

GRAMMAR AND THE GRAMMATICALITY OF NIGERIA ENGLISH BASED PIDGIN IN OWERRI AREA

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Abstract

This paper discusses pidgin as it is used in Owerri Area in Imo State Nigeria, it defines pidgin as a contact language; an interplay between two or more languages from the source language to the target language. Various definitions of pidgin are explicated in the paper. It defines grammar as a set of rules governing a language in both the spoken and written form. It also draws its strength from the grammaticality of a language which is the various forms and applications of these grammar rules. The Nigeria English Based Pidgin (NEBP) of which Owerri manifestation is at the core of the paper is examined. The first part of this paper is theory based while the second part of the paper is laden with grammatical applications. Core examples are given in phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. This paper is anchored on Gile's accommodation theory of 1970 which postulate that there should be adjustment in communication to accommodate interlocutors to enhance mutual intelligibility in a stretch of discourse. We found that phonological laws are loose, the syntax rules are not rigid while morphological rules are not strict but meaning is usually assured, we conclude by saying that a little bit of academic discipline should be brought into Nigeria English Based Pidgin(NEBP) since it is now widely used for news broadcast and advertorials even on sensitive national issues like electioneering campaigns, national census sensitization even Health issues like EBOLA and COVID-19 campaign or awareness Nigeria English base pidgin is not left out.

Introduction

Communication is very paramount in every human existence and hence the use and importance of language O' Grady, Archbald and Katama (2012) posit that, "Language is at the heart of all things human.... All normal human beings have at least one language and it is difficult to imagine much significant social, intellectual or artistic activities taking place without opportunities for communication offered by language (p1). The implication is that the life of man as a social animal would be very unworthy and difficult without language. In different parts of the world, different languages exist and these different languages differ from sect to sect and from ethnic group to ethnic group which also makes communication and mutual intelligibility difficult and impossible. As the languages differ so also their structures differ. Ugorji, (2020) states, that, it is axiomatic that the primary essence of language is communication.

The inability of one sect or group to understand the other sect or group gave birth to pidgin, which is a contact and makeshift language created very impromptu to solve communication problems. Linguistically speaking, people or travelers from different language backgrounds come together for a particular purpose but are not mutually intelligible they grope their way and quickly establish or formulate a linguistic system that is filled with demonstrations and signs to carry them on. The result is the simplification of the languages involved to come up with an entirely new language pidgin. Elugbe (2015) avers that, the linguistic or the contact situation between the British and the Local Nigeria population were too urgent to await the arrival of Standard English via the formal literacy, hence the up come of pidgin.

Denham and Lobeck (2010) state that pidgin is a simplified non-native contact language that develops to speakers of distinct languages to communicate. Also Jowitt (2000) postulate that, even among the highly educated teachers of English in Nigeria Universities, there is often a recourse to pidgin English as the vehicle of informal communication (P.14) Pidgins truly solve communication problems. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) opine that pidgin is a simple but rule governed language developed for communication among speakers of mutually unintelligible languages often based on one of those languages called the lexifier language (p.55) it is evident that as there are different language, so there are different pidgins and hence “lexifier Language”. The pidgin to be discussed in this paper is Nigerian English based pidgin (NEBP) which henceforth it shall be called. It is a Nigerian variety of pidgin developed from the Nigerian contact with the Portuguese/British.

Pidgin by reason of their nature and conditions that generate them emanate from older existing language Finegan (2004) stipulates that, pidgins draw largely from older languages where they are based during a period of linguistic crisis to fill an urgent needs for communication. This situation makes pidgin to look like deformed version of those older languages or a reduced variety of a normal language and so pidgins have their humble beginnings as second or third languages. As Mensah (2012) opines, “there is no speaker of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) in Nigeria without a distinct mother tongue. NP merely serves as L₂ to speakers without Western education and L₃ to speakers with such privileges”. It is only in some minority groups that NEBP has been creolized. A situation whereby the speaker has no first language (L₁) other than pidgin. Obviously, Nigerian pidgin has also creolized to a first language L₁ in some minority group in Nigeria. The children born into this environment of the above have no mother tongue or L₁ or native language, pidgin has taken over the first language.

Be that as it may, any language whether pidgin, creole or normal language must have its grammar. Prasad (2009) postulates; every language including pidgin should have its system of rules governing the structure of phrases, clauses and sentences consisting of words of lexicon. The implication of the above is that a language must have its system or rule that will make it stand the privilege of being subjected to grammatical analysis at any time. Grammar basically is a group of hypothesis or rules that describe the syntax of a particular language.

Carnie (2007) states that grammar is a word that generate terror in the hearts or minds of people as it is a set of rules that generate sentences in a language or languages. It is what a speaker knows about a language which embraces, the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of that language. Grammar can also be said to be a mental representation of a speaker’s competence. This deals with the competence of the speaker in using that particular language.

Ngulube (2015) states that grammar means the complete description of a language, that is, what the sounds are and how they combine, what the words are and how they combined what the meanings of the words are etc.

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) are not left out in the definition of grammar as; Grammar includes the knowledge speakers have about the units and rules of their language-rules for combining sounds into words (phonology), rules for word formation (morphology), rules for combining words into phrases or phrases into (syntax) and rules for assigning meaning (semantic). (p4).

The authors above make reference to Dionysius Thrax of the 2nd century bce who defined grammar as “that which permits us either to speak a language or to speak about a language or to speak about a language or to speak about a language. The contention above remain valid since every language has its system of organizing segments and units in order to cover linguistic gap without making communication impossible. It should be noted that without language rules, speakers of the same language can also come up with different forms of representation which can lead to misunderstanding of one another.

Apart from what grammar is and what is it not, there is this issue of a speaker being grammatical which has to do with the application of the rules that govern the use of a language. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007)

explain that grammatical means that a sentence conforms to rules of mental grammar of a language while ungrammatical means that a sentence deviates from the rules of that language (p14). It should be over emphasized that the treaties above; grammatical and ungrammatical become relevant in a situation where grammar exit.

Lyon (200&) avers that “grammaticality is central to the task of accounting for the native speaker’s ability to generate finite well formed sentences (p.113). Grammar in a narrow sense belongs to phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics pidgin is widely use in both formal and informal situations in Nigeria today Jibril (2005) states that, Nigeria pidgin is now being used for news broadcasting in government owned radio stations and for serious poetry and drama by several well educated poets and playwrights. Premised on the above stipulations by different authors, this paper discusses the grammar and grammaticality of Nigeria English Based Pidgin (NEBP) by looking into the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics but paying greater attention to its syntax.

The phonology of NEBP

It is obvious that interference cuts across all language levels which phonology is inclusive. The phonology of Nigeria English based pidgin is very fluid as there is no standard pronunciation in NEBP because of glearing interference emanating from the source languages forming the pidgin to the target language. This makes the NEBP to be greatly influenced phonologically by the mother tongue of the speakers, thus the NEBP is heavily supplanted phonologically by the phonology or pronunciation pattern of the language or dialect of the ethnic group using the pidgin.

Each pidgin is constructed to suit the needs of the users for there to be a linguistic accommodation between the users. Wardhaugh (2006) Holmes (2000) state that there is always an imbalance or dominance in the formation of pidgin among the speakers. The superstrate or lexifier language which is the language base of the pidgin provide the major percentage of the vocabulary while the phonology and structure of the pidgin come from the substrate language. Relying on the treatise above, it becomes clear that the NEBP phonology will never be uniform hence there are multi language groups in Nigeria. The thrust of the matter above is that phonologically each user’s pronunciation tilts to that user’s language pronunciation pattern for instance, there is a lot of slur in Warri pidgin which is also, greatly nasalized. Eg make Una doamnao

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored by Gile’s Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) of 1970. The trust of this theory is adjustment in communication to create mutual intelligibility among the interlocutors. Giles (1970) in Umera Okeke (2019) states that this theory is of two folds; (i) the behavioural changes people make to attune their communication to their partner, and (@) the extent to which people perceive their partner as appropriately attuning to them. The crux of the matter is of the above is that the interlocutors must adjust their speech/language molds to allow communication to take place understanding one another. West and Turner (2010) in this stance state that “core of Communication Accommodation Theory” is that in an interpersonal relationship, in a small group, across cultures, people adjust their communication to others.

Umera-Okeke (2019) posits that adjusting one’s communication (verbal and non verbal) styles to accommodate the others can be done in two ways: divergent and convergence where Divergence is used to highlight group identity through touting the differences of the group they identify with and used by the stronger group with racial pride while convergence is used often by the powerless individuals. The suitability of this theory to the study should not be over-emphasized as pidgin is nobody’s L1 language but accommodates everyone who wishes to used it according to his/her own percieperice for furtherance of communication.

Analysis

The structure of Nigerian based pidgin is weak in the sense that the users of pidgin make up the structures. Pidgin is not taught in a classroom situation hence its grammaticality is fluid. However, users of pidgin have some common linguistic features.

In the main, the tense structures can admit lexical repetitions present, past future for the purposes of this paper we shall analyze the following data:

1. Dat one happen tey tey
2. Bros mu na follow body come sweep church
3. This chikini money no fit tear pocket
4. As e dey sweet us, e de pain dem, as e de pain dem, e de sweet us
5. Bros come follow but no fall my hand
6. The man don kpeme, abi na japa or na delete wey I do
7. Anty sabi nyan

Sentences one suggests the past tense which is followed.

Sentence one “e don happen tey tey” means that it has happened long time ago. The use of the phrase “tey tey” signifies the past or the past participle some other examples will include “before before day before yesterday”.

A run down of the tense structure in pidgin shows that the tense structure of pidgin with regard to the verb is not rigid. For instance:

- a. I eat am
- b. I go eat am
- c. Yesterday I eat am

In the structure above, the main verb in the sentences a-c, the verb eat remain the same. In the sentences below, the verb come also conform to tense.

- d. I don come una house
- e. I go come una house
- f. No bi yesterday wey I come una house? (the voice does not rise)
- g. Na only to carry woman him sabi (He knows only how to date a woman)
- h. she don carry belle (she is pregnant)
- i. I carry last for class

in sentence (g-i) the word carry as verb does not change form in standard English, I carry last for class may mean he came last in the class” and “I carry first” may also mean he came top of the class.

Sentence 2:

Bros mu na follow body come sweep church
- Please try to come and sweep the church.

What is curious about this sentence is the phrase “follow body” which implies that you endeavour to come and sweep the church.

Recall that in fast speech “make una, come” becomes “mu na come”.

Sentence 3

This chikini money no go fit tear pocket

English: This little money will have no effect.

Pidgin in this sentence does a form of transliteration because money stays in the pocket, so the little amount will have no devastating effect on your resources.

Sentence 4

As e dey sweet us, e dey pain dem

As e dey pain dem, e dey sweet us

The sentence above is one of a kind. The expression is an adverbial express which answers the expression why/how. Pidgin often utilizes sentences fragments for its interactions.

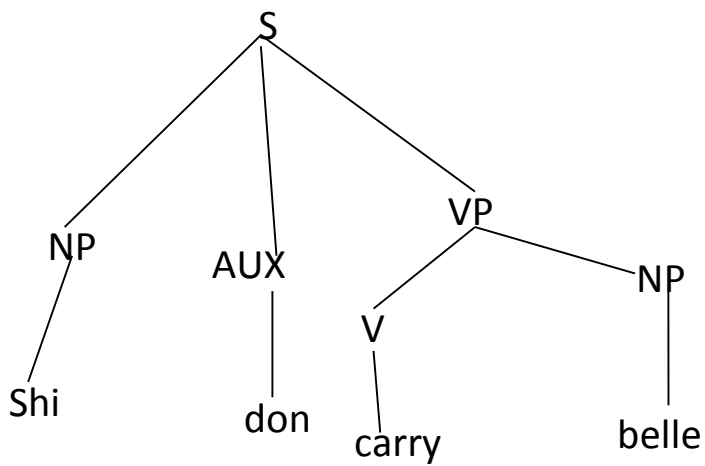
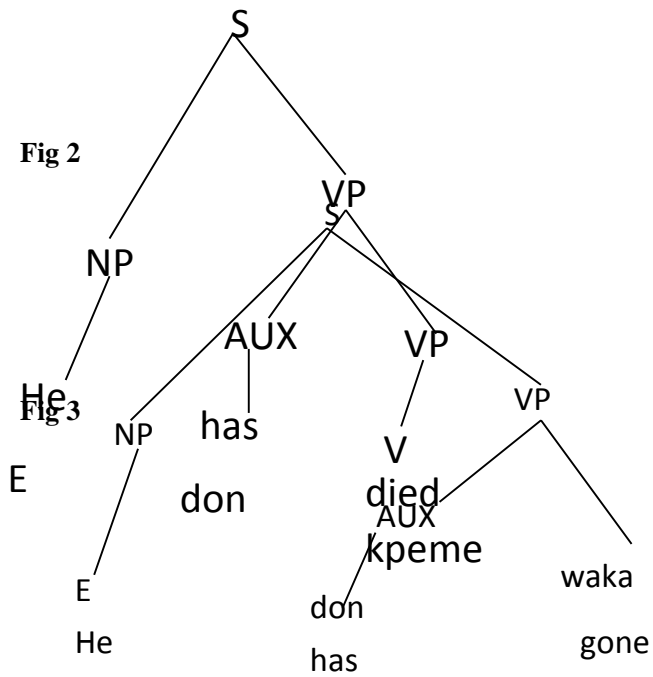
Sentence 5

No fall my hand

There is subject deletion in sentence no 5. Do not get into trouble with me. To fall into somebody’s hands means to be at cross road with somebody.

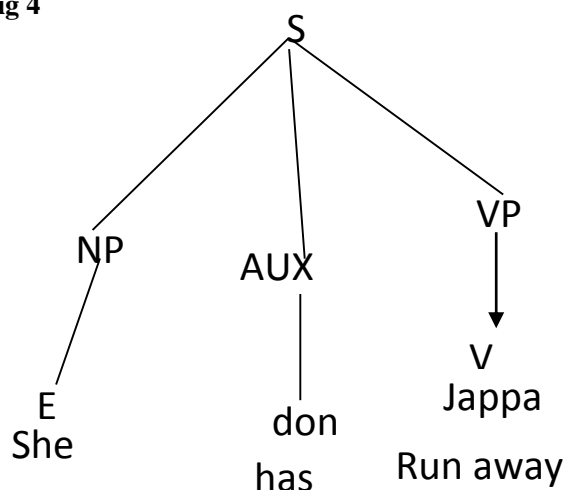
Sentence 6
 E don kpeme
 It means he has died, 'kpeme' meand died

Fig I



The essence of positing some of these sentences on a tree diagram is to show the explicitness of the structure, it is to show how the pidgin syntax works.

Fig 4



Morphology. The morphology of pidgin is usually drawn from the two languages. English is at the base of it all but some key words or better still content words like nouns and verbs are usually drawn from the local environment. For instance:

Jakpa	-	runaway
Kpeme	-	death/died
Belle	-	Pregnancy
Wahala	-	trouble (no wahala)
Nyan	-	to talk
Chop	-	food

Semantics

The semantics of pidgins actually is what gives it its currency. The interlocutors understand one another that is why the language thrives.

E.g E don get belle.

This expression is widely used in virtually varieties of pidgin to mean that the woman/girl is pregnant. Another widely used expression in pidgin is “to carry” which is used for various contexts.

1. E dey carry woman - To date a woman
2. E carry body - He/She is fat
3. E don carry last - He came last or lost
4. E don carry first - He came first or won
5. Warri no dey carry last - You can't cheat a Warri man

In all the sentences above, the pidgin word “carry” has different shades of meaning.

In all examples given, we will notice that pidgin verbs do not conform to V-S v-ing, v-ed, and V-edz. Of the five parts of the verb, pidgin usually uses the V- which is the based or, the root form of the verb. Eg go, play, come, eat etc.

Verb parts like went, played come, comes, coming etc are rarely used.

We will observe that verbs in pidgin do not comply with particles like –s, es, -ed –ing. The verb simply remains the base/root form.

Another structural observation is that nouns in pidgin do not conform to the use of plural makers like –s, es, -ies etc. Even when they are used like in the word “Bros” they do not imply plural even a single boy/man

will still be addressed as “Bros”. the word “bros” in pidgin does not imply plural. Again, pidgin uses number or another word to add to the main word to form plural.

Examples include:

1. Motor plenty
2. Na four motor
3. Tomato dey berekete
4. Potato bokwu for market
5. Pepper many for soup

Pidgin does not obey the use of pronouns such as everybody, everyone. E.g Evribody sabi say na him take am

A swear die say na him do am

We make bold to say that the syntactic structure of pidgin is porous, fluid and loose, just as one can say “na tori wey I tori am” meaning “ I merely told him a story”.

The point to underscore is that “na dem dem” one and the same people. Language is arbitrary; users of pidgin contribute to its lexis and structure.

The use of words in pidgin is not strict. Users of the language contribute to the lexical items of the vocabulary of pidgin. What is key to pidgin is semantics. All users of pidgin aim at meaning since pidgin is not taught in the classroom it has no rigid grammatical rules. It accommodates all user and so a free world to all.

The phonology pidgin is arbitrary speakers pronounce the way they like. It is only in the Sapele Warri axis that they have a nasalized falling pitch intonation.

Example

1. Una follow body come work
2. I take God beg you na
3. Na just tori wey I tori am

Finally we make bold to say that pidgin is different from standard Nigerian English. It is also different from Broken English. The standard Nigerian English is that brand of English used by Nigerian Television (FRCN) and voice of Nigeria Authority (NTA and Radio Nigeria.) The standard Nigerian English (SNE) for short is that variety of English acceptable to West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Commission (NECO).

Broken English is a poorly taught and learnt form of English

E.g

Broken: I doesn't like it

Pidgin: I no like am

Standard English (SE) I don't like it.

Broken: I can be able to do it

Pidgin: I fit do am

Standard English (SE): I can do it

Pidgin has gained in the use of semantics. Meaning is at the core of pidgin. Communication is the most important reason for pidgin and the volume of pidgin based adverts show the pride of place currently enjoyed by pidgin.

Conclusion

In this paper, we extrapolated the makers of the grammaticality of pidgin. Our paper shows that pidgin has a fluid phonology, fluid in the sense that there are no standard way of pronunciation of pidgin words. The users of pidgin bring in their mother tongue interference. Largely plurality in pidgin is not done by the use of suffixes but by the use of numerals (e.g two pen, three country). We also posited that tense in pidgin is not rigid, we gave examples like I de come

I wan come

I bin come yesterday

Pidgin enjoys semantics by means of yielding meaning. When utterances yield meaning amongst the interlocutors, you have communication has taken place.

New words enter pidgin in a flexible manner. The source language and the target language contribute to the morphology of pidgin.

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