

PIDGIN ENGLISH IN GHANAIAN CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

This paper revisits the sociolinguistic discussions on the domain of use of Pidgin English in Ghana (cf. Huber 1999; 1995; Dako 2002; Ofulue 2011). It advances the claim that pidgin is currently undergoing a process of expanding its domain of use into some respected formal spaces (such as the church) in Ghana, particularly through gospel music. What this means is that the account in the literature that pidgin is absent in formal domains in Ghana can no longer be held to be accurate, for pidgin has now entered Christian religious worship. This has been possible partly through contacts within the West African sub-region. Unsurprisingly, the most popular pidgin songs in Ghanaian Christian communities, as reflected through responses to questionnaires administered, bear features of Nigerian Pidgin English; some of the songs have obviously been imported from Nigeria. Could this development be the watershed for the redemption of the image of Pidgin English in Ghana? For the purpose of this paper, Christians who fellowship in Accra only were surveyed; Accra serves as a haven for church activities due, perhaps, to its highly cosmopolitan background, and numerous churches are headquartered in this city.

Introduction

Ghanaian church music and language

The church has always been noted for its respect for ‘high culture’. In all of its senses – as a building, as a worship and as a community of believers – the church is regarded as a sanctified

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space and Ghanaians accord it sanctity. When the Bible in the Psalms admonishes Christians to make a joyful noise unto the Lord (cf. Ps 98; Ps 100), it isn’t explicit about which language should constitute the text for this joyful noise. And yet traditions over the years have deemed some languages more worthy for performing the special offices of the church. Church music (the joyful noise) is only one aspect of church service which employs language.

In line with the numerous instances in the Bible suggesting the tremendous role of music in the Judeo-Christian belief system and worship, Alexander Agordoh, a Ghanaian ethnomusicologist, describes the importance of church music as follows:

Today, few people learn any faith dogmas by heart, like in the olden times when people were forced to rattle parts of the church catechism by memory. The only confessional documents people (believers) might know by heart today are the words from hymns and songs they sing. It is these hymns and songs, repeated over and over, which form the container of much of our faith (Agordoh 2011: 1–2).

What this implies is that the language of church music is as important as the language of the sermon, the holy Eucharist/the mass, intercessory prayers, etc. But in the Ghanaian church, this has not been so. The Ghanaian Christian gives the impression, from the survey I conducted, that the language of church music does not matter as much as does the language used in other aspects of the church service.

The European Christian missionaries who first brought Christianity to Ghana, however, had a different view, and their contribution to the development of local languages and to vernacular literacy needs mention here. Some Wesleyan missionaries, including Rev. T. Laing, Rev. A. W. Parker and W. M. Cannell, made a modest attempt which could not endure the opposition of their own colleagues. The opposition emanated from colleague missionaries who ‘called for a greater use of English and the abandonment of Fanti in school and church’ (McWilliam 1975). But this early effort of these missionary-scholars led to the production of the first Fante primer for schools in 1870 by Rev. Laing, followed in 1877 by the Fante version of two gospels produced by the Rev. Parker. In 1886, Rev. Parker jointly produced the first Fanti-English Dictionary (McWilliams 1975).

The Swiss of the Basel Mission and the Germans of the Bremen Mission, however, were more successful in their efforts at developing local languages for church activities and for education. Their legacy in vernacular literacy is captured by McWilliams in the following quotation:

...because their main aim was the establishment of a native African Church, ‘they discouraged the use of English in the schools and mostly used the vernacular’. The foundations of the Ga and Twi studies were therefore laid by them (McWilliams 1975: 33).

The work of J. G. Christaller, a Basel missionary, for instance, is arguably the most comprehensive in the literature. His publications include a translation of the entire Bible into Twi, a Twi grammar and a Twi Dictionary. Christaller’s effort was not an isolated one, for, elsewhere in Ewe-land and Ga-land, other German-speaking missionaries laid an equally solid vernacular literacy foundation. For example, Schlegel and Westermann produced the first Ewe grammar and Ewe dictionary

respectively. Similarly, Zimmermann made an impressive contribution to Ga literacy. His notable works include a translation of the four gospels into Ga in 1855, a Ga grammar in 1857, a Ga Dictionary in 1857 and a Ga version of the whole Bible in 1866. This explains the variegated attitudes of mission churches and African Independent Churches (AICs) to local languages over the years.

The AICs claim to be motivated in their activities by the zeal to promote the worship of God in Africa the African way, so they place emphasis on African cultural practices. The irony is that though these new churches claim to promote local customs such as drumming, dancing, clapping of hands, etc. in their worship, they have done very little in promoting local languages. The AICs have over the years always marginalised local languages in the content of their church service due, perhaps, to the prestige associated with English as well as to their target population (the AICs target working middle class Ghanaians). An interesting phenomenon in this regard is the names of these AICs; the names of almost all of these neo-Christian churches¹ are composed of English words (cf. Frimpong, forthcoming). There is an impression that these English names are more ‘modern’ and attractive in drawing more converts. In Ghana today, English is the most neutral language among over 45 indigenous languages (cf. Anyidoho and Dakubu 2008).

In recent times, however, a novel linguistic trend is emerging in the Ghanaian Christian church space. Pidgin, a highly stigmatised language in Ghana, has stealthily crept into the protected space of the Ghanaian church and has managed to gain considerable popularity, not only among the youth but also among the entire membership of the church. Pidgin English has entered the church space through music. Its pervading influence is so massive that it is found in the praise and worship and even

choral songs of both mission churches and AICs, and when accompanied by the clapping of hands, the beating of drums and dancing, most believers forget or do not care what language the songs are composed in. It must be noted that of the two types of church music (liturgical music and non-liturgical music) identified by Agordoh (2011: 2), it is in the non-liturgical music that Pidgin has found an immediate welcome.

The non-liturgical music comprises what is popularly called in Ghanaian parlance, 'praise and worship songs', and they are songs usually composed by any Christian who has the gift of song composition or who may have been 'inspired' by the Holy Spirit. This is one lucrative area of activity in the church today, for through it many Christians make a living, and many gospel artistes are produced in this aspect of the church's activities whose songs are sung at funerals, outdoor ceremonies,² weddings, birthday parties, etc. And these are the songs that are used for the 'collection'³ and for prayer sessions in a typical Ghanaian church service. This type of praise and worship in which pidgin has found a place has psycho-social implications. That is, pidgin used in this context can be construed to entertain and perform a cathartic as well as a levelling function.

In the first place, these songs engage mnemonic devices such as simplification, repetition and idiophones, among others. Thus, the pidgin songs selected for this study have a few (two or three) lines which are repeated over and over. Not only that, but also pidgin songs have as part of their feature simple high sounding words whose melodic tones tend to make a natural appeal to the Ghanaian; these high tones (na double double oo, Igweee, Winner eeei) remind one of Ghanaian music. Since these songs are not stylistically highly contrived compared to traditional Christian hymns and do not need reference to any

book in the form of a hymn book or music notation, it is easy to sing them. This music offers the opportunity for a relaxed ambiance suitable for dancing.

But there is, perhaps, a form of psychological healing associated with this phenomenon. In what may be described as cathartic, the kind of praise and worship which is described here has a feature of a mystic blend of songs, drumming, ecstatic shouts/screams and dancing. This has a tendency of building up to a crescendo of a trance state where participants can ease themselves of emotional burdens. Therefore some Ghanaians, especially the youth, will go to a church where the praise and worship is characteristic of the type described above, where everybody is involved in the event and age and other social differentials such as status and gender do not matter.

This paper claims, among other things, that contrary to the established notion of the use of Pidgin English only in informal situations among students and as the lingua franca in barracks, it has made a successful incursion into religion (church service) in the area of church music in Ghana, and that the most popular of these Pidgin songs are of the Nigerian variety of Pidgin English. One would want to know the future of this phenomenon. Will it move into other church domains?

Already this phenomenon has found a positive appeal in Ghanaian political circles, for two popular Pidgin songs have been endorsed by the two most influential political parties in Ghana which have adopted these songs as their banner songs. In 2008, the New Patriotic Party which was the party in government at the time adopted *Go Go High*, a pidgin gospel song by Philipa Barfi, a Ghanaian gospel musician. Recently in 2011, the National Democratic Congress, now in government,

adopted *Na Double Double*, a Nigerian gospel song which was already popular in Ghana.

While there may be nothing unusual in using pidgin in the church in Nigeria, for pidgin plays an extensive neutral role in Nigeria (cf. Akande 2010), the situation is different in Ghana. Pidgin is still heavily stigmatised in Ghana (Huber 1999; Dako 2002), and the Ghanaian church space is a protected one reserved for English and local languages. It is interesting to note that for reasons of prestige, it is not common (if it happens at all) for a preacher to preach in a local language and have the message interpreted into English and other local languages, though the reverse is a common trend even in local churches whose members speak the common indigenous language of the community.

1. Contacts Within the Sub-Region

It has been touted that the Ghanaian can be found in almost every corner of the world. The fact is that Ghanaians, probably like other nationals, are eager to explore other worlds in search of greener pastures. The same can be said about Nigerians who also have been noted to travel extensively. Over the years, migration within the sub-region has not been limited to one single country. Ghanaians have travelled to Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Libya, La Cote d'Ivoire, etc. In the same way, Nigerians and other nationals from the sub-region have moved into Ghana. However, bilateral movements between Nigeria and Ghana go back to well before independence (Papademetriou et al 1991; Skinner 1963).

Nationals from these two countries have also experienced expulsions from each other's country. A heavy presence of 'illegal' Nigerians was recorded in Ghana leading to their expulsion by the Ghanaian government in 1969. A similar situation led to the expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria in 1983 (Papademetriou et al 1991). In recent times, another similar phenomenon is building up gradually in Ghana. Nigerians are noted to have migrated into Ghana in their numbers.

They are found in the church business, in tertiary institutions, in banking, in general trading and in the entertainment industry. Of course some Ghanaians may also be found in Nigeria currently, though not in similar proportions.

The point of interest is that these contacts have linguistic implications. They serve as a recipe for linguistic diffusion, for instance. Already, some Ghanaians believe that pidgin in Ghana is the result of the 1983 exodus of Ghanaian immigrants from Nigeria; of course this position cannot be taken seriously because it suggests that Ghana had not known pidgin before this period. It can only be considered as one of a number of factors, and perhaps only a contributory one responsible for the development of pidgin in Ghana. Yet the returnees brought back home their acquired new code—Nigerian Pidgin—along with their tape recorder machines. But the literature available on this subject (cf. Huber 1999; Dako 2002) traces the history of pidgin in Ghana to other West African Pidgins (Liberian, Sierra Leonean and Nigerian pidgins). According to these accounts, pidgin must have developed in Ghana after 1900 with the migration into Ghana of male labourers from Liberia and Sierra Leone and soldiers, policemen, domestic servants and traders from Nigeria (Dako 2002). Police and military barracks are among the first spaces to have absorbed and developed pidgin, due not only to the low level of education of both the police and the army but also to the multilingual ecology of the barracks.

Technology is a very powerful tool in today's society and it also facilitates language contacts. The strength of the internet that fosters globalization, coupled with the influence from the movie industry, for instance, facilitates cultural fermentation. One language/code that is capable of influencing the Ghanaian culture in this regard is Nigerian Pidgin. As Ghanaians consume Nigerian movies, and as they share religious communion together with Nigerians, pidgin has a chance of expanding its domains and of redeeming its negative image in Ghana. At the moment a pidgin

version of the Bible has found its way onto the World Wide Web, accessible to all. Additionally, a movie of the life of Jesus Christ in pidgin has enjoyed an overwhelming viewership in Ghana, a situation that not only suggests the versatility of Pidgin English in Ghana but also connotes the expansion of its domain of use.

2. Pidgin English within the West African Sub-region

English-based pidgins within the West African sub-region have been described and continue to receive attention at the various linguistic levels (Holm 1989; Elugbe and Omamor 1991; Singler 1997; Huber 1999; Faraclas 2004; Peter and Wolf 2007; Ofulue 2011; etc.). Of these varieties – which include Ghanaian Pidgin, Nigerian Pidgin, Cameroonian Pidgin, Liberian Pidgin, (also commonly referred to as Kru Pidgin in Ghana), and Sierra Leonean Krio – the first three (the Ghanaian, the Nigerian and the Cameroonian varieties) are noted to be the most comparable since they are similar in most features. The Nigerian variety is noted to share more similarities with the Cameroonian variety whereas the Ghanaian variety which has its roots in Kru English and Abongo Brofo⁴ (Dako 2002) shows more similarities with the Nigerian Pidgin. These similarities do not by any means suggest that the varieties are mutually intelligible, for these varieties have varying features at all levels which make them to a very large extent unintelligible (Huber 1999).

For instance, at the phonological level, the three varieties are observed to be more similar to their national standard varieties of English (Peter and Wolf 2007). Lexically, though there are borrowings across varieties and it makes sense to assume that the Nigerian and Cameroonian varieties share a number of lexical items due to geographical proximity, there are enormous differences since these varieties do not merely draw vocabulary from English but also directly from local languages. Generally, varieties of West African Pidgin English (WAPE) have West African indigenous languages as the substrate and English as the

lexifier/superstrate. This point is relevant to the subject of this paper in that words which have obviously entered NigPE from Nigerian local languages have not only been used in some of the church music under discussion but have also had an influence on Ghanaian secular music and local movies. Words such as ‘Igwe’, ‘Chineke’, ‘Oga’ ‘tofiakwa’, ‘nyafunyafu’⁵ are some of the words of Nigerian provenance which are now common in Ghana. Igwe has been used as the title of a popular Nigerian song on the Ghanaian market. In the song, Igwe is the chorus and a line runs ‘come bless me nyafunyafu’.

Additionally, these varieties differ considerably at the grammatical level. For example, it is observed that the Ghanaian variety differs from the Nigerian and Cameroonian Pidgins in some grammatical features. As table 1 below from Peter and Wolf (2007: 17) shows, ‘na’ in all of its functions (as focus marker, as copular, as intensifier and as locative preposition) is absent from GhPE. In the same way, ‘don’, ‘bin’, ‘una’ and ‘dem’ are more Nigerian and Cameroonian than they are Ghanaian.

Table 1: Distinctive features and their occurrences in the varieties of WAPE (Peter and Wolf 2007: 17)

Feature	GhanPE	NigPE	CamPE
RP /ɪ/	[ɔ], [a]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
RP /ə:/	[ɛ], more seldom [ɔ]	[ɔ], [a], [ɛ]	[ɔ], [ɛ] seldom [a]
<-er> -suffixes with plural -s	[es]	[as]	[as]
<i>na</i> as copula	No	Yes	Yes
<i>na</i> : focus marker/ rhematizer	No	Yes	Yes
<i>na</i> as intensifier	No	Yes	Yes
<i>dem</i> as postpos. Plural marker	No	Yes	Yes
<i>dɔn</i> as retrospective marker	No	Yes	Yes (<i>dɔŋ</i>)
<i>bin</i> as past tense marker	No	Yes	Yes (bi)
<i>kɔm</i> : auxiliary and sequencer	<i>kam/kan</i>	<i>kɔm/ kɔn</i>	<i>kam, seldom kɔm</i>
<i>ji</i> : marked 3 rd pers. sg. pron.	No	No	Yes
<i>una</i> as 2nd pers. plural pron.	No	Yes	Yes (<i>wuna</i>)
<i>mi</i> as (unmarked) subj. pron.	No	Yes	No
<i>na</i> as locative preposition	No	Occasional	Rare

NB: In the table ‘No’ indicates feature is not attested in a particular variety and ‘Yes’ indicates the presence of a feature. As it turns out, there are variables for some of the features in the case of some varieties as attested in a couple of instances.

The relevance of this table is that the presence of features of Nigerian Pidgin in GhPE and pidgin gospel songs points to an influence which may have come from the Nigerian variety. Thus in the songs selected for this study, the grammatical features typical of NigPE but which are not notable in GhPE are targeted together with lexical items unique to NigPE

It must be mentioned here that these national varieties of pidgin are not monolithic entities, for some of them are noted to have local sub-varieties. Therefore NigPE, though mutually

intelligible nationwide, has internal variations across geographical locations. Conversely, pidgin in Ghana is conceptualised in a continuum. Huber (1999), for instance, identifies the ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated’ sociolectal varieties as the two manifestations of Pidgin English in Ghana.

The difference between these local varieties exists both at the structural and lexical levels (cf. Huber 1999; Dako 2002). Moreover, the educated variety which is found mostly among students (and so is also referred to elsewhere as Student Pidgin – SP) is typically more characteristic of word creation potential (Huber 1999). The interesting point about the two varieties is that they perform different functions. Whereas the uneducated variety serves as a contact language for groups of people whose first languages differ, the Ghanaian SP serves as an in-group solidarity marker. In the context of the pidgin in Ghanaian churches, it becomes apparent that neither of these functions is the reason for its use. As it has been claimed above, the pidgin in Ghanaian church music serves more of a stylistic or entertaining function than as an in-group identification or communicative requirement.

Another interesting area in the discussion of pidgin is the attitude of the community towards its use, and here much has already been written in the body of literature (Elugbe and Omamor 1991; Huber 1999; Peter and Wolf 2007 and Akande 2010). In all of these accounts, NigPE is reported to enjoy the most favourable ecology while the Ghanaian variety is the most stigmatised and limited in domain of use. In this regard Huber (1999:156) describes the situation as follows:

... Pidgin in Ghana is more stigmatised and less widespread in terms of area and number of speakers than it is in other Anglophone West African countries. Especially among the educated section of Ghanaian society (but this is also true for less educated Ghanaians) Pidgin is still frowned upon as a mark of illiteracy and unpolished manners.

In sharp contrast to this situation is the Nigerian context where the educated members of the society also use Pidgin English and pidgin is used in wider domains than in Ghana. In fact, in Nigeria, Pidgin English has a speaker population of about thirty million as claimed in a paper presented by Christine Ofulue at the SPCL Conference ⁶ at the University of Ghana in August 2011. This same paper points to the tremendous widespread use of Pidgin in both formal and informal domains in Nigeria. That is, unlike in Ghana and Cameroon, Pidgin has already found a home in Nigeria as it is found in Bible translations and in the media/news broadcasts, and grammars and dictionaries have even been created in it. This is the reason why the point of this paper that pidgin has found its way into the church would not stir anybody if it was said about the church in Nigeria. Ofulue's (2011) study is among the body of literature on this subject that claims that pidgin is absent in religion as well as in all other formal domains in Ghana.

3. Methodology

Research of this nature in which lyrics of music constitute the corpus exists, though there is not much of it (cf. Trudgill 1983; Miethaner 2005). For the purpose of this paper, I collected and transcribed 10 'popular' pidgin gospel songs. These consist of songs composed by Nigerian musicians which have received patronage in Ghana, and others composed by Ghanaians. The aims are twofold: to test the assumption that Pidgin English is gaining popularity in the Ghanaian church and to analyse these songs to detect a Nigerian influence or otherwise. To do this, I prepared anonymous questionnaires and administered them to respondents of varied Christian backgrounds. All my respondents are resident in Accra. The purpose was to test the familiarity of respondents with the songs and their attitude to Pidgin English in church service, and to confirm the popularity rate of these songs.

4. Results of questionnaires and analysis of songs

In all, 30 questionnaires were administered, of which 25 were returned. They were filled out by 13 females and 12 males. The respondents were between 20 and 50 years. As the data involved songs, I committed to singing the selected songs, especially those of which the words were not familiar to respondents. A summary of the demographic information on respondents is contained in table 2 below:

Table 2: Demographic background of respondents

Age	Gender		No of respondents
	Male	Female	
20 – 29	6	11	17
30 – 39	4	1	5
40 – 49	1	0	1
No age	1	1	2
Total	12	13	25

As the church is a very revered space in Ghana where Pidgin English is still highly stigmatised, I expected some respondents to prevaricate on whether pidgin is used in their churches. To make sure I got the facts, I intentionally recast the question on the presence of pidgin in respondents' church for confirmation. My suspicion was confirmed when 16 out of the 25 respondents said pidgin is not used in any aspect of the service of their church. But when provided with the 10 songs and asked which of them were sung in their church, 13 out of the 16 who claimed that pidgin was absent in all aspects of their church listed at least 3 songs, with some listing as many as 9 songs. In some instances, respondents from the same church did not agree about the use of pidgin or otherwise in their church, as captured in table 3 below.

Table 3: Distribution of churches and responses on presence of pidgin in churches

Name of Church	No of Respondents	Presence of Pidgin	
		YES	NO
Trinity Baptist Church	1		1
Catholic Church	3	2	1
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana	1		1
International Central Gospel Church	1		1
Jehovah's Witness	1		1
Methodist Church	6	3	3
Presbyterian Church	5	3	2
The Apostolic Church Ghana	1		1
The Church of Pentecost	4	1	3
Tesano Baptist Church	1		1
Winners' Chapel	1		1
Total	25	9	16

These responses reflect three possibilities: either the phenomenon is not as widespread as the impression suggests and so members from different branches of the same church may not be equally exposed to it, or even if it is used in their churches respondents have not paid attention to the words of the songs. However, in view of the status of pidgin in Ghana, the most likely possibility is that respondents were ashamed to associate their church with pidgin

On respondents' attitude to pidgin in the church, though some were 'indifferent' about it, others expressed misgivings ranging from utter surprise, to 'it depends on the context'. Some even thought it was justified only as long as it was meant to reach out to a Nigerian audience, though 2 respondents thought it was normal only for a youth service. To some of the respondents, however, Pidgin English was permissible only in church music.

On the popularity ranking of the songs, the following five songs appear to be in the lead: .

Na Double Double

Igwe,

So So Wonders,

Go Go High

Jesus na you be Oga,

Na Double Double, Igwe and *Jesus na you be Oga* are of Nigerian origin. The remaining 2 – *Go Go High* and *So So Wonders* – are the most popular Ghana made Pidgin songs, though *So So Wonders* also, arguably, has a Nigerian influence. Songs that are not common among the respondents are *God Dey be*, a Ghanaian rap gospel song and *Jesus na you be oo Oga Kpatakpata*, obviously a Nigerian pidgin gospel song. I analysed these first five popular songs since to analyse all ten songs would be beyond the scope of this paper.

Na Double Double has been heard in Ghana for about 4 years now. Probably due to its simplicity, it has received the highest patronage; even children of 2 years enjoy it (my two year old son's teacher tells me this song is my son's favourite). This song is of Nigerian origin, though only two grammatical constructions identify it as Nigerian.

It has the equative copular 'na' which Huber (1999) and Peter and Wolf (2007) agree is a grammatical feature of Nigerian Pidgin English. There is also the reduplicative 'double double' which is more of a Nigerian than a Ghanaian feature. Similarly, *Igwe* was composed by a Nigerian and is performed by choirs in Ghanaian churches. Though many Ghanaian Christians do not know most of the words of the song, they love such expressions as:

Come bless me nyafunyafu

You love me sote

Igwe

'Igwe' is already a household word in Ghana, and so is 'nyafunyafu'. And these are not the only words in the song that are

from Nigerian substrate languages; others include ‘Oga’, ‘Baba’, etc.

So so Wonders was recorded by a Ghanaian gospel musician formerly known by the name Diana Akiwumi. Diana Akiwumi won an award in Ghana for this song and another one, *Mai Body eei na God ai go Givam*. *So So Wonders* can be claimed to have a Nigerian origin in the sense that at the time she sung it a Nigerian version which has virtually the same wording existed. Besides, Diana lived most of her youthful years in Nigeria with her Nigerian husband who is said to have played a very influential role in the songs she performed. One feature that marks *So So Wonders* as Nigerian is the reduplicative ‘so so’ which means ‘many’ which does not exist in Ghanaian Pidgin.

Go Go High is another popular pidgin gospel song in Ghana. It was performed by one Philipa Barfi who calls herself ‘the pidgin gospel artiste’; interestingly most of the Ghanaian pidgin gospel songs were performed by women, including Helena Rabbles, another Ghanaian female pidgin gospel artiste. Though *Go Go High* has some features of Nigerian Pidgin, it seems more to approximate Ghanaian Student Pidgin. Features of Nigerian pidgin adopted in this song include ‘una’ and ‘Oga’. However, the song does not look like one composed in a natural pidgin since it contains many structural features of Standard English which pidgins usually lack. It can perfectly be described as code mixing of pidgin with Standard English. For instance, the two stanzas below have Standard English with the exception of the Nigerian vocatives ‘abi’⁷ and ‘Oga’.⁸

Where you are is not your limit oh abi
Where you are is not your limit oh, Oga
The sky is your limit (2x)
Don't be content with where you are oh abi

Jesus is your power
Jesus is your strength oh
Winners no for quit o, abi abi
Quitters no for win o

An admittedly Nigerian pidgin gospel song that is going through a tremendous evolution in Ghana is ‘*Jesus Na You Be Oga*’. It has been stylistically reworked into a danceable choral song by a Ghanaian composer and has had more appeal in churches where it is sung. In terms of its lexis and grammar, this is one simple song that has so many Nigerian features. The equative copular ‘na’ is present in the song together with Nigerian lexical elements such as ‘Oga’, and ‘ye ye’⁹. Of course the reduplicative ‘so so’ is present. From observation, this song entered the Ghanaian gospel scene some years ago as a pop praise song. The new choral version prefaces the song with a Standard English introductory prefix whose words many fans of the music hardly know.

Discussion

It appears most respondents do not recognize the importance of music in church service and so though they blacklist pidgin in general, they endorse it in church music. Some do not have any problem with pidgin in their church service as long as it is made to appeal to a Nigerian audience (and not to Ghanaians) or it is employed at a children’s service. These attitudes reflect the observation by Huber (1999) that in most situations, pidgin is used in Ghana for humour and entertainment. But this is a subtle way of courting pidgin in the church and the effect is that, coupled with the presence of pidgin in Ghana through Nigerian movies and other entertainment contacts between Nigerians and Ghanaians, Ghanaians will continue to pick phrases and expressions of Nigerian Pidgin. This situation, perhaps, explains Huber’s observation of Ghanaian children using pidgin expressions at play

(Huber 1999). The point is that the density of pidgin in Ghana seems to be growing gradually. Thus some stock pidgin expressions are present in the Ghanaian linguistic ecology to which many Ghanaian learners of English, including children, resort when short of standard expressions. The following pidgin expressions, for instance, are common in Ghana and may be heard in the speech of some people even when they are using Standard English.

How be? – how is it?

(I)be like – it is like-

To chuk someone – to stab someone

You dey? – are you there?

I dey – I am around

I dey like I no dey – I am around

The initial assumption of this paper was that Nigerian Pidgin music, or the type of pidgin music that has a predominance of features of NigPE is the most common pidgin music in Ghanaian churches. Again it was hoped that AICs would not have any problems with pidgin in their church service since they claim to promote Ghanaian/African cultural values. The truth is that mission churches have had a history of conservatism towards Ghanaian innovations, especially with regard to the use of drumming and clapping of hands. Therefore it was assumed initially that they, of all the churches, would reject pidgin outright.

In the first place, the assumption that pidgin gospel music of Nigerian origin, or those songs which have Nigerian features, would be more popular in Ghanaian churches seems to have been confirmed by respondents in the sense that the first five most popular songs are either of Nigerian origin or have a Nigerian influence reflected in the presence of Nigerian features – either structural or lexical. Secondly, the assumption that pidgin would be more readily accepted by AICs is not confirmed by the responses to the questionnaires. Respondents who belong to

mission churches tend to easily accept that there is a pidgin factor in their church service. Surprisingly, respondents from AICs like Winners Chapel Ghana, the Church of Pentecost and the International Central Gospel Church are among those who had difficulty accepting pidgin in their churches. Indeed, they are mostly the respondents who deny the presence of pidgin in their churches and yet are able to make a list of pidgin songs performed in their church activities.

Conclusion

Though the emphasis of this paper is purely linguistic and therefore issues such as a definition of music may appear irrelevant, Doggett's (2009: 401) definition of music as 'a vehicle, used by all groups of people to bear human prayer and praise to God, and to bear God's word to his people' is useful even in this discussion and may serve as an anchor for the conclusion. At least, it helps to establish the place of music in Christian worship. The explicit position of most of the people I surveyed is that whereas it is very normal for Pidgin English to be used in music at church, it is an anathema for it to be used in any other way in the church.

Pidgin English is in many ways a youth phenomenon, and in Ghana it does not receive the open endorsement it has in Nigeria partly because the neutralising role it plays in Nigeria is being fulfilled by Standard English. Besides, in Ghana – especially in cities in the south – Twi seems to perform the informal function pidgin performs in Nigeria. Twi is said to be spoken by almost 80 percent of the Ghanaian population, making it a second lingua franca (cf. Dako 2002). But the point here is that Pidgin English, especially the Nigerian brand, has found its way into the Ghanaian church through music and the church seems to be flirting with it at the moment. This trend, though clandestinely making bold incursions into a highly formal space at present, is perhaps a test to see if the church has a place for the youth and the uneducated.

Notes

¹ Beginning from the 1960's a new wave of Christian evangelism with the zeal of planting churches blew across Ghana. This was the inception of the Pentecost movement in Ghana spearheaded by Ghanaians and which has continued into the current dispensation of the Charismatic movement. Apart from their belief in and practice of glossolalia (speaking and praying in tongues), these churches have the mission of worshipping God the African way through dancing and clapping of hands.

² Outdooring is the traditional naming of a child in Ghana, especially popular among the Gas.

³ 'Collection' in Ghana is the money contributed by church members during offertory

⁴ Kru Brofo and Abongo Brofo are both alternative terms used to describe Pidgin English in Ghana. Kru is a Sierra Leonean tribe and Brofo is a Twi translation for English. Kru Brofo thus refers to Pidgin English which in Ghana is believed to have originated in Sierra Leon. Abongo Brofo, on the other hand, is used in Ghana to refer to Nigerian Pidgin. Abongo is a Twi word for a soldier connoting that this type of pidgin is typically found in the barracks among soldiers and policemen.

⁵ These are Yoruba and Igbo lexical items which are most frequent in Nigerian movies that are found on the Ghanaian market. Their meanings are as follows:

Igwe – an Igbo word which means king/traditional ruler

Chineke – an Igbo word which means God the creator

Tofiakwa – a Yoruba exclamation which means forbidden

Nyafu-nyafu – a Yoruba expression which means more than enough

⁶ SPCL Conference 2011 is an international conference of the Society of Pidgin and Creole Languages held in 2011 in Ghana at University of Ghana

⁷ Abi is a Yoruba tag meaning 'is it?' or 'ok?'

⁸ Oga is a pidgin word of Nigerian origin which means 'my boss'

⁹ The reduplicative 'ye ye' is a Yoruba expression which means useless, nonsense or naughty

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