

Attitudes Regarding the Use of Nigerian Pidgin English among Nigerian Students at Coventry University

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Abstract

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) is a widely spoken language in Nigeria and is used by many Nigerian students in educational institutions. It evolved into a predominant means of communication among Nigerians, serving as the most extensively used language of interaction across diverse ethnic groups that lack a shared linguistic background. This study examines the use, perception, and recognition of NPE by Nigerian students at Coventry University (CU) in the UK. To determine the perspectives and attitudes of selected students regarding the language, an online questionnaire and a focus group interview were administered. The findings revealed that, in general, participants held a negative attitude towards Nigerian Pidgin English. In conclusion, prejudices against NPE continue to exist and date back to the colonial era, when the language was perceived as a low and corrupted language (Akande & Salami 2010).

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), Lingua Franca, Language attitudes, Language Contact, Coventry University (CU)

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In a speech community, language attitudes involve social meanings in relation to social-cultural norms. The study of language attitudes is crucial because it can shed light on how shifts and maintenance in a language are contingent on whether members of the speech community like or dislike it (Mann 1997). It contributes to understanding the social significance of a given language or code and the use of language as a symbol of identity (Salami 1991; Adegbija 1994; Ihemere 2006). Prior research on Nigeria's linguistic environment revealed the complexity of the country's indigenous sociolinguistics context. According to Adegbija (1994: 75), there are over 500 spoken languages in Nigeria. As a result, Nigerian society is multilingual, leaving room for the adoption of English as the country's official and secondary language. Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are constitutionally recognized as major indigenous languages in Nigeria, endowing them with a formal status among the country's linguistic diversity. In contrast, Nigerian Pidgin English holds a unique position with both exogenous and indigenous characteristics (Adegbija 2004: 46). Nigerian Pidgin is spoken by approximately 3-5 million individuals as their native language, while an additional 75 million people use it as a second language (Ihemere 2006). Faraclas (2021) provides a more recent estimation, indicating that the number of Nigerian Pidgin speakers in Nigeria exceeds 110 million, affirming its notable numerical strength.

The language with the most speakers in Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin English, developed through historical contact between English and other indigenous languages in Nigeria

(Dada 2007: 87).¹ Its generative and dynamic capabilities have continued to support the country's interaction and communication processes. It is regarded by Akande & Salami (2010) as a distorted form of English and the language of illiterates, and its use has therefore been used as a measure of one's English proficiency. Nonetheless, Nigerian Pidgin English has assumed an important communicative role among Nigeria's diverse cultural groups that do not share the same language. According to Akande (2008), NPE is the dominant language of Nigeria's educated elites, including graduates, lawyers, professors, and journalists. It has been demonstrated that NPE is also used in popular advertisements, other public service announcements, local political debates, and radio (Durodola 2013). Therefore, it is untrue that only illiterates or those without a formal education use NPE (Agheyisi 1984). On the contrary, educated users can speak both NPE and Standard Nigerian English, the latter of which enjoys widespread acceptance and used in diverse formal contexts within the nation (Akande 2008).

Unlike English and the other three major languages mentioned above in Nigeria, NPE is not recognised by the government and is subject to marginalisation. Evidently, a prevailing perception among the Nigerian elite is that Nigerian pidgin is predominantly perceived as a contact language devoid of any discernible ethnic or regional association (Balogun 2013). Consequently, it is relegated to the periphery of social acceptance owing to its perceived lack of influential impact. Like other indigenous languages, English is taught as a subject in Nigerian schools and universities, but neither a school nor a department teaches Nigerian Pidgin English. This suggests that NPE is receiving less emphasis in the Nigerian educational system and the government's apparent lack of interest in promoting NPE could be a factor in its continued marginalisation.

The increasing use of NPE by Nigerians has helped raise the status of the language in the country. Despite lacking official recognition, it is still widely spoken and used in contemporary Nigeria. Since NPE is the only language used by many Nigerians, educated and uneducated, regardless of ethnicity and identity (Akande & Salami 2010), one could argue that it has facilitated the dissemination of national ideas and linguistic, sociocultural, and political developments. It has been observed, however, that many adults, including teachers and high-ranking government officials, disapprove of its use in formal and informal settings by adolescents and young adults (Akande & Salami 2010: 72). Despite its numerous seemingly beneficial practical applications, Nigerian Pidgin continues to be an undervalued language.

1.2. Problem statement

What began as a contact language between black traders and British colonialists is now the primary language spoken by most Nigerian students in educational institutions, outside and inside the classroom. Nigerian students frequently use non-standard forms of communication, such as code-switching and NPE, due to their multilingualism. Since Standard English is the only acceptable medium of instruction used for teaching and learning in tertiary institutions and secondary schools in Nigeria, students are regularly cautioned not to employ NPE, with potential financial penalties for its use during school

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hours (Ojarikre 2013). In light of this context, this study investigates the attitudes of Coventry University (CU) Nigerian students towards the use of NPE and the possibility of its official recognition.

1.3. Objectives of the study

This study aims to discover the following. First, an objective would be to determine how Nigerian students at CU perceive NPE. The next goal would be to assess the context and extent of NPE usage among Nigerian students enrolled at CU. Finally, it hopes to examine the perspectives of students regarding the official recognition of NPE in key Nigerian domains².

1.4. Rationale and possible significance

As a result of this diachronic change and growth, NPE has become popular among Nigerians both within and beyond Nigeria. The significance of this study lies in the fact that its findings can shed light on the perceptions and attitudes of Nigerian CU students towards NPE and the potential for its status to be elevated. This work may raise awareness of the language's usage in the diaspora. It will help determine how widely NPE is used in the diaspora. Given Akande's (2008) claim that NPE is a marker of solidarity and identity, it is crucial to ascertain whether NPE among Nigerian students at CU serves any solidarity-marking function.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The origin of Nigerian Pidgin English

Controversy surrounds the emergence of pidgin and creole contact languages (Siegel 2008: 6). Despite numerous academic hypotheses, the origin of pidgin remains obscure. Late in the 18th century, West African Pidgin, also known as the Creole language of the Guinean coast, emerged (Holm 1988: 426). It is a creole and pidgin language based on English that is used throughout Nigeria and beyond (Deuber 2005: 183). It is intriguing to note that pidgin languages generally involve business or trade contacts between individuals from culturally diverse groups. NPE is connected to a group of English lexifier pidgins and creoles spoken in various African diaspora communities and along the coast of West Africa across the Atlantic Basin. Cameroonian Pidgin is more similar to NPE than Jamaican Krio or Sierra Leonean Pidgin (Owusu, Adoma & Aboagye 2016: 541). Notwithstanding, these pidgins and creoles share a wide range of phonological, grammatical, and semantic features (Faraclas 2013). The colonial government, social conditions, and the introduction of schools by missionaries all contributed to the development and diffusion of the language (Adegbija 1994: 16). According to Jenkins' (2003: 10) assertion, pidgin languages initially developed to satisfy the limited communication requirements of individuals³ who do not share a common language. In a similar manner, Elugbe & Omamor (1991) assert that the origin of NPE derived from contact between visiting European merchants and multilingual coastal communities, first in Portuguese, then Dutch, and finally English.

According to Egbohare (2003) and Deuber (2005), the Niger Delta is the birthplace of NPE, where it has acquired native speakers (Holm 2000), from which it is believed to

² For “domain”, I use the definition provided in Holmes & Wilson (2017).

³ Many thanks are given to my mentor, the late Temitope Balogun Joshua, family, and friends for their unwavering love, support, and encouragement, without whom this paper would not be possible.

have spread to other regions and acquired speakers. In particular, it was already spoken in the Niger Delta region's coastal states (Ogu 1992), and its use was restricted to commercial transactions (Agheyisi 1984). As a lingua franca among speakers of mutually incomprehensible languages, NPE is likely to evolve over time in a multilingual country like Nigeria, where it serves more and more functions (Buba, Al-Shujairi & Ya'u 2016). When Pidgin is nativized by a speech community, a creole develops (Todd 2003), and as a mother tongue, it is capable of expressing diverse facets of human thought and emotion. According to Holm (2000: 6), generally, creole is descended from pidgin because it is spoken as a first language by a multilingual speech community. Therefore, a speech community cannot be conceptualised as a group of speakers who speak the same language but rather as a group that shares the same language norms (Daoust 1997). Throughout history, it has maintained contact with both the substrate and lexifier languages (Deuber 2005). Under British colonial rule, English became the official language of Nigeria, despite the fact that the vast majority of Nigerians speak indigenous languages as their native tongue. However, Nigerian Pidgin English serves as a supplementary medium of communication in restricted informal contexts because it has acquired some functions in other formal domains (Akande 2008) and is now a common language among educated Nigerians having informal conversations. Thus, Nigerian Pidgin English is not a dialect of English like Australian or American English. It has been viewed as a hybrid of African languages (Gennadievna 2019).

2.2. Uses and functions of Nigerian Pidgin English

According to Labov (1990: 9), the term "pidgin" generally refers to a contact language resulting from interaction between speakers of a socially subordinate language and speakers of a culturally dominant language. A Pidgin community demonstrates linguistic diversity. Nigeria is exemplary of an African colonial state that is multilingual, pluralistic⁴, and heterogeneous (Ogunmodimu 2015). It is necessary to investigate the use of NPE to comprehend the country's social structure. Jowitt (1991) shows that the use of Pidgin in Nigeria signifies familiarity and informality. It has recently earned the respect of both literate and illiterate members of society (Akande 2008). According to Deuber (2005), the primary domain of use for NPE and other Nigerian Indigenous languages is informal as opposed to formal. As a result, NPE is a common lingua franca used in informal communication, as many Nigerians are proficient in the English language, which they employ with ease when discussing matters of more than local importance. Moreover, it serves as a political tool, as it is now widely employed for mass mobilisation, public announcements, political campaigns, and government propaganda. It is also widely used in advertising as a means of identifying with the average person (Adegbija 2004).

Since the first poem written in Nigerian Pidgin English (Egbokhare 2003), the language has served an intellectual purpose. Its prevalence in media, advertising, radio, and television confers a great deal of visibility on a language deemed incorrect or malformed. Elugbe & Omamor (1991) view Pidgin as a marginal language that arose to serve communication purposes in specific contexts. It is widely used in the country as a second language, and the number of native speakers is growing. Based on the preceding definition, it can be asserted that pidgin is not recognized as an official language; rather,

⁴ It is pluralistic in the sense that it is a diverse country with various ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups.

its usage is limited to facilitating communication among individuals who possess varied linguistic and social backgrounds.

2.3. Language policy on education in Nigeria

The current language policy on education in Nigeria acknowledges roles for all indigenous languages but does not specify any role for Nigerian Pidgin English in education, despite the recognition of the role of indigenous languages in the early years of schooling (NPE 2013). The languages of the immediate environment are used as the medium of instruction in primary education. For example, in the context of a primary school situated within a demographically Yoruba-dominant community in Nigeria, Yoruba emerges as one among the languages of the immediate environment. It is noteworthy that the students within this locality predominantly employ Yoruba as their primary language of communication within familial contexts. Consequently, the educational institution in question may opt to employ Yoruba as the medium of instruction. This strategic selection is rooted in the pedagogical principle of leveraging languages of the immediate environment to facilitate effective early education. English is used in numerous facets of Nigeria's multilingualism, including educational, communication, national, institutional, policy-related, and symbolic functions. However, other indigenous Nigerian languages, particularly Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba are regarded as instruments for cultural enrichment, symbols of Nigerian independence, and vehicles for nationalism (Adegbija 2004).

Nigerian Pidgin English, on the other hand, is an ethnically neutral language that serves as a lingua franca in Nigeria's informal domains. It is now the most widely spoken language in Nigeria and the multilingual speech communities of the diaspora. Despite these dynamics, Nigeria's language policy has yet to address the status of NPE (Adegbija 2004).

2.4. Attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin English within the familial domain

Positive or negative attitudes towards languages are frequently influenced by the language standardisation process (Garrett 2010). 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 (Ihemere 2006). Language attitudes possess a unique characteristic that sets them apart from other types of attitudes, namely their direct focus on languages themselves and the way they shape individual and collective identities. The mentalist framework makes behavioural inferences to account for the direct study of the mental state of language users. As a result, this study employs a mentalist methodology, as attitudes towards language frequently reflect attitudes towards individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Fasold 1984).

Even though most Nigerians speak NPE (Faraclas 2008; Igboanusi 2008) and both educated and illiterate Nigerians use it (Akande 2008), the attitudes of many Nigerian citizens remain overwhelmingly negative. Some Nigerian families use it as their native language. However, the characterization of NPE as English that has been corrupted or broken is indicative of a negative attitude towards this language. In contemporary Nigerian society, people tend to view NPE as a corrupt or inferior language (Mann 1996; Igboanusi 2008). However, it plays an important role in the lives of Nigerians but lacks

the socioeconomic prestige of English. Parents and students consequently view education in indigenous languages or NPE as detrimental.

Ogunmodimu (2015: 159) argues that a country as linguistically diverse as Nigeria could benefit from adopting a multilingual language policy in which all languages are accorded due recognition according to their function. A major argument in favour of NPE's adoption as Nigeria's official language is that it is an ethnically neutral code. Igboanus (2008) further argues that elementary schools should use NPE as a medium of instruction for NPE-speaking students. The language is currently unrecognised⁵ despite efforts by advocates for its official recognition (Elugbe & Omamor 1991); Egbokhare (2003). As such, these negative attitudes can be attributed to the weak power position of NPE speakers.

3. Methodology

This study is predicated on a mixed-methods research approach that permits the exploration of diverse perspectives and the discovery of relationships among multifaceted research questions. In this study, the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative methods were combined, resulting in a more cohesive research design.

3.1. Research questions:

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent and in what contexts do Nigerian students at CU use Nigerian Pidgin English?
2. What is the perception of Nigerian students at CU towards NPE?
3. What are Nigerian students' views towards the official recognition of NPE in certain key domains in the country?

3.2. Sample selection and size

This research employs two methods of data collection: a 10-minute online questionnaire and a 30-minute focus group interview. 22 Nigerian undergraduate and graduate students currently enrolled at CU responded to the online survey, while four (two male and two female) Nigerian undergraduate and graduate students participated in the focus group interview. Stratified purposive sampling was used to select the sample for this study. Even though students were selected at random from various disciplines, each participant was required to be a Nigerian-born undergraduate or graduate student at CU.

3.3. Instrumentation

3.3.1. Questionnaire

The online questionnaire for participants consisted of fifteen closed questions (see Table 1) about their usage, attitudes, and perspectives regarding Nigerian Pidgin English. These questions were partially adapted from Akande & Salami (2010). Although closed questions lack spontaneity and expressiveness (Oppenheim 2005), they offer a variety of alternative responses to respondents.

⁵ In this context "unrecognised" means that Nigerian Pidgin is not officially acknowledged, endorsed, or accepted as a formal or legitimate language within formal institutions, such as the educational system or government. It lacks official recognition or status, which can result in limited or no support, resources, or inclusion in official policies or programs.

3.3.2. Focus group interview

A semi-structured focus group interview was conducted to discuss their perceptions of NPE in more detail. Seven open-ended questions prompted interviewees to elaborate on their general perspectives, attitudes, and use of Nigerian Pidgin English.

3.4. Data Analysis

Regarding the analysis of responses to the questionnaire, responses from participants were distributed according to polar and non-polar questions. The responses have been converted to percentages using a simple statistical instrument and tabular frequency. This is required as the obtained data is quantitative and fixed. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns or themes within the qualitative data to interpret them. The framework of thematic analysis provided by Braun & Clarke (2006) was used to analyse the focus interview data because it provides a clear and usable structure for thematic analysis.

4. Online Questionnaire

4.1. Results

According to Table 1, 77.3% of Nigerian students in CU agree that NPE is a language, whereas 22.7% disagree. The percentage of students who view NPE as a language is greater than that of those who do not, as shown by the data presented below. Similarly, 72.7% of participants believe that NPE is an English dialect, while 27.3% disagree.

Table 1. Yes/No Responses to Views, Uses, and Attitudes Regarding Nigerian Pidgin English

	Questions	Yes	No
General Views	Is Nigerian Pidgin English a language?	77.3%	22.7%
	Do you think it is a variety of English?	72.7%	27.3%
Use	Do you use Nigerian Pidgin English?	81.8%	18.2%
	Do you read materials (books, magazines, and novels) written in Nigerian Pidgin English?	31.8%	68.2%
	Should there be more books, magazines written in Nigerian Pidgin English?	54.5%	45.5%
	Should there be more television programmes in Nigerian Pidgin English?	77.3%	22.7%
Attitudes	Should Nigerian Pidgin English be taught in Nigerian schools?	22.75	77.3%
	Should Nigerian Pidgin English be one of the mediums of instruction in primary school?	18.2%	81.8%
	Should Nigerian Pidgin English be adopted as an official language in Nigeria?	50%	50%

Regarding the use of NPE, 81.8% of Nigerian students at CU claim to use the language, compared to 18.2% who say they do not. Furthermore, 68.2% of students indicate that they do not read any magazines or books written in Pidgin English, while only 31.8% indicate that they do. As shown in the table above, 77.3% of respondents agree that more television programmes should be produced in Nigerian Pidgin, while 22.7% disagree. This is consistent with Elugbe & Omamor (1991) assertion that Pidgin English in Nigeria is a spoken language that has successfully maintained a vital and robust oral literature.

In addition, 77.3% of respondents disagree that Nigerian Pidgin English should be taught in Nigerian schools, while 22.7% of respondents agree. Similarly, 81.8% are opposed to the use of the language as a medium of instruction in primary school, whereas 18.2% are in favour. On the topic of the official recognition of Nigerian Pidgin English, fifty percent of respondents agree that it should be adopted as the official language of Nigeria, while the remaining fifty percent disagree completely.

Presented below are the responses to the non-polar questions “What Category of people do you think speak Nigerian Pidgin English?” (Table 2) and “When did you start learning Nigerian Pidgin English?” (Table 3).

Table 2. “What Category of people do you think speak Nigerian Pidgin English?”

Category	Percentage
All Categories	81.8%
Literates	0
Non-literates	18.2%

81.8% of the participants at CU agree that NPE is spoken by all categories of Nigerians; 18.2% of respondents say that the language is spoken by illiterate Nigerians; and none of the respondents claimed that only literate Nigerians speak it (Table 2). According to the data presented in Table 2, Nigerian students at CU hold positive views of NPE in its role as a tool for fostering effective communication and bridging gaps among speakers from different ethnic backgrounds and encompassing various social categories.

Table 3. “When did you start learning Nigerian Pidgin English?”

Domain	Percentage
Childhood	40.9%
Primary School	4.5%
Secondary School	31.8%
University	22.7%

Table 3 shows the statistical analysis of when participants first learned NPE. The results indicate that 40.9% of participants acquired the language at elementary school and 31.1% at secondary school. This indicates that most students acquired the language at a young age; consequently, negative transfer⁶ and fossilisation issues may arise when communicating using standard Nigerian English.

Table 4. “Where do you normally use Nigerian Pidgin English?”

Domain	Percentage
Home	13.6%
Social Gathering	59.1%
Classroom	0
All the above	13.6%
None of the above	13.6%

⁶ Negative transfer here focuses on interference or influence of NPE (or a previously learned language) on the learning and use of Standard Nigerian English.

Table 4 reveals that 59.1% of participants use NPE primarily in social settings, whereas 13.6% claim to speak it at home. 13.6% of respondents also use pidgin at home, in social settings, and in the classroom.

Table 5. “How often do you speak Nigerian Pidgin English?”

Frequency	Percentage
Occasionally	54.5%
Frequently	13.6%
Rarely	22.7%
Never	9.1%

Table 5 demonstrates that most respondents (54.5%) occasionally communicate in NPE. Only 13.6% of those surveyed report using the language frequently in their communication. However, 22.7% of respondents said they rarely use NPE, and 9.1% said they have never used it in any of their conversations.

Table 6. “Should its use in school be allowed, actively encouraged, or used at the discretion of the school or the teacher?”

Response	Percentage
Yes	27.3%
Maybe	18.2%
No	54.5%

Table 6 depicts the responses to the question “Should its use in school be allowed, actively encouraged, or used at the discretion of the school or the teacher?”, which reveal that 54.5% of respondents do not encourage or accept the use of the language in schools, even at the discretion of teachers. 27.3% are in favour of its use in schools, while 18.2% of these respondents are neutral and neither agree nor disagree with this statement.

Table 7. “Is Nigerian Pidgin English capable of expressing any area of your thoughts and feelings?”

Response	Percentage
Yes	54.5%
Sometimes	45.5%
No	0

Table 7 demonstrates that 54.5% of Nigerian students claim to be able to express their feelings, desires, and thoughts in any area of communication using NPE. According to 45.5% of these students, these can only be used occasionally, not always, depending on the context. Respondents seem to agree that NPE has the potential to convey at least some of the student's thoughts and emotions.

4.2. Discussion

A large proportion of Nigerian students at CU use NPE occasionally, according to the findings of the data analysis presented in Table 5 above. More importantly, the students' perception of the language leans predominantly towards negativity, particularly in its role

as a language for formal education. This contradicts the findings of Buba, Al-Shujairi & Ya'u (2016), in which NPE was viewed favourably. This may have happened because NPE is viewed by these students as a threat to the English language, which they consider to be the 'real one', while NPE is viewed as a form of English in miserable disguise (Adegbija 2004: 129). Over 70% of the students in Table 1 agree that NPE is both a language and a variety of the English language.

Based on Table 2, it seems that students consider NPE in a way as a neutral language, without the ethnic connotations of the indigenous languages nor the elitist connotations of English. Consequently, literate Nigerian students at CU are not an exception, as the findings indicate that a significant number of students use it in the multicultural and heterogeneous society in which they reside. The available data in Table 7 indicates that NPE serves more than a limited purpose, as it is used in every conceivable aspect of their daily lives and can express the participants' thoughts, emotions, opinions, and desires regardless of the domain they are engaged in.

Even though most Nigerians both inside and outside of the country use NPE, 50% of the participants in Table 1 disagree with its official recognition in Nigeria. The results indicate that the lack of status of Nigerian Pidgin English is because speaking the language alone confers no social advantage on its speakers. As a result, the negative attitude of these participants towards the official adoption of NPE may be a result of their inability to read and write in NPE as they can in English, which they believe allows them to advance in society. Therefore, NPE is less prevalent among Nigerian students at CU.

Moreover, Nigerian students at CU use NPE more frequently in social settings, like informal meetings or casual get-togethers with friends and/or family, than at home or in the classroom. The occasional use of NPE by these Nigerian students may have resulted from their linguistic background and the small number (13.6%) of Nigerian students who use NPE frequently for communication as presented in Table 5 above. It should be noted, however, that the majority of university students do not support the use of Nigerian pidgin as a medium of instruction in primary school, nor do they accept its use in Nigerian schools. This is one way in which the language in Nigeria has been marginalised. Mann (1993), as cited in Adegbija (2004: 130), contends that despite the essential services, social prestige, and credibility that NPE provides, it has yet to be officially recognised as an official language, and as a result, the sociolinguistic survival of the language is neither guaranteed nor assured.

5. Focus Group Interview

5.1. Themes

Three themes and a total of seven subthemes were identified during the focus group interview (Table 8). The three major themes are based on the study's three research questions: "use of NPE with an emphasis on the how and why of NPE," "perceptions of Nigerian Pidgin," and "recognition of NPE".

Table 8: Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Theme 1: Use of NPE	Reasons for using Nigerian Pidgin English

	How Nigerian Pidgin English is (not) used
	Where Pidgin is used
Theme 2: Perceptions Towards Nigerian Pidgin English	Meeting Academic expectations
Theme 3: Recognition of NPE	Awareness raising on its widespread use. What students want from NPE Influence of NPE on English

5.2. Discussion

5.2.1. Use of Nigerian Pidgin English

In the four-person language-based focus group discussion, NPE was variously described as “a language in its own right,” “not proper,” “unrecognised,” and “English mixed with local stuff”. One respondent, referring to NPE as a variety of English, stated, “Pidgin is a broken piece of English that is mixed together in order to communicate”. Another participant argued that “the British should have the final say because it is their language to begin with”. In the discussion, the significance of NPE usage was also evident. Three respondents stated that NPE was their primary language for social activities:

Moderator: *do you use Nigerian Pidgin very often?*

Participant 2: *I use it mostly when I want to get into someone.... it's just like be free with the person like you...peers....*

Participant 1: *I think I use it frequently not with anybody but mainly friends just made purposely for social activities.... Yeah, I think it shows more connection that we have in common.... you understand we are people from almost different ethnicity and other things.*

It is evident that NPE is predominantly used with friends, family, and in other informal contexts. According to Deuber (2005), the use of NPE conveys endearment and signifies familiarity and friendship. It is therefore consistent with Ndimele's (2016) assertion that NPE is significantly excluded from both educational and official domains, while it is heavily utilised in informal domains.

In the following statement, participant 4 acknowledges using NPE on occasion but primarily at the market:

Moderator: *How often do you use Pidgin English?*

Participant 4: *not often...I only use Pidgin if I'm in the market [in Nigeria]*

...

Moderator: *why's that? Do you think people in the market are less educated? What's your reason for that?*

Participant 4: *I only use Pidgin if I am in the market because you don't know if the person can understand what you are saying if you speak English.... I just feel like that's the best way you can speak with them...*

According to the participant's comments, the use of NPE in interethnic business contacts in different regions of Nigeria is functionally unparalleled. This may be because its origin and history are rooted in this field on both individual and societal levels. This is consistent with Adegbija's (2004) assertion that the predominant use of NPE in Nigerian markets

demonstrates that it is a language of interethnic communication used for soliciting and price haggling. This participant's predominant use of NPE in the marketplace demonstrates that it is a language of informality and socialisation. Consequently, its use in the commercial realm serves not only to facilitate negotiations but also to foster solidarity. As a result, NPE is regarded as a useful means of communication due to its simple structure and widespread use, particularly in a nation as linguistically and culturally diverse as Nigeria.

Moderator: *Does Pidgin have the capacity to express every area of your thoughts and feelings?*

Participant 1: *of course, yes...of course like most times I have to express myself using pidgin you know...there are some situations you will find yourself and you will just have this thing you want to express and the best way you could express it is using Pidgin ...*

Participant 2: *yeah...well I think it is same for local languages as well.....laughs...*

Clearly, participant 1 uses NPE to express a variety of desires, emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, while participant 2 suggests the same is true for local languages. Participant 2 is more interested in other local languages than in NPE.

5.2.2. Perceptions towards Nigerian Pidgin English

Two of these respondents appear to oppose the use of NPE within the Nigerian educational system. They believe that the coexistence of English and NPE would cause problems in the Nigerian educational system. These participants recognised that the coexistence of these two languages, English and NPE, would hinder the effective acquisition of Standard English. This is evidenced by the following statement:

Moderator: *From its widespread use, do you think it should be one of the mediums of instruction in primary schools?*

Participant 2: *personally, I don't think so because there will be like huge margin the way you handle professional life and the way you do it with your peers...because let's say you go international now it's going to affect how we professionally communicate in Standard English...*

Participant 3: *you can't take it to the professional world to express word to express feelings...I mean a corporate world you can't do that...you need proper English to relate with people all over the world as well....*

Considering that NPE has always been referred to as a substandard language and viewed as inferior, the evaluation of these Nigerian students' perceptions of NPE at CU further confirms that. As a result, the participant was opposed to its use in schools and the incorporation of NPE into the curriculum of primary schools in Nigeria. This result is consistent with the findings of Akande and Salami (2010), whose study revealed that neither students from the University of Benin nor those from University of Lagos hold a favourable view of the use or instruction of NPE in Nigerian schools. The result reveals that two of these respondents oppose its use in the Nigerian educational curriculum. Significantly, the remaining two respondents (Participants 1 and 4) believe that NPE is undervalued and worthy of international recognition:

Participant 1: *logically I think it should...my reason is because if you look at South Africa they have 15 languages and their schools are channelled to if a*

child understands a language better, he or she can be sent to the school that teaches with that particular language...if Nigeria could adopt this system that if a child can understand more of 'Broken' then the child will be taught with Broken I think that's cool...

Participant 4: *I think Pidgin should be adopted in the educational system because if you find yourself maybe outside Nigeria like people from different ethnicity...it's a way for people to communicate in a better way...that's my own opinion...*

Therefore, it is suggested that NPE should be used in schools in Nigeria where students understand NPE better than English. Participant 1 believes that students will learn more effectively if they are instructed in their native language, as this will eliminate the initial shock of learning a new language. Therefore, the Nigerian language policy should logically result in the development of NPE as the official medium of instruction in Nigerian schools.

Moreover, participant 2 demonstrates a strong affinity for and preference for indigenous languages over Pidgin English. In his statement:

Participant 2: *yeah, in my own view we have local languages and I think it is better to reinforce our local languages than Pidgin...*

Even though NPE is spoken by all ethnic groups and is more popular than the three major languages: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba (Elugbe & Omamor 1991), as well as the language's perceived neutrality, Participant 2 continues to advocate for the promotion of indigenous languages over NPE. Dooga (2012) asserted that losing one's language entails losing one's culture and heritage, as well as a substantial portion of the nation's origin, because as language declines, so do cultural norms. As a result, it is possible that the participant believed that choosing NPE over our native languages could result in a loss of cultural values and identity.

5.2.3. Recognition of Nigerian Pidgin English

Participants are consistent and lucid regarding what constitutes a potential candidate for official language status, and they have provided concrete suggestions for enhancing NPE's acceptability and standing. What students want for NPE is rooted in the challenges of understanding its status and prestige, the need for further development, and the perception that NPE poses a threat to standard NPE. Participants favour a language that accommodates both individual and societal viewpoints.

Moderator: *my question now is that since one can express his/herself using Pidgin...and other important functions it performs...do you think it should have an official status in Nigeria? Being the fact that different ethnicity can speak it...do you think it should be officially recognised in Nigeria?...*

Participant 2: *there will be like huge margin...the way you handle our professional life and the way you do it with your peers...because let me say you go international now and it's going to affect how we professionally communicate in standard English....*

Instead of advocating for the official recognition of NPE, Participant 2 prefers English as the official language and medium of instruction in Nigerian schools.

Participant 2: *I know what you mean but uhm mm...because my own support is an international language first of all like proper English... and like having Pidgin in the education is going to be a problem....*

Participant 2's statement hints at a comparison with standard Nigerian English. Participant 2's partial opposition to the official recognition of NPE can be attributed to the prejudice that the language lacks international acceptability and intelligibility and is viewed as a corrupt form of English. Also, due to its lack of linguistic development (Deuber 2005), this participant believes that a language must have social prestige, be an international language, and have widespread usage as well as international acceptability and intelligibility to qualify as a country's official language, just as English does.

Nonetheless, Participant 1 articulated the need to increase recognition of Nigerian Pidgin English. He further explains that the use of NPE by Nigerians unifies the nation. An example is the frequency with which the keyword "unity" was mentioned.

Participant 1: *Well for me I think when it's given more awareness, more acceptability, it will **unite** us. You know because part of the basic element of development is **unity** and **unity** start with communication, regardless of your locality, if I can understand you, you discover that we are going to be close friends...*

Three of the respondents who supported the official recognition of NPE in Nigeria cited its widespread use by Nigerian citizens and its status as a neutral language that connects Nigerians across social and ethnic lines. They believed that NPE is inextricably learned in society because it does not require formal education and is simple to comprehend. Participants identified and acknowledged its use and significance; therefore, it cannot be ignored.

Participant 3: *within Nigeria yes because it's already been used by a lot of people like **majority of Nigerians** use it...so...why not just **recognise** it yeah...*

Participant 2: *in that point of view, I think maybe we can have uhmm...maybe another form of English, you know we move English aside and Pidgin aside...you know...it's because I can see from where this is going...we can have written English and then pidgin aside so we can know like to create awareness so they discover the difference between Standard and pidgin English becomes the main...we have this aside and the other aside.*

Participant 3 supports the recognition of NPE because most of the population now speaks it. Participant 2 concludes by advocating for a policy that recognises NPE as an official language while retaining English for diplomatic purposes, higher education, and international communication. In my personal view, NPE has survived despite opposition because it serves primarily as a fallback language when there is a need for communication between people of different ethnicities.

Perhaps the most notable result observed is that for these participants, NPE is a more plausible and desirable candidate than other indigenous languages for the status of official language, as they acknowledged that it is a unifying language that is widely used by most Nigerians, as stated by Participant 1 below:

Participant 1: *because one unique thing about the language is that despite ethnicity from Nigeria or even Africa...you discover that 80% can understand each other when they are speaking Broken....*

Participant 1 referred to NPE as “Broken”. This is consistent with the findings of Faraclas (2008 and Igboanusi (2008), which indicate that most Nigerians speak NPE. Even those who maintain the language by speaking it continue to refuse to acknowledge or recognise it. In my perspective, given the diminished social prestige associated with this language, there exists a notable disparity between acknowledging the occasional use of NPE and being recognised as someone who speaks NPE. Consequently, it is evident that the language has survived and flourished because it is readily accessible and useful, filling a communication void in Nigeria.

These findings indicate that despite the issues surrounding NPE, such as low social prestige and perception as a low or corrupt language, it is widely used among these students due to its usefulness, simplicity, and significance. The sociolinguistic reality among these Nigerian students at CU demonstrates that both literate and illiterate members of society speak NPE, supporting Akande's (2008) claim that both groups use the language. The research revealed that there are numerous negative perceptions of NPE. These perceptions have resulted in a string of disparaging views of NPE as an improper or corrupted form of the English language. As a result, others have started to view the language as subpar, inferior, marginal, and adulterated (Deuber 2005). The results revealed these degrading qualifications, which explain why these Nigerian students at CU use NPE as an oral mode of communication. NPE as a language is without a doubt widely used, spoken, and understood by these Nigerian students at CU. Based on an analysis of the interview data, it has been determined that these students use NPE primarily at social gatherings⁷. This suggests that the language is used more frequently with their peers.

6. Conclusion

The perception of NPE, particularly in relation to its applicability in education, demonstrates a lack of favourable sentiment, as revealed by the outcomes of both the online questionnaire and the focus group discussion. This finding holds significance as it signifies a discernible division of opinions regarding the official status of NPE (Buba, Al-Shujairi & Ya'u 2016). Furthermore, the data indicates the existence of varying degrees of prejudice among Nigerian students at CU, and there is presently no indication of imminent alterations in the existing language policy and practice. The findings contradict the claim that Nigerian college students have the most positive attitude (Elugbe & Omamor 1991). This could be due to inadequate language development. In the absence of literature and orthography, NPE cannot effectively compete with other Nigerian languages for government recognition. Since it is not developed and does not play a role in formal education, it is not the linguistic superiority of the English language that places it above NPE, but rather the value that Nigeria and the rest of the world place on it. In contrast to indigenous languages, NPE has not been evaluated in any of the country's formal education systems. This is a direct result of the government's lack of interest (Elugbe & Omamor 1991).

⁷ The use of NPE in a social gathering refers to a gathering of people in a relaxed and casual setting where they come together for social interaction, enjoyment, and informal conversations. These gatherings can take various forms, such as parties, get-togethers, hangouts, or other informal events.

The lack of NPE development in Nigeria could be responsible for the negative perception (Elugbe & Omamor 1991). NPE lacks a standardised orthography because there have been no efforts to expand its lexicon and there is no codified standard variety of the language (Deuber 2005). Consequently, the results of the focus group interview may be described as promising for a non-standardised language that suffers most from low social prestige and lacks official recognition. It could be argued that the significance and benefits of NPE have not yet been fully exploited in the nation's policy planning. Since it is a national language and the only ethnically neutral language, it could be viewed as an asset. According to the findings of the study, proposals to expand and officially recognise the functions of NPE are not without merit. Due to socio-political developments, it is difficult to predict whether NPE will surpass its unofficial recognition and become an officially recognised language (Deuber 2005). However, due to the increasing popularity and widespread use of the language in Nigeria and the diaspora, it will continue to play an important role in the sociolinguistic context of Nigeria.

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