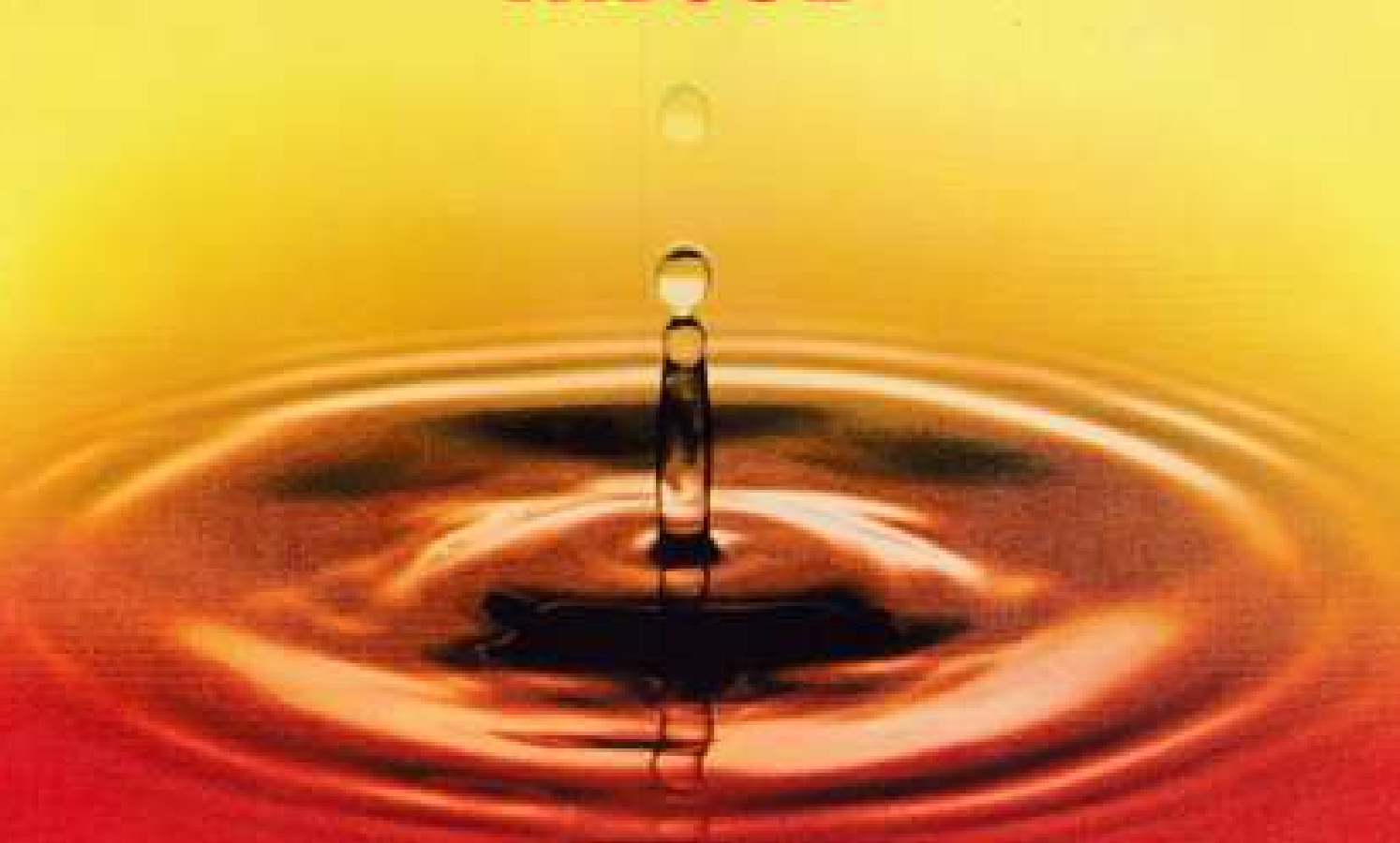




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We hope that you will enjoy reading the articles in this and other subsequent editions.

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LEXICO-SEMANTIC PROCESSES OF ATLANTIC PIDGINS AND CREOLES THAT COMPENSATE FOR THEIR FEW LEXICAL INVENTORY

By

Dr. Happy D. Omenogor

Abstract

It has been observed that the lexical inventory of Atlantic pidgins and creoles are few. As such, some scholars have expressed fear on whether or not Atlantic pidgins and creoles can express all situations of human encounter. Contrary to the above view, Atlantic pidgins and creoles have some lexico semantic processes which enriched its lexicon and therefore is able to express any situation or human experience. Such processes are treated in this paper. The first section of the paper is introduction while the next deals with the characteristic of the Atlantic pidgins and creoles that make up for the few lexical inventory. The last section concludes the work.

Introduction

According to Tod, quoted by Elugbe and Omamor, (year) pidgin is "a language which arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language (1)". A creole is a language which has a jargon or pidgin in its ancestry. It is a language spoken natively by an entire speech community"... (6) as Holm has noted. It has been discovered that the minimal pidgin has few vocabulary items when compared with the extended pidgin and Creoles while the extended pidgins and Creoles also have few vocabulary items when compared with natural languages.

In this paper, we will examine the lexico-semantic processes of the atlantic pidgins and creoles in order to point out their characteristics that make up for the fact that they have few lexical items when compared with natural languages.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ATLANTIC PIDGINS AND CREOLES

As Holm suggested, certain characteristics of the lexicon of the pidgins and Creoles partly compensate for their restricted size. Such characteristics are multifunctionality, polysemy, reduplication, coining and semantic broadening. Other characteristics which are however not suggested by Holm are borrowing, compounding and blending.

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY: This concerns a situation whereby a word performs several syntactic functions. Polysemy which is a process whereby a word has different uses is closely related to multi-functionality but it is restricted to meaning. Circumlocation which emanates from multi-functionality refers to the use of language in such a way that phrases represent lexical items. In pidgin, syntactic categories could not be maintained because of a general lack of morphology. Words were able to change their syntactic functions because there were no bound morphemes. The early speakers of pidgin were faced with the problem of notional equivalent structures that did not always correspond to some syntactic categories in the first language and the target language.

Multifunctionality emerged because of the above problems hence many words took additional syntactic functions.

Examples of the above syntactic changes of words are:

1. 'He catch cracy' (103) Holm. The above sentence means he became psychotic. Cracy is used as a noun. It can also function as an adjective.

'She advantage herself'. 'Advantage' above can be a noun and a verb. Holm however pointed out that it seemed likely that many of the syntactic changes in pidgin or early creole lexicon were later changed in the direction of the European Source language.

2.2 POLYSEMY: This an act of using language in such a manner that a word has various meanings. The usage of this device in pidgins and Creoles allows flexibility that enables the word to gain fresh meanings without losing its original meanings. An example of such usage is,

D gel get bele

'Bele' will mean stomach in another context. Holm believes that there is likely to be a relationship between 'polysemy' in pidgins and the frequent semantic broadening found in creole words e.g.

Krio C. E 'na' which is also a general locative preposition. Stolz also notes that Africans can replace almost every other preposition as an evidence of an earlier pidgin stage "Polysemy occasions circumlocution with modifying phrases so that intended meanings can be specified. E.g. TOK Pisin gas bilon fes 'beard' as opposed to gras bilon hed 'hair' (91) as Hall noted,

2.3 REDUPLICATION

According to Holm, 'reduplication is a mechanism for forming new words. It involves the repetition of a word (or part of a word) resulting in a distinct lexical item with a slightly different meaning' (88). The authority in question also notes that in European languages, reduplication is often:

associated with hypocorism or baby-talk

(e.g. wee-wee ...) but this is not the case

in Atlantic creoles and Niger congo

languages. (88).

Holm further suggests that reduplication became a productive mechanism for word formation through calquing on African models. For example, the Yoruba word 'nla', 'big' can be reduplicated to intensify its meaning, that is 'nlanla', 'huge'.

Cassidy takes note of some two hundred reduplicated forms in Jamaican CE; he traced sixteen of these directly to African sources (69-3). as Holm recalled. An example of the words he traced is putta putta 'mud'. The word also features Yoruba

language where it is pronounced as Poto poto with the same meaning (mud). It is believed that poto poto; is derived from twi in Ghana and Yoruba.

As Mafeni would want us to believe there are different forms of reduplications with particular reference to Nigerian pidgin.

1	Reduplications involving extension of meaning	English Source	Meaning in NP
i.	Ben-ben	Bend	Crooked or shady
ii.	Kàtà-kata	Scatter	Confusion (galore) chaos
iii.	Soso	So	All the time
iv.	Blo'blo'	Blow	Ballon
2	Reduplications involving the idea of intensity		
i.	Wa'k'-wa'ka'	Walk	Wander perpetually Someone who is always going somewhere or the other
ii.	Wa'k'-wa'ka'		
iii.	Be'g-be-g	Beg	Perpetual beggar, beg perpetually etc
3	Reduplication Involving No change in meaning		
i.	San-San/San-Saan	Sand	Sand

(104)

2.4 Coining

The spontaneous creation of words with no exterior model does not appear to be very common in any language (68) as Hancock notes. The above authority however stated an example of a coinage in creole; which is Trinidadian 'bobolops' which means a 'fat lady'. There is also a coinage used in Warri and Saple (Nigeria) known as 'kpians' which means 'a witch or wizard'.

2.5 Borrowing

As Mafeni points out, pidgins and creoles, particularly Nigerian pidgin did not rely on only the superstrate languages. The instances of words which Mafeni cites as the ones borrowed from the substrate languages include:

Wayo 'tricks' (Hausa Origin)

Nyanga / Nyangã 'Vanity' (Hausa Origin)

Siga 'master'/'superior' (Yoruba Origin)

Aguda 'rufian'/'rascal' (Yoruba Origin) (105-106)

etc'

The above examples show that the Atlantic pidgins and creoles do not rely solely on the lexifier languages but as a matter of fact have drawn; from the substrate languages for their lexicons.

2.6 COMPOUNDING:

This is the process whereby two words are brought together in order for an idea to be expressed in pidgin e.g

'Tight-hand', which refers to a person that is stingy

2.7 BLENDING:

This is the situation whereby parts of two words are joined in order to express a particular idea. E.g.

'Domot' which means 'front of a person's door' in a compound.

'do' is taken from 'door' while 'mot' is taken from 'mouth'

'Door and Mouth' are in the source language (English).

Conclusion

It has been observed that the lexicon of atlantic pidgins and creoles are not as broad as the lexicon of natural languages. Several factors are responsible for this. Chief among the factors is the fact that substrate language speakers who drew from the lexifier languages could not take all the words from the lexifier language as they had to rely on only the words that are related to their subject-matters of communication. Pidgin as we know is used for certain communication needs, particularly marginal pidgin. However, with the aid of lexico-semantic processes such as: multifunctionality, polysemy, reduplication, coining, borrowing, blending and compounding, the inadequacy in the lexicon of atlantic pidgins and creoles has been made up.

Extended pidgins and creoles can be used to express any situation just like natural languages in any part of the world. This is made possible by the above lexico-semantic processes.