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Power in Nigerian Pidgin (NP) Discourse

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Abstract

Power may often be considered very significant when people of different classes, genders, races, ethnicities or religions interact especially in bilingual or multilingual milieus. This is very often expressed in the discourse of interlocutors with similar or different backgrounds or ethnic languages. Generally, especially in the public, Nigerian Pidgin (NP) is often denounced as an inappropriate, low class language by institutional authorities which constitute the power behind the discourse of political and social dominance and control as extrapolated by Fairclough (2001). However, the main objective of this paper is to show that NP speakers, as interlocutors belonging to the same class, the same socio-political and economic level, the same linguistic level, and

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living in the same place, Ajegunle, also demonstrate relationship of unequal power in their verbal interactions. Based on the conceptual frameworks propounded by Ventola (1979), Melrose (1995), Fairclough (2001, 2014), Gee (2004), Wodak & Meyer (2009) and Collings & Hollo (2010), I attempt a critical discourse analysis of NP, using sample texts obtained randomly at Ajegunle. It is demonstrated clearly in the way Nigerians interact among themselves, as NP speakers, that there is power in their discourse.

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin, power relationship, dominance, control, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

In most languages, it is often said that action speaks louder than words. In English, a picture is said to worth a thousand words! Furthermore, Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Huddleston (1976), and a few other linguists and pragmatists have attempted to demonstrate that words are sometimes not only act(ion)s but also pictures in the minds of both the speaker and the hearer implicitly expressing power relations between them. By their presumptions, I assume they presuppose the physical or psychological effects of words used in appropriate contexts. Power relationship may often be considered very significant when people of different classes, genders, races, ethnicities or religions interact especially in bilingual or multilingual milieus. This is very often expressed and noticeable in the discourse of interlocutors in the context of situation as some kind of power play. Thus the speaker with greater power tends to dictate, determine or control the direction or the run of discourse while the speaker with a lesser power complies, follows or responds appropriately (Fairclough 2001: 38-39). Naturally, pidgin speakers are often considered low in

social status, education and political ambition and thus looked down upon. As such, they tend to be at the receiving end, especially in a polarised society where political class and social elite hold sway by controlling much of the economy of the state. Thus in Nigeria, those of low social class (who are mostly speakers of Nigerian Pidgin) are persecuted, marginalised and discriminated against. As a result, in the metropolis such as Lagos and Kano, they tend to live in places considered to be slums and ghettos and are often referred to as backward, uneducated and unenlightened. This leads to class discrimination, oppression and segregation which is also associated with their mode or form of speech. This is perhaps why the so-called educated elite discriminate against, and distance themselves from, the use of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) which, in the public, is often denounced as an inappropriate, low class language (which they nevertheless employ in their privacy). However, in the Niger Delta area, where NP has become the first language of most residents of different classes, it is a prestigious global language displacing most native languages in their primary functions. In fact, in this and most other places in Nigeria, it is spoken by all, regardless of status (Osoba & Alebiosu 2016: 132)!

In this study, my focus is on the tenor of discourse as explicated by Collins & Hollo (2010) in terms of its significant feature of distance. According to them, distance in tenor is created by unequal, non-reciprocal power relationship (socioeconomic, class, professional), by differences in age and gender, by the frequency of contact and the degree of emotional involvement. Moreover, most societies tend to have clear expectations about the amount of personal space appropriate in different social situations as well as the fact that personal stance, gesture or volume of voice may indicate the differing power relationships between interlocutors (ibid: 205). From

a broad perspective, Fairclough (2001: 18-19) appropriately examines discourse as a form of social practice. In this regard, language is considered in three parts as (i) a part of society, (ii) a social process, and (iii) a socially conditioned process. From his perspective, 'English' and other languages, including pidgins and creoles, can be seen as the product of social conditions specific to a particular historical epoch. Since everyone uses languages in ways that are subject to social conventions especially in their most intimate and private encounters, they can be seen to be determined by social relationships of the family as well as their social effects in terms of maintenance of those relationships. Thus this study tends to demonstrate the power relations implicitly or explicitly expressed in the discourses of interlocutors within the same social cultural circles as well as those outside them as speakers of Nigerian Pidgin.

2. Discourse and Power: A Theoretical Perspective

Power, in relation to discourse, may be understood to derive, more or less, as a by-product of the language used by individuals, groups and societies, in the sense that, its effectiveness/authority ultimately derives from a covert or an overt consent (assumed as consensus) given and approved for the majority of its citizenry and its common sense ideology that an official lingua franca is for the good of the nation or state, especially as it engenders unity, oneness, solidarity and patriotism. Power, in this sense, can be seen from two perspectives. First, there is the *power behind discourse*; and second, there is *power in discourse*, as graciously explicated by Fairclough (2001).

Power is not only associated with those wielding the instrument of state, as rulers, but also with their language through social

conventions in the society. Conventions are rules and regulations governing relationships in every human society. These conventions, which relate to the use of language, may be social, political, religious or professional. But the actual power behind the conventions of a discourse, according to Fairclough (2001: 51), belongs to the power-holders rather than their institutions because the policing of conventions is in the hands of institutional power-holders at various levels. They are therefore assumed to constitute the *power behind discourse*.

Power behind discourse is necessarily an important instrument of control in every human society. This is because it relates to the regulation and organisation of social, religious, professional, political and economic relationships in the society through established conventions enforced by power-holders. Thus since language is a product of society, it may also relate to several other aspects of the human life or relationships. An individual then tends to exercise the power in discourse based on the established conventions. But what is perhaps most fascinating is that every use of language simply reflects or indicates power relations or struggle. Thus every discourse type or use of language can be seen to demonstrate power relation or struggle between interlocutors. When this happens between individuals of the same class, gender or ethnicity, it indicates *power in discourse*.

Interestingly, Tollefson (1996: 9) simply describes power as “the ability to achieve one’s goals and to control events through intentional action”. Moreover, to him, “individuals exercise power as a result of their social relationships within institutional structures that provide meaning to their actions and also constrain them”. Thus a dynamic relationship between societal structure and power can be established in relation to the actions of the individual and those of the

society at large. Fairclough (2001: 38-39, 49) attempts to provide a further insight by saying “that power in discourse [has] to do with powerful participants *controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants*”. Three types of such overlapping constraints include (i) that on *contents* (what is said or done); (ii) that on *relations* (tenor of discourse); and (iii) that on *subjects* (the ‘subject positions’ people can occupy). He considers medical examination an example of a of ‘face-to-face’ discourse type that demonstrates an exercise of power where participants are unequal. Nevertheless, power can also be exercised even when participants tend to have equal status. This is because, even within the same social class, members attempt to control and determine the run of events in their verbal interaction. However, in his more recent work, Fairclough (2017: 2), his main goal is to explain how interlocutors determine the direction of discourse through interactional devices or constraints in order “to raise consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, as a step towards social emancipation”.

In his own opinion,

Power relations are always relations of struggle, using the term in a technical sense to refer to the process whereby social groupings with different interests engage with one another Social struggle may be more or less intense and may appear in more or less overt forms, but all social developments, and any exercise of power, take place under conditions of social struggle. This also applies ... to language: language is both a site of and a stake in class struggle, and those who exercise power through language must constantly be involved in struggle with others to defend

(or lose) their position (Fairclough 2001: 28-29).

The point here is that within the socio-cultural and political arrangement that we call Nigeria, there exists the conflict of interest among, as well as within, the various ethnic groups and social classes that constitute the nation in terms of language use, attitude and preference. The elite are associated with the preference for Standard English while the low class members tend to be associated with the less-preferred indigenous languages and Nigerian Pidgin. Scholars such as Elugbe & Omamor (1991), Jibril (1995) and Osoba (2014, 2015) have however pointed to the fact NP is spoken by most Nigerians regardless of class, status, gender or ethnicity, especially in their unofficial capacity. In this light, it may be interestingly illuminating to investigate the power in NP discourse. Based on the historicity and the ideology of language use in Nigeria as both a pre-independence and a post-independence experience, in Lagos where our sample data are taken from, it is rather impossible to find power behind NP discourse presently. The reason is simply that political power holders may not risk jeopardizing their status by using NP on formal occasions. Apart from its recent use for political campaigns, adverts and jingles, NP is not favoured by most members of the educated and political class, as noted by Osoba (2014).

It is clear that unequal power relations exists between the Nigerian elite and the poor masses. But it is not unclear that Nigerian Pidgin interlocutors display equal power as result of their ability to control tread of arguments and to achieve their individual or collective goals in their verbal interactions. Interestingly, Fairclough (ibid: 113) highlights four of the commonest devices which powerful participants employ in other control the less powerful or non-powerful participants in verbal discourse “by putting constraints on

their contributions”. These are (i) interruption, (ii) enforcing explicitness, (iii) controlling topic, and (iv) formulation. *Interruption* is used to control the contribution of the non-powerful interlocutor in terms of the correct or appropriate manner or way of commencing a procedure, duty or service; or stop the repetition of information or giving of irrelevant information. Enforcing explicitness is employed to force the non-powerful participants to make their meaning clearly understood or unambiguous through questions like: *Is that a threat?* or *what do you think?* *Topics* can be used to specify the nature and purpose of an interaction at its commencement and to disallow irrelevant contributions. *Formulation* is employed widely and diversely to reword what has been said partially or wholly by the powerful interlocutor or others as a way of checking understanding or reaching an agreed characterisation of what has transpired in the discourse. It is usually a rewording of what is assumed to follow from or implied by what has been said. The devices combined with the verbal strategies explicated by Melrose (1995) can be found to be appropriate and adequate for the analysis of the two sample texts of the Nigerian Pidgin discourse in this study.

3. The Ideology of Language Use and Power Relations in Nigeria: Historicity

The multilingual nature of Nigeria presents a complex and an intricate situation in which some languages have become dominating and others dominated. This is as a result of education and language policies which have led to the assumption that some languages are modern/standard while other are unmodern/no-standard. Modern languages, such as English and French, are then assumed to be better

because of their prestige while indigenous languages, including Nigerian Pidgin, are seen as not so good and lacking any prestige. This assumption appears to have originated from the colonial era and extended to the post-independence period as a common sense solution to the multilingual problem of the Nigerian state. B. Adeniran (1992: 13) aptly captures the experience when he observes that

In the 1890s, the British were well-placed to create a nation-state in the area of modern Nigeria. They had the force and some amount of goodwill to federate the three geo-cultural units into a single political unit. They also had the mechanism to obliterate the ethnic differences among component ethnic groups and foster a spirit of national identity among the peoples. But the colonial situation turned out to be one in which differences intensified, regional separation became marked and the pre-colonial moves towards political integration were halted.

The consequence of the colonial situation is described as leading to a precarious sociolinguistic and political scenario. Thus he notes that

In the atmosphere, attempts at ethnic integration were viewed as a move towards the establishment of the political hegemony of a dominant group and oppression of the other groups which would then constitute the minorities It was with this mistrust and ethnic competition that Nigeria became a sovereign state in 1960 (ibid: 23).

From that perspective, one can infer that the colonial social policy actually engendered and entrenched ethnic and linguistic division

rather than unity. Thus every ethnic or linguistic group would then view anyone outside their group with some suspicion rather than trust. No one is ready therefore to forego their own language to adopt or learn those of others. This was the main reason why Nigeria had to adopt the English language as its official lingua franca after her independence in 1960. Little wonder, W. Adeniran (2007: 124) observes that “One indisputable feature of the colonial languages in Africa is the barrier they create to communication and cooperation among the various African peoples and countries”.

In almost all former multilingual colonial British territories, the assumption that the adoption of the English language would solve the problem of national integration, unity and national language question, as an ideology and education policy, has rather led to greater inequality and domination instead of mitigating or reducing it. It can be observed to have created a class of elite that is isolated from the rest of the citizenry in terms of highest job employment, political participation and economic advancement. Access to social amenities and dividends of political democracy tends to be of exclusive preserve of the elite. The adoption of the English language, which is the language of the elite, as Nigeria’s official language has further created some divide between the elite who use often it and other Nigerians who use other languages more often because of the privileges attached to it as a modernized language. In this regard, Tollefson (1996: 206) clearly explains that

Speakers of some languages are disadvantaged not because their languages are ‘unmodernised’; rather, the fact that languages are viewed as unmodernised is a reflection of the relationships of power among speakers of different languages. Thus powerful participants because of their use of

the so-called modernized language are often seen *controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants* with unmodernised languages. However, speakers of unmodernised languages, like NP, can at times be seen as not only controlling and constraining the contributions of others but also being accorded the right to do so by the less power interlocutors within their own class. This is simply because such powerful participants are acknowledged as being leaders based on their courage demonstrated in their discourse and pedigree.

This may be the reason Fairclough's (2001: 28) observation and suggestion that "Power relations are not reducible to class relations" appears to be significant. In his view, "There are power relations between social groupings ..., and there are power relations between women and men, between ethnic groupings, between young and old, which are not specific to particular institutions". Based on that assumption, we can assert that power relations cut across ethnicity, gender, religion and class. Moreover, in Nigeria, power relations are observable among all classes, sexes, professions and administrations/administrators. Our focus in this study however is the tenor of power in the discourse of NP speakers, with Ajegunle resident NP speakers as sample representative.

4. Power Relations and Nigerian Pidgin Discourse: Interacional Sequence

In the Nigerian Pidgin discourse, power relationship is evident among its interlocutors of the same or different ethnic affiliations.

Thus according to Fairclough (ibid: 36), “discourse” can be considered “as a place where relations are actually exercised and enacted ...: power in face to face discourse, power in ‘cross-cultural’ discourse where participants belong to different ethnic groupings”. Most speakers of Ajegunle NP employ it in such an emotional and natural way to indicate power relations, sometimes expressing power in form of their ability to prove superior intelligence, prowess or tact in their interactions or simply to express the aesthetics of their titillating NP discourse. This use of NP, expressing an attitude or air of superiority in discourse, is common among all Ajegunle NP residents-speakers whether they are students, workers, market traders or touts. Thus a close observation of their verbal interactions may reveal the inherent brashness, cockiness and brassiness found in most NP discourses. This attitude or air of superiority is usually reinforced by their frequent use of the interjections such “*shuu!*” or question tag, “*dem fit?*” in certain contexts to demonstrate some high scale of relationship of power when interacting with or reacting to the discourse of other NP speakers.

To have a good understanding of the relations of power in the Nigerian Pidgin discourse, it is necessary to understand the “verbal strategies used to accomplish social purposes of many kinds” as explicated by Melrose (1995: 43-44) in his discussion of interactional sequence in the study of spoken genres. The unmarked order of the elements of schematic structure for casual conversations and service encounters as proposed in the work of Ventola (1979) and used by Melrose (ibid.) to exemplify the concept of interactional sequence seems to suffice for the study of power relations in the NP discourse. This is warranted by the fact that they relate directly to the sample data for this study. Text 1 is more or less a causal conversation while Text 2 is an exchange of goods and services. The

choice of texts was determined by relevance, time and space constraints.

Discourse in any spoken language is, as highlighted previously, a matter of social conventions. This, as we know, also relates to struggle and power within and among social groups and classes and this reflects in the structures of their discourse. The unmarked order of the two spoken genres are presented respectively as follows:

(1) Casual conversation

- i. greetings
- ii. address
- iii. approach, either direct, relating to health, appearance, family members, every day or professional life; or indirect, relating to weather, current news, etc.
- iv. centering, an optional element in which one or more cognitive or informative topics is discussed
- v. leave-taking
- vi. goodbye

(2) Service encounter

- i. greetings
- ii. turn allocation (select next customer)
- iii. service bid (offer of service)
- iv. service (statement of need)
- v. resolution (decision to buy or not to buy)
- vi. pay
- vii. goods hand over
- viii. closing
- ix. goodbye

(Melrose 1995: 44)

Based on the orders above, one may agree with Melrose's view that

The structures of casual conversations and service encounters clearly represent the stages through which speakers move to accomplish particular social purposes, or to put it another way, verbal strategies that speakers use to accomplish transactions (Melrose 1995: 44).

But the social conventions which underlie those structures are not always explicitly expressed or reflected especially where the relationship between the interlocutors is so intimate that they are implied or assumed to be present. Thus where the highest level of intimacy or familiarity is implicit in an NP discourse, it sometimes unnecessary to apply their explicit markers or devices. This is perhaps why pidgins and creoles are generally tagged informal languages.

5. Methodology

The data for this paper was collected from Ajegunle between 2006 and 2015. Research Assistants were actively and directly involved in the collection of data through tape recording and participant observation. Some of the data were collected at the Ajegunle Boundary market while others were got from Ajegunle residents. Ajegunle, otherwise called, 'A.J. City', 'Jungle' and 'Ilu Isobo', etc. comprises many ethnic groups, such as Yoruba, Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko, Igbo, Bini Igala, Efik, Ibibio and Hausa. It can be regarded as a true representative of Nigeria. According to Bobby (2016), Ajegunle can be compared with Trench town in Jamaica and Soweto in South

Africa, where residents rank among the poorest. In fact, Ajegunle town has been known as one of the worst slums in Lagos State where residents see themselves as slum-dwellers. The data used for analysis were randomly selected since it appears that power relation permeates all of the discourses of the collected NP corpora. The verbal discourse involved interactions among interlocutors who were male and female adult Ajegunle NP resident-speakers.

6. Presentation of Data

(3) Text 1 (Boundary, Ajegunle; 16 October, 2007)

Speaker A, B, C, D & E were residents of Boundary area in Ajegunle when this conversation about their general lifestyle was recorded. They were actually having fun at a nearby hotel and perhaps oblivious of everything and everyone else. The research assistant who also resided in Ajegunle had sought and obtained the help of Speaker A in the collection of NP data for the project with an understanding that it was meant for academic purposes only. This led to their meeting at a downtown hotel with four other friends: Speakers A, B, C, D and E. The transcript of the tape recorded data is as follows:

- i. A: {Correcting B's impression about the research assistant's mission/request} *no bi dat said. Shi tok sey ...*
- ii. B: OK, I wont, I wont ... OK! Na di ...
- iii. A: ... *fomali, people do think eh ...* A.J.; the conception of most people out there ... say A.J. *na*

one kind rural area now ... you know; wen dem talk am bifo ... for ... you know; if Oyibo go tok, im go se Africa ... na ... Africa ... na ... wia monkey den full, say the conception of some people, means A.J. is em ... an area where touts or hoodlums or all those I say A.J. is just like any other place. But the originality, from A.J. that you hear on the TV, that is the music and all the stuff, it is inborn. It is not something you keep; you can get in say of ... in any other ... area of Lagos. Like as una dey yearn just now. No other place for Lagos here wey dem dey do like dat (shaking his head); i no possible, i no fit bi! If i no bi so

- iv. B: If I may ask, eh mm? ... If I may ask now say, *wetin be your ... that is, you don stei Ajegunle tei bikos, wi {put palm on chest}, wi be brought up, you onderstan? Ehn, so no bi sei ... er ... fo mi, ehn? Fo my oun levu, Ai bi Warri boi oh! Na Waffi, nau! Yu no ondastan, shuo?* {C entered}
- v. C: *Waffi!*
- vi. B: *Dat won, dem no dey aid, dem dey sho! Shey yu ondastan? So di levu wey dey dia bi sey eh ... bi yu as Ajegunle gai {pointed at A} yu ondastan? Wetin yu enjoj most for insaid Ajegunle, yu ondastan bikos, for Ajegunle eh, for di hol siti of Lagos, for Lagos as a whole, dem sey Ajegunle na won of di most dangerous place, at di same taim eh, na won , won of di most ... when Ai min grooviest, yu ondastan? So, if yu no hol yor hed straight, entin dey hapin {chuckled} na wetin dey hapin fo di mufs,*

shey yu ondastan? So na konfam, so mi go laik kno ehn ... as yu don stey Ajegunle, wetin yu enjoj most when yu dey stey Ajegunle?

- vii. C: *Konfam!*
- viii. A: *Wetin Ai enjoj most dat taim eh, fo Ajegunle, ol boi, dat taim ... na rud bois ends ... eyes, during dat taim, of eh, kasikajal, Mandus kleimin, kleimin It is not about collecting people's things oh! But who is the toughest ... in town? Shey, shey yu ondastan? This group battling battling this other group to si uh strong pas, uh old graund No bi sey dem go yus am tif o entin. That was what we played ... that ... in those taim in Ajegunle! Den Ai dey stei fo Satellite Town but my beis na Ajegunle. Ai dey olweis dey ia 2-4-7. So, as I bi nao, na I ... laik musik don teik ova, shey yu ondastan? Musik don teik ova! Wie kno Ajegunle of ..., for their music and em*
- ix. D: *their dance, dance step ...*
- x. A: *and our dance, i dey different from every other part ... in Nigeria, our slangs and efiri galala, our yans, efiritin dey different!*
- xi. B: *So ... for me, Ajegunle mm na pleis wey bi sey mi no, we get the right things and we get the right people because, won, dem dey kondem. Every other place, dem they condem Ajegunle, shey yu ondastan? So mi, ... yu ondastan?*
- xii. A: *Wai yu no go chop liva?*
- xiii. B: *Aniwia eh!*
- xiv. A: *Liva!*
- xv. B: *Na wia di pleis, ... na wia ... na wia ... Ajegunle*

dey yu ondastan? So na so i jost bi ... so ... wi go de meik tins hapin fo di moves. Ajegunle na fo wi, ba, yu ondastan?

iget won taim ehe, dem sey dem won demolish Ajegunle, bot we let dem no sey ... make una kari on nao, una fit? {Chuckled} Ao i wan teik hapin?

xvi. A: *Dem no bon dem!*

xvii. C: *Ai de ask dem!*

xviii. B: *Shuoo! Dem ... dem no ivin nak dem, dem no ... dem no fit nao? Yu no ondastan? Bot todey, wetin dey hapin? Di pleis de divelop exferidey. Si am ... Yu de ... Si am nao, most sta atist, dem wan kom in, dem wan kom si wetin dey hapin fo di moves!*

xix. C: *Dem wan kom fiil!*

(4) TEXT 2 (Ajegunle Market; Thursday, 17 December, 2015)

Speakers A, B are market women. Speaker C is the Assistant who recorded their interactions on a conceded voice recorder and keen observation. He was an active participant in the conversation which was meant to convince him to buy ingredients for a local soup from the sellers. In the process, both women attempt to prove that the manner of cooking a soup and the type of meal with which it is eaten are determined the superiority of the culinary skills of an ethnic group. This led to an interesting and illuminating arguments featuring power relationship between distinct ethnic groups, the Delta group consisting of the Irobo, Isoko, Benin, Warri, Sapele people and representing the minor ethnicity and the Yoruba group representing the major ethnicity in Nigeria.

- i. A: *Wi de len!*
- ii. B: *Oh, shuo, A.J. said!*
- iii. A: *Wai yu de bief laik.*
- iv. B: *Na A.J. City wi de so o!*
- v. A: *Yu bai, yu sel o!*
- vi. B: *Aha, if na dis mai Banga; if ai kuk am for yu, yu go no hau ai kuk am o!*
- vii. A: *wetin? Hau yu go kuk?*
- viii. B: *Yu de reik am; yu de reik am.*
- ix. A: *Hau yu de kuk am? Yu go kuk am laik Yoruba or Delta wuman?*
- x. B: *Yoruba ke? Yoruba na smol children wia wi de kuk!*
- xi. A: *A beg, mi ai de laik Amala; when yu kombain ...*
- xii. B: *Amala no bi fud ...*
- xiii. A: *Amala with ehn Na mai best fud bi dat. Eventhough abi Delta ai laik Amala.*
- xiv. B: *Amala bi fud we yu sit down, so yu go shit! If yu teik stash, i go de for yor bodi.*
- xv. A: *Ai beg, na Stash meik yu stron laik dat!*
- xvi. B: *Yes, aim meik am strong so.*
- xvii. A: *Stash na Stash!*
- xviii. B: *Wi no de teik Stash plei fo wi Delta.*
- xix. A: *Mi ai no de plei with mai Amala!*
- xx. B: *Na Amala meik yor yansh de soft.*
- xxi. A: *Na im meik mai yansh de soft.*
- xxii. C: *Amala de pas yor own; Amala de powerful.*
- xxiii. B: *Amala no bi fud! Stash bi Eba with all dis Banga soup.*
- xxiv. A: *Madam, ai no de listen dat yor mata ja re.*

- xxv. B: *Ai beg, wi de len! Yor levu no rich awa oun; yor oun levu no rich awa oun!*
- xxvi. A: *If ai tebu yor mata for dis A.J., yu no go laik am; if ai tebu yor mata!*
- xxvii. B: *No de waind mi jare; no de waind mi. Ai no de laik am!*
- xxviii. A: *U de waind yu? U de waind yu? Na yu de waind yorsef; na yu de waind yorsef.*
- xxix. B: *Listen yor mata wel; yu get won levu? Which levu yu get? Yu neva rich!*

7. Analysis of Data

In this analysis, two texts (labelled Text 1 and Text 2) are examined in terms of relationship that characterize the conversations or the tenor of their discourse. The texts reflect the attempts by the interlocutors to control the run of discourse by the use of strategies and devices that lead to dominance regardless of their same ethnicity and status. Courage, skills and dexterity are displayed in the process of establishing who or what is superior through the cultural/social perceptions of the interlocutors as well as whatever is presupposed in their utterances as their goals. In order to determine the relation of power among the interlocutors in the two texts, it is important to understand and identify their frequency of contact and the degree of emotional involvement in their discourse. However, strategies for casual conversations and service encounters may sometimes not be explicit in NP discourse as in Texts 1 and 2 above. The reason for this is likely that, since discourse participants belong to the same class and status, it is almost unnecessary to follow through all of the

rituals in their extremely informal context. Participants see themselves as brothers and sisters with a tenor of informal or intimate relationship and much of their greetings and salutations are implied or assumed to be part of their established verbal interactions in their socio-cultural circle. Non-NP speakers are likely to consider this attitude of theirs as an obvious negligence of social rules or see NP speakers as being rude and incontinent.

Text 1 can be regarded as emanating from a casual conversation about Ajegunle city and what operates there from the perspectives of some of its four young male residents, A, B, C and D. In the process, two of the interlocutors, A and B, become domineering by attempting to control and constrain the contributions of the other two. They actually dictate the flow and run of their interaction and are acknowledged by the other two, C and D, as more audacious and cleverer as a result of their overall and explicit knowledge of Ajegunle and its historical struggle to retain or maintain its A.J. City status. Thus speakers A and B can be considered as powerful participants as they employ the four commonest controlling and constraining devices highlighted by Fairclough. For instance, just before the actual conversation began, Speaker A had to interrupt B to ensure that the topic of their discussion is focused on by telling Speaker B “*no bi dat said! Shi tok sey ...* (Not that issue/matter! She said...)” because he noticed that speaker B did not fully understand the request by the female research assistant and was about to deviate from the issue she raised. The device of interruption is used appropriately by Speaker A to stop B from providing irrelevant information. Speaker B, in his utterance, “OK, I wont, I wont ... OK! Na di ... (OK. I wanted to ..., I wanted to ... OK! It was ...)”, then attempts to explain to Speaker A what he was actually trying to do but was interrupted again by Speaker A, who went ahead to introduce

the supposed topic by first explaining the general perception about Ajegunle, its residents and their ways of life. Here, one can observe and assume that Speaker A is a powerful participant as he attempts to specify the nature and purpose of their interaction at its commencement and to disallow irrelevant contributions. Thus two of the four devices can be seen to be evident at the beginning of their discourse showing that Speaker A is more powerful than Speaker B, even though they belong to the same social class. It is in this discourse therefore that power is clearly demonstrated!

But in Speaker A's utterance there is much code-mixing and switching between English and NP! This may suggest that he was not born and bred in Ajegunle. Though he is now a resident and attempts to prove his affinity to A.J. City, it appears that he had actually acquired a better education than most residents and would not naturally be accepted as a leader or power broker by those who were born, buttered and bred in the place. Thus his dexterity and skills are likely to be of temporary advantage over Speaker B who appears to be a local breed.

In utterance (iv) Speaker B makes an attempt to take over the floor by asking a pertinent question about Speaker A's claim to A.J. City. This attempt goes to demonstrate that Speaker A is actually less powerful than Speaker B. This becomes a challenge to Speaker A and turns the table around in favour of Speaker B. Boldly, Speaker B asks Speaker A if he had lived long enough in Ajegunle in utterance (iv) to prove his competence or authority to discuss the city: "If I may ask, eh mm? ... If I may ask now say, *wetin be your* ... that is, *you don stei Ajegunle tei bikos, wi* {put palm on chest}, *wi be brought up, you onderstan?* (If I may ask, eh mm? If I may ask now, 'What's your ...' I mean 'Have you been in Ajegunle for a long time because we, (placing his palm on his chest) we were born and bred here, do

understand?’)’ He goes on to assert his birth place as Ajegunle and to prove also that his ethnic origin is Warri, which is assumed to be the birth place of the Nigerian Pidgin. Thus, if NP speakers are to be put on a scale of preference, Warri speakers will be accorded the first position or a pride of place. Moreover, it is where NP has creolised and is the first language of the younger generation of speakers. The variety of the NP spoken in Warri is labelled Waffi. In the hierarchy of dialects of NP today, Waffi may be said to occupy the highest position or place in usage and prestige. Thus every speaker of Waffi Pidgin tends to be proud of speaking the variety in any part of Nigeria. This is perhaps why Speaker B, in the second part of utterance (iv), asserts:

Ehn, so no bi sei ... er ... fo mi, ehn?

(Ehn, so it is not ..., for me, Ehn)

Fo my oun levu, Ai bi Warri boi oh! Na Waffi, nau! Yu no ondastan, shuo?

(My own variety, I am a Warri Boy oh! It is Waffi, at the present! Do you understand, yes?)

As Speaker B was marking his assertion, Speaker C joined them and acknowledged that Speaker B was truly a Waffi speaker by addressing him as Waffi in utterance (v) “*Waffi!*” The manner of greeting indicates a confirmation of what had earlier been asserted by Speaker B. So in a sense, authority or power is rightfully or dutifully accorded the Waffi speaker. Among the four speakers present, Speaker B can be said to be the powerful participant because he speaks the variety associated with the most prestigious, effective, fluent and native form of NP. In fact, this is the variety associated with the so-called Standard Nigerian Pidgin (SNP), which has

received little scholarly attention to date.

Speaker A, no doubt, as a full resident of Ajegunle, can also be seen as being proud of his status and use of NP. In this light, he seems eager to defend both the town and its associated language. We are not therefore surprised as he boasts and brags about his heritage in utterance (iii): “Like *as una dey yearn* just now. No other place for Lagos here *wey dem dey do like dat* (shaking his head); *i no possible, i no fit bi! If i no bi so* (Just the way/manner we converse now. There is no other part of Lagos where that is done. It is rare, it can’t be! If it is not so ...).” The point this interlocutor is making is that it is almost impossible to find a better type of easy, flowing and flawless discourse anywhere in Lagos other than Ajegunle. To him, discourses or verbal interactions in NP, especially the Ajegunle variety, are better than in any other language in Nigeria. Most Ajegunle residents and NP speakers appear to share this linguistic prejudice or bias. In fact, all interlocutors, in both texts 1 and 2, demonstrate that fact, overtly or covertly, as they express their strong emotional attachment to the NP in their discourse. It may not be far-fetched therefore to consider Speaker A as a less powerful participant because he does not speak the variety associated with powerful NP speakers, the Waffi! Since he is less powerful, he has to naturally concede or yield the position of the powerful to Speaker B, who then takes control of their discussion by asserting his authority or dominance through his ethnic heritage and affinity to the Waffi NP.

Furthermore, in utterance (vi), Speaker B reinforces his authority by claiming that it is a thing of pride to be a Waffi speaker of NP and nothing to be ashamed of: “*Dat won, dem no dey aid, dem dey sho! Shey yu ondastan?* (That is fact that cannot be hidden / it not something to be ashamed of, do you understand?)” He then points at Speaker A and asks him what he enjoys most as an Ajegunle resident

thereby enforcing explicitness as well as exacting the veracity of his claim to A.J. City. What Speaker B is trying to do is to make Speaker A clearly explain his link to the city in an unambiguous way. Having made that point, Speaker B then goes to show how the perception of non-Ajgunle residents in Lagos State conflicts the reality of life in A.J. City. To the non-residents, A.J. City is a dangerous place whereas it is the grooviest or most enjoyable on earth for the residents!

Interestingly, Speaker A tells others what he loved most about A.J. City in his answer to Speaker B's question, in utterance (viii), as the struggles, fights or clashes that used to occur between the various groups of young male Ajgunle residents to prove their supremacy and to determine which of them was the toughest or strongest in various skills, crafts and physical strength. These struggles sometimes resulted in clashes between groups and led to loud uproars and disorderliness that is associated with A.J. City until today. Thus other Lagosians tend to have a negative picture of Ajgunle residents by perceiving them as hoodlums, riffraff, ragamuffins, criminals and dangerous bedfellows! To him, however, those groups of boys were not criminals or thieves, they were just trying to determine the most courageous or powerful among them. This is clearly stated in his utterance: "*Wetin Ai enjoi most dat taim eh, fo Ajgunle, ol boi, dat taim ... na rud bois ends ... eyes, during dat taim, of eh, Kasikajal, Mandus kleimin, kleimin It is not about collecting people's things oh! But who is the toughest ... in town? Shey, shey yu ondastan? This group battling battling this other group to si uh strong pas, uh old graund (to know who is the strongest).*"

Thus, from utterance (viii) lines 2 to 5, one can perceive the struggle for power, dominance or relevance among people of the

same class or social status during the period of the notorious Kasikajal and Mandus Kleimi. Having conceded the powerful participant position to Speaker B, Speaker A makes a bold attempt, in utterance (x), to demonstrate the superiority of A.J. City to other places in Lagos in terms of its original contribution to the music industry in Lagos State in particular and Nigeria in general. To him, A.J. City music dominates other music genres and is therefore more powerful. This is what makes A.J. City unique or distinct as he asserts: “and our dance, *i dey different from every other part ... in Nigeria, our slangs and efiri galala, our yans, efiritin dey different!* (Every dance step, manner of speaking, our raps/song, everything is unique!)” This is an apt reference to the success recorded by many Nigerian musicians, from the 1980s to the present, who were Ajegunle residents (some still live there). Among the most prolific and successful are Daddy Showkey, Marvellous Benjy, African China Buma Boy and Oritse Femi, who are very proud of their Ajegunle background/residency and their use of NP in their music. From his perspective, A.J. City music and musicians/artistes can truly be seen as powerful participants in the Nigerian music industry and cannot be relegated to the background or be classified as backward, retrogressive or low class! Their attempt to swap their social class and status from non-powerful position to that of power through their use of NP in their music is marvelous and commendable. Thus, through their discourse, they have been able to prove that their music is powerful.

In utterances (xii) and (xiii), Speaker A openly acknowledges Speaker B as the powerful participant by exclaiming in a rhetorical question directed at Speaker: “*Wai yu no go chop liva?* (Why wouldn’t you be bold/courageous/fearless?)” and interjection, “*Liva!* (Boldness/courage/fearlessness!)”. Speaker B’s response in utterance

(xiv) approves that assertion as valid and correct in all situation: “*Aniwia eh!* (At all times and places!)”. This then makes him recall a situation, in the past, when Lagos State government served a notice of demolition of houses to Ajegunle residents but could not carry out the plan because of their resistance. This victory for Ajegunle residents shows that power holders can sometimes fail as powerful discourse participants, indicating that power behind discourse may be less powerful than the power in discourse. This can be seen as a defeat of the official English discourse participants by the unofficial NP discourse participants.

In utterances (xv) and (xviii), Speaker B attempts to reformulate the on-going discussion by emphasising the courage of Ajegunle residents to resist oppression by power holders as well as the ingenuity and innovation of Ajegunle residents in their music and lifestyle: “*una fit?* (you dare not!) {chuckled} *Ao i wan teik hapin?* (How can that ever be?)” Other interlocutors, in utterances (xvi) and (xvii),

(xvi) A: *Dem no bon dem!* (Such have not been born!)

(xvii) C: *Ai de ask dem!* (That a big question for them!)

simply concur with his submission in their interjections, which goes a long way to validate the assumption that he is the powerful participant in their conversational NP discourse.

In Text 2, three market women or traders are seen trying to convince the research assistant to buy from them. After the initial exchange of pleasantries, Speaker B tries to woo the buyer to the surprise of Speaker A, who expresses her disapproval of that behaviour in utterances (i) “*Wi de len!* (We are learning!)” and (iii) “*Wai yu de bief laik dat?* (Why do you exhibit that untoward/selfish

behaviour?)”. Speaker B then reminds her colleague in utterances (ii) “*Oh, shuo, A.J. said!* (Oh yes, that is how it is in Ajegunle)” and (iv) “*Na A.J. City wi de so o! (We are in Ajegunle!)*” that that is nature of Ajegunle and its residents, where residents struggle for survival through hard and harsh competitions. This is what is known as the survival of the fittest. This simply shows that she understands the lifestyle of A.J. City better than the other seller. By this, she also proves herself as the powerful participant in the ensuing discourse.

Afterwards she introduces her product, a soup ingredient called *Banga* and attempts to demonstrate her culinary skills and preference for how it is prepared by the Delta group intrinsically associated with A.J. City. In fact, the alternative name for Ajegunle is Irobo town which the Yoruba ethnic group names as “Ilu Irobo”. In subsequent verbal exchanges, she goes further to prove that the Delta people of Nigeria, many of whom speak Waffi variety of NP and have it as their first language, are more powerful than other ethnic groups when it comes to culinary skills, especially the ones involved in the cooking of *Banga* soup. This is expressed in utterance (x) “*Yoruba ke? Yoruba na smol children wia wi de kuk!* (Which Yoruba people? The Yoruba people are babies when compared to us in culinary skills)”, where she attempts to prove that *Stash*, a cassava based food common with Delta group, is better than the alternative *Amala*, which be cassava or yam based, common with the Yoruba ethnic group. This seems to be done in her effort to establish herself as the powerful participant in market discourse while the other participants are non-powerful. Thus she controls and dominates the discourse through her reformulation of the discourse topic. Every attempt made by Speaker B to convince her that *Amala* is as good as *Stash* because both are full of carbohydrate fails. Out of frustration, in utterance (xxiv), “*Madam, ai no de listen dat yor mata ja re!* (Madam, I am no

longer interested in that topic!)”, she gives up by telling Speaker A that she is no longer interested in the topic of their discussion.

As both sellers struggle for power in this discourse, Speaker B declares that both of them do not belong to the same class even though Speaker A also claims to have come from the Delta group.

Apparently, Speaker B does not recognize Speaker A as belonging to her class or group because of her declared likeness for *Amala* a local food common with the Yoruba ethnic group. To her, no proper member of her class would prefer any food to *Banga* and *Stash*. From her reaction, it becomes evident that Speaker A sees herself and her ethnic group as belonging to a class higher than that of the other ethnic groups. It is therefore not surprising that she can boldly assert that in the following utterance (xxv) “*Ai beg, wi de len! Yor levu no rich awa oun; yor oun levu no rich awa oun!* (Please, **your class** is lower than our own class; **your own class** is lower than our own!)”.

Thus the relation of power is obviously enacted in the verbal interactions between the two sellers, one apparently representing the true Waffi speakers of NP, the Delta group, and the other unwittingly representing other ethnic groups in Nigeria, including their languages. Power is ascribed to the Delta group as well as their language, NP while non-power or less power is ascribed to the non-Delta group by Speaker B. She demonstrates a strong attachment to her group and her group language through her attitude of defiance, ruggedness, ruthlessness, native intelligence and strong bias for her socio-cultural values which Speaker A seems not to have. In fact, the threat by Speaker A to report her to their superiors and other Ajegunle residents in utterance (xxvi): “*If ai tebu yor mata for dis A.J., yu no go laik am; if ai tebu yor mata!* (If I report your case in this Ajegunle, you will be sorry; if I report your case!)” is quickly and bluntly rebuffed. She issues warnings in utterances (xxvii) and (xxix) of

being angered by Speaker A's threat and still claims that Speaker A has no class and therefore powerless. This struggle for supremacy between both sellers shows a level of power relations that has been established by them which indicates that Speaker A is actually the powerful participant in their discourse.

8. Conclusions

From the foregoing, it is possible to reach certain conclusions about the use of power in discourse of NP. First, it is clear that power behind the discourse of NP cannot be established until it becomes an official language in Nigeria and used by power holders for administrative and other purposes. Second, power in the discourse of NP can be demonstrated by NP speakers, being supported by the socio-cultural conventions of those who speak it as their first language. Third, an individual can exercise the power in discourse based on the established conventions. Fourth, every use of language reflects or indicates power relations or struggle. Hence, every discourse type or use of language can be seen as a demonstration of power relation or struggle between interlocutors. Fifth, when a relation of power is established between individuals of the same class, gender or ethnicity, it indicates power *in discourse*. As earlier noted and as evident in the analyses of Text 1 and 2, speakers of the so-called *unmodernised languages*, like NP, not only control and constrain the contributions of others but, sometimes, are also accorded the right to do so by the less powerful interlocutors within their own class. Such powerful participants then emerge as a result of competitive verbal interactions precipitated by discourse strategies and devices that are rooted in social conventions.

My final conclusion is that, with NP, most speakers find an unusual confidence in the expression of their pride, courage and ability that not only could stand against social and political oppression but also could be used to exercise dominance or control in their verbal interactions among themselves. Speaking NP, to them, is therefore not a disadvantage but a potent weapon of dominance and control.

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