

DIGLOSSIA AND BILINGUALISM IN NIGERIA: SIAMESE TWINS LANGUAGE IN USE

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Abstract

The study sets to explore the linguistic situations in Nigeria with regards to diglossia and bilingualism. As a multilingual nation, this work seeks to ascertain whether there are definite roles assigned to languages in the linguistically diverse Nigerian society. It goes on to give a detailed description of the term diglossia and bilingualism and highlights the distinctive features of a diglossia situation as well as motivation for code switching. It further discusses the issue of code switching and the way it takes place in diglossic situations that exist in Nigeria. Finally, this paper points out the implications of the diglossic situations in Nigeria for English language. The methodology adopted is descriptive approach

Keywords: Diglossia, Bilingualism, code-switching

Introduction

The act of choosing a language or variety with which to communicate, at any given time is a common feature of bilingual or multilingual societies. In such societies, people are always faced with communicative situations, which demand that they choose an appropriate code with which to express themselves. However, the choices they make are governed by a number of social context and linguistic context factors. The social context determines to a large extent, the language or variety that one chooses to use. It consists of a number of other factors, such as: the time and place of communication, the formality of the occasion, the topic under discussion, the degree of familiarity between interlocutors and so on. Also, the social characteristics of a person help to determine his choice of language or variety of a language at any given time. These social characteristics are the person's social class, ethnic group, religious beliefs, values, age and sex to mention but a few. Code-switching from one language to another is a common feature of a bilingual or multilingual society. Bilinguals and multilingual always find themselves switching from one code to another, either consciously or unconsciously. There are many reasons why people code-switch but generally, they do so in response to social context factors.

Bilingualism is a fact of life in Nigeria. Apart from over four hundred and ten (410) indigenous languages (Crozier, D. and R.M Blench (1992), Nigeria has an official language- English, the language inherited from her former colonial masters. When French was introduced as the second official language in 1997, the country officially became a bilingual country. Even before Nigeria came under the tutelage of the British colonial administration in 1884, missionaries had been very active for several years bringing to us the western form of education which has spread to every nook and cranny of our country today. With the introduction of western education into Nigeria, the first crop of elite had their first contact with the English language which had up to the present day served as our official language of communication, used in all domains including politics, religion and education. But it should be realized that before the advent of British colonial rule in Nigeria, Nigerians had their indigenous language which Dada (1976) put at between 400 and 513. If educated Nigerians have their mother tongue which many of them speak at home and which in fact is used as a medium of instruction in later years, it is obvious that they now have two languages in contact. The degree to which they are in contact we shall see as we proceed in this paper. Linguists have found out that different languages come in contact through travels, trade, war and conquest, migration etc. But when such languages come in contact, certain phenomenon comes into play. These include language change, language assimilation, diglossia, language death, lingua franca, bilingualism and language domination.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to explore the linguistic situations in Nigeria with regards to diglossia and bilingualism as Siamese twins' language in use.

The concept of diglossia and bilingualism

Diglossia

Diglossia is a linguistic phenomenon found in many bilingual/multilingual communities like Nigeria. Diglossia is the co-existence of two varieties of the same language in a speech community. Often, one form is the official or prestige dialect and the other is a common dialect spoken by most of the population. The prestige variety is typically reserved for official functions in more formal situation in the public sphere like, in government, written education, and religious functions or by the media. The other variety which is regarded as the low variety is exclusively used and restricted to informal speech. It is usually made of the vernacular variety used at home for informal everyday conversations. Nigeria as a diglossic society has many varieties of English language which ranges from Standard English to non Standard English, Pidgin English, slangy expressions, vulgarism etc.

Examples

S/N	Standard English	Non Standard English
1	John and I are brothers	John and Me are brothers
2	I want to eat	I want to chop
3	EEDC has interrupted electricity supply	EEDC has taken light

Diglossia can also take place among varieties of local languages. For example, an Igbo person from Abakiliki can speak standard Igbo to people from Anambra or Imo state but speak his own dialect to someone from his own speech community. In this case, the standard variety of the local language becomes the high variety while the other variety becomes the low variety.

Features of a Diglossic Situation

In an attempt to make full description of a diglossic situation, Ferguson (1959) carries out an in-depth study of four languages: Arabic, Greek Swiss German and Haitian Creole. He categorizes each of these languages into two varieties: high(H)and low(L). He categorizes the distinct features of these varieties and discuss them under four sub- heading which includes; Function, Prestige, Acquisition, and Standardization. He makes further studies in2006 and come up with five more features.

Ferguson (2006) explains diglossia under the following rubrics:

- 1. Function:** The most important feature of diglossia is the specialization of the functions of the two varieties. One language serves two different functions. In some communicative situations, only the high variety (H) is appropriate but in other situations only the low variety(L)is used,

for example:

S/N	High Variety(H)	Low Variety(L)
1	Sermons in churches	Informal conversation
2	Formal letters	Instruction to servants
3	Political speeches	Folk literature
4	Lectures	Buying and selling in the market
5	News broadcasts	Radio soap opera

The L, variety is the informal, casual conversational language

- 2. Prestige:** The high variety (H) enjoys a greater and superior status than the low variety (L). It is believed that the 'H 'variety is more intelligible, elegant, more coherent, and more logical than 'L' these qualities earn more respect and recognition for H variety leaving L variety inferior.
- 3. Literacy heritage:** there are more literatures in the H variety. Textbooks and legal documents are written in H variety which gives it literacy heritage.

Acquisition: The low variety (L) is usually acquired naturally by the child in his home environment and is used at home to speak to children and spoken by children, but the high variety(H)is acquired through

explicit teaching in a formal setting.

4. **Standardization:** The high variety (H) is standardized but the low variety is not standardized but in some communities a standardized 'L' may arise as a result of imitation of the dialect by speakers of other dialects. When this happens the function of the low variety still remains limited to that of 'L'. It is standardized by means of formal codification, dictionaries, grammars, pronunciation guide and books are written with H variety
5. **Stability:** diglossia is an extremely stable phenomenon. The tension between H and L is reduced to some extent by the development of mixed intermediate forms which share some of the features of both H and L varieties.
6. **Grammar:** the syntax, complex sentences with numerous subordinate constructions of the H variety are appropriate while that of the L is simpler. There are considerable differences in the grammar of H and that of L.
7. **Lexicon:** there are words that are found in high variety that are also found in low variety. The vocabulary of high variety are shared with Low variety, that notwithstanding, learned words and technical terms are only found in H variety. There are words in the home objects that have no equivalents in the H variety. There is also the existence of paired words.

The last but not the least feature as contributed by Fasold (1984) is the phonological feature. There is a substantial range of difference between Hand L varieties phonologies.

Bilingualism:

According to Adegbite (2004), bilingualism is the act of choosing a language or variety with which to communicate at any given time. Bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages by the members of the same community. The social context determines to a large extent the language or variety that one chooses to use. It consists of other factors, such as the time and place of communication, the formality of the occasion, the topic under discussion, the degrees of formality between interlocutors and so on code switching from one language to another is a common feature of a bilingual society.

Types of bilingualism

Adegbite (2004) goes on to mention three types of bilingualism as follows:

1. Coordinate bilingualism: this is when an individual has or possess the ability to use or speak the two languages proficiently.
2. Subordinate bilingualism: this is when an individual is proficient in one of the two languages. This language in which he is proficient is usually the mother tongue, then he can speak the other language, but not with great proficiency as the other language.
3. Incipient bilingualism: an incipient bilingual is just able to use one of the two languages proficiently, usually the mother tongue, but with a partial understanding of the other language.

Diglossia and bilingualism in Nigeria

Nigeria is a diglossic and bilingual/multilingual society. According to Adegbite (2010), the total number of languages spoken in Nigeria is about five hundred. This linguistic diversity in the country has occasioned the development and the spread of the concept of diglossia and bilingualism.

Diglossia is a word derived from a French word "diglossie" and was brought into English use by Charles Ferguson in 1959. According to him, diglossia is a linguistic situation where two varieties of a language exist side by side in a speech community. One of the varieties is the standardized high variety but the other is the low variety which may not be standardized.

Bilingualism is the existence of two different languages within the speech community. The act of choosing a language or variety with which to communicate at any given time is a common feature of bilingualism. There are two forms of bilingualism: societal bilingualism and individual bilingualism. Societal bilingualism is when a society has two different languages existing within it, and the two languages are assigned similar or different functions within it, then, we can say, such society is bilingual. Nigeria is an example of bilingual society which assigns different roles to both the official language and regional languages. In Nigeria, English has the role of official language while regional is for un-official interactions. Individual bilingualism is when an individual within a speech community can speak two languages.

Features of diglossia and bilingualism in Nigeria

There are a number of linguistic situations in Nigeria that reflect the features of diglossia and bilingualism. In such situations, speakers code-switch from one language to another or from one variety to another.

Code-switching is the practice of moving back and forth between two languages or between dialects of the language at one time depending on the social context or setting. Examples are:

1. **Code-switching from English to a local language**
2. **Code-switching from English to Pidgin.**
3. **Code switching from a local language to its variety**
4. **Code-switching from standard to non Standard English.**

Code switching from English to a local language:

As pointed earlier, there are about five hundred indigenous languages in Nigeria. In varied situations of daily living, people code-switch from English to their local language and vice versa. They do this in response to the social context they find themselves. People use English and their local language interchangeable. In this case, English assumes the role of high variety while local language assumes the role of low variety.

Code-switching from English to Pidgin:

Pidgin is a contact language. It is a bastardization or corruption of the original language. It is a common practice in Nigeria, especially those living in cities like Benin, Lagos, Warri, Port-Harcourt etc. to code-switch from English to Pidgin when communicating with people in informal situations. This practice is also common among Nigerian police and students in Nigeria universities and colleges of Education. In this case, English assumes the role of high variety while pidgin assumes the role of low variety.

Code-switching from a local language to its variety:

Code-switching can take place between a local language and its varieties because many Nigerian languages have two or more varieties. For instance, an Igbo speaking person from Owerri (Imo state) can speak standard Igbo to someone who don't understand Igbo variety of Imo state but speaks his own dialects to someone from his own speech community. In this diglossic situation, the standard Igbo variety becomes the high variety while the other becomes the low variety.

Code-switching from standard to non-standard English:

Standard English is the British English introduced in Nigeria by the European missionaries and colonial administrators. Non-standard English is the variety spoken by Nigerians.

Examples

Standard English	Non-standard English
1 the radio set is broken	The radio set is spoiled
2 I will join you soon	I am coming
3 she is my elder sister	She is my big sister
4 she is plump	She is plumpy
Ike promised to pay by installments	Ike promised to pay installmentally
Traffic jam	Go slow

Types of code switching

There are two major types of code switching, they are: Situational code-switching and Metaphorical codes switching. (Ferguson, 2006)

Situational code-switching: this is the type of code switching that occurs when a speaker changes from one language to another as a result of change in situation or social context. A change in the interlocutors can bring about a change in language as well as a change in the physical environment or setting. A teacher or lecturer may start a discussion with a student with a student in his or her office with English and changes to Igbo or any other language depending on the tribe or the language both of them have common knowledge of. The teacher or lecturer may do this to change his or her role as teacher/lecturer or superior or an authority so that the aim of the conversation will be achieved. This can also happen on realization that they both come from same town or language area. This switch can also come

from the student for same reasons as that of the lecturer's. Two Igbo students may also change from Igbo language to English language because the arrival of an Efik student in their midst so as to carry the non Igbo speaking student along. The entire discussion may not change but most of the words will be in English. On the other hand, two Igbo students speaking English may switch to Igbo at the arrival of other students who they do not want to accommodate in their discussing.

Metaphorical code switching

This is the occasional change of topic or subject matter. The situation may remain the same but the topic of discussion changes. Some topics of discussion are more adaptable to one language than another. Political speeches for instance are usually found to be from mother tongue to English language. A discussion on cultural and domestic issues is better carried out in native language than in second language. Under metaphorical code-switching also, the switch may occur when one wants to introduce metaphors, proverbs, idioms and figurative expressions in one's mother tongue to enrich the conversation. Switches may occur while making commands, questions and so on, in a language which is more convenient.

Motivations for code switching

Though Language users have varying reasons for code-switching but code-switching is mostly done for psychological reasons. Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2008) noted that in Igbo, where English is used as a foreign language, code-switching and code-mixing are triggered by some socio-psychological motivations. These socio-psychological motivations include: language attitude, subconscious linguistic behavior, and cultural disloyalty. When an individual employs the use of an accent or dialect of a group, the audience is more receptive to the content. This context can easily be observed in political campaigns rallies and speeches. More psychological reasons for code-switches occur in the areas of trying to emphasize a command, eliminating ambiguity, for humorous effects, to show respect and avoid socio-cultural/linguistic taboo and soon.

Also, code-switching can be Linguistic motivated. Code switching is motivated by the speakers need to repeat words or sentences for either stylistic effect or for the purpose of emphasis. There petition is meant to give more weight to the utterance made in one of the two bilingual's languages. It may also be used to qualify a message or to reinforce it, here, switching is motivated to clarify as well as elaborate a point, to exclaim or interject a point as a sign of exclamation or excitement. Switches are made in order to foreground statements, greetings; addresses and soon are used to foreground speeches. Adeniran (1990) used the term *phatic* for these types of foregrounding switches. Switching is motivated by need to introduce technical terms and expressions. This motivation is to satisfy speaker and listener's lexical needs. The desire to mark off quotation and direct quotation is also a reason for switching. It could be stereotypical imitation of speech in jokes or even in learned citation,

Other general reasons for code-switching manifests during praying, teasing, abusing, cajoling, mocking praising, cursing, swearing, bluffing, gossiping, disarming participants, making apology and showing multiple identity

Language contacts-factors responsible for diglossia and bilingualism:

According to Weinreich (1974), what gave rise to bilingualism and diglossia is language contacts. Whenever two languages come in contact with individuals or in a community, such an individual or host community inevitably becomes bilingual. Yusuf (1999) is of the view that language contact be seen in the broad sense of contact between two cultures and it can be as a result of conquest, wars, migration, colonization etc. language contact occurs when speakers of two or more languages or varieties interact and influence each others.

According to Fishman (1971) one major source of bilingualism is colonialism. In the process of ruling the indigenes of a particular state, the language and culture of the colonialist are introduced through the process of Education into the social, economic and political life of the nation involved. It is through this

process that many African states like Nigeria became bilingual. This also gave rise to the concept of diglossia.

Language contact can also be traced to an attempt by an individual or community to trade with another individual or community. This act of trading with another individual or community brings about exchange of language and cultures of those involved. This is why many Nigerians are able to speak their mother tongue in addition to other indigenous languages. The Europeans traded with Nigerians establishing a port in Benin kingdom and as such their language was introduced to Nigerians as a tool for communication, this result to bilingualism and diglossia.

Wars of conquest are another factor that can lead to bilingualism. When a powerful nation embarks on a war in order to be able to control the politics of a weaker nation, their language and culture will be forcefully introduced to the nation conquered (Gal, 1988).

Borderline area is another point that language can be traced to. For example, in Nigeria, the occupants of Idi-Iroko, a community which shares the boundaries of Nigeria and Benin republic are bilinguals. This is because they interact with the people of Benin republic who speak French and indigenes who speak Yoruba.

Migration is another factor that gave rise to bilingualism and diglossia. When people move from one region to another, may be in search of greener pastures, it is obvious that they will their language to be able to take part in the society. Migration accounts for a very large proportion of bilinguals. From the fore-going, one can say that language contact gave rise to bilingualism and diglossia. It is also important to say that language contact has some consequences; it gave rise to interference at all levels of language description.

Implications of Diglossia and Code-Switching for English Language Teaching and Learning:

The concept of diglossia and code-switching has serious implications for English language teaching and learning in Nigeria. First and foremost, diglossia emphasizes the importance of matching the right variety with the appropriate situation. This is also important in English language learning. Learners should be taught to use formal language in formal situations and informal language in informal situations. A child should learn how to greet people in the village in his local language and not in English.

Second, it has been observed that code-switching occurs frequently and unconsciously in diglossic situations. Therefore, English language teachers should emphasize that learners learn to keep to one particular code at a time instead of mixing them up. This is pertinent because many Nigerian undergraduates find it difficult to speak English accurately without mixing their sentences with pidgin. In addition, the concept of diglossia and code-switching relates mainly to oral communication. Therefore, English language teachers should give more attention to oral communication in the classroom. The emphasis should be on teaching English as it is used for communication in natural situations of daily living, for different purposes and functions. They should provide learners with learning activities that reflect real-life experiences. Also learners should be given opportunities to practice the linguistic forms and structures they learn in the classroom, as they are actually used in real-life situations.

Conclusion

Diglossia and bilingualism are Siamese twins when it comes to language use. Both of them refer to the existence of two languages or varieties of language in a speech community. The only difference is in the assignment of functions on them which is what diglossia focuses on. In this case, one variety is regarded as the high or prestige variety and is used in an official social setting like teaching, government; religious functions etc, whereas the other variety is regarded as the low variety which in most cases is the indigenous variety of the speech community. This low variety is used on unofficial social context like in the family discussions, indigenous market places etc.

Nigeria as a diglossic society assigned the role of prestige variety to the English language. English language is used for official functions in more formal situations. The other variety which could be indigenous languages or Pidgin English is issued in an informal setting. However, diglossia can also take place among varieties of local language. For example, the standard Igbo can be used in a formal igbo setting and variety (dialect) will be used for people in the same speech community. In this case, the standard igbo variety assumes the role of prestige variety and the other low variety. In summary, it is the concept of bilingualism and multilingualism that gave rise to the concept of diglossia. That means, if a speech community like Nigeria is not bilingual /multilingual, there will be no high or low variety of language which is what diglossia is all about.

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