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**THE LIFE AND TIMES OF  
LANGUAGE**

**By**

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*Professor of Linguistics*



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## Introduction

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, like humans, languages are born. Languages grow, they become aged, weak or decay and die. Language is so much part of our lives that the Greek orator – Cicero – thought that the cultivation of the power of speech was the essence of the citizen's duty while for others it was the essence of deception and distortion. Also, at a time in eighteenth century Europe the new scientific minds began to distrust deeply the things language could do (Chilton, 2004: ix). In their life time, however, languages are active in several areas – in small talks, politics, economy, religion, identity, romance, and so on. In these roles, languages face structural and social stresses which imbue them with the capacity to vary and change. In linguistics, we learn about language – particularly about its structure : sounds, words, sentences, and meaning. We may also learn about the relationship of language to its users: how it influences their thinking and behaviour, and how they, in turn, influence it in its life and times.

There have been several efforts to relate the life and times of languages, using different approaches and in different areas in which languages are used. In this lecture, I will attempt to address the twin phenomena of variability and change in language resulting from the ways it is used and perceived by individuals, within groups and social networks from the background of the works I have done in the last two and half decades. I will also talk about other aspects of the life of language as exemplified in my studies in language use; language and disability; language and identity; language and power; and language policy.

The intriguing fact about linguistics is that it straddles so many disciplines including biology; the social sciences, medicine and technology. Linguists are found in the area of information and communication technology via studies in artificial intelligence

which has linguistics as an important component of study. There are linguists whose research concerns are the effects of neurological diseases on language structure and use. There are also linguists who are in the legal profession practicing forensic linguistics. Therefore, this lecture may present a challenge to those who traditionally and erroneously define the linguist as “someone who speaks so many languages” as my works on language straddle sociology, anthropology, psychology, neurology, politics, and religion among others.<sup>1</sup>

True, it is possible to have a linguist who knows and speaks many languages but not all linguists do. There are linguists who do not speak more than their mother tongue and one other language which could be their language of education (if different from their mother tongue). But linguists who have been properly trained have some advantage over non-linguists in that they are more likely to be exposed to more languages when doing “field methods” (a course in linguistics) and therefore have broader knowledge about many languages than non-linguists. I have enjoyed, in my undergraduate and post-graduate years, the opportunity of being taught by German, Japanese, English (British and American), French, Arab, Lango (Uganda), Yoruba, Nembe and Ishekiri linguists. The teaching, research and language experiences of these teachers have shaped my love for language and language-related issues and research interests.

### **The birth of the language and naturalness of diversity**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, humans are wont to behave as if diversity in culture, religion, speech, pigmentation and so on, is an aberration. Thus in the case of language, if someone speaks a language or a dialect different from ours we tend to categorise such persons as ‘having an accent’,

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<sup>1</sup> My studies in language acquisition and disability, and language and religion are not mentioned in this lecture, but see Salami (2004; 2005; 2006b; 2006c; 2008a and 2010).

‘inferior’, ‘unrefined’, ‘bush’ (*ero isa* in Ikare dialect of Yoruba) or ‘provincial’ (*ara-oke* according to Lagosians). This type of prejudice has been the root cause of discrimination and stereotypes: linguistic, racial, religious, ethnic, among others. The interesting fact is that we all speak one dialect or the other, including the speakers of the standard dialect! A renowned linguist – Uriel Weinreich – had ably captured the fact that language (and by implication the standard variety) is a political concept in his famous definition of language as nothing but “a dialect with an army and a navy.”

For the linguist, therefore, it is not enough to investigate what structural relationships exist among speech varieties in order to establish whether or not they belong to the same language but it is equally important to find out the different perceptions of the language by speakers and establish the social, cultural and historical reasons for their divergence. For example, it would be of interest to ask why anyone will differentiate between /ibo/ and /igbo/ not on the basis of pronunciation differences but on the basis that speakers of the Igbo variety in Delta North (referred to as western Igbo) are ‘ibo’ people and not ‘igbo’ as once claimed by a former student of mine from Ika-Igbo speaking area. Could this effort to differentiate have a historical basis in the existence of this region once in the former Western Region of Nigeria? Could it have been motivated by the distrust embedded in the 1967 – 1970 civil war which, unfortunately, was seen as a war against the Igbo people? Could the differentiation have resulted from the presence of a barrier (the river Niger) to regular interaction between the Igbo varieties on both sides of the river? Or could it be the result of different allegiances to the different varieties of one language? It is for the linguist as a sociologist of language to unpack these scenarios.

Studies of language history and language change have shown that variation and diversity in language are not unnatural and that they

will continue to occur as long as changes are taking place in language as humans constantly use it. Furthermore, variation occurs by the virtue of the fact that speakers live in different geographical locations, belong to different social groups and networks, and are of different ages and genders. In other words, variation is a characteristic of language in use. It can occur at several levels of language and in different forms: variation within communities of users, variation resulting from language and dialect contact, variation resulting from language learning and acquisition and so on.

Humans had, from time immemorial, not only been aware that languages differ in several ways but also the diversity posed, in the distant past, constituted some wonder to them while they tried to find one explanation or the other for the occurrence. At Babel, it was said that the Lord (God) sent confusion into the one language of humans because the Lord felt that as they were building their tower towards the heavens, there was nothing impossible for humans. As a linguist, this does not only show, to me, that the people of the Old Testament were conscious of language diversity but that they also sought an explanation. For the Old Testament writer, the only reason was found in teleology. Babel arose because the people in the plain of Shinar had seemingly 'threatened' the abode of the Lord God. In other words, the Old Testament people felt that since there was one race (humans) created by one God something untoward must have happened to warrant what they saw as racial dispersion and the accompanying linguistic differences they found. This ostensible resistance to accepting diversity as natural can still be seen, as mentioned earlier, in the guise of our attitudes to dialects and accents today as strange or odd strains of standard languages.

As an organism, a language grows but in the brains and mouths of humans. They are regularly nourished through their use in small, medium and large communities peopled by young and old, boys

and girls, women and men, the rich and the poor and so on. These people tend often to bring their speech peculiarities to bear on languages – the aggregates of which may become permanent – leading to the evolution of a variety, a pidgin, a patois, a dialect, a slang, an argot, a Creole or a new language entirely. Human languages are diverse both in structure and function and they change in time and through time. Language change is motivated by such large scale factors as history, migration, colonialism and war as well as micro structures as age, gender, social class, ethnicity, the community of practice and social networks among others.

### **Structural and social pressures on language**

Language is structured and systematic. This is reflected in every aspect of its description: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Language is considered as a rule-governed system but when the system begins to ‘falter’ there is need to seek an explanation(s) for its seeming ‘crash’. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a group of linguists called the Neo-grammarians, in search of general principles governing language change, had postulated a number of laws of language change. They had argued that sound changes were not only rule-governed and regular but that such changes were exceptionless. That is to say, a law of sound change applies to all sounds no matter what. It must be emphasized that the Neo-grammarians looked only at the internal evidence (i.e. linguistic) for explanation, and just as in the natural sciences, they made *a priori* assumptions about language, which showed up to have no empirical justification. This was because it was soon discovered by studies in traditional dialectology that not only were there varying and seemingly haphazard distributions of dialect forms but that linguistic changes were also often irregular and did not affect all words equally.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Britain, David “Dialectology” retrieved from <http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/964>.

The consequence of the realization that the laws postulated by Neo-grammarians could not account for apparent irregularity in phonological systems, was the need to find other explanation for language variability, as it was observed to be more or less a given phenomenon of the language system. Therefore, the interest in language variation study in the last forty years or so can be traced to the need to find a systematic way of explaining the structural heterogeneity in language which had earlier been thought to be rather unmanageable. The initial attempt to do this was for traditional dialectologists to resort to such explanations as 'dialect borrowing', 'dialect mixture' and 'speakers' idiosyncracies'. Also, it was traditional to describe alternate realizations or pronunciations of phonemes as forms in free variation. In tackling the question, linguists of generative linguistics persuasion, as pioneered by Chomsky, argued that such variant linguistic elements could be captured by what they described as optional rules. Thus, for example, in describing the alternation of alveopalatal /ʃ/ and the alveolar /s/ before the high rounded back vowel /u/ in Spoken Yoruba in the word /iʃu/: *yam* it would be argued that there is a [categorical] rule : /s/ → [ʃ]/ — [+vocalic, +round, +high] as this is well motivated. However, when there is an occurrence of /s/ in this same environment, that is, /s/ → /s/ — [+voc, +round, +high] as in /isu/ for the same word, such realization is regarded as optional as there is no principled reason for it. In this Yoruba language example, however, what has been described as optional is a variable pronunciation.

All languages and language varieties exhibit variability in one structural area or the other – phonetic, phonological, lexical, syntactic and so on. In many parts of England, for example, the sound /t/ can be pronounced as an alveolar stop /t/ or a glottal stop /ʔ/ as in [bɒtɪ] and [bɒʔɪ] respectively. In Yoruba urban vernacular the word for 'miser' can be pronounced as /ahun/ or /aɸun/ without causing a change in meaning. Also, in Igbo, the word for 'food' can be pronounced as /nri/ or /nli/ depending on

the dialect of the speaker. Today, there is an ongoing variable use of auxiliaries in the expressions '*So that Joe can be able to do it*' and '*So that Joe is able to do it*'. We will also note the alternation in the pronunciation of the glottal fricative /h/ in such utterances as: '*I want an /hegg/*' in place of '*I want an /egg/*'. There are many examples of these speech patterns in spoken English in Nigeria today which constitute what sociolinguists call *indicators*. Studies have shown that linguistic variability is patterned and systematic and underlined not only by linguistic internal rules but also by external social factors such as age, level of education, gender and social networks (see for example, Labov, 1966, 1972; Trudgill, 1974; Romaine, 1982; Milroy, 1987; Salami, 1991a; 2006a).

The ability to speak is biologically programmed, but a language lives through the socialization processes that are embedded in the concrete material and historical institutions of a people. Thus, changes taking place in a society are reflected in its language. For example, in the area of Yoruba *onomastics*, a purely structural linguistic study of such names as *Olulana*, *Jesuleye*, *Olutula* and *Olusina* can only tell us about the morphology and semantics of these names. However, a sociology of Yoruba language and religion would show that these names, which derive from *Ogunlana*, *Awoleye*, *Fatula* and *Fasina* respectively, were motivated by changes in the material history of the Yoruba (Nigerian) society, especially the impacts of structural adjustment programmes, globalization and identity formation.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, it needs mentioning, however, that there are linguists who do not think the social is critical to the understanding of what humans know when they use language. The goal of such linguists, according to Pinker (1994: 18), has been to describe a distinct piece of the biological make-up of the human brain. For such linguists, language is treated as a formal system, a mental organ, a neural system, and a



computational module that can be studied independently of its use and users. In other words, these linguists seem to hold that it is possible to know how human language works by understanding only its formal properties. Noam Chomsky is one particular linguist who holds this view. As noted by Chilton (2004: x), linguists working within the generative model pioneered by Chomsky identified language faculty largely with syntax, and viewed it as sealed off from other mental capacities. Thus, for Chomsky and other generativists, the social and cultural are external to the knowledge architecture of language as they are not structures contained in this language plan or template.

However, there are views, especially in sociolinguistics, ethnography of speaking and anthropological linguistics, that the knowledge of language includes the knowledge of its social and cultural use. The question is does the cognitive structure of human language exclude social cognition? In other words, is it not possible that there are ways in which, universally, humans acquire 'the social' as a property of language? These are questions that have formed, among others, the focus of research in sociolinguistics, the sociology of language, ethnography of communication, linguistic pragmatics, discourse and the social psychology of language. Sociolinguists, for example, have argued that to be able to describe someone as knowledgeable in a language they must be able to use the language "socially and culturally" appropriately. However, the questions those that I will describe in this lecture as *asocial* linguists seem to be posing are:

- Is it possible to 'systematize', formally, this socio-cultural knowledge?
- How would we be able to generate the principles of this socio-cultural knowledge?
- Will it be feasible to compute social rules which are likely to be large and indeterminate?



Will a system built on such indeterminate rules be efficient, as it will require a lot of procedures?

These posers derive from the assumption that human language is an efficient system and that the more economical or constrained its rules are, the more efficient it is likely to be. The challenge, for us, then is not whether or not we are able to build such a system containing the social template as early experiments with what was referred to as VARBRUL showed that it was possible.<sup>3</sup> In addition, studies in sociolinguistics, especially in discourse and pragmatics, have shown that we can construct social rules. The issue here is in finding out how such rules, if they exist, are generated and constrained by the language faculty. For me, this is a major task that should be remitted to the multidisciplinary framework of artificial intelligence (AI) – a partner discipline to linguistics.

I should like to say here, however, that Chomsky and others have not said that the social explanation to language structure is not important, but rather they argue that it does not tell us what the nature as well as the knowledge architecture of language is. In essence, their concern is more with the epistemological question: what do humans know when we say that they know a language? Nonetheless, since it has also been demonstrated in several studies that language does not exist outside of those who use it, its nature and characteristics are bound to be influenced by the users and use. As observed by Gupta (2009), languages are not things out there but are human constructs. Speakers make languages, speakers

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<sup>3</sup> Early in the development of the study of sociolinguistic variation, a number of linguists including Cedergren and Sankoff attempted to see how these rules could be specified in some formal way. This was what brought about the VARBRUL which was assumed to be able to account for the social competences of speakers.

change and languages change.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, apart from analyzing its formal structures, it will be interesting and rewarding to look at the interaction between language and the society in which it is used.

### **Studies in social dialectology and language variation**

The rise of the discipline of sociolinguistics has introduced the consideration of social and demographic factors into the description and analysis of languages and language varieties. This has made the study of dialects a significant area in the understanding of not only human behaviour but also of the processes of language change. However, the study of the dialects of Yoruba (including the *koine*), so far, has followed largely in the two frameworks of traditional dialectology and descriptive linguistics to the neglect of social dialectology and variation (see, for example, Adetugbo, 1967, 1973; Oyelaran, 1976; Awobuluyi, 1992; Fabunmi, 1998, 2006, 2009; Ajongolo, 2005 and Aboderin, 2006).

In my studies on Yoruba, I have focused mainly on variation arising within community of speakers. In these studies, I have concerned myself with the relationship especially between Yoruba language use and social structures such as age, education, gender, occupation and social networks among others. It must be mentioned here that variation in language structure and use often leads to structural change. Thus, to properly and adequately capture the life and times of a language, we cannot but look into the synchronic variation in its structure and use. My efforts in the last twenty-three years or so have been to look for adequate theories to explain the phenomenon of variation and also the methodologies to track it, using Yoruba and English for exemplification.

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<sup>4</sup> See Anthea Gupta's contribution to 'Endangered languages, endangered thought', in [Lgpolicylist@ccat.sas.upenn.edu](mailto:Lgpolicylist@ccat.sas.upenn.edu), 4 March, 2009.

Where does [ʃi ~ si] alternation come from? And what is the history of [w] in Yoruba?

Many Yoruba speakers, especially those who have had contact with Oyo and Ibadan Yoruba, are aware that there is usually an alternation between /s/ and /ʃ/ in the variety of Yoruba spoken by these people. That is, there is a variable realization of the alveopalatal fricative. This alternation often constitutes a butt of joke as in *omo Ibadan kini so*. This has become the stereotype of Ibadan or Oyo speech. Examples are :

English Gloss	Common Yoruba	Ibadan/Oyo
'yam'	ifu	isu
'nail'	ifo	iso/eso
'tobacco snuff'	aasa	aafa
'fart'	iso	ifo

In *Social structures in Yoruba phonology: A sociolinguistic analysis of the variable use of the Yoruba shibboleth (SH) in Ile-Ife*, I examined this variable pronunciation in a dialect contact situation as it is a phenomenon found also in some Yoruba variety spoken in the Central Yoruba region. The purpose of the study was to determine the social basis for the variable pronunciation among those interviewed. Using social variables such as age, gender, education, regional background, and community of residence, the results of the study showed that education was significant in determining the non-use of the /s/ shibboleth, as it occurred least in the speech of those with Post-Secondary school (University and Polytechnics) education (Salami, 1986: 35). This is not to say that education alone was responsible for the non-use as a later analysis showed that the network of relationships which the interviewees had in the city also influenced their speech behaviour. Thus those who had more of their social networks outside the region of the /s/ ~ /ʃ/ alternation also had less of the shibboleth in their speech.

In another paper, *Issues in Yoruba Dialectology*, I tried to trace the history of the /s/ ~ /ʃ/ alternation in the phonology of the Yoruba language. In doing this, I noted that an earlier study by Adetugbo (1967) had observed and had concluded that the alternation arose from two processes. The first is that in the earlier history of the language, Proto-Yoruba split into /s/ and /ʃ/ in the Southeast region (Ondo, Owo, Ikare) and Egba area in the Northwest region while in the major part of the Northwest and the Central region (Ife, Ijesa and Ekiti) the phoneme /s/ was retained. That is to say that there was no split in the Central region. The second process was that as a result of the contact between Northwest speakers whose dialect contained only /s/ and standard Yoruba speakers as well the contact with the English language, alveopalatal /ʃ/ was introduced into Northwest and Central Yoruba areas where today it is used variably (Salami, 2001: 101).

I will like to recall three points made in re-examining the foregoing history of both the alveolar and alveo-palatal fricatives in Yoruba. The first is that the choice of the alveolar /s/ rather than the alveo-palatal /ʃ/ as the Proto-Yoruba [+ant, +cor] strident by Adetugbo derived from the claim that standard Yoruba is patterned largely on the grammar and vocabulary of Oyo in the Northwestern Yoruba (NWY) region. It is a fact that standard written Yoruba is patterned on this variety but it is not likely to be true that other dialects derived historically from it. The dialects of the Southeastern area as Owo and Ikare, for example, still have today an alveo-palatal affricate /tʃ/ which is even absent in standard Yoruba and some other NWY and Central Yoruba (CY) varieties.

The second point is that the existence of /s/ in the speech of one part of NWY area and /ʃ/ in another part means that we might need to split the dialect into two: NWY-1 and NWY-2. This kind of split will not be necessary, however, if the alternation of /s/ and /ʃ/ today is understood to be motivated probably by some extra-linguistic factor which requires investigation.

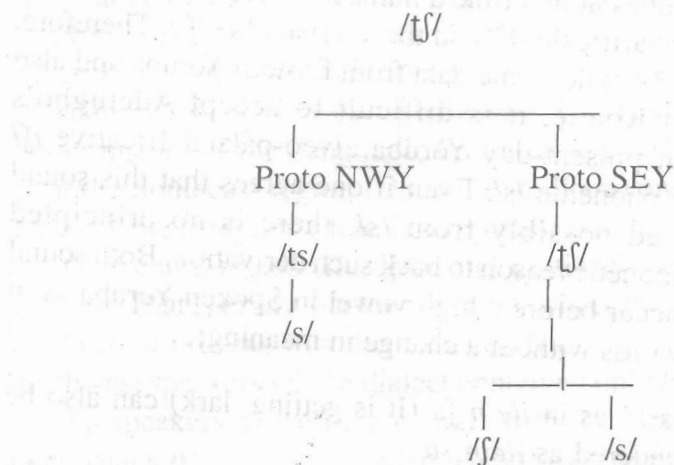
The third point is that we need to go back in history, for example, by examining Koelle's 1853 Yoruba word list where we would have noticed that as at that time a number of Yoruba dialects had the alveo-palatal affricate /tʃ/ and the alternant [s ~ ʃ]. Therefore, on the basis of the synchronic data from Eastern Yoruba and also evidence from Koelle, it is difficult to accept Adetugbo's postulation that present-day Yoruba alveo-palatal fricative /ʃ/ derived from a phoneme /s/. Even if one agrees that this sound segment derived possibly from /s/, there is no principled phonological/phonetic reason to back such derivation. Both sound segments can occur before a high vowel in Spoken Yoruba as in the following words without a change in meaning:

ʃu : 'dark' as in *ile n ʃu* (It is getting dark) can also be rendered as *ile n su*

ʃi : 'open' as in *o ʃi ilekun* (S/he opened the door) can be rendered as *o si ilekun*

Although there is need to investigate further the place of these segments in the various dialects of the language, our study suggests that the alveolar fricative /s/ shibboleth used by Yoruba speakers in the NWY and CY regions derived from Proto-Yoruba alveo-palatal affricate /tʃ/. In other words, the probable history of the speech behaviour of the Oyo and Ibadan Yoruba variety speakers is that at the stage of dialect divergence, the alveo-palatal /tʃ/ shifted probably to alveolar affricate /ts/ and the fricative /s/ in some dialects while it shifted to the alveo-palatal affricate /tʃ/, the fricative /ʃ/ and the alveolar fricative /s/ in others as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



We need to note, however, that from existing studies there is no evidence of the presence of the alveolar affricate /ts/ in any of the dialects today. It can then be postulated that at the time of shift in the phonology of the Yoruba language, the alveo-palatal affricate /tʃ/ did not shift categorically (as there was, probably, no compelling phonetic/phonological motivation to do this) to alveolar fricative /s/ in the NWY region rather it was a variable shift involving the alternation of [s ~ ʃ]. It is this incomplete process that we see today as Oyo/Ibadan stereotypical speech. Its future direction will be dictated by the forces of education, urbanization, and social networks.<sup>5</sup>

In *Lexical incidental variability in the pronunciation of the Yoruba labiovelar /w/*, I examined the use of the variants of this sound segment and attempted to trace its history and development using the Chen and Wang (1975) argument that when a change takes place in language it spreads gradually through the lexicon.

<sup>5</sup> I have friends who hail from Oyo and Ibadan towns who, stereotypically, are expected to use /s/ where /ʃ/ is expected but do not because of the influence of their education and, perhaps, their social networks.

The argument is that in the process of change, linguistic norms diffuse differently in different words with different speakers. Chambers and Trudgill (1980, cited in Salami, 1991a: 142) observed that it is unusual to find a change which has apparently spread over around half the vocabulary of a language because the usual state of affairs for incomplete changes is that they affect almost all or a few words. Thus it is possible, for example, that while a change might have taken place in the lexicon of Yoruba within Oyo dialect, it might not have been completed in the speech of Ife dialect speakers.

Some earlier analysis of the Yoruba labiovelar /w/ had traced its variants to include /gw/ as in /ɛgwa/ : 'ten' in Oka-Akoko dialect, /h/ in /ha/ : 'come' in Ikare-Akoko dialect, /ɣ/ in /ɔɣɔ/ Owo name of a town – Owo dialect as well as in Ife dialect and /ŋ/ as in /iŋɔ/ : 'they' in Ife dialect and /ɸ/ as in /aɸun/ : 'miser' in Yoruba urban vernacular (Common Spoken Yoruba). Our study of this sound segment shows that the pronunciation of present-day Yoruba /w/ is socially diagnostic and that the alternations noticed in its *koine* may represent the process of lexical diffusion and change. That is to say that there seems to be an ongoing change in this Yoruba speech sound which may be spreading from one lexical item (word) to another. In particular, when we examined /w/ deletion in Common Spoken Yoruba, we found that Central Yoruba dialect speakers (Ife, Ijesa, Ekiti) as well as Yoruba youngsters seem to be most /w/-deleting (Salami, 1991b: 151). The caveat is that though this may seem to be the current trend among young people and Central Yoruba speakers, it could become aborted if there are pressures of stigmatization of the speech behaviour or the need to conform with the standard written form. For now, this is not the case.

### *Urbanization, Language Use and Variation*

Urban social dialectology is not only an established area of study, it also constitutes a growing area of research in language variation, language and identity and language and migration. However, this



is an area of research in which the life of Nigerian languages and urban communities does not seem to attract much interest. In the Yoruba-Speaking Southwestern Nigeria, except for Akere's study of Ikorodu community carried out in 1977, there were no other sociolinguistic studies of Yoruba towns until 1987 when I did a study of the Yoruba urban vernacular in the city of Ile-Ife. There have been very few follow-ups to these two studies in the sense of a large scale sociolinguistic investigation of Yoruba urban communities (see, however, Omoniyi, 1992).<sup>6</sup> In fact, there are no known large-scale systematic variation studies of Yoruba urban vernaculars in the cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Osogbo, Abeokuta, Ado-Ekiti and Akure with their visible presence of differing Yoruba dialects coming into contact. Apart from the fact that urban sociolinguistic studies have a lot to tell us about social stratification of language use, they can also provide insights into the processes of language change. For the Yoruba language, these cities are fertile sites for learning about the processes of dialect levelling through dialect contact, koineisation, and norm focussing. Furthermore, such studies on language situations in cosmopolitan communities may shed light on issues of migration and immigrants, indigenes, settlers and integration in the context of Nigeria (see, for example, Oyetade, 1995).<sup>7</sup>

At the time I began my post-graduate studies in the UK in 1983, the 'classical' Labovian model of sociolinguistic variation studies was being challenged following a large scale study of the English urban vernacular in Belfast by Lesley Milroy. Borrowing the concept of social networks from anthropology and ethnography, the major argument of that study was that "people are, in their everyday encounters, largely dependent, in the ways they use language, on others with whom they interact rather than on

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<sup>6</sup> Tope Omoniyi, (1992) 'Ibollo: Rural dialect in urban stranglehold.' *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 28, 123-140.

<sup>7</sup> I am currently looking at the language behaviour of Igbo immigrants in Ile-Ife: acquisition, use and attitudes to Yoruba language as a case study of language identity and maintenance.



anabstract society” (see Salami, 1991a: 218). In other words, although social and demographic factors like age, class, and gender are important, the pressures of one’s everyday social encounters are capable of making speakers of a language to influence each other’s linguistic behaviour. The paper - *Diffusion and focusing: phonological variation and social networks in Ile-Ife* - represents my use of the concept of social networks to explain the process of norm formation (levelling) in the phonology of urban Yoruba vernacular in Ile-Ife. However, I made some advance on the explanatory power of the concept by integrating it with Bob Le Page’s principles of projection and focusing which enabled me to arrive at three conclusions: that linguistic elements do not only serve as social status and / identity badges, rather they also function as norms of social networks; that the norms of Spoken Yoruba among urban dwellers such as in the city of Ile-Ife are diffuse but focused within specific social networks; and that the diffuse norms in the urban vernacular in Ile-Ife derived from speakers’ solidarity with their different social and sub-ethnic identities (Salami, *ibid*: 243).

The theme of sociolinguistic variation, urbanization and contact was pursued further in a study of the Ikare dialect of Yoruba. As observed by Schilling-Estes (2006: 320), the most noticeable differences between dialects are the different lexical items used in different varieties. For example, the words for ‘pawpaw’ are *ibepe* in Standard Yoruba and *ogolomasi* in Ikare dialect. Ikare also has a word for ‘pineapple’ called *gogoyin* where standard Yoruba has none but a new creation called - *ope oyinbo* (the whiteman’s oil-palm). In other words, these are different terms to refer to the same items in the two varieties of Yoruba. However, the word *ode* in standard Yoruba refers to ‘outside’ in *o lo s’ode* (s/he went out) whereas in Ikare dialect it refers to ‘home’ in *o w’ode* (s/he went home). These differences often constitute important markers of regional or social identity. Also, the usage of these lexical items in a situation of contact between

different variety speakers is a veritable source of language change. As noted by Shukla and Connor-Linton (2006: 28), contact between speakers of different languages is an important social force that may cause language change.

In the paper, *Sociolinguistic variation in Ikare-Yoruba*, I focused on the correlation of the use of some selected phonological and lexical items with Ikare-Yoruba speakers' social characteristics. The major aim was to see the impact of urbanization and the contact between Common Spoken Yoruba and the Ikare dialect (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Selected Lexical items in Ikare and Common Yoruba

	Ikare	Common Yoruba	English Gloss
1.	àáyẹ	ọbẹ	soup
2.	ùsẹn	ọbẹ	kitchen knife
3.	púúrù	àgbòn	coconut
4.	ùúsá	ọwọ	broom
5.	agẹdọ	igbá àyà	chest
6.	òkù	ìdì	buttock
7.	òtùtà	ìjòkó	stool
8.	ẹhẹn	eyin	egg
9.	ùho	ìwo	horn
10.	uhọ	iwo	navel
11.	àhẹn	àwìn	credit
12.	urẹn	irin	iron/steel
13.	uná	iná	fire
14.	ulí	ilẹ	house
15.	ùsọ	ìsọ	nail

The results of the study showed that there was a general trend for more Ikare speakers to use Common Yoruba forms: /ọbẹ/ and /ọbẹ/ rather than 'aayẹ' and 'usẹn' for 'soup' and 'knife' respectively. However, more people used the Ikare dialect forms:

/púúrù/ : 'coconut' and /ɛhɛn/ : 'egg' than the urban vernacular or Common Yoruba forms: /àgbɔn/ and /ɛyin/. One interesting outcome of the study was that more female speakers than the males tended to use the Common Yoruba forms more than the Ikare dialect forms (Salami, 1995: 119). This seems to confirm a general observation of women linguistic behaviour across the world. There have been many explanations for this behaviour, some of which have been adduced to women's insecurity, lack of confidence or prestige consciousness (see Trudgill, 1972; Lakoff, 1975). Some of these reasons have, however, been rejected as gender-biased (Cameron, 1998; Coates, 1993). The Ikare study showed, however, that male speakers tended to be more locally-oriented as they used more local forms than the women. The women's position, on the other hand, could have resulted from the influence of their greater contact or networking with non-Ikare residents whom they probably meet more regularly in the markets and in trading activities. What seems to be certain from the study, however, is that there is an ongoing change in the Ikare Yoruba dialect with a gradual replacement of the two lexical items /aaye/ : 'soup' and /usɛn/ : 'kitchen knife' by their Common Yoruba forms. This outcome may not be unique to Ikare town as other Yoruba cities are likely to be currently in the throes of change which require investigation.

I continued with the theme of variation in language use by examining lexical usage in Yoruba and English as well as variation in attitudes to Yoruba language in: *DE: the social distribution of users of a colloquial lexical item in Spoken Yoruba in Ile-Ife; We speak code-mix: some perceptions of the Yoruba language in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and Use and Attitude towards English Taboo Words among Young Adults in a Nigerian University*. These studies also show that use or non-use of a language, its varieties or aspects of its structure, as well as the perception of language usage carry social meanings relative to the norms of the community of practice.

## Gender, culture and language use

Linguistic practices often reflect attitudes, values, and world views. They can and do reinforce, for example, gender relations. In a number of societies, there are underlying assumptions that women are marginal, weak, powerless, subordinate, and dependent on men. These assumptions are often encoded in speech practices and deployed as frameworks for dealing with women. The Yoruba, like many patriarchal traditions, often espouse male supremacy. Therefore, in the family, as in the outside world, hierarchical relationships of ruler to the ruled and old to the young seem to typify the relationships between women and their spouses among the Yoruba (Salami, 2004c). Generally, among the Yoruba, wives do not often address or refer to their husbands by their first names but rather by some other forms of address such as teknonyms, pet names and nick-names. The use of address terms such as 'Baba Iyabo'; 'Eleyin Gold'; 'Oga'; 'Daddy'; 'My dear'; 'Dear mi', and so on constitutes an aspect of their linguistic practices where there is inequality in language use on the basis of gender.

In a study - *Deference and subordination: Gender roles and other variables in addressing and referring to husbands by Yoruba women* - I showed that although social factors such as age, level of education, region of origin and context of speech are determinants of how a Yoruba woman addresses her husband, gender role-expectation (child-rearing) and the relations of power between Yoruba men and women contribute in a crucial way to the address terms selected. Although most women reported in this study claimed to use teknonyms such as 'Baba Tosin' or 'Daddy Dolapo' with their husbands, the use of first name occurred most among women with higher (University/Polytechnic) education. What this means, in essence, is that highly educated Yoruba women have become 'norm-breakers' as they have ostensibly violated an unwritten cultural rule of not addressing husbands by first name. But we must begin to understand this change in the light of the agency of women as they, today, have relatively greater bargaining

power to take decisions in their households than hitherto. The significance of this study to language life is that address usage forms a site for the understanding of the place of women among the Yoruba and the role of the individual or group in motivating language change.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, in Yoruba-speaking Southwestern Nigeria, it is common knowledge that every Friday or Saturday, wedding engagements have become the norm. Like naming, house-warming and burial ceremonies, engagement ceremonies are speech events which are not only structured but are also governed by certain cultural expectations and rules of language use. The ritual drama or acting which seems to mark it separates it from everyday casual speech encounter and succeeds only when its unwritten rules are not violated. In *Writing in: an ethnography of a marriage proposal among the Yoruba*, I examined the ritual of *itoro* or 'wedding engagement' which has become part of our everyday social encounters that seems to pass us by with little or no critical attention paid to it as a major speech or communicative event where language plays a central role. Two questions agitated my mind in trying to understand the engagement ceremony: why do the participants go through what often looks like avoidable routines and ritualized behaviour in order to enact this social interaction?; and why do they have to go through what, ostensibly, is an unnecessary and meaningless process in order to make a marriage proposal? In other words, are there meanings underlying the ritual of wedding engagement as a speech event that a first time visitor to Yorubaland needs to know in order to fully understand it?

The study that I carried out showed that what has been distilled in the engagement practice is a 'creolized' culture that has its root in Yoruba *itoro omo* and *idàna* with contributions from Christian-European influence and Yoruba-Muslim culture. The routines made up mainly of an opening (marked by arrival of suitor's party and rendition of songs); presentation of self (where the old *alarina*

or go-between now substituted by the *alaga iduro* or the 'voice' of the bride's parents initiates talk); questioning and demanding purpose of call; reading of letter of intent (with the one to read coming usually from the bride's household); response from the bride's parents (request often granted), and closing (marked by public giving of bride, rendition of songs and entertainment). It needs mentioning that between these routines are sub-routines such as asking the suitor to identify his would-be bride, exhortations from parents or a designated family member, and saying of prayers.

One important point to make of the engagement ceremony is the major function of language as this is more of phatic communion than the exchange of information. The ritualized question-asking part of the ceremony, for example, is to show the public that investigations have been conducted (as expected) on both sides and the families are quite familiar with each other. Thus, if we take away this phatic role, the engagement ceremony will not only become stilted, it will also look unrealistic. Failure to act within its structure as a well defined speech event will violate some cultural rules and interactional routines in Yoruba. This is because wedding engagement, as it is practiced among the Yoruba today, has defined boundaries and predictable verbal and non-verbal routines which need to be learnt in order to behave appropriately.

### **Language in the nation and language in education**

In almost all post-colonial states in Africa, Asia and South America, the former colonial languages have been adopted as official languages. The motivation for such adoption varies from the need for national unity through a neutral language to having a language that will facilitate international relations. In Nigeria, the issue of which language to adopt as the national language, among the very many languages that exist in the country, has been a perennial question. It seems to constitute some challenge to development on two fronts: how to define Nigeria's identity linguistically and what language for the education of the Nigerian

child. The challenge is underlined by the fact that these two fronts are covered, currently, largely by the English language. Here, therefore 'national' for many advocates of the policy of a local national language is defined with the sentiment that we behave like colonials when we use English to define Nigerians, for example, as Anglophone rather than Nembe, Bura, Esan, Jarawan or Angas-speaking people. This challenge arises from the fixation with the nineteenth century European definition of a nation as constituted by a people with the same race and language. The question is, must the Nigerian 'nation' be constructed by a common local language where its constituent parts do not share a common history? Is such a nation plausible where its people have different world views as encoded in their languages? In other words, is a Nigerian nation plausible in the linguistic sense when its diverse people do not seem to have a common conception of a Nigerian nation?

In the work - *Other Tongue Policy and Ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria* - I examined the sentiment of language-induced unity and identity by carrying out an empirical investigation of attitudes of Yoruba people to the national language question. In that work, I investigated the extent to which loyalty to one's ethnic background could impact on the evolution of the Nigerian nation and a national indigenous language, using the Yoruba - whose language is one of the three major languages being promoted through the other tongue learning policy - as a case study. I used the intersection of two social and historical forces to interrogate this challenge of national language for Nigeria. These are the Yoruba reaction to June 12, 1993 presidential election and the rise in Yoruba ethnic nationalism with the emergence of Oodua People's Congress (OPC). As noted by Candlin in Tollefson (1991: vi - vii), there is a link between micro-social and macro-social decisions about language which we must find principled means of connecting. It is Candlin's view that language planning cannot be undertaken or its effects evaluated in a social vacuum.



This is because there are governing forces of the state and the individual including power, hegemony and discrimination that come into play. Nigeria's current policy of learning one of Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba in addition to the Mother Tongue, at the Junior Secondary School level derived, ostensibly, from the ideology that the solution to problems of communication in a multilingual society is to require everyone to speak the dominant language. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages have power conferred on them by virtue of the apparatus of state coercive power in the hands of the three dominating groups. The ultimate goal of the nationalization of these three languages is that if successful, one of them will emerge as Nigeria's national language.

There are three major outcomes of that study. First, a relatively large percentage of the Yoruba people interviewed for the study had positive feelings towards Nigeria in spite of their loyalty to their Yoruba identity. However, this positive attitude to the Nigerian 'nation' did not translate into their acceptance of either Igbo or Hausa as a national language. Secondly, they were well disposed to learning another Nigerian language but they would only do so if it would not be for the purpose of selecting it as a national language. For these Yoruba people, therefore, language could not be considered as critical for defining the Nigerian identity. It needs be understood here, however, that the rejection of a national indigenous language by the Yoruba in this study could be a response to a possible intrusion of Yoruba identity and/or domination by an equally local political power.

The third interesting result is that ethnicity *per se* did not feature as a factor in the willingness of the Yoruba people interviewed to learn Igbo or Hausa. Although they held negative views of the Hausa ethnic group while they were more positively disposed to the Igbo, the respondents claimed that they were willing to learn the languages of the two ethnic groups. Therefore, assuming that we can translate the positive disposition of the Yoruba to Igbo



ethnic group into the acceptance of a national language, the Yoruba in this study, theoretically, would prefer Igbo to Hausa that is often thought to be more widespread in use and a better candidate. This is largely in theory as we have said earlier that the Yoruba would not accept either of the two languages as a national language.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, a language lives through institutions like education judiciary, politics, religion and so on. Although Nigeria has joined the global effort for educational reforms within the millennium development goals (MDGs) programme and Education for All (EFA) by 2015, it seems that language-in-education is yet to take a crucial place in that effort (Salami, (2008b). Educational language planning and implementation in a linguistically and culturally diverse country like Nigeria are influenced by factors which Freeman (1998) notes are not only dynamic but also multidirectional. For Nigeria, the use of the mother tongue in education has not only met with varying degrees of success in different parts of the country, it is also slow and haphazard (see Ajayi & Oyetayo, 2002; Akinnaso, 1993; and Odumuh, 2002). As observed by Blommaert (1999), the use of indigenous languages in education is motivated as a matter of the right to easy access to education. Consequently, whoever denies people the right to get education in their own language can be considered to be acting against the fundamental principles of democracy.

In another study – *It is still “double take”: mother tongue education and bilingual classroom practice in Nigeria* - I examined language practices in Nigerian primary school classrooms in order to see whether or not they conformed with the policy on mother tongue education. The results of the study conducted in primary schools in Ile-Ife showed a rather unstructured practice of bilingualism by teachers in terms of curricular application and levels. In addition, rather than implementing the country's mother tongue education policy,

teachers in primary schools varied between bilingual instruction and code-switching: using English as early as the first year of primary school while the mother tongue continues to be used throughout the fourth year when the transition to English medium should have commenced, and code-switching (between English and mother tongue) regularly in lessons up to primary six.

The study showed that the teachers most often used code-switching (CS) as a medium of instruction perhaps because of their pupils' limited English proficiencies. Although the pupils showed some preference for mother tongue medium, the attitudes of their teachers and government agencies to instruction in the mother tongue were still largely negative. In fact, many teachers did not show interest in implementing the mother tongue education policy. From the study, we suspect, however, that the teachers would probably have preferred CS as a medium of instruction if it was given a legal teeth by government or education policy makers. In short, what the teachers have done (and still do) is to take ownership of the language-in-education policy process and appropriate it in a way that benefited them and their pupils.

### **Language, politics, ideology and identity**

Changes taking place in the social, political and economic lives of human communities are not only expressed by language but are also promoted through the use of language. As noted by Jones and Peccei (2004: 39), language can be used not only to steer people's thoughts and beliefs but also to control both. For example, the neoliberal conception of the world today can be seen in the way citizens are no longer expected to have claims on their states, but are rather obligated to become entrepreneurs of themselves.<sup>8</sup> This is reflected in the discourses on employment, labour and economy. This subtle ideological change is uncovered, for example, by such new lexical terms in English as *monetization*,

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<sup>8</sup> See Ong, A. (2006). *Neoliberalism as Exception*, for a fuller discussion.

*deregulation, rightsizing, outsourcing* and so on. In Nigerian universities today, the word “entrepreneurship” in the general studies course is, ostensibly, taken as a neutral term and accepted as a must in order to produce graduates who will be self-employed. However, a careful reading of globalization and its attendant impacts on states and citizens will show that the term is not a neutral one coming from a benevolent God, rather it is an ideology in its discursive construction.

In recent years, I have begun to look at the ideological role of language in political economy, identity creation, as well as in policy issues. In the sub-discipline of sociolinguistics called discourse analysis, language is seen both as an ideology and a reproducer of ideology. In the particular perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language use is considered as multilayered and susceptible to ideological loading. I have argued elsewhere that language use is not determined only by micro-structures but also by other macro-socio-historical factors including the concrete material relationships between and among language users (Salami, 1993). Language becomes an ideology, for example, when a variety can be constructed as low status because of the class of its speakers. It is obvious that the social structuring of the variety is based on the relations of social and economic power.

At the height of the Obasanjo regime between 2003 and 2007, neo-liberal market-based policies that were signposted in the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) years had become a development ideology of the government supported by a few *nouvau riche* and neo-liberal intellectuals in the universities and the press. The lack of will on the part of the people in power to commit themselves to people-oriented development, as well as corruption had began to be touted as the inability of the state to successfully run enterprises. Therefore, to achieve growth, the solutions suggested included the search for *foreign direct investment, outsourcing* the management of government

businesses and outfits, *deregulation* of commodity prices, *privatization* of government companies and *right-sizing* of the work-force, among others. These lexical items and expressions which have emerged in the vocabulary of the discourse of neo-liberalism were used as if they were neutral of intentions. It needs to be mentioned that neo-liberalism tends to cast government activities as non-political and non-ideological problems that need technical solutions (Ong, 2006: 3). This was, for instance, essentially the mould in which the question of the prices of petroleum products was addressed by the Nigerian government during the Obasanjo years.

In the article – *The ‘war’ of appropriate pricing of petroleum products: the discourse of Nigeria’s reform agenda*, written in collaboration with Kehinde Ayoola, we examined newspaper coverage of the debate on the pricing of petroleum products in Nigeria in relation to the government’s reform agenda. In that work, we sought to analyze, using the tool of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the choice of lexical items and different syntactic constructions to point out how language is ideology-laden in the seemingly neutral choice of words in talking about the need to fix a new set of prices for Nigeria’s petroleum products.<sup>9</sup> The results of our analysis show that the different angles of telling about petroleum pricing and economic reform and the discourses of development emanated from different underlying issues of identity and power rather than a classless-driven concern for Nigeria’s economy (Salami and Ayoola, 2010: 51).

In another collaborative study funded by the British Academy, Tope Omoniyi and I examined and analyzed the narratives of

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<sup>9</sup> There was a time on this University campus when a Vice-Chancellor consistently referred to negotiated increments in salaries and allowances as ‘awards.’ The university branch of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) also at every available opportunity tried to correct the Vice-Chancellor as it was able to read that the choice of the word ‘award’ was not neutral but ‘anti-labour’ and a way to belittle the ‘struggle’ of workers.

identity in Bakassi, against the backdrop of International Court of Justice's ruling on the ownership of the Peninsula.<sup>10</sup> In that study, we focused on what the subjects of the investigation employed in their narratives as paradigms to explain the history of the Bakassi Peninsula in order to define their identity. In doing this, we investigated how factors such as ethnic affiliation, ancestry, language, cultural properties (e.g. sacred sites), the people's way of life (including occupation and religious practices) and resources embedded in personal and community narratives were used to uncover the people's identity. It must be mentioned that identities are social, discursive and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004: 19). The result of our study showed that the construction of Bakassi identity in the context of ICJ verdict carried a lot of implications including the fact that identity can be dynamic. In other words, identity is not static because its boundary and meaning can be in a constant state of flux as it can be associated with differing components in particular time and place. Thus, what is stressed as identity boundary marker in a particular space or time could be different from what is stressed at another. As shown in several studies, identities are often subject to construction and re-construction (see Anderson, 1991; Meinhof, 2002; Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). For Bakassi, we argued that institutionally ascribed identities may not reflect the lived identities of the people on the ground. We saw here a dichotomy between sovereign and community identities as represented in the people's narratives. This study has a larger implication for Nigerian domestic politics, especially in relation to citizenship, as issues resulting from migration, the dichotomy between settlers and indigenes have become of political concern in a place like Jos, Plateau State.

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<sup>10</sup> See Tope Omoniyi and Dipo Salami (2004).

## Conclusion and the way forward

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to conclude this inaugural lecture by recalling that I started off with a degree in Islamic Studies but I took courses in Political Science, Geography, Linguistics, English Language and Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan when the National Universities Commission was not as stifling, as it is today, of the autonomy of universities to decide the direction of their academic programmes. Diversity is basic to life and it does not diminish but enriches life. In the last three decades or so, I have taught diverse courses in the defunct Department of Linguistics as well as the Department of English where I am resident today. These courses range from Phonetics, Phonology, Semantics, The Morphology of English, The English Language in Nigeria, The History of the English Language, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics to Research Methodology. As I have tried to show earlier, my research interests have also been enriched by this diverse involvement in teaching.

My adventures in language study have shown me that when a language begins to vary in structure and use, divergence and change are in the offing. Nigeria is a country with a diversity of languages that are facing structural and social pressures, resulting in their potential decline. Some of these languages are not only changing but they are threatened with loss and death. A language lost is a people lost. It is a thought, a worldview lost. Therefore, there is need to prevent loss and death by preserving Nigerian languages through continuous documentation, revival of dying ones through use in schools, by parents with their children, in community associations, and other situations. There are complaints from many quarters – parents, social commentators and policy makers - that Nigerian children no longer use or speak their mother tongues. The fear is palpable that Nigeria might lose many of its languages

especially small and minority heritage mother tongues<sup>11</sup>. Change is natural and death is inevitable but we can slow down language death through deliberate policies that are targeted towards developing and sustaining language use. We can preserve those languages that are being threatened with death. It must be mentioned, however, that the worry over language loss is not restricted to any particular region of the world as many nations where minority language groups exist also face this threat. In the USA, there are non-governmental agencies involved in efforts to preserve dying languages while the European Union has policies targeted at sustaining the linguistic and cultural diversities of its member states, even when it is working towards their political integration. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is also playing a significant role in the preservation of cultural (including language) heritages of peoples around the world. Recently, the Federal Ministry of Culture and Orientation started a project on the documentation of endangered Nigerian languages and cultures. This project, of which I am involved, is also seeking collaboration with the UNESCO. Preliminary reports from the six geo-political zones of the country showed that many minority languages and cultures face the threat of loss.

Language preservation, whether through documentation, education, or use, is driven by policy. As mentioned earlier, language policy is not formulated in a vacuum as a language policy item could be one way in which dominant discourses about language is perpetuated. One example of such dominant discourses is the choice of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba for nationalization (through the policy of learning of one of them in the Junior Secondary School). The apparent qualification for their choice is that they are spoken by large populations who are politically dominant. This policy is one of those signs manifesting the Nigerian state's

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<sup>11</sup> In Ondo State, for example, the Akokoid cluster and Apoi may not survive as they have limited domains of use.



use of language to perpetuate the system of social inequality and cultural hegemony. Besides, it is a policy that is anti-democratic as it threatens the language rights of the country's minority populations.

Nigeria is not a nation in the mould of one nation, one race, and one language and it does not have to be. We may need a language to work and relate together but we do not necessarily have to be defined as one people linguistically. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia forged what could be described as unifying or national languages from Russian and Serbo-Croatian respectively but the language politics could not prevent the break-up of those 'nations'. Somalia is mono-ethnic but it is a failed state. Izon, Hausa, Kanawuri, Igbo, Tarok, Yoruba, Kanuri, Efik, Tiv, and so on have the rights to participate fully as languages of the ethnic nationalities constituting the Nigerian state. There is nothing inherently wrong or illegitimate about Nigeria being a state constituted by multiethnic nationalities except when ethnicity is deployed for anti-democratic end. The linguistic diversity in Nigeria should not be seen as a disease or an ailment from which the 'nation' must not suffer. The diversity must be preserved to keep alive the thoughts of the hundreds of the different people inhabiting the country. What we need is to design policies that will protect cultural and linguistic minorities on the one hand and, on the other hand, promote the role of language in inter-linguistic and intercultural communication, opinion formation and the process of information dissemination.

In my research activities, I have observed that many of us in one language department or the other in Nigerian universities today do one sociolinguistic study or the other to the extent that it seems it is an all-comers discipline that has little or no theoretical rigour to it. My candid opinion is that this seems to be the case but most who do sociolinguistics do with little or no social theory. This is why one cannot but suggest that the departments of sociology and/or anthropology should incorporate a course(s) in the



sociology of language to include subjects like language and ethnicity, language and identity, language and citizenship, language and migration among others, which are issues of significance globally today. Students in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian/African Languages who are not often made to take courses in the social sciences like political science, sociology and psychology on the erroneous thinking that linguistic study is largely meant for equipping students to carry out the description and analysis of Nigerian/African languages should be encouraged to see the need to venture out of their major disciplines. What I am saying, in essence, is that we should begin to break down our contrived academic empires and engage in inter and/or multidisciplinary studies. We should think out of the box of the NUC's minimum standards by encouraging students from computer science, philosophy and psychology, for example, to take courses in linguistics as these courses, in conjunction with linguistics, have made contributions to the evolution of the relatively young discipline of Artificial Intelligence.

In the first coming of linguistics to this university as a department between 1976 and 1994, there was a year the department admitted a graduate of physics into its M.A. programme. This was in line with the departmental vision then of engaging in the study of human language not just as a science of human behaviour but also as a science comparable to natural and physical sciences in its theoretical postulations. Furthermore, it was of the view that linguistics could borrow from these allied disciplines processes of theory construction and model building in explaining how language works. However, the department was phased out in 1994 due to ignorance of its academic role until it re-emerged in the Department of African Languages many years later. One wonders whether or not it would have been possible to do word processing, e-mailing, Short Messaging Service (known in Nigeria as texting) or the GSM mobile phone communication if we do not understand how the human language works.

ε see o  
ε ka re o  
Me teekun o  
Sansaŋa o  
N de e wo  
Naa go de  
Shukran jaziilan  
Merci beaucoup  
Thank you

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