

Functional Use of Pidgin in Billboard Advertisement in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigates the use of pidgin in billboard advertisement in Nigeria. A purposive sampling method is used to select a total of 50 samples for the study. The accommodation theory is applied to the analysis of data to explain the motivation behind the use of pidgin in advertisement. The findings show that pidgin serves as barrier breaker, popular culture, source of creativity and vehicle for the realisation of Nigerian identity in the context of billboard advertisement. To this end, the use of pidgin in billboard advertising serves as a means of mass appeal to Nigerians, both educated and non-educated, and across linguistic and cultural divides.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing focus on the study of Nigerian pidgin because of the communicative roles it plays. These studies tend to investigate the nature and the attitude to Nigerian pidgin. Some of the notable studies in this regard are Elugbe and Omamor (1991), the function of Nigerian pidgin and Uses of Nigerian pidgin, Ofuani (1981). The present study however is to study the use of Nigerian pidgin in billboard advertisement. Though, there have been studies in the use of Nigerian pidgin in advertisement (Osoba, 2014), none has studied the use of Nigeria Pidgin in billboard. To this end, this study aims to expand the existing literature in Nigerian pidgin by studying the use of pidgin in billboard advertisement in Nigeria, particularly in the South-South region.

Advertising Language

Fruburger and Rotzol (1997) cited by Oluwole Akinbode (2012:1) defines advertising as “the market instrument which advertisers use to influence the behaviour of the consumers at the point of purchase”. This means that advertising plays important role in the economy of production and marketing which to a large extent determines the success or failure of any productive venture. As a result, the message and mode of advertising are well considered before use. In this case, the copy writers do a comparative analysis of target audience to determine their preferences in terms of religion, language and social affiliations. It is believed that focusing on the interest of the target audience makes advertisement more effective. Language is one of such important factors that define preferences of a target group. Therefore, language is very important in creating effective advertising. In Nigeria, there are quite a number of languages with a few serving as lingua-franca, that is, language for cross- cultural and inter-ethnic communication. These are English and Nigerian pidgin. Between the two, Nigerian Pidgin appears to be more popular because of its use in educational, religious and other social settings.

The Use of Nigerian Pidgin in Advertising

Nigerian Pidgin is widely used in Nigeria, both in formal and informal settings and across ethnic, religious and social divides. Azubike (2003), citing Kelechukwu notes that more than five million Nigerians speak Pidgin. He equally observes that pidgin is a second language for another seven million Nigerians. Little wonder, in a *Special Lecture* at the Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, on October 13, 2010, the guest lecturer, Carlos Moore, advocated the use of Nigerian Pidgin as a national lingua-franca. Agheyisi (1984), Elugbe and Omamor (1991), Osoba (2000) and others have earlier suggested the adoption of Nigerian Pidgin as a common language in Nigeria. A notable reason adduced is the fact that it is the fastest growing common language in Nigeria today. From practical experience, it is noted to have the widest

currency among Nigerians from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. In fact, this currency is reflected in the language use in music, social interaction, religious activities, mass media and literary works. In recent times, pidgin has made considerable in-road into settings where Standard English was originally used. For instance, Ken Saro Wiwa wrote a full length novel, *Sozaboy* using pidgin. Major General Mamman Vatsa's poem, "Tori for Get Bow Leg"; Aig Imoukhuede's "My Pidgin Stew and Sufferhead", Fadaka's *Pidgin Translation of the Universal Human Rights* are entirely Pidgin. In the works of prominent Nigerian literary icons like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Festus Iyayi, Gabriel Okara, the use of Nigerian Pidgin is evident.

Moore (2010) citing Osoba notes that as far back as the early 60's, the late foremost Nigerian jazz and popular music icon, Fela Kuti, had adopted, apart from Yoruba, his mother tongue, Nigerian Pidgin as the language of his music. From the 1960's until his death in 1997, he sang most of his songs in Nigerian Pidgin. In fact, (about 90%) of his works from the 1970s until his death in 1997 were all in Pidgin.

Literature Review

There have been scholarly works in the study of pidgin in the context of advertising. Below are selected reviews of related scholarships. Endong (2015) studies Nigerian Pidgin in print advertising. The study aims to show the inherent complexity of advertising copy due to the prevalence of different and personalized spelling systems in the representation of NP words. The study is a content analysis of randomly selected print advertising copies partially written in NP. The study uses informational and the symbolic meaning approaches to illustrate how most Nigerian advertising copywriters artfully deviate from the standard orthography. The study notes that the use of pidgin may be relatively unnoticed in cases where it is not dominant in the body of the advertising copy, the language has the potential of triggering the curiosity and interest of the consumer to know more about the product advertised. The study equally shows

how effective the use of NPE may be in catching the attention of readers. According to the author, the use of pidgin has the potential of creating fun, and increasing the entertaining qualities of the print advert. All these characteristics may motivate consumers to go for the product or service on promotion.

Osoba (2014) examines the functions of Nigerian Pidgin. The intention is to establish how pidgin adverts communicate the intended meaning of the advertisers and how the audience perceives them. Data was collected for the study through listening to radio and television broadcasts. Findings from the study show that the Nigerian Pidgin is used among the educated and barely educated. The study also notes the use of pidgin in the mass media, schools and government offices despite the fact that it is not the official language of the country.

Rotimi (2012) studies language and cultural identity of Nigerians in diaspora. The study aims to examine the linguistic behavior of Nigerians in diaspora as they exchange ideas and opinions on Nigerian issues. The study uses a popular website known as the 'Nigeria Village Square' as a case study. The study uses Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) as its analytical tool. Findings from the study show that Nigerians in diaspora employ and use simplified variety of English, indigenous coinages and idiomatic expressions, loan words as a deliberate attempt to construct their identities as Nigerians.

Akinbode (2012) examines sociolinguistics aspect of advertising language. The study aims to find out how advertising language influences the consumer's purchasing attitude. In order to achieve this aim, the study examines the essential features of advertising language in the mass media which enables the advertisers to reach the target audience. The study uses Interactional Sociolinguistics as its analytical tool. Findings from the study show that, apart from the language which advertisers use to persuade consumers, they also employ extra-linguistic factors such as context of situation and illustrations which play a significant role in determining the overall texture of an advertisement and its effectiveness. The study recommends that

Nigerian advertisers should improve on the quality of their advertisement linguistically and stylistically, since the language of advertising is relevant to human choices in a competitive world of commercial enterprise. Also, it recommends that marketers and advertisers should improve on their communication skills because effective communication in English is a *sine-qua-non* for effective advertising.

Ndimele (2011) investigates the communication problems that speakers of pidgin language encounter. The paper reveals that irrespective of the important roles Nigeria Pidgin play, its speakers encounter social unacceptability among others. This is because there have been little or no practical effort by sociolinguists and other stakeholders to evolve a workable standardization programme that will raise the sociolinguistic status of the language. The paper recommends steps that could lead to the development of a standard variety of Nigerian Pidgin, which would in effect give it a sociolinguistic vitality that will enhance its social acceptability.

Ohoneme and Okwilagie (2009) carry out a study of billboard advertisement. The study analyzed select billboard advertisement in Ibadan Metropolis using the Lexico- Semantic approach to explain the meaning making processes in advertising. The study shows that the pictorial and graphological illustrations compliment texts in achieving effective communication in billboard advertisement. This study deviates so much from the present study as it does not examine Nigerian pidgin as the present study does.

Theoretical Consideration

The study is based on accommodation theory. Accommodation theory is an attempt to explain the considerations in the choice and usage of language in communication situation between speakers and audience from different ethnic linguistic background. Its main thrust is that the more a speaker tries to use the language or code of the target audience, the more favorable response she/ he is likely to get. According to Gile,

Taylor and Bourish (1973: 177) “ the greater the effort in accommodation that a bilingual speaker put into his message, the more favorable he would be perceived by listeners from another ethnic group.” It is believed that through this process linguistic and cultural barriers are collapsed or broken. Thus, this result in acceptance and mutual respect which in the short and in the long run promotes good and harmonious relationship. The choice of this theory is predicated on the assumption that linguistic accommodation behaviour promotes good relationship between and among interactants. The theory is relevant to the present study because the advertisers in the studied data use the NP to disseminate information instead of the Standard English in order to identify and accommodate the speakers of pidgin in Nigeria. It is assumed by the advertisers that the choice of pidgin would elicit favorable response from a greater number of people than the use of any other language variant.

Methodology

The data for the study are text extracts from billboards. This means that pictorials and other artistic impressions were not part of the data. They are collected within a period of one year, that is, between July, 2016 and June, 2017 and are collected within and across towns in the cities of South-South region of Nigeria such as Asaba, Warri, Benin and Port-Harcourt. Data is collected using purposive sampling method to collect a total of 15 extracts. The study adopts a content analytical method to establish the data as instances of Nigeria Pidgin by studying their structure and meaning in the context of use. Finally, the study examines the data to explain their usage as a means of speech accommodation techniques to reach a wider audience for the purpose of achieving the objective of advertising presentation.

Data Presentation and Analysis

1. Jemok water (e de kamkpe)
2. Power oil (na our oil)
3. Omo (e de wash well well)

4. EfCC (nobody de above the law)
5. Semovita (better chop for everybody)
6. Indomine (Mama wen cook for us you do good)
7. Airtel: (de give bonus yafu-yafu)
8. Maggi (Every woman na star)
9. Origin (if no be origin, e no be original)
10. Panadol extra (ogbonge cure for strong strong headache)
11. Power oil: (na our oil)
12. Poly foam- (make una carry dash me)
13. E.F.C.C. (na we get am)
14. Dr Iguedo gboko clenser na the ogbonge medicine wen de clean all the yamma, yamma
15. Raid insecticide – raid power e no get photocopy

In order to explain the use of NP as a means of speech accommodation in billboard advertising in Nigeria, the study identifies four main functions of NP in the society and explains how the consideration of these functions influence its usage in the advertisement under study. These functions are:

1. The use of NP as a barrier breaker
2. The use of NP as a popular demand.
3. The use of NP as a source of humor and creativity
4. The use of NP as a Nigerian identity

1. Nigerian Pidgin as a Barrier Breaker

In the context of advertising, NP is conceived as a barrier breaker as its use permeates various divides. For instance, it is used across ethnic and religious divides and among the educated and the non- educated. It could be noted that unlike English, the use of NP transcend all imaginable divides in Nigeria ethno-religious and cultural settings. It is in the consideration of the above that advertisers use pidgin for advertisement. Extracts

1 (Jemok water: e de kamkpe)

- 2 (Power oil: na our oil), and
- 3 Omo: e de wash well well)

are instances of the use of Nigerian Pidgin in billboard advertising. For instance, extract 1 is used to advertise purified water (Jemok). It is made up of English words and the pidgin form 'na'. In the case of extract 2, English and an indigenous language, Igbo is equally combined. This is also the case of extract 3. It is noted that the use of Nigerian Pidgin is a technique used to establish contact with the wider audience that speaks NP. The use of NP therefore is communication accommodation technique that the advertisers use to neutralize linguistic barriers, thereby, establishing a relationship with the target audience. This serves the interest of advertising as it thrives on the positive evaluation of the people in order to achieve a set goal.

2. Nigerian Pidgin as Popular Culture

In recent times, the use of pidgin has acquired so much popularity because it is used to express the social-political consciousness of the people in a realistic and appealing manner. In realisation of this, individuals, corporate organisations and governmental institutions have resorted to the use of pidgin in order to establish rapport with the Nigeria public. In order to achieve the objective of the advertising, advertisers have identified and developed programmes that are popular and embedded in pidgin culture in order to reach a wide audience at a minimal cost. This explains why radio programmes, TV programmes and other activities that are deemed to attract wide audience are used as strategic avenues for advertising. For instance, *Wazobia*, a popular FM radio station runs all its programmes in pidgin. Also, Ken Saro Wiwa wrote a full length novel, *Sozaboy* using pidgin. In line with this, the advertisers have come to identify the use of pidgin as such a popular culture in the country and a veritable tool to reach the people. Extract

- 4 (EFCC: nobody de above the law),
- 5 (Semovita: better chop for everybody) and
- 6 (Indomine: mama wen cook for us you do good)

could be used to illustrate this. In extract 4, English words; nobody, above, the law are used in conjunction with a pidgin element 'de'. Also, in extract 5, for instance, all the words used are English but the structure is that of pidgin. This is also the case of extract 7 and 8 in which English words are combined with pidgin. The choice of pidgin in advertising is a communication strategy that is used to express the advertising message in the true sense of Nigerian experience thereby identifying with the wide Nigeria audience. This corroborates the view of Balogun when he observes, "NP is down to earth and as such many people are motivated and carried along" (2013:95). From the explanation above, it is obvious that through the use of the pidgin medium, the advertisers aim to accommodate the generality of Nigerian and thus realise the object of advertisement which is reaching a wider audience with the message of their goods and services.

3. Nigerian Pidgin as a Source of Creativity

Besides the use of Nigeria Pidgin as a means of communication, it is also used for creative and humorous purposes. An examination of extracts

- 7 (Maggi: Every woman na star)
- 8. (Airtel: de give bonus yafu-yafu) and
- 9. (Origin: if no be origin, e no be original)

will explain how Nigeria Pidgin is used as a vehicle for creativity and humor in the context of advertising. In extract 7, 'Everywoman' is likened to a star in a metaphorical expression of indirect comparison. Extract 8 illustrates the use of metaphor that is reinforced by repetition. The kind of bonus that is given by Airtel is compared to the satisfactory eating of a delicious

food .that is captured with the use of the expression *yafu-yafu*. The repetition of the word *yafu-yafu* is also significant because it accentuates the creative effect of the expression. Also, extract 9 which is an advertisement for a brand of drink known as origin has a play on the use of the word origin as a name of drink and as a source. This is also reinforced by a partial repetition of the words 'origin' and 'original'. There is also the case of grammatical parallelism in which a whole structure is repeated as could be seen in the following expression: *if no be origin, e no be original*. From the above, the use of pidgin could be understood as a mini-poetic expression that is targeted at enchanting the audience. This affirms the view of Balogun when he says that Nigerian Pidgin has rhythm that gives it a poetic form (2013:5). This form of usage by advertisers brings novelty, freshness and creativeness which ultimately has a positive effect on the attitude of would be customers. In essence, the creative use of language in advertising is a form of speech accommodation that is targeted at accommodating a wide range of people with divergent interests.

4. The Use of NP as a Vehicle of Nigerian Identity

Over the years, pidgin has come to reflect the Nigerian identity both in and outside the country. Collaborating this view, Rotimi in his study of language and cultural identity of Nigerian in Diaspora affirms that the 'africanization' of English language through the use of culture specific lexis, code-switching and verbal genre is a deliberate attempt by Nigerians in diaspora to construct their identities as Nigerians, even though most of them are educated and are capable of sustaining their discourse in Standard English (Rotimi 2012:21). This has made the use of pidgin to be embraced by both the high and the low as a means of reaching the people. The realisation of this, has led to effort to document the use of pidgin in Nigeria. For instance, in recent times, efforts have been made to compile a dictionary of the Nigerian Pidgin. Also, there are such usages as 'nija' and other

such slogans that are crafted in pidgin which have attracted huge following. The following extracts:

10. Panadol extra: ogbonge cure for strong strong headache
11. Power oil: na our oil
12. Poly foam: make una carry dash me
13. EFCC na we get am
14. Dr Iguedo gboko clenser na the ogbonge medicine wen
de clean all the yamma, yamma
15. Raid insecticide: raid power e no get photocopy

are instances of pidgin that are used to connect with the Nigeria people

Conclusion

In this paper, the researchers have been able to explain the use of Nigerian Pidgin in billboard advertisement. The analysis carried out in this paper explains the functions of Nigerian Pidgin through the application of Speech Accommodation Theory. The paper provides illuminating insights on billboard advertisement and explains the motivation behind the use of pidgin in advertisement in Nigeria. Findings from the study shows that pidgin is used in billboard advertisement as a means of mass appeal to Nigerians across educational, linguistic and cultural divides. Thus, it is insightful to note that NP billboard adverts can be studied using accommodation theory as a useful analytical tool.

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