'CHALE SUP': MOTIVATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF PIDGIN ENGLISH USAGE IN A GHANAIAN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract
The English language is used for official purposes and the language in education in Ghana. However, the continuous penetration of Pidgin English (PE) in Ghanaian Senior High Schools (SHS) has been evident in recent times. The paper focuses on the motivations and perceptions of students, in a Senior High School (SHS) in Ghana, on their use of PE in school. It adopts the various motivations and perceptions of students on the use of PE, as identified in the literature, in a questionnaire survey for the responses of the research participants. The study reveals that PE is used as a concealment strategy in students' conversations against those outside their group, and as a means of solidarity. However, the participants exhibited mixed perceptions of the use of PE in schools. The paper provides insights into PE usage in Ghanaian SHSs.

Keywords: English language, Ghanaian, pidgin English, SHS, students

Introduction

Holmes and Wilson (2017, p. 89) describe pidgin as a language that "develop as a means of communication between people who do not have a common language… [It] arises when two groups with different languages are communicating in a situation where there is also a third dominant language". Ankrah (2018) adds that pidgin is a rough blend of one dominant language with that of one or more dependent groups. When languages of speakers come into contact, the vocabulary of a dominant language, referred to as the superstrate, blends with the grammar and syntax of other local dialects of the speakers, referred to as the substrate (Salifu-Asuro, 2015; Wardhaugh, & Fuller, 2015). Similar views are shared by Meyerhoff (2011) that, a pidgin language comes into being when two or more mutually incomprehensible languages come into contact and there is a need to have a common linguistic tool for interaction. Recent definitions of pidgin, therefore, have described the term as one that emerges from the combination of two or more languages to give rise to a common language of interaction among speakers. Holm (2010) describes pidgin as an artificial language for which the word is a corrupted version of the English word 'business'; as pronounced by 19th-century Chinese.

Pidgins are found in many countries. In West Africa, the plurality of languages in the region has given rise to the emergence of several language varieties. The historical background of the people brought about their contact with foreign languages, for which their local dialects fused with that of the foreigners. Through contact with English speakers who were mostly merchants, English pidgins emerged across the region, and are commonly found among the population. The term 'West African Pidgin English' (WAPE) has been used in the literature to refer to a variety of related pidgins 'that range from rudimentary to highly expanded, creole-like varieties' spoken in the coastal countries where English is an official language - the Gambia, Sierra-Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon (Holmes, 1988, cited in Ofulue, 2012). Based on geographical, historical, and linguistic factors, these languages are put under the Atlantic group of English-based pidgins and creoles (Sebba, 1997). Among the Ghanaian population, Dako (2002) avers that Pidgin English is spoken among a substantial population which draws much attention to its features, nature, development, and functions.

Like other WAPEs, Ghanaian Pidgin English (GhaPE) emerged as a result of contact between British tradesmen and West African traders. Ghanaian traders who had their indigenous languages had to find a means of breaking the linguistic barrier between them and their European traders. The blending of the English language with their local language, therefore, gave rise to a new variety of languages, referred to as GhaPE. As Huber (1999) claims, the evolvement of a pidgin in Ghana was a result of the need for communication between two parties, foreigners and indigenes, who were coastal people speaking Fante. GhaPE is hence described by Suglo (2012, p.7) as "a hybrid of Standard English and not only Fante but numerous Ghanaian languages".

Interestingly, GhaPE has moved from serving the need for communication between coastal traders and British merchants to becoming a lingua franca between non-speakers and speakers of English who may not be able to comprehend any Ghanaian language in common. GhaPE has become a distinct variety of English spoken in Ghana, besides the standard British English (BE) and American English (AE). Dako (2002) observes that pidgin in Ghana has become a vibrant spoken lingua franca with distinct features in respect of vocabulary, pronunciation, and other grammatical features. It has around 5 million speakers and is spoken mostly in urban and southern areas of Ghana (Huber, 2012). It is spoken in schools, churches, at homes, in the media, and at various functions for different purposes (Amoako, 1992, Suglo, 2012, Dako, 2002; Mireku-Gyimah, 2018). GhaPE has, therefore, become a vibrant variety and a strong medium of communication among the general population. It has a substantial population of speakers. In recent years, its distinct grammatical and phonological features have gained considerable scholarly attention drawing the interest of linguists to explore the nature of this variety.

As a former British colony, Ghana is among the Anglophone countries of Africa. The country's contact with British tradesmen and colonizers saw its adoption of the English language as its official language and the most prestigious language (Dako & Quarcoo, 2017). Nonetheless, the country has about fifty non-mutually intelligible languages (Anyidoho & Kropp-Dakubu, 2008). Out of the numerous languages, only six are used within the media space, and also used for

official and written communications: Akan, Ga, Ewe, Hausa, Dagbani, and Nzema (Dako, 2002). The need to have a mutually intelligible language of communication among the people, even after the coming of the British, gave rise to a new variety of English language, which is the GhaPE. GhaPE has become a current spoken communication tool. Across different regions and settings, the use of Pidgin English among the general population could be witnessed. The substantial population of speakers of GhaPE has also driven the interest of researchers to delve into the motivation for the growth of this variety of languages, especially in Ghanaian schools. Mireku-Gyimah (2018) notes for instance that any variety apart from the Standard English Language is frowned upon by most Ghanaians. Hence, the seemingly widespread acceptance of a pidgin variety in Ghana, mostly among secondary and tertiary students brings to mind the basic question of the motivation for the variety's use. These and other relevant questions have been the basis for several researches carried out to explore various issues surrounding GhaPE and student pidgin (SP). Notable among these studies include Mireku-Gyimah (2018), Dako (2002), Forson (1996), Forson (2006), Huber (2004), Pipkins (2004), Huber (2014), Ankrah (2018) and Dako and Bonnie (2014). To provide a clear understanding of the motivations and uniqueness of GhaPE amid attitudes towards other varieties of English used in Ghana, this paper sought to explore the use of pidgin as a communication tool in a Ghanaian SHS. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the motivation of the Ghanaian SHS students on their use of Pidgin English in school
2. Ascertain the perception of the Ghanaian SHS students on their use of Pidgin English in school

Ghanaian pidgin English (GhaPE) and its origins

Ghanaian Pidgin English, while present and widely used, is not regarded as a significant lingua franca in the same way that it is in other countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, and Liberia (Dako, 2012). There are two main historical accounts of how this linguistic variant emerged in the country. According to some experts, the language reached the nation with the introduction of European traders (Wiredu, 2013). It served as a means of communication between the locals and their colonial overlords to encourage trade. Because the language was mostly spoken by local tradesmen, it was seen as a low-status language. According to Wiredu (2013), Boadi (1971) holds that Pidgin English became a bastardized language used solely by subjects to their masters in Ghana. Other researchers believe that nomadic male laborers from Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as traders, soldiers, domestic workers, and some police officers from Nigeria, were responsible for the linguistic variation (Dako, 2012). The language evolved as "Kru brofo" or "Abongo brofo", according to one interpretation (Dako, 2013). This translates as "English that is not truly English." According to Baitie (2010), additional words for it include broken English or poor English, a divergence from Standard English.

Varieties of Ghanaian pidgin English

GhaPE has evolved and it is now widely utilized in the general community in a variety of settings. There are two primary varieties of the GhaPE known to be

in use: institutionalized or educated pidgin and non-institutionalized or uneducated pidgin (Osei-Tutu, 2016; Dako, 2013; Huber, 1999). According to Dako (2013, p. 149), the educated variant is "the acrolectal manifestation of GhaPE". He explains that this kind is utilized by students at second-cycle institutions and universities – i.e., by those who are thought to have some level of knowledge of Standard English (SE). Dako (2013) goes on to say this variety is not used as a need for mutual understanding. Its usage is not critical but it is used for various purposes. This variety can also be deemed Student Pidgin (SP), School Pidgin English (SPE), and Ghanaian Student Pidgin (GSP). Before the introduction of the educated variety, some individuals, such as male laborers, utilized the non-institutionalized variety, also known as the uneducated variety; it is largely spoken by the least educated or uneducated members of society (Mireku-Gyimah, 2018). This variety becomes one of need since uneducated persons may decide to communicate with this variety to educated people whom they do not share a common language with. It is also classed as the variety's lowest range and can also be known as town pidgin or motor park pidgin (Osei-Tutu, 2016).

Related literature

The creation and evolution of GhaPE have sparked some scientific interest. Many researchers have investigated various parts of GhaPE by explaining the language's distinctive traits and role. Amoako (1992) is one of the pioneering works in this area. His research projects diachronic and synchronic evidence of GhaPE through the analysis of tape recordings, music, newspapers, magazines, and interview data from educated and non-educated Ghanaians. He notes that GhaPE is a young language that is mostly used to promote cohesion and belongingness. Further, the study unravels that GhaPE contains twenty-one consonants, with the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ being the least common whereas the inter-dentals /Ɵ/ and /ð/ were not existent. Again, a constraint in GhaPE's general inflection, which forces users to rely on word creation, tone, and reduplication to communicate grammatical information is noticed in the paper. For example, reduplication is employed to imply plurality, and exhibit intensity, repetition, and continuity. The GhaPE, according to Amoako (1992) is used in several settings, with a predominant use by males. Dako (2002) examines GhaPE through student pidgin (SP). He asserts that SP is largely utilized by male university students for their out-of-classroom communication requirements. It was discovered to play a significant effect in tertiary students' language repertoire. Dako observes that SP has a distinct lexis to general GhaPE. He explains that the former does not have a separate vocabulary since users can readily augment their vocabulary demands with common languages. Further, he acknowledges the admixture of Twi, Ga, and SE as code choices in the SP and concludes that SP is a stabilized pidgin with lexical and structural possibilities beyond GhaPE. Pipkins (2004), on his part, studies the growth of pidgin among students in a school environment in Cape Coast – where it is expected that they use SE. Pipkin's paper focuses on the reasons behind the adoption of this variant among students in second-cycle colleges. The paper reveals that one of the most common motivations for students' use of pidgin is to fit in the school's environment. Other reasons include the ease of communication, the supposed joy and 'less pressure'

connected with its use, and the ability to communicate with all. Although males predominantly use this, their female counterparts are noted to adopt it to be accepted in masculine groups (Pipkins, 2004).

Suglo (2012) also explores the language attitudes to GhaPE among students by detailing the majority of speakers of the educated variety of GhaPE, the period of active acquisition, reasons for usage, and the attitude to the use of the variety. In respect of the majority speakers, Suglo observes that while more males speak PE than females, more Kwa than Gru language-speaking people are speakers of Pidgin. The study also asserts that PE is an urban phenomenon since it is widely used in urban areas in Greater Accra, Ashanti, and the Northern Regions of Ghana. Suglo observes that the SHS phase of the Ghanaian education system is the active phase where PE is acquired and used, primarily, as a way of solidarization within the school and extended to workplaces and beyond. Further, Dako and Bonnie (2014) provide an appraisal of SP as a youth language. They specifically explore the lexical, structural, and idiomatic peculiarities of SP as well as the details of its speakers. Although they agree that SP is a variety of WAPE, they believe that SP may not be considered a pidgin because it does not have reduced lexicon and grammatical structure nor a contact language, a parameter for holding a language to be pidgin. Additionally, they hold that SP, mainly spoken by male students outside the classroom, has its basis in GhaPE and is a phenomenon peculiar to Ghana. SP's out-of-classroom usage reflects its sociolectal connotations, one which signals "that the speaker is a product of a higher education" (Dako & Bonnie, 2014, p. 119). Finally, Mireku-Gyimah (2018) explores the motivations for the penetration of GhaPE and its resultant attitudes in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. The paper reveals that the use of GhaPE is trendy, comfortable, advantageous, and fosters a sense of belongingness. She concludes that although the participants admit that GhaPE is not standard, and may affect the SE, they express no regrets in its use.

Method

The population for the study was students in a Ghanaian Senior High School, which is located in Cape Coast, Central Region of Ghana. The school admits students from varied socio-economic and religious backgrounds, through the Computerized Schools Placement System of the Ghana Education Service. Considering the nature of this study, second and third-year students were purposely selected, during the 2021/2022 academic year, from the population because they had been in the school for a longer period and had been exposed to the pidgin culture of the school. Further, 203 students were sampled out of the said year groups to form the research participants. The consent of the participants and that of the school's administration were sought and approved. A questionnaire was employed as the data collection instrument. It sought for some bio-data of the participants and the motivations and perceptions of students, in the selected Ghanaian SHS, on their use of PE in school. The questionnaire yielded quantitative data for the analysis and discussion of this study.

Research participants

In terms of the age of the participants, 33.5% of the 203 students (68) were 17 years old, 29.1% (59) were 16 years old, and 24.1% (49) were aged 18 years.

The remaining 13.3% (27) were 19 years old. The students were clearly within the adolescent age group and could be said to be in the ideal age range of a Ghanaian high school student.

On the home regions of the participants, 23.2% (47) were from Greater Accra, 12.8% (26) were from the Central Region, 12.3% (25) were from the Ashanti Region, 9.6% (19) were from the Western North Region, 10.3% (21) were from the Western Region, 8.4% (17) were from Volta Region, 6.9% (14), each, were from the Savannah and Eastern Regions, 3.9% (8) were from the Bono Region, 2.9% (6) were from North East Region, 1.9% (4) were from the North West Region and 0.9% (2) were from the Oti Region. Students were from different parts of the country.

Findings and Discussion

It must be restated that the primary objectives of this study are to identify and ascertain the motivations and perceptions of students in a selected Ghanaian Senior High School on their use of PE in school. However, to reliably achieve these objectives, the researchers ascertained whether PE was still in use at the school. On this, 82.3% (167) of the respondents answered in the affirmative whereas 13.8% (28) did in the negative. The remaining 3.9% (8) of the participants did not give any response. The researchers further inquired about the frequency of the use of PE in the school. Here, 75.9% (154) of the respondents were of the view that it is used at all times whereas 13.8% (28) note that it is used sometimes. Additionally, 8.4% (17) believed that it is rarely or never used whilst 1.9% (4) did not respond to this. On the subject of the communicative participant(s) with whom PE is used, 89.7% (182) noted that PE is used with peers or friends and 7.9% (16) recorded it is used with their siblings or relatives. 2.4% (5) of the participants did not record any response. Considering the numbers, it is therefore clear that PE is used as a medium of communication in the school, mostly amongst students.

To realize the objectives of this study, the questionnaire solicited the views of the respondents on the motivations for their use of PE in the school and their perceptions of their use of PE in the school. The researchers adopted the various motivations and perceptions as identified in the literature (Amoako, 1992; Dako & Bonnie, 2014; Mireku-Gyimah, 2018; Pipkins, 2004; Suglo, 2012) and presented them to the participants to respond on a four-point Likert Scale, ranging from *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree* and *strongly disagree*.

Motivations of Ghanaian SHS students on their use of pidgin English in school

Most respondents were of the view that the use of PE projected a sense of unity or oneness amongst the students' fraternity (*solidarity*) as well as promoted the feeling of inclusion or being a part of a group or connected to a group of individuals with a common interest (*belongingness*). 49.8% (101) of the respondents strongly agreed to the point that PE is used in the school because it promotes solidarity and a sense of belongingness whereas 47.8% (97) agreed to this point. Conversely, 2.5% did not provide any response. In a nutshell, 97.6% (198) of the participants (strongly) agreed with this viewpoint that PE is used for solidarity and belongingness in Ghanaian SHSs. An overwhelming majority of the

participants averred that the use of PE fosters a cordial relationship amongst students.

On the motivation that *PE is easy to speak*, 42.4% (86) showed their strong agreement while 36.5% (74) also expressed their agreement. However, 18.2% (37) showed their disagreement with this motivating factor and 2.9% did not provide any response. This means that 78.9% (160) of the participants were certain that PE is used in the school because *it is easy to speak*. As noted earlier, 18.2% (37) do not share this viewpoint. That notwithstanding, unlike SE, PE is more flexible on the rules that are used to construct acceptable and meaningful sentences. It allows students to draw on their somewhat little knowledge of the English language and their knowledge of local languages to communicate. This makes PE contagious and a variety of choices for SHS students (Mireku-Gyimah, 2018).

89.2% (181) of the participants noted that the use of PE in the school is motivated by the assertion that *it is a trendy or fashionable language variety of use on the SHS campus*. Out of the said 181 participants, 72 (35.5% of 203 participants) strongly agreed to the above assertion whereas 109 (53.7% of 203 participants) agreed. 6.4% (13) of the participants disagreed that PE is used because it is a trendy language variety with the remaining 4.4% (9) deciding not to respond to the given assertion.

Interestingly, 99% (201 out of 203) of the student-participants (strongly) agreed that PE was used in school because it helped them make the imports of their conversations discreet to those outside the student group. Specifically, 34.5% (70) of the research participants strongly agreed with this motivation while as much as 64.5% (131) expressed their agreement with this motivation. Only 1% (2) did not respond to this query. Pipkins (2004) posits that pidgin use in Ghanaian schools is mainly purposed to provide an avenue for students to make their communication more comprehensible to those inside their group but incomprehensible to those outside. Students use PE to create a social structure that is unique to them. As a lesser group within society, the use of PE may give them a unique identity. The overwhelming numbers that affirm this motivation in this study are consistent with Pipkins' findings.

Perceptions of Ghanaian SHS students on their use of pidgin English in school
23.6% (48) of the research participants strongly agreed that the use of PE negatively affects the quality of SE while 40.4% (82) agreed that PE does the same to their use of SE. Resultantly, 64% (130) affirmed the negative impact of the use of PE on SE. On the other hand, 33.5% (68) of the participants (strongly) disagreed with the idea that PE affects the students' competence in the SE. The seemingly divided views on this subject convey the not-so-clear position of the students in the SHS on the effects of the use of PE on SE. However, Mireku-Gyimah (2018) notes that students are aware of the adverse effects of PE on their competence in SE.

100% (203) of the participants (strongly) agreed that PE is a substandard language. Specifically, 67.5% (137) expressed their agreement while 32.5% (66) showed a strong agreement. This means that all participants hold this perception, that PE is substandard, but to a varying degree. This perception is not only held by students but also by teachers and parents (Mireku-Gyimah, 2018). Suglo (2012)

reports that most students who admitted to the use of PE on campus did not recommend its use to other people or in a wider setting – they only considered PE appropriate for informal settings and would not claim for it to be used in formal settings. This observation makes it clear that students do acknowledge the place of PE on the continuum of English in Ghana. Thus, they are aware of the fact that SE remains the official language of use in Ghana.

On whether the participants will recommend the use of PE to students in SHS, 88.7% (180) of the participants hold the perception that they will not do so. More specifically on the above, 45.8% (93) disagreed and 42.9% (87) strongly disagreed. Notwithstanding, 9.4% (19) hold the view that they will recommend PE's use to other students whilst 1.9% gave no response. The respondents do not feel inclined to recommend the use of PE to other students.

Participants were required to indicate whether they were comfortable/unashamed or uncomfortable/ashamed when they used PE. A whooping 92.1 (187) indicated that they are unashamed/comfortable when they use it whereas the remaining 7.9% (16) noted that they are ashamed/uncomfortable when they use it. Considering the motivations for the use of PE in the school, it is unsurprising for the respondents to exhibit a positive feeling towards the use of PE.

Conclusion

This study set out to identify and ascertain the motivations and perceptions of students in a selected Ghanaian Senior High School on their use of Pidgin English in school. It can be concluded that, the principal motivations for the use of Pidgin English are the facts that students use the language variety as a concealment strategy, on the import of their conversations, against those who are outside the student group (99% of the participants affirmed this) and that it is used as a means to foster solidarity and a sense of belongingness to the student fraternity (97.6% affirmed this). On the side of their perceptions, it can be concluded that the participants exhibited mixed reactions. An overwhelming 100% of the participants agreed to its substandard nature, 88.7% held the view that they would not recommend the use of PE to their peers and 64% acknowledged that it impedes competence in Standard English. These notwithstanding, they admitted to being comfortable with its use. The present study has provided insights into the motivating factors and perceptions on the use of Pidgin English by students of a Ghanaian Senior High School (SHS) in Cape Coast, Central Region.

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