

WWJMRD 2015; 1(5): 46-47
www.wwjmr.com
e-ISSN: 2454-6615

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An assessment of the effect of Pidgin English on English language communication in public offices in Yola, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study exposes the difficulties experienced by workers in public offices with respect to Pidgin English interference on English Language speaking in some selected public offices in Yola, the Adamawa state capital. Some research questions were formulated to guide the direction of the study against the background of variable factors in the speaking situation. An instrument was designed to obtain information from respondents. The instrument in the form of direct questions was administered and tabulated side by side the formulated research questions with answers provided to them. The results obtained show that about 56% of the selected staff communicate verbally within themselves in Pidgin English and other Languages in the offices.

Keywords: Pidgin English, English Language, Communication, Public Offices

Introduction

English language originated in England and is now widely spoken throughout the continents (Fishman, 1997). It is the primary language of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and various small Island nations in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. It is also an official language of India, the Philippines and many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa. In Nigeria, English Language is the lingual Franca. This makes the language an indispensable tool for workers/students in the country to communicate and interact socially because of the numerous indigenous languages or dialects spoken by the different ethnic groups in different parts of the country. Some dialects are similar both in spoken and in written form, while others are radically different from one another (Egbokhare, 2001). These Nigerian languages include Hausa, Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Kwale, Owan, Urhobo, Edo, Ijaw etc. However, none of these dominant tribal languages has been generally accepted as a national language. English language is the official language in Nigeria and the means through which the colonial masters in their era used in uniting the various tribes for communication to take place (Adegbija, 1994).

Pidgin English is traceable to the Portuguese coming to Nigeria as traders and missionaries. Pidgin English is a hybrid language, contains elements of both immediate African language speaking environment and English. It is not what a learner learns by itself because it is no developmental. It is a fairly closed language sound system and serves restricted numerous functions an expanding to serve fresh function by wholesale borrowing of vocabulary from English. The missionaries from Portugal used Pidgin English as a means of communication with the natives of the coastal lands (Decamp, 1971).

English language is global language of education, technology, science, aviation and computer, and a world language of importance. Therefore efficient spoken/written knowledge of English Language is of basic importance to the study of every other subject of Standard English language command respect and prestige in the society (Obiechnina, 1984). In spite of the importance of correct use of English language, it is found that in particular students and public workers perform woefully in its usage both in examinations and daily life interactions. A number of factors contribute to the situation one of which is the constant used of Pidgin English in the study and daily interactions (Brann, 1985).

Writing on Nigerian pidgin, Jowitt (1991) also remarked that recently the pidgin has attained the feat of dignity not only among the illiterates but also the literate members of the society. He stated that the use of pidgin signals proximity and informality and that it is good

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for cracking jokes. Today, Pidgin English is used to facilitate communication link among individual, serves as a language of the literate and the illiterate in the Nigerian society. However, this Pidgin English which is mostly used at homes, market, parks and among peer groups should be stepped aside in the office activities, so that Standard English acquisition and command comes to the way of staff. This will make workers take the Standard English official usage in offices serious and afford them active a command of good English in terms of communication and social interaction (Elugbe, 1995).

Methodology

To collate the data, twenty-five (25) offices were selected for direct questioning to four (4) staff in each office. Respondents were randomly selected from thirteen (13) offices in the Adamawa state secretariat Yola and twelve (12) offices in the Federal secretariat Yola. (See the format of the questions below)

Survey research method was adopted to the research, because this research needed a sample of the population which can be used to interpret the entire population at large. The study’s population was the variables or the exact samples from which the data for the studies were collected. The data for the study was collected from from twenty-five (25) offices. The samples comprised of four (4) people that were asked questions in each office. Random sampling was employed because it involves minimum expenses while covering large number of respondents both junior and senior staff. The following questions were directed to Four (4) staff in each of Twenty-five (25) offices in Adamawa state secretariat and Federal secretariat Yola, for responses.

The Questionnaire

1	Which of these languages do you verbally communicate to your colleagues in the office ?	Pidgin English	English Language	Other Languages
2	Which of these languages do you communicate in writing in the office ?	Pidgin English	English Language	Other Languages

Results and Discussion

All the selected staff of the two secretariats responded to the questions. The results were collated and presented as shown in the table below.

1	Which of these languages do you verbally communicate to your colleagues in the office ?	Pidgin English 26	English Language 44	Other Languages 30
2	Which of these languages do you communicate in writing in the office ?	Pidgin English 0	English Language 100	Other Languages 0

The results show that for verbal communication, 26% of selected staff verbally communicate to their colleagues in the office in Pidgin English, 44% of selected staff communicate to their colleagues in the office in English Language and 30% of selected staff communicate to their colleagues in the office in other languages.

However, for communication in writing, the results also

show that all the selected staff communicates in writing to their colleagues in the office in English Language.

Life in office is about official duties. No doubt that the English language is the officially recognized medium of communication verbally and in writing within staff. It is also the language of communication between departments. However, as revealed by this study, pidgin expressions intermittently used by the staff for jocular effects so that the work will not be boring. This practice, as revealed by the oral interview, often makes other staff feel that such an administrator is accessible. In the impression of the respondents, such an administrator has good method of administration. From the oral interview conducted by this study, it seems, it is impossible to completely eliminate the verbal communication in Pidgin English in public offices.

Conclusion

This study revealed that Pidgin English is substantially being used in communication within staff in the offices. This in essence has an effect on the flow of fluent English Language communication in the offices. However, Pidgin English and other languages have no effect on written English communication in the offices.

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