
The function of Student Pidgin in Ghana

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Why do Ghanaian students who are proficient in Standard English choose to speak Student Pidgin?

1. Introduction¹

The emergence of Student Pidgin in Ghana is estimated to have started fairly recently: between 1965 and the early 1970s (Huber, 1999; Dako, 2002). Male students in high prestige senior secondary schools and universities have been credited with leading in the development of Student Pidgin. The use of Student Pidgin has since been spreading among some girls and is currently found in an increasing number of contexts, including the home. The fact that students use Student Pidgin seems unexpected, considering the fact that they are competent speakers of Standard English.² In this context, the question to consider is what underlies this behavior? This has been the subject of recurrent debate. Educational authorities typically feel that Student Pidgin reflects the fact that the standard of English in Ghanaian senior secondary schools and universities has fallen. An example of this comes from a speech given by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, Professor Kwadwo Asenso-Okyere, on 28 October 2002:

[He] expressed concern about the standard of English among university students and advised them to desist from speaking Pidgin English, which he said would not help them. Speaking at this year's matriculation of 7,959 freshmen out of the 10,301 admitted into the University, Prof Asenso-Okyere said there was evidence of deterioration in English Language among students in their examinations and theses, which some employers had also complained about.

This article envisages that we cannot merely attribute Student Pidgin to fallen English standards,³ and instead presents a more complex perspective. What I believe is happening is that Student

Pidgin has purposefully been constructed as an 'intermediate' variety of English, a term introduced by Trudgill (1986), and similar in spirit to Auer's (1999) notion of 'language mixing' and Tældeman's (2007) 'tussentaal' (interlanguage). I envisage that Student Pidgin is intermediate from a linguistic as well as a social perspective. Linguistically, Student Pidgin combines features of Standard English and local varieties. This is reminiscent, for instance, of what Tældeman (2007) has argued for 'Verkavelingsvlaams', a mixture of Standard Dutch and Flemish, and, to some extent, Cornips (2006) for the regional variety Heerlen Dutch. Socially, Student Pidgin serves the students projecting their identity and engaging in the social practice of negotiating between different communities. Swigart (1992) has suggested a comparable function for Urban Wolof, which is spoken in Dakar, the capital of Senegal.



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The article is structured as follows. In section 2, I start with a brief description of the linguistic and social differences between Pidgin English and Student Pidgin in Ghana. Section 3 presents an overview of the different functions that have been suggested for Student Pidgin thus far. Section 4 describes the data that I gathered for my research. Section 5 outlines the concept of an ‘intermediate variety’ in more depth against the backdrop of established concepts and previous findings in sociolinguistic research and goes on to present an analysis of the findings in this context. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings.⁴

2. Ghanaian Pidgin English and Student Pidgin: linguistic and social differences

Following Huber (1999), there are two forms of pidgin in Ghana: basilectal or uneducated Ghanaian Pidgin English and mesolectal/acrolectal or educated Ghanaian Pidgin English. The latter is the form that is referred to as Student Pidgin here. Huber (1999) argues that the difference lies mostly in the social status that they have. Basilectal Ghanaian Pidgin English is spoken in highly multilingual urban areas, such as, for example, Accra, which experienced large-scale immigration of workers from various West African countries from early 1900. These workers have low educational attainment and use Pidgin English as a lingua franca to bridge their different linguistic backgrounds. On the other hand, mesolectal/acrolectal (Student) Pidgin is spoken by Ghanaians who have progressed to secondary schools and tertiary education. They share at least Standard English and local languages such as Twi, the major local lingua franca of the country, or Ga.

Descriptions of Pidgin English and Student Pidgin (Huber, 1999; Dako, 2002; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2011) show that linguistic differences are far less great and are largely lexical.⁵ For example, in Student Pidgin the third person plural pronoun is *dem* ‘they’, as illustrated in (1). In Ghanaian Pidgin English, it is *dei*. The example is taken from Dako (2002: 57).

- (1) *den do dem wan, wan, wan*
then do them one at a time

Dako (2002) points out that Student Pidgin has a different lexis from Ghanaian Pidgin English, to the extent that it does not have much special pidgin vocabulary. Rather, speakers of Student Pidgin can

use words from languages like Standard English and Twi or Ga. Dako (2002: 55) puts it this way:

Because speakers of SP [Student Pidgin LR] can draw on other common languages to supplement their vocabulary and also their structures, SP exhibits a different vocabulary from GhaPE [Ghanaian Pidgin English LR] and code switching is much more noticeable, embedding both SE [Standard English LR] and (predominantly) Twi and Ga vocabulary and structures.

Examples of this are given in (2a–b). (2a) shows a combination of Ga and Standard English words, and (2b) a sequence derived from Twi (Dako, 2002: 55; 60).

- (2) a. *But ené le: bad* (Ga and Standard English words)
But this is bad
b. *Ma bodi katsh mi* (Student Pidgin)
Mi hu akyin me (Twi)
I am in trouble

It is important to bear in mind that while there are these differences between Ghanaian Pidgin English and Student Pidgin, the two varieties are mutually intelligible.

3. The functions of Student Pidgin

Dako (2002) highlights the important point that even though Ghanaian universities are melting pots of all ethnic groups in the country, Student Pidgin did not evolve from a basic communicative need. In the case at hand, all students speak Standard English with fairly high proficiency. Standard English could be resorted to if no common indigenous language were available. Furthermore, it is estimated that the majority of the students also have knowledge of Twi. Pidgin English is otherwise associated with the uneducated section of society, and students are aware that English is a vehicle to better opportunities in life.⁶ Despite this, students of the same ethnic group use Student Pidgin to speak to each other.

So why do Ghanaian students use Student Pidgin? Pipkins (2004) presents a list of reasons that have been contemplated in research. For example, she refers to Forson’s idea (n.d., cited in Pipkins, 2004) that Student Pidgin is an in-group language. Within the context of a larger group, sub-groups may use a language that reinforces a sense of identity or solidarity. Sekyi-Baidoo (2011) has argued that Student Pidgin serves as a badge of group membership in opposition to non-group

members, especially adults and dominant institutional authorities of the school community like their teachers.

Pipkins (2004) also cites Dako (2000) to suggest that speaking Student Pidgin is a way to avoid performance pressure to speak good English. Student Pidgin is said to be easier than Standard English to the extent that the latter allows less room for error.

Pipkins (2004) reports comparable conclusions from her own research. With reference to Dako (2000), Pipkins (2004) argues that Student Pidgin started off as a form of resistance to the current policy of using only English as a medium of instruction at all school levels, at the expense of Ghanaian languages (Owu-Ewie, 2006), and that although the reasons for using Student Pidgin have changed over the years, Student Pidgin is still used as a form of resistance. Following Pipkins (2004), the students speak Student Pidgin better than Standard English and Student Pidgin suits them better than Standard English.

Pipkins (2004) admits that there are undoubtedly more factors involved in the students' use of Student Pidgin. She points to the fact that through speaking Student Pidgin, the students know that they are recognized as having attended higher institutions of learning. As Pipkins (2004) notes, in Ghana Student Pidgin has more prestige than Ghanaian Pidgin English as spoken in town.

Findings from Fuller's research (2009) can put Pipkins' (2004) last observation into further perspective. Fuller studied five 10-year-old boys in a classroom in a German-American bilingual school in Berlin. They were clearly highly competent in English. However, sometimes they produced sentences that were at odds with their actual English proficiency. Fuller terms these utterances 'Mock English'. Since their credentials as capable English mother tongue speakers gave the boys prestige in the school setting, it seems odd that they would undermine this source of status by deliberately speaking in a non-standard way. Fuller (2009) finds that, in order to fully appreciate the importance of the Mock English utterances, we must recognize that they are really purposeful performances of non-standard English in a setting in which Standard English proficiency is highly valued. She argues that Mock English has three functions. First, it allows boys to meld good student and masculine rebellious identities. Secondly, Fuller (2009) goes on to note that the boys presented their use of Mock English as amusing. Through presenting Mock English in an amusing manner, the boys can use Mock English to deal with face-threatening incidents. Fuller (2009) asks

us to bear in mind that these were boys of upwardly mobile middle-class professionals attending prestigious institutions. There is a great deal at stake for them if they do not do well, both in terms of their own self-confidence and the expectations of their teachers and parents. Speaking English and offering answers involves a potential loss of face if the evaluation is negative. One way of dealing with this face threat is to use Mock English. If the boys are wrong, their response is easy to pass off as a joke and this allows them to save face.

Thirdly and significantly, Fuller (2009) goes on to point out that far from undermining their elite status as speakers of Standard English, the boys in her study used non-standard Mock English to reinforce their status. Mock English indirectly constructs the speaker's identity as a proficient speaker of Standard English because the production of such non-standard variants is viewed as uncharacteristic for the speaker. In contrast with studies in which stigmatized codes are used to index marginalization, here the marked nature of Mock English instead constructs Standard English as the norm.

I believe Fuller's (2009) analysis has made an important contribution to our understanding of the function of some types of non-standard English and I use that study as a baseline to analyze Student Pidgin. In the current paper I pursue the following research questions: (1) why students use Student Pidgin and (2) what constitute the sociolinguistic factors behind their choice. The next section first reports on Student Pidgin data that I collected for my research.

4. Data and results

The data upon which this study is built come from research conducted at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Ghana between August 2011 and November 2012. An important source for the design of my research was a PhD study conducted by Elizabeth Erling (2004) into the role of English in Germany. My research consisted of a quantitative analysis of a questionnaire that was distributed to 191 UCC students: 106 male students and 85 female students. The empirical analysis of the questionnaire was followed up by a focus group interview with 17 students and supported by qualitative ethnographic data involving diary entries and short recordings made by three students.

All students who participated in the research were recruited through personal contacts of the author with lecturers at UCC, who administered the questionnaire. I aimed for my sample to be representative of younger and older segments of

the student population and of students with different educational backgrounds. The students were therefore drawn from three different cohorts. There was one group of 65 first-year Arts students (35 males, 30 females), one group of 50 second/third-year Arts students (14 males, 36 females), and one group of 76 first/second/third-year Biology students (57 males, 19 females). Since the different groups turned out to show similar results, I here present results from all the three groups collapsed together. The students' age ranged between 19 and 43 years old and the majority of them were in their early twenties. Together they spoke 29 different native languages. 58 students had Twi as their mother tongue, 45 spoke Fante, and 34 Ewe.

In view of my research questions, the main objectives of the questionnaire were to gain insight into the use that students make of Student Pidgin and their attitudes to Student Pidgin. Accordingly, the questionnaire inquired if and when students use Student Pidgin, their motivation for (not) using Student Pidgin and their perception of Student Pidgin compared to other varieties of English like Ghanaian Pidgin English and Standard English. I also asked for the occupation of their fathers in order to examine if the students' social background could be a factor in their opinions about Student Pidgin. It has been well established (cf. e.g. Trudgill, 1974) that people may seek to advance their socio-economic position by speaking the standard variety rather than non-standard varieties, and this is especially pertinent

in societies like Ghana where English is an official language used in formal contexts of life, including government, business, the judiciary and education (Albakry & Ofori, 2011).

The questionnaire was written in English and contained 24 items, the majority of them forced choice questions. Respondents could answer other questions, such as those that inquired into their opinions about Student Pidgin, by choosing values on a Likert-type scale, from, for instance, 'strongly agree' (1) to 'strongly disagree' (5). Finally, there were a few open questions, intended to capture the variety of views that might exist among students and to solicit larger explanations, for example, of students' motives for (not) using Student Pidgin. The questionnaire was anonymous.

Figures 1–3 summarize the results of the questionnaire. Figure 1 shows the percentage of users and non-users of Student Pidgin among the participants according to sex.

Figure 2 presents the reasons that male and female students gave for speaking Student Pidgin.

Finally, Figure 3 presents the reasons that male and female students gave for not speaking Student Pidgin.

Consistent with earlier reports that boys are the most frequent users of Student Pidgin (cf. e.g. Huber, 1999; Dako, 2002), Figure 1 shows that 64% of the male students said they spoke Student Pidgin (68 out of 106). As can be seen in Figure 2, there was considerable variation in the reason that they gave for their use of Student Pidgin. An oft-cited reason was that Student

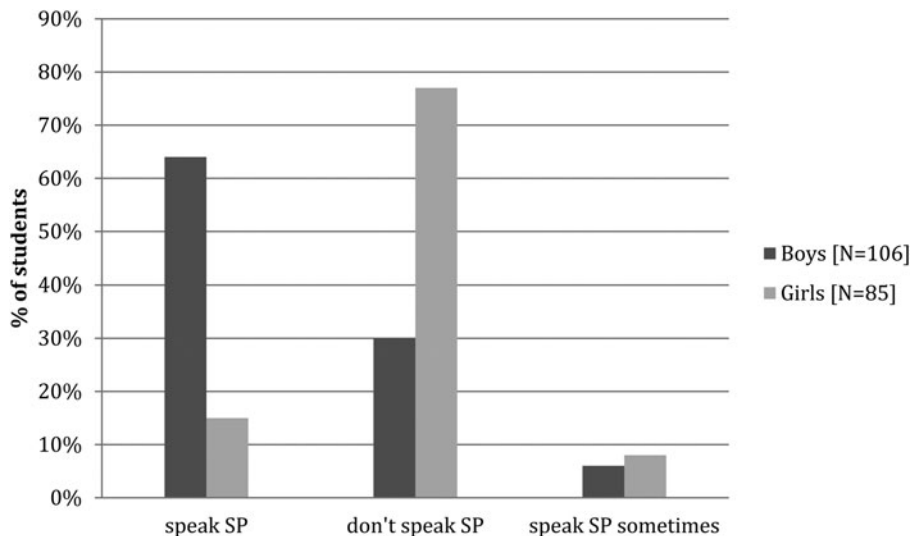


Figure 1. (Non-)speakers of Student Pidgin (SP)

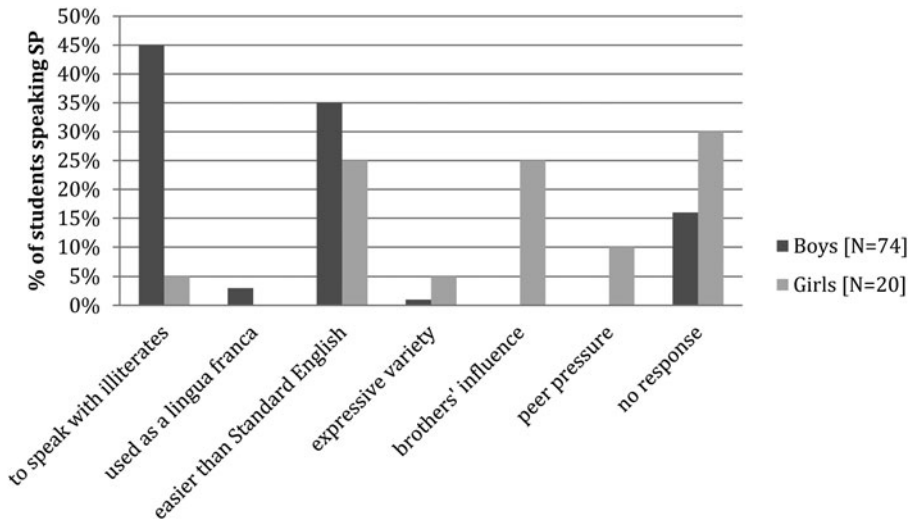


Figure 2. Reasons given by students for speaking Student Pidgin (SP) (open question)

Pidgin is easier than Standard English, as illustrated in (3):

- (3) It [Student Pidgin] is easy; English is not my mother tongue.

Another reason cited often was that Student Pidgin was used to communicate with (what the students themselves termed) ‘illiterates’ or ‘illiterate people’ who do not speak Standard English. A few boys reported using Student Pidgin as a lingua franca.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the association of Student Pidgin with male students, 30% of the

boys (32 out of 106) did not show the expected pattern. The reason for their anomalous behavior may be that they had working-class background. Many of these boys (22 out of 32) reported having fathers with a blue-collar job (the majority farmers, but also, for example, builders or drivers). Given the prestige that is associated with speaking the standard variety, they would be especially keen to speak Standard English as one of the means of improving their social status. Indeed, as Figure 3 shows, of the boys who reported that they did not speak Student Pidgin, the majority (55%) said

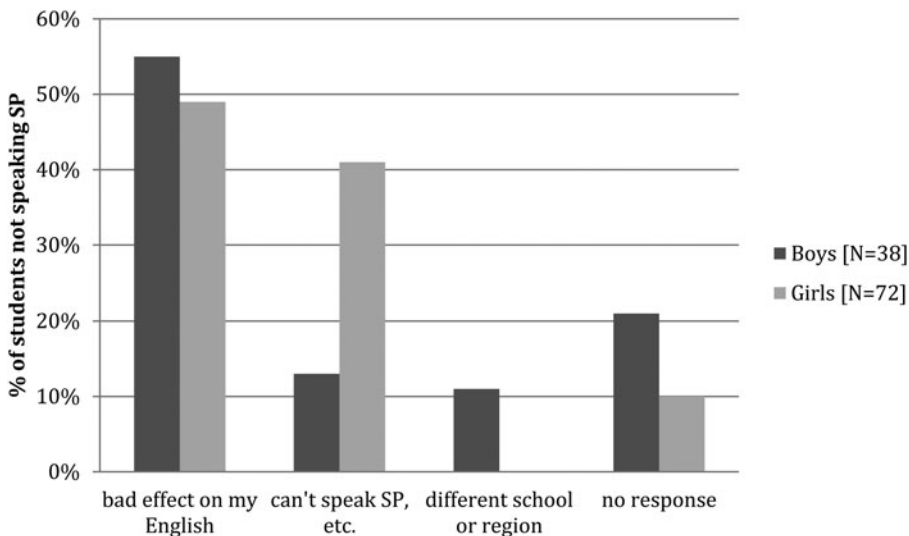


Figure 3. Reasons given by students for not speaking Student Pidgin (SP) (open question)

that they wanted to speak appropriate English and expressed concern about the effect that Student Pidgin would have on their English. One of them remarked:

- (4) It [Student Pidgin] will affect my English language.

The remainder of them gave reasons that did not so much express a negative attitude to Student Pidgin *per se* but rather its inaccessibility or their inability to speak it. Some boys wrote that they are ‘not fluent’ and ‘find it difficult to speak’, and some that they did not speak Student Pidgin because they did not attend boarding school⁷ or because Student Pidgin is not spoken in their region. This student replied:

- (5) I had my secondary high school in the Brung-Ahafy region. Student Pidgin is spoken in Central and Asante region.

We know from earlier reports (Huber, 1999; Dako, 2002) that boys have been the most frequent users of Student Pidgin and that the rates among female speakers are much lower. Figure 1 confirms that similar conclusions are observed in the current study as well. In my study there were considerably fewer Student Pidgin speakers among the female students as compared with the male students: only 15% as compared to 64%, with another 8% of the girls saying they use Student Pidgin sometimes. Figure 3 shows that of the girls who reported that they did not speak Student Pidgin, 49% said it would corrupt their English, while 41% of the girls said they did not understand or did not speak it. Figure 2 indicates that the girls who sometimes spoke Student Pidgin attributed this to their brothers or to peer pressure (‘Other people speak it’). Further, the girls speaking Student Pidgin said that ‘it is easier’ than Standard English or that they speak it ‘to feel free’.

In response to the question of how Student Pidgin differs from other pidgins, many students responded that Student Pidgin is more a mixture of English and local languages. From their answers it is also apparent that the students consider Student Pidgin to have higher status than Ghanaian Pidgin English because it has more English features. Consider the remarks in (6):

- (6) a. It [Student Pidgin] is more organized and nearer to English.
b. Student Pidgin differs from pidgin because students know English.

- c. Student Pidgin contains more English words. Student Pidgin is not as bad as local pidgin.

The role of the local languages is highlighted in the responses in (7):

- (7) a. Student Pidgin is a mixture of the local languages mixed with English as compared to other types of pidgin.
b. Student Pidgin is more or less a direct translation of Twi or Ga. Student Pidgin has some local dialects inclusive. It is not English throughout with grammatical errors but some parts English and some parts local dialect.

For the follow-up focus group interview, I interviewed 17 students. The students were chosen because they volunteered by writing their names and e-mail addresses on the questionnaire and on the basis of the categories of (non-)speakers that they fitted into. I originally aimed to select 18 students: from each of the three cohorts, one boy and one girl who had reported in the questionnaire that (1) s/he spoke Student Pidgin, (2) s/he did not speak Student Pidgin, and (3) s/he sometimes spoke Student Pidgin. One of these cells remained empty in the end: there were only boys speaking Student Pidgin sometimes in two of the three cohorts. The interviews were held in an informal setting and conducted in Standard English. Although the students were aware that I was involved in linguistic research about Student Pidgin, they did not know my specific research questions. The students seemed to welcome my interest and the opportunity to talk about their experiences with Student Pidgin. I had the questionnaire results with me, which I often referred to in a question. The interview lasted two hours and was recorded with a small tape recorder. All students interviewed consented to having their interviews recorded and their data being presented. The interview questions were designed to compensate for the limitations inherent to a questionnaire and provided an opportunity to inquire into the quantitative results that I had already established in more detail. Two issues that I was specifically interested in were students commenting that they used Student Pidgin because it is ‘easy’ or to communicate with ‘illiterates’.⁸

The following quotations represent the students’ opinions regarding Student Pidgin being easy. They are literal excerpts to allow these users of Student Pidgin to speak for themselves. Excerpts are preceded by the initials of the students’

pseudonyms. It seems to me that they can be understood in the light of Fuller's (2009) insight into the complexity of the function of some non-standard English utterances.

YJ: Student Pidgin is spoken by students though they can speak the Standard English. Student Pidgin is spoken by students who don't want to make grammatical errors and be laughed at.

IA: Yes it is not that I don't understand the English language properly. I speak Student Pidgin but I also speak and write good English.

SL: We hardly make errors when speaking Student Pidgin as compared to English. It enables us to express yourself without the fear of committing mistakes. But people know that Student Pidgin is for educated enlightened people rather than for laymen.

SAB: We want them to think that we are fluent in English. People think pidgin does make one fluent in the Standard English language.

Just as Fuller (2009) envisages for Mock English, students appear to use Student Pidgin as a device to save face. At the same time, Student Pidgin reinforces their elite status as speakers of Standard English who have attended higher institutions of learning.

The following quotations represent the students' comments regarding their use of Student Pidgin to converse with uneducated people or 'illiterates' who do not speak Standard English. Today in Ghana, only about 31.8% of the population can lay claim to English proficiency, and it is still very much a privilege of the educated elite (Albakry & Ofori, 2011).

SL: I speak Student Pidgin because some people in our areas are not good in English but they do their best in pidgin. I speak Student Pidgin with those who have a low level of education, especially grammar. It enhances easier communication and understanding. Student Pidgin is spoken by people who have a room for those who do not understand English.

DDK: The use of Student Pidgin also closes the gap between young men since those who do not go to school learn the pidgin and converse with their counterparts who are attending school by chance or by being lucky enough to come from well to do families.

AJS: Everybody understands it; I speak it with illiterates who do not understand English. Even someone who has never been to school, like the market people, understands Student Pidgin. Because Student Pidgin

uses a mixture of words from Standard English and the local languages. This helps illiterates understand. But other kinds of pidgin may have their own words. Student Pidgin is more easily understood by literates and illiterates alike.

These excerpts provide evidence to suggest that not only do those students speak Student Pidgin amongst themselves but that Student Pidgin also has a practical use outside the student community.

To support and exemplify the data that were obtained through the questionnaire and the interview, I asked three students from the focus group who spoke Student Pidgin to do some fieldwork during their summer vacation between 1 June and 1 August 2012. They were two girls from the Greater Accra Region, referred to by the pseudonyms SL and AJS, respectively, and one boy from the Upper East, FA. From the interview I remembered them as very cooperative and reliable. They wrote daily diary notes and recorded short passages of their use of Student Pidgin at the University of Cape Coast and in their home environment, where possible and with informed consent. The notes and recordings confirmed the reports from the focus group. All three students spoke Student Pidgin rather than local languages with peers on the university campus, even if they had the same mother tongue. When asked about this they explained that while Student Pidgin is easier than Standard English, Student Pidgin is a more upmarket language than the local mother tongues. AJS spoke Ga with her relatives and local friends at home and Student Pidgin with university friends. SL spoke (Standard) English at home, which she explained her parents had introduced in order to provide her with better opportunities. SL spoke Student Pidgin mixed with Ga with a range of different individuals in her home environment, including some friends and people selling products at the local markets. FA spoke his local language, Frafra, in his home environment and Hausa, the lingua franca in the Upper East region of Ghana, when meeting with people with a different mother tongue. He spoke Student Pidgin with elderly males who would start speaking English with him as a joke or out of respect to him as a university student.

A number of different lines of evidence can be inferred from these data. The next step is to consider what the patterns mean.

5. Discussion

I now come back to the research questions guiding this study, which are why students use Student

Pidgin and what the sociolinguistic factors are behind their choice. I would like to argue that what the findings suggest is that, contrary to popular perception, Student Pidgin is not so much a stigma imposed by others but indeed an 'intermediate variety' that has been purposefully chosen as an alternative to other languages that are used in Ghana. As Auer (1999) outlines very clearly, a wide range of phenomena have been described in which two languages are juxtaposed in discourse or within a sentence, called 'language alternation', 'codeswitching', 'codemixing', etc. While the reader is referred to Auer (1999) for a detailed comparison between the different forms, Student Pidgin appears to be of what Auer considers the 'language mixing' type, i.e. codemixing. Different from codeswitching, amongst other things, is that alternation between different languages or language varieties is not conducted to convey a particular (discourse-related or participant-related) meaning, but rather the very fact of selecting a mixing mode from the speech repertoire is socially significant. This suggestion is not new. Auer (1999) himself cites insights from Poplack's (1981) study of Puerto Rican bilinguals in the USA, the data collected in Africa by Scotton (1988), and Blommaert's (1990) analysis of Campus Swahili in Tanzania. To this we could add Albakry & Ofori's (2011) research into a mixture of Standard English and Ghanaian local languages that can be found among worshippers at Catholic churches in Accra, the capital of Ghana, and Swigart's (1992) study of Urban Wolof that involves French, the official language of Senegal, mixed with Wolof, the major lingua franca of the capital Dakar, respectively. Many of these researchers have claimed that rather than being viewed as a product of blending distinctive languages, the language mixing should in fact be regarded as a hybrid language, or a separate third code in its own right. Linguistic support for this view comes from the fact that these language mixtures may have features that exist in neither donor language.

Socially, the intermediate varieties are said to form an integral part of the everyday communicative life of the groups of speakers that use them. Often these groups have been found to be the young urban educated elite, whom it suits to speak an intermediate variety in informal situations. Auer (1999) points out that intermediate varieties frequently provoke strong negative reactions and have folk names that can be attributed to their identity-related function, like Twinglish (Twi + English; Albakry & Ofori, 2011) and Student Pidgin.

Turning to Student Pidgin, following Bucholtz (1999), the Ghanaian students would seem to form a community of practice that have employed the particular linguistic practice of Student Pidgin to project an identity for themselves.⁹ It has been suggested to me by one of the lecturers at the University of Cape Coast that Student Pidgin is actually anti-social in nature because it gives rise to intergroup discrimination. The ingroup of Student Pidgin speakers differentiate themselves from a comparison outgroup that cannot or do not speak Student Pidgin. This outgroup concerns most of the girls and some boys, who fear for their future or were not raised in an area where Student Pidgin was used.¹⁰ These groups were indeed present in my sample. However, I am not certain that Student Pidgin only (or any longer) has this negative dimension. The intermediate linguistic characteristics of Student Pidgin are intimately tied to the identity of the students and therefore central for understanding how Student Pidgin works in social practice. On the one hand, Student Pidgin is not snobbish and does not discriminate: it has elements of the local languages, which makes it understandable for less privileged people who lack proficiency in Standard English. On the other hand, Student Pidgin is not marginalized and has prestige: it has elements from Standard English.¹¹ As a consequence, Student Pidgin encodes a dual entity, showing that fact and establishing the students as both members of higher institutions of learning and members of the local community. I envisage that Student Pidgin is best understood as a social leveler between different social relations in the student speakers' networks. I would therefore also recommend that educational authorities take note of the important social function of Student Pidgin for the students and adopt considerate policies. This leaves the question of why Student Pidgin is based on Pidgin English rather than on a common local language. Along the lines of Fuller's (2009) insight into the complexity of functions of non-standard varieties, I speculate that this is because the easy variety of Student Pidgin embraces the linguistic insecurity of the students while they continue to be associated with the prestige that is attached to Standard English. ■

Notes

1 I am grateful to the Van Coeverden-Adriani Stichting who provided support for this research. The research has greatly benefited from feedback from colleagues at VU University Amsterdam (in particular, Bert Weltens, Lieke Stoffelsma, Sandra Evers and

participants in the Anthropology of Children Seminar) and colleagues at the University of Cape Coast. I would also like to thank Justyna Robinson, Assistant Editor for *English Today*, who provided helpful commentary. All this has greatly assisted me in conducting the research and writing up this report, though no one but myself should be held responsible for any errors that remain.

2 I use the term Standard English here to refer to Standard Ghanaian English that linguists have accepted as one of the 'new Englishes' (Joseph Afful, p.c.). See Owusu-Ansah (1997) for discussion of the intricate matter of how to distinguish between norm setting forms and nativization on the one hand, and norm breaking forms ('errors') and manifestations of lowering standards on the other.

3 Omani (2010, cited in Sekyi-Baidoo, 2011: 21) found that there is no direct link between students' use of Student Pidgin and their performance in particular West African Examination Council examinations.

4 See Huber (1999) for a description of the colonial history of Ghana, the complex linguistic situation that arose from the historical developments, and the different views that exist as to how a pidgin emerged in Ghana.

5 I refer to these works for extensive descriptions of such linguistic differences. I also refer to Bobda (2000) for a phonological description of Ghanaian English and Huber & Dako (2004) for a morphosyntactic description.

6 Pipkins (2004) carried out a survey of 60 students at prestigious secondary schools in Cape Coast. The students were asked whether they thought Student Pidgin should be taught at school or used in institutions like the church and parliament. The students said they did not want this to happen because it would spoil their English. Findings along these lines are also reported by Guerini (2008). She surveyed a random sample of 90 students from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ghana (Accra) in September 2004 by means of a written questionnaire about their attitudes to English and Akan, one of the major native languages of the Ghanaian population in terms of numbers of speakers. (The name Akan actually indicates a cluster of dialects, including Asante, Twi and Fante.) 39 respondents out of 90 declared Akan to be their native language. Contrary to Guerini's expectation, the Akan language appeared to be opposed not only by students with a different mother tongue, but also by the majority of Akan speakers themselves. Indeed, 79.5% of Akan speakers pronounced themselves to be against the use of Akan primary school lessons, whereas almost the entire group (94.9%) rejected the introduction of Akan as the medium of instruction at college and university. The results confirm the perceived economic worth of good competence in English, as well as the belief that the language of a single ethnic group should not be imposed on the others, with the language introduced by the former colonial administration being 'neutral' in this respect.

7 Boarding schools in Ghana are an inheritance of former British colonial times. However, while in England boarding schools are largely private and a factor in the class system, Ghana has a predominantly boarding school system and many of them are public. This is a legacy of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah (1952–1966), who introduced a policy of mass education and established dozens of secondary boarding schools throughout the country. As many different ethnic groups were placed in these boarding schools together, they are thought to have helped prevent ethnic tensions occurring in Ghana (BBC Focus on Africa, 19 December 2006). Dako (2002) has also argued that isolation in boarding schools, and later on university campuses, removed from traditional family and cultural influences, created the situation for students to develop Student Pidgin.

8 I would like to express my gratitude to those students who volunteered their time and insights for the interview.

9 The concept of 'community of practice' derives from Wenger (1998) and was introduced into sociolinguistics by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992), both cited in Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999).

10 This is in fact reminiscent of Blommaert & Gijssels' (1990) analysis of Campus Kiswahili, a non-standard variety of English that is attested at universities in Tanzania. According to Blommaert and Gijssels (1990), one of the linguistic characteristics of Campus Kiswahili is that speakers blend two qualitatively high variants of languages: 'good' Swahili and 'good' English. In this quality of the mixed languages, Campus Kiswahili is distinguished from other English-interfered variants of Dar-es-Salaam Swahili. The sociolinguistic correlate is that the use of Campus Kiswahili is restricted to university academic personnel. For others, good English is inaccessible, partly because of the local education policy, which is highly selective, and partly because of the national language policy, which used to ban English from public life. When a University staff member switches to Campus Kiswahili, this choice automatically excludes all those who have not obtained the same degree of mastery in the two languages. In other words, the identity construction effected through Campus Kiswahili is one that makes use of an exclusive resource, one that excludes 90% of society. According to Blommaert and Gijssels (1990), Campus Kiswahili is largely anti-social in nature: it isolates the participants from the rest of society by means of the privileged use of a rare commodity.

11 Another occurrence of an intermediate variety may be Estuary English, as identified in 1981 by David Rosewarne in the UK. Linguistically, Estuary English can be characterized as a mixture of RP with some Cockney features and some new features. Crystal (2007) on the BBC website *Voices* describes Estuary English as 'a down-market trend towards "ordinary" (as opposed to "posh") speech by the middle class', who do not wish to be associated with the snobbery

of RP, as well as 'as an upmarket movement of originally Cockney speakers'.

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