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Pidgin! Make we hear your speak, Make we know why chaw students dey luv you

Desiree Pipkins

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Pidgin!
Make we hear your speak,
Make we know why chaw students dey luv you

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SIT Ghana African Diaspora
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ABSTRACT

Historical evidence contends that as a country, Ghana (formally the Gold Coast) had not need for a pidgin. Additionally, the colonial administration made deliberate attempts to acknowledge and teach Standard English, exclusively, in school, as a result of these factors, there is a minimal need to speak Pidgin in Ghana, as compared to Standard English; further, it is not socially considered an attractive option for interpersonal communication as it is in other West African countries, particularly, Nigeria.

Nevertheless, a new phenomenon of non-standard English has developed among students in senior secondary schools in Ghana. This rapidly progressing variety of English has almost become, as one scholar asserts, a shibboleth among students in senior secondary schools. The Student Pidgin variety is being cultivated in an environment where the students are strictly limited to the exclusive use of Standard English. The focus of this research is to examine the reasons behind the utilization of student pidgin in senior secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Using both an inter-institutional and an intra-institutional lens, this study utilizes socio-linguistic factors, both inside and outside of the classroom, in an attempt to answer why Ghanaian senior secondary students employ non-Standard English, or Pidgin English, as a means of communication.

The language situation in Ghanaian senior secondary schools is the subject of recurrent debates. The general feeling is that the standard of English in Ghanaian senior secondary schools has fallen and one of the factors is believed to be the use of Pidgin English by the students. Quarcoo, as quoted in Forson's thesis, argues that

a number of educated people when confronted with performance problems of a number of Ghanaian children in the Ghanaian educational system prefer to look away from what was happening in say, agriculture, manufacture, planning and the execution of national projects and focus on English as the only subject which when exorcised will solve all our problems as a Third World country aspiring to reach the fringes of the computer age. They blame everything on the children speaking pidgin.¹

The Ghanaian Times and Daily Graphic featured stories on the issue of language in Ghanaian senior secondary schools and both newspapers highlighted the alleged negative impact of Pidgin English on students academic performance. It is important to mention that most Ghanaians learn English through formal education and Ghanaian schools are explicit on the language model – Standard English. In fact, most schools insist that Standard English be spoken both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, students are aware that a “pass” in English is a necessary requirement for higher education in the country and a good performance in English is required for most well paid jobs.²

Yet, knowing the social advantages of Standard English and the alleged dangers of non-Standard English, students still defer heavily to Pidgin English. So the fundamental question of this study is why: why do students select the linguistic phenomenon of Pidgin English as their mode of communication?

¹ Benjamin Emmanuel Forson. An Investigation into the Argot (Pidgin) as a Means of Communication among Students in Ghanaian Secondary Schools. Unpublished M. Phil thesis, University of Ghana.

² Researcher's Note: A “pass” in secondary school is a pre-requisite for all courses in tertiary institutions which proves that English takes a central position in the education process of a Ghanaian child.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1. *Role of Language in Society: Language as Culture*

“To speak a language means to be in a position to use certain syntax to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture.”

Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*.

Particular languages embody unique ways of experiencing the world, of defining what and who we are. In understanding that languages come with some cultural associations attached, by speaking a particular language we automatically, to some extent, align ourselves with the culture of that language. That is, we not only speak in particular languages, but more fundamentally we become the person we are because of the particular language community in which we are reared. Language, above all else, shapes our distinctive ways of being in the world. Therefore it can be argued that language is the carrier of a people’s identity – the vehicle of a certain way of thinking, experiencing, feeling, and the determinant of our perception and conception of the world. This is the power and the essence of language. To state it simply, language is culture.

1.2. *History of English in Ghana*

“The aim of the imposition of a language of imperialism is to break the self-identity of the colonized culture, couple with eth immense array of colonial structures and processes gradually prevail over the collective self of the people.”

Shina Afolayan, *The Question of a Post-Colonial Culture*

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi asserts that “language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history.”³ Therefore only by understanding the method and means by which the English language was acquired in Ghana, can the “deviant” forms in English usage be critically accounted for, as these are often conditioned by non linguistic factors.

As Ghana is reported to be one of the countries with a very long linguistic link to English, it is necessary to look at implantation of English via mercantile contact, colonial rule, and missionary activity. According to Spencer, the earliest contact between Europe and West Africa was developed by the Portuguese in the 15th century. They constructed their headquarters, the fort of Sao Jorge de Mina, within 11 years of their first landfall on the Gold Coast.⁴ Through trade

³ <http://phobos.ramapo.edu/~rchristo/thiongo.doc>

⁴ John Spencer. *The English Language in West Africa*. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971), 9.

contract, a Pidginized form of Portuguese (referred to by linguists as *NegroPortuguese*) developed along the coast between Europeans and Africans. However, *Negro-Portuguese* was supplanted by a Pidginized form of English, which was then used as the trading *lingua franca* of the coast.⁵ When the English language was first heard on the Gold Coast cannot be determined precisely but the first arrival of the British dates back to the 1550's. Although they arrived almost 100 years after the entrance of the Portuguese, British contact with Ghana proved to be the longest and most enduring connection. Sackey argues that British contact was essentially a trade contact that the British won out by "marginalizing other Europeans in acquiring their forts and castles."⁶ Sackey continues that after 1872 the British had virtually no European rival, as they secured Cape Coast in 1656, Fort Amsterdam and Kormantine in 1631, Komenda in 1663 and purchased the Danish and Dutch possessions in 1850 and 1872 respectively.

As the nature of their contact was initially trade, the Europeans developed a policy to train Gold Coast peoples as interpreters; the policy was initiated by the Portuguese and continued by the British. In the 1550's British voyages of William Towerson, he reported that a young man who had escaped from Elmina Castle inquired about a previous voyage which had taken five young men away. So Towerson and company:

made him answer that they had they were in England well used, and were there kept till they could speak the language, and then they should be brought back again to be a help to Englishmen in this country.⁷

Therefore if Towerson's assertion is true, it is likely that by the end of the 17th century there was a scattered group of Ghanaians capable of interpreting between English and a number of local vernaculars. It is during this mercantile period that Pidginized versions of European languages must have developed – though this is a matter of dispute among socio-historians and linguists.⁸

Spencer notes that as the traffic in slaves expanded in the 18th century, West Africans engaged in trade with Europeans "found it increasingly expedient to acquire a knowledge of their languages."⁹ Therefore, nowhere else during the trade period were the possibilities for learning English, in a formal way, greater than in the forts and castles. The earliest schools were established

⁵ Ibid, 11. Researcher's Note: Evidence of the *Negro-Portuguese* is identified by the presence of Portuguese words in Ghanaian Pidgin English. Example: *Dash* (or in its earliest citation, *dashee*) in Pidgin English means 'to give' (although the exact contemporary meaning raises issues of semantics) and is derived from the corruption of the Portuguese phrase *das-me*, "give me".

⁶ J.A. Sackey. "The English Language in Ghana: A Historical Perspective." In *English in Ghana*. Ed. M.E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Ghana English studies Association, 1997), 126.

⁷ Ibid, 127. In Spencer's "West Africa and the English Language," he adds that these locals must have been some of the earliest West Africans to learn English, though involuntarily sent.

⁸ Spencer argues that Pidgin English was developed during this time but many other scholars contend that there was no Pidgin present in Ghana at this time because of the high presence of interpreters along the Gold Coast. This debate will be visited in greater detail later in the paper.

⁹ John Spencer. *The English Language in West Africa*. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971), 10.

at Elmina, Christianborg, Accra and Cape Coast Castles. The English school at the Cape Coast Castle lasted until colonial times, and was officially started by Reverend Philip Quaque. Reverend Quaque's aim was to give his pupils (never more than 16 and often biracial children) a sound moral education – teaching reading, writing, and study of the Bible, though his most significant contribution to education was the “entrenchment of the English language.”¹⁰ Sackey asserts that in spite of Quaque's pioneer role in the development of education, he was the “earliest example, or victim of linguistic and cultural assimilation.”¹¹ From 1750 to 1821, the British trade contact with Ghana, administered by merchant companies, brought new languages and according to Sackey, introduced new skills not previously available.¹²

Spencer argues that the pre-colonial period gave birth to pidgins, whereas the abolition of the slave trade and the establishment of colonial rule and missionary activity launched the second phase of the “entrenchment of the English language.” It was during that phase that Spencer believes pidgins were pushed underground by the so called “civilizing mission” of colonial powers in combination with missionary societies which called for the “suppression of ‘debased’ forms of English” and their replacement with “correct” bourgeois English.¹³ Thereby engendering the specific diglossia in Ghanaian English, which Spencer argues is “exemplified in the low status allotted to demotic Englishes and the high status of literary and book-learned English.”¹⁴

English was imposed as the language of the government, law, education, and national newspapers during colonialism. As the British Government became more directly involved in administering the country and extending its influence outside the coastal areas, English spread and its impact was immense. The principal agent for the spread was the increasing number of missionaries with the intent of converting; their interest was achieved through the use of the English language and the establishment of formal education in schools. The official use of English was made possible by the missionary schools where English was taught as second language. English was used as the medium of instruction in government schools and in Wesleyan missionary schools, additionally, English was to be “exclusively spoken in the schools,” as it was stressed that the English language was “the most important agent of civilization.”¹⁵ The actual implantation and extension of English was initiated on May 6, 1882; the British colonial government passed its first colonial ordinance to regulate educational practices on the Gold Coast.¹⁶ The second educational

¹⁰ J. A. Sackey, “The English Language in Ghana: A Historical Perspective” in *English in Ghana*. Ed. M. E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Ghana English studies Association, 1997), 127

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 128

¹³ John Spencer. *The English Language in West Africa*. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971), 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23

¹⁵ J.A. Sackey. “The English Language in Ghana: A Historical Perspective” in *English in Ghana*. Ed. M.E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Ghana English studies Association, 1997), 129.

¹⁶ Eyamba Bokamba. “West Africa.” In *English Around the World: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*. Ed. Jenny Cheshire (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 495

ordinance was passed in 1887; these ordinances provided: grants-in-aid, payment by results, and the division of primary schools into those maintained solely by public funds and those established by missions and private persons.¹⁷ However, schools which used indigenous languages as the medium of instruction could not qualify for grant-in-aid thus leaving schools which utilized local languages without access to government subsidies, thereby deferring most schooling to the Wesleyan schools, which coincidentally were favoured by the colonial government.

Throughout the colonial period local languages declined in use because Ghana had not single indigenous language that could be used as the mother tongue of all citizens and also because English was established as the language of the government administration, education, and social intercourse. Because of its ubiquitous presence in social life and activity, English was elevated in prominence over about 40 indigenous languages. The English language was seen as “the road to knowledge and wealth.”¹⁸ Even after Independence, English remained the official language of Ghana and the language of formal education in schools. Without comprehension of English there could be no participation in economic and political activities. English was associated with occupational choice and therefore wealth – as wealth, knowledge, and authority was determined by occupation, while occupation was dependent on one's proficiency in English.¹⁹ English became the language of social mobility for education Ghanaians, who grew into an elite group whose influence rested on their command of English; bilingualism emerged as the trademark of an educated Ghanaian (though code-switching occurred often among this socially mobile population as most Ghanaian population spoke a local language or some variant of Standard English) and as Sackey argues, it served as the cohesive force for educated Ghanaians. The social advantages accrued from an English language education, consequently, led to the demand for more schools.

Even today, forty-six years after Independence, English has retained its preeminent position as the official language, in fact institutions making use of English did not cease after Independence, they multiplied. English had not replaced indigenous languages completely but it has successfully managed to marginalize them so that they are used for purposes other than official.²⁰ English is an international language, “the language of commerce and industry, the language of modern science and technology.”²¹ And as Sackey, concludes English has such a hold on the national psyche that an indigenous language will find it hard to loosen.²²

¹⁷ J.A. Sackey, “The English Language in Ghana: A History Perspective.” In *English in Ghana*. Ed. M.E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Ghana English studies Association, 1997), 129

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 130

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Though because of its position as a medium of “utilitarian communication and aesthetic expression,” English had been subjected to diverse varieties of linguistic life in Ghana, and West Africa, that it becomes gradually more interwoven into the lives of more and more people, which results in the manipulation of the language to connect communication gaps.

²¹ *Ibid.* 137

²² *Ibid.*

1.3 Resistance to English

Unlike Europe in the 18th century, the rise of nationalist movements in Ghana were hardly ever linked with the development of indigenous language arguments. Sackey notes that the nationalist movements for independence defined themselves “not as in Europe by common language or culture but primarily by the common experience of foreign rule.”²³ Due to that foreign rule, Ghanaian nationalists had the foreign language of English in common, and as Boadi explains, politicians condemned colonialism “both on the political platform and on paper with all the animus and vehemence they could command. But ironically, their eloquence and debating powers could find expression in no other medium than on of the legacies of colonialism – the English language (.)”²⁴ Sackey notes that there was no “rearguard action” against the use and extension of English during the colonial rule, but there were attempts by some educated Ghanaians to ‘throw away’ anglicized native names and English names and instead adopt purely African names. Sackey identifies Reverend S.R.B. Solomon who changed his name to Atto Ahuma and advocated ‘an ear of intelligent backward movement’ from contact with European civilization.²⁵ Sackey notes that in *Ethiopia Unbound*, Casely Hasford stressed the need for Africans to look for “the good things of the treasure house of his own nationality”, which included language and culture.²⁶ However, Sackey points out that these were isolated attempts and not directed against the use of English but rather against the habits and mentality which ‘an education on European lines conferred on the African.’²⁷

²³ Ibid, 132

²⁴ L.A. Boadi. “Education and the Role of English in Ghana” in *The English Language in West Africa*. Ed. John Spencer (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971), 50. Boadi continues that they employed English not because they were not competent in the use of their own first languages but because they had to reach the largest possible number of people within the shortest possible time and at the least expense.

Researcher’s Note: I applaud any means by which to overthrow colonial powers but I think the use of English as a means speaks to the unfortunate success of language as an instrument of colonization as it prevented the development of a national indigenous language and asserted itself as the official language of Ghana, which above all local languages could reach the largest population. While I recognize that English was no longer the sole possession of the colonizer at the point when the oppressed were able to turn that oppressive tool into an agent of resistance, it still seems crucial to the deconstruction of colonization to disestablish European language dominance as it has contributed immensely to the colonial conquest. As language, especially languages of imperialism, raise issues of political hegemony, domination and power, an uncritical employment of European languages connotes a tacit agreement to the thoughts Africa as an appendage to Europe. This is a dangerous implication because it suggests that Ghana’s freedom is in some way bounded within the limits of their colonizer. But at the same time, I must critic my own view thoughts as they place significant weight on language as the exclusive instrument of colonialism when patently language along cannot destroy the self-identity of a people nor can it be the sole process to colonization. Also it seems de rigeur that Ghana nationalists use the language of the oppressor to unshackle the holds of colonialism as their audience was unwilling to learn the language of the ruled. Therefore by employing the master’s tool it can no longer be exclusively the master’s tool but rather a universal tool. At a conference on African literature in 1963, one delegate poignantly asserted, “the problem is to make the people of England realize that their languages are no longer their sole property, because they have almost defeated themselves by their own success in propagating their language.” (Boadi, 51)

²⁵ J.A. Sackey, “The English Language in Ghana: A Historical Perspective: in *English in Ghana*. Ed. M.E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Ghana English Studies Association, 1997), 135

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Albeit in a vacuum of no competition, English became the official language by the colonial influence of the British. Since Independence, in 1957, there have been three institutional attempts to raise the issue of national language for Ghana, with English as the rightful culprit. In 1961, the Convention People's Party opened debate in Parliament, Akan was the choice that proved most favourable but the government deferred decision on the grounds that Akan was underdeveloped for modern purposes.²⁸ The matter was brought up again in 1965, under the same CPP party and the motion was withdrawn. In 1971, the issue was again raised in Parliament under the government of the Progress Party. Among the arguments raised against the use of English were "the widespread use of Akan in the country, the emotional satisfaction of using an indigenous language as a national language," and the point was also made that "the continued use of English prevented the vast majority of Ghanaians from participation in discussions of national issues."²⁹ Nevertheless, debate closed with the House concluding, "in view of the importance of a national language as a factor for national unity in Ghana, this House should take note of the necessity of modern language or lingua franca."³⁰ Essentially admitting that the English language was serving as the neutral binding force and that choice of a local language might raise opposition from speakers from other languages. The civilian government of the National Democratic Congress in 1992 resolved a standing order to grant Parliament proceedings in the House to be conducted in either Akan, Nzema, Ga, Ewe, Hausa, Dagbani, Dagaare or other local languages provided facilities exist in the House for their interpretation.³¹ The only problem, as Sackey notes, was that not only were facilities not adequately provided but moreover members who chose to speak an indigenous language in Parliament might be ridiculed for their assumed lack of education, viewed in their preference of local languages over English, as well as the difficulty of an interpreter translating "technical terms" into Ghanaian languages.³² Though however unfeasible the option, it was a momentous decision to allow other languages to be used in Parliament.

As mentioned previously, Spencer argues that the imposition of colonial English forced "debased" forms of English underground, demonstrating the power and dominance of English and the colonially established and socially maintained "acceptable" forms of discourse.³³ Yet even

²⁸ Researcher's Note: Yet this argument lacks the critical analysis of why indigenous languages might be deficient in terms of "modernity." Initial European contact occurred during West Africa's incipient stages of "modern" development, thereby stunting its development and growth due to the European appropriation of resources. In respect to linguistic development, English and other European languages were imposed on the peoples of the Gold Coast restricting the growth of indigenous languages. I would argue that had external languages of imperialism, specifically English, not been inflicted upon the emerging social and linguistic communities, they would have progressed into "modernity."

²⁹ Ibid. 136

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. 137

³² Ibid.

³³ Researcher's Note: Foucault examines the power of discourse to create a reality which by virtue of exclusion (i.e not allowing certain ideas into the arena of its created reality) shapes discourse. Foucault explains this through the rejection of a mad man's words as "mere noise" because they don't fall within the boundaries of the created reality and

though variations, such as pidgins, Creoles and broken English, are placed outside the limits of “correct” English and were thus delegated to the lower rung of the diglossia, they are still maintained for reasons of linguistic utility and in resistance to the colonially imposed English language.

are rejected. Yet the mad man’s words are functional within the reality which he operates but are called “mad” by those outside of his reality. Since discourse requires institutional support to survive and his fall outside the boundaries they are then excluded.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 *Introduction to Pidgin*

Due to the nature of English in Ghana, it is difficult to make a generalizing statement about the wide varieties of English in this country. Its users range from the most educated to the totally illiterate. So far the sake of convenience it is enough to distinguish arbitrarily between educated and uneducated varieties and regard them as “the extremities of a graded continuum,” with the least educated being the least internationally accepted and the most educated variety as the most widely understood in the Anglophone world.³⁴ Within the diglossic relationship of English in Ghana, Pidgins are associated with the lower uneducated variety. Yet sociolinguists, like Huber, argue that just as there are different types of Ghanaian English that can be arranged on a continuum, there are also two distinct varieties of Ghanaian Pidgin English (GhaPE) that can be described as forming a line. The cline, according to Huber and Dako, is comprised of basilect varieties that are associated with the less educated sections of society, which they employ for basic inter-ethnic communication purposes, to the more mesolectal and acrolectal forms that are usually spoken by those who have at least progressed to the upper forms of secondary school.³⁵ Huber also makes important reference that the Pidgin ‘basilect’ is only associated with the uneducated context because of its is most often heard in these sections. He also asserts that the educational attainment of a speaker is not a sufficient indicator to whether or not he or she speaks ‘basilectal’ or ‘acrolectal’ Ghanaian Pidgin English. Huber goes on to argue that the difference between GhaPE varieties lays not so much in their structure as in the function they serve. The uneducated GhaPE is used as the ‘lingua franca’ in highly multilingual contexts where as the more acrolectal varieties are better characterized as an in-group language, whose main function is to express group solidarity. The latter GhaPE is used by those with high educational attainment and does not fulfill basic communication needs – English is available to all parties if there was no common indigenous language. Also it is a richer Pidgin English because it has access to wider resources from which to extract words: typically Akan, Ga, and also Standard English are large contributors to the vocabulary of this variety.³⁶ Huber explains that the main differences between the two varieties are “lexical, not structural” because of the strong Standard English interference the variety used by students is characterized by a high number

³⁴ Magnus Huber. *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 138

³⁵ *Ibid.* 139 –140. Huber does not identify a specific mesolect variety of Pidgin English and simply identifies the polar extremes: basilect and acrolect. Researcher’s Note: The terms basilect, mesolect, and acrolect do not carry the same associations in this paper as they would in within a standard sociolinguistic analysis.

³⁶ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author.

of short-lived words, which may only be current on one campus or among a sub group of students. Also educated GhaPE can also be called an institutionalized variety because it is acquired and used in well-defined institutions such as secondary schools. Where as the uneducated GhaPE is spoken in multilingual, usually urban, areas; it serves as a community language, binding together various linguistic groups through its ethnic neutrality. Moreover, Pidgin English gains its neutrality from the fact that it has no native speaker in Ghana.³⁷ Huber describes the major function of the uneducated variety of GhaPE as a “bridge (to fill) the communication gaps between linguistically mixed quarters and working places of coastal agglomerations.”³⁸

2.1. *Origin of Ghanaian Pidgin English*

Because there has been considerably less work done on Ghanaian Pidgin English, especially when compared to other West African Pidgins, there is much debate among scholars about whether an indigenous West African Pidgin ever developed in Ghana. Spencer argues that a pidginized form of Portuguese (Negro-Portuguese) was used for contact between European and West Africans (and Gold Coast residents), from their initial contact until the 18th century.³⁹ As other European languages came into contact with the Coast, several pidginized forms of European languages developed and coexisted along the Coast. Spencer contends that an English based contact language developed at least by the 17th century as British traders replaced Portuguese holdings, thereby replacing Negro-Portuguese with a pidginized form of English.⁴⁰ Spencer also makes reference to a number of Gold Coast Africans being taken to England to serve as translators. Basically, he avers that during this mercantile period pidgin languages were derived.

Contrastingly, Huber and Sey both argue that no indigenous West African Pidgin developed in Ghana, due to the abundance of educated young men along the Coast to act as interpreters between the British and the uneducated population.⁴¹ They argue that it was not necessary for the mass of the native population to deal directly with the British traders, administrators, and missionaries because of the bilingual middlemen. According to Sey, the ideal conditions under which Pidgin languages emerge and flourish existed only on a very small scale in Ghana, therefore a distinct Ghanaian Pidgin English did not have the opportunity to develop.⁴² He attempts to further validate his contention by suggesting that the educated Ghanaian from the beginning of the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Magnus Huber. *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 142

³⁹ John Spencer. *The English Language in West Africa*. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971), 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ K.A. Sey. *Ghanaian English An Exploratory Survey*. (London: Macmillan Education Limited, 1973), 5.

⁴² Ibid.

introduction to the English language aspired to proficiency in the use of British Standard English and as a result would not be complacent with non-Standard English, i.e. pidginized variation.⁴³

Similar to Sey and Huber, Dako claims that Pidgin has “never played any significant role in the linguistic repertoire of Ghana,” because, as she argues, GhaPE never came full circle because it was imported into this country.⁴⁴ She describes Pidgin as an alien phenomenon that came with immigrants from Liberia (Kru English), Nigeria (Barracks Pidgin) and more recently the million + Ghanaians expelled from Nigeria.⁴⁵

Though all these theories of origin are independently plausible, they are not mutually exclusive; moreover, the origin of Pidgin in Ghana might be better explained when the theories are critically evaluated in order to tell a complete story. With this in mind, Spencer’s theory seems to be the most tenable based in part on the evidence of words in English Pidgin showing a distinct Portuguese origin, proving that English Pidgin did in fact supplant the older Negro-Portuguese. This explanation also is consistent with the English based Creoles in the Caribbean, specifically Jamaica as Gold Coast slaves were taken to the Caribbean as bilingual speakers (Akan and Pidgin English) but due to the nature of the Middle Passage and conditions in the Caribbean plantations, they lost their indigenous language and the Pidgin became creolized.⁴⁶ This proves first that there was a Pidgin prior to the influx of West African immigrants and secondly, it establishes that the Pidgin was used by significant portion uneducated population in that the enslaved peoples had a decent grasp of the Pidgin which was used as the linguistic unifier on the Trans-Atlantic ships. Thereby disproving Sey’s assumption that only the translators spoke English or an English variant. Along the same lines, it would be odd that during the trade and especially under the early colonial

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author. Historically Dako states that coastal trading activities occurred in relatively monolingual areas and as Sey would agree, that from the 16th century translators acted as middlemen in coastal trade with Europeans. Her conclusion is that it didn’t develop as other West African Pidgins; instead it was imported but as its own developed features picked up from different languages from Ghana language structures via contact., and is spoken in relatively small pockets of coastal urban centers.

⁴⁵ Ibid. In 1982 Nigeria expelled all Ghanaians illegally residing in Nigeria. Many of the returnees acquired Pidgin in Nigeria and congregated in urban areas upon their return to Ghana, giving Pidgin “an additional impetus in Ghana.” (Dako, 15 April 2004).

⁴⁶ John Spencer. *The English Language in West Africa*. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971), 14; and Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author. Researcher’s Note: By definition, Pidgin speakers are bilingual, speaking their first language (L1) and the Pidgin. When the Pidgin speaker becomes monolingual, speaking only the Pidgin, illustrates that the Pidgin has been creolized. When placed in the context of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Dako convincingly argues that bilingual captives were forcibly transported to the Caribbean and due to the multilingual and multi-ethnic conditions on the slave ships the only language which could be accessed by majority of the slaves was Pidgin. And because similar conditions were maintained on the Caribbean plantations and magnified by the use of English by the slave masters, the L1 was no longer useful and was replaced in efficiency by the Pidgin, which fulfilled the complete communication needs of the community. Thus, the result was the creolization of an English-based Pidgin. Interestingly, the Creole retained Portuguese words from the Gold Coast’s earliest contact language and these words are still used today, which partially how the current Jamaican population was traced back to Ghana because there was no Portuguese influence in the Caribbean, additionally, the existence of L1 (Twi) terms in the English-based Jamaican Creole helped relocate them as well.

period that only a select few people would know English, it seems more likely rather that people at all level of society would attempt to learn English. And because they might have lacked full access to education and therefore Standard English, they would pick up fragments of the language, resulting in a form of Pidgin or at least Broken English.⁴⁷

Clearly Pidgin English did not develop in Ghana as it did in Sierra Leone and Nigeria but that does not negate the existence of some sort of indigenously developed Pidgin. Yet because education and therefore English played a sizable role in British colonialism in Ghana, it is likely that Pidgin was, as Sey avers, pushed underground thereby preventing, it, as Dako claims, from “coming full circle.” Making Dako’s explanation of Pidgin English as an imported linguistic phenomenon, a probable account of modern Pidgin’s origin and location in urban areas. Her hypothesis of Pidgin as a mostly urban development also seems consistent with the basic definition of a pidgin – a contact language that arise because people of different linguistic backgrounds have a need to communicate, thus it is typically found along trade routes and places where many meet but do not speak the same language, i.e. urban centers.⁴⁸ In Ghanaian urban setting, like Accra and Kumasi, with a large immigrant population there is little usefulness of a Ghanaian lingua franca and limited applicability in the use of Standard English as a language of inter-ethnic communication. It is also highly likely that through these large immigrant populations, which utilize Pidgin English, that the various forms of Pidgin English have arose, possibly even Student Pidgin.

2.2. *Entry of Pidgin English into Senior Secondary Schools*

The rise and spread of Pidgin English into Ghanaian senior secondary schools is a relatively recent development. According to Hubert’s research, the phenomenon must have started around 1965 and Dako states that it started to appear in high prestige multiethnic coastal senior secondary schools in the early 1970’s.⁴⁹ Dadzie, as quoted in Huber, speculates why Pidgin started to be spoken by schoolboys:

In the 1950’s and early 1960’s, the influence of the ‘sea men’, a they were then called, was considerable around the port cities, especially Takoradi and later Tema. Because these seamen came back with the latest in fashion and swaggered in the characteristic

⁴⁷ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Magnus Huber. *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 142; and Kari Dako, “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.” In *Ghanaian Journal of English Studies*, Ghanaian English Studies Association No. 1 ed. M.E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd. 2002) 75

sailor gait, schoolchildren, particularly secondary schoolchildren, at the impressionable age of 15 or over, began to want to look like sea men; and if they looked them, it was no wonder they started also talking like them.⁵⁰

Huber adds that it seems possible “that the schoolboys adopted Pidgin to identify with this high status group.”⁵¹ Being a largely unskilled and uneducated, this group did not constitute the ‘target norm’ for the entire society but may have constituted the norm for the schoolboys.⁵² Dako suggests that Liberian fisherman and crewmen along the coast spoke ‘Kru English’ or Kroo Brofo (the Akan term for Kru English). These migrant labourers existed on the fringes of Ghanaian society and “their relations with Ghanaians were rather hostile.”⁵³ So, similar to Huber’s speculation, Dako suggests that school boys adopted it from the ‘Kroo Brofo’.

Another factor on which Dako and Huber both concur, is that the spread of Pidgin was furthered by the massive presence of the army in public life in the wake of military coups. In the 1960’s and again in the early 1970’s, Ghana was under military rule starting with Nkrumah’s overthrow in 1966, soldiers became a very visible and ever present group on the streets.⁵⁴ Dako adds, “(they) openly and aggressively displayed their power and they spoke Pidgin. Therefore the soldiers and their language may have impressed the school boys, who then started to imitate them as their language code connoted power and ‘macho’ behaviour.”⁵⁵ This military population was called ‘Abongo Brofo’, Military English, or ‘Barracks Pidgin’ as many of the pre-independence military recruits were from Nigeria and lived in male communities and were never posted in one location for long periods of time as they were frequently transferred.⁵⁶ Dako’s research suggests that Student Pidgin (SP) started as an attempt to reproduce the Pidgin they heard to town. Dako briefly makes mention of a more recent Pidgin speaking influx from the millions of Ghanaians expelled from Nigeria in 1982. Many of the Ghanaian returnees had relatively low levels of education and had acquired Pidgin in Nigeria. She claims that most of them congregated in urban

⁵⁰ Magnus Huber. *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 149

⁵¹ Magnus Huber. *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 149

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author; and Kari Dako, “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.” In *Ghanaian Journal of English Studies*, Ghanaian English Studies Association No. 1 ed. M.E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd. 2002) 76

⁵⁴ Magnus Huber. *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 149

⁵⁵ Kari Dako. “Student Pidgin (SP): The Language of the Educated Male Elite,” Dako’s research paper.

⁵⁶ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author.

areas of Ghana, giving ‘the use of Pidgin an additional impetus.’⁵⁷ Whatever the source, Dako explains that SP started off as a school slang at prestigious schools and was brought to Cape Coast, as it was the location of a high number of prestigious senior secondary schools, by students from political and administrative upper middle class families who assumed the behaviour of “marginal-deviant groups.”⁵⁸ Though there is no one explanation, it is logical to assume that over the years SP gained prominence at every coup and finally from the expelled emigrants from Nigeria. Though it is important to note that the explanations for the rise of Pidgin English in senior secondary school is of sociolinguistic factors rather than out of the need for an effective means of communication.

⁵⁷ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author.

⁵⁸ Kari Dako. “Student of Pidgin (SP) The Language of the Educated Male Elite,” Dako’s research paper.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0. *Why Students Speak Pidgin English*

Textual Explanations

As a formal institution, the senior secondary school maintains a specific set of aims and objectives. The goals of the school established in direct relationship to the national guidelines, which measure levels of achievement. Therefore the institutional policies of the school are a reflection of the national policy. In examining the language policy of the school, it is clear that at no point in the educational career of the Ghanaian student are they ever expected to speak “sub-standard English.” In fact, the policy is explicit on the language that is to be used – Standard English. Yet students opt for Pidgin English. As mentioned earlier in the paper, teachers, administrators and parents disapproved strongly of Student English. They fear that PE will have an adverse effect on their pupils performance and strictly forbid its use in the classroom. But students freely resort to it when unobserved by the teaching staff, fully aware of its alleged dangers.

A compilation of sources elucidate four main reasons in the direction of answering the proposed question of the paper.

Reason 1:

Dako asserts that from the beginning SP was a “daring attempts at deviancy – a flouting of the school rules that prohibited the use of local languages.”⁵⁹ Her interviews with older men, who belonged to the generation of secondary students who first began speaking PE in school, reinforce the impression of ‘protest,’ as pidgin was used instead of Standard English with the argument “You say we should speak English but not what type of English we should speak.”⁶⁰ She supplements by arguing with Nkrumah’s free education policy the quality of education decreased because there were too few teachers to adequately accommodate the increasing number of students. As a result, English became a ‘foreign language’ that was no longer thoroughly taught yet it maintained its dominance in the school system and became a language that students could not identify with and a language whose “informal registers the students did not master.”⁶¹ In sum, PE was a form of protest to the English that was poorly taught but still vehemently demanded by the secondary school system.

⁵⁹ Kari Dako. “

⁶⁰ Kari Dako. “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.” In Ghanaian Journal of English Studies, Ghanaian English Studies Association No. 1 ed. M. E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd. 2002) 75.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Reason 2:

The emergence of Pidgin in senior secondary school is a reflection of acculturation. By being isolated in boarding schools removed from traditional control (i.e. parents and cultural influences), the students assume the behavioural aspects of “marginal-deviant groups” as well as the more aggressive behaviour of their urban colleagues.⁶² As people are products of their environments, students from urban settings were raised in an environment of acculturation and therefore are more likely to behave under a wider scope of societal “norms.” It is interesting to note the similarities between the conditions in a boarding school and in an urban environment, as both provide ample room for acculturation since they both lack traditional controls (the urban are houses a number of different people and languages without checks on “deviant” behaviour, that would otherwise be present in a village).

Reason 3:

There is inherently no need for Student Pidgin – all students speak Standard English with fairly high proficiency and the majority of them (Dako estimates between 80-90%) speak the Twi language. Yet the preference towards PE can be understood as it is an easier form of communication when compared to Standard English, though PE draws its superstrate from English and its substrate from African languages (Ga, Twi, Hausa etc).⁶³ Dako discusses the propensity of students to speak SP in terms of performance pressure – ‘the pressure of speaking grammatically correct, idiomatically correct, and pronouncing words the proper way to removed so there is no pressure to perform’ because there are not as much room for error as compared to Standard English.⁶⁴ Further, PE is appealing to students because it has no ethnic connotations, it is a language of neutrality.⁶⁵ So unlike speaking an indigenous language, SP preferences no ethnicity and no linguistic group.

Reason 4:

Forson and Huber contend this SP’s function is as a ‘peer group cohesive,’ an in-group language.⁶⁶ As a code that is primarily sociolectal (social dialect) in nature, SP marks itself as distinct from Ghanaian Pidgin English and the speaker is recognized as having attended secondary

⁶² Kari Dako. “Student Pidgin (SP): The Language of the Educated male Elite,” Dako’s research paper.

⁶³ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author. Dako also explains that Pidgin is an autonomous code with its own rules, distinct from both its substrate and its superstrate.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Emmanuel Forson. An Investigation into the Argot (Pidgin) as a Means of Communication among Students in Ghanaian Secondary Schools. Unpublished M. Phil thesis, University of Ghana.

school or an institution of higher learning.⁶⁷ SP reinforces the group identity of school (predominately) male groupings and it is thus acceptable and expected that male students speak it, as non-speaker of SP would be considered an “outsider.”⁶⁸ SP is used not out of communicative need but as a means of expressing group solidarity and intimacy with peers, it may also “serve as a badge of identity in opposition to non-group members, especially teachers and adults.”⁶⁹ Subsumed under this explanation for the use of Pidgin is Forson’s comprehensive research into student pidgin as an argot.

3.1. *Student Pidgin as an Argot*

A strict definition of an argot refers to a non standard language usually used by a secret group to render communication incomprehensible to outsiders. It carries the implication of negation with the social structure and hierarchy of society through an alternative means of communication. Argot implies the establishment of a social organization that simultaneously simulates and opposes that of society. This other world created by the argot is to provide an identity that is lost in the dominate society.⁷⁰ The argot takes life by creating an alternative social reality of the dominate society or as Foucault might argue, by creating its own linguistic delimiters that exclude ideas that it deems do not fall within that reality. The argot emerges from need to maintain solidarity under pressure so the purpose of the phenomenon is to (re) construct the individual and society.

Therefore argots tend to arise among subcultures and groups that are marginalized and disadvantaged by the dominant society and they operate on principles that counteract those of society. Usually subgroups evolve and create a language that reinforces a sense of identity or solidarity set within the context of the larger group; in senior secondary schools, Forson argues that these take the form with the Student Pidgin speakers as the subgroup opposingly positioned against the dominant society of the school community.⁷¹

An argot presupposes a strict boundary between speaker and non-speakers of the code. In relation to senior secondary schools, Forson argues that “the speech community of the school has conditions that may facilitate the prevalence of the argot. The existence of a social relationship based authority creates a potential conflict. The conflict arises out of what institutional authorities

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Magnus Huber. Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 147

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Emmanuel Forson. An Investigation into the Argot (Pidgin) as a Means of Communication among Students in Ghanaian Secondary Schools. Unpublished M. Phil thesis, University of Ghana.

⁷¹ Ibid.

insist is right and what the natural instinct of the students dictates in spite of the rules.”⁷² For example, unorthodox student activity like drinking or sneaking into town can be expressed in the dominant language for fear of attracting attention, it then be safer to use a different code. So switching codes to carve out a new linguistic space may result in an argot. Because the argot, as an alternate code, exists within same domain of a dominant language and exists within a diglossic relationship with Standard English, Forson argues that the argot implies the use of code switching.⁷³

3.2. *Code Switching within Student Pidgin*

“The Black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. This division is a direct result of colonist subjugation is beyond question.”

Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*

Fanon asserts that “to speak it to exist absolutely for the other,” therefore it is an intrinsic part of human communication to change linguistic codes according to the audience.⁷⁴ According to Dako, people have a natural proclivity to switch to one code from another for the specific linguistic situation in which they are engaged.⁷⁵ This process is called code-switching. The use of language is dictated by context; domain and function determine the use of language. Forson’s appraisal of secondary schools highlights the use of a “use oriented pattern,” which sees language use in terms of distinct speech variations each having its own particular communication characteristics of status and prestige.⁷⁶ One usage pattern is expected of students as a fulfillment of the objectives of the school and the other usage pattern fulfills the informal needs of students outside the classroom, the former requires a “high prestige code,” Standard English and the latter, a “non-formal code,” Student Pidgin.⁷⁷ Forson goes on to explain that the culture of the school has an in-built diglossia with two distinct codes, ie. bilingualism, which are expressed through code-switching.⁷⁸

Forson argues that the concept of a cline plays an important part in the understanding of appropriateness of a particular code, because language use is influenced by different social relations. Within the language cline of a secondary student. Student Pidgin and Standard English

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Franz Fanon. *Black Skin White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press.1967). 17

⁷⁵ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author.

⁷⁶ Benjamin Emmanuel Forson. *An Investigation into the Argot (Pidgin) as a Means of Communication among Students in Ghanaian Secondary Schools*. Unpublished M. Phil thesis, University of Ghana

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

make up the extremes of language use. So Pidgin is used during informal conversations out of the classroom and out of the presence of school authorities, while Standard English is used formally in the classroom and when addressing a non-student or in the presence of a non-student. As a result students switch between codes with ease and frequency.

3.3. *Process of Pidginization*

Dako defines pidginization as the process by which a language simplifies itself, explained by an attempt to communicate or learn the language of a dominant, vital, or important group.⁷⁹ To determine the process of pidginization it is necessary to look at the chronological aspect of language acquisition of a Ghanaian student. Generally the child acquires her first language (L1) at home in an informal way so at this stage the child is monolingual. Most children in Ghana have their first contact with English in a school setting. In the school setting English is formally taught with Standard English as the model. At this point English begins competing with the L1 as a form of communication with teachers and peers. So that by year 4 the student is taught with English as the medium of instruction. At senior secondary school, a third code develops to add to the students' bilingual repertoire – a code described as Student Pidgin. Though it is not officially recognized and in some cases banned, the repertoire of L1, Standard English, and the Pidgin code all compete for use. Forson describes the language culture in senior secondary schools as “use oriented with the interlocutor choosing from existing varieties to serve different linguistic needs within the speech community.”⁸⁰ Selecting which language to use is deliberate and goal oriented; the dominant choice underlying the process is domain, which was elucidated in the explanation of code-switching.

3.4. *Student Pidgin as a Gender Specific Phenomenon*

Overview:

Huber plainly asserts “girls only rarely speak Pidgin English,” and this is the general perception of Pidgin English – that it is almost exclusively male.⁸¹ Therefore this section will attempt to explain the use of Pidgin English as a sociocultural gender-based phenomenon.⁸²

⁷⁹ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author.

⁸⁰ Benjamin Emmanuel Forson. *An Investigation into the Argot (Pidgin) as a Means of Communication among Students in Ghanaian Secondary Schools*. Unpublished M. Phil thesis, University of Ghana.

⁸¹ Magnus Huber. *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 147

Based on research at the University of Ghana, Dako lists the following reasons females gave when asked why they did not speak Pidgin English:

- a). it might make them less “ladylike”
- b). it might cast a slur on their character and expose them negatively
- c). as educated women they aspire to be very proficient in Standard English and the use of Pidgin is therefore unnecessary and deviant.
- d). Pidgin is a male language and females should conform to the norms of society; females who speak Pidgin are non-conformists⁸³

She also asked male respondents their attitude towards female speaker and those with a negative attitude expressed “un-lady-like behaviour,” “abnormal behaviour,” “non-conformity,” “lack of morals,” etc.⁸⁴ Both males and females saw Pidgin as an aggressive and uncouth language. Therefore a female speaking the language does not conform to societal norms of female behaviour, as women are supposed to be gentle and submissive, and pidgin, by virtue of its history in Ghana, is considered an aggressive language.⁸⁵ Thus the two are not complimentary. Dako asserts that women, world-wide, adhere more than men to both societal and prestige norms.⁸⁶

Historical Overview of Pidgin in Ghana in Relation to Gender:

For the sake of her gender specific analysis let us presume Dako’s argument on the origin of Ghanaian Pidgin English to be correct. To restate, she contends that PE was brought to Ghana by Pidgin-speaking migrant groups: Krus from Liberia and Nigeria military recruits. Dako argues because West African Pidgin never assumed any major communication status outside of the migrant male communities, it never attained widespread acceptance in Ghana. Both male communities existed on the fringes of society and it is important to add that neither group came with their families. Consequently, the women who came into contact with them must have done so clandestinely as they were considered a low status and “deviant” crowd. “So a woman admitting that she spoke the language of these marginalized groups would thereby have revealed a close relationship with them.”⁸⁷

⁸² The format and subtitles of this section mimic the layout in Kari Dako “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.”

⁸³ Kari Dako. “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.” in Ghanaian Journal of English Studies, Ghanaian English Studies Association No. 1 ed. M. E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd. 2002) 74.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author.

⁸⁷ Kari Dako. “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.” in Ghanaian Journal of English Studies, Ghanaian English Studies Association No. 1 ed. M. E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd. 2002) 77.

Female-Exclusive Factor:

“It is curious that the attitude towards pidgin, ie. that pidgin is unsuitable for women, is carried over into the new SP. The sociolinguistic environments of these two Pidgins are distinctly different. Whereas West African Pidgin is spoken by predominantly illiterate and marginalized migrant groups, SP is sociolectually important in that it signals (+SE) (+ higher education) (+ male in-group). Whereas the women who associated with males from the disadvantage social class, the female student stands socially very strong. Why should she conform to this dated linguistic taboo. According to Giles, whereas ethnic speech indicators function as group identifiers, gender indicators do not. It might be useful to consider Trudgill’s postulation of “covert prestige,” namely that middle class men, but not middle class women, adopt aspects of working class for which this to women being more status conscious than men and therefore ‘*more aware of the social significance of linguistic variables.*’ He further speculates on the possible reasons for this and gives two possible explanations, namely that ‘*the social position of women in our society is less secure than that of men, and is therefore subordinate to that of men*’ and that it might be ‘*more necessary for women to secure and signal their social status linguistically... and be more aware of the importance of this type of signal.*’ And finally, that we tend to evaluate men more by their occupation, skills and income i.e. on what they do, whereas women are assessed on how they appear.

In the Ghanaian context, SP has therefore covert prestige for men. This is supported by Dadzie who gives one of the reasons for the rise of SP as a “socialist fad” – ‘*the need to identify with the common man*’ that became fashionable in the higher institutions of learning.... It might be therefore be that in order to function satisfactorily as a professional woman in modern society, the aspect of conformity to what she perceives as acceptable behaviour and conservatism has to be emphasized.”⁸⁸

Dako recognizes the gender differentiation in speech as an aspect of inequality of power in gender relations; she therefore explains female conformity in linguistic behaviour as “a face saving

⁸⁸ Professor Kari Dako of University of Ghana, interviewed by author, 15 April 2004, Accra tape recording, University of Ghana English Department office, possession of author. As quoted from “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.” Researcher’s Note: Dako references Trudgill about “covert prestige” and in my initial research on the topic I read LaBov’s analysis of gendered prestige norms. He selected three department stores of descending prestige in New York City (Saks, Macy’s and S. Klein) and asked a question requiring the answer “On the fourth floor,” in order to focus on the pronunciation of “r.” The “proper” pronunciation was upheld most at Saks and least at S. Klein. His research suggests that women are more prestige-conscious than men and they avoid using linguistic forms that are stigmatized in their speech community. This may be explained through Trudgill’s suggestions that women have a less secure social position than men. So they may use language more crucially to secure and mark their social status; for this reason, they may pay more attention to the importance of their speech. In understanding females likelihood conform to “acceptable” forms of behaviour, its imperative to consider that in a patriarchal society, men have the ability and power to shape who and what a woman is and does and women unconsciously internalize these notions and conform to meet them.

strategy.”⁸⁹ However, she says that this can explain the behaviour of earlier generations of Ghanaian females but not today’s female student who chooses not to speak Pidgin English. More than simply being more conscious of speaking correctly for fear that PE might contaminate their speech. Dako claims there are more fundamental issues involved. She explains that men and women have different bonding patterns: men bond around occupational patterns, whereas women bond through “face saving appearance.”⁹⁰ She asserts that people do not learn a language unless it is useful to them and Pidgin English is simply not useful to women in Ghana, as it does not enhance her status in anyway. She references Eberhardt’s writing on Black Vernacular English which suggests that “Black female speakers of Standard English are viewed more positively than Black male speakers of Standard English,” to support the findings that “females are considered both feminine and competent if they adhere to accepted standard speech.”⁹¹

Essentially, Dako argues female of former generations wished to hide their associations with social faux pas men by denying that she spoke and understood pidgin while her contemporary, the educated female, has inherited this bias and additionally recognizes Pidgin as a low prestige language that is of no benefit to her, either financially or socially. Because she is status conscious, she focuses on more useful codes, such as Standard English. To speak Pidgin English as a Ghanaian male gives him prestige and identity; he attains “covert prestige” by speaking Student Pidgin, a “sociolectal indicator of higher education.”⁹² On the other hand, the Ghanaian female has picked up the old prejudice because Pidgin is of little use to her as a prestige marker.

Huber argues that because education is so highly valued in Ghana and Pidgin English is still associated with the uneducated section of society, it is “understandable that girls should choose to speak Standard English rather than the non-Standard variety that bears the stigma of illiteracy.”⁹³ But he claims that many female students understand SP and sometimes actively use it, but the small number of girls who actively use SP are generally considered to be “strong minded, independent and above all unladylike.”⁹⁴ Dako gives the example of a woman who came to one of the male halls at the University speaking Pidgin and looking for someone whose name she had forgotten, and the students assumed she was a prostitute.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Kari Dako. “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.” in Ghanaian Journal of English Studies, Ghanaian English Studies Association No. 1 ed. M. E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd. 2002) 79.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 80.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Magnus Huber. Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999). 148.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Kari Dako. “Pidgin as a Gender Specific Language in Ghana.” in Ghanaian Journal of English Studies, Ghanaian English Studies Association No. 1 ed. M. E. Kropp Dakubu (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd. 2002) 74.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0. *Methodology*

- ❖ I selected the location Cape Coast because has the most prestigious senior secondary schools in the nation. Therefore it draws its student population from all over Ghana, especially urban areas.
- ❖ I choose third year students as my target group because they are in the highest level of non-tertiary schooling and presumable have the best grasp of English and have also had the most exposure to Pidgin English.
- ❖ I wanted to study the gendered nature of the linguistic phenomenon so I need homogenous and mixed populations.
- ❖ I selected the schools based on my familiarity with the schools. My host brother attended Adisadel College, I heard a young woman speaking fluent Pidgin and she attended Ghana National, and I heard that Wesley Girls' High School had a strict policy against Pidgin English.
- ❖ I used an open ended questionnaire to receive the most honest and expressive answers rather than pre selecting the choices with a multiple choice format.
- ❖ I picked 60 as the number of students to question because I wanted to have a large enough population to have an accurate sample of the student perspective and also because of the timing of Easter Break in secondary schools I had to downsize my initial number because many students were not on campus when I wanted to distribute the questionnaires (Adisco didn't return to school so I had to search out 20 form three students in Cape Coast and because of this I only got 14 back).
- ❖ I wanted to have an alternative view of the Student Pidgin to triangulate the results from the questionnaire so I asked to speak with English teachers from each school.

4.1. *Analysis*

Question 1: Where and when did you learn Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 8 did not speak
- ❖ 7 from males
- ❖ 3 at school
- ❖ 2 at home

Adisadel College

- ❖ 13 at school
- ❖ 1 at home

Ghana National College

Boys

- ❖ 9 at school
- ❖ 1 at home

Girls

- ❖ 6 at school
- ❖ 3 did not speak
- ❖ 1 at home

Analysis:

The response gathered at the all-girls school shows that they do not speak Pidgin English, among that group two admit to understanding it but simply choose not to speak it. This point is consistent with the Dako's assumption that Student Pidgin and for that matter Ghana Pidgin, is a gender specific phenomenon, and most women choose not to speak it because it is of low prestige, as it connotes a lack of education and serves little purpose as a female sociolect. The next largest response, however, was that the girls learned SP from males, mostly brothers, cousins, and male friends. As males were located as the source of SP, it indicates that SP is a predominately male code and that quite a significant portion of this female population seems to reject Dako's assumption of SP as a low prestige language with limited appeal to girls, though the data here will be critiqued later in response Question 12. Three girls reported that they acquired PE from their all-girls senior secondary school which proves that not only is SP spoken at these schools but also that it might have a small community of SP speakers. Lastly, the two girls who learned Pidgin English at home" were from large urban cities (Accra and Kumasi) with large immigrant populations, which speaks to the acculturation in large cities that is translated through the students at secondary schools who are from those areas.

Both school populations of males show that most boys learned SP at school. Proving that it is both a popular code among young males and that it is largely a senior secondary school acquired phenomenon. Similar to the girls at Wesley Girls' High School, the males (one from Adisadel

College and the other from Ghana National College) who learned PE at home were from large cities (Accra and Tema, respectively).

The majority of girls at Ghana National learned SP while in senior secondary school, which corresponds with both male populations. So it might be assumed that because of the mixed gender dynamic at Ghana National that the gender specific phenomenon is neutralized and further suggests that there it might also serve as sociolect for girls. A much smaller portion of girls report that they do not speak Pidgin English, adhering the assumption that SP is predominately male. Consistent with other speakers who acquired PE at home, the one female respondent from Ghana National was from a large city, Takoradi.

Conclusion:

Most boys, independent of school and girls at Ghana National learn SP in senior secondary school. While the female SP speakers at all girls school acquire SP from males and consistent with previous research in the field, the majority of girls at all-girls schools maintain that they do not speak pidgin.

Question 2: Why do you speak Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 8 did not speak
- ❖ 7 to fit into a group
- ❖ 3 for easy communication
- ❖ 1 to speak to illiterates
- ❖ 1 other

Adisadel College

- ❖ 11 for easy communication
- ❖ 3 to fit into a group

Ghana National College

Boys

- ❖ 6 for easy communication
- ❖ 4 to fit into a group

Girls

- ❖ 4 for easy communication
- ❖ 4 to fit into a group
- ❖ 2 did not speak

Analysis:

The previous eight non-speakers of SP at Wesley Girls' School report again that they do not speak SP. While seven report speaking it to fit into a group, a group that seems to be predominately male. Answers that were compiled into "to fit into a group" included; "Because most of my friends speak it and naturally you will speak it with them," to be able to talk back to people who speak pidgin to me," "Because I want to fit into a group;" some suggested that it was specifically necessary to speak it because of males, "Because I have many male friends, siblings, and relatives who speak it with me," "Isn't just for the fun of it – it's more like the only language I can communicate with (male cousins and their friends) in." Similar to the majority of student response, three girls at Wesley Girls' said they spoke it to make communication easier, ("It's easier to speak and one doesn't have much to conjugate!" " Mainly because it is shorter and the vocabulary is much more interesting and the translations are literal.") which directly corresponds with the Dako's assertion that it is an easier form of communication than Standard English because the performance pressure is removed. One female student reports that she utilizes PE to communicate with "illiterate people who don't know proper English," illustrating Pidgin English's use as a true Pidgin – to bridge gaps of communication between people who do not speak a common language.

The majority of the boys surveyed reported that they spoke SP for easy communication (reasons explained above). Adisadel boys said, "Because it is easy to learn and speak," "It's simple to understand," and several explained that SP allowed them to "express themselves as fast as possible." Most of the boys at Ghana National spoke SP for the same reason, explaining, "I feel it is easy, understandable, communicable to all people even illiterates," "fast and easy way of communicating and shortness sentences making it easier to understand," and "It helps me express myself so well." Boys at both schools also agreed that it allowed them to fit into a group; Adisadel College boys remarked, "Because everybody is speaking it," "Its like a fashion," and "It makes socialization easy and also as the seniors are speaking it you will be anxious to learn from them;" the boys at Ghana National similarly responded, "It is a part of school life and moreover the major language of communication among we boys," "Because it makes me feel popular at school," and as one student so aptly put it, "per influence." Though the number of male students who choose it to

fit into a group is fewer than those who speak SP for an easy form of communication, the answers illustrate the desire to express group solidarity, or as Forson would argue an argot.

The girls at Ghana National gave an equal number of responses to “easy communication” and ‘to fit into a group,’ which suggests that the girls at the mixed school serve as the middle ground between the norms at all-girls schools and boy norms. But it is interesting to note that in the first question three girls claimed that they did not speak PE while only two mentioned they did not speaking with the third girl reporting that she spoke it for “fun in a group for my peers.”

Conclusion:

It is clear from the girls who speak SP at Wesley Girls’ High School do so to fit into a group, a group which is usually male. This suggests that girls adjust their social activities to fit within their surroundings. Huber suggests that girls are more strictly follow societal rules and norms and so these results imply that within the boundaries of male socialization girls attempt to conform to those norms. The evidence shows that boys speak SP because its an easier form of communication than Standard English, which corresponds with Dako’s explanation of pidgin’s appeal because it is not performance based, it maintains a separate set of structural rules, and is therefore a more accessible form of communication. Drawing from the balanced answers given by the girls at Ghana National College, it seems that they are medium of the two gender norms. This may be the result of their mixed gender environment, i.e. the influence of their male peers that allows them to establish another set of social norms (this is supported by evidence from Question 12). It also helps validate girls are likely to adapt to different socialization norms, as suggested in response to Wesley Girls’ answers to Question 2.

Question 3: When is it appropriate to speak Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls’ High School:

- ❖ 14 informally with friends
- ❖ 3 with illiterates
- ❖ 2 Never appropriate

Adisadel College

- ❖ 14 Informally with friends

Ghana National College

Boys

- ❖ 9 Informally with friends

Girls

- ❖ 9 Informally with friends
- ❖ 1 Never appropriate

Analysis and Conclusion:

The overwhelming majority of students, independent of school, reported that PE is only appropriate informally with friends. This answer is consistent with PE's place on the continuum of English in Ghana – as a “non-standard” English variant that is associated with the less educated and is the least internationally recognizable, thus it finds its use in Ghana in formal settings. Their answers might also be the internalized reflection of societal judgments about PE as improper, disrespectful, and uneducated. The results show that only females consider PE to never be appropriate, another indication of their adherence to societal rules.

Question 4: What do you think about people who only speak Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 11 Uneducated
- ❖ 4 No prejudice
- ❖ 2 Undisciplined
- ❖ 2 Limiting their future
- ❖ 1 Other

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 6 Uneducated
- ❖ 3 No prejudice
- ❖ 3 Limiting their future
- ❖ 2 Spoiling their English

Ghana National College:

Boys

- ❖ 5 Spoiling their English
- ❖ 3 Uneducated
- ❖ 1 Undisciplined
- ❖ 1 Limiting their future

Girls

- ❖ 4 Limiting their future
- ❖ 4 Uneducated
- ❖ 1 Undisciplined
- ❖ 1 No prejudice

Analysis and Conclusion:

Most of the students held a pejorative view of people who only speak PE, because many of them thought of it as an informal language and thought that people should at least have a passive command of Standard English. Additionally, many of them considered a lack of education to a negative attribute. Several students thought speaking only PE would spoil their Standard English, a point which will be covered later in the analysis. A total of ten students thought it would limit their future, which demonstrates their understanding of Standard English as the vehicle to university, jobs, etc. (discussed in the History of English in Ghana). In the pool of those who said they harboured no prejudice towards those who speak only PE, were the most sympathetic and challenging comments: from two Wesley Girls' students, "If they are happy with themselves I suppose it's alright," "At least they make the effort to speak the (English) language;" and from Adisadel College students, "No prejudice – it is a perfect language," "high level of consciousness," and "I have no problem with that. I think they feel that it is the best language they can speak to express to express themselves." These students, especially the Adisadel College boys, it seems are attempting to challenge the dominance of Standard English as the only "proper" language, and trying to elevate and legitimize other forms of English.

Question 5: How do you feel about older people who speak Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 11 Do not respect
- ❖ 4 Amused
- ❖ 2 Not a problem
- ❖ 2 Corrupting English

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 6 Not a problem
- ❖ 4 Do not respect
- ❖ 2 Probably do not speak English

Ghana National College:

Boys

- ❖ 4 Not a problem
- ❖ 2 Problem do not speak English
- ❖ 2 Do not respect

Girls

- ❖ 5 Do not respect
- ❖ 4 Not a Problem

Analysis:

The majority of the results as Wesley Girls' High School demonstrate overwhelmingly that the girls do not respect older people who speak PE. In fact many of their responses were quite relentless and austere, "I think they sound immature and raw. I also see it as wrong and unpardonable because they are looked up to by the youth," "I feel they should grow up!" "I feel that as older people they should rather be encouraging the youth to speak better English and therefore they are a disgrace to society." "They have no self-respect," and "I feel they should know better than speak Pidgin English." This attitude can be attributed to reverence typically given to ones elders in this culture, which the girls think is compromised when they speak Pidgin English. It also seems that the girls mark PE as a part of youth culture and limit its use to that space. They argue that older people who speak PE do not set a good example for the youth.

Yet the boys at Adisadel College and boys at Ghana National did not consider its use by older people to be a problem. The boys at the two schools gave similar explanations in respect to why it was not a problem. The boys at Adisadel College said, "I feel normal and feel happy because they know how to express their selves with the pidgin English without finding any difficulties," Sometimes they learnt it from school and for that matter it has strict to their minds. It just makes them feel like the people who practice Western culture," "Not bad since English is not the only correct language." At Ghana National College the boys did not find it a problem because they assumed that the older people were trying to identify with their past; "I feel it normal because I think they've been like us before," "I think it's great as they have achieved what is supposed to be achieved, since it reminds them of those days when they went in school," "I feel they speak it to remember when they were in school or they began speaking it." These points, argue in support of the use of SP as a male sociolect as it is expected and accepted that men speak SP.

Similar to Wesley Girls' most of the girls at Ghana National lacked respect for older Pidgin speakers. Their main reason being that the older people were setting a bad example for the youth;

their comments were a bit severe, reporting that they felt “embarrassed,” “Its is very bad to see older people speaking Pidgin English will not be appropriate,” “I feel disgusted. I think only young people should speak Pidgin English.” However, the second half of the female respondents sided with the boys at Ghana National and felt it was not a problem, arguing, “I think its cool especially when they get together with their male friends and all of the speak the Pidgin” and “I think it is okay with them since they have finished schooling and it just reminds them of their school days.” Thus, reinforcing the idea of SP as a male sociolect as it identifies the speaker as having attended some level of higher education.

Conclusion:

Generally the boys were less judgmental about older people speaking it, this can be linked to SP as a distinct code which connotes education among its male speakers and since the boys would receive the advantages of this label they were more inclined to support PE in older people. Whereas the girls ascribe SP to youth culture and view adults, they were bitterly against its use outside of juvenile communities. This could also be because as Dako argues, they receive fewer benefits from the sociolect.

Question 6: Do school authorities approve of Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls’ High School:

❖ 20 No

Adisadel College

❖ 13 No

❖ 1 Yes

Ghana National College

Boys

❖ 9 No

Girls

❖ 10 No

Analysis and Conclusion:

All the students, except one, reported that school authorities did not approve of SP. They all listed similar reasons of SP of it not being appropriate in formal places and because of its affect on education, specifically the teaching of English. The student who answered affirmatively, explained that teachers approve of it as a “topic under literature in General Arts,” but otherwise it finds disapproval from school authorities. After interviewing English teachers from the three schools, it is clear that the students are very clear on the teachers perceptions on Pidgin English. And because all the students agreed students, however it has not been effectively taught to them as most of them continue to speak SP. The conclusion will be better answered in Question 11.

Question 7: How do older people respond to Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls’ High School:

- ❖ 13 Dislike
- ❖ 4 Recognise as part of youth culture

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 13 Dislike

Ghana National College:

Boys

- ❖ 8 Dislike
- ❖ 1 Recognise as part of youth culture

Girls

- ❖ 8 Dislike
- ❖ 2 Recognise as part of youth culture

Analysis and Conclusion:

Only seven students reported that older people (i.e. teachers, parents, etc) did not dislike Pidgin English, they claim that some adults recognize SP as a part of youth culture which they took part in when they were younger. Otherwise, older people find it “disrespectful,” “detestable,” “unbecoming,” an improper form of communication,” “barbaric and uncouth,” etc. Adults associate PE with negative aspects of society, according to the questionnaires it is linked with criminal behaviour, drug and alcohol use in youth, and indiscipline. Its position in Ghanaian society is due to its social history with Kroo Brofo and Abongo Brofo.

Question 8: Among the division of schools, which speak Pidgin English the most?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 20 Boys Schools

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 14 Boys School

Ghana National College:

Boys:

- ❖ 9 Boys School
- ❖ 1 Mixed Schools

Girls

- ❖ 10 Boys Schools

Question 9: Do you prefer the English taught in schools or Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 18 English taught in schools
- ❖ 2 Both

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 10 English taught in schools
- ❖ 3 Both
- ❖ 1 Pidgin English

Ghana National College:

Boys:

- ❖ 10 English taught in Schools

Girls:

- ❖ 10 English taught in schools

Analysis and Conclusion:

Most of the students preferred the English taught in schools over Pidgin English. The results are interesting because even the boys claimed to prefer Standard English even though they admit to speaking it the most. The students preferred Standard English because they saw it as an international language with millions of speakers worldwide, they said that it would give them better opportunities in life because it is the official language of the country and in general, it the “best” language. At both single sex schools recognize the advantages of both English and Pidgin English. Wesley Girls’ students, who are less versed in SP than Ghana National girls, recognize the value of PE more than the girls at Ghana National who utilize it more. In conclusion, their answers reflect dominance of English in this country as the direct result of its long tradition in the country. Their answers correspond with Huber’s continuum which places Standard English on the highest most acceptable form of English and Pidginized varieties near the bottom.

Question 10: How would you feel if Pidgin were used...

A). as a medium of instruction?

Wesley Girls’ High School:

- ❖ 15 Disapprove
- ❖ 2 Approve
- ❖ 1 Mixed / Indifferent

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 12 Disapprove
- ❖ 1 Approve
- ❖ 1 Mixed / Indifferent

Ghana National College:

Boys:

- ❖ 6 Approve
- ❖ 4 Disapprove

Girls:

- ❖ 5 Disapprove
- ❖ 4 Approve

B). to deliver a sermon in Church?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 17 Disapprove
- ❖ 2 Approve
- ❖ 2 Mixed / Indifferent

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 12 Disapprove
- ❖ 2 Approve

Ghana National College:

Boys:

- ❖ 5 Disapprove
- ❖ 4 Approve

Girls:

- ❖ 8 Disapprove
- ❖ 1 Approve

C). In Parliament?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 19 Disapprove
- ❖ 1 Mixed / Indifferent

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 13 Disapprove
- ❖ 1 Approve

Ghana National College:

Boys:

- ❖ 9 Disapprove
- ❖ 1 Approve

Girls:

- ❖ 8 Disapprove
- ❖ 1 Approve

Analysis:

Across the board, the response at Wesley Girls' was disapproval in all three areas, with the most reported towards the use of Pidgin English in Parliament. The same applies for Adisadel College, a consistent twelve students disagreed with its use as medium of instruction and to deliver a sermon in Church, and an additional student was opposed to PE in Parliament. At Ghana National, more boys than girls approved of the use of Pidgin English as a means of instruction, while the girls disapproved of its use but the difference between approval and disapproval was separated by one student. In the other areas, they were against the use of PE, though in the delivery of a sermon the boys disapproval was just one student more than approval. Most felt it would complicate education and prevent the students from being successful because PE is not accepted in all parts of society. And they feared that if PE were used in Church it would make a mockery of the Church as an institution and thus a mockery of God. While most agreed that it would be wholly inappropriate and internationally embarrassing if Parliament used PE as it would portray Parliament as a "playground" and too informal and it would not be taken seriously by other governments and by Ghanaians.

Conclusion:

Because the students think of PE as an informal language they disapprove of its use in places they deem formal. Also the language is associated with the youth and it would "corrupt" these areas of society.

Question 11: Do you think Pidgin English will spoil your school taught English?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 13 Yes
- ❖ 6 No
- ❖ 1 May be

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 6 Yes
- ❖ 5 No
- ❖ 1 Maybe

Ghana National College:

Boys:

- ❖ 6 Yes
- ❖ 3 No
- ❖ 1 Maybe

Girls:

- ❖ 7 Yes
- ❖ 3 No

Analysis:

Overall the students feel that Pidgin will “spoil” the Standard English yet the majority of them speak Pidgin English. There seems to be a drastic inconsistency between what student think and what students do, as is the case with most people when it comes down to principles. Many answers speak to PE being “addictive” and creeping into your Standard English, especially when writing exams. The results from Adisadel College are the nearest to negating that PE will spoil English. Their arguments speak to bilingualism and code switching, they contend, “that it depends on the individual,” “because it is just like any other language like Twi, Twi will not affect your school taught English.” These students demonstrate the ability to move between codes in response to their domain. The final student thinks of SP as a form of bilingualism and contends that like any other foreign language, SP will not interfere with the Standard English.

Conclusion:

Yet having read all 54 questionnaires that were returned, none included PE, however, there were grammatical and spelling mistakes but no Pidgin English was used. In the interviews with teachers they all mentioned that PE sometimes but rarely appears in the examinations but Forson notes that there is no empirical evidence where Student Pidgin had ‘corrupted’ or spoiled the Standard English of students. The students’ answers maybe the result of teacher and parental warnings rather than the actual belief that SP will displace Standard English. But if we think of PE as a distinct language in the students multilingual repertoire then just as bilingual students are aware of which language they are using, the SP speaker is aware of which code is being used. Therefore the codes are distinct which might prevent the student from “slipping” into PE.

Question 12: What do you think about girls who speak Pidgin English?

Wesley Girls' High School:

- ❖ 11 unladylike, hardcore, etc
- ❖ 6 Good, normal etc
- ❖ 2 Mixed

Adisadel College:

- ❖ 9 Unladylike, hardcore, etc
- ❖ 5 Good, normal, etc

Ghana National College:

Boys:

- ❖ 5 Good, normal, etc
- ❖ 4 Unladylike, hardcore, etc

Girls:

- ❖ 5 Good, normal, etc
- ❖ 5 Unladylike, hardcore, etc

Analysis:

In conjunction with the answers from Questions 1 and 2, the answers from this question vividly elucidate the perpetuation of SP as a gender specific phenomenon. The response from the all-girls school reports that SP is 'unladylike' and socially unacceptable, yet from the answers from Question 1, twelve girls speak pidgin. So are we to assume that they are "unladylike"? Oddly, the responses to this question were given in the third person, example; "They are not ladies or girls of good breeding." Thereby distancing themselves from the language and its implication by deflecting culpability through the use of third person. The answers suggest that these girls themselves are not "unladylike' but rather they specify that other girls who speak SP and speak it regularly are 'unsuitable,' example from a female SP speaker who learned PE at home: "If it's 'full blown' Pidgin English, then I don't approve of these girls and I think ill of them. However if it's the simple basic pidgin, I think it's not really a bother." One girl reported, "I think that they are trading the path of doom. What will they teach their children in the future when they become mothers." The girls at this all-girls school have internalized and maintain these traditional social norms, which supports Huber's contention women follow rules more closely than men and Dako's

assertion that contemporary women inherited the prejudices against PE especially when used by women.

The boys at the all boys schools have also taken on traditional biases against female PE speakers and report similar statements about female speakers. Most boys simply stated that they feel “bad’ about a girl who speaks PE, a few went further to explain, “I believe ladies are to present themselves as ladies and hence if they speak Pidgin they are uncouth,” “I feel gloomy because they think they are of themselves and to what ever they like by not obeying school rules. **HARDCORES,**” lastly, “They are not serious, myopic, mere imitators and uncivilized. They must be prompted to stop. It doesn’t befit them.” Therefore it seems that in the same sex schools they maintain traditional perceptions about women and femininity, and their adherence to these norms maybe be the result of their isolation to single sex spaces.

The students at Ghana National were basically split half and half about girls speaking Pidgin English. But most approve of the behaviours. When viewed in the context of Question 2 and why the girls at Ghana National spoke SP, for the same reasons as the boys, it seems that their mixed school environment creates its own rules of gender that are more accommodating to their environment. The boys and girls probably think less badly of female speakers because, respectively, they know female speakers and see that they are not any less “ladylike’ and that they themselves are speakers and do not identify with the negative associations. Thereby actively rejecting the traditional associations and assumptions about female speakers.

Likewise, some girls at the single sex schools rebel against the construct of SP as masculine and extremely negative behaviour for girls. One girl does consider herself in her answer and responds, “I think it normal because I speak it. How can I condemn it when I also speak it;” another woman answers that “if she knows when and when not to speak pidgin it is very cool.” Some portion of the Adisadel boys saw it as “normal,” two explained that they were “good because it makes them really conscious.” And that it was “normal, they do also want to feel like girls, girls.” But they are not the majority.

Conclusion:

In single sex schools, there is strict adherence to traditional perceptions about women and even girls who utilize SP contend that is an inappropriate language for women. Although these responses seem odd, they are typical contradictions within most people and especially teenagers, as they are still determining who they are and what they think. The girls it seems are in a transitional stage of becoming what women so they harbour traditional ideas about women but having had greater access to higher education they are faced with a new set of values and norms which do not correspond with those of tradition. Yet the girls (and boys) at mixed institutions have constructed a

new framework with which to evaluate rules and norms, one that is more lenient and understanding of modern women; thereby rejecting pidgin as gender specific phenomenon.

4.2. *Attitudes towards Student Pidgin*

In order to fully understand why students choose Student Pidgin as mode of communication in senior secondary school, it is necessary to speak with the school authorities and teachers. The students reported that most school authorities disapproved of Pidgin English and also argued that it would ruin the Standard English taught in schools, these speculations require that we talk to the actual source.

Questions asked to teachers and administrators at the three schools:

1. What is Pidgin English
2. What is the official school policy towards its use?
→ Why? How is it enforced?
3. How prevalent is Pidgin English on your campus?
4. Why do students speak Pidgin English?
5. Why is it gender specific phenomenon?
6. Why is your school opposed to its use?
→ Is there any empirical proof that its use interferes with Standard English?
7. Does the school encourage the use of a Ghanaian language?
→ Do you think Pidgin English brings the students nearer to English than the use of a Ghanaian language?
8. Do you think Pidgin can be another means of self-expression among students (especially in cases where the student shows difficulty in the use of English)?
9. What is your personal view on Pidgin English?

Ghana National College

Mr. William Afedu-Annan, Senior Housemaster and Alumni of Ghana National.

❖ Response to Question 4:

“Looking at my student days, I think student speak PE basically because it’s a bit easier to communicate freely and in real terms... they use words from local languages to better express their inner feelings and make them feel superior to those who speak the Queen’s English.” “Students

don't really learn Pidgin English you just grow into it... all you need to do to speak it is just corrupt a few words and add a few jargons that your peers will understand.”

Analysis: Corroborates with the student response that they speak it because it's an easy form of communication that allows for better self expression.

❖ Response to Question 5:

“Female students in secondary schools...its rare. But in tertiary institutions it's a bit common because they want to belong. But in secondary schools they can understand it but they feels a bit shy to speak it out loud to the hearing of others because when female second cycle students speak it they are looked upon as not to belong. They are outcasts, that kind of person who is too forward. If you look at it critically, in secondary schools girls are looked at as second class citizens but in tertiary institutions they feel that if they can speak it they are rigid among the boys.”

Analysis: Contends that female speakers are rare and they understand it but choose not to speak it because they are perceived as equal to their male counterparts but in tertiary institutions they are equal. I think this suggests that in secondary schools girls are trying to proof their worth and therefore elect not to speak PE because it is associated with the uneducated and they want to promote an image of themselves as equals and competitors so they avoid all implications that would lump with a subordinate status.

❖ Response to Question 9:

“Definitely, definitely yes. There are certain words in the English language which are hard to cradle enough feelings in terms of the use. But when you speak it with the local language or jargon that will make you stand out as a different person to your peers. If a small group of people substitute money with a word like “quadja” (SIC) which is word that is used in some South African countries, so that if everybody else used the term money and we the small group of people substitute money with “quadja” it makes you look different. So that if the others don't understand what “quadja” is then you have a secret to share among yourselves.”

Analysis: His comments elucidate SP's use as secret code, an in-group language: an argot. Mr. Christian Biney, former head of English Department and current English tutor.

❖ Response to Question 1:

“Many students find PE more readily accessible than the standard language in colloquial or conversational situations. It looks to me that they regard it as a status symbol because when you take a look at the use of Pidgin you discover that even good speakers of the language are caught in that web of Pidgin speaking, you find that they speak it spiritedly as groups of friends. It is exactly

because of the spirited way they speak it that I say it is then comes to stand as status symbol. It makes them identify as someone who is a student that is clear because it is not normally heard among people... when you hear the pidgin you are probably sure that students are speaking it.”

Analysis: Biney’s explanation supports the idea of SP as an argot as it is used as a “badge of identity” marking its speakers as students. Its use as a status symbol suggests that SP is a sociolect among student speakers since it says immediately that they had a senior secondary education, as most students learn it in senior secondary school.

❖ Response to Question 3:

“It’s so pervasive that you come out of the classrooms, and even though they are not supposed to speak it, you hear around. That’s what they speak. In other words, they can’t resist the temptation to speak it.”

Analysis: Similar to the comment of a student who said it was an addictive language, I think this speaks to SP as an easy, convenient and fast mode of communication that allows them to express themselves quickly and efficiently because of this, they resort to it often.

❖ Response to Question 5:

“Scarcely ever because if ever they do then I would say that want to please the opposite sex, because you hardly ever hear it among girls when they are alone. Girls seem to want to do what they think is the right thing: they are more amenable to rules and regulations. And in any case, at our school it’s the girls who are ahead.”

Analysis: Consistent with the number of girls at Wesley Girls’ High School who learned SP from males and mostly use it to speak with a male audience. It also suggests that the women at Ghana National speak SP because of their constant contact with boys. Although a bit heterosexist, Biney thinks this is because they want to impress the boys, which from data gathered, is likely to be true. Also his answer corresponds with the evidence that women observe rules more than their male counterparts.

❖ Response to Question 6:

“The level of English is very low, sometimes actually appalling. And that situation is aggravated if steps were not taken to curb the speaking of Pidgin. The point is that as long as somebody speaks Pidgin and loves to do so... he doesn’t make his mind up to study good English. He has easy access to this language that it’s what he uses all the time so he doesn’t make his mind to pour into Standard English.”

Analysis: Biney argues that PE further exacerbates the acquisition of Standard English and not that PE alone corrodes Standard English. Therefore it seems that PE is not the source of poor English but rather is one of the problems within the greater problem of education, specifically the learning of Standard English. Therefore, one might instead argue that if Standard English were engrained and taught better Pidgin would be less likely to interfere, Dako suggests that Nkrumah's free public education decreased the quality of education in schools and students weren't being taught English as well but it was demanded of them so in resistance they began speaking SP. And it seems now that because the quality of education has steadily decreased SP has started to have a detrimental effect on their education. Proving that PE is not solely at fault.

Wesley Girls' High School

Auntie Albe, Alberta Crawson, English teacher

❖ Response to Question 2:

"It's not prevalent. You will find girls speaking proper English, even in their own quarters. Just a few but the person will stop as soon as they see you around. It looks as if the girls are trying to learn from the boys. If they speak it, they speak it in an informal sector and actually without the hearing of any member of staff, they speak it among themselves. So if they see or get wind that a member of staff is coming around they quickly stop and change meter bands back to proper English."

Analysis: It does seem that in fact the girls, especially at Wesley Girls, are learning SP from the boys, proven in their answers from the questionnaire.

❖ Response to Question 4:

"It was a rebellious notion against proper English. They felt that the English language was not my language, it is the British man's language so why should I speak it. But if that is true then speak your local language because the local language is becoming difficult for them to speak. But why do you speak Pidgin as a rebellious form... speak your local dialect"

Analysis: Ms. Alberta speaks to the origins of SP as a form of rebellion but suggests that its not really an effect form of rebellion and they should use their local languages. All the same, points out that SP is a form of rebellion.

❖ Response to Question 5:

“Women usually do not speak it... can we say it is because of our lady like qualities. Maybe I should say that men and boys will always be men and boys and they are always rebelling. But I think girls and women are ladylike.”

❖ Response to Question 8:

“Yes, yes. It’s a way of them expressing themselves but unfortunately they are expressing themselves in a society that does not use Pidgin English. Ghanaians don’t speak Pidgin, so if the youth wish to express themselves and they speak PE unfortunately the adults wont understand them. They can have their secret language but they are sent to school to learn Standard English so speak Standard English.”

Analysis: This might be precisely why students use SP as a means of communication to keep adults and outsiders from entering their spaces – the use of SP as an argot to limit its use to a certain group and keep others out because they will not understand the language.

Adisadel College

Mrs. Elizabeth Nyatuame-Gborsong and Mr. Philip Gborsong, English teacher and former English teacher, respectively.

❖ Response to Question 2:

“The rules instruct that students are only to speak Standard English. But you can follow the students everywhere but when they are in our presence they cannot speak Pidgin....if the students speak it we just correct them and scold them, not punish them.”

❖ Response to Question 4:

“They feel ...well they are guys so they feel that they are copying from America and that kind of thing. If you can speak that way it says you are mean. If you can speak then that means you are guys, that you are not old men. It’s a mark of civilization, that’s how they see it. If you speak the Standard one then that means you are a villager or something like that.”

Analysis: Validates the use of pidgin as a male sociolect.

❖ Response to Question 5:

“Boys like speaking Pidgin more than the girls. We can’t judge it because we only have males here. But from my study in gender girls are more likely to pay attention to orders given by their teachers than the boys. so at a girl’s school when they tell you are not allowed to speak the Pidgin they keep to it more than the boys students.”

Analysis: Consistent with the other accounts of females being more attuned to rules than males.

❖ Response to Question 8:

“Because of the nature of the examinations, they may not find (Pidgin English)...it will not be very important unless I know that there are books written in it, of course I know the Bible is written in Pidgin. But if the guidelines set out, the teachers know it and is a policy that they should allow it to be taught then the students would see it to be very good because they like it. But here is the case where the teachers have not been trained in Pidgin and they don’t know it. Even the students speaking it, I wouldn’t say they are speaking Pidgin, they are speaking some sort of Broken English because they don’t know the rules govern the Pidgin.”

Analysis: They contend that Pidgin is not inherently bad but it is not what is tested on examinations so therefore it should not be spoken but if it were apart of the curriculum they would feel comfortable with it.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0. *Conclusion*

My research was in investigate use of Student Pidgin in secondary school. My research data was gathered from questionnaires to students and interviews with teachers. And from the data collected, I arrived at the following conclusion – students speak Student Pidgin mainly because it is an easier form of communication and as the language of a group. As SP started off as form of resistance to the Standard English only policies of secondary school, I argue that although the reasons have changed over the years, Student Pidgin's continued use is a form of resistance. Although its speakers do not specifically label it as such, I think that it is an everyday form of resistance: resistance to Standard English because Pidgin English easier and resistance to the culture of Standard English.

The secondary schools require students to speak Standard English even though standard at which English is taught has decreased. Students explain that they are able to express themselves effectively through Pidgin English because they cannot identify with Standard English. So their use of Pidgin English is in rebellion to the performance pressure and lack of identification with Standard English. Secondly students report that they speak Pidgin informally, out of class for the purpose of solidarity among a group and for socialization, which proves Forson's argument of student pidgin as an argot. As an argot, SP is established in opposition to the dominant society, i.e. the senior secondary school. They speak Pidgin English to carve out their own, sometimes secret, space, to create and maintain a culture that would not be acceptable in mainstream society. Therefore Pidgin English among secondary school students constructs its own world and creates its own culture through the use of language.

5.1. *Considerations*

It might be interesting to do a comparison between the attitudes of Black Vernacular English and Ghanaian Pidgin, to research the relocation of Twi in the Caribbean, to study the creolization of Pidgin English as it crossed the Atlantic, to investigate the influence of American hip hop on Student Pidgin, to look further into the gender division in Ghanaian Pidgin English, and also the pidginization of Ghanaian languages.

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Appendix
Pidgin English Questionnaire
Part One

Name:

Name of Secondary School:

Form:

Gender: Male []

Female []

Place of permanent residence:

Educational background of parents:

.....

Occupation of parents;

.....

Part Two

Please answer the questions as carefully and thoroughly as you can. Your responses should reflect your personal experience rather than what official school policy dictates.

1. Where and when did you learn Pidgin English?
2. Why do you speak Pidgin English?
3. When is it appropriate to speak Pidgin English? Why?
4. What do you think about people who only speak Pidgin English?
5. How do you feel about older people who speak Pidgin English?
6. Do school authorities approve of Pidgin English? Why or why not?
7. How do older people (teachers, parents, etc) respond to Pidgin English? What do they think about Pidgin English? Why do they feel that way?

8. Among the division of schools (ie boys schools, girls schools, and mixed schools) which speak Pidgin English the most? Why?
9. Do you prefer the English taught in schools or Pidgin English? Why?
10. How would you feel if Pidgin English was used.....
 - (a). as a medium of instruction?
 - (b). to deliver a sermon in Church?
 - (c). in Parliament?
11. Do you think Pidgin English will spoil your school taught English? Why or why not?
12. What do you feel about girls who speak Pidgin English?

All information provided will be used exclusively for research purposes. If you are interested in or available for additional questions or an interview, please leave your contact information below. Thank you for your time and assistance!!