SOCIOLINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE IN FUNERAL TRIBUTES BY SELECTED YORUBA-ENGLISH BILINGUALS IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study identified the content and structure of funeral tributes and foregrounded the social contexts of delivery of funeral tributes. It examined and analysed the linguistic features employed by Yoruba-English bilinguals to convey emotion for their dead relatives through tributes delivery, and it discussed the usage and relevance of sociolinguistic features utilised in funeral tributes. This was with a view to analysing the sociolinguistic features of funeral tributes by Yoruba English bilinguals in Southwestern Nigeria.

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source comprised 30 audio-visual recorded funeral tribute deliveries of Yoruba-English bilinguals drawn from the Yoruba speaking states of Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo and Ekiti in Southwestern Nigeria. These six states constitute the main location of Yoruba-English bilinguals in Nigeria. Five spoken funeral tributes were audio-visually recorded from each of the six states. The thirty funeral tributes consisted of fifteen tributes made during the Christian wakes and funeral services of Christian faithful. From these fifteen, ten were selected from those given at home domain, while the remaining five were from the church domain. The reason for this disparity was that there is usually more time to give tributes at home during wakes than in the church. There were another fifteen tribute speeches made during the funeral services (janazah and fidau) of Muslim faithful. All these were at the home domain as Muslims do not usually take their deceased faithful to the mosque for burial rites. The secondary source included journal articles, books, and the Internet. The study adopted a qualitative approach to the analysis and description of data. The contextual domains of the funeral tributes delivery was looked into and the schematic and rhetorical contents of the tributes were examined. In doing this, Swales move-
model rhetorical structure was employed. Theoretical insights were drawn from certain sociolinguistic theories such as ethnography, socio-pragmatic, Systemic Functional Grammar and so on.

The results showed that the main communicative purpose of funeral tributes among the Yoruba was to praise the dead. The study revealed that funeral tributes contained three major moves of attention catching, thesis and denouement, each of which was realised through various steps. This was done in three major social contexts: situational, psychological and socio-cultural. The study discovered that certain linguistic features at various levels of description; lexical, syntactic, and so on played important roles in fulfilling the communicative purpose of tribute speeches. Finally, the study revealed that the Yoruba-English bilinguals utilised certain sociolinguistic features such as social identity, elastic and Nigerianised address terms, euphemism, politeness principles in form of appropriation maxim, sympathy maxim, modesty maxim and Pollyanna principle.

The study concluded that the sociolinguistic model applied for the analysis of funeral tributes by Yoruba-English bilinguals in Southwestern Nigeria demonstrated that language cannot be separated from culture. It also concluded that language and culture serve as two sides of the same coin in socio-cultural interactions.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This chapter gives background information to the research work. It explains how the English language came to be used in Nigeria. It also throws some light on certain key words (such as Nigerian English, Yoruba English, genre, register, tribute and funeral tribute) in the study. The chapter also contains certain theoretical preliminaries of the study namely: the statement of research problems, research questions, aim and objectives of the study, scope, significance and the justification for the study.

1.1. Background Information

1.1.1 Socio-cultural Features of English Usage

Studies in social interactions and socio-cultural language usage have focused on genres of quotidian social interpersonal routines such as greetings, expression of thanks/gratitude and acknowledgements, apology, complaint, compliments and compliment responses, kinship terms, language use in taboo and so forth. All these are speech acts performing different functions and having different meanings in different societies (Yuliana, 2014). Their uses are guarded by cultural and social norms, values and constraints as applicable to specific cultural and linguistic communities in which they are used. When people interact, therefore, they consciously or unconsciously bring to bear their culturally and socially inherited sets of constraints, values and norms to monitor and evaluate their speech and that of their co-interlocutors (Abdallah, 2013). In the literature, it is evident that all of these social interpersonal routines are culturally induced.
and that having a pragmatic understanding of how and when they are used is very germane to successful communication and interpersonal interaction (Saberi 2012; Meiramova and Kulzhanova, 2015).

The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria is an exceedingly traditionalistic and culture-laden society where varieties of such informal routine verbal expressions dominate and permeate everyday interpersonal and social interactions. Indeed, Yoruba has different kinds of compliments and greetings for virtually all human endeavours, occupations, occasions, day and night times, and cultural and social activities (Akindele and Adegbite, 2005). All these socio-cultural and linguistic features are transferred to the English usage of the Yoruba-English bilinguals. Equally, appropriateness of use of these varieties of expressions is also held in high esteem by the Yoruba people of the Southwestern Nigeria. This research attempts to examine the sociolinguistic features of English usage of the Yoruba-English bilinguals as they pay tributes to their dead loved ones. It is our belief that researching into this aspect of language usage would reveal the peculiarity of semantics and pragmatics of the Yoruba-English in funeral tributes.

1.1.2 English Language in Nigeria

It has become a truism that English language has assumed the status of world language and there are many varieties of it all over the world at present. This is so because of daily increasing number of people all over the world who believe that acquiring English as an additional language is to their advantages. Graddol (1999: 62) had sometime forecast that there would be a significant upsurge in the ratio of non-native speakers of English to that of native speakers. He avers that:

the number of people using English as their second language will grow…

This indicates that the balance between L₁ and L₂ speakers will critically change, with L₂ speaker eventually overtaking L₁ speakers.
To language scholars all over the world, the English language has become an enormous field of study as it is being studied and experimented with everyday everywhere.

It is also fast becoming a cliché to say in Nigeria today that English has come to find its footings as an official language. Although it came in subtly as a language of commerce, colonial administration and religion; it official status has given it broader roles as the language of administration, education, the mass media, business transactions, politics, judicial procedure, science, and international communication (Are, 2016). In Nigeria today, the importance of the language is emphasised in the place given it in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (with amendments 2011) and the 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE revised 1981, 1998, 2004 and 2013). In fact, it is the only heritage of the Colonial Master which serves as a means of uniting the linguistic multitudinous nature of the territory. It has become prominent in the education system of the nation and an elitist status symbol for enthusiastic Nigerians who seek after formal education. It holds the key to progress into higher institutions as a minimum credit pass is required in it for admission into any course of study in Nigerian Universities or Polytechnics. That is why it is being taught as a core subject and a medium of instruction right from the primary school to the higher institution of learning.

Akindele and Adegbite (2005) discuss the roles and functions of English language in Nigeria along three major dimensions of accommodation, participation and social mobility. In its accommodation function, English is regarded as an international language which serves as a link between the whole of multi-linguistic and multi-tribal Africa and the outside world. For instance, for Nigeria to become accommodated into international politics, trades, sports, science and technology and other numerous international organisations such as African Union, United Nation Organisation, World Health Organisation, Commonwealth of Nations and so on; there is no other medium of expression than English language. Its accommodation role is further
expressed in its use within the shore of the country. It is the language used as a symbol of national unity. It is a medium of social interaction and inter-ethnic communication among various tribes and ethnics in Nigeria. It is believed that adopting the English language is far more politically expedient than any of other major national/official indigenous languages. So English is adopted to foster unity, social interactions and political stability in the country.

In its participation role, the role of English is explained in terms of functions given it in the constitution. Those who wish to participate in the political, social and economic life of the country must be proficient in English. The knowledge of the language is a pre-requisite for admission into parliament, call to bench/bar, civil service and so on. In its social mobility function, Akindele and Adegbite (ibid) see English usage to entail both horizontal and vertical mobility of people. Based on ability to use the language, a speaker is considered an illiterate or literate. A speaker is regarded an illiterate if s/he cannot speak English even if s/he is literate in his/her indigenous language. Earlier, Banjo (1979) has discussed the Groupings of English language users in Nigeria along what looks like Akindele and Adegbite’s (op. cit.) social mobility role of English language. Base on Nigerians’ proficiency in the use and mastery of the language, Banjo (ibid.) groups Nigerians learners and users of English into three categories. Variety III is adjudged to be the most acceptable and internationally intelligible. Mann (1996: 104), discussing the role of English in Nigeria claims that:

It is unlikely that there will be a significant challenge to the role of English in Nigeria’s official language in the foreseeable future… Given that English remains the language of education, and, therefore the passport to educational qualifications and upward social mobility, these two pulls or forces, the national and international will continue to constitute its attraction to Nigerians. Moreover, it is unlikely that those who use it to attain an elite status will be sympathetic to a change that puts their position in jeopardy.

Invariably, the English language has firmly been entrenched into all facets of life in Nigeria. There is virtually nothing that a white man does with his language that the language