

RELEVANCE OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND THE INDIGENIZATION OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract:

Language is an attitude subject, therefore, the awareness of attitude in any policy for language, especially in a multilingual context is very essential. No policy will succeed if it does not conform to the expressed attitude of those involved and also persuade those who express negative attitude about the rightness of the policy. Thus, language attitude offers an interesting area of study in sociolinguistics. The focus of this paper is to investigate the relevance of sociolinguistics to the indigenization of English in Nigeria and determine the trend of the nation's compliance to indigenization of English in the country.

The focus of the sociolinguist is on the effect that social institutions have on language and how the use of language affects each social class. As at today, in most educated Nigerian homes, English is encouraged as a medium of communication, hence its relevance and adoption in the society as an indigenized language.

Keywords: Language, sociolinguistics, English Language and Indigenization of English Language

Introduction:

There are many socio-historical factors that can motivate attitudes towards language either positively or negatively. Early language policies and language development relisting in standardization of selected languages and the neglect of others, as well as socio-historical ecology of particular languages among others abound. For instance, Mulhausler (1992) cited in Adegbija (1994) posits that Kiswahili in Tanzania received a big boost because of language ecology factors that have favoured its geographical spread, its ability to accommodate new terms and the strong governmental support, which it has enjoyed. In the Nigerian context, Hausa, Yorùbá and Igbo are being officially promoted and groomed to be national languages. This situation would definitely attract positive attitude from the speakers of the languages while the speakers of the small group languages, who have the fear of being marginalized would exhibit negative attitudes to the three main languages.

Sociolinguistics

'Language cannot exists without society, neither can society exists without language' (Adeyanju, 2002). The above implies that language and society are two inseparable phenomena. It is the existence of the society that brings about language, a means of interpersonal relationship. Likewise, it is the existence of language that ensures the sustenance of the structure of society. Sociolinguistics is that field of study, which is interested in the relationship between the two phenomena: Language and society.

Hudson (1980) defines sociolinguistics as the study of language in relation to the society. Crystal (1997) in the same vein describes it as the study of the interaction between language and the structure and functioning of society. The two definitions thus portray sociolinguistics as probing into the linguistics codes, which are used in the composition of the society. It goes to say

that sociolinguistics does not only explain the complexities of man in using language but also the role language plays in the structure of the society.

Sociolinguistics has a slight distinction from sociology of language. As explained by Hudson (1980), sociology of language is primarily concerned with the study of the society and how the society uses language. The emphasis is on society, which according to Akindele and Adegbite (1999) is viewed as broader than language and therefore, provides the context in which all language behaviours operate.

Sociology of language embraces theories like ethnography of communication by Del Hymes as well as issues like language of the social class, the relationship between language and culture and forms of interaction. However, scholars have noted that there is no clear-cut differentiation between sociolinguistics and sociology of language. "There is an overlap in the preoccupation of the sociology of language and sociolinguistics in such a way that the two concepts are used interchangeably to describe the relationship between language and society". (Akindele and Adegbite (1999).

Sociolinguistics, unlike formal linguistics, is interested in the extra-linguistic phenomena of utterance or speech, made by people in the society. Sociolinguistics thus looks beyond the sentence level and studies the differences in language in relation to the different social groups, instead of being prescriptive. Sociolinguistics further attempts to investigate and describe features of verbal interaction peculiar to each social class because each social group has its own linguistic distinctions. The focus of the sociolinguist therefore is on the effect social institutions have on language and how the use of language affects each social class.

Sociolinguistics provides the ground for the analysis of not only what the speaker says but also who the speaker is, what his relationship with his interlocutor is, how the utterance is made and why it is made? Sociolinguistics tries to disclose the norms of linguistic usage. It analyses the generally accepted social pattern of language use and behavior toward language in particular communities.

Sociolinguistics, in addition, examines the relationship which exists between language, culture and traditions of a speech community. It investigates how people manage their language in relation to their cultural backgrounds and goals of iteration. This means that sociolinguistics deals with language variation and belief systems of the human race. Yule (1996: 105) states that Sociolinguistics has been described to deal with the interrelationship between language and society. It has strong connections to anthropology, through the investigation of language and culture, through the crucial role that language plays in the organization of social groups and institutions.

Sociolinguistics is also concerned with the social organization of language. It examines the relationship between language and society. In other words, it focuses upon language use and also language attitude and overt behavior towards language users. This subsumes the aspect of social psychology, particularly with regards to how attitudes and perception are expressed and how in-group and out-group behaviours are identified. Every society has its own attitude to dialects and other forms of language being used. For example, in Nigeria, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are identified as three major languages while English, an exoglossic language is equally the language of politics, trade, commerce, science and technology among others. The societal or individual attitudes towards the use of language offer an interesting field of inquiry for Sociolinguistics.

According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999), Sociolinguistics further involves language policy and planning, which consider language problems of nations, language in education, language selection etc. Most multi-lingual speech communities usually have language problems facing them. In such situations, government policies are usually applied to assign roles and functions to the languages. Sociolinguistics, as a field is interested in the use of language and social organization behavior and it is also interested in investigating how such policies work and the attitudes of users.

Yet another concern of sociolinguistics is the provision of answer to the question: what accounts for differential changes in the social organization of language use and behavior toward language? This, according to Fishman (1968) is dynamic sociology of language. This aspect of sociolinguistics tries to explain why and how the social organization use and behavior towards language have become selectively different in the same social networks or communities on two different occasions. It further seeks to explain why and how two once similar social networks or communities have arrived at a quite different social organization of language use and behavior toward language. Sociolinguistics is therefore relevant to the study of language attitude and language shift among users in a multilingual setting. The sociolinguistics theories that are relevant to this paper are discussed presently.

Sociolinguistics Theories

The major pre-occupation of Sociolinguistics is the scientific study of language in social contexts, hence, Sociolinguistics theories lay emphasis on the relationship between linguistic properties and the social conditions. In Sociolinguistics, language is not considered in isolation but rather, as it relates to the social and cultural structures in place. Emphasis on the relevance of Sociolinguistics is presented as follows:

...Linguistics is merely interested in accounting for the structure of language at various levels such as lexis, syntax, phonological etc. without taking into consideration the socio contexts in which such linguistics-structures are used. Such a study cannot be complete, hence the relevance of sociolinguistics (Adeyanju, 2002)

Thus, sociolinguistics lays emphasis on the study of human speech and the social functions. It sees language as eliciting the different social segments in the society and analyses "who makes what utterance, where it is made, how it is made and why it is made" (Omole, 1985: 29). We can thus see sociolinguistics as a field that explores all topics and issues concerned with the social organization of language in the society and also the various dispositions of language users.

There are frameworks, which have been established by eminent scholars, for carrying out studies in Sociolinguistics. Language attitude theory as enunciated by the behaviourist and mentalist orientation is basically relevant to this study.

Language Attitude Determinant

In African multilingual and multicultural contexts, there are some factors that could be said to determine the formation and entrenchment of particular language attitude. Amongst them are socio-historical forces, quest for social mobility, allocation of function to languages etc.

Socio-historical Forces

Colonialism in Africa is a big factor that brought the exoglossic languages like English and French to most African countries. The Colonial masters ensured the implantation of such exoglossic languages to function as the official language. Owing to the official function of the languages and their usefulness in the domain of education in particular, they have over the years been associated with power, prestige, progress, success and achievement. Such associations have generally resulted to their receiving high positive evaluation.

According to Adegbija (1994), post-colonial language policies have further served to ensure the entrenchment of European languages in African countries. For instance, the period before and immediately after independence in Nigeria was marked by a near-negative attitude to English. People's minds started gradually to be directed towards their own country and indeed wanted their language to replace the English language. However, the post-colonial policy

makers generally fear that major changes could result in an unfavourable political backlash. Moreover, the fact that European languages have for long been performing mainly "High" function means that they have become entrenched in such domains, e.g. education and official communication. By contrast, however, the fact that the indigenous languages have been denied such functions means that they are not associated with high functions. The low status given the indigenous languages in the area of education thus makes many Nigerians believe that the languages can never function, for example, in the expression of science and technology.

The quest for social mobility

Generally, most individuals do not enjoy static existence. People want to move up the social ladder and be seen as achievers. An important component of the desire to achieve is language usage. Language is used to project identity and image in order to achieve particular goals and to realize some potential. In a multilingual setting, there is a natural conflict between the different languages for the fulfilling of these roles. Any language, which helps to achieve such goals and proves able to fulfill our crucial instrumental, integrative and other pragmatic needs, tends naturally to command our admiration and respect and thus attracts positive attitudes.

According to Obanya (1992), the ego-satisfying instrumental potentialities of European languages in Africa have been predominant reasons for their strong pulling force and attraction, especially in the desire to rise socially. In Nigeria for instance, the English language is so important that there is a general feeling that without it, one cannot attain a great height. Virtually, all upper cadre civil service jobs and higher education are impossible to attain without competence in English. Naturally therefore, over the years, those who desire to rise know that this language (English) carries a lot of weight and so pay keen attention to acquiring competence in it. Often in Nigeria, incompetence in English translates into not being counted among the power broking and power wielding small elite club (Adegbija, 1994:71).

The desire for upward social mobility as a factor influencing attitudes towards exoglossic languages is not peculiar to Nigeria alone in Africa. Scholars have made interesting comments that give an insight into the development of social attitudes. Such comments from the study of languages choice in Kampala are as follows:

In most Kampala situations requiring a lingua Franca, most people are likely to speak Swahili. But Swahili is still considered by most Africans to be the language of the less educated. English is recognized as the language of learning and position. Parents, even though may speak Swahili regularly and English infrequently or not at all, want their children to learn English as well as Swahili. (Scotton, 2002: 129).

Walusinmbi makes a similar discovery with regard to a review of the mother tongue for teaching in Uganda. It goes thus:

Teachers as well as parents believe that English is the only means, which will enable children to pass the primary leaving examinations, to enter secondary school or any other post primary institution and eventually secure good jobs (Walusimbi, 1971:147)

In Nigeria too, the English language commands upward social mobility in many respects than the indigenous languages. The reasons are that English is the language of commerce and law, politics and administration, education and of instruction at all levels above the primary school. As such, adequate knowledge of English is an indispensable requirement for anyone to rise in status. Such functions attached to exoglossic languages in sub-Saharan Africa will

continue to be a strong basis for evolution of positive social attitudes towards them and will further entrench their high valuation. The position is corroborated as follows:

Such findings about the functions of exoglossic languages are considered with the reality of the situation in all countries where an exoglossic language is the official language. Not only do parents want their children to learn this language, they sometimes ensure, by sending the children to special schools, that they start learning the languages from an early age. (Bamgbose, 1979: 20)

In most educated Nigeria homes, English is encouraged as a medium of communication. In fact, in some middle class educated homes you sometimes find the inscription. 'No speaking in vernacular'. The goal of such parents is to ensure that their children get familiar with the use of English, the prestigious language of social mobility in the country. Thus, there is the irresistible quest for vertical social mobility amongst our people. This definitely is a factor that determines people's positive attitudes to the language.

Allocation of Functions to Languages

Another factor determining language attitudes is seen in the significant functions assigned to a language. A language that plays an important role in a community grows and gains more respect than a language not officially assigned functions.

The official recognition, support or functions accorded a language tend to affect the prestige of that language and the value judgment made concerning it. (Adegbija, 1994:71). For example, African languages like Kiswahili in East Africa and Hausa in many parts of West Africa that have received institutional support or been assigned official functions nationally, regionally, or even locally, have grown considerably in stature and esteem. On the other hand, languages that have no institutional support generally tend to dwindle in influence unless their speakers do something positive to salvage their destiny.

The English language in Nigeria is an exoglossic language which has continued to grow in esteem as a result of the various functions allotted to it. For instance, university education is virtually impossible without a credit pass in English. Such a role influences people's attitude to it. A citizen who is indifferent and refuses to see the attitudinal line suggested by the policy does so at his peril and remains externally damned by the system unless he can, by dint of personal effort do something else to justify this defiance and thus maintain a respectable living. The obstacle caused by English would however remain in the psyche and life history of such a person. This could leave an imprint of hostility administration. Hostility, because a life ambition has been prematurely cut-short and crushed by a language of secret administration because the language and those able to acquire competence in it are looked up to as apparently worthier.

The Survivor Factor

The desire for survival of people often dictates attitudes towards language. This factor particularly obtains among speakers of small or minority languages. Generally, ethno-linguistic rivalry between groups often results in an exaggerated attitude of language and culture preservation and loyalty.

In the case of minority groups, such strategies often imply an attitude of the glorification, love for, or hallowing of the minority language. Such attitudes could emphasize the desire for discreteness. On the other hand, the desire not to continue being dominated or threatened as a member of a minority group sometimes results in the desire for assimilation with speakers of the language that constitutes a threat and this could be interpreted as integrative motivation. This

tends to be particularly true when ultimate survival is perceived to hinge on assimilation. Jantsje (1990:91) observes that minority language speakers usually do not want to lose something, which is their own but do not also see any future utility of the language. The result of this conflicting attitude is probably a kind of general indifference.

The Indigenization of English in Nigeria

Indigenization of English in Nigeria could be seen as an act of adapting and taming the English language to fit or suit the Nigerian environment. It is also known as "nativisation" or domestication. According to Adegbija (2004), the English language in Nigeria has been adapted for home use and made applicable to our numerous conveniences, experiences, nuances and sensibilities.

Indigenization implies that English has become Nigerian property. Various authors have long maintained this position. Tamuno (1979) opines that the English language "is no longer foreign" to Nigeria for we have effectively appropriated it". Ubahakwe (1979) establishes the status of Nigerian English as a dialect subset, and Awonusi (1990) concludes that the English language in Nigeria "has come of age".

The indigenization process brings about the development of an internal norm, which is evident from the fact that numerous structures that would be totally unintelligible to native speakers of English are used in Nigeria. The outcome of the norm thus brings about Nigeria English. Some scholars in the past had denied the existence of Nigerian English and attributed its features to deviations from standard British English. However, many notable scholars such as Adetugbo (1987), Adegbija (1989), Banjo (1995), assert that English exists and indeed has numerous sociology sub-types with the standard sub-variety being the most prestigious. Kujore (1985), Egbe (1989), Awonusi (1990) are among several studies that have attempted to describe the nature and character of Nigerian English. Igboanusi (2001) went a little further in the characterization of Nigerian English by coming out with a dictionary of Nigerian English usage. Such studies demonstrate beyond doubt that the domestication of English in Nigeria has gone a long way (Adegbija, 2004:21).

The domestication of English in Nigeria is seen as a natural response to yawning linguistic and socio-cultural needs. No language in contact can exist in a vacuum; hence, the day-to-day contact of English with many indigenous languages in Nigeria brings interferences. This has created the need for new ideas and mode of thought to be expressed in new ways that are not available in the native variety of English. The teaching of English by second language teachers is yet another factor that enhanced the domestication of English in Nigeria. Since the English language as used in the L1 setting cannot adequately express certain aspects of our socio-cultural heritage, it becomes inevitable to fashion out expressions of English that are most apt for the Nigerian situation.

According to Adekunle (1979:39) English has come to a new ethno linguistic environment and its contact with local languages and speech habits, as well as its use to project local customs and traditions has naturally resulted in its being assimilated into the local culture and acquisition of a local colour. Bamiro (1991) attributed a number of factors to the domestication of English in Nigeria. First is the obedience of the principle of least effort and economy of expressions e.g 'too know' (someone who claims to be very knowledgeable). Another factor is the indomitable, pervasive and omnipresent media influence, either in bringing entirely new words into existence or in establishing and confirming them. Examples are "bottom power" (favour obtained by a woman via her femininity) or the granting of sexual favours) 'national cake' (assets, rights and privileges to which Nigerian citizens consider themselves entitled). The standardization of idiosyncrasies and errors where an erroneous usage subsequently gains legitimacy, attention and admiration is yet another factor for domesticating

English. A term can gain acceptance as a standard Nigerian English expression either because of the importance of the user or the topicality of the context of usage. An example of this is “a man of timber and caliber” attributed to Kingsley Mbadiwe, a famous Nigerian politician. Also ‘trouble-shooter’ is used in Nigeria in reference to someone who foments trouble, rather than the original English sense of someone who prevents trouble from occurring or somehow who shoots at trouble.

Thus, the indigenization or domestication of English in Nigeria is a continuous process. It is a process that brings about varieties of Nigerian English which further shows that English is being accepted on our own terms and that native speakers of English no longer have copy right ownership of the language. Conclusively, domestication is a distinct Nigerian identity-affirming process that implies “we are unique, our brand of English is peculiar” (Adegbija, 2004:39).

The Future of English in Nigeria

Attitude of users is one of the factors that determines the existence or extinction of a language. Some factors have been helping to construct positive attitudes towards English in Nigeria. The domestication of the language in Nigeria is one of the major factors that have helped to promote positive attitude to it in the country.

English in Nigeria is no longer seen as foreign. Its importance and role in the country is so enormous that its future is bright considering the following factors: Nigeria is a multi-lingual nation that has found it difficult to select a single national language out of her over 400 indigenous languages. The sensitive nature of the National language question has not enabled successive governments to formulate a policy that would pick one language as the national language. What has been done so far is the identification of three major languages i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. This problematic multi-lingual situation in Nigeria has succeeded in giving English an upper hand and a domineering status of the official language and lingual Franca.

According to Adegbija (2004) the functions the English language is officially assigned (*de jure*) and those it is seen to be actually performing in practice, (*de facto*) has determined its esteem and future. The English language has been assigned vital high functions both constitutionally and in practice, officially. Its esteem in the hearts of future generations is therefore destined to continue to soar. Such functions attract value to a language and carve out a niche for it in the future both practically and in the hearts of Nigerians.

Another factor that entrenches the future of English is the unchallenged and unparalleled role of the language in Nigerian education system. As long as our policy makers continue to pay only lip services to indigenous languages, English will continue to become more firmly rooted. Language grows and becomes established with use. English is used mostly in Nigerian education. It will therefore continue to wax stronger. Most indigenous languages, including even the major ones, are minimally used in educational circles. They will therefore continue to diminish in importance in the educational sector.

The languages of media and literature dominate the hearts and lives of a people. In Nigeria today, the percentage of use of the English for media and literature is higher than the indigenous languages. According to Adegbija (2004:37), “one of the consequences of the domestication of English in Nigeria is that a native Nigerian English literature has continued to blossom”. This has further entrenched English and secured its future. Newspapers, magazines, tracts, leaflets are mostly written in English and Nigerians now have positive attitude to English in order to read and enjoy the information disseminated.

Conclusion

English is a world language. This status will continue to have effect on the future of Nigerian English. English is the world's language of information dissemination of sports, entertainment, culture and arts and of science and technology par excellence and so on.

This international status of English has a backwash effect on the esteem of institutionalized Englishes or domesticated Englishes. What is more, the internet has made the

world a global village and English is the predominant language of the internet. So, as Nigeria wants to flow along with the internet, its domesticated English will also flow along. Thus, the use of Nigerian English will result in becoming more internationally acceptable and intelligible as the internet is creating a linguistic and cultural melting pot.

Thus, the globalization of our psyche and of our environment will further entrench Nigerian English in the Nigerian psyche. The computer owns the age and has become the language of the world and every nation on earth is rushing to exploit the benefits of the internet. Nigeria's participation is carried out in Nigerian English. Given no policy change in practice, therefore, it can be said that the domestication of English will continue and Nigerian English will remain perpetually salient in our affairs as a linguistic strategy for making us out, as Nigerians, especially in the global community. In fact, in the opinion of Banjo (1996: 149), the English language, having fully naturalized, would be on its way to becoming an indigenous language in the country, and one which, in time might well assume the status of the tongue of some Nigerians.

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