

Chapter 5

Linguistic Diversity: An Evaluation of Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English in a Nigerian Film

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ABSTRACT

*There is an old adage that states, “Languages have armies and dialects don’t.” This articulates a common belief that those who speak an “inferior” language are often marginalized and lack political power. This chapter is an evaluation of the use of Nigerian Pidgin English and the discriminatory societal views associated with Nigerian Pidgin English users. This chapter discusses the power struggles of those who choose to speak Nigerian Pidgin English verses those who use the preferred standard, Standard English. This chapter examines how Nigerian films can propagate societal stereotypes, thus reinforcing social biases against Nigerian Pidgin English speakers who choose to use Nigerian Pidgin English in Nigeria. This evaluation is done by analyzing the conversations between Nigerian Pidgin English users and Standard English users in the Nollywood film *Corporate Maid*.*

INTRODUCTION

In short, the Third World finds itself and speaks to itself through his voice. We know that it is not a homogeneous world; we know too that enslaved peoples are still to be found there, together with some who have achieved a simulacrum of phony independence, others who are still fighting to attain sovereignty and others again who have obtained complete freedom but who live under the constant menace of imperialist aggression. These differences are born of colonial history, in other words of oppression. Here, the mother country is satisfied to keep some feudal rulers in her pay; there, dividing and ruling she has created a native bourgeoisie, sham from beginning to end; elsewhere she has played a double game: colony is planted with settlers and exploited at the same time. Thus Europe has multiplied divisions and

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opposing groups, has fashioned classes and sometimes even racial prejudices, and has endeavored by every means to bring about and intensify the stratification of colonized societies (Sartre, 1963, pp. 10-11).

How does culture influence what is portrayed in a film? Films can be seen as one of the primary documentaries of a certain culture. Moreover, films can also be an embellishment of certain motifs from within a culture as they are a money-driven enterprise. However, films provide some of the best visuals in understanding the intricate social norms in a particular culture, at a particular time. Recently, more researchers are studying African films to understand cultural motifs that make African films “African.” Writers such as Diawara, 1992; Gugler, 2003; Armes, 2008; Pfaff, 2008; Ďurovičová and Newman, 2010; Saul and Austen, 2010; have all contributed to the development of research on African cinema and its political and social effects on African society.

By investigating the cultural motifs in a Nigerian film, one can examine how these motifs shape and define Nigerian culture through languages, customs, and moral values. Unlike literature, films can reach certain socio-economic groups. Thus, films are useful in describing the images of Africa and showcasing postcolonial African identities within African culture (Diawara, 1992). Furthermore, African films encompass different perspectives on dealing with the social and political issues that are made available to the public through media. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to evaluate how the different motifs define and shape Nigerian culture through a Nollywood film and the characterization of social identities in African films by the language used, specifically Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English. One way to do so is to conduct a comparative analysis of the use of Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English in a Nigerian Nollywood film in hopes of understanding how the two languages, shape identity, define social perceptions, and strategically stratify interlocutors of both language speakers into accepted societal norms by the language they use.

Henceforth, the purpose of this chapter is to help readers conceptualize how language affects its users by analyzing the usage between those who speak the preferred Standard English versus those who speak the Nonstandard English, Nigerian Pidgin English. This process will be done through the analyzation of the conversations between the Standard English speakers and Nigerian Pidgin English speakers in the “Nollywood” film *Corporate Maid*. Also, this analysis examines the subtle conversational structures that prevent or enable Nigerian Pidgin English speakers to communicate in arguments with their Standard English-speaking interlocutors. The analysis will consist of an evaluation of the historical context of Nigerian Pidgin English in Nigerian society, its sociolinguistic influences in society, and its usage in Nollywood films will be examined. Next, an analysis of the film *Corporate Maid* will be evaluated. Then the conversations between Nigerian Pidgin English and Standard English will be compared using a sociolinguistic conversation analysis approach to codify the conversations in the script by using transcription symbols. Finally, social implications will be discussed not only on the effects of language use in society, but also the systematic effects of a preferred language over the Standard and Nonstandard English in Nigerian society.

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC NATURE OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH

As a result of the social stigmas associated with Nigerian Pidgin English, the film *Corporate Maid* perpetuates the same stereotypical biases that are common among those who speak Nigerian Pidgin English

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