

Pidgin English

A Pidgin language is a grammatically simplified means of communication that develops between two or more groups that do not have a language in common. It is a mixture of languages and is deliberately kept simple to ease communication. It is commonly used in situations such as trade, where there is no common language between the traders.

Pidgin is usually learned as a second language. It is built using words from multiple languages. It allows people who have no common language to communicate.

Pidgin English is a mixture of English and other languages. Most West African countries have many different ethnic groups who do not have a common language, so Pidgin English has developed there. It is widely spoken in Nigeria, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon.

There are some differences between the Pidgins of these countries, because English is mixed with different languages in each country, but they are usually mutually understandable. A form of Pidgin English has developed into a mother tongue for the Krio community in Sierra Leone, which non-Krios can find difficult to understand.

What is so special about Pidgin English?

"It's very fluid, it keeps changing all the time and it's expressive too." says Bilkisu Labran, head of the BBC language services for Nigeria.

"Sometimes, if you don't have a word for something, you can just create an onomatopoeic sound. It will be appreciated and understood."

"I can talk about gun shots as '*ga-baga-baga-baga*' and you understand me. You know it was a machine gun." Also, Pidgin doesn't follow grammatical rules!

Examples of Pidgin English:

- How far? = How are you?
- I wan chop = I want to eat
- Do you wan chop? = Do you want to eat?
- Gift me = Give me something
- No wahala = No problem
- Mumu = Foreigner
- Abeg = Please
- I from Nigeria = I come from Nigeria
- I no no = I don't know
- Where you be? = Where are you?
- You sabi? = Do you know?
- Is troway = It is a waste
- Kurukere waka = Illegal business
- Pepper no dey = I don't have any money

How many people speak it?

It is difficult to know the precise number of speakers, because it is not formally studied in schools and is spoken in varying degrees of proficiency. But millions of people speak it every day. Nigeria is estimated to have between 3 and 5 million people who primarily use Pidgin English in their day-to-day interactions. But it is a second language for 75 million people in Nigeria, about half the population. Pidgin English is not (yet) an official language in West Africa. In some schools, children are disciplined if they speak Pidgin, instead of their mother tongue. However, some radio stations broadcast in Pidgin English.

Nigerian English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sCIUqI11S8> (4 mins)

Pidgin Phrases: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtLagRaRCOo> (8 min)

Pidgin English in Gabon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fC5nkdHV2b8> (4 mins)