Journal of West African Languages XVI.2 (1986)

PRONOUNS, CREOLIZATION, AND DECREOLIZATION IN NIGERIAN PIDGIN: A PILOT STUDY

Nicholas Faraclas
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria
University of California, Berkeley

An initial panlectal grid analysis (Rickford, 1980) of the use of prounouns in the Nigerian Pidgin (NP)-speaking community of Port Harcourt indicates that the processes of creolization and decreolization in the language may be traced through the realization of particular forms by individual speakers. Such an analysis promises to lay a scientific foundation for the identification of patterns of socially conditioned variation (as well as areas of stability) which must be accounted for in any adequate description of the language. The results also provide a more empirically-anchored (and -verifiable) basis for current debates concerning the processes of creolization and decreolization themselves.

Un analyse panlectal (Rickford, 1980) de l'usage des pronoms dans le Pidgin (NP) parlé à Port Harcourt au Nigéria indique que les processus de créolisation et de décréolisation dans la langue se révèlent dans les tendences régulières des individus de réaliser des formes particulières. Un tel analyse peut établir un point de départ pour identifier d'une manière scientifique les points de variance (et les points de stabilité) dans l'usage qui, dans leur ensemble, doivent être pris en compte dans toute déscription linguistique qui prètend à être suffisante. Les résultats peuvent fournir en plus des bases d'argumentation plus solides et vérifiables dans les débats actuels sur la créolisation et la décréolisation.

1. BACKGROUND

At least 30 million Nigerians of every regional,ethnolinguistic, and socioeconomic background speak Nigerian Pidgin (hereafter NP) as a second language and a rapidly growing number of young Nigerians are learning NP as a first language. NP may be divided for convenience of description into three sets of social varieties (acrolectal or decreolized, mesolectal or creolized, and basilectal or pidginized) and at least four regional dialects (Midwestern, Eastern, Western, and Northern).

For the general sample, tape recordings of conversations, narratives, and other relatively spontaneous speech (at least one hour per speaker recorded over several sessions) were made in the markets and working class neighborhoods of urban Port Harcourt

from each of some 50 individuals chosen on the basis of age, sex, socioeconomic level, ethnolinguistic background, and educational history to represent a cross section of the city's NP speaking population. After the recordings were transcribed a panlectal grid analysis (as illustrated in Rickford, 1980) was applied to the data to reveal pattterns of socially conditioned variation.

The study on which this work is based was made possible by a Fulbright-Hays grant (G008540643-U.S. Dept. of Education) and the invaluable help of Mr. Magnus Igwe, my assistant. Thanks are also due to Mr. S. Adewole for his helpful comments. This paper was first presented at the W.A.L.S. Congress at Ibadan in March.

1.1 ORTHOGRAPHY

The orthography used in this work is that recommended by Faraclas et al. 1984. Vowels are nasalized before syllable final nasal consonants, which are often either homorganic to a following consonant or deleted. Forms without tone marking are composite forms.

1.2 ABBREVIATIONS

In this work, the following abbreviations are used:

1	first person singular	L2	second language
2	second person singular	M	masculine
3	third person singular	N	neuter
4	first person plural	NP	Nigerian Pidgin
5	second person plural	NSE	Nigerian Standard English
6	third person plural	O	object
E	emphatic	P	pronoun
F	feminine	S	subject
L1	first language	TRANS	transitive marker

2. THE PRONOUN SYSTEM OF NP

2.1 PREVIOUS DESCRIPTIONS

Previous works on NP (Agheyisi 1971, Faraclas et al. 1984, Elugbe and Omamor forthcoming) divide the nonpossessive pronouns into three categories, which correspond very closely to the categories used for the description of pronouns in many Benue-Congo languages: 1) neutral or nonemphatic subject pronouns (SP); 2) accusative or object pronouns (OP); and 3) pronominals or emphatic pronouns (EP). Nonemphatic pronouns occur in the same phonological phrase or stress group as the verb for which they serve as arguments, while emphatic pronouns normally form the nucleus of a separate stress group, independent of any verb with regard to the rules of stress assignment (Faraclas 1985). Example (/ marks stress group boundary):

(1) **Mí, á láyk yù o.**
//EP / SP OP //
1ESP 1SP like 2OP PARTICLE
'(As for) me, I (really) like you.'

The above mentioned authors list the following pronouns for NP:

Person	SP	OP	EP
1	**à**	**mì**	**mí**
2	**yù**	**yù**	**yú**
3	**ì/ì(m)**	**àm**	**ím**
4	**wì**	**wì/ọ̀s**	**wí**
5	**ùnà**	**ùnà**	**ùnà**
6	**dẹ̀m**	**dẹ̀m**	**dẹ́m**

2.2 PRONOUNS IN THE TARGET SAMPLE

The phonetic form of every unambiguous instance of pronoun usage in the initial 3,500 (minus the very first 200) words realized by each of 17 speakers was noted and classified according to person, gender, and the three categories outlined in 2.1 above: subject, object, and emphatic. The 17 target speakers for this pilot study represent the entire set of inidividuals recorded in one of three urban compounds where the majority of the data in the general sample were collected. The adult members of the target compound speak NP as a second language and work as traders or laborers or are unemployed. Most of the children in the compound speak NP as a first language and all attend school except for the youngest ones, who are not yet old enough to be admitted. Because this compound is the most diverse of the three compounds (in terms of socioeconomic level, amount of formal schooling, and history of NP use) included in the general sample, it was selected to illustrate the broadest range of socially conditioned variation.

Table I lists all of the realizations attested for each type of pronoun among the 17 target speakers. Because emphatic subject pronouns sometimes differ from emphatic object pronouns, each is listed separately. (A key to the abbreviations used may be found in 1.2 above).

1SP **à/ày**	EP **mí**	3MSP **ì(m)**	EP **í(m)/hí(m)**
1OP **mì/à**	EP **mí**	3MOP **àm**	EP **ám**
2SP **yù/ì**	EP **yú/í**	4SP **wì**	EP **wí**
2OP **yù**	EP **yú**	4OP **ọ̀s**	EP **ọ́s**
3NSP **ì(m)**	EP **í(m)/hí(m)**	5SP **ùnà/yù**	EP **ùnà**
3NOP **àm/ì**	EP **ám**	5OP **ùnà**	EP **ùnà**
3FSP **ì(m)/shì**	EP **í(m)/shí**	6SP **dẹ̀m/ì**	EP **dẹ́m**
3FOP **àm/hà**	EP **ám/há**	6OP **dẹ̀m/àm**	EP **dẹ́m**

TABLE I. Range of pronoun realizations for 17 target speakers

The data in Table I show that the forms for 2OP, 3MOP, 4SP, 4OP, and 5OP do not vary, and correspond to the forms listed in 2.1, with the exception of 4OP **wi** which is always realized **ọs** in the sample (4OP **wi** does occur, however, in the speech of some elderly NPL2 speakers in other compounds). All of the other categories show variation.

2.3 PATTERNS OF VARIATION

Most of the patterns of variation which occur in the sample are not random. Some forms are found mostly only in the speech of those with extensive exposure to Nigerian Standard English (NSE) (acrolectal varieties), while others forms are found mostly in the speech of those who speak NP as L2 and who use the language only in a limited number of contexts (basilectal varieties). The forms which are found in the speech of all 17 speakers are almost without exception the very same forms which are invariable in the speech of NPL1 children, especially those who have never attended school (mesolectal varieties). The patterns of pronoun usage which typify the speech of NPL1 preschool age children may therefore be said to represent a common or core system which is reflected in the speech of all other speakers in the sample, but which is modified in the direction of NSE in acrolectal varieties and in the direction of other Nigerian languages in basilectal varieties.

	1SP	3NSP	3FSP	3FOP	5SP	3MSP	Example
	3-**ay**	3-**hi(m)**	3-**shi**	3-**ha**	3-**yu**	3-**hi(m)**	Speakers
Isolect	2-**a**	2-**i(m)**	2-**i(m)**	2-**am**	2-**una**	2-**i(m)**	age/sex/ed./NP
A5	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	13/F/8/L1
A4	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	2	13/F/9/L1
A3	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	2	2	10/M/3/L1
A2	3/2	3/2	3/2	2	2	2	23/M/6/L2
A1	3/2	3/2	2	2	2	2	10/F/3/L1
M0	3/2	2	2	2	2	2	6/F/0/L1
							5/F/0/L1

TABLE II. Acrolectal (isolect A5) to mesolectal (isolect M0) grid

Table II traces how the mesolectal forms (marked by the number 2 in the matrix) gradually begin to vary with more acrolectal forms (marked by the number 3 in the matrix) as the degree of exposure to NSE (mainly via formal schooling) increases. The affected categories are (in order of their decreasing susceptibility to acrolectal variation): 3NSP, 3FSP, 3FOP, 5SP, and 3MSP. Each line of the matrix represents the pronoun use patterns found in the speech of one or more of the individuals in the target sample (i.e., in a single isolect). The age, sex, and number of years of schooling completed are listed for one or two speakers of each isolect in the column to the far right. NPL1 speakers are marked L1 while NPL2 speakers are marked L2.

	1SP	6OP	6SP	2SP	TRANS	3NOP	1OP	Example
	1-**a**	1-**am**	1-o	1-**i**	1-3NOP	1-**i**	1-**a**	Speakers
Isolect	2-**ay**	2-**ɖem**	2-**ɖe(m)**	2-**yu**	2-0	2-**am**	2-**mi**	age/sex/ ed./NP
B6	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	53/M/5/L2
B5	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	2	37/F/1/L2
B4	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	2	2	22/F/6/L2
B3	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	2	2	2	36/M/0/L2
B2	1/2	1/2	1/2	2	2	2	2	23/M/6/L2
B1	1/2	1/2	2	2	2	2	2	12/F/5/L2
M0	1/2	2	2	2	2	2	2	6/F/0/L1 5/F/0/L1

TABLE III. Basilectal (isolect B6) to mesolectal (isolect M0) grid

Table III shows how the categories 6OP, 6SP, 2SP, 3NOP, and 1OP (in order of decreasing susceptibility to basilectal variation) are increasingly affected by variation between mesolectal forms (marked 2) and basilectal forms (marked 1) as the age of an L2 speaker increases (and although not explicitly indicated, as his reliance on NP as the principal language used in daily activities decreases). The right hand column gives a profile of one or two speakers of each isolect.

One pattern found only in basilectal varieties has less to do with the phonetic form of pronouns and more to do with their grammatical function. 3NOP **am** often occurs in basilectal speech with any verb with an object as one of its arguments, e.g:

(2) **à kọ́m páwnd yám./À kọ́m páwnd-am yám.**
1SP REALIS pound yam 3NOP
'(It came to pass that) I pounded yams.'

In such cases 3NOP **am** is being used as a marker of transitivity (see TRANS column, Table III). The manner in which this purely functionally defined variable fits neatly into the general patterns of variation exhibited by more formally (morphophonemically) defined variables suggests that variation in different linguistic subsystems may be analyzed together (simultaneously) using panlectal grids.

As shown in both Table II and Table III, 1SP **a** varies with 1SP **ay** in all isolects. This pattern of variation is extremely stable across all socially defined groups. This provides support for Rickford's suggestion that the relationship between diachronic language change and synchronic variation is not completely symmetric (1980:176).

A reexamination of Table I in light of the data provided in Tables II and III reveals that variation patterns which tend to increase the number of semantic distinctions marked by pronouns in mesolectal varieties seem to establish themselves first in focused (or emphatic) environments before spreading to nonfocused environments (i.e. the usage patterns of the emphatic pronouns tend to introduce further complexity into the mesolectal system). Variation which tends to decrease the number of semantic distinctions marked by pronouns in the mesolects appears to start

in nonfocused environments before affecting the emphatic pronouns (i.e. the usage patterns of the nonemphatic pronouns tend to simplify the mesolectal system).

3. TOWARD AN ADEQUATE DESCRIPTION OF THE PRONOUN SYSTEM OF NP

An adequate description of the nonpossessive nonreflexive pronoun system of NP must include an account of patterns of variation as well as of areas of stability. I propose the following.

The pronoun system which typifies the mesolectal varieties of the language and which is found to one degree or another in all varieties of NP is quite stable and may be summarized thus:

1SP	**à(y)**	EP	**mí**	4SP	**wì**	EP	**wí**
1OP	**mì**	EP	**mí**	4OP	**ọ̀s**	EP	**ọ́s**
2SP/OP	**yù**	EP	**yú**	5SP/OP	**ùnà**	EP	**ùnà**
3SP	**ì(m)**	EP	**í(m)**	6SP/OP	**dẹ̀m**	EP	**dẹ́m**
3OP	**àm**	EP	**ám**				

The patterns of variation in pronoun usage exhibited by speakers of a full range of NP social lects are summarized by the following rules, assuming the mesolectal forms to be the underlying forms. Each rule is variable and each is weighted, with higher numbers indicating greater distance from mesolectal varieties. A more heavily weighted rule may not apply where a less heavily weighted rule has not already applied:

ACROLECTAL RULES		BASILECTAL RULES	
<3NSP--->	hi(m)>1	<6OP--->	3OP>1
<3FSP--->	shi>2	<6SP--->	3SP>2
<3FOP--->	ha>3	<2SP--->	3SP>3
<5SP--->	2SP>4	<3NOP--->	TRANS>4
<3MSP--->	ji(m)>5	<3NOP--->	3SP>5
		<1OP--->	1SP>6

REFERENCES

Bokamba, E. ed. 1985. Language in African Culture and Society. Studies in the Linguistic Sciences 14.2.

Elugbe, B.O. and A.P. Omamor. forthcoming. Nigerian Pidgin (NP): Background and Prospects.

Faraclas, N. 1985. Rivers Pidgin English: Tone, stress, or pitch-accent language? In E. Bokamba ed. 1985: 67-76.

Faraclas, N., O. Ibim, G. Worukwo, A. Minah, and A. Tariah. 1984. Rivers State Pidgin English. Journal of the Linguistic Society of Nigeria 2:187-198.

Rickford, J. 1980. Analyzing variation in creole languages. In A. Valdman and A. Highfield. eds. 1980:165-185.

Valdman, A. and A. Highfield. eds. 1980. Theoretical orientations in Creole studies. New York: Academic Press.