

A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Language Choice among Yoruba - English Bilinguals of Bishop Onabanjo High School Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

In spite of the rich social context of secondary schools as a linguistic environment, there is an observed lack of linguists' attention as evidenced by the scanty works available in sociolinguistic researches in secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis (Adekunle, 1990). This paper is motivated by the need to investigate the factors influencing the language preference and the possible sociolinguistic implications. It sets out to investigate the language choice of members of Bishop Onabanjo High School, Ibadan as a bilingual speech community.

Introduction

Nigeria is generally referred to as Africa in a miniature given the diversity of her people. According to Bamgbose, (1971), Nigeria is a multilingual nation with more than 400 indigenous languages and each geographical boundary sees her language as a mark of social identity. English is a second language in Nigeria and in this capacity it has flourished tremendously. It can be said to have the function of a unifying language of interpersonal relationships among linguistically diverse country where the rich language resources can be categorized into the indigenous and non- indigenous languages – major and minor respectively. The English language performs several functions in the country. It has been accorded the status of an official and national language which is predominantly used in the field of administration to conduct government businesses at the three tiers of government- Federal, State and Local.

Furthermore, the Nigerian constitution is written in English and one must have a fairly reasonable grasp of the language to contest in the present political dispensation. Its role in education cannot be over- emphasized. Apart from the fact that English is a subject that must be passed before an individual can be promoted to the next class in schools. It is also used by creative writers to propagate our cultural beliefs to the outside world (Soyele, 2004).

In commerce, industry and the media (print and electronics), English serves as an effective tool in the transaction of daily businesses and dissemination of information. Its extensive use seems to have reduced the functions and domains of almost all the Nigerian languages considerably.

According to Adeyanju (2006, P66), Nigerians have been brain-washed and made to accept the superiority of English over their indigenous languages and since existing legislations (Education Ordinances and Codes of 1882 and 1896) assigned specific roles to English and made certification in English mandatory for people who want to be relevant in the scheme of things. Nigerians were unconsciously forced to have a negative attitude towards their mother-tongue. It then became imperative for Nigerians to learn and speak English. The most agonizing aspect of it is that, even after several years of independence the relics of this linguistic imperialism persist till today as many Nigerians prefer to speak English to their children rather than their mother tongue. English is spoken by more than 20 percent of Nigerians. The linguistic situation in Nigeria reveals the dominance of English in terms of spread, acceptance and its official status. (Igboanusi, 2002).

The findings of the above cited researches invariably bring up questions on the choice of people for language policies in a speech community, such questions include:

1. What factors determine the language choice of Yoruba-English bilinguals of Bishop Onabanjo High School?
2. What are the factors that are influential on such a preference as well as its possible sociolinguistic implications for both the immediate and extended speech communities?

The focus of this paper is therefore geared towards the factors influencing the language Choice of Yoruba-English bilinguals of Bishop Onabanjo High School as a speech Community.

Language Choice

According to Romaine (2000, P35), “the first step in understanding what choices are available to speakers is to gain some idea of what languages and varieties are available to them in a particular social context. Context in this case may be thought of in its widest sense as the varieties made available either officially or unofficially such as Oyo or in a very narrow sense, as the varieties available in Bishop Onabanjo High School, Ibadan. One way of looking at language use in society is to see it in terms of making choices.

According to Hoffman (1991), human communication entails selecting from the linguistic and stylistic items available, that is favoring some and rejecting others. This choice can be made consciously or unconsciously. Similarly, members of bilingual societies are faced with wider choices in their language use. The language choice of bilinguals whether individual or societal will always presupposes that more than one language is available to the speaker and that he/she will be sufficiently proficient in the languages concerned for a genuine choice to present itself. This does not imply equal competence in both

languages on the parts of the individual. Given the multiple languages available within the communicative repertoire of a community, speakers must select the code and interaction strategy to be used in any specific context knowing the alternatives and the rules for appropriate choice from among them; this is part of the speakers' communicative competence (Trioke, 1992). Whenever speakers of two or more languages come together a decision has to be made. Language choice may also be affected by utilitarian considerations. A speaker may feel that the use of a particular language will place him in an advantageous position either within a group or within a wider social context (Buda 1991). If his antagonists in a discussion or argument are less fluent than he is, this will clearly serve to give him a valuable edge. It is obvious that a large number of factors influence language choice and many other factors may work either with or against each other which will produce a complex web of interaction.

Factors Responsible for Language Choice

According to Hoffman (1991), the factors influencing language choice are the same for adult and children. Listed below are some of the determinants of language selection of bilinguals. These factors are considered to have especially strong influences on the choice people make in discourse.

These include:

- (i) The person(s) engaged in the speech event.
- (ii) The setting / place/ situation.
- (iii) The function or purpose of interaction.
- (iv) The topic
- (v) Linguistic Proficiency
- (vi) Attitude

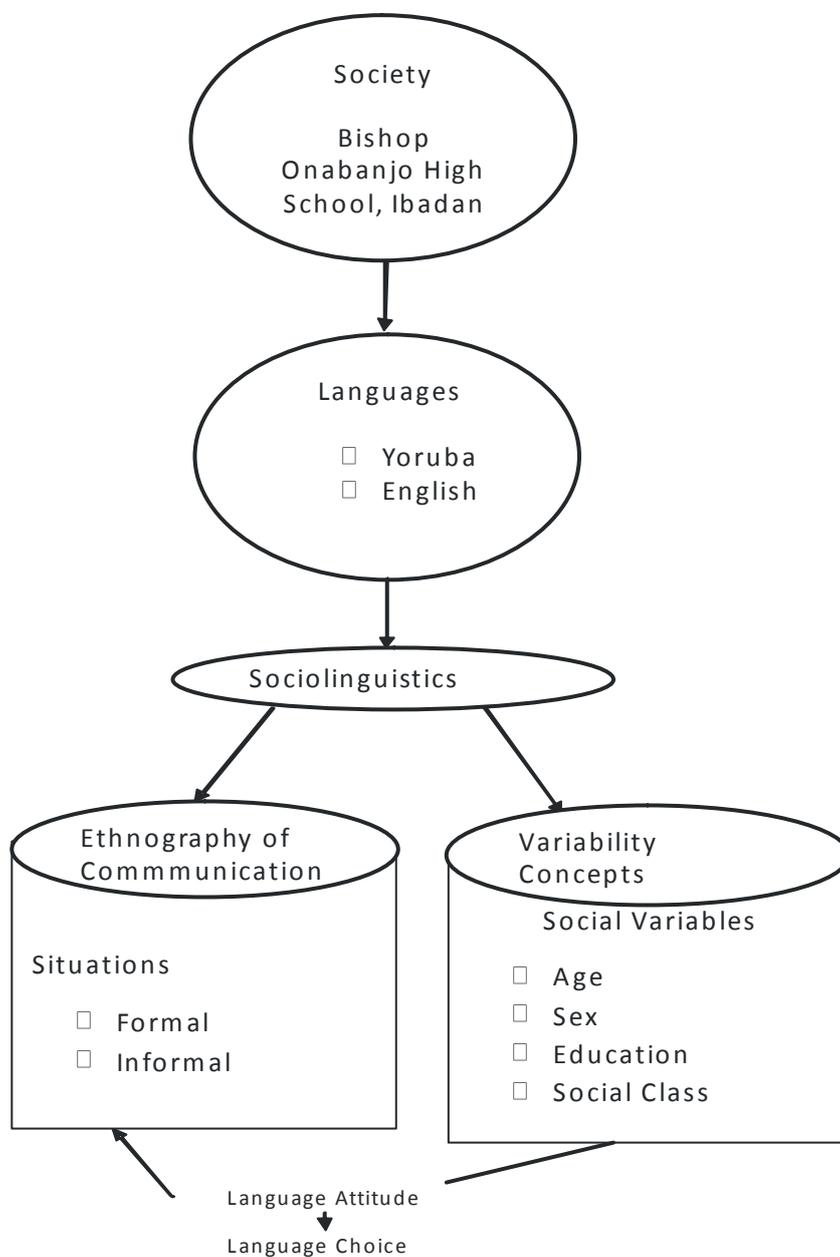
Theoretical Framework

Language does not exist in a vacuum in the context of the society and since society as a matter of necessity for its existence, must choose language, the two (language and society) are inseparable. Therefore, any study of language excludes the society that uses it is an incomplete exercise (Adeyanju, 2002). The above implies that language and society are inseparable. It is existence of the society that brings about language. Sociolinguistics is that field of study which is interested in the relationship between language and the society, thus, Hudson (1980) defined sociolinguistics as the study of language in relation to the society.

Olorunfoba-Oju (1999:122) is of the opinion that sociolinguistics is concerned with language and social interaction. He further claims that precisely, sociolinguistics deals with the linguistic indices of social interaction, that is aspect of languages that express, indicate or show evidence of the various situations obtaining in the society.

In this research, the focus is on the factors that are influential on such a preference as well as its sociolinguistic implication on the speech community among the Yoruba –English bilinguals.

Fig 1: PROPOSED INTEGRATED SOCIOLINGUISTIC MODEL



Methodology

This paper combines the use of questionnaire and participatory observation as instrument of collecting data. It also presents the integrated linguistic model as the adopted analytical framework for the study. A total of 120 respondents were sampled for the study based on stratified random sampling. These include: 20 teachers and 100 students. The questionnaire is made up of two sections, i.e. the personal data and the question items.

There were eight questionnaire items. The questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher; some copies were retrieved immediately while the others were collected later. One hundred and twenty questionnaires were administered but only 100 were retrieved. The Yoruba – English bilinguals covered a range from students to a number of staff. The time the researcher was waiting for the questionnaires to be filled out also gave ample opportunity to observe the language preference of the bilinguals.

Data Analysis and Findings

Using integrated sociolinguistic model which utilizes the resources of Labov's variability concept and Dell Hymens' Ethnography of communication as well as the concept of language attitude. The study adopted an interpretive approach to the evaluation of participants' responses towards both Yoruba and English in the context of Bishop Onabanjo High school, Ibadan. This paper discusses the findings of the study with respect to respondents' language choice as motivated by the tripartial sociolinguistic factors of situation, social variables and language attitude. The following tables were generated.

Table 1: Situational Influence on Respondents' Language Choice

Language	<u>Situations of Use</u>		
	Formal Only	Informal Only	Both Situation
Yoruba	2	44	54
English	62	10	28

Table 1 shows that 62% of the population used English, while only 2% used Yoruba during formal situation. This result clearly indicates that English is the official language of Bishop Onabanjo High School, Ibadan; Hence it is used to discharge their official duties. This result is however expected because the English language is used in schools for discharging the day-to-day activities, filing records, issuing queries and making responses (Odumosu 1990 as cited by (Soyele, 2009). Under the informal situation, the result shows that 44% of the population use Yoruba while only 10% use English. The reason for this is not fat- fetched. First, English is ruled, hence this makes it easy for the Yoruba–English

bilinguals to use Yoruba more in informal situation so as to be free in communicating their experiences. Second, since Yoruba is their modern tongue, they speak it unconsciously and third, the respondents in the study speak more familiar with the rules of the Yoruba language thereby giving them confidence in speaking it.

The central claim of Dell Hymes' Ethnography of communication is that language is context dependence which is explored in the situation. Speakers make choices of language based on situations. As situation refers to the context under which language is used. This may be formal or informal as a case in Bishop Onabanjo High School, Ibadan.

Formal situation here refers to the following periods:

- Assembly periods
- Class activities (teaching and learning)
- Teacher addressing student(s) officially and,
- Examination hall and other assessment periods

While Informal situations refer to:

- Unofficial interaction with others
- Personal discussions or running errands within the school premises.

Table 2: Respondents' Linguistic Status

Respondents' Mother Tongue	Total Number
Yoruba	100
English	Nil

Table 2 shows the linguistic status of all the respondents. The entire study population had Yoruba as their mother tongue while none of the respondents has English as his/her mother tongue. This projects the dominance of Yoruba over English and thus gives it some advantage of favorable attitude over English among users in this speech community.

Table 3: Respondents' by Social Status

S o c i a l V a r i a b l e s	T o t a l S a m p l e
S E X	40
M a l e	60
F e m a l e	
	N i l
A G E B R A C K E T	70
1 - 19 yrs	10
20 - 25 yrs	20
26 -30 yrs	
31+	20
O C C U P A T I O N	80
S t a f f	100
S t u d e n t s	
T o t a l R e s p o n d e n t s	

Table 3 shows that age difference is one of the social factors that is influential on the choice of code in this speech community. It is observed that the older generations were more conservative with the use of language. They prefer to speak Yoruba; this was discovered during formal situation. Even under informal situation, the younger ones still used English more in their interactions. One major point to back up this observation could be seen in the way the younger ones send messages through text in English while the older ones prefer to make calls to enable them use Yoruba to communicate with their callers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has shown that a bilingual in a multilingual state like Nigeria is bound to be affected by several factors responsible for the choice of code in ones speech community. It also observed lack of linguists' attention as evidenced by the few works available in socio-linguistic researches in secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis.

Furthermore, data collected were analyzed with the facility of an integrated sociolinguistic model (see model on figure 1). This harmonized the resources of both Dell Hymes Ethnography of Communication and Labov's Variability Concept and Language Attitude (Fig 1). The justification for this derived model comes from the perceived inadequacy of the sociolinguistic models to singularly provide an objective analytical framework for the nature of this data.

It was also discovered that the attitude of the bilinguals is unstable (positive and negative) in their use of language which means there is a constant movement from negative to positive and vice versa in their choice between Yoruba and English. The outcome of this result is known as language attitude fluctuation. This is seen to be caused by the level of influence of the context of situation imposed on speaker's choices.

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