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# Historical Development of Naijá

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## Abstract

Since the 1400s, Nigerian Pidgin, now properly referred to as Naijá, has evolved from being a trade language among the Portuguese and the natives of the Niger-Delta to being the unofficial lingua franca among Nigeria's over 500 linguistic nationalities. In the last 500 years the language has evolved, it has grown from a contact pidgin to creole and has spread from the Niger Delta to other parts of the country. In describing how the language evolved, we examined historical events and accounts for evidence from across three major historical periods to see how, why and in what ways the language developed, spread across the Nigerian nation and expanded its domains of use.

### Preliminary framework

The history of the development of Naijá is by no means a straightforward one. Authoritative research in this area is scarce; as such, we need to rely on other histories and accounts to piece together a fairly logical account of the development of the language. Even so, a beneficial account should demonstrate the important historical events and significant linguistic issues in the diachronic study of the language.

Historical discussions of language often centre on such issues as: what events or factors led to the development of the language, who were the people or personages involved in the development of the language, and what linguistic changes took place as it evolved? In this study, all of these and other factors would be taken into consideration in describing the historical development of Naijá.

Since Naijá is both an expanded pidgin and a creole (Esizimotor, 2002a; Ihemere, 2006), in accounting for the development of the language, we must also probe the histories of the region for evidence, and perhaps resort to the reconstruction of missing accounts to show how the language evolved from trade or contact language through pidginisation to creole; as well as account for its expansion from a restricted language to a lingua franca.

Although various theories have been laid out to explain the genesis of pidgins and creoles around the globe, historical research has demonstrably pinned the genesis of Naijá to the Niger Delta (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991; Elugbe, 1995; Egbokhare, 2001; Esizimotor, 2002b; Adegbija, 2003). In examining the histories of the region and its peoples to determine why and how the language evolved the way it did, it is important that we establish in some detail the geographics of the area, as well survey the linguistic and ethnic peopling of the region.

The term, Niger Delta as it is used in this study is not only limited to the cartographic region of Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers states, it also encompasses the geopolitical region of the South-South. On the Western Niger Delta, it includes Edo and Delta states; while the Eastern Niger Delta has Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom and Cross River states.

Cartographically, the Niger Delta is one of the world's largest deltas, where the waters of the great Niger and Benue rivers converging at Lokoja empty into the Atlantic Ocean. As an important centre for plant, animal and human biodiversity, the region has been known to bustle with the activities of farmers,

fishermen, hunters, traders, boat-makers, wood-carvers and other craftsmen, for several hundreds of years before and after the arrival of the Europeans on the shores of Nigeria.

Bound in the south by the Atlantic Ocean in the Gulf of Guinea, it is a vast geopolitical territory that covers a coastline of over 480 kilometres from the mouth of the Benin River to the estuary of River Cross, and about 160 kilometres inland. The entire region extending for over 70,000 km<sup>2</sup> makes up about 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. With a network of creeks, mangrove swamps and estuaries, its coastal city states are largely connected by water-ways, the geopolitical region has one of the densest linguistic diversity in Nigeria. It is home to some 20 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups including such major tribal groups as the Annang, Edo, Efik, Eket, Ekoi, Ibibio, Ijo, Isoko, Itsekiri, Oron, Urhobo, Ukwuani, as well as Yoruba and Igbo groups, all speaking some 250 dialects in the region alone (Buah, 1974, pp.152-157; Egbokhare 2001; Plouch, 2008).

Although three of the four major African language families are spoken in Nigeria – Niger-Congo, Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan, only the Niger-Congo family of languages are home to the Niger-Delta, with such sub-grouping as: West Benue (Yoruba, Igbo), South Bantoid (Annang, Efik, Eket, Ekoi, Ibibio), Benue Congo (Edo, Isoko, Urhobo) and Atlantic Congo (Ijaw).

Considering the plural-linguistic nature of the Niger Delta, the supposition that there was a common regional language that predates European presence in the region is debatable. Although we do not know precisely of any lingua franca that was at any time used among the diverse peoples of the region, but some scholars have suggested that Igbo was once used for this purpose (Egbokhare, 2001; Ithemere, 2006, p.299; Faraclas, 1996). But it could be argued from historical and linguistic perspectives that Bini or some Edoid language may have been used in the region at some time in the past. But none of these is known with any certainty.

However, communication wouldn't have been too difficult since many of the languages in the region had a certain degree of mutual intelligibility. The situation would have been such that many traders, fishermen and craftspeople would have been able to speak/hear two or more languages, and perhaps too, they may have used the services of some 'cosmopolitan' people who could interpret or broker trade among parties who could not communicate in a single language.

To describe the language situation in the Niger Delta correctly, we need to also rely on the dynamics of contact. Awonusi (1996, p. 51) argues that in language contact situations, the interacting languages exert varied levels of influence on one another to bring about varied linguistic consequences upon the languages in that environment. Hence the fortunes of any language, according to Egbokhare (2001, p. 105), is inextricably tied to the fortunes of its speakers; and in the same vein, Liberson (1984, p. 4) notes that languages change, not as a result of their inherent quality but as a result of users' power positions vis-à-vis the socio-political and historic forces at play in the environment. And as we have come to observe, when languages are in sustained contact, they are more likely to change dramatically when they are dissimilar/unrelated than when they are similar or related. All changes in language require time to

ripple through social and geographical space and bring about inevitable linguistic and sociolinguistic changes (Esizimotor 2002b, pp. 3-5).

So, in this paper, we will examine the development of *Naijá* across three major periods: (a) the first period, which saw the Portuguese domination of trade and overriding influence on activities in the region; (b) the second period, which witnessed the arrival of the English as the dominant imperialist force controlling activities in the region; and (c) the third period, which accounts for the stabilisation, expansion and spread of *Naijá* across independent Nigeria.

## 2.0 First period: influence of the Portuguese in the Niger Delta

### 2.1 Early contact with the Europeans and Arabs

Prior to the contact of the people of the Niger-Delta with the Europeans, many of the people who lived in the area had lived in the region for perhaps hundreds of years as distinct and separate ethno-linguistic groups. Even so, they were in contact with the Arab world and Europe by way of the Trans-Saharan trade and through intermediaries like the Tuaregs, Hausas and Yorubas who brought in cloth, leather, onion, and beads into the region in exchange for ivory, palm-oil, pepper and slaves (Esizimotor, 2002b, p. 9; Onwubiko, 1966, p. 61).

But the contact between the Niger Delta and Arab Europe, even though it spanned well over 1000 years, a long and sustained period of contact, seem not to have resulted in a pidgin in the region. This is because the contact was indirect, and it was such that the people of the region dealt directly with middle men like the Yoruba whose languages were rather familiar unlike the contact with Western Europeans whose languages were unfamiliar, and with whom contact was direct. And so, instead of the contact between the Niger Delta and Arab Europe leading to pidginisation, it led to the linguistic enrichment of Languages in Nigeria and some languages of the Niger Delta region (as shown in the following table).

**Table 1:** Arab influence on some Nigerian and Niger Delta languages

Item	Arabic	Gloss	Corresponding forms in some Nigerian and Niger Delta languages
1.	al basal	onion	<b>albasa</b> (Hausa), <b>alubosa</b> (Yoruba), <b>alubasa</b> (Yekhee), <b>alubara</b> (Bini), <b>alibasa</b> (Igbo),
2.	al-‘afiya	peace	<b>lafia</b> (Hausa) , <b>alafia</b> (Yoruba)
3.	tasa	bowl	<b>tasa</b> (Yoruba), <b>atasa</b> (Yekhee)
4.	ai'lbara	needle	<b>allura</b> (Hausa) <b>abere</b> (Yoruba), <b>agbede</b> (Yekhee), <b>egwede</b> (Oleh), <b>egbede</b> (Urhobo)

If the sort of contact that led to such linguistic change as shown above had far too minimal impact to signal pidginisation, then what sort of contact led to the development of Najjá in the Niger Delta?

## 2.2 Portuguese contact with the people of the Niger Delta

So, the sort of contact that led to the development a pidgin/creole in the Niger Delta began with the direct and sustained contact between the Niger Deltans and Western Europeans who came to the region. Since the Niger Deltans and the Europeans had no common language, because of the urgency of their contact needs they could not learn or master any of the other's language, and so they inadvertently developed a contact language (Esizimotor, 2002a: p. 2-4).

Propelled by commercial, religious and political motives, the Portuguese started making successful trips to the coasts of West Africa from as early as 1434 AD in search of gold, spices and slaves (Onwubiko, 1966, p. 136). And the Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in the Niger-Delta.

Ryder (1969) traces the first interactional encounter of the Portuguese and the natives of the Niger Delta to about 1469AD. The Portuguese having discovered the Gold Coast (El Mina), wanted to trade with the gold mining Akan tribes, and according to Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 3) quoting Ryder (1969, p. 24), the tribes "preferred, or even insisted on, receiving part of the price of their gold in slaves". And unable to procure the required number of slaves between Portugal and the Gold Coast, the Portuguese sailed further on to the Niger Delta in search of slaves. Since the king of Benin controlled activities in the region at that time, they were led to Oba Ewuare, who then permitted them to trade in the region. That was the beginning of the major trade link between the people of the Niger Delta and the Portuguese. And for a long time, trade between the Western Niger Deltans and Western Europeans was conducted on the authority of the Benin king.

Now the question is: how were the Portuguese able to communicate with the Niger Deltans from their first encounter onward? Did they speak Portuguese to the natives or did the Portuguese speak the language of their hosts? Because to trade as effectively as they did, they must have established an effective means of communication with the people of the region. To this end, Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 2) describe four options of communication open to people or groups at contact under such circumstances. In considering these options, we can clearly see what communicative strategies were open to the Portuguese and the Niger Deltans, and can, to some extent, successfully reconstruct what really happened between the natives and the Portuguese in the Niger Delta.

These options are: the **contact termination option**, in which under extreme circumstance the parties at contact may terminate the contact altogether; or the **barter option**, in which the groups at contact may do without speech but carry on with some kind of 'dumb barter'; or the **second language option**, in which the parties or one of the parties at contact may have to adopt one of the languages of the parties at contact; or the **pidginisation option**, in which the parties at contact try to communicate in one another's language but instead a rudimentary speech form develops from the attempt (Esizimotor , 2002b, p. 11; Elugbe and Omamor, 1991, p. 2).

When the Portuguese first traded with the natives of the region, because of the urgency of the contact, when they probably tried speech and failed, and unwilling to terminate the contact, they had one option – the dumb barter. By a combination of few words and hand gestures, the parties at contact were able to trade successfully (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991).

At that time, when the Portuguese first visited the area, Benin was already a powerful kingdom and was carrying out a war of expansion to the east, north and west, such that the Portuguese were guaranteed a plentiful supply of war prisoners that were sold as slaves. While Benin chiefly sold slaves and some pepper to the Portuguese, the Portuguese exchanged them for fire-arms, cloth, copper and bracelets. Because Benin was the chief centre for the supply of slaves in the whole of the slave coast (from the mouth of the Volta to the delta of the Niger), in 1486, the Portuguese built a trading post at Gwatto, the port of Benin, from whence they conducted all their trading activities with the people of the Niger-Delta (Onwubiko, 1966).

The Portuguese trading post at Gwatto meant one thing: that the natives of the region and the visiting Europeans were in for a sustained trade regime. By this time, the dumb barter option had given way to the pidginisation option. And as more and more trade deals were struck, the natives who now knew the Portuguese as *kpotoki* (corruption of the word 'Portuguese') could identify the items they traded by the names the Portuguese called them and the Portuguese could also identify the local items by the names the natives called them. Such was the beginning of the contact language or rudimentary pidgin in the Niger Delta.

At first the speech form or contact language was limited to just a few words. But more and more lexical items (especially major class items as nouns and verbs) were added to the minimal pidgin as their communicative experience and trade activities broadened. Thus the rudimentary pidgin began to expand as their contact needs grew. To compliment the few words available in the rather minimal pidgin, speakers had to make extensive use of circumlocution (Esizimotor, 2002a).

Now, at some point in the development of the rudimentary language, the Portuguese would have felt they were speaking the language of their hosts while their hosts would have thought they were speaking the language of the Portuguese. This double illusion effect became the psychological framework that supported the development and sustenance of the contact language. This also helped the contact language to achieve a certain level of independence from the original languages of the hosts and that of the visiting Europeans.

From just a handful of speakers, the number of speakers of the new language grew as more and more people in the trading communities of the region bought into the language. The language became a healthy market place language for many of the coastal natives who were from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds. In time, it also became a means for communication between the coastal and inland natives of the Niger Delta.

The Portuguese operated the trading post at Gwatto until 1520 AD when they finally abandoned it. Since the Niger Delta was considered unhealthy for permanent European habitation, they moved over to the

islands of Sao Tome and Fernando Po, which they had colonised around 1500 AD, from where they began trading with Benin and the people of the Niger Delta region (Onwubiko 1966, p. 139).

After 1520, the Portuguese began to visit Benin less frequently. At this time, the marginal Portuguese based pidgin spoken in the Niger Delta coast had already achieved a stable form. Slaves taken from all over the Niger Delta mainland to Sao Tome Island found the marginal language the only reliable means of communicating with their masters and fellow slaves with different ethno-linguistic background. The African wives of the Portuguese merchants found the Portuguese based pidgin the only means of communicating with their husbands and their children. Because Sao Tome, like other Portuguese settlements soon became a society of half-castes and detribalised Africans with no strong allegiance to Portugal, the people of the island spoke the same Portuguese based pidgin that was developed in mainland Niger Delta (Onwubiko, 1966). As the language expanded in the mainland, it also became the principal language of the people of the island. And it is possible that as early as the 1600s the Portuguese based pidgin of the Niger Delta had started creolising in Sao Tome; for it gave a suitable identity to the island and its people.

Today, Sao Tomense, a Portuguese based creole that evolved from that marginal pidgin once spoken in the Niger Delta, is the only evidence we have of what Naijá looked like between 1500s and 1700s. Sao Tomense is a creole that principally has Edoid and related languages (Kongo/Bantu) features in its substratum, reminding us of the link the island once had with the Niger Delta (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991, p.4; Ferraz, 1978). Proof of this is given in an impressive list of words alongside some etymological information.

The following table is an adaptation from the list in Elugbe and Omamor (1991, pp. 5-7).

**Table 2:** Niger-Delta language influence on Sao Tomense

Item	Sao Tomense	Gloss	Edoid Equivalent
1.	le'le	accompany, follow	<b>lele</b> (Bini)
2.	'punda	because, because of	<b>rhun-da</b> (Bini)
3	fo'fo	blow (of wind)	<b>hoho, fofo</b> (Yekhee)
4.	bo'bo	carry an infant on the back	<b>vbovbo</b> (Bini)
5.	pɔtɔpɔtɔ	idiophone of drenching	<b>pɔtɔpɔtɔ</b> (Ijo), ideophone of mudiness
6.	de'de	embrace	<b>dede</b> (Bini)
7.	'oke	hill, ramp	<b>oke</b> (Yoruba) <b>oke</b> (Esan)

8.	uku	rubbish	<b>iku</b> (Bini/Yekhee)
9.	golo	search, look for	<b>gwalo</b> (Bini)
10.	mu'ja	wait, stand	<b>mudia</b> (Bini)

Elugbe and Omamor (1991) who examined Ryder's historical account giving details of the interaction between the Portuguese and the Royal Court of Benin, conclude this way:

Ryder's accounts reveal intensive contact between the court and the Portuguese, leading to an exchange of letters and ambassadors between Benin and the King of Portugal. Since these exchanges were obviously in Portuguese and we are told that some of the emissaries from the Benin Court to Portugal were *faladors* (i.e. interpreters), we must conclude that there were attempts to teach the standard form of Portuguese in the king's court and, perhaps, elsewhere. Whatever these attempts were, the Portuguese did not stay long enough to leave a permanent legacy in the form of a language – standard or otherwise (p.7).

Even after the trade between Benin and Portugal began to decline, the Portuguese influence on Benin was still strong. Besides sending ambassadors to Portugal, The king of Benin also allowed his son and some of his chiefs to become Christians, he built churches and allowed the Portuguese to teach his people to read and write Portuguese. And by 1553 AD when Captain Windham visited Benin he was surprised that the king of Benin, Oba Orhogbua, spoke fluent Portuguese (Egharevba 1968; Onwubiko 1966; Buah 1974).

As the contact between the natives began to develop beyond trade to social, religious and political dimensions the existing contact or marginal language also began to broaden to deal with broader concerns. The vocabulary base of the marginal language increased while the grammar stabilised. The usage though was mainly for trade, it also featured in other social, religious and political events where the natives and the Portuguese were in contact.

About the same time the Portuguese visited the Niger Delta, the ethnic peopling of the region also had also started to re-defining itself. The Itsekiri kingdom, founded by a Benin prince in the late 1400s, for strategic location, grew in importance from the early 1500s when the people were in contact with the Portuguese. Like the Itsekiri, the establishment of Ijaw city states like Nembe, Kalabari and Bonny is linked to migrations from Benin and the economic boom in the Niger Delta, resulting from the Portuguese activities in the region, sometime between mid 1400s and 1700s (Buah, 1974, pp.152-153; Aigbokhai 1971, p. 23; Algoa, 1980). Bonny, Opobo and Calabar and other towns along the coasts of eastern Niger Delta came into being as a result of Portuguese activities in the region. As a result of the domestic strife in Benin, towns like Badagary, Lagos and Warri, which were originally outposts of Benin also became independent late in the 1600s and began to trade with the Western Europeans on their own (Onwubiko, 1966, pp. 97, 142).

Historians also account for the fact that the Portuguese particularly had a significant influence on the Itsekiri court at that time. The princes of Itsekiri court not only learnt Portuguese as did their Benin overlords in the court of the Oba, the Portuguese were also allowed to conduct Christian missionary activities in Itsekiri land and elsewhere in the Niger Delta (Buah 1974, p. 153).

Although the Portuguese directly participated in trade for just about a century but their influence on Benin, the whole of the Niger Delta, and the Atlantic coasts lasted for several centuries, even to this day, elements of the language still exist in Naijá. And their influence actually dwarfed and almost made irrelevant the influence of the Dutch and the French who later visited the region.

Portuguese contribution to Naijá today is surprisingly meagre when compared to the impact of their activities in the region (see the following table).

**Table 3:** Portuguese influence on Naijá

Item	Naijá	Portuguese	Gloss
1.	dash	das	give/donate/gift
2.	kpalava	palabras	trouble/serious problem
3.	kpotoki	Portuguese	Portuguese/white man
4.	legos	lago	lagoon
5.	pikin	pequeno	child
6a.	sabi	sabeir	to know
6b.	sabi-sabi	sabeir	all knowing/being too forward

### 2.3 Dutch contact with the people of the Niger Delta

When the Dutch entered the scene in 1593 AD, they took over as the main trading partners of the people of Niger Delta. But unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch seem to have concentrated their trading efforts more on the eastern Niger Delta than on the western end. This perhaps also made it possible for the Portuguese traders and missionaries to carry on their activities in western Niger Delta even after the Dutch had taken over as main trading partners in the region.

According Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 8) quoting Algoa (1980, p. 72):

The eastern (Niger) Delta was probably most actively involved in the overseas trade from about the 17th century. By that time the Dutch had taken over as the most important European trading nation in this part of Africa.

The situation for the new Portuguese based pidgin looked fairly okay even when the Portuguese were ousted by the Dutch. To the people of the Niger Delta, the Dutchmen were just another group of *kpotoki* who should understand the language of the earlier group of *kpotoki*. The Dutch traded in the region for about 57 years before they were ousted. But we do not seem to have any linguistic evidence in Naijá today that suggest their contribution to the language.

But we know that the Dutch who had all the while been trailing the Portuguese should have had no problem mastering the Portuguese based Naijá spoken in the Niger Delta because some other forms of Portuguese based pidgins were already spoken around many ports of call on the West African coast. And while the Dutch restricted their activities to trade only, they still allowed the Portuguese missionaries to continue with their activities.

Naijá, at that time, had obviously become a language in its own right. While it was a second language to many merchants, missionaries and boatmen at that time, it was a foreign language to many who were coming into the territory for the first time. The basic grammar of the pidgin at that time was patterned on the substrate of Edoid languages, and was easy to master in no time, especially since the vocabulary base was small.

The Dutch interest in trading with the eastern Niger Deltans may also have helped in spreading the emerging pidgin from the western Niger Delta to the eastern Niger Delta and to such places as Bonny, Kalabari and Calabar.

## 2.4 French contact with the people of the Niger Delta

Late in the early period, the English and the French started making incursions into the region. The French didn't quite succeed in trading permanently in the region before the English came on board.

The French influence on the people of the Niger Delta is not significant. The reason is not farfetched. For the French, it wasn't imperialism or expansionism that first brought them to the Niger Delta. It was an expedition to verify the truth of the existence of a powerful and wealthy kingdom at the heart of Black Africa that did – to visit the great kingdom of Benin.

At no time did the French stay in the region for any significant length of time. They first made an incursion into the region around 1539. Though the Portuguese, at that had started pulling out from directly trading while maintaining a strong diplomatic and missionary presence in the region, the French then abandoned their pursuit in the Niger Delta after a while.

Little is known of the French presence in the trade in the Niger Delta, but the French seem to have later sneaked in when the English were not watching. In 1788, they built a trading station at Gwatto, where they conducted trade with the people of the region, but four years later when the English then noticed

what the French were doing, they destroyed the trading post in 1792 (Egharevba, 1968; Elugbe and Omamor, 1991).

We are not quite certain if it was at that time that French influence first entered the Naijá language. But since the French have been on and off the Guinea coasts, their influence on the emerging Naijá could really have been minimal as suggested by the scanty evidence that remains till date.

**Table 4:** French influence on Naijá

Item	Naijá	French	Gloss
1a.	boku	beaucoup	many, much
1b.	boku boku	beaucoup	very many, very much
1c.	obokuru	beaucoup	very large, a very fat person

### 3.0 Second period: the influence of the English in the Niger Delta

#### 3.1 English influence in the Niger Delta

The second period started with the entrance of the English into the Trans-Atlantic trade. In 1650, they took over from the Dutch and became the main trading partner of the people of the Niger Delta. Although the English had made earlier incursions into the region in the 1530s and 1550s and even traded in the region, according to Onwubiko (1966, pp. 145-146), their efforts were individualistic, piratical and unorganised, such that their first mission to the Niger Delta was a national failure.

Even so, the English had to communicate with the natives in the already existing Portuguese based pidgin of the region. This is evidenced in the fact that to get to West Africa, early English explorers, sailors and merchants had to work hand in hand with Portuguese sailors who knew the territory and the language. Onwubiko (1966, p.145) recounts that:

In 1553, another Englishman Thomas Wyndham was guided to Elmina and Benin by a Portuguese captain Antonio Pinteado. Wyndham bought gold and pepper and made a profit of £10,000 on the gold.

By 1650, the English were now better prepared. Like the Dutch, they formed companies to explore the interiors. Between the 1700s and 1800s, with much of Africa mapped, courses of rivers charted, the British came to realise the vast resources of this region of the continent, and were in a neck to neck competition with the French for dominance of much of West Africa till about 1750 AD. And from 1750 onward, the British controlled the greater bulk of the trade in the region, especially the trade in slaves.

For much of the first century of the British entrance and dominance of activities in the Niger Delta, we cannot say with any certainty that the British succeeded quite well in displacing the already popular Portuguese based pidgin. And for very practical reasons, much of the early communication between the

British and the natives had to be done in the business language of the region – the Portuguese based pidgin or Naijá of the Niger Delta.

And it was in the second half of the 1700s when they began setting up their colonial administration, delivering low level cadre education programmes and conducting missionary activities in English, that the initial Portuguese based pidgin gradually became relexified and eventually supplanted by an English based pidgin. So, trade, politics and religion came to be conducted in the language of the new master. Because a Portuguese based pidgin was already spoken in the region; two structural development processes were simultaneously activated: relexification and pidginisation. So while the old Portuguese based pidgin was being relexified, the new official language, English, was being pidginised.

Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 9) affirm the nature of communication between the British and the Nigerian coastal peoples in the 17th century. They note that:

The Nigerians may have been a little disappointed at the withdrawal of the Portuguese and the coming of a new group of white-skinned people who did not understand the language of the first group. Still the Nigerians would have tried their existing jargon on the new visitors. And the English, since they and the Portuguese had been in competition for some time before the Portuguese finally withdrew, and since they may have come across some kind of minimal Portuguese in some of the other ports of call, may not have been complete strangers to this jargon. With the aid of gestures (as it happens in any linguistically problematic situation), the English would gradually replace the Portuguese contribution with a contribution from their own language.

This definitely spelt some sort of new beginning for Naijá. It was not a spontaneous thing that took just a couple of years, in fact it took several decades to relexify and or pidginise the already existing Naijá. But the re-emerging Naijá (relexified and repidginised) would certainly have relied on major grammatical categories, especially verbs and nouns, coupled with gestures and circumlocutions (Esizimotor, 2002a, Elugbe and Omamor, 1991).

And while Naijá was being re-invented in western Niger Delta, the new pidgin seemed to have developed hitch free and faster in several coastal areas of the eastern Niger Delta, including places like Calabar and Bonny, where the Portuguese had not quite succeeded.

Evidence of the linguistic development of Naijá in the late 1700s suggests that the pidginisation of English at that time was still at an early stage. In the 'Diary of Antera Duke' (Forde, 1956) documenting events in Calabar between 1785 and 1788, we see a demonstration of what the English based minimal pidgin looked like at that time. It was basically a broken form of language (English in this instance) – one of the earliest processes in the development toward a pidgin or a second language.

...I have see the peoples about 200 hand com for meet the want me to give to 2 my father son for pown Roonsom the men Eyo Duk was stop for what the owe him and the say one the men Dead for Arshbong Duk hand same time I see the first head men com & call me out to go up in the King Plaver house to hear

what they say soon after I see one my men was Liv him to canow com up and tell me he say Enyong peoples tak my canow way for Landing so I Run and Go Down for Landing I find no canow...

Similarly, Mafeni (1971, p. 97) also shows us what NP looked like in 1824, less than 40 years after Antera Duke wrote. In this text written by King Opubu, we discover that the language was already stabilising. Opubu's text is quite ahead of Duke's. Unlike Duke's text that is more of a broken English, Opubu's text demonstrates some more regular syntactic forms associated with Naijá as it is today.

Brudder George... send warship look um what water bar ab got, dat good, me let um dat. Brudder send boat chopum slave, dat good. E no send warship for cappen no peake me, no lookee face. No, no; no me tell you, No; Suppose you come all you come mont full palaver, give e reason, why e do it, me tell you, you peake lie, you peakeed-n lie. Suppose my fader, or my fader fader come up from ground and peake me why English man do dat, no sabby tell why. (Mafeni, 1971, p. 96)

Although the English started the relationship with the people of the Niger Delta like their predecessors, first on a visit to Benin to trade, but unlike their immediate predecessors who bolted out after half a century, the English, just kept coming back, initially for trade, then for slaves and then for control of the region. As if trade interests metamorphosed into imperialistic ones, the English became ubiquitous, by force of might, they conquered kingdom after kingdom annexing them into a colony. Soon they had protectorates all over Nigeria whether the people or kingdoms were willing or not.

In the mid 19th century, when the missionaries began to open their schools, the linguistic pattern for both English as Second language and the English based Naijá had become well established. While classroom education perpetuated Standard English, the continual contact between the natives of different ethnic backgrounds and the white man in the non formal sector helped to establish Naijá more firmly (Banjo, 1995, pp.205-206).

The influence of English on Naijá superstratum is evident today, especially since the bulk of everyday words came from English (see the following table).

**Table 5:** Influence of English on Naijá

Item	Naijá	English	Gloss
1.	am	am	it/him
2.	dem	them	they/them
3.	domot	door mouth	entrance/verandah
4.	komot	come out	go away/
5.	kwench	quench	put out a fire

6.	mashin	machine	motor bike
7.	trek	trek	walk purposefully
8.	waka	walk	walk
9.	winch	witch	witch/diabolical person
10.	wokman	work man/ walkman	skilled worker/walk man

### 3.2 Edoid influence on Naijá

Central to European activities in the Niger Delta is the great forest kingdom of Benin, a large and well-organised kingdom that grew into an empire that thrived from the 1400s to the 1900s. It was such that in spite of the multilingualism in the coastal areas of Niger Delta, Benin maintained active control of activities in the region for several centuries before and after the arrival of the Europeans in the area. The people traded among themselves in the creeks and rivers and in major inland markets with traders who came from as far as the Hausa and Fulani country in the north, as well as traders from other inland city states like Oyo, Idah and Igbo land.

To unsettle the stability in the Niger Delta, the British wrestled control of the coastal areas from Benin. Previously, the powerful chiefs of coastal Niger Delta were under the Benin king, but because the British wanted to control the region, they had the chiefs of the five separate powerful Niger Delta ethnic nations of Itsekiri, Isoko, Ukwuani, Ijaw and Urhobo sign separate 'Treaties of Protection' to displace Benin's power and influence in the region as well further their own interests in the Niger Delta.

The English wanted complete control of trade in the Niger delta, but Benin's influence and power in the region, which seemingly hindered them, was abhorred by the English. So in 1897 the British led a punitive expedition against the great forest kingdom, sacked its treasures and burnt the city.

Because of the overriding influence that Benin had over the entire Niger Delta which lasted for five centuries, the effect of the Edoid language on the languages of Niger Delta is significant and these languages in turn exerted a strong influence on Naijá substratum (as shown in the following table). Some of the core verbal and major class elements seem to have been in place since the development of the first Portuguese based pidgin and were then carried over into the English based Naijá.

**Table 6:** Influence of Niger Delta languages on Naijá

Item	Naijá	Niger Delta languages	Gloss
1.	chukuchuku	? Urhobo/Isoko	thorn
2	de	Bini	progressive marker

3.	dé	Bini/Yekhee	is/are
4.	ikebe	Urhobo	buttocks/ bottom
5.	kamkpe	?Yoruba	solid/unshakeable/ real good
6.	kpangolo	Bini	tin/container
7.	na	Bini	is/it is
8.	oyibo	Urhobo	white man
9.	potopoto	Ijaw	ideophone for muddiness
10.	una	Igbo	you (pl.)
11.	wowo	? Bini	ugly
12.	yeye	? Yekhee	stupid/useless/not dependable

### 3.3 Other stabilizing influences on Naijá

Some scholars have argued that there were outside influences from languages like Krio, which helped to stabilise Naijá in Nigeria. Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 19) cite Welmers (1973, p.13) as saying:

In the nineteenth century, [Krio] was transported by its native speakers to Cameroon, Nigeria and some other points along the West African coast....where it has become a second language for inter-tribal communication....

Claiming that Welmers' claim cannot be ignored, Elugbe and Omamor (1991) argue that the Yoruba elements in Naijá are explainable from the point of view that since Krio has much Yoruba influence then it should be the source of the Yoruba elements in Naijá.

Although for the most part, the argument for Krio influence of Pidgin is unsubstantiated, but it does actually point to the probability that Krio in some way helped in stabilising Naijá. As for the Yoruba elements coming from krio, that would be quite difficult to explain because people of Yoruba extraction have been doing business or living around the Niger Delta. So, the contributions of Yoruba to Naijá would be direct rather than indirect. And historically, Yoruba merchants have been trading in the region long before the Europeans or the advent of Krio speaking Saros in the region.

Historical fact shows that Krio speaking peoples known as the Saros migrated to cities as Lagos, Ibadan, Warri but no one is exactly certain of their linguistic contributions to Naijá. While the effect of Saros were limited in Yoruba speaking areas, it may have helped the language to creolise in places like Warri and Sapele.

Again because many Nigerian civil servants and intellectuals were sent to institutions like Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, in the mid 19th and early 20th century, they would have picked up some Krio there. And on getting home, they would have helped out not only in raising the level of Standard English in Nigeria but also in sustaining Naijá in the communities where they lived.

Unquestionable is the mutual intelligibility that exists between the English based pidgins of West Africa including Krio and Naijá, but this may not be directly linked to one influencing the other. And as Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 19) have shown, Naijá did not take its origin from Krio but may have been influenced by Krio. The similarity between the pidgins of West Africa and indeed the Atlantic creoles can be better explained from the universalist perspective rather than from the direct influence of one pidgin/creole over another.

#### **4.0 The spread of Naijá in modern day Nigeria**

No doubt, Naijá originated in the Niger Delta, but it did not simultaneously appear in all parts of Nigeria where the language is spoken today. Mafeni (1971, p.98) quoted in Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p.15), essentially spells out how Naijá developed and spread around the country.

Nigerian Pidgin is essentially a product of the process of urbanization. While its origins lie historically...on the coast, its development and spread is the result of contact between Africans. The rapidly growing towns of Nigeria have increasingly become the melting pots of the many tribes and races which constitute Nigeria and Pidgin seems to be today a very widely spoken lingua franca, many town and city dwellers being at least bilingual in Pidgin and an indigenous language.

As Mafeni (1971) has shown, it is in diverse communities where you have people from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds that you find Naijá. The newly formed Nigerian nation in the 1960s had people of Niger Delta extraction working in various parts of the country, in northern, western and eastern parts of Nigeria. And wherever they went, they spread the language to those places. In many parts of northern Nigeria, where the Sabon-gari communities settled, there Naijá language prospered.

The growing urbanisation of many parts of the country after independence also drew many professionals, government officials and business people of different tribes and ethnicities to the new cities and cosmopolitan centres across the country where they started interacting with people from other ethnic backgrounds. And Naijá, outside such well known pidgin centres as Warri, Sapele, Benin and Port-Hacourt, became the language of choice for inter-ethnic communication in places like Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Abuja, Jos among others. Elsewhere, I have argued that Naijá is not just a language for inter-ethnic communication; it is also a potent tool for maintaining a high degree of neutrality. Because of this, it is considered nobody's language and at the same time everybody's language – especially because it is free of the ethnic, political and religious attachments associated with other languages in Nigeria (Esizimotor 2002a, p.13).

Of note is the fact that the settlement of people of the Niger Delta stock in Lagos and in places like Ajegunle has also helped in the spread and stabilisation of Naijá in Lagos, as well as to other parts of the

country. In addition, the national sports festival as well as other cultural festivals which saw the dominance of the old Bendel State in many events also helped in spreading the language as the language of national champions.

The language has been more tolerated in multi-ethnic communities than in monolingual ones, that is why it has kept on spreading to places and communities with higher linguistic diversity. The language has since found its way to military and police barracks, NYSC orientation camps around the country as well to many public and private universities around the country (Esizimotor, 2002a; Elugbe and Omamor, 1991; Elugbe, 1995; Bamgbose, 1995; Egbokhare; 2001).

Government ministries, agencies and departments, surprising, have been at the forefront of spreading the language by conducting public campaigns in Naijá, especially in relation to public awareness, health and safety issues. Various organs of government have at various times in the past and till date still use Naijá to pass on their messages. They include various political parties, ministries of information, MAMSER, NOA, EFCC, NAFDAC, FRSC as well as NGOs and corporate organisations. Naijá has today become the language of popular advertising and mass dissemination of public information.

Music has been perhaps the biggest tool that has inadvertently been used in the spread of Naijá. In the 60s, 70s and 80s, the popular Highlife, Calypso and Afrobeat music, which had Naijá lyrics in them, if not all totally in Naijá, were played in various radio and television stations across the country, and in many homes. They include: 'Swit Moda' by Prince Nico Mbanga, 'If Yu Si Mami-wota' by Sir Victor Uwaifo, 'Wota No Get Enimi' by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, 'Taim Na Moni' and many others. Today, some of the most highly rated Nigerian hip-hop, reggae, R&B, and Highlife songs have simply continued in the tradition of what may today be properly described as Naijá music. And wherever Naijá music goes, Naijá language follows.

Of particular note here is Fela Anikulapo Kuti. His Afrobeat music gained popularity across the country throughout the 70s and the 80s, not just because it was protest music but because the central message was passed on in Naijá. His iconic role in popularising Naijá words is exceptional. Words like '**zombi**', '**yelo-fiva**', '**ded-bodi**', '**dobul wahala**' gained wide currency and use in Naijá as a result of Fela's music.

Today, both sitcoms and stand-up comedies have made Naijá the language of comic expression in Nigeria. Naijá is used both for live performances and serialised television dramas. From the 70s and 80s we have had 'Niu Maskored', 'Hotel di Jodan', 'Sekond Chans' all done in Naijá. More recently, 'Papa Ajasko & Kompini' has also been one of the biggest comedies series done in Naijá. Within the last decade, stand-up comedies have also risen very fast in popularity. There are practically hundreds of shows and promotions that now feature Naijá speaking comedians. 'Nite of a Thousand Laughs, and 'Stand UP Nigeria' have been among the most successful stand-up comedy events celebrating the artistic and comic use of Naijá.

In the 80s, a number of soft sell magazines written in Naijá were quite popular, but they are no longer available at news-stands today. Popular Naijá comic magazines like Ikebe Super and Lagos Weekend (with its 'Wakabout' column) have all gone extinct. Besides the Naijá speaking character in the works of great authors like Achebe, Soyinka and a host of others, only few authors have ventured into all out use

of Naijá in literary texts – Aig Imuekhuede’s ‘Pijin Stiu an Sofahed’ and Maman Vatsa’s ‘Tori fo Geti Bo Leg an oda pijin puem’ are among the best known.

The Media has also facilitated the spread and use of Naijá, in many radio and television stations, especially in the states of the Niger Delta and other cosmopolitan cities, where news, discussions and commercials are done in Naijá. Serious TV Naijá drama series like ‘Wetin De’ have also been popular. Newspaper and magazine columns have also regularly featured Naijá in cartoons. Now the big rave in Lagos is the new FM radio station called WAZOBIA FM, broadcasting news, commercials and talk-shows all practically in Naijá language.

Today, the statistics bear us out on the spread and popularity of Naijá in Nigeria. It has been estimated that between 40 and 75 million people across the entire nation speak Naijá as a second language in Nigeria and in many overseas countries where you have Nigerians (Egbokhare, 2001; Ihemere, 2006, p. 297), and that between 3 and 5 million people in Nigeria, speak Naijá as first language (Ihemere, 2006). This is certainly indicative of the intensity and level at which the language has been engaged; from its use in common domestic issues to complex corporate solutions, the language has proven itself.

Besides being the biggest pidgin/creole language spoken anywhere in the world, Naijá is also the language with the largest population of speakers in the country today. Such that it is surprising that the language is yet to be standardised, by way of having a stable orthography, standard reference grammar and dictionary, receiving official/government recognition, employed in teaching and learning, as well as having some great circular and religious literature like ‘Things Fall Apart’, the Bible and the Koran translated into the language.

The possibilities are immense, as long as the language continues to spread and is engaged in unifying the nation, eradicating poverty and diseases, passing on knowledge from one generation to another, preserving our cultural heritage and making society a peaceful and better place to live in.

## **5.0 Concluding remarks**

With the advancement in transportation and communication technology as well in medicine, vis as vis the discovery of the coasts of West Africa and her vast human and natural resources, hordes of Western European explorers, industrialists and colonists poured across Africa establishing themselves in areas as the Niger Delta and the midlands of present day Nigeria in search of raw materials like cotton, rubber, palm oil, cocoa, tea, tin among others that European consumers were accustomed to and that European industry were dependent on.

While the missionaries established churches and built schools, European merchants captured Africans as slaves and sent them to work in Europe and in plantations, and European explorers and industrialists exploited the natural resources of the land. These helped to build and sustained relationship between the visiting Europeans and host natives.

Given the multi-ethnic nature of the Niger Delta, where much of the interaction was conducted between the Europeans and their African hosts, because they had no common language, a contact language was developed to facilitate trade. In time, this language became a means for communicating among the various tribal/ethnic groups who previously had no common language.

And gradually it has spread around the country. The language is now accessible to everybody in a variety of media, irrespective of tribal and religious background. It has become the best known lingua franca in the country accessible to both the rich and the poor.

However, the language needs to be studied, properly described and standardized to put it to good and proper use, especially in the attempt to transform society.

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# Historical Development of Naijá

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## Abstract

Since the 1400s, Nigerian Pidgin, now properly referred to as Naijá, has evolved from being a trade language among the Portuguese and the natives of the Niger-Delta to being the unofficial lingua franca among Nigeria's over 500 linguistic nationalities. In the last 500 years the language has evolved, it has grown from a contact pidgin to creole and has spread from the Niger Delta to other parts of the country. In describing how the language evolved, we examined historical events and accounts for evidence from across three major historical periods to see how, why and in what ways the language developed, spread across the Nigerian nation and expanded its domains of use.

### 1.0 Preliminary framework

The history of the development of Naijá is by no means a straightforward one. Authoritative research in this area is scarce; as such, we need to rely on other histories and accounts to piece together a fairly logical account of the development of the language. Even so, a beneficial account should demonstrate the important historical events and significant linguistic issues in the diachronic study of the language.

Historical discussions of language often centre on such issues as: what events or factors led to the development of the language, who were the people or personages involved in the development of the language, and what linguistic changes took place as it evolved? In this study, all of these and other factors would be taken into consideration in describing the historical development of Naijá.

Since Naijá is both an expanded pidgin and a creole (Esizimotor, 2002a; Ihemere, 2006), in accounting for the development of the language, we must also probe the histories of the region for evidence, and perhaps resort to the reconstruction of missing accounts to show how the language evolved from trade or contact language through pidginisation to creole; as well as account for its expansion from a restricted language to a lingua franca.

Although various theories have been laid out to explain the genesis of pidgins and creoles around the globe, historical research has demonstrably pinned the genesis of Naijá to the Niger Delta (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991; Elugbe, 1995; Egbokhare, 2001; Esizimotor, 2002b; Adegbija, 2003). In examining the histories of the region and its peoples to determine why and how the language evolved the way it did, it is important that we establish in some detail the geographics of the area, as well survey the linguistic and ethnic peopling of the region.

The term, Niger Delta as it is used in this study is not only limited to the cartographic region of Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers states, it also encompasses the geopolitical region of the South-South. On the Western Niger Delta, it includes Edo and Delta states; while the Eastern Niger Delta has Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom and Cross River states.

Cartographically, the Niger Delta is one of the world's largest deltas, where the waters of the great Niger and Benue rivers converging at Lokoja empty into the Atlantic Ocean. As an important centre for plant, animal and human biodiversity, the region has been known to bustle with the activities of farmers,

fishermen, hunters, traders, boat-makers, wood-carvers and other craftsmen, for several hundreds of years before and after the arrival of the Europeans on the shores of Nigeria.

Bound in the south by the Atlantic Ocean in the Gulf of Guinea, it is a vast geopolitical territory that covers a coastline of over 480 kilometres from the mouth of the Benin River to the estuary of River Cross, and about 160 kilometres inland. The entire region extending for over 70,000 km<sup>2</sup> makes up about 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. With a network of creeks, mangrove swamps and estuaries, its coastal city states are largely connected by water-ways, the geopolitical region has one of the densest linguistic diversity in Nigeria. It is home to some 20 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups including such major tribal groups as the Annang, Edo, Efik, Eket, Ekoi, Ibibio, Ijo, Isoko, Itsekiri, Oron, Urhobo, Ukwuani, as well as Yoruba and Igbo groups, all speaking some 250 dialects in the region alone (Buah, 1974, pp.152-157; Egbokhare 2001; Plouch, 2008).

Although three of the four major African language families are spoken in Nigeria – Niger-Congo, Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan, only the Niger-Congo family of languages are home to the Niger-Delta, with such sub-grouping as: West Benue (Yoruba, Igbo), South Bantoid (Annang, Efik, Eket, Ekoi, Ibibio), Benue Congo (Edo, Isoko, Urhobo) and Atlantic Congo (Ijaw).

Considering the plural-linguistic nature of the Niger Delta, the supposition that there was a common regional language that predates European presence in the region is debatable. Although we do not know precisely of any lingua franca that was at any time used among the diverse peoples of the region, but some scholars have suggested that Igbo was once used for this purpose (Egbokhare, 2001; Ithemere, 2006, p.299; Faraclas, 1996). But it could be argued from historical and linguistic perspectives that Bini or some Edoid language may have been used in the region at some time in the past. But none of these is known with any certainty.

However, communication wouldn't have been too difficult since many of the languages in the region had a certain degree of mutual intelligibility. The situation would have been such that many traders, fishermen and craftspeople would have been able to speak/hear two or more languages, and perhaps too, they may have used the services of some 'cosmopolitan' people who could interpret or broker trade among parties who could not communicate in a single language.

To describe the language situation in the Niger Delta correctly, we need to also rely on the dynamics of contact. Awonusi (1996, p. 51) argues that in language contact situations, the interacting languages exert varied levels of influence on one another to bring about varied linguistic consequences upon the languages in that environment. Hence the fortunes of any language, according to Egbokhare (2001, p. 105), is inextricably tied to the fortunes of its speakers; and in the same vein, Liberson (1984, p. 4) notes that languages change, not as a result of their inherent quality but as a result of users' power positions vis-à-vis the socio-political and historic forces at play in the environment. And as we have come to observe, when languages are in sustained contact, they are more likely to change dramatically when they are dissimilar/unrelated than when they are similar or related. All changes in language require time to ripple through social and geographical space and bring about inevitable linguistic and sociolinguistic changes (Esizimotor 2002b, pp. 3-5).

So, in this paper, we will examine the development of Najjá across three major periods: (a) the first period, which saw the Portuguese domination of trade and overriding influence on activities in the region; (b) the second period, which witnessed the arrival of the English as the dominant imperialist force controlling activities in the region; and (c) the third period, which accounts for the stabilisation, expansion and spread of Najjá across independent Nigeria.

## 2.0 First period: influence of the Portuguese in the Niger Delta

### 2.1 Early contact with the Europeans and Arabs

Prior to the contact of the people of the Niger-Delta with the Europeans, many of the people who lived in the area had lived in the region for perhaps hundreds of years as distinct and separate ethno-linguistic groups. Even so, they were in contact with the Arab world and Europe by way of the Trans-Saharan trade and through intermediaries like the Tuaregs, Hausas and Yorubas who brought in cloth, leather, onion, and beads into the region in exchange for ivory, palm-oil, pepper and slaves (Esizimotor, 2002b, p. 9; Onwubiko, 1966, p. 61).

But the contact between the Niger Delta and Arab Europe, even though it spanned well over 1000 years, a long and sustained period of contact, seem not to have resulted in a pidgin in the region. This is because the contact was indirect, and it was such that the people of the region dealt directly with middle men like the Yoruba whose languages were rather familiar unlike the contact with Western Europeans whose languages were unfamiliar, and with whom contact was direct. And so, instead of the contact between the Niger Delta and Arab Europe leading to pidginisation, it led to the linguistic enrichment of Languages in Nigeria and some languages of the Niger Delta region (as shown in the following table).

**Table 1:** Arab influence on some Nigerian and Niger Delta languages

Item	Arabic	Gloss	Corresponding forms in some Nigerian and Niger Delta languages
1.	al basal	onion	<b>albasa</b> (Hausa), <b>alubosa</b> (Yoruba), <b>alubasa</b> (Yekhee), <b>alubara</b> (Bini), <b>alibasa</b> (Igbo),
2.	al-‘afiya	peace	<b>lafia</b> (Hausa) , <b>alafia</b> (Yoruba)
3.	tasa	bowl	<b>tasa</b> (Yoruba), <b>atasa</b> (Yehkee)
4.	ai’lbara	needle	<b>allura</b> (Hausa) <b>abere</b> (Yoruba), <b>agbede</b> (Yekhee), <b>egwede</b> (Oleh), <b>egbede</b> (Urhobo)

If the sort of contact that led to such linguistic change as shown above had far too minimal impact to signal pidginisation, then what sort of contact led to the development of Najjá in the Niger Delta?

## 2.2 Portuguese contact with the people of the Niger Delta

So, the sort of contact that led to the development a pidgin/creole in the Niger Delta began with the direct and sustained contact between the Niger Deltans and Western Europeans who came to the region. Since the Niger Deltans and the Europeans had no common language, because of the urgency of their contact needs they could not learn or master any of the other's language, and so they inadvertently developed a contact language (Esizimotor, 2002a: p. 2-4).

Propelled by commercial, religious and political motives, the Portuguese started making successful trips to the coasts of West Africa from as early as 1482 AD in search of gold, spices and slaves (Onwubiko, 1966, p. 136). And the Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in the Niger-Delta.

Ryder (1969) traces the first interactional encounter of the Portuguese and the natives of the Niger Delta to about 1482AD. The Portuguese having discovered the Gold Coast (El Mina), wanted to trade with the gold mining Akan tribes, and according to Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 3) quoting Ryder (1969, p. 24), the tribes "preferred, or even insisted on, receiving part of the price of their gold in slaves". And unable to procure the required number of slaves between Portugal and the Gold Coast, the Portuguese sailed further on to the Niger Delta in search of slaves. Since the king of Benin controlled activities in the region at that time, they were led to Oba Ewuare, who then permitted them to trade in the region. That was the beginning of the major trade link between the people of the Niger Delta and the Portuguese. And for a long time, trade between the Western Niger Deltans and Western Europeans was conducted on the authority of the Benin king.

Now the question is: how were the Portuguese able to communicate with the Niger Deltans from their first encounter onward? Did they speak Portuguese to the natives or did the Portuguese speak the language of their hosts? Because to trade as effectively as they did, they must have established an effective means of communication with the people of the region. To this end, Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 2) describe four options of communication open to people or groups at contact under such circumstances. In considering these options, we can clearly see what communicative strategies were open to the Portuguese and the Niger Deltans, and can, to some extent, successfully reconstruct what really happened between the natives and the Portuguese in the Niger Delta.

These options are: the **contact termination option**, in which under extreme circumstance the parties at contact may terminate the contact altogether; or the **barter option**, in which the groups at contact may do without speech but carry on with some kind of 'dumb barter'; or the **second language option**, in which the parties or one of the parties at contact may have to adopt one of the languages of the parties at contact; or the **pidginisation option**, in which the parties at contact try to communicate in one another's language but instead a rudimentary speech form develops from the attempt (Esizimotor , 2002b, p. 11; Elugbe and Omamor, 1991, p. 2).

When the Portuguese first traded with the natives of the region, because of the urgency of the contact, when they probably tried speech and failed, and unwilling to terminate the contact, they had one option – the dumb barter. By a combination of few words and hand gestures, the parties at contact were able to trade successfully (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991).

At that time, when the Portuguese first visited the area, Benin was already a powerful kingdom and was carrying out a war of expansion to the east, north and west, such that the Portuguese were guaranteed a plentiful supply of war prisoners that were sold as slaves. While Benin chiefly sold slaves and some pepper to the Portuguese, the Portuguese exchanged them for fire-arms, cloth, copper and bracelets. Because Benin was the chief centre for the supply of slaves in the whole of the slave coast (from the mouth of the Volta to the delta of the Niger), in 1486, the Portuguese built a trading post at Gwatto, the port of Benin, from whence they conducted all their trading activities with the people of the Niger-Delta (Onwubiko, 1966).

The Portuguese trading post at Gwatto meant one thing: that the natives of the region and the visiting Europeans were in for a sustained trade regime. By this time, the dumb barter option had given way to the pidginisation option. And as more and more trade deals were struck, the natives who now knew the Portuguese as *kpotoki* (corruption of the word 'Portuguese') could identify the items they traded by the names the Portuguese called them and the Portuguese could also identify the local items by the names the natives called them. Such was the beginning of the contact language or rudimentary pidgin in the Niger Delta.

At first the speech form or contact language was limited to just a few words. But more and more lexical items (especially major class items as nouns and verbs) were added to the minimal pidgin as their communicative experience and trade activities broadened. Thus the rudimentary pidgin began to expand as their contact needs grew. To compliment the few words available in the rather minimal pidgin, speakers had to make extensive use of circumlocution (Esizimotor, 2002a).

Now, at some point in the development of the rudimentary language, the Portuguese would have felt they were speaking the language of their hosts while their hosts would have thought they were speaking the language of the Portuguese. This double illusion effect became the psychological framework that supported the development and sustenance of the contact language. This also helped the contact language to achieve a certain level of independence from the original languages of the hosts and that of the visiting Europeans.

From just a handful of speakers, the number of speakers of the new language grew as more and more people in the trading communities of the region bought into the language. The language became a healthy market place language for many of the coastal natives who were from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds. In time, it also became a means for communication between the coastal and inland natives of the Niger Delta.

The Portuguese operated the trading post at Gwatto until 1520 AD when they finally abandoned it. Since the Niger Delta was considered unhealthy for permanent European habitation, they moved over to the islands of Sao Tome and Fernando Po, which they had colonised around 1500 AD, from where they began trading with Benin and the people of the Niger Delta region (Onwubiko 1966, p. 139).

After 1520, the Portuguese began to visit Benin less frequently. At this time, the marginal Portuguese based pidgin spoken in the Niger Delta coast had already achieved a stable form. Slaves taken from all over the Niger Delta mainland to Sao Tome Island found the marginal language the only reliable means

of communicating with their masters and fellow slaves with different ethno-linguistic background. The African wives of the Portuguese merchants found the Portuguese based pidgin the only means of communicating with their husbands and their children. Because Sao Tome, like other Portuguese settlements soon became a society of half-castes and detribalised Africans with no strong allegiance to Portugal, the people of the island spoke the same Portuguese based pidgin that was developed in mainland Niger Delta (Onwubiko, 1966). As the language expanded in the mainland, it also became the principal language of the people of the island. And it is possible that as early as the 1600s the Portuguese based pidgin of the Niger Delta had started creolising in Sao Tome; for it gave a suitable identity to the island and its people.

Today, Sao Tomense, a Portuguese based creole that evolved from that marginal pidgin once spoken in the Niger Delta, is the only evidence we have of what Naijá looked like between 1500s and 1700s. Sao Tomense is a creole that principally has Edoid and related languages (Kongo/Bantu) features in its substratum, reminding us of the link the island once had with the Niger Delta (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991, p.4; Ferraz, 1978). Proof of this is given in an impressive list of words alongside some etymological information.

The following table is an adaptation from the list in Elugbe and Omamor (1991, pp. 5-7).

**Table 2:** Niger-Delta language influence on Sao Tomense

Item	Sao Tomense	Gloss	Edoid Equivalent
1.	le'le	accompany, follow	<b>lele</b> (Bini)
2.	'punda	because, because of	<b>rhun-da</b> (Bini)
3	fo'fo	blow (of wind)	<b>hoho, fofo</b> (Yekhee)
4.	bo'bo	carry an infant on the back	<b>vbovbo</b> (Bini)
5.	pɔtɔpɔtɔ	idiophone of drenching	<b>pɔtɔpɔtɔ</b> (Ijo), ideophone of mudiness
6.	de'de	embrace	<b>dede</b> (Bini)
7.	'oke	hill, ramp	<b>oke</b> (Yoruba) <b>oke</b> (Esan)
8.	uku	rubbish	<b>iku</b> (Bini/Yekhee)
9.	gɔlɔ	search, look for	<b>gwalo</b> (Bini)
10.	mu'ja	wait, stand	<b>mudia</b> (Bini)

Elugbe and Omamor (1991) who examined Ryder's historical account giving details of the interaction between the Portuguese and the Royal Court of Benin, conclude this way:

Ryder's accounts reveal intensive contact between the court and the Portuguese, leading to an exchange of letters and ambassadors between Benin and the King of Portugal. Since these exchanges were obviously in Portuguese and we are told that some of the emissaries from the Benin Court to Portugal were *faladors* (i.e. interpreters), we must conclude that there were attempts to teach the standard form of Portuguese in the king's court and, perhaps, elsewhere. Whatever these attempts were, the Portuguese did not stay long enough to leave a permanent legacy in the form of a language – standard or otherwise (p.7).

Even after the trade between Benin and Portugal began to decline, the Portuguese influence on Benin was still strong. Besides sending ambassadors to Portugal, The king of Benin also allowed his son and some of his chiefs to become Christians, he built churches and allowed the Portuguese to teach his people to read and write Portuguese. And by 1553 AD when Captain Windham visited Benin he was surprised that the king of Benin, Oba Orhogbua, spoke fluent Portuguese (Egharevba 1968; Onwubiko 1966; Buah 1974).

As the contact between the natives began to develop beyond trade to social, religious and political dimensions the existing contact or marginal language also began to broaden to deal with broader concerns. The vocabulary base of the marginal language increased while the grammar stabilised. The usage though was mainly for trade, it also featured in other social, religious and political events where the natives and the Portuguese were in contact.

About the same time the Portuguese visited the Niger Delta, the ethnic peopling of the region also had also started to re-defining itself. The Itsekiri kingdom, founded by a Benin prince in the late 1400s, for strategic location, grew in importance from the early 1500s when the people were in contact with the Portuguese. Like the Itsekiri, the establishment of Ijaw city states like Nembe, Kalabari and Bonny is linked to migrations from Benin and the economic boom in the Niger Delta, resulting from the Portuguese activities in the region, sometime between mid 1400s and 1700s (Buah, 1974, pp.152-153; Aigbokhai 1971, p. 23; Algoa, 1980). Bonny, Opobo and Calabar and other towns along the coasts of eastern Niger Delta came into being as a result of Portuguese activities in the region. As a result of the domestic strife in Benin, towns like Badagary, Lagos and Warri, which were originally outposts of Benin also became independent late in the 1600s and began to trade with the Western Europeans on their own (Onwubiko, 1966, pp. 97, 142).

Historians also account for the fact that the Portuguese particularly had a significant influence on the Itsekiri court at that time. The princes of Itsekiri court not only learnt Portuguese as did their Benin overlords in the court of the Oba, the Portuguese were also allowed to conduct Christian missionary activities in Itsekiri land and elsewhere in the Niger Delta (Buah 1974, p. 153).

Although the Portuguese directly participated in trade for just about a century but their influence on Benin, the whole of the Niger Delta, and the Atlantic coasts lasted for several centuries, even to this day,

elements of the language still exist in Naijá. And their influence actually dwarfed and almost made irrelevant the influence of the Dutch and the French who later visited the region.

Portuguese contribution to Naijá today is surprisingly meagre when compared to the impact of their activities in the region (see the following table).

**Table 3:** Portuguese influence on Naijá

Item	Naijá	Portuguese	Gloss
1.	dash	das	give/donate/gift
2.	kpalava	palabras	trouble/serious problem
3.	kpotoki	Portuguese	Portuguese/white man
4.	legos	lago	lagoon
5.	pikin	pequeno	child
6a.	sabi	sabeir	to know
6b.	sabi-sabi	sabeir	all knowing/being too forward

### 2.3 Dutch contact with the people of the Niger Delta

When the Dutch entered the scene in 1593 AD, they took over as the main trading partners of the people of Niger Delta. But unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch seem to have concentrated their trading efforts more on the eastern Niger Delta than on the western end. This perhaps also made it possible for the Portuguese traders and missionaries to carry on their activities in western Niger Delta even after the Dutch had taken over as main trading partners in the region.

According Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 8) quoting Algoa (1980, p. 72):

The eastern (Niger) Delta was probably most actively involved in the overseas trade from about the 17th century. By that time the Dutch had taken over as the most important European trading nation in this part of Africa.

The situation for the new Portuguese based pidgin looked fairly okay even when the Portuguese were ousted by the Dutch. To the people of the Niger Delta, the Dutchmen were just another group of *kpotoki* who should understand the language of the earlier group of *kpotoki*. The Dutch traded in the region for about 57 years before they were ousted. But we do not seem to have any linguistic evidence in Naijá today that suggest their contribution to the language.

But we know that the Dutch who had all the while been trailing the Portuguese should have had no problem mastering the Portuguese based *Naijá* spoken in the Niger Delta because some other forms of Portuguese based pidgins were already spoken around many ports of call on the West African coast. And while the Dutch restricted their activities to trade only, they still allowed the Portuguese missionaries to continue with their activities.

*Naijá*, at that time, had obviously become a language in its own right. While it was a second language to many merchants, missionaries and boatmen at that time, it was a foreign language to many who were coming into the territory for the first time. The basic grammar of the pidgin at that time was patterned on the substrate of Edoid languages, and was easy to master in no time, especially since the vocabulary base was small.

The Dutch interest in trading with the eastern Niger Deltans may also have helped in spreading the emerging pidgin from the western Niger Delta to the eastern Niger Delta and to such places as Bonny, Kalabari and Calabar.

## 2.4 French contact with the people of the Niger Delta

Late in the early period, the English and the French started making incursions into the region. The French didn't quite succeed in trading permanently in the region before the English came on board.

The French influence on the people of the Niger Delta is not significant. The reason is not farfetched. For the French, it wasn't imperialism or expansionism that first brought them to the Niger Delta. It was an expedition to verify the truth of the existence of a powerful and wealthy kingdom at the heart of Black Africa that did – to visit the great kingdom of Benin.

At no time did the French stay in the region for any significant length of time. They first made an incursion into the region around 1539. Though the Portuguese, at that had started pulling out from directly trading while maintaining a strong diplomatic and missionary presence in the region, the French then abandoned their pursuit in the Niger Delta after a while.

Little is known of the French presence in the trade in the Niger Delta, but the French seem to have later sneaked in when the English were not watching. In 1788, they built a trading station at Gwatto, where they conducted trade with the people of the region, but four years later when the English then noticed what the French were doing, they destroyed the trading post in 1792 (Egharevba, 1968; Elugbe and Omamor, 1991).

We are not quite certain if it was at that time that French influence first entered the *Naijá* language. But since the French have been on and off the Guinea coasts, their influence on the emerging *Naijá* could really have been minimal as suggested by the scanty evidence that remains till date.

**Table 4:** French influence on *Naijá*

Item	<i>Naijá</i>	French	Gloss
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1a.	boku	beaucoup	many, much
1b.	boku boku	beaucoup	very many, very much
1c.	obokuru	beaucoup	very large, a very fat person

### 3.0 Second period: the influence of the English in the Niger Delta

#### 3.1 English influence in the Niger Delta

The second period started with the entrance of the English into the Trans-Atlantic trade. In 1650, they took over from the Dutch and became the main trading partner of the people of the Niger Delta. Although the English had made earlier incursions into the region in the 1530s and 1550s and even traded in the region, according to Onwubiko (1966, pp. 145-146), their efforts were individualistic, piratical and unorganised, such that their first mission to the Niger Delta was a national failure.

Even so, the English had to communicate with the natives in the already existing Portuguese based pidgin of the region. This is evidenced in the fact that to get to West Africa, early English explorers, sailors and merchants had to work hand in hand with Portuguese sailors who knew the territory and the language. Onwubiko (1966, p.145) recounts that:

In 1553, another Englishman Thomas Wyndham was guided to Elmina and Benin by a Portuguese captain Antonio Pinteado. Wyndham bought gold and pepper and made a profit of £10,000 on the gold.

By 1650, the English were now better prepared. Like the Dutch, they formed companies to explore the interiors. Between the 1700s and 1800s, with much of Africa mapped, courses of rivers charted, the British came to realise the vast resources of this region of the continent, and were in a neck to neck competition with the French for dominance of much of West Africa till about 1750 AD. And from 1750 onward, the British controlled the greater bulk of the trade in the region, especially the trade in slaves.

For much of the first century of the British entrance and dominance of activities in the Niger Delta, we cannot say with any certainty that the British succeeded quite well in displacing the already popular Portuguese based pidgin. And for very practical reasons, much of the early communication between the British and the natives had to be done in the business language of the region – the Portuguese based pidgin or Naijá of the Niger Delta.

And it was in the second half of the 1700s when they began setting up their colonial administration, delivering low level cadre education programmes and conducting missionary activities in English, that the initial Portuguese based pidgin gradually became relexified and eventually supplanted by an English based pidgin. So, trade, politics and religion came to be conducted in the language of the new master. Because a Portuguese based pidgin was already spoken in the region; two structural development processes were simultaneously activated: relexification and pidginisation. So while the old Portuguese based pidgin was being relexified, the new official language, English, was being pidginised.

Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 9) affirm the nature of communication between the British and the Nigerian coastal peoples in the 17th century. They note that:

The Nigerians may have been a little disappointed at the withdrawal of the Portuguese and the coming of a new group of white-skinned people who did not understand the language of the first group. Still the Nigerians would have tried their existing jargon on the new visitors. And the English, since they and the Portuguese had been in competition for some time before the Portuguese finally withdrew, and since they may have come across some kind of minimal Portuguese in some of the other ports of call, may not have been complete strangers to this jargon. With the aid of gestures (as it happens in any linguistically problematic situation), the English would gradually replace the Portuguese contribution with a contribution from their own language.

This definitely spelt some sort of new beginning for Naijá. It was not a spontaneous thing that took just a couple of years, in fact it took several decades to relexify and or pidginise the already existing Naijá. But the re-emerging Naijá (relexified and repidginised) would certainly have relied on major grammatical categories, especially verbs and nouns, coupled with gestures and circumlocutions (Esizimeton, 2002a, Elugbe and Omamor, 1991).

And while Naijá was being re-invented in western Niger Delta, the new pidgin seemed to have developed hitch free and faster in several coastal areas of the eastern Niger Delta, including places like Calabar and Bonny, where the Portuguese had not quite succeeded.

Evidence of the linguistic development of Naijá in the late 1700s suggests that the pidginisation of English at that time was still at an early stage. In the 'Diary of Antera Duke' (Forde, 1956) documenting events in Calabar between 1785 and 1788, we see a demonstration of what the English based minimal pidgin looked like at that time. It was basically a broken form of language (English in this instance) – one of the earliest processes in the development toward a pidgin or a second language.

...I have see the peoples about 200 hand com for meet the want me to give to 2 my father son for pown Roonsom the men Eyo Duk was stop for what the owe him and the say one the men Dead for Arshbong Duk hand same time I see the first head men com & call me out to go up in the King Plaver house to hear what they say soon after I see one my men was Liv him to canow com up and tell me he say Enyong peoples tak my canow way for Landing so I Run and Go Down for Landing I find no canow...

Similarly, Mafeni (1971, p. 97) also shows us what NP looked like in 1824, less than 40 years after Antera Duke wrote. In this text written by King Opubu, we discover that the language was already stabilising. Opubu's text is quite ahead of Duke's. Unlike Duke's text that is more of a broken English, Opubu's text demonstrates some more regular syntactic forms associated with Naijá as it is today.

Brudder George... send warship look um what water bar ab got, dat good, me let um dat. Brudder send boat chopum slave, dat good. E no send warship for cappen no peake me, no lookee face. No, no; no me tell you, No; Suppose you come all you come mont full palaver, give e reason, why e do it, me tell you, you peake lie, you peakeed-n lie. Suppose my fader, or my fader fader come up from ground and peake me why English man do dat, no sabby tell why. (Mafeni, 1971, p. 96)

Although the English started the relationship with the people of the Niger Delta like their predecessors, first on a visit to Benin to trade, but unlike their immediate predecessors who bolted out after half a century, the English, just kept coming back, initially for trade, then for slaves and then for control of the region. As if trade interests metamorphosed into imperialistic ones, the English became ubiquitous, by force of might, they conquered kingdom after kingdom annexing them into a colony. Soon they had protectorates all over Nigeria whether the people or kingdoms were willing or not.

In the mid 19th century, when the missionaries began to open their schools, the linguistic pattern for both English as Second language and the English based Naijá had become well established. While classroom education perpetuated Standard English, the continual contact between the natives of different ethnic backgrounds and the white man in the non formal sector helped to establish Naijá more firmly (Banjo, 1995, pp.205-206).

The influence of English on Naijá superstratum is evident today, especially since the bulk of everyday words came from English (see the following table).

**Table 5:** Influence of English on Naijá

Item	Naijá	English	Gloss
1.	am	am	it/him
2.	dem	them	they/them
3.	domot	door mouth	entrance/verandah
4.	komot	come out	go away/
5.	kwench	quench	put out a fire
6.	mashin	machine	motor bike
7.	trek	trek	walk purposefully
8.	waka	walk	walk
9.	winch	witch	witch/diabolical person
10.	wokman	work man/ walkman	skilled worker/walk man

### 3.2 Edoid influence on Naijá

Central to European activities in the Niger Delta is the great forest kingdom of Benin, a large and well-organised kingdom that grew into an empire that thrived from the 1400s to the 1900s. It was such that in spite of the multilingualism in the coastal areas of Niger Delta, Benin maintained active control of activities in the region for several centuries before and after the arrival of the Europeans in the area. The people traded among themselves in the creeks and rivers and in major inland markets with traders who

came from as far as the Hausa and Fulani country in the north, as well as traders from other inland city states like Oyo, Idah and Igbo land.

To unsettle the stability in the Niger Delta, the British wrestled control of the coastal areas from Benin. Previously, the powerful chiefs of coastal Niger Delta were under the Benin king, but because the British wanted to control the region, they had the chiefs of the five separate powerful Niger Delta ethnic nations of Itsekiri, Isoko, Ukwuani, Ijaw and Urhobo sign separate 'Treaties of Protection' to displace Benin's power and influence in the region as well further their own interests in the Niger Delta.

The English wanted complete control of trade in the Niger delta, but Benin's influence and power in the region, which seemingly hindered them, was abhorred by the English. So in 1897 the British led a punitive expedition against the great forest kingdom, sacked its treasures and burnt the city.

Because of the overriding influence that Benin had over the entire Niger Delta which lasted for five centuries, the effect of the Edoid language on the languages of Niger Delta is significant and these languages in turn exerted a strong influence on Naijá substratum (as shown in the following table). Some of the core verbal and major class elements seem to have been in place since the development of the first Portuguese based pidgin and were then carried over into the English based Naijá.

**Table 6:** Influence of Niger Delta languages on Naijá

Item	Naijá	Niger Delta languages	Gloss
1.	chukuchuku	? Urhobo/Isoko	thorn
2	de	Bini	progressive marker
3.	dé	Bini/Yekhee	is/are
4.	ikebe	Urhobo	buttocks/ bottom
5.	kamkpe	?Yoruba	solid/unshakeable/ real good
6.	kpangolo	Bini	tin/container
7.	na	Bini	is/it is
8.	oyibo	Urhobo	white man
9.	potopoto	Ijaw	ideophone for muddiness
10.	una	Igbo	you (pl.)
11.	wowo	? Bini	ugly
12.	yeye	? Yekhee	stupid/useless/not dependable

### **3.3 Other stabilizing influences on Naijá**

Some scholars have argued that there were outside influences from languages like Krio, which helped to stabilise Naijá in Nigeria. Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 19) cite Welmers (1973, p.13) as saying:

In the nineteenth century, [Krio] was transported by its native speakers to Cameroon, Nigeria and some other points along the West African coast....where it has become a second language for inter-tribal communication....

Claiming that Welmers' claim cannot be ignored, Elugbe and Omamor (1991) argue that the Yoruba elements in Naijá are explainable from the point of view that since Krio has much Yoruba influence then it should be the source of the Yoruba elements in Naijá.

Although for the most part, the argument for Krio influence of Pidgin is unsubstantiated, but it does actually point to the probability that Krio in some way helped in stabilising Naijá. As for the Yoruba elements coming from krio, that would be quite difficult to explain because people of Yoruba extraction have been doing business or living around the Niger Delta. So, the contributions of Yoruba to Naijá would be direct rather than indirect. And historically, Yoruba merchants have been trading in the region long before the Europeans or the advent of Krio speaking Saros in the region.

Historical fact shows that Krio speaking peoples known as the Saros migrated to cities as Lagos, Ibadan, Warri but no one is exactly certain of their linguistic contributions to Naijá. While the effect of Saros were limited in Yoruba speaking areas, it may have helped the language to creolise in places like Warri and Sapele.

Again because many Nigerian civil servants and intellectuals were sent to institutions like Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, in the mid 19th and early 20th century, they would have picked up some Krio there. And on getting home, they would have helped out not only in raising the level of Standard English in Nigeria but also in sustaining Naijá in the communities where they lived.

Unquestionable is the mutual intelligibility that exists between the English based pidgins of West Africa including Krio and Naijá, but this may not be directly linked to one influencing the other. And as Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p. 19) have shown, Naijá did not take its origin from Krio but may have been influenced by Krio. The similarity between the pidgins of West Africa and indeed the Atlantic creoles can be better explained from the universalist perspective rather than from the direct influence of one pidgin/creole over another.

### **4.0 The spread of Naijá in modern day Nigeria**

No doubt, Naijá originated in the Niger Delta, but it did not simultaneously appear in all parts of Nigeria where the language is spoken today. Mafeni (1971, p.98) quoted in Elugbe and Omamor (1991, p.15), essentially spells out how Naijá developed and spread around the country.

Nigerian Pidgin is essentially a product of the process of urbanization. While its origins lie historically...on the coast, its development and spread is the result of contact between Africans. The rapidly growing towns of Nigeria have increasingly become the melting pots of the many tribes and races which constitute Nigeria and Pidgin seems to be today a very widely spoken lingua franca, many town and city dwellers being at least bilingual in Pidgin and an indigenous language.

As Mafeni (1971) has shown, it is in diverse communities where you have people from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds that you find Naijá. The newly formed Nigerian nation in the 1960s had people of Niger Delta extraction working in various parts of the country, in northern, western and eastern parts of Nigeria. And wherever they went, they spread the language to those places. In many parts of northern Nigeria, where the Sabon-gari communities settled, there Naijá language prospered.

The growing urbanisation of many parts of the country after independence also drew many professionals, government officials and business people of different tribes and ethnicities to the new cities and cosmopolitan centres across the country where they started interacting with people from other ethnic backgrounds. And Naijá, outside such well known pidgin centres as Warri, Sapele, Benin and Port-Hacourt, became the language of choice for inter-ethnic communication in places like Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Abuja, Jos among others. Elsewhere, I have argued that Naijá is not just a language for inter-ethnic communication; it is also a potent tool for maintaining a high degree of neutrality. Because of this, it is considered nobody's language and at the same time everybody's language – especially because it is free of the ethnic, political and religious attachments associated with other languages in Nigeria (Esizimotor 2002a, p.13).

Of note is the fact that the settlement of people of the Niger Delta stock in Lagos and in places like Ajegunle has also helped in the spread and stabilisation of Naijá in Lagos, as well as to other parts of the country. In addition, the national sports festival as well as other cultural festivals which saw the dominance of the old Bendel State in many events also helped in spreading the language as the language of national champions.

The language has been more tolerated in multi-ethnic communities than in monolingual ones, that is why it has kept on spreading to places and communities with higher linguistic diversity. The language has since found its way to military and police barracks, NYSC orientation camps around the country as well to many public and private universities around the country (Esizimotor, 2002a; Elugbe and Omamor, 1991; Elugbe, 1995; Bamgbose, 1995; Egbokhare; 2001).

Government ministries, agencies and departments, surprising, have been at the forefront of spreading the language by conducting public campaigns in Naijá, especially in relation to public awareness, health and safety issues. Various organs of government have at various times in the past and till date still use Naijá to pass on their messages. They include various political parties, ministries of information, MAMSER, NOA, EFCC, NAFDAC, FRSC as well as NGOs and corporate organisations. Naijá has today become the language of popular advertising and mass dissemination of public information.

Music has been perhaps the biggest tool that has inadvertently been used in the spread of Naijá. In the 60s, 70s and 80s, the popular Highlife, Calypso and Afrobeat music, which had Naijá lyrics in them, if not

all totally in Naijá, were played in various radio and television stations across the country, and in many homes. They include: 'Swit Moda' by Prince Nico Mbanga, 'If Yu Si Mami-wota' by Sir Victor Uwaifo, 'Wota No Get Enimi' by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, 'Taim Na Moni' and many others. Today, some of the most highly rated Nigerian hip-hop, reggae, R&B, and Highlife songs have simply continued in the tradition of what may today be properly described as Naijá music. And wherever Naijá music goes, Naijá language follows.

Of particular note here is Fela Anikulapo Kuti. His Afrobeat music gained popularity across the country throughout the 70s and the 80s, not just because it was protest music but because the central message was passed on in Naijá. His iconic role in popularising Naijá words is exceptional. Words like '**zombi**', '**yelo-fiva**', '**ded-bodi**', '**dobul wahala**' gained wide currency and use in Naijá as a result of Fela's music.

Today, both sitcoms and stand-up comedies have made Naijá the language of comic expression in Nigeria. Naijá is used both for live performances and serialised television dramas. From the 70s and 80s we have had 'Niu Maskored', 'Hotel di Jodan', 'Sekond Chans' all done in Naijá. More recently, 'Papa Ajasko & Kompini' has also been one of the biggest comedies series done in Naijá. Within the last decade, stand-up comedies have also risen very fast in popularity. There are practically hundreds of shows and promotions that now feature Naijá speaking comedians. 'Nite of a Thousand Laughs, and 'Stand UP Nigeria' have been among the most successful stand-up comedy events celebrating the artistic and comic use of Naijá.

In the 80s, a number of soft sell magazines written in Naijá were quite popular, but they are no longer available at news-stands today. Popular Naijá comic magazines like Ikebe Super and Lagos Weekend (with its 'Wakabout' column) have all gone extinct. Besides the Naijá speaking character in the works of great authors like Achebe, Soyinka and a host of others, only few authors have ventured into all out use of Naijá in literary texts – Aig Imuekhuede's 'Pijin Stiu an Sofahed' and Maman Vatsa's 'Tori fo Geti Bo Leg an oda pijin poem' are among the best known.

The Media has also facilitated the spread and use of Naijá, in many radio and television stations, especially in the states of the Niger Delta and other cosmopolitan cities, where news, discussions and commercials are done in Naijá. Serious TV Naijá drama series like 'Wetin De' have also been popular. Newspaper and magazine columns have also regularly featured Naijá in cartoons. Now the big rave in Lagos is the new FM radio station called WAZOBIA FM, broadcasting news, commercials and talk-shows all practically in Naijá language.

Today, the statistics bear us out on the spread and popularity of Naijá in Nigeria. It has been estimated that between 40 and 75 million people across the entire nation speak Naijá as a second language in Nigeria and in many overseas countries where you have Nigerians (Egbokhare, 2001; Ihemere, 2006, p. 297), and that between 3 and 5 million people in Nigeria, speak Naijá as first language (Ihemere, 2006). This is certainly indicative of the intensity and level at which the language has been engaged; from its use in common domestic issues to complex corporate solutions, the language has proven itself.

Besides being the biggest pidgin/creole language spoken anywhere in the world, Naijá is also the language with the largest population of speakers in the country today. Such that it is surprising that the language is yet to be standardised, by way of having a stable orthography, standard reference grammar

and dictionary, receiving official/government recognition, employed in teaching and learning, as well as having some great circular and religious literature like 'Things Fall Apart', the Bible and the Koran translated into the language.

The possibilities are immense, as long as the language continues to spread and is engaged in unifying the nation, eradicating poverty and diseases, passing on knowledge from one generation to another, preserving our cultural heritage and making society a peaceful and better place to live in.

## 5.0 Concluding remarks

With the advancement in transportation and communication technology as well in medicine, vis as vis the discovery of the coasts of West Africa and her vast human and natural resources, hordes of Western European explorers, industrialists and colonists poured across Africa establishing themselves in areas as the Niger Delta and the midlands of present day Nigeria in search of raw materials like cotton, rubber, palm oil, cocoa, tea, tin among others that European consumers were accustomed to and that European industry were dependent on.

While the missionaries established churches and built schools, European merchants captured Africans as slaves and sent them to work in Europe and in plantations, and European explorers and industrialists exploited the natural resources of the land. These helped to build and sustained relationship between the visiting Europeans and host natives.

Given the multi-ethnic nature of the Niger Delta, where much of the interaction was conducted between the Europeans and their African hosts, because they had no common language, a contact language was developed to facilitate trade. In time, this language became a means for communicating among the various tribal/ethnic groups who previously had no common language.

And gradually it has spread around the country. The language is now accessible to everybody in a variety of media, irrespective of tribal and religious background. It has become the best known lingua franca in the country accessible to both the rich and the poor.

However, the language needs to be studied, properly described and standardized to put it to good and proper use, especially in the attempt to transform society.

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