

Nigerian Pidgin: The identity of a Nigerian away from home

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Abstract: Nigerian Pidgin (hereafter NP) is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria, but many Nigerians view it negatively, as they associate it with uneducated people in the country and often caricature it as a bad form of English. However, attitudes towards NP in the diaspora and its role as a marker of social identity within and outside Nigeria have not been researched. Through informal interviews and focus group discussions with 10 Nigerians (5 men; 5 women) in Canada, I find that the participants choose NP as the language they use to express their identity as Nigerians in Canada. While the women embraced Standard English, the men had more positive attitudes towards NP suggesting covert prestige. Therefore, this study provides a good pilot project for analyzing attitudes towards NP and its role as a language of identity for Nigerians in the diaspora.

Keywords: language and identity; Nigerian Pidgin; sociolinguistics; diaspora; language attitudes

1 Introduction

Even though NP has the highest population of speakers in Nigeria, previous studies have shown that it is still associated with people of the lower class that lack formal education in the country, and NP is often defined as a caricature and a bad form of English (Akande and Salami 2010). It is commonly used as a lingua franca between interactants who share neither a common mother tongue, nor English, the official language of Nigeria. NP is also used for familiarity purposes in informal settings among close acquaintances, and to bridge the gap of communication between the highly educated and the non-educated that have little or no knowledge of Standard English. Notwithstanding, NP is looked down upon for its lack of status and recognition.

Previous research mostly focused on attitudes towards NP in relation to its possible use as the language of education (Akande, 2010), the national language (Mann, 2009), language policy, and other language standardization and development issues with their results being mostly negative. Some studies have looked at the attitudes of educated Nigerians because they have alternative languages, that is, they have a good command of English and their native languages (Herbert, 2008). Therefore, educated Nigerians are in a better position to influence and participate in policymaking in the country (Herbert, 2008). The case of NP relating to one's "Nigerianess" or one's identity as a Nigerian has not necessarily been captured in the literature. This study, therefore, focuses on the identity of Nigerians in Canada as it relates to their use and interactions with other Nigerians in NP.

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This study is important because it explores both one's identity as a Nigerian in Canada (away from home) and Nigerians' attitudes towards NP in Canada, and it serves as a step towards determining the role of NP in constructing a Nigerian identity in the diaspora. This study also examines the usefulness and impact of NP as a language that unites Nigerians in countries far away from home. This may shed more light on the importance of empowering NP in Nigeria because the knowledge of the importance of NP as a language in the diaspora may enable NP to be more appreciated and valued in Nigeria.

2 Context

2.1 Demography of Nigeria

Nigeria is the most densely populated country in Africa, with over 196 million people (Akinyemi 2014). It is a multilingual nation and home to over 250 ethnic groups speaking over 500 languages, reflecting the great cultural diversity in the country (Reed & Mberu, 2014). Located in West Africa (Figure 1), it is made up of 36 states—with each state divided into local government areas—and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Gayawan, Arogundade, & Adebayo, 2014) (Figure 2). In each state, five or more languages are spoken. The exact number of languages in Nigeria is difficult to ascertain because of its extreme linguistic diversity (Omachonu, 2015). It is however estimated by Blench (2012) that there are about 550 languages spoken in Nigeria, of these, English and NP are used as languages of wider communication and for interaction between people of different ethnic groups (Omachonu, 2015). Nigeria has three dominant ethnic groups: Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. Other ethnic groups include the Efik, Ibibio, Anaang, Ijaw, Urhobo-Isoko, Edo, Itsekiri, Kanuri, Chibok, Bali, and Nupe, among others.



Figure 1. Map of Africa, showing the location of Nigeria in green (Discott, 2010).

The English language, which was adopted from the British colonial government, is the official language of the country, while NP is used as a *social language* with no official status attributed to it. *Social language* here means an informal language that Nigerians use when conversing with family members or friends and in informal situations in Nigeria, as well as outside Nigeria when among Nigerians. Agheyisi (1988), explains that in the past, NP served primarily as a trade language in markets and other informal commercial settings, or as a medium of interaction

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with uneducated employees and domestic servants. But more recently, NP has come to serve as an unofficial lingua franca used in entertainment, for newscasting, and for public enlightenment, even though it does not have any official status (Agheyisi, 1988, p. 229).

A national policy on education adopted in Nigeria in 1977 addressed the national language question, and this policy was seen as “a bold step and a deliberate plan towards national multilingualism” (Afolayan and Bamgbose, 1980, p. 220). In the policy, every child is encouraged to learn one of the three major languages (i.e., Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa) in addition to their own mother tongue. The 1979 constitution of Nigeria, established on October 1st during the administration of President Shehu Shagari, outlined the functional status of different languages in the country. English was established as the lingua franca, and Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa as the national languages. These national languages are the three main recognized ethnic languages in Nigeria and are allowed to be a) used in national functions such as the civil service, law, and commerce, b) taught as subjects in schools, and c) used in official domains (Ayeomoni, 2012). Other minor ethnic languages are only officially recognized within their ethnic groups, like Ibibio and Efik, spoken in the South-South part of the country (see Figure 2).

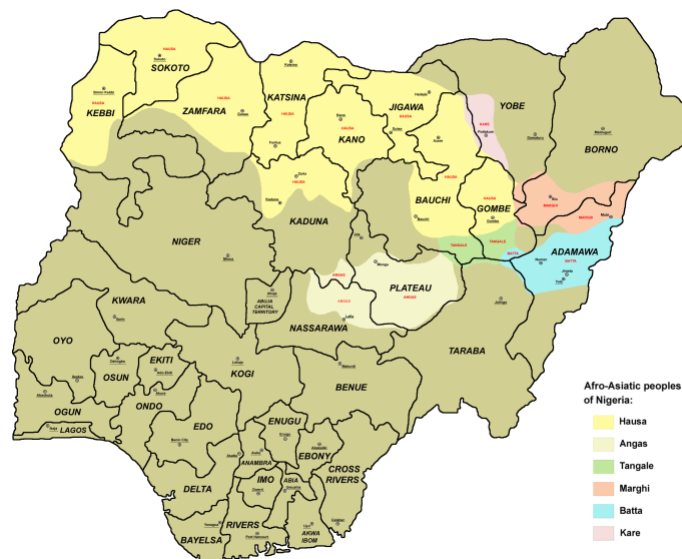


Figure 2. Map of Nigeria showing its States (Panonian, 2022).

NP is not mentioned at all in official language policy of Nigeria. However, while English functions as the official code and as the main medium of instruction in school, NP is used in informal settings for intra and inter-ethnic communication (Ferguson, 1959). It is used as a means of communication between speakers who share different native Nigerian languages and among family and friends. Therefore, English enjoys high prestige while NP has low prestige (Akande, 2010).

2.2 NP

NP, previously referred to as “broken English” or “bad English” by most Nigerians, is spoken by more than thirty million Nigerians (Holms, 1989), and forms a continuum with the West African Pidgin English that stretches from Sierra Leone to Gabon in Central Africa (Barbag-stoll, 1983) with the exception of Liberia. The BBC (2016) estimates that between three and five million speakers primarily use NP in their day-to-day interactions. It is said to be a second language to up

to seventy-five million people in Nigeria alone, about half the population (BBC, 2016). In a more recent study, Faraclas (2021) comprehensively assessed the number of people who speak NP in Nigeria and puts the number at about 110 million, making it not just the most widely spoken language in Nigeria but one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. In tracing the inception of NP, Faraclas (2002) explains that with its large and vigorous population and linguistic diversity and tolerance, Nigeria was able to develop a highly mercantile society with major urban centres, centuries before the landing of European merchants' ships in the 15th century. Lifestyles such as trading, travel, and intermarriage, etc. had brought Nigerians who speak different languages into close contact with one another for years. For this reason, it is possible that pidginized versions of Nigerian languages were widely spread in many areas before Europeans (e.g., Portuguese and British traders) arrived. After their arrival, some European words, namely English and Portuguese-derived items (such as *sabi* 'know') would have been substituted for Nigerian words to facilitate communication (Faraclas, 2002). However, it has also been argued that West African Pidgin arose from contact and from a desire to communicate with Africans in West Africa, and was generally known as West African Pidgin English, with its varieties such as NP and Ghanaian Pidgin spoken in specific West African countries (Yakpo, 2016). In the highly multilingual states in Nigeria, which also lack widespread ethnic lingua francas, such as Rivers and Cross River (in the South-South region), NP readily complements English to meet this important communication need (Agheyisi, 1984).

NP has come to dominate urban spaces in Nigeria and has been accepted in a widespread level to the extent of it being the first language of many Nigerians, especially in Edo state, Warri, Port Harcourt, and Sapele (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991). The widespread use of NP has led some linguists over the years to propose its adoption as the national language of Nigeria. One reason for this proposal is that choosing a single ethnic official language out of 500 possible languages is not easy to do, which may be why Nigeria still maintains English as its official language after its independence (Ogunmodimu, 2015). Under such circumstances, NP, a language that originated within Nigeria, can be seen as ethnic to an extent and has justification to be promoted as a national language. Another advantage of NP is that its lexicon embodies a composite of diverse Nigerian linguistic heritages (Agbali, 2005). NP is a language that is spoken by Nigerians from all social strata, both educated and non-educated, young and old, as well as people with different religious affiliations, and even Nigerians in the diaspora. Despite NP being an informal lingua franca which transcends regional, ethnic and linguistic boundaries, it has no official status or recognition in Nigeria (Ogunmodimu, 2015). It is therefore important to look at NP as an aspect of identity formation for Nigerians away from Nigeria. A study like this has not yet been done in the diaspora, and it is interesting to access the attitudes of diasporic Nigerians towards NP.

2.3 Literature review on language attitudes

Language may vary in multiple ways. Variation may occur at the level of sound, morpheme, word, phrase, discourse, or in paralinguistic cues. Speakers and listeners may have attitudes and reactions towards variation along all these dimensions and more. Attitudes can be defined as a "disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects" (Sarnoff, 1970, p. 279). In the context of this study, a language attitude is referred to as "any affective, cognitive, or behavioural index of evaluative reactions towards different language varieties or their speakers" (Ryan, Giles & Sebastian, 1982, p. 7). Attitudes may not always be positive or negative, but they may subsume both positivity and negativity (Haddock & Maio, 2004, p. 1). Some techniques used to access speakers' attitudes in the literature include quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires, and/or qualitative methods such as sociolinguistic interviews, matched guise tests,

and verbal guise techniques. These techniques are used to access speakers' attitudes towards language and the attitudes of people around them. For example, Haugen's (1966) study elicited language attitudes in a survey on mutual intelligibility in Scandinavia. The result of the study showed that 42% of the Danish participants thought that Swedish sounded more beautiful than their own language, while none of the Swedish participants thought that Danish sounded more beautiful than Swedish. In another study focussing on Danish and Swedish (Schuppert et al., 2015), a matched-guise experiment, a test that consists of lexically identical speech samples from a balanced bilingual speaker, was carried out with recordings of a balanced bilingual speaker of Danish and Swedish. The participants were groups of Danish and Swedish children between 7 and 16 years old who were tasked with judging the Swedish and Danish recordings and four other languages on a 5-point semantic differential scale indicating how normal, beautiful, smart, modern, kind, and rich the speakers sounded to them. Although the participants judged the bilingual speaker positively when she spoke the listener's own language, the Danes rated the Swedish guise more positively than the Danish guise because they believed that Swedish sounded more beautiful than Danish as found in Haugen (1966). These studies show that people may have positive or negative attitudes towards languages (including ones they may speak) but may view the language they speak more positively than the one they do not, as a sign of solidarity.

Leibschner and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) discussed their observation of language attitudes in interaction, arguing that the approach provides invaluable insights for the study of language attitudes. They maintain that interactional approaches particularly, should be viewed as at least as fundamental to language attitude research as more commonly used quantitative methods of analysis, since the interactional method (e.g., conversational interviews and focus groups) provides more insight to the researcher than the quantitative methods. For this reason, the current study makes use of qualitative methods—conversational interviews and focus group discussions—and quantitative methods—language proficiency and preference questionnaires—to assess Nigerians' attitudes towards NP in Canada.

2.4 Literature review on attitudes towards NP

Some Nigerians view NP as a bad form of English and attribute NP to those without formal education (Akande 2010). As found in the literature (e.g., DeGraff, 2003, 2005), NP, like other creoles and pidgins with European language lexifiers, has been perceived as bastardized English, or as a lesser language (Mann 1996), which could be linked to colonialism and prejudice against speakers of pidgins and creoles (see Section 2.5 below). By contrast, linguistic scholarship has recognized NP as a distinct language separate from English. An example of such studies is Agheyisi (1984) who argues that there are educated speakers of NP that incorporate English into NP, but that NP is a separate language from English. Elugbe and Omamor (1991) solidify this by explaining that the sentence structure and sound system of NP are sufficiently different from those which operate in English to warrant it being classified as a separate language (p. 61).

Some studies regarding attitudes towards NP have been conducted in urban centres in Nigeria, including places where NP is used as a native language. An example of such a study is Igboanusi (2008), who investigates attitudinal dispositions of his participants towards empowering NP and giving it a recognized status and higher function in education. The majority of the participants (over 73%), who were students at the University of Ibadan and Benin (where NP is dominant), disagreed with the proposal that NP should be taught in schools. Yet, despite its lack of status, linguistic scholarship has suggested that NP be used as an official or national language

(Egbokhare, 2003) and as a medium of instruction in the early stage of primary school education, especially for NP-speaking children (Egbokhare, 2003),

Another study conducted to assess Nigerians' attitudes towards NP was completed by Ithemere (2006). His study explored language shift in Port-Harcourt, a city in Nigeria where NP and Ikwerre are spoken as a first language. He investigated the Ikwerre people's attitudes towards their languages (Ikwerre and NP), as they relate to language choices. A language proficiency and preference questionnaire, as well as the matched-guise technique, were used as tools for analysis in the study. For the matched-guise test, two Ikwerre bilinguals (a man and a woman) were each recorded reading the same 40-second passage twice, once in Ikwerre and once in NP. The four voices were ordered so that Ikwerre versions alternated with NP ones, and no voice was followed immediately by its matched guise. The respondents were told at the beginning of the test that they would hear four speakers reading the same passage, some in Ikwerre and some in NP. The fact that they would hear the same speakers' voices twice was concealed from them. Before listening to each voice, they were given a response sheet containing ten traits on which they had to rate the speaker. Each voice was played once, and the respondents were given enough time to complete all their ratings for this voice before the next one was played to them (p. 197). All the participants (across three generations, i.e., grandparents, parents, and children) judged NP more favorably than their native language Ikwerre, because they used it more frequently than Ikwerre. However, the Ikwerre guise was judged to be more honest, friendly, and generous (echoing feelings of traditional values). Although the speakers judged NP more favourably than Ikwerre, their judgement towards Ikwerre showed signs of solidarity towards their native language.

Although negative attitudes have been expressed towards NP as analyzed in previous studies, the language still assumes a significant role in Nigeria as it is used for interaction between people of different ethnic groups who do not share a common language and in informal situations in Nigeria. Therefore, NP can be seen, in a sense, to reflect national identity in Nigeria (Akande and Salami, 2010). It reifies a sense of Nigerian identity; it defines "Nigerianess"; and it is expected to rise above a social language identity to become a national language (Agbali, 2005).

2.5 Hypotheses

2.5.1 Hypothesis 1

NP will be rated as the language of identity for Nigerians in the diaspora by all the participants in informal situations.

NP is the language that bridges the gap between English and ethnic languages in Nigeria (Ogunmodimu, 2015). It is a language of familiarity; therefore, Nigerians in Canada may easily choose NP over English as a tool with which to identify with other Nigerians in informal situations. Since there are over 500 ethnic languages in Nigeria, it is likely that the Nigerian person with whom one interacts speaks a different ethnic language. While English continues to perform "high" language functions in Nigeria, NP has almost taken over the role of lingua franca in informal domains. It is to be noted that NP is used by individuals in every social stratum in Nigeria, i.e., educated and uneducated, upper class and working class (Ogunmodimo, 2015). Therefore, Nigerians in Canada will choose NP as the language they speak when they relate with other Nigerians in informal situations, and NP may likely be chosen as the language of identity of Nigerians in Canada.

2.5.2 *Hypothesis 2*

Female speakers will prefer English to NP when interacting with other Nigerians in informal situations in Canada. The men will prefer NP to English language in this context.

Female speakers are more likely to prefer the prestigious form (Standard English) over NP while interacting with other Nigerians in informal situations in Canada, since English is highly prestigious in Nigeria. Literature in sociolinguistics has shown that women typically produce linguistic forms that closely approach that of the standard language or have higher prestige than those produced by men (e.g., Trudgill 1972, p. 180; Wolfram, 1969; Labov, 1966; Tagliamonte, 2012). As for the male speakers, they will embrace NP and prefer to speak it in informal situations with other Nigerians because NP may have covert prestige. Indeed, Trudgill (1972) argues that women and men respond to different norms: men to covert vernacular prestige norms and women to overt, standard-language prestige norms. In the Nigerian context, English is the standard language while NP is the non-standard form, which is more “vernacular” than Standard English.

3 Methodology

The methodology used in this research project involves both qualitative and quantitative methods. Focus groups and informal conversational interviews (held and recorded over Zoom) were used to explore participants’ beliefs and to view the emergence of those beliefs in interactions with others within the group and in the individual interviews. The focus group and the individual interviews were particularly important to encourage discussions of issues surrounding NP which participants may not have considered earlier. The discussions helped facilitate more in-depth exploration of participants’ views and allowed for sufficient structuring and management by the researcher to ensure a focus on the specific topic areas (Yitzhaki, 2010). For the quantitative method, participants were given a language preference and proficiency questionnaire to fill out to indicate which language (between NP and English) they prefer to speak with other Nigerians in informal situations and how proficiently or well they speak NP as rated by the participants.

3.1 Participants

A total of ten participants took part in this study. Out of this number, focus groups were divided by gender with one including three male participants and the other involving three female participants. The other four participants (2 males and 2 females) took part in the informal individual interviews all conducted by the researcher. All the participants are immigrants to Canada who lived in Nigeria for the most part of their lives before relocating to Canada. This criterion was enforced to ensure that they could speak and understand NP satisfactorily. The participants were located in different parts of Canada; one married couple was in Calgary, Alberta, another was in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and all the other participants were in Toronto, Ontario. Altogether, 3 married couples (male and female) participated in the study while the other four individuals were single. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Hoffman, 2014). They were between the ages of 30-45 years old, and they were all highly educated (graduate level). They all speak a variety of different languages, that is, they have a good command of English, NP, and their native languages, and are thus in a good position to talk about, influence, and participate in policymaking in Nigeria (Herbert, 2008). They all have had to use NP in different situations and are all professionals in different fields including health, academia, and information technology. The reason for ensuring that all the participants are university graduates and working professionals is to be able to assess participants’ attitudes by gender without the confounds of class or education interfering. A table summarizing the participants’ demographic information is provided in Appendix D.

3.2 The questionnaire

For the quantitative method, a questionnaire was used. The focus group/interviews together with the questionnaire were used to investigate and account for each participant's degree of integration within the group of Nigerians in the diaspora and interaction with NP. The questionnaire asked the participants for sociodemographic information such as their age, gender, region or state in Nigeria they are from, language proficiency, and language preference in informal interactions with other Nigerians in Canada. The question about language proficiency and preference would provide insights into which language—English or NP—is the preferred choice when the participants communicate with other Nigerians in their routine day-to-day interactions. The questions (adapted from Ihemere, 2006) are listed in Appendix B. The open-ended questions discussed in each focus group session and individual interview are provided in Appendix C.

3.3 The focus groups and the individual interviews

Two focus groups and four individual interviews were conducted. Since the participants were not all located in Toronto where the researcher is located, some of the interviews were held on Zoom. The male focus group was held on Zoom, the female focus group was held in person in Toronto, and the four individual interviews were held on Zoom. The two couples in Winnipeg and in Calgary were interviewed individually to avoid being influenced by their partners' views. They made up the four participants interviewed individually. The members of the third couple, located in Toronto, participated in the male and female focus groups. The focus groups and the individual interviews involved discussions of language preference, choice, and reasons for these choices. The group and individual interview discussions were done informally to enable participants to speak freely with people of their age group. Attitudes that may not have been discovered previously by other methods may be revealed. The focus group and interviews involved discussions of people's views, feelings, and concerns towards NP, how the language relates to their identity as Nigerians, and other important issues like standardizing NP, and increasing its status to a language used in education/the national or official language in Nigeria, as obtained in previous studies.

4 Results

In this section, I present and discuss the responses of the participants in different themes based on their responses to the open-ended questions in the interviews and focus group discussions. I begin with some of the general descriptions of NP in 4.1, responses to the discussion regarding NP as the identity of Nigerians in Canada in 4.2, gender and NP in 4.3, language proficiency and attitudes towards NP in 4.4, partners' (married couples) opposing views on the usage of NP in their homes in 4.5, and NP and the individual in 4.6. The names of the participants provided are pseudonyms.

4.1 General description of NP

In the focus groups and interviews, I asked the participants some open-ended questions that facilitated discussions about NP and their general views on it. When asked what their opinion about NP was, the participants gave responses describing their experience and background with NP. The following are responses from two participants.

- (1) Unfortunately, when we were growing up, NP was not encouraged because it was seen as a language for commoners or a motor-garage language, so it was seen as something for people who could not speak proper English, and then it immediately delineates you to a certain social class, and because we didn't want to identify with that social class, NP was not encouraged. It was highly frowned upon in classrooms while going to school, so it was forbidden in school, it was forbidden at home. However, over the

years, it has evolved to see that if you want to communicate with your maid, your driver, your gate-guard, you go to market and other places, it is better to speak NP... To a foreigner, I will say that Pidgin English [NP] is a non-formal official language of Nigeria... (Samuel, male, 37 years, moderate NP speaker)

- (2) I was raised to see it as a social barrier breaker, so the way I was raised was that pidgin language [NP] is not a language for the educated, it is not a language for the refined, but if you find yourself in a situation where you need to communicate with people who don't know, exactly, who aren't exactly educated, it becomes an easy barrier breaker... so, that's the way I was raised to view Pidgin, and I guess that has also.. that's still the way I see Pidgin language because the only time I still use it is when I'm in these situations... (Cherry, female, 30 years, moderate NP speaker)

In (1) above, Samuel's response to the question about his opinion of NP expresses his background and experience with the language. He grew up with negative attitudes expressed towards NP in his environment, where NP is regarded as a language for "commoners" and as being used by those who cannot speak Standard English. Therefore, using NP signals that one is a member of a particular social class. This shows that some of the negative attitudes towards NP are taught to children by the society in which they are raised.

Similarly, in example (2), the speaker expresses that she was raised to view NP as a language for the uneducated, as she must use it when she speaks with the uneducated. This is a negative attitude towards NP because, although the language is commonly used as a lingua franca between interactants who don't share a common mother tongue, nor understanding of English, it is seen as not "refined" or "educated", despite the fact that NP has also been shown to be used as a language of communication by the highly educated in informal situations, in previous studies (Ogunmodimu, 2015).

4.2 NP as the language of identity of the Nigerian in Canada

Eight out of ten speakers (the male speakers and three female speakers) identified NP as the language of identity for Nigerians in Canada. The following are the comments some speakers made about NP with regard to identity:

- (3) Pidgin is our heritage, the stigma from NP has eroded a great lot, it is our new identity...we see that those of us who were forbidden from speaking NP because it was a motor garage English, are now trying to struggle to speak it to show that we belong (Samuel, male, 37 years, moderate NP speaker)

In (3), Samuel, who earlier expressed how NP was used by commoners in (1), here explains how NP is Nigerians' heritage and how there is a change in the perception of the language given that those who were not allowed to speak NP as kids are trying to speak it as adults, because according to him, NP is Nigerians' "new" identity. This is interesting because the expression "new" suggests that it was not the case that he viewed NP as a language of identity in the past, but that view has changed in the present. It seems that in leaving Nigeria, Samuel, who is no longer among family, friends, and his immediate community who share his ethnic language now has a different view about NP in the diaspora. This shows the role of NP in constructing the Nigerian identity in the diaspora. This may be because NP is what most Nigerians communicate with in informal situations in the diaspora, given that most Nigerians one meets may not speak one's native language, and thus, for purposes of solidarity and identity, the only other language option for indexing specifically Nigerian identity, is NP (as has been expressed by the majority of the participants in this study, n=8/10). Consider also examples (4) and (5) below.

- (4) I try to teach [my children] as much as I can, that's part of the foundation of who they are, that's their identity (IT, male, 43 years, fully fluent NP speaker)
- (5) I will like them [her children] to learn and speak [NP] because I will like them to feel as Nigerian as possible (Olive, female, 31 years, moderate NP speaker)

In (4), IT explains how important it is for his children to speak NP because it is their identity and the foundation of who they are. IT, who speaks NP fluently, expressed that he teaches his children the language because the language identifies them as Nigerians. This view is also expressed by Olive in (5) when she explains the need for her children to speak NP, as a way to feel as Nigerian as possible, therefore relating NP to their "Nigerianess".

4.3 Gender and NP

Male and female speakers had different views in their responses to some of the questions asked in the group discussions and interviews. An example is for the question *Would you like your kids to speak NP?* All the male speakers said *yes*, but three out of the five female speakers said *no*. This supports the hypothesis that male speakers will embrace NP more than female speakers. When asked what their favourite Nigerian language is in Canada, four out of five female speakers chose English as their favourite language in Canada. For the male speakers, three out of five chose NP. However, this apparent gender divide may instead relate to language proficiency. The two male speakers who chose English as their favourite language expressed that they chose it because they speak NP moderately well and have a stronger command of English, but the four female speakers maintained that they preferred to speak English on all occasions rather than speaking NP. The only female speaker who chose NP speaks NP fluently as a native speaker. The difference in the proficiency of the speakers is mostly due to their backgrounds and their exposure to the language.

4.4 Language proficiency and attitudes towards NP

Six out of the ten participants spoke NP moderately well, and the other four participants belong to the "fully fluent" or "very well" group. Participants who speak NP fluently or very well, as indicated in their language proficiency and preference questionnaires (Appendix B), had more positive comments about NP than those who spoke it moderately well. Examples of their comments are seen below:

- (6) (In response to the question about his opinion of NP)
Whoever thought of it [NP] in the first place did something brilliant right ... I try to teach my colleagues the language, I try to indoctrinate my Canadian friends to NP. Pidgin language to me is just awesome, it is a good way for us to communicate at different levels back home (IT, male, 44 years, fully fluent NP speaker)
- (7) (In response to the question about his opinion of NP)
For me, NP is not ugly; it is attractive (Uby, male, 45 years, speaks NP very well)
- (8) I love speaking Pidgin with my friends, there is this connection, this happiness, this joy that we are Nigerians, and it is an easy language to speak and to communicate (Nsy, female, 39 years, fully fluent NP speaker)
- (9) I think NP is a fun language, and it is also easy to learn (UY, male, 33 years, fully fluent NP speaker)

Examples (6)-(9) above are positive comments expressed by speakers with high proficiency in NP. They all had generally positive attitudes towards the language, more so than those in this study who speak NP moderately well. This can be related to the findings of previous attitudes studies as discussed in Section 2 (e.g., Schuppert et al., 2015; Ihemere, 2006) that showed

that speakers rate their own language more positively than the one they do not speak. Here, those with higher proficiency in NP rated NP more positively than those who spoke it moderately, showing their solidarity towards NP.

4.5 Partners' opposing views on NP usage in their household

As mentioned earlier, some of the participants interviewed were married couples with kids. An interesting pattern emerged concerning men's and women's opinions of their kids speaking NP. The men strongly agreed that their kids should speak NP while the women disagreed. The interviews were held separately, so each partner did not know what the response of the other was, thereby discouraging bias in their responses. In response to the question *Would you like your kids to speak NP? What would be your take on that?* the couples provided the following responses:

- (10) 100%. I try to teach them as much as I can, that's part of the foundation of who they are... Not just to be all about English (IT, male, 44 years, fully fluent NP speaker-Miriam's husband)
- (11) Right now, I will prefer them to learn regular English, or Queen's English, and when they grow up, they can decide to speak [NP] (Miriam, female, 43 years, moderate NP speaker-IT's wife)

In (10) and (11), we see opposing views of NP from Miriam and IT who are married and have two children. While Miriam does not want the children to learn NP, her husband, IT strongly approves of the children speaking NP. Consider also the views expressed by Samuel and Dora below:

- (12) I want my children to embrace pidgin English because that is what identifies you as a Nigerian, that's your tool of communication (Samuel, male, 37 years, moderate NP speaker-Dora's husband)
- (13) I think I would like my son to speak NP, but if he can speak English fully fluently well, what is the point really? (Dora, female, 33 years, moderate NP speaker-Samuel's wife)

In (12) and (13), Dora and her husband Samuel had separate views. This further shows how women embrace Standard language more than their male counterparts, as the women both gave more prominence to their children speaking English, though they do not object to them not speaking NP.

4.6 NP and the individual speaker

I observed that two individual speakers, one male and one female who spoke NP moderately well, had positive attitudes towards NP. Olive (31 years, female) was the only female in this category (i.e., female and moderate NP speaker) who expressed value for NP.

- (14) I will like them [her children] to learn and speak [NP] because I will like them to feel as Nigerian as possible (Olive, female, 31 years, moderate NP speaker)

I find this interesting because her views of NP were different from those of the other participants in her category. She is highly educated, speaks other ethnic Nigerian languages, has spent most of her life in the diaspora, grew up in a community where NP was not appreciated, yet desires that her kids speak the language (as seen in (14), above), and that NP be developed and given a status of a national language in Nigeria. This shows that individuals may have diverse views of the language they speak despite their backgrounds or experiences.

Samuel (37 years, male) was also a moderate NP speaker who used positive adjectives to describe NP (as seen in (15), below):

- (15) How do you interpret the beauty of the word *gidigba* (a word in NP that means “strong”) how do you say that in English? I mean the language has become so beautiful... (Samuel, male, 37 years, moderate NP speaker).

Samuel’s case may be attributed to his gender, as men have more positive attitudes towards non-standard varieties of language than women (Trudgill, 1972).

Cherry (30 years, female, moderate NP speaker) was the only speaker who maintained that up until the time of the interview, she still viewed NP as a language for the uneducated and unrefined because she only speaks NP when she talks to Nigerians who are uneducated back in Nigeria (as seen in (16), below, and also in (2) above).

- (16) I was raised to see it as a social barrier breaker, so the way I was raised was that Pidgin language is not a language for the educated, it is not a language for the refined, so, that’s the way I was raised to view Pidgin, and I guess that has also... that’s still the way I see Pidgin language (Cherry, female, 30 years, moderate NP speaker).

The reason for this attitude could be attributed to her background since she had stated that she was raised to view NP that way and that her mother refers to NP as “gutter language”. This is an example of attitudes that were adopted by reason of societal and familial background.

5 Patterns observed and conclusion

As was hypothesized, almost all the participants (n=8/10) viewed NP as the language of identity of Nigerians in Canada. The men exhibited more knowledge about the history and importance of NP than the women, which may be linked to their positive attitudes towards the language. There was an observed pattern in which more men had positive attitudes towards NP than the women, which may suggest covert prestige (Trudgill, 1972). Although not tested statistically, I observed that more women (n=4/5) in this study embraced Standard English more than the men, as is common in sociolinguistics studies. I also noticed that most of the participants who have higher fluency and speak NP most of the time (e.g., Nsy, Uby and IT) did not express any negative attitude towards NP, e.g., “That it is a broken English, gutter language, motor-garage language” as opposed to the others. They all had more positive attitudes towards NP and used positive adjectives to describe the language compared to the other speakers who spoke the language moderately. This may be attributed to their background, as they did not express that they were exposed to negative attitudes when growing up as the others did. This tells us that the background and immediate community a Nigerian is raised may influence their attitudes towards NP. When comparing responses by interview type (focus group and individual sociolinguistic interviews), there were no differences attributable to methodological variation. From the responses of the participants, it appears that NP is the language of identity of the Nigerian away from home (at least in Canada). However, the study is limited by its few participants, so it is not possible to draw such general conclusions. The findings of this research can inform further research on attitudes towards NP and NP as the identity of a Nigerian in the diaspora. This study may add to the methodology of research on qualitative studies of attitudes towards NP. It also serves as a good pilot study for future work that seeks to determine attitudes towards NP in the diaspora and Nigerian identity construction in Canada. Further studies can be done to test NP speakers’ overt and covert prestige towards the language.

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Appendix A: Sociodemographic questionnaire

1. Nationality -----
2. State of Origin -----
3. Age -----
4. Gender -----
5. Languages spoken -----
6. How many years have you lived in Canada? -----
7. How long did you live in Nigeria?

Appendix B: Questionnaire for language proficiency and language preference.

Language proficiency:

- a. If you had to describe how well you speak NP which would you say?
 - 3 = Fully fluent NP
 - 2 = Very well.
 - 1 = Moderately well.
 - 0 = Hardly at all.

Language preference:

- b. Which language do you use when you talk to other Nigerians in Canada: English or NP?
 - 3 = All the time.
 - 2 = Most of the time.
 - 1 = Sometimes.
 - 0 = Not at all.

Appendix C: Open-ended questions for the focus groups discussion and individual interviews.

1. Do you consciously try to sound Canadian?
2. What is your favorite Nigerian language in Canada and why is it your favorite language?
3. If you want others to identify you as a Nigerian through the language you speak, which would you speak and why?
4. What language do you prefer to speak with your friends that are Nigerians who do not share same indigenous language with you?
5. What is your opinion about NP?
6. How would you describe NP to a foreigner?
7. Would you like your kids to speak NP? What would be your take on that? (follow up question).
8. Between English, NP and your indigenous language(s) which would you prefer to be the national/official language of Nigeria. Can you give reasons for your choice?
9. What is your take on English being taught and used as a medium of instruction in school and not NP?
10. What is your take on the idea of having NP textual materials like stories and moonlight tales? (Follow up question: would you buy it for your kids?)

Appendix D: Participant information

Participants	Age	Gender	Lang. Preference	NP Proficiency	Frequency of use	Location	Years lived in Canada	Years lived in Nigeria
Kenneth	38	M	English	Moderate	Most times	Toronto	3	27
Samuel	37	M	English	Moderate	Most times	Toronto	1	36
Uby	45	M	NP	Very well	Most times	Calgary	3	28
IT	44	M	NP	Fully fluent	Most times	Winnipeg	12	32
UY	33	M	NP	Fully fluent	Most times	Toronto	2	20
Olive	31	F	English	Moderate	Most times	Toronto	1	23
Dora	33	F	English	Moderate	Most times	Toronto	1	32
Nsy	39	F	NP	Fully fluent	Most times	Calgary	3	27
Miriam	43	F	English	Moderate	Most times	Winnipeg	3	40
Cherry	30	F	English	Moderate	Most times	Toronto	1	26