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Title:

"Linguistic and literary development of Nigerian Pidgin: the contribution of radio drama"

Abstract:

Radio drama serials aimed at public enlightenment have in recent years become an important feature on Nigerian radio. Many of them employ Pidgin as the main or only language. Although linguists have suggested that most of the writers who use this language in literature and entertainment lack the necessary competence and produce deviant forms of it, radio drama was one of the categories which received high ratings in a survey of the linguistic appropriateness of a large number of Pidgin texts conducted by the authors. Using the survey data and examples from one drama serial, "Rainbow City", we will thus attempt to show that radio Pidgin has developed to a stage where some texts present what might almost qualify as a standard form of the language. However, we believe that linguistic appropriateness is only one of the factors to be considered in the assessment of creative texts in Pidgin. We therefore plan to show how, in the drama in question, successful handling of linguistic codes combines with literary factors to enable the author to drive home a serious message in a language that has long been considered the hallmark of ridicule.

Linguistic and Literary Development of Nigerian Pidgin: The Contribution of Radio Drama

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Introduction

The language that is the subject of this paper is known by the name of "Nigerian Pidgin" (or "Nigerian Pidgin English"), popularly also "Broken". These terms suggest some kind of trade jargon, and this was indeed how it started off in the eighteenth century (Agheyisi 1984: 211-12). However, the status of Nigerian Pidgin has changed dramatically since then. Today, it functions as a lingua franca in a wide range of contexts (Agheyisi 1984: 212), and it has been described as "the most widely spoken language in the country" (Faraclas 1996: 2). The less educated are usually thought of as the typical speakers (Agheyisi 1988: 230), but Pidgin is also used among the educated in informal situations (Agheyisi 1984: 212). In addition, it has acquired a number functions beyond private informal communication (Agheyisi 1984: 212-13; Jibril 1995: 233-34). Most notable among these new functions of Pidgin is perhaps that of a medium of radio broadcasting. For example, in Lagos, where the research on which this paper is based was conducted, several local stations have programmes in the language. One of them, Radio Nigeria 3, even has five hours daily on its programme schedule; besides music and entertainment programmes, the station's broadcasts in Pidgin include news and some public enlightenment talks. Public enlightenment is also the aim of certain drama serials wholly or partly in Pidgin which are aired by a number of stations. It is these drama serials that this paper is primarily concerned with.

We decided to include texts from two serials in our research. One of these, entitled *Rainbow City*, deals with various social issues, in particular citizens' rights and duties in a democratic society. The other, *One Thing at a Time*, is about problems surrounding reproductive health, especially AIDS.[1] Such topics obviously require the introduction of many concepts for which Pidgin may not have a term, and the question therefore arises whether the scriptwriter will be able to avoid excessive borrowing from English. Similar problems have been investigated by Augusta Omamor in regard to Pidgin in literature and some media texts (see Omamor 1997; also Elugbe/Omamor 1991: 61-72). She comes to the conclusion that many of the writers produce a heavily anglicized form of the language which she describes as "pseudopidgin" (1997: 221). However, most of her examples are from written sources, and, as in fact in the whole literature on Nigerian Pidgin, radio language receives scant attention.[2] This is, we believe, a serious omission, especially since many of these broadcasts are directed first and foremost at an audience with less formal education and consequently less knowledge of English than the reading public.

The corpus study

In view of the issues outlined above, we decided to make radio language an important part of a research project on English influence on Pidgin for which we did fieldwork during a six-month period between April and October 2000.[3] As a first step, we compiled a corpus of spoken Pidgin, the composition of which can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. The corpus

Text categories		Number of texts
Radio broadcasts		20:
	News	5
	Advice	5
	Drama *(Rainbow City/ One Thing at a Time)*	10 (5/5)
Non-broadcast speech		20:
	Interviews	5
	Discussions	5
	Conversations	10

There are, in total, 40 texts of approximately 2000 words. Half of these are from the radio, with "News", "Advice" (public enlightenment talks) and "Drama" as subcategories and in the latter section, five texts from each of the two serials. The other twenty texts are samples of various types of spontaneous, non-broadcast speech from fluent speakers with at least a secondary education, the minimum educational level that one would also expect of broadcasters. This corpus was subdivided into 320 shorter extracts (8 per text), which were distributed among 20 competent informants[4] along with a linguistic questionnaire where he/she was asked, first, to assess the frequency of what he/she considered English lexical and, separately, grammatical elements in the extract in question on a scale from "very frequently" to "not at all", and, if applicable, to provide examples of such elements; then, in a second section of the questionnaire, he/she was asked to give an overall assessment of the language of the extract. The results for the whole corpus are as follows:
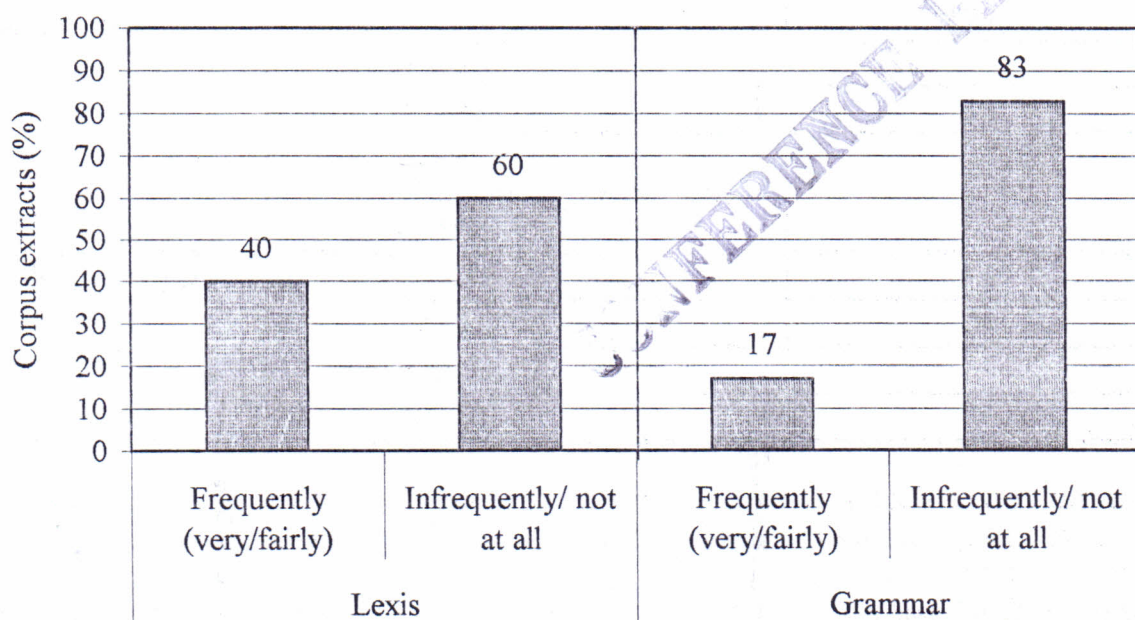

Figure 1. Use of English elements

English influence, as figure 1 shows, was found to be more pronounced in the area of lexis than in grammar, although in both areas the informants judged in the majority of cases that

English elements were used only infrequently or not at all. The fact that most of the extracts seem to conform more or less to what the informants regard as Pidgin at least grammatically may explain in part why the results of the overall assessment (figure 2) were remarkably positive (another possible explanation being that some anglicisms have attained a high degree of acceptability):
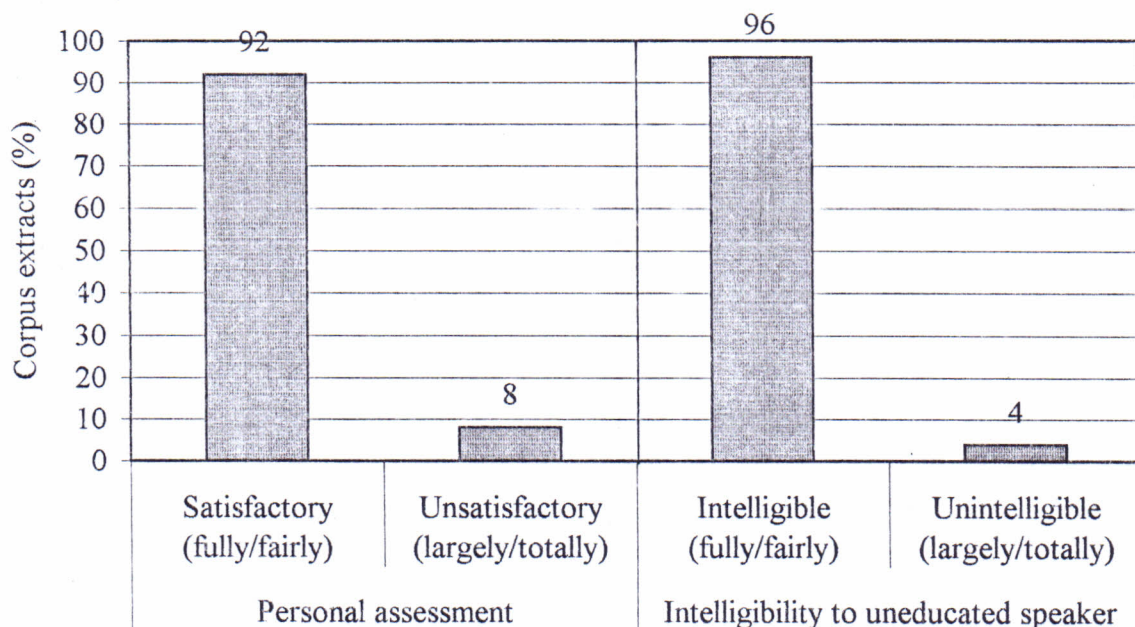

Figure 2. Overall assessment

The language of over 90% of the extracts was rated as either fully or fairly satisfactory to the informant personally as an educated speaker, and was thought to be either fully or fairly intelligible to an uneducated speaker.

Furthermore, we compared responses across categories, applying the chi-square test for statistical significance. Summarizing the results as presented in the appendix, we can say that the radio sample as a whole shows, according to the questionnaires, significantly less use of English than non-broadcast speech, and also received better overall ratings. Among the radio subcategories, "Advice" and "Drama" have less English influence (in the lexicon) and better ratings than "News". There is also a significant difference between the two drama serials, with fewer English lexical items and better ratings in the *Rainbow City* text group.

The corpus study thus shows that there is a general tendency among educated speakers to insert English elements, especially lexical items, into their Pidgin, but also that radio scriptwriters try with varying degrees of success to adapt their language to the target audience. Still, English elements are far from absent from the broadcasts. This even applies to *Rainbow City*, which was rated so highly in the study. However, the use of English expressions does not necessarily mean the serial is written in "pseudopidgin", as the analysis of some extracts in the following section will show.

The language of *Rainbow City*
The first extract that we present here is from a scene where a character called "Chairman" (he is the chairman of a taxi drivers' union) is giving another character, Madam Asabe, some advice for her newly formed market women's union.

Extract 1 (from *Rainbow City*, Episode 7)[5]

Text in Pidgin (*English elements*)[a]	English translation
Asabe: Last week one member run come tell me say dat woman wey we go give money keep na jibiti woman. *That* di woman don dey borrow small small from di money. […] Abeg help me. Wetin we fit do now?	**Asabe:** Last week a member reported that the woman we had entrusted our money to is a fraud. That she has started spending the money. Please help me. What can we do now?
Chairman: Uhm, anyway, na simple matter. Una don *register* una *union*?	**Chairman:** It's a simple matter. Have you registered your union?
Asabe: No, we never register am.	**Asabe:** No, we haven't.
Chairman: Ah-ah.	**Chairman:** Are you serious?
Asabe: Dem say we no go fit register if we no get proper *officers* wey we choose for *election*.	**Asabe:** We were told that the union can't be registered unless we have duly elected officers.
Chairman: Na true. Dat one na true. So make *you people* make *your* elections.	**Chairman:** Yes, that's right. So you should hold elections.
Asabe: Mhm.	**Asabe:** Mhm.
Chairman: When you don register, una go take all your union money go bank.	**Chairman:** Once the union is registered, you'll put the money into a bank account.

[a]Only the first occurrence is marked.

Apart from the subordinator *that*, which is used for no apparent reason instead of Pidgin *say*, and *you (people)/ your*[6], the elements that could be classified as English in this extract are lexical items without Pidgin equivalents that are crucial to the topic under discussion. Their use is probably deliberate and seems justified in a public enlightenment programme as long as they are not too numerous and their meaning becomes clear in context.

Extract 2 is taken from a scene where one of the characters, Adolphus, is quarrelling with his daughter Vero, who he intends to marry off to a rich old man instead of allowing her to take her secondary school examination once more (she has already failed three times).

Extract 2 (from *Rainbow City*, Episode 4)

Text in Pidgin (*English elements*)	English translation
Adolphus: […] which kind rubbish you dey talk for my ear?	**Adolphus:** What nonsense are you telling me?
Vero: *But papa, mama told me she has given you the money.*	
Adolphus: I no send anybody message o. Eh? Dat money instead make we throway for your WAEC, I go take am feed your broder and sister.	**Adolphus:** I didn't ask anybody for help. Rather than waste the money on your exam, I'll use it to feed your brothers and sisters.
Vero: Papa, you no get *right to force me to do what I don't want to do.*	**Vero:** Dad, you don't have the right …
Adolphus: Eh? Na me you dey talk to, Vero? Me, N.K., eh, me, your papa?	**Adolphus:** Are you talking to me, Vero? Me, N.K., me, your father?
Vero: Papa, I tell you make you no make me vex with you. Now you come dey do and talk as if I no get *any right over what I want to do*	**Vero:** Dad, I warned you not to make me angry with you. Now you're acting and talking as if I don't have …

with my life.	
Adolphus: Oh oh. I know who dey behind all dis katakata. Eh. I know say na dat boy Chris.	**Adolphus:** Oh oh. I know who is behind all this trouble. Yes. I know it's that boy, Chris.

The insertion of the highlighted English sentence and sentence fragments can be identified as code-switching which serves a specific purpose: Vero invokes the connotations of English – power and knowledge – in an attempt to assert herself over her father and to prove her intellectual abilities. Of course, Adolphus may rightly suspect that she picked up some of the phrases from her well-educated boyfriend, Chris. Code-switching is also found in the non-broadcast part of the corpus, and some additional recordings of less educated speakers that we made show that in an urban environment – and this is after all where *Rainbow City* is set – even speakers with little formal education often intersperse their Pidgin with English words and phrases they have picked up informally.

All in all, the language of *Rainbow City* may not be perfect Pidgin, but the writer succeeds in drawing on English to fill lexical gaps and to reflect typical urban speech patterns without a major loss in authenticity and intelligibility.

The question of "authenticity"
The linguistic authenticity of literary Pidgin is an important issue, but, as the discussion above has shown, one should beware of overstating the case. Indeed, the efforts of concerned linguists to point out instances of "pseudopidgin" and to show what authentic or "regular" Pidgin (Omamor 1997: 224) is like, commendable though they may be in principle, sometimes promote a variety of the language which one may describe as "academic Pidgin". The phenomenon can be observed, for example, in the phonemic spelling system used in attempts to Pidginize what are considered deficient representations of the language. In almost all cases, such translations make sense to the Pidgin speaker who is not a linguist only when they appear, as they often do, side by side with the "deficient" version. This points to a gap between well thought-out academic arguments for phonemic spelling systems and the realities of everyday language use which Görlach (1998: 195) has aptly formulated thus:

> In spite of the linguistic advantages of phonemic spellings, language planners ought to reconsider whether it is not wise to choose a convention that is closer to English: readers of Pidgin texts can be expected to be bilingual, and more fluent as readers in the prestige language English, so why not accept in spelling a state of affairs that is likely to happen in pronunciation, too, with the increasing impact of English?

The quotation also hints at another problem: what the conservative linguist regards as "regular" Pidgin in terms of phonology, but also lexis and grammar often fails to take account of the new, partially anglicized varieties of the language developing in a multilingual context where Pidgin coexists with English. A detailed discussion of the features of these varieties and the degree to which elements newly borrowed from English have become established in Pidgin is, however, beyond the scope of the present study and requires further analysis the corpus.[7]

Pidgin in literature
Like the authenticity of literary Pidgin, the use and functions of the language in literature have been the subject of much discussion.[8] For now, creative activity in Pidgin is centred on drama and poetry, where collections written exclusively in the language have been published. No full-length novel has been written in Pidgin.[9] Rather, there are occasional instances of direct speech by characters who are shown to be inadequately versed in the use of English. This is in line with a general tendency in the use of Pidgin in literature: besides being associated with humour, Pidgin is often put into the mouths of characters of low social status. In addition,

these characters may also be portrayed as being of low moral standing; it is telling that the "first full-fledged 'Pidgin personality'" (Zabus 1992: 122) in a novel, namely the title character of Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1963), is a prostitute.

Serious discussion of Pidgin literature has largely been limited to these written works. Oral forms such as radio drama have hardly been mentioned, perhaps because such forms cannot be classified as literature without some qualifications. But in this neglect, the present status of Pidgin as an essentially oral language, and the capacity of an oral medium like the radio to function as a base for the development of a Pidgin literature, are often overlooked. In addition, as mentioned above, written literature has often promoted the view of Pidgin as the language of a permanent underclass. But a convincing argument can now be made for the language as having transcended that role. And if the expression of profound thoughts in accessible idiom is a major quality of literary language, we sometimes need to turn to a medium like the radio to discern the evolving capacity of Pidgin in that connection (it has to be said, though, that the stereotypical use of Pidgin observed in much of the written literature is also found in radio texts). Again, *Rainbow City* is a good example.

Literary dimensions of *Rainbow City*

Rainbow City may have the limitations of a popular serial, but it does show that Pidgin can move beyond its stereotypical role. The characters in the drama are engaging and its conflicts are significant enough to reveal human nature in its manifold shades. The themes are legion; they include unemployment, corruption, gender stereotypes and all the consequences which such problems can have. The sustained use of Pidgin to highlight these issues in a style that is at times comic but at times also sobering runs counter to negative attitudes about the ability of the language to handle serious issues and about the role and status of Pidgin speakers vis-à-vis speakers of English.

To illustrate this, we have chosen an extract from a scene that was excluded from the corpus project because it is one of a few scenes where one character uses English consistently. This demonstrates another aspect of the Nigerian linguistic reality in which sometimes speakers of English and Pidgin interact and understand each other quite well. The context of extract 3 is that Duma, the owner of a betting office, has ordered Adolphus to pay the money that he owes him but is faced with Adolphus' outright refusal.

Extract 3 (from *Rainbow City*, episode 7)

Text	English translation
Duma: You should be ashamed of yourself, Adolphus.	
Adolphus: Because I owe you? Eh? How much I owe you self? Eh? You too you no dey borrow money from people wey dey come stake uh for coupon here? […]	**Adolphus:** Because I owe you? How much do I owe you in the first place? Don't you also borrow money from your customers?
Duma: Look, you are a wreck and a wretch, that's what you are, Adolphus. Only a wretch like you can do what you are doing to your poor daughter! Pressing the helpless girl's favours on Mr. Johnson, that notorious he-goat!	
Adolphus: Heh, Duma, eeeh, I see say noto jackpot pool office you come run for Endurance Villa.	**Adolphus:** Duma, I can see that it's not only the business of pool betting that you want to concern yourself with in Endurance Villa.
Duma: Deny it if you can. Shameless man!	

Adolphus: Eh? **Duma:** Deny it! **Adolphus:** Me shameless man? **Duma:** Yes! **Adolphus:** I gree. But wetin we go call man wey dey make corner corner love with one buka madam? **Duma:** Eh? **Adolphus:** Hm. **Duma:** Adolphus, what did you say just now? **Adolphus:** I talk say e no go tay wey wind go blow and e go scatter feader for fowl nyash.	**Adolphus:** I accept. But what do you call a man who is engaged in an illicit affair with a food seller? **Adolphus:** I said that very soon, the wind will blow and reveal the hidden anus of the chicken.

The two characters exemplify the opposing social categories between whom a barrier is often erected in literary contexts. But contrary to the stereotypical pattern, the English speaker, Duma, fails miserably in his attempt to claim a superior status. The Pidgin speaker, Adolphus, acknowledges that he is a debtor but then counterattacks by bringing up Duma's adulterous affair with his neighbour's wife. A controversy is thus raised about what constitutes a "shameless" act. The listener is implicitly called upon to resolve the moral question by weighing what could be regarded as an act of survival on the part of Adolphus against Duma's socially abhorrent behaviour. When, after his "real self" has been revealed, Duma recoils in a sensitive self-recognition reminiscent of the guilty secret convention of the nineteenth century English novel, it becomes clear that the moral ground on which he stands in making his accusation against Adolphus is not so secure. Adolphus' successful resistance is, one might say, symbolic of the new status of Pidgin and its speakers in literature and points to a future in which the subservient role of both will have become part of literary history.

Conclusion

In the absence of any official language policy in support of Pidgin, we have to agree with Agheyisi's statement that "the success of the standardization of NPE [Nigerian Pidgin English] will have to depend on the individual efforts of interested users of the language" (1988: 240). Radio drama – if like *Rainbow City*, it is of linguistic and literary merit – can make a significant contribution in this regard.

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Appendix

Table A.1. Corpus study/ comparison of major text categories

Question, *answers*	Number of corpus extracts (% in brackets)		Non-broadcast speech	
	Radio broadcasts		Non-broadcast speech	
Use of Eng. elements/ lexis:				
Frequently	52** (33%)		76** (48%)	
(of which *very* | *fairly*)	16 (31%)	36 (69%)	14 (18%)	62 (82%)
Infrequently or *not at all*	108** (68%)		84** (53%)	
(of which *infrequently* | *not at all*)	84 (78%)	24 (22%)	74 (88%)	10 (12%)
Use of Eng. elements/ grammar:				
Frequently	17** (11%)		36** (23%)	
(of which *very* | *fairly*)	4 (24%)	13 (76%)	8 (22%)	28 (88%)
Infrequently or *not at all*	143** (89%)		124** (78%)	
(of which *infrequently* | *not at all*)	84 (59%)	59 (41%)	76 (61%)	48 (39%)
Personal assessment:				
Satisfactory	149 (93%)		145 (91%)	
(of which *fully* | *fairly*)	100** (67%)	49** (33%)	69** (48%)	76** (52%)
Unsatisfactory	11 (7%)		15 (9%)	
(of which *largely* | *totally*)	11 (100%)	0 (0%)	14 (93%)	1 (7%)
Intelligibility to uneducated speaker:				
Intelligible	156 (98%)		151 (94%)	
(of which *fully* | *fairly*)	90* (58%)	66* (42%)	68* (45%)	83* (55%)
Unintelligible	4 (3%)		9 (6%)	
(of which *largely* | *totally*)	4 (100%)	0 (0%)	9 (100%)	0 (0%)

*p≤0.05; **p≤0.01

Table A.2. Corpus study/ comparison of radio subcategories

Question, *answers*	Number of corpus extracts (% in brackets)					
	News		Advice		Drama	
Use of Eng. elements/ lexis:						
Frequently	22** (55%)		7** (18%)		23** (29%)	
(of which *very* | *fairly*)	9 (41%)	13 (59%)	0 (0%)	7 (100%)	7 (30%)	16 (70%)
Infrequently or *not at all*	18** (45%)		33** (83%)		57** (71%)	
(of which *infrequently* | *not at all*)	14 (78%)	4 (22%)	26 (79%)	7 (21%)	44 (77%)	13 (23%)
Use of Eng. elements/ grammar:						
Frequently	2 (5%)		4 (10%)		11 (14%)	
(of which *very* | *fairly*)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	4 (36%)	7 (64%)
Infrequently or *not at all*	38 (95%)		36 (90%)		69 (86%)	
(of which *infrequently* | *not at all*)	25 (66%)	13 (34%)	17 (47%)	19 (53%)	42 (61%)	27 (39%)
Personal assessment:						
Satisfactory	34 (85%)		39 (98%)		76 (95%)	
(of which *fully* | *fairly*)	14** (41%)	20** (59%)	32** (82%)	7** (18%)	54** (71%)	22** (29%)
Unsatisfactory	6 (15%)		1 (3%)		4 (5%)	
(of which *largely* | *totally*)	6 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	0 (0%)
Intelligibility to uneducated speaker: *Intelligible*	39 (98%)		39 (98%)		78 (98%)	
(of which *fully* | *fairly*)	11** (28%)	28** (72%)	30** (77%)	9** (23%)	49** (63%)	29** (37%)
Unintelligible	1 (3%)		1 (3%)		2 (3%)	
(of which *largely* | *totally*)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)

*p≤0.05; **p≤0.01

Table A.3. Corpus study/ comparison of drama serials

Question, *answers*	Number of corpus extracts (% in brackets)			
	Rainbow City		*One thing at a time*	
Use of Eng. elements/ lexis:				
Frequently	5** (13%)		18** (45%)	
(of which *very* | *fairly*)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	5 (28%)	13 (72%)
Infrequently or *not at all*	35** (88%)		22** (55%)	
(of which *infrequently* | *not at all*)	28 (80%)	7 (20%)	16 (73%)	6 (27%)
Use of Eng. elements/ grammar:				
Frequently	3 (8%)		8 (20%)	
(of which *very* | *fairly*)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (13%)	7 (88%)
Infrequently or *not at all*	37 (93%)		32 (80%)	
(of which *infrequently* | *not at all*)	23 (62%)	14 (38%)	19 (59%)	13 (41%)
Personal assessment:				
Satisfactory	38 (95%)		38 (95%)	
(of which *fully* | *fairly*)	33** (87%)	5** (13%)	21** (55%)	17** (45%)
Unsatisfactory	2 (5%)		2 (5%)	
(of which *largely* | *totally*)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
Intelligibility to uneducated speaker:				
Intelligible	39 (98%)		39 (98%)	
(of which *fully* | *fairly*)	30** (77%)	9** (23%)	19** (49%)	20** (51%)
Unintelligible	1 (3%)		1 (3%)	
(of which *largely* | *totally*)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)

*$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$

Notes

[1]*Rainbow City* is written by Tunde Aiyegbusi and produced by the African Radio Drama Association (Lagos). *One Thing at a Time*, by Kola Ogunjobi, is produced by the Society for Family Health (Lagos). We are grateful to the producers for making scripts and tape recordings available to us.

[2]While Agheyisi (1984: 227-28) and Jibril (1995: 236; 239-42) are among the few authors who make reference to Pidgin on the radio, Omamor (1997) does not include any radio texts. Elugbe/Omamor (1991) contains, besides a transcription of a news broadcast that appears virtually without comment (168-70), an analysis of the speech of Zebrudaya, the hero of the radio and television comedy serial *Masquerade* (61-66). The authors conclude that Zebrudaya's speech "represents an unfortunate attempt to speak Standard English by an ill-informed person" (63). This serves their aim of showing that there are forms of non-standard English distinct from Pidgin, but it should be pointed out that Zebrudaya's speech is apparently intended as precisely such a form, and not as Pidgin; this becomes clear in the context of the drama, where Zebrudaya's broken English contrasts sharply with the Pidgin of his wife, for example.

[3]We would like to acknowledge financial support of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in the form of a doctoral research grant (HSP III) to Dagmar Deuber during the period mentioned.

[4]Most of the informants were advanced students or lecturers in English and other language-related disciplines at the University of Lagos. All claimed a good knowledge of Pidgin, to which most had been exposed from childhood. L_1 competence, though claimed by some, was not made a prerequisite for participation in the study, since Nigerian Pidgin is still mostly spoken as L_2 and good L_2 knowledge is considered sufficient for most practical purposes, including broadcast production (Smart Esi, Head of Pidgin Section at Radio Nigeria 3, p.c.).

[5]The script of Rainbow City is written in adapted English orthography; the spelling of some words has been modified in the corpus for the sake of consistency.

[6]Pidgin *make una make una elections* would have been slightly awkward with the double occurrence of *make una*.

[7]For a perceptive though of necessity limited description of English-influenced Pidgin as spoken by fluent speakers (which must be distinguished from "interlanguage" Pidgin [Agheyisi 1984: 222 ff.]), see Agheyisi 1984: 217-222.

[8]As this is not the place for a detailed survey of literary uses of Pidgin and criticism thereof, the interested reader is referred to the literary works cited in Jibril (1995), Elugbe/Omamor (1991), Omamor (1997) and critical studies like Obilade (1978), Zabus (1992), or Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1994).

[9]One may wish to make an exception here for Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985), which, however, is written in a mixture of Pidgin and English (standard and non-standard) which the author has chosen to call "rotten English" in the "Author's Note" (1985: n.p.).

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