislative Terms (henceforth QGLT): The QGLT is an assemblage of terms in English and their equivalents in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The Project, which was facilitated by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), covers a wide range of areas which legislative discourse can be centred on (e.g. education, politics, revenue collection and allocation, industrial, commercial or agricultural development, information, sports, etc.);
- Yoruba Dictionary of Engineering Physics (henceforth, YDEP): YDEP is a bilingual English-Yoruba/Yoruba English dictionary. Apart from its main entries on Engineering Physics, the dictionary also contains entries on physical laws, rules, theorems and principles as an appendix.

The National Policy of Education should ensure widespread translation of textbooks into Nigerian Pidgin. This can be done in its already-existing framework captured by Dada [7]. The framework is presented below:

- 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).

In addition, translation can promote studies in Nigerian Pidgin in conformity with what Bamgbose [11] notes as ways of using indigenous languages to promote English studies:

Assuming that a language is to be used as a medium of instruction, even in the restricted sense of initial literacy, the basic requirements are:

- (i) Linguistic analysis of the phonology (sound system) and the grammar of the language;
- (ii) Devising a practical orthography based on the linguistic analysis in (i) above, or reforming an existing orthography;
- (iii) Preparation and testing of primers and readers as well as supplementary reading materials;
- (iv) Preparation and introduction of Teacher's Notes and Manuals to guide teachers in the use of Primers, readers and perhaps to explain the principles of the orthography. Where the language is expected to be used as a medium in the wider sense of teaching other subjects through it, additional requirements include:
 - i. Preparation of textbooks in the school subjects in the language concerned. This will involve extensive corpus planning or language development, for appropriate vocabulary will have to be developed for terminology in elementary mathematics, science, social studies etc. Some amounts of curriculum development may also be involved;
 - ii. Encouragement and development of written literature in the language. This could be done through organizing writer's workshops and literacy competitions, and facilitating publication of deserving texts.

The essence of language planning is to change an existing status-quo in the language situation of a country, and the implications of such planning are both short-term and long-term ones. Koul [12] posits that "language planning "denotes a deliberate attempt in resolving language-related problems necessary for the development of a particular language." Language planning invariably implies language policies. Scholars have defined language policy in different ways.

Language planning cannot thrive in an atmosphere of intense negative attitudes towards language and language-related proposals such as the proposals of this study. Positive attitudes are favourable to language policies. Adebijia [13] 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.”

Translation is invariably a science-driven perspective of teaching and learning of any school subject. For the pedagogical process to achieve expected success, teaching has to be as scientific as possible. Wilkins [14] submits that “... by studying language in as scientific a manner as possible, we should be able to make change in language teaching...”.

It is good to enhance the recognition of NP and expand its functionality in terms of Morakinyo Ogunmodimu’s [10] classification of the languages as national, regional, state and local lingual francas. This being the case, the translation of textbooks into NP and use of the language alongside English as medium of instruction in schools, will be an entirely Nigerian project which will thrive because NP is neutral in the Nigerian speech community, and interacts with it pragmatically and cohesively. Leena Vanha [15] quotes the Norwegian Linguist, Einar Haugen, who defines ecolinguistics or language ecology as “the study of interactions between any given language and its environments... [3]” According to Leena Vanha [15] “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.” In a similar vein, Lantolf *et al.*, [16] assert that according to the Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), “while human neurobiology is required for higher mental processes (for example voluntary memory, logic thought, learning, and attention) it is through interaction in social and material environments that the crucial forms of human cognitive activity develop.” Thus, social interaction, just like the human mind, also facilitates learning and capacity-building.

The negligence suffered by endogenous languages in Nigeria is also suffered by Nigerian Pidgin, due to poor implementation of the existing ones. There is need for visionary language policy on the place of Nigerian Pidgin in the transmission of knowledge in educational institutions. As a component of the policy, textbooks should be translated into Nigerian Pidgin.

Notes

1. Obi Edith Ifeyinwa [5] also posits that “a pidgin language could thrive or go into extinction depending on the suitability of the environment it finds itself. Since it is a contact language built specifically for trading, it could go into extinction if the users do not continue with the trade. On the other hand, if Pidgin finds a favourable environment such as a multilingual community, its linguistic features

expand in order to satisfy the communicative needs of different ethnic groups who find it difficult to relate with their neighbour who neither speak nor understand each other’s language.”

2. All human beings are interested in growth and development, and it is achievable through the instrumentality of language (cf. Charles Chukwuma Montanya [1].
3. The author quotes Kramsch & Steffensen [22].

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