

Nigerian Pidgin as Lingua Franca: Emerging Communication Trend in The Anthropocene

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Article DOI: [10.55677/SSHRB/2025-3050-1201](https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2025-3050-1201)

DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2025-3050-1201>

KEYWORDS: Anthropocene; Creole; Lingua franca; Nigeria Pidgin; Nigerian Languages.

ABSTRACT: This study examines Nigerian Pidgin as a lingua franca and an emerging communication trend in the Anthropocene. As Nigeria's diverse linguistic landscape necessitates a common language of interaction, Nigerian Pidgin has risen to prominence, facilitating communication across various ethnic and social groups. Based on the Communication Accommodation Theory, the research explores pertinent literature on Nigerian Pidgin and other related materials. The study also conducted a content analysis of a Nigerian Pidgin tutorial and advertisements of two international brands, Colgate Toothpaste and Indomie Noodles displayed on YouTube. The analysis revealed that the Nigerian Pidgin content garnered a considerable amount of likes, views, subscriptions, and comments, which are all significant YouTube metrics that reflect a video's popularity. Using determinants such as multilingual setting, national spread, number of speakers and widespread use in the media, it was argued that Nigerian Pidgin meets relevant criteria for designation as a lingua franca. The widespread adoption of Nigerian Pidgin is demonstrated by its prevalence in almost every sphere of human interaction, including education and advertising. The implications of these findings underscore the importance of Nigerian Pidgin in fostering inclusive communication within the context of linguistic diversity, while recommending the recognition of Nigerian Pidgin as an official language and lingua franca in Nigeria.

Published: December 04, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The role of language in a society permeates its religious, cultural, educational, scientific, social and political needs. Nigeria, located in West Africa, is among the world's most linguistically diversified nations, making the idea of a common national language germane to its national development. With a projected population figure in 2022 at 216,783,381 comprising 108,350,410 males and 108,432,971 females (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023), Nigeria is home to 520 living Indigenous languages (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2024). Section 55 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, recognises English, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba as official languages. The commonly spoken Pidgin in Nigeria is not mentioned in the constitution. As Elugbe and Omamor (1991) insightfully opined, in Nigeria, Pidgin is presumably more extensively spoken than any of the three major languages namely, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba. Yet, the Nigerian Pidgin (hereinafter referred to as NP) remains an unofficial language.

Numerous studies have been conducted over the years to investigate various aspects of NP to advance its status (Donwa-Ifode, 1983; Egbohokare, 2001; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Emenanjo, 2010; Esizimetor, 2010; Faraclas, 1996, 2004; 2021; Mafeni, 1971; Todd, 1974; 1995) amongst others. Still, there is much to be done. For instance, Iwuchukwu and Okafor (2017) carried out a study on NP research conducted in the Department of Linguistics, University of Ibadan. They found that during the three decades (1980–2010), there were just three master's-level studies, and thirteen undergraduate-level studies, with no PhD dissertation on NP. This demonstrates that NP is not essentially well-positioned to compete in the Nigerian linguistic landscape of the twenty-first century, let alone survive it, given the presence of indigenous languages, English, and foreign languages.

Observably, despite its increasing popularity, the unofficial status of the NP endangers the language. Therefore, in the Anthropocene, where human activities have a dominant influence on climate and environment, the survival of the NP has become critical because of its potential benefits in communications about sustainable development and behavioural change. Akande and Salami (2010) highlighted the value of incorporating NP in national development in the context of national integration and development.

Therefore, exploring the NP as a lingua franca and an emerging communication trend is necessary, notwithstanding the substantial and continuously expanding corpus of research already available on the subject matter. In light of this, the present study examines pertinent literature on the status of the NP in the Nigerian linguistic and Anthropocene ecology. It explores language and society, the NP's origins, identity, status, and shifting profiles, all of which are placed in the framework of determinants that influence the development of a lingua franca within the context of the NP. The study also carried out a content analysis of NP content on YouTube to bolster the status of NP as the lingua franca.

Language and Society

The role of language in a society permeates its religious, cultural, educational, scientific, social and political needs. The importance of a language is inextricably tied to the fortunes of its users. Liberson (1982) states that although languages have the same intrinsic power, language users differ in their capacity to change the way that languages are used, which in turn affects the language's fortunes. As a result, language users may not be aware of how their power affects their language, which is the result of complex historical and socio-political processes interacting. Therefore, if a language is linked to a flourishing culture, religion, trade, science, technology, and education, or if it is linked to a dominant political and economic power, its profile may improve favourably. However, a people and their language may suffer from natural calamities, conquest, migration, urbanisation, violence, and prejudice. Power struggles in a multilingual environment like Nigeria have demonstrated the unworthiness of using offensive policies and language planning to alter language usage patterns. This is always the case: the majority class makes great efforts to uphold its dominance and prominence as soon as it assumes the dominant political position. According to Bamgbose (1990 p.1), "They use the same position of advantage to continue to resist change and perpetuate elitism which the use of favoured language entails". One way of doing this is by creating official languages or the recognition of a lingua franca. Bamgbose, further observes that 'the consequence of this is that the two classes of citizens are immediately created, the class of the advantaged, and therefore included and the class of the disadvantaged, and therefore excluded'. The excluded group is denied basic rights to literacy, information, law and participation in the process of governance, and are discriminated against because of the language they speak.

Nigerian Pidgin: Conceptualisations and Evolution

Pidgin refers to a language that develops when people of different languages need to communicate but do not speak the same language (O'Donnell & Todd, 1991; Oluwatobi, 2021). Others like Egba and Nkanu (n. d.) opined that pidgin is essentially a simplified language used for interpersonal or group communication that is created spontaneously or through convention. In an attempt to describe Pidgin, Elugbe and Omamor (1991), averred that it is a type of marginal language that develops to meet certain communication demands under clearly specified conditions. These conceptualizations may have served as the foundation for the development of NP as a lingua franca, which is a term used to describe a language that speakers of diverse native tongues have accepted as a common language. Thus, the boundaries between Pidgin and lingua franca are a little hazy due to their inextricable connectedness.

Although the origin of NP is still unclear, there is some degree of consensus among scholars that NP is a language with a strong English foundation that was first used as a contact language for communication during the transitional period of trade in some parts of Nigeria centuries ago. Nigerian Pidgin has been traced to the Niger Delta and coastal areas of Nigeria (Adegbija, 2003; Egbochukwu, 2001; Elugbe, 1995; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Esizimetor, 2002, 2010; Eze, 1980), which later spread to other parts of the nation (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

According to Mensah (2011) and Onyejekwu & Onyedikachi (2020), NP originated in trade with the Portuguese in the Niger Delta region in the 1400s. The language is the result of the fusion of many Nigerian languages with current European languages, among others (Agbo & Plag, 2020; Inyang, 2016). These languages include English, French, Portuguese/Spanish, German, and many more. The pidgin dialects of Warri, Sapele, Benin, Port Harcourt, Lagos, and Onitsha are among many that have emanated from NP. NP is also noted to have become increasingly popular for use in dealings with the country's socioeconomic activities (Ihemere, 2006).

Scholars once held the opinion that NP was exclusively utilised by illiterate Nigerians. Among the earlier controversies characteristics of the nature of identification, definition and description of pidgins, are the erroneous claims and misconstruction that labelled them as 'minimum makeshift languages' (Buah, 1974) or 'emergency or marginal means of communication' (Todd, 1974). As Agheyisi (1971) asserted, the majority of NP speakers were those with minimal or no formal education. Agheyisi (1984) also contended that this early pidgin was limited, if not completely, to the trading environment. On his part, Bamgbose (1995) observed that the Nigerian Pidgin was originally spoken by illiterate people. These bogus but useful submissions led to contemptuous branding of Pidgins as 'broken English', 'bastard Portuguese and Nigger French'. Such perceptions denied pidgins their linguistic statuses and significance, thus overlooking them as linguistic systems in their own right. Other derogatory references to pidgins include 'baby talk' and 'lazy', corrupt and primitive thought processes.

However, according to Fayer (1990 p.1), 'It is only comparatively recently, that linguists have realized that pidgins and creoles are not versions of other languages but rather new languages'. According to Crystal (2008), pidgins are distinctly creative modifications of natural languages that have their own rules and structure. NP is now spoken by academics, lawyers, university graduates, and journalists in Nigeria due to the country's current sociolinguistic reality (Akande, 2008; Kniele & Beloucif, 2023; Osoba, 2021). Despite changes brought about by linguistic evolution, much work remains to be done with the NP.

As Esizimetro (2010) noted, attempts to write NP dates back to the late 1700s. Several scholars have written extensively about NP's orthography and provided linguistic standards for the language (Donwa-Ifode, 1983; Egbohkhare, 2001; Elugbe 1995; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991; Emenanjo, 2010; Esizimetro, 2010; Essien, 2003; Eze, 1980; Faraclas, 1983, 1996; 2004; 2021; Igboanusi & Peter, 2005; Mafeni, 1971; Mowarin, 2010; Okon, 1997, 2003; Todd, 1974). However, no consensus was reached to accept any of them until after the first NP conference, which took place at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, on June 9-11, 2009, organised by the Institute of African Studies (IFRA), University of Ibadan.

Although there have been scholarly efforts to standardise the NP by Aziza, (2015), Elugbe (1995), Faraclas, (1996), and Egbohkhare (2001) among others through its grammatical system to prove that it is a linguistic system different from those languages from which they draw their lexicon. Elugbe and Omamor (1991) quoting Hall (1966), stated that two conditions must be met for a language to be pidgin namely, "Its grammatical structure and its vocabulary must be sharply reduced; secondly, the resultant language must be native to none of those who use it". From this perspective, while commendable efforts have been made to standardise the NP, care should be taken to avoid overly intellectualising its grammatical form because the appeal of its organic spread stems from its less demanding requirements. Nevertheless, starting with the inaugural NP Conference in 2009, the contribution of scholars to the standardisation of the NP has been undeniable. Since then, scholarly interest in the NP has sparked global research interest. Figure 1 illustrates some of the most recent academic initiatives to advance conversations around the NP.



Figure 1. Call for Papers on Nigerian Pidgin

The Call for Papers for the *Naija Festival* in Figure 1 is scheduled to be held in October 2024. This is a bold step by the Naija Language Network towards advancing the status of the NP.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a review of the literature and content analysis. The Researchers searched for articles from databases such as Google, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate using search keywords such as "Nigerian Pidgin", "Nigerian Pidgin English" and "Pidgin English", "Pidgin English Conference". These databases were included because they host a wide range of scholarly articles, books, and conference papers. Additionally, a YouTube search for the terms "Nigerian Pidgin," "Pidgin English," and "Pidgin English Advert" was conducted. The study includes the top results from each of the three searches. YouTube was chosen on purpose because it is a popular source of multimodal content.

Theoretical Framework

This paper hinges on the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Howard Giles developed the CAT in 1971 to explain speech after observing novel ways in which individuals modify their communication with others. Nevertheless, CAT was eventually modified to incorporate both verbal and nonverbal communication (Hordila-Vatamanescu & Pana, 2010). It explores how individuals adjust their communication styles to either converge or diverge from others. According to Soliz, Thorson and Rittenour (2009), accommodation is performed for seeking approval, inclusion, affiliation, or interpersonal goals, whereas non-accommodation serves to highlight differences between people.

When it comes to CAT, it is crucial to remember that communication always takes place in a context. Relationship negotiation, especially the negotiation of power, is a part of the conversation. Effective communication accommodation fosters a shared sense of identity between communicators (Hordila-Vatamanescu & Pana, 2010). Individuals who speak different first languages will feel more unified despite their differences when they attempt to adapt by blending their languages to create a new language that works for them. As Soliz et al. (2009) pointed out; non-accommodation helps to draw attention to individual differences, whereas accommodation is done to gain acceptance, inclusion, affiliation, or interpersonal goals. This theory is relevant to understanding the growth and evolution of NP in several ways.

First, convergence involves adapting one's communication style to be more like the other person's. In the context of Nigerian Pidgin, speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds converge towards NP as a common lingua franca to ensure mutual intelligibility. This convergence fosters greater understanding and communication efficiency in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multilingual society. Secondly, CAT posits that people adjust their communication to signal group membership and social identity. By using NP, individuals assert their Nigerian identity and create a sense of belonging and solidarity among speakers, which supports its growth and widespread use. Thirdly, Nigerian Pidgin is used in various social contexts, including informal conversations, media, music, and advertising. Speakers accommodate their language use depending on the context and audience.

For instance, media personalities might use NP to reach a broader audience, while musicians might use it to connect with their fans. As Akinfeleye (2008) noted, the NP accommodates fun and creativity and as such it has been able to fill significant actual space of communication. This adaptability and accommodation in different contexts contribute to the dynamic nature and expansion of NP. Fourthly, by converging towards a common language like Nigerian Pidgin, social and ethnic barriers are reduced.

As can be deduced from the above, a large number of Nigerians speak English in addition to their Mother Tongues, Pidgin, and/or other languages. Due to the unfathomable depth of the human creative wellspring, patterns of social interaction, and boundless avenues for communication, languages grew more accommodating and adaptable, leading to the prevalent occurrences of code-mixing and code-switching (Adekunle, 1990). Based on these considerations, the CAT is appropriate for this study.

The Status of NP as a Language

For several decades now, the status of NP is shrouded in some controversy. Whether intellectual or trivial, the controversy has serious practical implications on its identity. Is it a language? Then let it be given the proper constitutional recognition and treatment accorded to other languages spoken in Nigeria; otherwise, its relegation and non-recognition as a language in Nigeria will confine it to the realms of intellectual discourse. According to Elugbe and Omamor (1991), among the 'World Englishes', there are those who see NP as a variety of English languages. However, Aziza (2015), Egbokhare (2001), Elugbe and Omamor (1991), Faracclas (1996), and many others have shown that the NP is not simply a linguistic phenomenon, but a language with its structure and is associated with a community of speakers.

Thus, Elugbe and Omamor (1991) argue for official recognition of the NP as a separate language in Nigeria. Egbokhare (2001) supports this contention on the basis that the NP is not just a linguistic phenomenon, but a language with its structure and is associated with a community of speakers. Notwithstanding, NP has been creolized in some parts of the Niger Delta. Creoles are languages that originated as pidgins and were later nativised by a speech community and by becoming the mother tongue of a community; it expanded its functions and resources (Raymond & Ngulube, 2022). As Faracclas (2004) states, NP seems to be going through a creolisation process, especially for children of intertribal marriages or for those who reside in multilingual cities like Lagos or Port Harcourt.

According to Faracclas (2004, p. 828), "no Creole language in the world has nearly as many speakers as NP." A few studies published in the last fifteen years have estimated that three to five million Nigerians speak Pidgin as their first language, with over 75 million people speaking it as a second language (Egbokhare, 2001; Faracclas, 2004; Grimes, 1992; Ihemere, 2006; Onyejelem & Onyedikachi, 2020). Other studies have suggested that Nigerian Pidgin's ethnic neutrality, adaptability, and trendiness have contributed to its rise to prominence and reputation as the language of survival and excellence in Nigerian higher education institutions (Egbokhare, 2021; Faracclas, 2021; Osoba, 2021). Despite its informal status, Raymond and Ngulube (2022) contended that NP serves as Nigeria's de facto lingua franca.

As Mafeni (1971) pointed out, a philosophy of education or language that values human contact in society, as well as human growth, cannot afford to downplay the significance of a lingua franca such as Pidgin. Even though NP is not accorded any official status in Nigeria's Constitution, its sociolinguistic profile is rising as the de facto lingua franca as it permeates all domains of language use including the home, media, workplaces, entertainment and schools. Though NP is not officially used as a medium of instruction in schools, it has been noted that teachers in the states of Rivers and Bayelsa still use it for explanation, particularly in the early stages of primary education, as there is no other language that the students speak in common (Ndimele, 357).

From the foregoing, it may be deduced that, even in cases where a language is not recognised by the constitution, specific factors determine its status as a lingua franca. The following factors, among others, are important to consider:

i.) Multilingual Setting

Multilingualism is one linguistic factor that naturally necessitated the growth and spread of the NP. According to Eberhard et al. (2024) in a recent Ethnologue publication, Nigeria is home to around 520 indigenous languages that are spoken by different ethnic groups. This estimate does not include the NP and English, which is a foreign language imposed on its population as a national language at the expense of native languages. According to Iwuchukwu and Okafor (2017), Pidgin, a shortened language for inter-ethnic communication and interaction emerged as a potent national language in Nigeria due to the country's multilingual past.

Many would agree that it is easier to acquire NP skills as it requires no formal education and lacks the complexities of English and indigenous languages. The utilisation of the NP serves to mitigate the language divide that occurs across the many ethnicities and societies in the country (Adetuyi, Jegede & Adeniran, 2018). On the other hand, the English Language is accessible to the educated few; making its use as a communicative means limited to minority users, thereby alienating a majority of non-users who lack formal education.

ii.) Number of Speakers

Languages are classified as 'major', 'minor' 'small' and so on, based on the numerical strength criterion (Garry & Rubino 2001 p. xi). Regarding Nigerian languages, power/dominance in addition to the aforementioned criterion played a prominent role in the choice of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as major languages (Essien, 2002; Mafeni, 1971). This notwithstanding, the total number of speakers of the three major languages and other minority languages put together; is no match to over 75 million people speaking NP as a second language (Egbokhare, 2001; Faraclas, 2004; Grimes, 1992; Ihemere, 2006; Onyejelem & Onyedikachi, 2020) and between three and five million Nigerians speak Naijá as their first language (Egbokhare, 2001; Elugbe 1995, Faraclas 1996, 2004; Ihemere, 2006). Thus, NP is considered a lingua franca due to the significant number of speakers.

iii.) NP in the Media

In actuality, NP is now widely available across a variety of media platforms, including social media, radio, television, newspapers, and other venues, in addition to being utilised extensively within linguistic circles. Additionally, NP has developed as an essential tool for communicating with the public on behalf of government organisations. NP was originally used on the radio in 1959 by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation's National Programme Service (Durodola, 2013). The popular comedic sketch series "Save Journey" employed it as a communication medium for ten years, during which time it was said to have "thrilled the majority of listeners" (Ladele, Adefela & Lasekan, 1979, p 131).

Radio dramas made in NP were especially successful in the 1970s. Among them were drama series such as "Njakiri Man," "Gandu Street," and "Join the Band Waggon" (Willy, 2012, as cited in Durodola, 2013). TV viewers were riveted by NP drama series such as Bendel Television's "Hotel De Jordan." Audiences in Rivers State and beyond found great appeal in Radio Rivers' "News in Pidgin English" in the 1980s and 90s, which was hosted by the legendary Boma Erokosima. These programmes gained popularity, most likely as a result of the rapid NP creolisation occurring in many Niger Delta regions.

In recent times, the rise of WAZOBIA RADIO/TV stations, which exclusively transmit on NP, is evidence of NP's rising popularity. This completely changed the significance of NP as a language for popular mobilisation and public education. Numerous more pidgin-based radio and television stations are currently broadcasting in Lagos, Rivers, Imo, Delta, Edo, Abia, and Kano states, in addition to WAZOBIA RADIO/TV. In the past, Pidgin in the media was reserved for jokes, humour cartoons, etc. Among the entertainment sectors where NP was utilised more regularly and prominently were comedy, music, and film. However, according to Egbokhare (2001), a lot has changed because it is now used to spread essential information for propaganda, poetry, news, public enlightenment, and other purposes.

As Durodola (2013) pointed out, Fela Anikulapo made his radio debut by employing NP as a language of wider communication and as an oppositional tool to challenge poor government. The Nigerian film industry, known as Nollywood, has also had an impact on the value of NP (Durodola, 2013). The print media were not left out as newspaper stories, cartoons, and light-hearted writing are often written in NP. Iroko (1989) stated that *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, and *Sunday Times* offer weekly features inviting interested readers to submit narratives, poems, and educational pieces in NP.

On the global scene, international organisations like the United Nations have recognised the wide acceptance of the NP. For instance, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) acknowledged that NP is "becoming more and more important as a language (OHCHR, 1998, p. 48)". Hence, it has translated into NP two crucial UN texts namely, The United Nations

Charter and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Also, NP was introduced by the BBC in 2016 with a target audience of more than five million language users (Oyewole, 2016; Uwandum, 2016).

Ezegwu (n. d.) noted that in May 2016, *Love at War*, a Nigerian Pidgin (NP) production of Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, was produced by British Council Nigeria in collaboration with Nigerian and UK theatrical directors. Oyebola and Ugwuanyi (2023) use an interview-questionnaire method to investigate the opinions of Nigerian respondents regarding the introduction of BBC Pidgin and how they see Nigerian Pidgin. The results indicate that respondents usually express positive sentiments about both BBC and Nigerian Pidgin. They claimed that BBC Pidgin differs from the pidgin version they use, particularly in terms of vocabulary and orthography, and that their attitudes towards considering utilising either of the two kinds for official reasons in Nigeria were usually negative.

Furthermore, in 2011, Google launched a search interface in Pidgin English, further giving global endorsement to the language. It is common knowledge that NP is now the language used for the mass distribution of public knowledge, which makes it necessary for websites like YouTube to host tutorials on NP, as illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 2: NP Tutorial on YouTube
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ugu-3DtSXX0&t=16s>

Figure 2 is a 7:54 minute video tutorial on NP titled, "7 COMMON NIGERIAN PIDGIN English Phrases You NEED to SURVIVE in Lagos, Nigeria". This video represents one of the many informal academic forms that NP have recently taken. The video, which was released in January 2021, has garnered 1.7k (1,700) "Likes" and 64,72 "Views" as of the study's time, which is a noteworthy milestone on YouTube view counts and suggests a considerable interest in NP.

Besides, serving educational purposes, the NP has supplied Nigerian advertising media on both online and offline platforms with memorable jingles, quotes, dance tunes, coinages, lexical items, catchphrases, slang, and colloquial expressions (Raymond & Ngulube, 2022). Figure 3 further illustrates this trend.



Indomie Instant Noodles TV Ad : Pidgin - Mama do good

Figure 3: Indomie Noodles Advertisement
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwSjs8MsjdM&t=2s>

As seen in Figure 3, Indomie Noodles, a global brand, has been incorporating NP into its advertising campaigns for a while. Figure 3 is a screenshot of a 1:08-minute Indomie Noodles YouTube advertisement titled “Mama do Good” that was posted 13 years ago. Despite the time-lapse, as of July 13, 2024, the analysis found that the video is still generating engagements as it had 1,500 (1.5k) ‘Likes’ on YouTube, 2.9k subscribers, which means that it has 2,900 subscribers and 42 comments across different countries. This result suggests that the advertisement has significantly engaged and stimulated interaction with the target audience. Notable metrics on YouTube include likes, subscribers, and comments, as they indicate how popular and often viewed a video is.

Even though the multimodal advertisement featured the character's conversations, dancing, and singing, it is argued that the use of NP contributed to the advertisement's success in spreading and becoming memorable. This claim is supported, for instance, by a comment made seven years ago by @jozieash5016, which read, ‘best advert that I can remember.’ Akinfeleye (2008) observed that the NP has been able to fill a sizable actual space of communication because it allows for creativity and fun. The dynamic nature and growth of NP are facilitated by this flexibility and accommodation in various advertising contexts, highlighting the tenets of the CAT.

Therefore, as claimed by Faraclas (1996), knowledge of NP is fast becoming indispensable for a better understanding of Nigerian affairs and practical communication in Nigeria. It would appear that the Nigerian government has realised that NP is a powerful language of communication that reaches a bigger audience than any other Nigerian language (Iroko, 1989). Even the government now demands that most of their messages be sent to NP (Egbokhare, 2001), even though NP does not currently hold official status as a lingua franca. Consistent with the CAT, the NP has made it possible for Nigerians from all ethnic backgrounds to converge, communicate and accommodate their language differences via the wide usage of the language.



Figure 4. Colgate Advertisement in Nigerian Pidgin
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhrOC0OEM0k>

The screenshot in Figure 4 is from a 0.06-second Colgate Toothpaste YouTube advertisement titled “Do Yanga with Your Smile,” which can be loosely translated as “Be proud of your smile,” “Show off your smile,” or “Flaunt your smile.” The video was posted to YouTube in July 2024, one month before the analysis. It had 4k likes, 72k views, and 2,43k subscribers. The comment section was disabled, most likely due to the advertisement featuring children, thus no comments were left on the video. This implies that the advert in NP, a language previously relegated to the background (Agheyisi, 1971) achieved some milestones on YouTube, attesting to its ubiquity and increasing acceptance in media spaces. The extensive acceptability and use of the language in the media is demonstrated by the fact that global brand such as Colgate uses NP in their advertising campaigns in Nigeria. The OHCHR’s (1998) assertion that NP is becoming a more significant language lends credence to this claim.

iv. National Spread

The socio-political, historical, and linguistic variety of Nigeria provides the most contexts for understanding the spread of NP (Egbokhare, 2001). In addition to the NP, there are an estimated 7,164 languages spoken worldwide; 520 of these languages are spoken in Nigeria alone (Eberhard et al., 2024), excluding NP. They added that the country now has the greatest number of languages in Africa and ranks third in the world on linguistic diversity. NP, spoken by more than 75 million people, is the most commonly spoken pidgin/creole language worldwide and the language spoken by the greatest number of people outside of Africa (Faraclas, 2004), despite its exclusion. Among these languages, only NP perhaps, qualifies as a lingua franca because it is spoken in the country. Studies have estimated that three to five million Nigerians speak Pidgin as their first language, with over 75 million people speaking it as a second language (Egbokhare, 2001; Faraclas, 2004; Grimes, 1992; Ihemere, 2006; Onyejekwu & Onyedikachi, 2020). As Faraclas, (1996) noted, the NP is making these inroads because members of every regional, ethno-linguistic, and religious and socioeconomic group in the federation speak it. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the NP flourishes in such multilingual settings as Nigeria because of its neutrality and adaptability.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the NP as a lingua franca and an emerging communication trend in the Anthropocene. Through a review of the literature and content analysis, this paper anchored on the CAT, and demonstrated that determinants such as multilingual setting, national spread number of speakers and use of NP in the media have given it prominence in virtually every aspect of interactions such as education and communication. The review and content analysis revealed that global brands like the BBC, United Nations, Colgate Toothpaste and Indomie Noodles, individual content creators and even the Nigerian government have recognised the widespread acceptance and usage of NP and thus, have integrated it into specific communication contexts and advertising campaigns.

Granted NP is not an official lingua franca, scholars like Faraclas (2021) have opined that Nigerian Pidgin is a language of the future and may someday become official; coexisting with standard Nigerian English, despite barriers associated with negative stereotypes. Over the past few decades, the NP has received so many endorsements and appeals, despite its exclusion in the constitution. NP, a language that was once only spoken by the uneducated has made its way into prestigious fields, including politics, education, literature, and different aspects of the media. Consequently, NP is often used in Nigeria to close linguistic gaps. It is now evident that the linguistic map of Nigerian languages will be incomplete without the NP. Therefore the government should accord it the official status it deserves in Nigeria's Constitution just like Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and English.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

There were certain limitations in this study. One significant limitation was the reliance on secondary sources to argue for the lingua franca status of the NP. Thus, more research should be done to obtain primary data via surveys, and focus groups, among others about the NP speaking/writing public to ascertain real challenges affecting the status of the language. Again, the narrow focus of the content analysis on a few YouTube content was an obvious limitation that prevented the generalization of its widespread use to other sectors.

Despite these limitations, this study adds to the ongoing scholarly discourse on the de facto lingua franca status of the NP. By extending the evolution of the NP within the framework of the CAT, this study has laid the groundwork for additional research in even more intriguing facets of the language. Finally, it is anticipated that this study would benefit scholars and students of linguistics, and communication and media studies.

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