



PSYCHOLOGY OF ENGLISH AND PIDGIN SPEAKERS IN NIGERIA: CULTURAL REVALUATION

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The paper examines the cultural perceptions of the Standard English language versus non-standard varieties, such as pidgin in Nigeria. It discusses the ways in which linguistic discrimination affects the psychological well-being and social identity of Nigerian Pidgin speakers. The research is based on a qualitative approach. Data was generated from news, observation, the International Corpus of English (ICE), and interviews. The study's results reveal that linguistic discrimination against pidgin speakers occurs because Pidgin carries a cultural stigma and is associated with the lower class and illiteracy. Standard English, inherited from British colonial masters, is perceived as a mark of education, class, and social mobility. Also, due to pressure to speak Standard English, Nigerians who speak English enroll in extra classes to refine their British accent. The tension between English and pidgin language highlights the cultural politics of language, how language and culture interact to shape communication and identity. This duality creates psychological and social pressures on speakers, influencing their self-esteem and the negotiation of their identity. Despite this contention, many Nigerians code-switch and combine Pidgin, other indigenous Nigerian languages, and English, creating a hybrid cultural resource. The paper suggests that instead of outlawing or penalizing its use, teachers should implement translanguaging strategies that incorporate Pidgin with English and native tongues, boosting pupils' self-esteem and literacy

ПСИХОЛОГІЯ НОСІЇВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ТА ПІДЖИНА В НІГЕРІЇ: КУЛЬТУРНА ПЕРЕОЦІНКА

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Ключові слова: лінгвістична дискримінація, піджин, стандартна англійська, культурний капітал, перемикання кодів, культурний ресурс.

У статті досліджується культурне сприйняття стандартної англійської мови порівняно з нестандартними різновидами, такими як піджин, у Нігерії. У ній обговорюється, як лінгвістична дискримінація впливає на психологічне благополуччя та соціальну ідентичність носіїв нігерійської піджин-мови. Дослідження базується на якісному підході. Дані були отримані з новин, спостережень, Міжнародного корпусу англійської мови (ICE) та інтерв'ю. Результати дослідження демонструють, що лінгвістична дискримінація щодо носіїв піджин-мови відбувається тому, що піджин несе культурну стигму та асоціюється з нижчим класом та неписьменністю. Стандартна англійська мова, успадкована від британських колоніальних господарів, сприймається як ознака освіти, класу та соціальної мобільності. Також через тиск, пов'язаний з необхідністю спілкуватися стандартною англійською, нігерійці, які розмовляють англійською, записуються на додаткові заняття, щоб удосконалити свій британський акцент. Напруженість між англійською мовою та мовою піджин підкреслює культурну політику мови, те, як мова та культура взаємодіють, формуючи комунікацію та ідентичність. Ця подвійність створює психологічний та соціальний тиск на носіїв мови, впливаючи на їхню самооцінку та усвідомлення своєї ідентичності. Незважаючи на це твердження, багато нігерійців перемикають коди та поєднують піджин, інші корінні нігерійські мови та англійську, створюючи гібридний культурний ресурс. У статті пропонується, щоб замість того, щоб забороняти чи карати його використання, вчителі впроваджували трансмовні стратегії, які поєднують піджин з англійською та рідними мовами, підвищуючи таким чином самооцінку та грамотність учнів.

Introduction. Language is a crucial aspect of an individual's identity and a primary means of communication [Drożdżowicz & Peled, 2024]. The English language and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) are simultaneously used in Nigeria. The English language and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) are undergoing cultural reevaluation in Nigeria, reflecting shifting perspectives on language, identity, and power. Cultural reevaluation is the process where customs, symbols and variants previously devalued or stigmatized are reexamined and given new status, legitimacy, or acceptance in society [Bourdieu, 1991].

Within the sociolinguistics field, cultural reevaluation refers to changes in the perceived value of

a language or dialect, often associated with identity, media representation, or shifting cultural perspectives [BBC News, 2017]. Pidgin's increasing cultural and communicative capital in media, music, and daily interaction is highlighted by this reevaluation, which defies previous ideologies that stigmatized it as "low" or "non-standard" [BBC News, 2017]. Nigerian Pidgin English, also referred to as "Broken English," "Naijia" or "Broken," is an English-based Creole language and the mixture a dialect of English and other indigenous Nigerian languages spoken as a type of lingua franca throughout Nigeria [Faraclas, 2021; Adelani et al; Nwoda, 2023]. It is spoken as a lingua franca throughout Nigeria, with an estimated 3 to 5 million individuals speaking Nigerian Pidgin

English as their first language, while 75 million speak it as a second language [Faraclas, 2021]. Indeed, Faraclas (2021) estimates that there are more than 110 million Nigerian Pidgin 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 [Oyebola, 2020; Haruyama, 2021; Nwoda, 2023].

Pidgin was first utilized by Europeans, such as the Portuguese, as a means of interaction during the 17th-century Atlantic slave trade [Nwoda, 2023; Lin et al, 2023]. 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 [Faraclas, 2021; Oyebola, 2023]. It is estimated that more than half of the Nigerian population speak NPE [Faraclas, 2021]. Pidgin is also popular than the three major languages in Nigeria and spoken by more than half of the Nigerian population [Agbo, 2020; Mensah, Ukaegbu & Nyong, 2021]. As such, pidgins serve as a *de facto* franca, bridging socioeconomic classes, cultures, and educational levels. Compared to Standard English, Pidgin has a larger audience [Onyejelem, 2020; Inyabri & Mensah, 2021].

However, there is tension between Nigerian Pidgin 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 with diverse ethnic groups reflected in more than 525 languages and 371 ethnic groups [Udoh et al., 2021; Akindele, Olatundun, & Akano, 2022; Alshehri, 2023]. Although more people use English than ever before on a global scale, including in Nigeria, it is widely used in government, industry, and education as a lingua franca [Christine, 2021]. English language variations exist in Nigeria, and Nigerians speak English differently because English is a second language for many Nigerians, who also speak multiple languages, which influences their proficiency in the language. Because of the diverse languages spoken in Nigeria, multilingualism is perceived as a severe problem in Nigeria due to the fear of domination

by other ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the English language is the *Lingua Franca* in multicultural countries due to its neutrality, peaceful coexistence, and ability to accommodate diverse languages, which facilitates successful communication between various ethnic and regional groups in Nigeria [Akindele et al., 2022; Nwoda, 2023; UNESCO, 2025]. Despite its low institutional status, Pidgin is widely used and referred to as languages of the illiterate.

Literature suggests that speakers of dominant languages tend to discriminate against speakers of less dominant languages and exhibit a tendency towards linguistic bias [Fridland, 2020; Ashtari & Krashen, 2023; Orjinmo, 2023; Drożdżowicz & Peled, 2024]. Despite the ubiquity of English, some English speakers face discrimination because of their accent and speaking 'queens' Standard English". Reports also suggest that educators in Nigeria punish and flog students to refrain from speaking Pidgin English or another Nigerian indigenous language in the classroom, suggesting linguistic discrimination [Orjinmo, 2023]. Linguistic discrimination also occurs in the classroom, where students are prevented from speaking pidgin, resulting in physical violence and punishment because it is considered inferior [Fridland, 2020; Ashtari & Krashen, 2023; Nwoda, 2023; Oyebola & Ugwuanyi, 2023; Orjinmo, 2023]. Linguistic discrimination manifests in instances where speakers and accents of non-standard languages, such as Pidgin, are devalued and considered the language of the illiterate. This also suggests that linguistic discrimination based on accent, dialect, and speech patterns is fueled by these misconceptions.

Literature Review. Bourdieu's 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. Additionally, colonial language ideologies continue to influence the perspective on linguistic correctness in postcolonial countries [Phillipson, 1992]. Standard English is the language that is socially and institutionally dominant, while Nigerian Pidgin is still stigmatized despite being widely used, especially in official educational and governmental situations. 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 (LD) refers to the unfair treatment of people based on their first language, accent, perceived vocabulary size (i.e., whether or not the speaker uses sophisticated and varied vocabulary), modality, and syntax [Baker-Bell, 2020; Drożdżowicz

& Peled, 2024]. It is also a form of racism and is known by other names, such as glossophobia, linguicism, and language. A person may instinctively make assumptions about the education, social standing, character, or other characteristics of another person based just on differences in language use, which could result in discrimination [The Diversity Trust, 2023; Drożdżowicz & Peled, 2024]. Overt linguistic racism can take the form of intentional humiliation or humiliating, such as "ethnic-accent bullying," which happens regardless of a person's actual level of English ability [Álvarez, 2020; Christine, 2021]. This kind of prejudice can have serious psychological effects because people who experience discrimination due to their language have inferiority complexes and begin to think that they are less intelligent. Linguistic discrimination is also amplified by language prescriptivism, which holds that there is a proper way to use language.

Drożdżowicz and Peled (2024) describe linguistic discrimination as when members of linguistic community A, usually the more powerful one, consistently discriminate against members of linguistic community B, the less powerful one, when members of B fail to meet implicit linguistic expectations of community A (e.g., by speaking with an accent or using a different linguistic modality). Members of A might act in this way without being aware of their underlying prejudices against B's language and other unfavorable views about them.

Debates about Linguistic discrimination (LD) and non-standard language are also rooted in Standard Language Ideology (SLI). Standard language ideology (SLI) informs and influences attitudes towards 'non-standard' language varieties. Standardization research on standard language ideology (SLI) has also begun to challenge earlier narratives that focused on multilingual contexts, considering minority and regional language varieties and the new speakers of these varieties, as well as examining the linguistic prejudice and discrimination caused by standard language ideology (SLI) [McLelland, 2020; Ayres-Bennett, 2021].

Materials and Methods. Data was generated from news observation (patterns in discourse from radio, news, and classrooms), the International Corpus of English (ICE), and interviews. By conducting interviews, rich, qualitative data on participants' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions can be gathered. This context enhances observational and corpus data [Demirci, 2024]. By observing language speakers, researchers can record and observe how language is used and spoken, including discourse patterns, lexical choices, and framing, which provides the researcher with insights into language, communication, and journalistic practices [Shin & Carpenter, 2022]. ICE is an international research

project that compiles and examines similar corpora of English dialects from all around the world. The initiative, launched in 1988 by Sidney Greenbaum at University College London, aims to facilitate the comparison of English grammar and usage across various national and regional variants. ICE provides an analysis of grammatical patterns, lexical choices, and code-switching between English and Nigerian Pidgin, made possible by the use of this corpus as a research tool, which offers genuine, empirical data on language use in formal and informal contexts [Wunder et al., 2010]. Additionally, the ICE corpora's architecture makes it easier to compare results with other English dialects, thereby improving the generalizability and dependability of the findings. Thus, using ICE-Nigeria enables a thorough, data-driven analysis of sociolinguistic phenomena and multilingual interactions in Nigeria.

Results and Discussion.

Nigerian Pidgin in Media and Public Discourse

Data from the International Corpus of English (ICE) reveals the examples of a pidgin language and its English translation suggests:

"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)" [WAZOBIA FM 95.1 News of 16th July, 2012].

'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)' [WAZOBIA Facebook Discussion Board accessed 1st August, 2012].

'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 4).

The prevalence of Pidgin is also evidenced in the British Broadcasting Service (BBC) World Service, which introduced BBC News Pidgin, an online news source in West African Pidgin English, in 2017 in Lagos, Nigeria (Bradley, 2017). As a result, the BBC created a "standardised" version of Pidgin to cater to West African speakers. The British Broadcasting Corporation offers a Pidgin language service, and there are radio stations in Nigeria that only broadcast in Pidgin. Wazobia FM, the first Nigerian radio station to broadcast in Pidgin, drew a sizable listenership because of its news source.

The cultural revaluation of languages is evident when formerly stigmatized linguistic forms acquire

new social legitimacy and acceptance (Bourdieu, 1991). This trend also manifests in Nigeria, where Nigerian Pidgin is gaining increasing respect as a symbol of togetherness and national identity, thanks to media outlets like BBC Pidgin [BBC News, 2017].

Smart People Speak English and the Stigmatization of Pidgin Speakers

Although NPE is the language 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 participants suggested,

'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 English speaker or language 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 Nigerian Pidgin English is associated with discriminatory social perceptions attached to Nigerian Pidgin English speakers. Linguistic discrimination against the Pidgin dialect spoken in Nigeria is rife because it differs significantly from the other dialects in Nigeria. It also reflects the linguistic reality of the uneducated and illiterate; this accent has traditionally been subject to societal stigmatization.

Language ideologies and policies that stigmatize speakers of other language variations and favor groups are reproduced by institutions when standardized English is viewed as the sole acceptable variation of the language, leading to power disparities. Some of the participants in this study, living abroad, mentioned feeling less insecure in their ability to communicate in English back in their home country, but then losing that confidence due to how they are treated in English-speaking nations

Findings suggest that, due to pressure to speak Standard English, Nigerians who also communicate fluently in English 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 Brits 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-traveled. 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.

Equally, concerns have been raised about the impact of Pidgin English usage by students in Nigeria's educational system because it adversely affects students' writing in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) English language course due to the use of broken English [Persis Adu-Boahen, 2020; Agbo, 2020; Oyebola, 2023; Nwoda, 202]. Many young people find it challenging to communicate effectively in either their native language or Standard English due to the prevalence of Pidgin English. Suggesting that the implementation of overt and language policies that reinforce linguistic racism might exacerbate the situation in schools and other educational settings. In addition, one of the arguments against the use of pidgin is that people commonly converse incorrectly due to the normalization of casual English and the belief that speaking English well is a sign of elitism. Naturally, this is a contributing factor to students' ongoing academic struggles, as well as a general decline in their ability to speak and pronounce words correctly when necessary in diverse communities and social circles.

In view of the perception of Pidgin English, scholars of Standard Language Ideology (SLI) argue that it produces a gap not limited to language use: it separates individuals who speak the standard from those who do not belong to the community of speakers of the idealized variation [Fairclough, 2021]. The phrase "Racio-linguistic ideologies" was first used by Rosa and Flores (2015) to characterize the phenomena of standard language variations in relation to the racial characteristics of its speakers. Standard variations are typically associated with a particular nation and its idealized portrayal of its people. While pluricentric standard languages, spoken in many nation-states and comprising two or more national standard variations, are generally commonly acknowledged, SLI permits some regional diversity [Vogl 2012, 11].

The Cultural Aspect of English.

Findings also reveal that the difference between English and Pidgin is not just linguistic; it is profoundly cultural. American and British English varieties function as cultural capital that unlocks doors to prestige, social networks, employment opportunities, and educational opportunities. Many Nigerians code-switch, combining Pidgin, local languages, and English to create a hybrid cultural resource. Pidgin is amplified by media, music, and social media, which contribute to its cultural revaluation. The hegemonic power of colonialism residue still influences Nigerian culture, as evidenced by the preference for Standard English. By penalizing Pidgin and elevating Standard English, the state and

educational institutions reproduce these hierarchies and uphold hegemonic authority.

This study's findings align with previous findings that ruling classes normalize particular cultural forms as "legitimate" and prefer a specific language use over another, as well as biased treatment of people based on their language use and speech characteristics [Drożdżowicz & Peled, 2024]. Findings suggest that, due to pressure to speak standard English, Nigerians who also communicate fluently in English enroll in extra classes to refine their British accent.

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 Nigerian Pidgin. The paper reveals that Pidgin speakers are occasionally marginalized 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" implies that there is a benchmark by which alternative linguistic forms are evaluated and labeled as improper. The cultural aspect of English in Nigeria is not neutral – it embodies the colonial history, globalization, and struggles over local identity.

This tension between English and pidgin language highlights the cultural politics of language and how language and culture interact to shape communication and identity. Pidgin is associated with a "lower social class" and may reinforce inferiority, affecting self-worth and psychology. On the other hand, embracing Pidgin as a valid form of expression can promote confidence, cultural pride, and social cohesion, which support psychological well-being. Pressure to conform to Standard English can cause internal conflict between cultural identity and social expectations. People who speak Nigerian Pidgin in formal or professional settings may feel judged or stigmatized because it's considered "low-status." Conversely, people expected to speak Standard English may experience stress or anxiety if they lack fluency, which can affect confidence and self-esteem.

Fluency in "Standard English" functions as cultural capital in Nigeria, providing access to better schools, jobs, and social mobility. Pidgin speakers may be excluded from spaces of power because their language is seen as culturally "inferior," even though it serves 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, globalization, and struggles over local identity. Implications for the future suggest that Pidgin's revaluation in media and education may help lessen the stigma and encourage

inclusivity. A continuing negotiation of identity and power is highlighted by Nigeria's cultural revaluation of English and Pidgin. While Pidgin increasingly represents 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 Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) is acknowledged as a valid language resource in educational institutions. Instead of outlawing or penalizing its use, teachers should implement translanguaging strategies that incorporate Pidgin with English and native tongues, boosting pupils' self-esteem and literacy.

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