

STANDARD AND PIDGIN ENGLISH IN NIGERIA: CULTURAL REVALUATION AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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This paper examines cultural perceptions of Standard English versus non-standard varieties, such as Nigerian Pidgin, and their implications for society. It discusses how linguistic discrimination affects the psychological well-being and social identity of speakers of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). The study is qualitative and is based on data generated from news sources, the International Corpus of English, observations and interviews. The results of the study reveal that linguistic discrimination against NPE speakers occurs because NPE carries a cultural stigma and is associated with lower social class and illiteracy. Standard English, inherited from the British colonial era, is perceived as a mark of education, class and social mobility. Due to the pressure to speak Standard English, Nigerians strive to improve their British accent, even when they have a high level of English proficiency. The tension between English and NPE varieties highlights cultural and linguistic politics, as well as the interaction between language and culture in shaping communication and identity. This duality creates psychological and social pressures for speakers, influencing their self-esteem and identity. Nevertheless, many Nigerians code-switch, combining NPE with other indigenous Nigerian languages and English to create a hybrid cultural resource. This paper argues that, rather than outlawing NPE or penalising its use, teachers should implement translanguaging strategies that incorporate NPE, English, and native languages,

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thereby boosting students' self-esteem and literacy. Further research could focus on ways to implement the findings of this study in the Nigerian education system.

Keywords: *cultural evaluation, educational system, linguistic discrimination, Nigeria, Standard English, Pidgin English.*

Statement of the Problem. Language is a crucial aspect of an individual's identity, and a primary means of communication. Both English and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) are used in Nigeria, and both languages are undergoing cultural re-evaluation, reflecting shifting perspectives on language, identity and power. Cultural revaluation is the process where customs, symbols and variants previously devalued or stigmatized are re-examined and given new status, legitimacy, or acceptance in society [10]. Within the sociolinguistics field, cultural revaluation refers to changes in the perceived value of a language or dialect, often associated with identity, media representation, or shifting cultural perspectives. Pidgin's increasing cultural and communicative capital in media, music, and daily interaction is highlighted by this revaluation, which defies previous ideologies that stigmatized it as "low" or "non-standard". NPE, also referred to as "Broken English" (*Naijia*) is an English-based Creole language and the mixture of English and various indigenous Nigerian languages [17; 1; 26]. It is spoken as a *lingua franca* throughout Nigeria, with an estimated 3 to 5 million individuals speaking NPE as their first language, while 75 million speak it as a second language [17]. Indeed, Faraclas [17] estimates that there are more than 110 million NPE speakers, confirming its remarkable prevalence. In contrast to English and the other three widely spoken languages in Nigeria, pidgin is marginalized and not acknowledged by the state because of the perception among the upper class in Nigeria that Nigerian pidgin is primarily regarded as a contact language without any obvious ethnic or regional connotations [32; 20; 26].

Pidgin was first utilized by Europeans, such as the Portuguese, as a means of interaction during the 17th-century Atlantic slave trade [26; 22]. European interaction with West African languages gave rise to Nigerian Pidgin and rapidly evolved from the language of contact and trade to a language to be reckoned with [17; 33]. It is estimated that more than half of the Nigerian population speak NPE [17]. Pidgin is also more popular than the three major languages in Nigeria and is spoken by more than half of the Nigerian population [3; 24]. As such,

pidgins serve as a *de facto franca*, bridging socioeconomic classes, cultures, and educational levels. Compared to Standard English, NPE has a larger audience [27; 24].

However, there is tension between NPE and standard English, which reflects broader cultural values and social hierarchies, highlighting the complex dynamics of language, identity and power in Nigerian society. Additionally, the way people communicate and the social judgments tied to language impact their psychological well-being. This alludes to Pidgin associated with informality and low social class, whereas “standard” English is often linked to education and modernity. The English language, a legacy of colonial rule, is the official language and the primary mode of instruction in schools and daily interactions.

Nigeria is a multicultural country, home to more than 525 languages and 371 ethnic groups [39; 4; 5]. Due to the diversity of languages spoken here, multilingualism is viewed as a significant issue due to concerns about domination by specific ethnic groups. In such countries, English is the *lingua franca* due to its neutrality and ability to facilitate peaceful coexistence and successful communication between diverse ethnic and regional groups [4; 26; 40]. That is why English in Nigeria is widely used in government, industry and education [13]. There are natural variations in the way English is spoken in Nigeria because it is a second language for many Nigerians, who also speak various other languages, which influences their proficiency in English. However, despite its low institutional status as the language of the illiterate, NPE is still widely used in the country.

Literature suggests that speakers of dominant languages tend to discriminate against speakers of less dominant languages and exhibit a tendency towards linguistic bias [19; 7; 30; 15]. Despite the ubiquity of English, some English speakers face discrimination because of their accent and speaking “queen’s” standard English. Reports also suggest that educators in Nigeria punish and flog students to refrain from speaking NPE or any other Nigerian indigenous language in the classroom, suggesting linguistic discrimination [30]. Linguistic discrimination also occurs in the classroom, where students are prevented from speaking NPE, resulting in physical violence and punishment because it is considered inferior [19; 7; 26; 33; 30]. Linguistic discrimination is also observed in cases of disrespectful treatment of speakers of NPE or other dialects that do not have official status, which only fuels negative attitudes toward their speakers.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital provides a valuable lens, highlighting the reasons why pidgin speakers are marginalized and standard English speakers enjoy high social class status and associated privileges [10]. Additionally, colonial language ideologies continue to influence the perspective of linguistic correctness in postcolonial countries [34]. Although NPE is widely used, it is still stigmatised, especially in official educational and governmental situations. Standard English is the socially and institutionally dominant language. This linguistic disparity restricts the cultural and social capital available to Pidgin speakers, perpetuates social inequalities, and causes psychological stress. Furthermore, there is a conflict between cultural identity and social expectations because linguistic regulations and cultural attitudes often reinforce the notion that Pidgin is inferior and linguistic discrimination.

Linguistic discrimination refers to the unfair treatment of people based on their first language, accent, perceived vocabulary size, modality and syntax [9; 15]. It is also a form of racism and is known by other names, such as glossophobia and linguisticism. A person may instinctively make assumptions about another person's education, social standing, character or other features based solely on differences in language use, which could result in discrimination [38; 15]. Overt linguistic racism can manifest as intentional humiliation, such as "ethnic accent bullying", regardless of a person's actual English proficiency [6; 13]. This kind of prejudice can have serious psychological effects, as people who experience it may develop inferiority complexes and begin to view themselves as less intelligent. Linguistic discrimination is also amplified by language prescriptivism, which asserts that there is a correct way to use language.

Drożdżowicz and Peled describe linguistic discrimination as the consistent mistreatment by members of linguistic community A (usually the more powerful one) against members of linguistic community B (the less powerful one) when members of community B fail to meet the implicit linguistic expectations of community A (e.g. by speaking with an accent or using a different linguistic modality) [15]. Members of community A may act in this way without being aware of their underlying prejudices against community B's language and their other unfavourable views about its speakers.

Debates about linguistic discrimination and non-standard language are also rooted in Standard Language Ideology. The latter informs and influences attitudes towards “non-standard” language varieties. Research on standardisation and standard language ideology has begun to challenge earlier narratives that focused on multilingual contexts and considered minority and regional language varieties, as well as the new speakers of these varieties. This research also examines the linguistic prejudice and discrimination caused by standard language ideology (SLI) [23; 8].

Materials and Methods. Data was generated through news observation (identifying patterns in discourse from radio, news and classroom sources), the International Corpus of English (ICE) and interviews. The latter provide a valuable source of rich, qualitative data on participants’ attitudes, experiences, and perceptions. This context enhances observational and corpus data [14]. Observing language speakers enables researchers to record how language is used, including discourse patterns, lexical choices, and framing. This provides insights into language, communication, and journalistic practices [37]. The International Corpus of English (ICE) is an international research project that compiles and examines corpora of English dialects from around the world. Launched in 1988 by Sidney Greenbaum at University College London, the initiative aims to facilitate the comparison of English grammar and usage across various national and regional variants. ICE provides analyses of grammatical patterns, lexical choices and code-switching between English and NPE. This is made possible by using the corpus as a research tool, which offers genuine, empirical data on language use in formal and informal contexts [41]. Additionally, the architecture of the ICE corpora makes it easier to compare results with those of other English dialects, thereby improving the generalisability and reliability of the findings. Thus, using ICE-Nigeria enables a thorough, data-driven analysis of sociolinguistic phenomena and multilingual interactions in Nigeria.

Presentation of the main material of the study. *NPE in Media and Public Discourse.* The following examples, borrowed from the International Corpus of English (ICE) data corpus, illustrate the use of NPE in the public domain. They are accompanied by their English translation: “We presido don tok am se I no gud mak we dey trow bomb fo choch bikos na we we, we de kill...” (Our President, has

condemned a series of bombing attacks on churches because he believes that we are killing ourselves) [25: 186].

“Boko Haram ’mak dis pipul kom do dia noncens bomb 4 Naija Delta mak we tel dem say ... militants and Boko Haram no be mates; ... l-a-y-e. we go roast dem ... fri dem ... dem no say militants senior dem. So mak dem relax...’. (The Boko Haram sect must not attempt to set a bomb in any part of the Niger Delta region or else the militants will show their superiority over them)” [25: 186].

“Nothing in so-called standard English is objectively more complex, superior, or better linguistically. Simply put, because it is supported by so much authority and prestige, we feel that it is more accurate” (Interview 3).

The prevalence of NPE is also evident in the BBC World Service, which launched BBC News Pidgin, an online news outlet in West African Pidgin English, in Lagos, Nigeria, in 2017 [11]. The BBC subsequently created a ‘standardised’ version of Pidgin to cater to West African speakers. The BBC offers a Pidgin language service, and there are radio stations in Nigeria that only broadcast in NPE. Wazobia FM, the first Nigerian radio station to broadcast in NPE, attracted a large audience because of its news coverage.

The cultural revaluation of languages is evident when formerly stigmatised linguistic forms acquire new social legitimacy and acceptance [10]. This trend is also evident in Nigeria, where NPE is increasingly being recognised as a unifying symbol of national identity thanks to media outlets such as BBC Pidgin [11].

Smart People Speak English and the Stigmatization of NPE Speakers. Although NPE is the dialect spoken by many Nigerians, it is not recognized by the government and is not taught in schools. Its lack of prestige stems from the fact that many Nigerians view it as a “bad” form of English and connect it to a group of socially marginalized individuals. As the BBC interview participants suggest:

“It is not only disrespectful and humiliating, but also factually incorrect, to judge someone’s language as inferior or broken and another person’s as legitimate or real based purely on their ethnicity and region. There is no objectively better way to speak English than what is known as Standard English” (Interview 1).

Not every speaker of English or some other language or dialect receives equal treatment, consciously or unconsciously: “I detest

listening to Pidgin English because I consider it to be the language of the impoverished, disenfranchised, and weak in politics” (Interview 2).

Similarly, speaking NPE is associated with discriminatory social perceptions of its speakers. Linguistic discrimination against NPE is widespread because it differs significantly from other Nigerian dialects. This accent has traditionally been stigmatised because it reflects the linguistic reality of the uneducated and illiterate.

Language ideologies and policies that stigmatise speakers of “inferior” language variations and favour certain groups are perpetuated by institutions when standardised English is considered the only acceptable form of the language. This leads to power imbalances. Some participants living abroad mentioned feeling more confident in their ability to communicate in English in their home country but then losing that confidence due to the way they are treated in English-speaking countries.

Findings suggest that, due to pressure to speak standard English, Nigerians who have a fluent command of the language, enroll in extra classes to refine their British accent. Diction and phonetics are taught at high prices in private schools to the children of the rich and famous, as well as to adults who wish to “correct” their accents by conversing like Britons to appear classy and sophisticated. This alludes to articulating with an American or British accent in Nigeria, which is considered a significant achievement because it is associated with high status, education, and being well-travelled. The overview suggests that linguistic discrimination against individuals based on their accents is a widespread issue, as accents are often perceived as being associated with social status rather than geographical regions.

Similarly, concerns have been raised about the impact of students using NPE in Nigeria’s educational system because it negatively affects their performance in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) English language course [2; 3; 33; 26]. The prevalence of NPE means that many young people find it challenging to communicate effectively in either their native language or standard English. This suggests that the implementation of overt language policies that reinforce linguistic racism might exacerbate the situation in schools and other educational settings. Additionally, one argument against the use of Pidgin English is that people often speak incorrectly due to the normalisation of casual English and the belief that speaking English well is elitist. This naturally contributes to students’ ongoing academic struggles and a

general decline in their ability to speak and pronounce words correctly in diverse communities and social circles when necessary.

In view of the perception of NPE, scholars of Standard Language Ideology (SLI) argue that it creates a divide that extends beyond language use, separating individuals who speak the standard from those who do not belong to the community of speakers of the idealised variation [16]. Rosa and Flores (2015) first used the phrase 'racial linguistic ideologies' to characterise standard language variations in relation to the racial characteristics of their speakers [18]. Standard variations are usually linked to a specific nation and its idealised depiction of its population. While pluricentric standard languages, which are spoken in many nation-states and comprise two or more national standard variations, are generally acknowledged, SLI allows for some regional diversity.

The Cultural Aspect of English. The findings also reveal that the difference between English and pidgin is not just linguistic, but also profoundly cultural. American and British English varieties function as cultural capital, unlocking doors to prestige, social networks, employment, and educational opportunities. Many Nigerians code-switch, combining NPE, local languages, and English to create a hybrid cultural resource. Pidgin is amplified by the media, music and social media, all of which contribute to its cultural revaluation. The residual influence of colonialism is still evident in Nigerian culture, as demonstrated by the preference for Standard English. By penalising NPE and elevating Standard English, the state and educational institutions perpetuate these hierarchies and maintain their authoritative control.

The study's findings are consistent with previous research indicating that ruling classes often legitimise certain cultural forms and favour one form of expression over another. Research has indicated that individuals are often treated differently based on their manner of speech [15]. It appears that even Nigerians who have a strong command of English often attend additional classes to improve their British accent, driven by a professional obligation to communicate in standard English.

Conclusion. The paper discusses the cultural perceptions of standard language versus non-standard varieties, such as pidgin, and to what extent they result in linguistic discrimination, as well as their connection to the cultural revaluation of NPE. The paper reveals that NPE speakers are occasionally marginalised due to the preference for

standard English, which shapes social status, literacy, and establishes linguistic hierarchies. The paper demonstrates biases against certain accents and dialects, which are classified as either standard or non-standard. The term “correct English” suggests the existence of a standard against which alternative linguistic forms are evaluated and classified as inappropriate. The cultural aspect of English in Nigeria is not neutral; it embodies the colonial history, globalisation, and struggles over local identity.

This tension between English and NPE highlights the cultural politics of language and how language and culture interact to shape communication and identity. Pidgin is often linked to a “lower social class” and can potentially reinforce feelings of inferiority, impacting an individual’s self-esteem and psychological well-being. Conversely, the adoption of pidgin as a legitimate form of expression has the potential to foster confidence, cultural pride and social cohesion, thereby promoting psychological well-being. The pressure to conform to standard English can create a sense of internal conflict between one’s cultural identity and social expectations. Individuals who use NPE in formal or professional contexts may experience feelings of judgement or stigma due to its perception as a “low-status” form of communication. On the other hand, people who are expected to speak standard English may experience stress or anxiety if they lack fluency, which can affect their confidence and self-esteem.

Fluency in “standard English” is a significant form of cultural capital in Nigeria, facilitating access to better schools, employment opportunities, and enhanced social mobility. Pidgin speakers may be excluded from spaces of power because their language is perceived as culturally “inferior”, despite its role as a *lingua franca* across Nigeria. This tension reflects a cultural negotiation: The cultural aspect also reveals that English in Nigeria is not neutral; it embodies colonial history, globalisation, and struggles over local identity. The implications for the future suggest that NPE’s revaluation in media and education may help lessen the stigma and encourage inclusivity. It is evident that Nigeria’s cultural revaluation of English and NPE is indicative of a continuous negotiation of identity and power. While NPE is increasingly used to represent cultural pride and national solidarity, English remains the language of institutional power. Collectively, they capture the multilingual reality of Nigeria, where linguistic diversity is not just a problem, but a cultural asset.

Linguistic discrimination may be lessened if NPE were acknowledged as a valid language resource in educational institutions in order to reduce instances of linguistic discrimination. Rather than outlawing or penalising its use, teachers should implement translanguaging strategies that incorporate NPE with English and native tongues. This approach has been shown to boost pupils' self-esteem and literacy.

Further research could focus on ways to implement the findings of this study in the Nigerian education system.

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СТАНДАРТНА ТА ПІДЖИН-АНГЛІЙСЬКА МОВА В НІГЕРІЇ: КУЛЬТУРНА ПЕРЕОЦІНКА ТА ЇЇ ВПЛИВ НА ОСВІТНЮ СИСТЕМУ

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Стаття досліджує культурні уявлення про стандартний варіант англійської мови у порівнянні з нестандартними різновидами, такими як нігерійський піджин, а також їхній вплив на суспільство. Розглянуто, як лінгвістична дискримінація впливає на психологічне благополуччя та соціальну ідентичність носіїв нігерійської піджин-англійської мови (NPE). Дослідження має якісний характер і ґрунтується на даних, отриманих із новинних джерел, Міжнародного корпусу англійської мови, спостережень та інтерв'ю.

Результати дослідження показують, що лінгвістична дискримінація щодо носіїв NPE виникає через те, що NPE має культурну стигму та асоціюється з нижчим соціальним класом і неписьменністю. Стандартна англійська, успадкована з британської колоніальної епохи, сприймається як ознака освіти, соціального статусу та мобільності. Через тиск, пов'язаний із необхідністю говорити стандартною англійською, нігерійці прагнуть удосконалити свій британський акцент, навіть якщо вони вже мають високий рівень володіння англійською мовою.

Напруження між англійською та NPE підкреслює культурну й лінгвістичну політику, а також взаємодію між мовою та культурою у формуванні комунікації та ідентичності. Ця подвійність створює психологічний і соціальний тиск на мовців, впливаючи на їхню самооцінку та відчуття власної ідентичності.

Попри це, багато нігерійців здійснюють код-перемикання, поєднуючи NPE з іншими корінними нігерійськими мовами та англійською, створюючи таким чином гібридний культурний ресурс. У статті стверджується, що

замість заборони NPE або покарання за його використання вчителі повинні впроваджувати транслінгвальні стратегії, які поєднують NPE, англійську та рідні мови, тим самим підвищуючи самооцінку та грамотність учнів. Подальші дослідження можуть бути спрямовані на пошук шляхів упровадження результатів цього дослідження в освітню систему Нігерії.

Ключові слова: культурна оцінка, лінгвістична дискримінація, Нігерія, освітня система, піджін-англійська, стандартна англійська.

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