



Pidgin English And English Language Development Of Preschoolers In Preschool Centres In Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

The study examined Pidgin English and English language development of preschoolers in preschool centers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The study employed the descriptive research design. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were posed to guide the study. The sample size for this study was 200. The instruments for data collection were a designed questionnaire. Data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The result of the findings showed that there was a significant relationship between listening ($r=0.139$) mimicking ($r=0.139$) Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English in preschool centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The study concluded that Pidgin English is a street language in language development and educational process of the preschool children. It has some adverse effects on them. It impedes proper communication in the sense that the children have limited language as a means of communication and recommended amongst other that parents, elder siblings, relatives, teachers and significant others should endeavor to stop the use of Pidgin English in communication with preschoolers since it does not help them excel academically.

Keywords: Pidgin English, English language, development, preschool

INTRODUCTION

Language is a characteristic which every human being is endowed or blessed with. It is a unique gift used naturally as one tool of expression consisting of different sub-skills which includes listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Amadi-Ali, 2008). Furthermore, Gleason (2009) opined that, language development primarily occurs during pre-school years. The greatest period of growth in speech and language development occurs in preschool children between 2 to 5 years of age. At birth, the only communication skill a child has is listening skill. The rest of the skills gradually develop with years.

Listening has been defined by many scholars as the ability to comprehend verbal utterances, it is also the ability to pay attention to verbal utterance and extract meaning from what have been listened to. In addition, it is an active skill which entails not only the perception of sound, but also the ability to understand and evaluate the sound (Amadi-Ali, 2008). Children acquire this skill by listening to various sounds on recordings, they can listen and repeat correct speech pattern; they can listen and re-tell stories given to them during speeches or story time etc. Such listening activities will give practice in acquiring information, following directions, preparing to contribute to discussion and interpreting mood (Amadi-Ail, 2008).

Listening to Pidgin English makes the preschoolers acquire the skill of speaking Pidgin English because, when a child is born, right from his first month, he begin to listen to the language of his immediate environment, by so doing, acquire it spontaneously. If the language of his immediate environment is Ibo, Yoruba, Hausa, Pidgin English, the Standard English or any other language, he will begin to acquire it

spontaneously without any one teaching him (Bybee, 2006). That is why, after listening to a particular language, the next thing a child does is to mimic that particular language from people around him. The same thing happens when a child listens to people speaking Pidgin English; he must definitely mimic and speak the same Pidgin English he is often exposed to.

By so doing, become less attentive to Standard English. This will definitely hinder the child from learning the correct or Standard English he needs to learn. This is why it is very important to teach children listening skills, mostly in Preschool Centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, so that they can acquire the skills for listening and also aid them to know the right language to listen to. Mimicking of Language means to imitate or copy speech or words from a person who speaks a particular language often playfully or derisively (Lewis, 2010). It is also to imitate in a servile or unthinking way; it is equally a process by which a person imitate or copy somebody in his action or speech. Mimicking is the act or technique of portraying a character, mood, idea or narration by gestures and bodily movement. Mimicking of Pidgin English among the little children has propelled them (preschoolers) to learn how to speak Pidgin English fluently, more than every other language around their immediate environment.

Pidgin English is the language of the streets, traders, illiterates etc that are not competent in speaking the correct English and Adults who knows the proper time and place to speak this Pidgin English (Nwornu, 2011). When these little children acquire the wrong language skill, they will not easily leave to speak it, even when they are old or at other levels of their education, it will still be part of them. That is why during their further education, they will find it difficult to cope with the standard or correct English they need to learn.

Nwomu, (2011), opined that, Pidgin English is the lower variety of English language. It is the first form of English language or contact language that was developed in Nigeria. She continued by saying that, Pidgin English is a result of a mixture of English language and other European language and Nigerian indigenous languages. This form of language served the purpose of communication among those traders and their middle men (explorers and missionaries). Even now, illiterates (i.e. people that are not educated) or uneducated people, use it as a language of communication with the educated or learned ones. This means that, it is not for the Pre-schoolers, rather, it is for those illiterates that did not acquire formal education or those adults that knows how to speak the correct English but decided to speak Pidgin English for a particular moment. In this case, they have already acquired the skill of speaking the correct English any time they like. But, for these preschoolers, hence they acquire the wrong language skill, they will tend to speak it every time and any where they are (Kenpro, 2010).

Pre-school children (2-5 years old) acquire the language of their immediate environment spontaneously. They assimilate it without being taught by any one, rather, they acquire it through listening, mimicking and then speak what they heard and speak freely and fluently (Kenpro, 2010). Example; a child in the researcher's neighbourhood, who always stay with the parents and older siblings that do not know how to speak Standard English began to speak Pidgin English when he started talking and that affected him when he was enrolled into nursery school. The teachers in the pre-school centre where he was enrolled into were all inexperienced and untrained, who didn't know how to speak the Standard English, these helped to worsen the child's situation by speaking Pidgin English all through. His stay in school helped to increase his problem of speaking Pidgin English.

Now, if this child continue in this way, till after his nursery school, it will be very difficult for the child to acquire the Standard English that is needed for him to do well in his further education. This can also render the child useless in his academic pursuit since he doesn't know how to speak simple correct English. So listening, mimicking, and speaking Pidgin English can automatically hinder or deprive a child (pre-schooler) from acquiring the Standard English he needs to learn (Kenpro, 2010).

Beyond the very pre-primary, elementary, colleges and higher level of schooling, English language becomes the medium of instruction and subject in the curriculum (Oyetunde, 2002). It is against this background this study examined Pidgin English and English language development among preschool children in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Statement of the Study

Pidgin English has caused a lot of harm in the language development of Pre-school children. There are observable problems which are involved in the spread of Pidgin English in our pre-school Centres especially, in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The problems are; the high rate of growth of Pidgin English which has almost dominated the Pre-school Centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. Pidgin English has deprived children (Pre-schoolers) from speaking the right or Standard English. Thereby, making them not to develop skills in speaking the Standard of English language. It has caused them to be frustrated in their academic pursuit in other levels of education, where they should speak and write well in English language, they will find themselves making numerous mistakes in speaking and writing the Standard English since they do not acquire the skill of speaking Standard English when they are in tender age. When these little children (Pre-schoolers) grow up, they will be unable to express themselves meaningful within simple and correct English during discussion or presentation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine Pidgin English and English language development among preschool children in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The objectives of this study are to:

1. Find out the relationship between listening to Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English in preschool centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.
2. Determine the relationship between the mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development among pre-school children in pre-school Centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The research was structured around two major questions.

1. What is the relationship between listening to Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English language in pre-school Centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development among pre-school children in Pre-school Centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

1. There is no significant relationship between listening to Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English in Pre-school Centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State,
2. There is no significant relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development among Pre-school children in Preschool Centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted the descriptive research design

Area of the Study

The study was carried out in preschool Centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Population of the Study

The study comprised of public pre-school pupils in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the 200 respondents (teachers and Parents) and 5 Pre-school Centres in the study area. To carry out the random sampling techniques, a ballot system was used with the inscription "S" for selected and "N" for not selected. There is a deliberate selection of an equal number of 40 respondents from each of the 5 sampled schools for effective analyses of the result to avoid bias.

Instrumentation

Data was collected using A 15 items researcher developed questionnaires titled, Pidgin English and English Language development of preschoolers Questionnaire (PEELDPQ) structured on four points' likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) 4 points. Agreed (A) 3 points, Disagreed (DA) 2 points and strongly Disagreed (SD) 1 point, was used for the study.

Validity of Instrument

The instrument was validated by three (3) experts in the department of Early Childhood/Primary Education and another, in Measurement and evaluation, in the department of Educational foundation, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.

Reliability of Instrument

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a test retest technique was used. The instrument was administered and re-administered after two weeks to 20 respondents (teachers and Parents) outside the sampled size of the study. After which, a reliability coefficient of 0.05 was established using Pearson Product Moment Correlation co-efficient. The instrument was judged suitable for the study.

Administration of Instrument

The researcher visited all the 5 pre-school centres that were used for the study and administered the questionnaire personally to the respondents (teachers/parents). This was intended to ensure high percentage return. The researcher at each occasion explained the purpose of the study, the content of the questionnaire and the mode of completion to the respondents. They were given ample time to complete the filling of the questionnaire.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient at 0.05 levels of significance in order to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Research Question one: *What is the relationship between the listening to Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English in preschool centers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?*

Table 1: Summary of Relationship between listening to Pidgin English and spread of Pidgin English

| Variables | $\sum X$ $\sum Y$ | $\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$ | $\sum XY$ | r_{cal} |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Listening of pidgin English | 550 | 1634 | 2465 | 0.99 |
| Spread of pidgin English | 888 | 4086 | | |

The result from Table 1 shows the summary of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of the relationship between listening to Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English in preschool centres. The result of the analysis shows an r-value of 0.99. This indicates that listening to Pidgin English has a high positive relationship to the spread of Pidgin English.

Research Question two: *What is the relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development of preschool children in preschool centers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?*

Table 2: Summary of Relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language Development

| Variables | $\sum X$ $\sum Y$ | $\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$ | $\sum XY$ | r_{cal} |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Mimicking of pidgin English | 484 | 1244 | 2134 | 0.96 |
| Poor standard English | 874 | 3920 | | |

The result from Table 2 shows the summary of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of the relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development of

preschool children. The result of the analysis shows an r-value of 0.96, indicating a high positive relationship to poor Standard English language development of preschoolers.

Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between listening to Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English in preschool centers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

Table 3: Summary of PPMC significant Relationship between listening to Pidgin English and spread of Pidgin English

| Variables | $\sum X$ $\sum Y$ | $\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$ | $\sum XY$ | r_{cal} | df | r_{crit} | Decision |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----|------------|-----------------------------|
| Listening of pidgin English | 550 | 1634 | 2465 | 0.99 | 198 | 0.139 | Null hypothesis is rejected |
| Spread of pidgin English | 888 | 4086 | | | | | |

Significant @ .05 alpha level

The result from Table 4 shows that at 0.05 level of significance and with a degree of freedom of 198, the calculated r-value (0.99) is greater than the critical value of r (0.139). This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between listening to Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English in preschool centres in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development of preschool children in preschool centers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

Table 4: Summary of PPMC significant Relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development

| Variables | $\sum X$ $\sum Y$ | $\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$ | $\sum XY$ | r_{cal} | df | r_{crit} | Decision |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----|------------|-----------------------------|
| Mimicking of pidgin English | 484 | 1244 | 2134 | 0.96 | 198 | 0.139 | Null hypothesis is rejected |
| Poor standard English language development | 874 | 3920 | | | | | |

Significant @ .05 alpha level

The result from Table 4 shows that at 0.05 level of significance and with a degree of freedom of 198, the calculated r-value (0.96) is greater than the critical value of r (0.139). This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development of preschool children in preschool centers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

DISCUSSION

The findings in hypothesis one shows that there is a significant relationship between listening to Pidgin English and the spread of Pidgin English in preschool centers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The findings of the study support the views of Spencer (2004) who opined that there are observable problems which are involved in the spread of Pidgin English in our pre-school centers. Spencer further opined that one of these problems is that the high rate of growth or the frequency of the use of Pidgin English which has almost dominated the preschool centers, thereby depriving children from speaking the right Standard English.

The findings in hypothesis two show that there is a significant relationship between mimicking of Pidgin English and poor Standard English language development of preschool children in preschool centers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. This finding is in agreement with the views of Crystal (1998) who observed that Pidgin English has deprived children from speaking the right or Standard English. Thereby, making the children not to develop skills in speaking the standard English language and that, pidgin is a simplified means of linguistic communication, as it is constructed impromptu, or by conversion, between individuals or groups of people.

CONCLUSION

Pidgin English is a street language in language development and educational process of the preschool children. It has some adverse effects on them. There are observable problems which are involved in the spread of Pidgin English in the preschool centers. One of these problems is the high rate of growth and frequency of the use of Pidgin English which has almost dominated the preschool centers. Pidgin English impedes proper communication in the sense that the children have limited language as a means of communication. The listening, mimicking and speaking of Pidgin English affects the proper acquisition and development of Standard English language to these preschool children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. The government should endeavor to employ trained and qualified teachers that are competent in speaking the Standard English language.
- ii. Parents, elder siblings, relatives, teachers and significant others should endeavor to stop the use of Pidgin English in communication with preschoolers since it does not help them excel academically.

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