THE STATUS OF “KOM” AND THE TIME, ASPECT-MODALITY SYSTEM OF ANGLO-NIGERIAN PIDGIN.

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ABSTRACT

Anglo-Nigeria Pidgin (ANP), a variety of English-based Pidgin/Creole is a modern urbanised phenomenon. Though it is widely believed that children of mixed families use ANP as their first language this research shares the view that a growing number Nigerians born in large cities even to parents sharing the same language and who have spent substantial number of years in those areas may infact be using ANP as a first language. In addition to these are those speakers who use it as a second or third language in the entire country.

Our research reveals that though ANP’s tense-aspect-modality (TA) system shares many similarities with Bickerton’s proto-creole TAM system, creolisation in Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin seems however to be pulling the language nearer to Nigerian languages by its unfoldment of an overt reals modality marker (Kom). While this research shares the views of Agheyisi (1988) and Faraclas (1987), to some extent it however, contrasts in many ways with their conclusions.

ANP’s tense-aspect-modality system, Creolisation, children and adolescent and Nigerian languages.

KEYWORDS:

1.0 BACKGROUND

Anglo – Nigerian pidgin (hereafter referred to as ANP) is a variety of the English – based pidgin / Creole spoken in several Anglophone countries of West Africa, particularly in parts of Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon1. It is predominantly used as a second or third language in Nigeria ; it draws its speakers, mainly the young from diversified regional, ethnolinguistic and social – economic sectors of the Nigerian community. However, ANP registers a growing population of first language users in Edo, Delta2, Bayelsa and Rivers States of Nigeria (Shenkal and Marchese 1983, Donwa-Ifoke 1983, Agheyisi 1988, Faracelas et al 1983, Faracelas 1987 and Simire 1993).

While it is true that Nigerians who speak ANP as first language are usually of mixed families, this research shares the view that a growing number of Nigerians who are born in Warri, Sapele, Benin City and Port-Harcourt, to parents sharing the same language and who have spent quite a substantial number of years in these towns may be using it as a first language. Most often, these people as children “pick up” a language as easily as they “drop it” due to many factors. To those who are fairly familiar with the African nay, Nigerian household, you will find that the average child often hears and learns at the same time, two to four languages spoken around him. In fact, he normally interacts by means of two to four languages. In multilingual environments, such as the towns cited above, it may in fact be difficult to specify which of the languages in focus was learnt first. An overall typology of ‘language influence on the Nigerian child of the primary age-group may reveal much about this phenomenon.

Essentially a modern urbanised phenomenon in the country, Anglo – Nigerian pidgin is nevertheless actively restricted to the Southern States. In some states, not only does it serve as a medium of newscasting and public enlightenment on radio and television, and as an unofficial medium of instruction in some urban schools, it is also a popular medium of entertainment in the entire country. Nonetheless, it remains a normal component of the linguistic repertory of the immigrant population that reside in the Northern States (Mafemi, 1971). The actual population of its users is unknown, though this can be attributed to the absence of reliable population figures with regard to language use. However, it ranks amongst the highest, exceeded perhaps only by that of Hausa. One can add that ANP is the closest thing to real “lingua franca” in the country. In fact, in its nativised form, it serves as a marker of social identity and it is fast becoming the next best thing to ethnic vernacular in constructing personalised / intimate rapport in the kinds of interaction that might otherwise keep those interacting rather distant. This point is clearly witnessed in official and informal transactions between Nigerians of diversified ethnic background.

1.1 Methodology

This work is primarily based on data obtained from field work conducted between January and March 1990, that of June to August 1991 as well as that of October-December1999 in five urban areas of Southern Nigeria : Benin City, Warri, Lagos, Port Harcourt and
Sapele. The processes for data collection and analysis were in conformity with those developed by Tabouret-Keller and Le Page (1970), DeCamp (1971), Labov (1972), Samarin (1967) as well as those in Rickford (1979, 1983). The research consists of interviews (spontaneous and controlled) held with fifty informants selected on the basis of age, sex, ethnolinguistic, educational and socio-professional backgrounds. Each speaker was interviewed for one hour thirty minutes, followed by group discussions of thirty minutes. The latter was usually arranged among friends in each of the towns visited. Each informant was interviewed on the following modules: Demographic and Family information, School, Leisure and games, Work, Boygirl relationship and marriage, fights, Sickness, Accidents, Death and Armed robbery. Taped recordings of these were transcribed phonetically and the data was then subjected to an analysis designed to identify and differentiate patterns of regional and social variation in the Southern states of the country.

2.0 The Data

2.1 Tense – Aspect – Modality in ANP.

The invariant ANP verb can be given any time-tense meaning. Its meaning is usually determined by the context in which it is used; relying mostly on auxiliaries, adverbials as well as other contextual factors. While the tense-aspect-modality (TAM) system in ANP shares many similarities with the proto-creole TAM system posited by Bickerton (1975:28-30), the analysis of data collected however, reveals that stativity may not be a lexical notion in the Basilect. This may explain why unmarked stative verbs do have a past-before-past meaning in the basilect, when used with the anterior tense auxiliary bbin. Generally, in ANP, the use of this auxiliary seems optional and rare since many speakers prefer to use either the verb stem and the adverb bbin or the verb stem accompanied by the complective auxiliary ppa as well as bbin. However, ANP has an irrele modality  which is one way of showing unreal time (future, conditionals, etc.).  is another auxiliary which indicates conditionals. is (a progressive aspect marker) indicates futurity in some contexts. In addition to these, Anglo-Nigerian pidgin uses two complective auxiliaries don and fini, and several modal verbs or auxiliaries of modality. In fact, generally, no one specific particle can be consistently used to indicate either one tense or one aspectual meaning. The position assumed here contrasts in many ways with those held by Agheyisi (1988) and Farascl (1987).

Nevertheless, the latter has revealed a new development in the tense-modality of ANP. He identifies from narrative and procedural texts the auxiliary use of kom as signalling reference to past events. He differentiates its use from the main verb kom (a verb of motion). This signifies that kom as used in the former case cannot be given the above interpretation. Rather, it would seem that kom in some cases is a part of a coordination construction with another verb in the deep surface structure. This would be shown shortly, it is however difficult to agree with his conclusions in their totality. Aspects of disagreement will be shown in 2.5.

2.2. Regional and social varieties of Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin.

Analysis of the data reveals that ANP is divisible into regional and social dialects. For the convenience of description, ANP may be divided into three sets of social dialect: the acrolectal (decreolised) varieties, which show significant influence from other Nigerian languages beside NSE, and mesolectal (creolised) varieties typifying the speech of Nigerians who might have learnt ANP as their first language. Regarding the regional varieties and contrary to the general opinion amongst renowned linguists (Agheyisi, Donwa-foke, Faracals and Mafeh), they do not necessarily correspond to the erstwhile four political regions viz; Midwestern, Eastern, Western and Northern regions of Nigeria.

Rather, we observed a sort of similarity between the varieties of pidgin spoken in and around Port Harcourt (extreme South) and those spoken in Benin City and Lagos (South West), especially with the latter. On the other hand, similarity was also observed between the varieties spoken in Warri and Sapele (South West). The latter varieties do in fact share a common vocabulary most of which are known to ANP users non-resident in both towns. While it is true that varieties of ANP spoken in towns like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Benin City, seem to be more accented and reflecting lexical items borrowed from dominant languages like Yoruba and Igbo. The Warri and Sapele varieties seem purer and less accented, with many lexical items drawn from some minority languages such as Urhobo, Isekeri etc... In fact, similarities and differences between these varieties are phonetical, lexical and syntactical in nature. These are well documented in Simire (1993).

2.3. The main verb use of kom vs the auxiliary use of kom (KA) in narratives and indirect discourses.

We present below the various uses of the morpheme "kom" in ANP’s narrative and procedural accounts (descriptions): In sentences 1, A, B and C below kom appears to function as a verb of motion meaning “to come”.

1 A} /.... na in fa ci kom se no bi in ,
Foc it hen come say Neg it
na tbi im fren na im kari
Foc tortise it friend FOC it Carry
am kom // UKASTAP-12, sp:5//65a/2
it come

“ The hen denied that it was her,
that she was brought there by her
friend, tortoise”

B) //, di foloin dey tbiis kom kom// DAFSTOH-18,
sp.:9//19a/1
the following day tortise come

“The tortise came the next day”
C) // as a kom dé bed a kom sé a go kom go
As I is bed I come say I prosp. Come go
dek inzéb n // DAFSTOHS-18, Cl: 11/1//24d/2
take injection

"As I laid on the bed I decided to go and take injection...."

But in 1 B above this morpheme seems to function as one of the preverbal particles listed in 2.1 above. Nevertheless, numerous ambiguous cases could be mentioned such as in 2 A & B below.

2-

A) //... ná in den kom howl faö // UKASTAP-12, sp: 5//65b/2
Foc it they hold fowl

"So, they held the hen".

B) //... den kom baj som médisin fo they buy some medicin for
mi // DAFSTOHS-18, cl:12//25a/2
me
"They bought me some drugs"

In these examples, it is possible to either give it a
KA interpretation or, see it as a verb in a serial
construction (Ofuani, 1984)6

Instances of KA-like interpretation seem very
possible in sentences 3 A B C below, probably due
to the speaker's descriptive style:

3-

A) // lajak na baj bin dé wákâ fo
like now boy ANT. PROG. Walk for
rowd, in kom si wán gél dé wákâ...//
TOGSTOOG-11, sp: 10/2/24c/5
road he see one girl PROG. Walk

"Such as a boy is trekking along the road, he saw a
girl who is also trekking along the same road..."

B) //dén kom dé luk ifda // TOGSTOOG-11,
sp: 13/2/24d/5
They PROG. look each other

"They started looking at one another"

C) // di gél kom raft lèta go
the girl write letter go
giv âm... // TOGSTOOG-11, sp:14/2/25a/5
giv him

"The girl wrote him a letter (after)"

In fact, these cases seem to contrast with the use of
"kom" in sentences 4 A & B below:

4-

A) // in go télifôn kom giv
or she PROSP phone give
di bj // TOGSTOOG-11, sp: 14/2/25b/5
the boy

"or, she would phone the boy".

B) //... éhm, afta di bj ó kom go
Exclam after the boy IRREALIS go
fo di gél pèrén haws-ib TOGSTOOG-
11, sp:16/2/25a/5
For the girl parent house

"... After the boy would go and
visit the girl's pretents...."

It is observed that ANP users, especially the
young aged between 7 and 24, are heavy users of kom
(KA) in narrative and indirect discourse. In ANP, the
accentuated use of the morpheme kom (KA) in making
reports, is further illustrated in sentences 10 - 14, as
extracted from the data.

10.
//ná wán gél kom sèn in sístá, mèk (i) kom bit âm
MBSTIBS 5/1d/2
It's one girl send her sister, that (she) beat her.

"It was a girl who sent her sister to beat her up"
(i.e. she was sent by her sister to beat her up).

11.
//i bigin fajt âm, dén pipél kom sòp dì fajt, bif i
he begin fight them people come stop the fight,
before it
gó kom dé tu blid bi // WILSTIGP-24, sp:7/150a/3
be too blood.

"He started fighting with him. Then, people came and stopped
the fight; before it became too bloody".

12.
//wétin kom mèk mi hét tòf what make me hate church,
na wétin dén dé du // OSAMECBB-17, sp: 1/14a/1
't's what they PROG do

"what made me to dislike the church
is due to their actions".

13.
//hi kom jàw t nà im pipél kom kom awki bif she shout it's people came out before
dèn go kom nà dì tif don go // UKASTAP-
12, sp: 3/55c/2
they will come now:the thief COMP go

"She shouted, people them came out (of their rooms).
Before they could come out, the thief had fled."
"As soon as the devils returned they started looking at one another"

- duration:

17. //ás in kóm de láf náw
as it PROG laugh now
ná im den howl Fao //UKASTAP-12,
sp:7/65d/2
  Foc they hold
  hen

"Just as it started laughing they held the hen"

- end point:

18. //dém kóm rost fáo fini]
they roast hen COMP.
den kom hang fó cp //UKASTAP-12,
sp:7/66a/2
  they hang for
up

"They roasted the hen completely (and) they hung it"

As indicated in 2.1. above, adverbials, auxiliaries, as well as other contextual factors, are strong determinants of the time-tense meaning given to sentences in ANP. From the data, it is quite clear that the presence or absence of KA does not add or delete from the basic aspectual meaning given to it. Nonetheless, it is observed that KA combines freely with the auxiliaries dé and go and fini. See 1c; 3b; 11; 13, 14, 15, 18 respectively. No instances or KA combining with dbn or bin is registered, though its combination with the latter is possible in ANP. In this case, the ambiguous interpretation of KA is erased. It seems, therefore, that it is the absence of bin that gives KA the same aspectual status as the latter.

What then is the real semantic interpretation of KA? It was earlier stated that modality views reality in terms of how the speaker uses the language to exert control over events or how events themselves exert control over the speaker.

The morpheme kóm (KA) refers to events which had occurred before the moment of speaking, at some indefinite time without reference to the moment of speaking at all, in some sentences put simply, this morpheme has little or no role in temporal sequencing. Rather, it is used in anchoring events with respect to each other (in actual order of their occurrence). See for example sentences 2b above, 15, 16, 17 and 18 which are presented below wherein attention is focused on the internal and external structure of the events under discussion via the use of KA.

For example, the beginning point:

15 //lèta in di lvn kóm sè
Later in the evening I
mék a wéka...// DAFSTOH-18, cl:14//45a/3
make I walk

"Later, in the evening, I decided to strolling".

16 //...ás di dëvu dém kóm ri dbn...
as the devil plu. return
ná den kóm dé
Foc they PROG
lùk ñùda //UKASTAP-12, sp:6/65c/2

Comrie (1976) defines aspect as "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation". More recent linguists such as Radford (1997:494) see aspect as denoting the duration of an event by a verb. In other words the verb describes the event as being on course or completed.

KA could be classified as an auxiliary of objectivity wherein a speaker asserts the positive truth value of his assertions (Faracas op. cit.). Its use by ANP users, especially by children and adolescents in storytelling and indirect discourses, could be said to be idiomatic and stylistic. Faracas (op. cit. 47-56) clearly shows the existence of KA-like markers in most Nigerian languages spoken in the southern part of the country. In fact, the intensive use of KA may be equated to the
"intensive" or "emphatic" use of verbs of motion revealed by Labov (ms. 66); Heine and Reh (1984: 78) as the first stage in the grammaticalisation process which eventually transforms such verbs into auxiliaries.

2.5. KA usage as a Child/Adolescent Speech Phenomenon

Faracias (p. 47) states that the increased use of KA is not a child speech phenomenon since "NPL2 children (...) show frequencies similar to those of NPL2 adults and since NPL1 adolescents (...) use KA at about the same rate as NPL1 children". He later concluded that "while the use of KA increases dramatically from NPL2 speech to NPL1, there is no corresponding increase or decrease in the use of any of the other auxiliaries (..)".

The results of our analysis contrast however, with those of Faracias. Table 1 shows the total frequencies of KA and other auxiliaries, as well as the frequency score for each of these auxiliaries recorded by individual speakers in the data. Generally, ANPL1 speakers use the auxiliary KA more frequently than ANPL2 speakers; but there are exceptions in this category: WILDSTGP-24, MATROHW-32, ADOBWBL-54 and SIMSCORB-71. How does one account for these deviant cases?

In addition, it is difficult to say precisely that ANPL2 adolescents i.e ADSTYOL-14 and OSAMECBB-17 show frequency scores identical to those of ANPL2 adults like ADASOHL-27, AYOTROHS-65 and OKOFAOHW-70. Nevertheless, a similarity in the frequency scores of ANPL1 children/adolescents (ex. UKASTIBP-11, MBSTIBS-14 and EBSTITSW-16) and those of ANPL1 adults (ex. EFECOHS-32 and OKOMHESW-43) is clearly seen.

From histogrammes obtained by the calculation of standard deviations of these raw scores according to the binomial principle (as proposed by Charles Muller), it is quite evident that children and adolescents, between 11 and 24 years actually register dramatic increases in their use of KA (kom) and go showing deficiency only in 6 (see histogramme 1), histogrammes 2-4 show the relative performance of the various age brackets in the data. A comparison of the results obtained for each group of speakers shows clearly that child/adolescent speech tends to differ from that of adults by the former's accentuated use of (kom) KA, go and dé coupled which a relative decrease in its use of 6 (See histogrammes 5-7; 8, 9 and 10 and note their respective correlation scores).

The reliability of this observation was tested by an examination of the speeches of children belonging to the primary school age group (6-10 years). Irrespective of the limited time during which these children were recorded (30 mins in each of the three towns visited - Sapele, Warri and Benin-City) no dramatic increase in their use of KA (kom) is observed. Rather their KA usage tends to conform with the observed pattern in the speeches of children and adolescents within the 11-20 years age group.

CONCLUSION

In addition to children born of mixed families residing in urban cities, this paper has clearly identified children born to parents sharing the same language and who have always lived in large cities right from birth not only as Anglo-Nigerian pidgin's first language speakers but also as frequent and heavy users of the language.

Furthermore, our paper has demonstrated through examples 1-18, extracted from spontaneous and controlled elicitations (Oral productions) if interviewees not only the used of "kom" (KA) in narrative and descriptive discourses but also the possible interpretations of it in diverse situations.

While "kom" (KA) could be classified as an auxiliary of objectivity wherein a speaker asserts the positive truth value of his assertions its use by ANP's children and adolescents in storytelling and indirect discourses, could be said to be idiomatic and stylistic; in the same manner as functional KA - like markers in most Nigerian languages spoken in Southern Nigeria.

Consequently, the role of the substrate languages in the evolution of Creoles and Pidgins cannot but be recognised by all scholars. Even Bickerton, who was later to deny such influence altogether, repeatedly did so in Bickerton (1975: 9, 22, 44, 58 etc...).

As a matter of fact, almost all the Kwa-family Nigerian languages spoken in the southern states of the country have the auxiliary-like reflexes of the verb "to come" which everybody uses irrespective of the languages he learnt first in life. The use of KA in ANP almost parallels this. Children and adolescents have actually transformed and accentuated its use both in story-telling and indirect discourse. It is suspected that at the earliest stages of creolisation, children and adolescents make considerable use of KA and this, however, may not be totally suppressed by older members of the community. As Faracias (1987: 53) concluded: "Rather than moving the ANP system into closer conformity with Bickerton's proto-creole system, creolisation in ANP seems to be doing the exact opposite by its evolvement of an overt realis modality marker."

FOOTNOTES

1. While Cameroun is a bilingual country using French and English as its official languages, pidgin English is a language of widespread usage in the Littoral and Eastern provinces of that country

2. Edo and Delta states constitute the erstwhile Bendel state.

3. From amongst these, twenty- seven informants were finally selected for our present study.
4. Our phonetic transcription is based on guidelines as spelt out by Claire Blanché – Benveniste / Colette Jean "Le Français parlé ", Paris INALF 1986.

5. As a matter of convenience and to ease our listeners’/ readers’ comprehension, we have adopted the term KA as used by Farasclas (1987: 46) in referring to the auxiliary use of kom as opposed to the main verb use of kom.

6. According to Jansen et al (1978), cited in J. Holm (1988: 183), serial verbs " consist of a series of two or more verbs having the same subject and not normally joined by a conjunction ("and") or a complementizer (" to ") as they would in European languages."

7. Farasclas’ informants are within the 4 and 60 years age bracket; while our informants are situated between 6 and 71.

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