

## *Naija Pidgin as an Indispensable Linguistic Orphan*

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**Abstract**

From its emergence as a contact language of commerce or trade during the earliest exploration of Africa by the Portuguese, Pidgin English has waxed stronger and could compete favourably with other languages to serve as a veritable tool of communication. Pidgin has evolved from a Portuguese – based Pidgin to English – based Pidgin and now, to a full-fledged language of its own known as *Naija Pidgin*. Although some scholars prefer to use such terms as Anglo-Pidgin, Pidgin English, Nigerian Pidgin English etc, this paper shall adopt the term, *Naija Pidgin*. This is attributed to its peculiarity and “Nigerian's” or Nigerian colour in its entirety. *Naija Pidgin* is a creolised Pidgin which has gained a new status of a lingua franca, Mother Tongue or first language in some metropolitan towns or cities in Nigeria. As a multilingual state, Nigerians from different ethno-religious backgrounds prefer to use *Naija Pidgin* when the need arises for them to communicate effectively. However, this code is yet to be accorded a pride of place in spite of its enormous or immeasurable communicative roles amid Nigerians from all walks of life.

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### Background to the Study

The metaphor of an orphan in describing ' *Naija Pidgin* ' is derivable from Ben Elugbe's poem wherein he endeavours to capture the enormous roles of pidgin which everybody sends on an errand but much is not done to compensate the messenger. According to Elugbe: (1996:284)

Naijiria Pijin	Nigeria Pidgin
bi laik pikin	is like a child
we no get Papa	who has no father
but evribodi	but everybody
de sen am mesej	send him on errands

The picture painted from the foregoing captures the exact roles of *Naija Pidgin* on Nigeria's linguistic landscape. Nigeria is an extremely multilingual state which boasts of over 450 – 510 indigenous languages. Of all these languages, no one has attained the status of an official or national language other than the English language – a second language imposed on us by colonialism. Before the advent and implantation of the English language into Nigeria, the Pidgin English (Portuguese-based) was already in use as a language of trade and commerce. The Portuguese explorers were the earliest Europeans who established trade contacts with Nigeria. This relationship flourished for some time until it birthed a new language of contact and communication. This language came to be known as a Portuguese-based Pidgin. It became the language of expression between the Portuguese and their African [Nigerian] counterparts.

After the Scramble and Partition of Africa in 1885 wherein Britain, France, Portugal etc shared African nations into colonies, Nigeria fell under the British. This development enhanced the replacement of Portuguese-based pidgin with an English-based pidgin. This new language was used alongside the English language – its cousin. According to Osuafor: (2002:3)

With the advent of the British who supplanted the Portuguese, the English language was introduced as a medium of communication between them and the natives. And the exigency of this period gave rise to a variety that could hardly be called the standard variety of English. What obtained as the contact language was Pidgin English needed for the coastal trade.

The Pidgin English (*Naija Pidgin*) has gloriously attained a status of a Mother –Tongue or first language in some cities in Nigeria. It has continued to dominate the linguistic landscape of Nigeria alongside the English language. Whenever Nigerians from different ethnic backgrounds converge, their choice of language would either be English (in a more formal situations) and *Naija Pidgin* (mostly in informal situations) and at every now and then. Everyone uses *Naija Pidgin* because of its simplicity and neutrality. Most of its lexical items are borrowed extensively from English and indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria. There is no ethnic bloc that could lay claim to its ownership or

originality. This stands it in a better stead to be adopted as a national language which could foster our national unity and integration. In spite of her immeasurable roles in communication and strengthening of our national unity, there is no clear-cut effort or policy of government (at all levels) to support or encourage its use. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) 2010 as amended recognised the English language, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Sections 55 and 97) and the National Policy on Education (2004) mentioned and recognised other languages including English but failed to recognize or mention the existence of *Naija Pidgin*.

**In view of the foregoing, the *National Policy on Education* provides:**

- (a) Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
- (b) For smooth interaction with our neighbours it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary School but non-vocational, elective at the Senior Secondary School. (2004:10)

It is substantially evident that no government has done what is required to empower this orphan – *Naija Pidgin*, despite the errands he runs for everyone. Of a truth, *Naija Pidgin* is incapacitated here. There is no developed orthography as it continued to be denigrated and relegated. *Naija Pidgin* flourishes on every aspect of lives of Nigerians. Although it is yet to be accorded any form of recognition by the Nigerian government, *Naija Pidgin* is dominantly a language of communication on university campuses in Nigeria. Nigerian undergraduates savour in the use of *Naija Pidgin* when they engage their contemporaries in informal discussions as well as formal discussions. The attitude of people towards this linguistic orphan is worrisome; even though the child goes on every errand she is sent.

#### ***Naija Pidgin* as a Contact Language**

The Portuguese were the very first Europeans who came to Africa for purposes of exploration and commerce. The quest for expansion pushed them to explore both material and human resources of the Africans. In his thought, Osuafor (2002:2) opines:

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to come to Africa in their quest for human and material resources as well as market for their finished goods. This quest sparked off by the industrial revolution which began in Europe in 1740. The introduction of the English language as well as other African countries became imperative because of the need for language of communication between the Europeans and the host African communities.

The quest to bridge this communication lacuna birthed the evolution of a Portuguese-based Pidgin which later metamorphosed to an English-based Pidgin consequent upon the annexation which in the guise of the partition and scramble of Africa. The British took a fuller charge of Nigerian territories after the Berlin Conference and the amalgamation of

Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria. Later in 1914, the fiancée of Frederick Lord Lugard, Flora Shaw gave Nigeria her name. Since then till date, the English language, a British heritage became an official and national language in Nigeria whereas *Naija Pidgin* plays some ancillary roles alongside Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Udofot (2007:44) views English and Pidgin as the lingua franca of Nigeria.

*Naija Pidgin* which was formerly known as Pidgin English, Anglo-Pidgin, Nigerian Pidgin, Nigerian Pidgin English etc. has not only gained a status of a lingua franca and first language, it has become a child of necessity which helps in resolving the linguistic quagmire Nigeria is into, owing to her multilingual status. *Naija Pidgin* is a creolised Pidgin that is mostly used in cosmopolitan cities and rural areas all over Nigeria. It has moved from its contact language status during the colonial era to a Mother Tongue or first language in some cities such as Port Harcourt, Warri, Lagos, Enugu, Yenagoa, Kano, Kaduna, Jos, etc. *Naija Pidgin* competes favourably with some indigenous languages in their domains to supplant them. In Port Harcourt, it is Ikwerre and *Naija Pidgin*, Warri (Ika-Igbo) and *Naija Pidgin*, Lagos (Yoruba and *Naija Pidgin*), Yenagoa (Izon and *Naija Pidgin*), Enugu (Igbo and *Naija Pidgin*), Kano (Hausa and *Naija Pidgin*), Kaduna (Hausa and *Naija Pidgin*).

### ***Naija Pidgin* in Written Literature**

The use of *Naija Pidgin* in Nigeria has not only flourished in our entire national life but tacitly dominating the literary arts. It is substantially evident that some authors in Nigeria have at one time or another, used this linguistic orphan to communicate their ideas or thoughts to their audience or readership. From Amos Tutuola's (*Palmwine Drinkards*) Ken Saro-Wiwa's (*Soza Boy*), Chinua Achebe's (*A Man of the People* and *Antihills of the Savannah*), INC Aniebo's (*The Anonymity of Sacrifice*), Cyprian Ekwensi's (*Jagua Nana's Daughter*), Flora Nwapa's (*One is Enough*) etc, Nigerian authors have created characters in these masterpieces who have employed *Naija Pidgin* both as a class-marker and a dominant code of communication. *Naija Pidgin* is a dominant language feature in Tutuola and Saro-Wiwa. The latter experiments with what he calls "Rotten English" which in itself fits adequately into the shoes of the linguistic orphan – *Naija Pidgin*. In his later days writings, Chinua Achebe creates low-class characters who use *Naija Pidgin*. This feature runs through the texts enumerated from the foregoing. Although most of the texts are in Prose fiction, the dramatic forms and poetic medium are not excluded in the use of *Naija Pidgin*. Some examples abound. Ola Rotimi in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* uses *Naija Pidgin* extensively.

It is noteworthy that poems are also delivered through *Naija Pidgin*. For instance:

“Dem 'O' Craze” (E.I.I.T Green)  
Which kain democracy be dis  
Wey  
You wey buy land to build house  
Buy generators, dig borehole  
And carry dirty,  
Then government go come collect tax

Take borehole fee  
And NEPA bring bill  
Then potytricksians go chop  
Them whole revenue?

From the foregoing, the persona uses his sarcastic tone as a means to bemoan some aberrations in governance of Nigeria where leaders fail woefully to provide basic social amenities and to deliver dividends of democracy to the people. Those in government do not think creatively on how to create wealth rather “then potytricksiansgo chop / then whole revenue? This is an excellent poetic piece craftily rendered in *Naija Pidgin*. The “lootocrats” and demons of democracy are hell-bent in pilfering the scarce resources of the nation. Of a truth, Nigeria is bleeding as there is bloodletting everywhere as a result of fallouts of bad governance and misrepresentation of facts and figures.

### ***Naija pidgin in media, music and comic industry***

*Naija Pidgin*- a linguistic orphan, strides like a colossus in the media space of Nigeria. Notable radio programmes and television programmes are at best, presented in *Naija Pidgin*. The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and other AM and FM radio stations run quite a number of their programmes in *Naija Pidgin*. It is this language that majority of Nigerians use, and understand at rural and urban areas. At some points, news bulletins are delivered in *Naija Pidgin*. The same goes for the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) which also runs many programmes in *Naija Pidgin*. In Port Harcourt, the Rivers State Capital, Radio Rivers broadcasts news in Pidgin and the RSTV runs “Tori for Town” in a local colour of *Naija Pidgin* known as “Pitakwa Pidgin”.

In modern broadcasting, the WAZOBIA MEDIA CONGLOMERATE has actually promoted the use of *Naija Pidgin* in running all its programmes. The Wazobia FM and TV use *Naija Pidgin* as their sole language of broadcasting. Some notable radio presenters have emerged from this development and they include Akas Baba, Poriko, Ehidiana, Rugged Pastor, etc. They use *Naija Pidgin* in a more fashionable and spectacular manner which captivates or enthralls their fans and audience.

Again, music industry is not left behind in the use of *Naija Pidgin* as a stock in trade. Prominent in this territory are some music maestros as as Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Lagbaja, Sunny Nneji, Danfo Driver, D Banj, Timaya etc. However, some hit tracks through *Naija Pidgin* medium include “Yellow Fever” - Fela Kuti; “Nothing for you” - Lagbaja; “Tolotolo” - Sunny Nneji; “Dan Mama” - Timaya; “Mad Melon” - Danfo Driver; “Amaka” - Tu Face; “God can bless anybody” - Mr. 2Kay; “Fall in Love” - Dbanj etc.

NP is a language that can be used in the society and as a neutral code. In Nigeria, NP has flourished as a medium in the ever-growing comic industry. On this premise, *Naija Pidgin* performs a ludic role. This is one of the communicative roles of human language (Ndimele 2007:5). There are some towering comedians in this sense such as Julius 'De Genius' Agwu, Prince Hezekiah, Dan D' Humourous, Rugged Pastor, Ali Baba, I Go Dye,



Gordons, I Go Save, Diplomatic Akas Baba etc. who thrill their teeming fans and large audience through the medium of NP. In fact, it is observed that jokes are, at best cracked in jokes, the medium where their hilarious flavour is savoured, heightened and appreciated.

### ***Naija Pidgin in Some Christian Songs***

*Naija Pidgin* as a language of communication is also used within some religious circles (churches mainly) in Nigeria. Nigerians from all walks of life cherish renditions rendered in *Naija Pidgin*. This is evident in their gleeful disposition when such tunes are being enchanted during Praise and Worship sessions at different worship centres. Most times, sermons are rendered in NP and gospel songs composed in pidgin too. On a more hilarious note, Jehovah God Himself also listens and enjoys *Naija Pidgin*. Well, often than not, we hear such gospel songs as the following in NP:

“Papa don do am for mi in a bigi way”  
“Papa don do am for mi in a bigi way”

“Satan don fall for gota, marcham, marcham!”  
“Satan don fall for gota, marcham, marcham!”

“Piple dey ask mi say na who dey make mi fine?”  
“I jus dey tell dem say na Jesus dey make mi fine”  
“I dey fine, I dey fine, I dey fine...”

However, there are some notable gospel artists who have flourished and towered to high heavens, in the use of *Naija Pidgin*. They include Nosa, Mercy Chinwo, Franklyn OG Praise, Eben, Sammie Okposo. The hit tracks in this category include “All the way” – Eben; “I go always pray for you” – Nosa; “Jesus na you dey reign” – Mercy Chinwo; “Jesus I thank you welu welu” – Sammie Okposo; “This Kind God” – Evangelist Chuks Chidube etc.

### **Conclusion**

In spite of its roles in uniting Nigerians and being a language of communication amid Nigerians from different ethno-religious backgrounds, *Naija Pidgin* (NP) remains a linguistic orphan which no government, either in the distant past or near future, has recognised or empowered. The elite class in Nigeria has a negative disposition or attitude towards *Naija Pidgin* (NP). This attitude has caused more harm than good to a language that, now, permeates our national life and existence.

This language is used by all and sundry in Nigeria. The grammatical structures are simple, and it has borrowed extensively from English, Nigerian English and indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria. *Naija Pidgin* is the preferred nomenclature for the brand of creolised pidgin spoken in Nigeria because of its peculiar Nigerian colour or “Nigerianness.”

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