How Code Choice is Influenced in Sabongida-Ora, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is a sociolinguistic survey of language or code choice in multilingual Sabongida-Ora community of Edo State, Nigeria. In multilingual settings, the choice between languages carries interactional force or implies something about the situation or the interlocutors. One language may be used for some social functions or in a specific social context, while another language is reserved for other functions or contexts. The questionnaire and interview methods were used to elicit response from the respondents. The findings revealed that language or code choice is influenced by the topic or purpose of discourse, the domain of interaction, the status of the interlocutors and the relationship between interlocutors.

Keywords: *Language choice, Code switching and mixing, Interlocutors.*

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Background to the Study
This paper is a sociolinguistic survey of factors that constrain code or language choice in Sabongida-Ora, Edo State, Nigeria. It is aimed at unraveling the underlying forces behind the choice that speakers make of the many languages available to users in this setting. Much as sociolinguists are agreed that sociolinguistics is the study of relationship between language and society, they are interested in explaining why people speak differently in different social contexts. They are also concerned with identifying the social functions of language and the way it is used to convey social meaning, (Holmes, 2008; Wardhaugh, 2006; Romaine, 2000; Yul-Ifode, 2001; Hudson, 1998). Multilingualism, a sub-field of sociolinguistics is defined as the act of using or promoting the use of multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers, (Fishman 1972; Spolsky, 1998; Wardhaugh, 2006).

It has been established by scholars in this field, (Fishman, 1972; Spolsky, 1998; Holmes, 2008; Bamgbose, 1991, and a host of others) that language choice in a multilingual speech community is not a random matter of momentary inclination but constrained by certain extra-lingualistic factors. This claim is equally supported by the study on Ogori/Magongo people of Kogi State, Nigeria (Zubair, 2011).

Brief Historical Background of Sabongida-Ora People of Edo State
Sabongida-Ora Community of Edo state inhabits a local government called Owan and the language spoken by the group is equally called Owan. However, by virtue of linguistic classification in which they have been grouped as a member of proto-North Central Edoid language (Elugbe, 1973), Edo is generally spoken. In addition to this, many of the inhabitants also speak Yoruba, while Etsako the language of their immediate Northern neighbours is also commonly spoken in addition to Nigerian pidgin and English language for the educated speakers.

Even though, they are presently referred to as Owan, historically they are called Luleha and they occupy the present day Owan West Local Government of Edo State. Sabongida Ora, the biggest town in the Luleha speaking area is the headquarters of the local government, and by 2006 Nigerian census they are said to have numbered 97,388. Obuhoro (2001) puts forward that historically, the origin of the Luleha people is traceable to one Irimo who is believed to have had a Yoruba ancestry. According to this source, Irimo (Aremu in Yoruba language) is believed to have migrated from Ile-Ife before settling down in Luleha land around 1200 AD. Obuhoro submits that Aremu is the son of Izoduwa or Oduduwa of Ile-Ife, the present day Osun State. Aremu migrated first to Ibini or Benin in the company of Oranmiyan, where they met Oba Awaika (pronounced Eweka) who was the then Oba of Benin. He further claims that Aremu moved from Benin with his wife Ooto to his distant cousin in Uokhai. As a result of disagreement, Aremu separated from his cousin and moved further to Kukuruku land that had a mixture of Hausa, Ebira, Yoruba and other migrants. They were called Kukuruku because during the Nupe war, when the Nupes came to capture them, they shouted as cockcrows to deceive their captors. The popular market where the Yorubas and the Kukuruku people traded in Etu

(meaning antelope in Yoruba) was called Oja Etu. Oja Etu or market for antelopes blossomed and was synchronized as "Jattu" located in Auchi land or Etsako. However, other Ora historians according to Obuhoro disagree with the Yoruba origin of Luleha. They are of the opinion that their origin is traceable to Benin. They claim that when Obazua and Okpame met at Uokha, a bond was formed. When the father of Okpame (the Oba of Benin) died, he was called back to inherit the throne of the Oba of Benin.

In view of the above historical accounts, it is therefore not surprising that Luleha or Owan or Ora people became multilingual where languages like Yoruba, Ebira and even Hausa are used simultaneously in conversation, in addition to the indigenous language of the people.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
Language Choice
In this study, we are looking at how choosing between languages can be invested with the same kinds of social and affective meaning as choosing styles in one language. Decisions made about the use and recognition of languages can have a powerful impact on the long term strength of a language. In multilingual settings, the choice between languages carries interactional force or implies something about the situation or the interlocutors. One language may be used for some social functions or in a specific social context, while another language is reserved for other functions and contexts. The study of choice can also focus on the relationship between groups of speakers and the languages in use in their community. This can lead to the understanding of why some languages remain strong in the face of social change, while others are abandoned within a few generation. It can equally help us to understand the role language plays in defining a group or ethnic identity. Domain of use can also determine the language a speaker chooses in a multilingual setting. In making a choice therefore, speakers may conceptualize the relationship between location, addressee and in group identity in different ways.

Language use in multilingual setting is, therefore, examined in specific contexts, looking at how, during the course of an interaction, speakers may adopt different language varieties or create switch between varieties as a communicative strategy.

Many studies of language use in multilingual communities have been concerned with habitual language choices made by speakers, (Mesthrie et al, 2009). However, in many cases, speakers could, in principle use any of their languages in interaction with others, but in practice certain languages tend to be associated with certain contexts (with certain settings, topics, groups of interlocutors and so on). For instance, Myers-Scotton in (Mesthrie et al 2009) noted that in Africa the most common pattern of multilingualism is to use the speaker's own mother tongue plus an indigenous lingua franca or an alien official language (such as English or French). She also argues that evidence from urban communities in Africa suggests that patterns of language choice vary according to speakers' social backgrounds and the types of interaction in which they engage. In multilingual communities, then it is possible to identify certain broad regularities or patterns of language use. This does not mean, however, that individual speakers simply

reflect these patterns. In so far as a language becomes associated with certain groups of speakers and contexts of use, it will require important social meanings. Speakers may use the language to convey information about their own identity and about the relationship that obtains between themselves and others (or that they would like to obtain between themselves and others). It has also been noted that language choice can be an uncertain matter. For instance the tension surrounding the position of English in Kenya (Myers-Scotton, 2009), i.e. whether English language will continue to serve as the only official language or it should be used alongside Swahili. Relationship between languages in multilingual settings may be relatively stable, but they may also change. A variety of social factors (migration, invasion and conquest, industrialization) have been associated with a process termed language shift, in which the functions carried out by one language are taken over by another.

It is pertinent to note that language use is critical to a good understanding of the linguistic situation in a multilingual setting. When people have command of two or more languages, they make choices as to when and where to use a certain language. The choices speakers make of the languages rests on their attitude concerning the language of choice (Zubair, 2011).

Code-Switching and Code-Mixing
Code-switching and mixing are sociolinguistic phenomena in which speakers of many languages combine aspects of the languages they speak in one communicative event. Essien (1995) cited in Ugot (2010) defines code-switching as "the process by which the speaker or the initiator of speech changes or switches from one language or code to another, depending on the situation, audience, subject matter, etc". Similar changes may also take place within a sentence, such a switch is known as code-mixing which Essien (1995) defines as "a phenomenon in which two codes or languages are used for the same message or communication".

Adekunle (1990:240) describes the phenomena as being determined by "bounds of limitless avenues and patterns of social interaction and the unfathomable depth of human creative reservoir". Code-mixing is usually the infusion of single word or item from the donor language into the L1 construction. Code-switching on the other hand is the lifting of phrasal, clausal or sentential structures. In syntactic terms, code-switching occurs in a discourse which is made up of sentences in languages A and B.

Bentahila and Davies (1983) stress that code-switching is sometimes used to register the multilingual's ability to choose one or the other of the languages in a particular situation. According to Banjo (1983) and Pfaff (1983) the phenomenon is conditioned by social as well as linguistic constraints. The linguistic constraints are those of proficiency and mastery of the systems of the various languages. Social constraints are primarily those of topic, situation, participants, education, sex, etc. The basic difference between code-switching and code-mixing is the composition of the elements intermingled and the arrangement of such intermingling, Ugot (2010).

Thus, Wardhaugh (1986:200) argues that in code-switching/mixing situation, the interlocutors are required to demonstrate good knowledge of the grammar of the languages involved as well as the societal norms that constrain the use of these languages. Lipski (1982:192) submits that the phenomenon arises from an inner-drive that cannot find a ready expression by remaining within a single language.

However, a good number of other sociolinguistic scholars have investigated the phenomenon of code-switching/mixing with emphasis on the causes, functions, characteristics and effects. The causes have been identified as mainly sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic. One is bilingualism itself or language contact that results in lexical borrowing and mixture of languages (Ansre, 1971; Bamgbose, 1971; Cheng and Butler, 1989). Some are status, integrity, self-pride, comfort ability and prestige (Akere, 1977; Bokamba, 1989; Hymes, 1962; Kachru, 1989, Kamwangamalu, 1989). Other causes include modernization, westernization, efficiency, professionalism and social advancement (Kachru, 1989; Kamwangamalu, 1989). Some of the identified functions are intra-group identity (Gumperz, 1982), poetic creativity (Kachru, 1989) and expression of modernization (Kamwangamalu, 1989). One of the major characteristics of the phenomenon according to Kamwangamalu (1989) is its imposition as the norm of language use in most multilingual communities.

Theoretical Framework
This research has adopted Giles' (1977) accommodation theory because it is socially diagnostic and lays emphasis on effective communication in complex multiethnic and multilingual communities. Furthermore, it is concerned with the way language users perceive and respond to language in such communities.

Accommodation theory is a powerful attempt to explain the courses of choice and it is paralleled by an approach within sociolinguistics. The theory is interested in the specific motivations that may encourage individual speakers to adopt certain language varieties. Accommodation is regarded as a general phenomenon, applying in both monolingual and multilingual communities.

The theory is a bundle of principles that are intended to characterize the strategies speakers use to establish, context or maintain relationships through talk. Regardless of its scope accommodation theory rests on one pivotal process: attunement. The idea is that we all tailor, or attune our behaviors according to the interaction and this process of attunement involves a range of communicative behaviours like language choice. Attunement renders the addressee(s) as equally important as the speaker and it also presents communicative behaviours as elements in a dynamic system. Speakers may consciously undertake convergence or divergence, but it is important to note that accommodation may occur well beyond the speaker's level of conscious awareness.

It tends to suggest that one's language behavior shows that one associates other social and interactional benefits with speaking more like the different groups of people one moves in and out of. The theory allows for the possibility of an interaction in which one person

converges and the other person diverges, which shows how complicated and important people's attitudes towards others are and how these attitudes can be played out in language choice. The theory may also reveal aspects of the structure of a speech community that a linguist may have taken for granted. The theory equally stresses the importance of speaker's attitudes to their addressee, and the resulting dynamism in interactions. The theory provides us with a context for comparing what speakers think they are doing with what they actually are doing.

Method of Data Collection
The study took the researcher to Sabongida-Ora town to physically observe the language situation and collect data. Collecting data through written questionnaires is an established method in other social scientific fields and has a long history in dialect geography (Milroy and Gordon, 2003). Interviews have also been regarded as one of the most common approach to data collection among sociolinguists.

The research methodology adopted for this study is survey method. This sample survey method is adopted through the use of structural questionnaire. The questionnaire is directed at respondents who are literate while structured and unstructured interview are directed at the illiterate members of the population of the study. Each questionnaire solicits information on age, sex, level of education and occupation. Other questions include other languages spoken apart from the mother tongue, how those languages are acquired, where and when they are used and what factors influence the choice of any of the languages.

Sample Size
About 200 respondents were randomly selected across social strata like age, sex, occupation and educational level in the setting. The researcher settled for 200 respondents in anticipation of those who might not cooperate. This sample size was arrived at in view of the fact that the respondents have similar environment, their characteristics are largely the same and their exposure are likely to be similar.

The Survey
In the community, the researcher was accompanied by informants who are indigenous to the environment to the field of interview. The interview was helpful in the sense that areas that could not be adequately covered by questionnaire were complemented by the interview.

Analytical Procedure
Two hundred questionnaires were processed in three stages, namely coding, data presentation and data analysis. The coding was carried out by giving numerical value to respondents' answers. The data was analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). The analysis was based largely on frequency and percentage distribution.

Tables were used to elucidate the data. There are three columns in each table. The first column deals with the number of respondents. The second column deals with the frequency of occurrence while the third column is concerned with the value as expressed in percentage.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis presented here was done using the frequency and percentage analysis method which is prevalent with researches in social sciences. This was adopted to get the necessary information that would lead to a meaningful conclusion. Although, 200 copies of the questionnaire were administered in the community and 191 was returned.

Question 1: How many languages do you speak apart from your mother tongue?

The responses to the above question revealed that many respondents in the community had at least a working knowledge of one language in addition to their mother tongue as shown in table below.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Number of Languages Spoken in Sabongida-Ora

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	78	40.8
2	85	44.5
3	25	13.1
4 and above	3	1.6
Total	**191**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2015

In Sabongida Ora, 78 respondents out of 191 admitted being able to speak one other language in addition to Ora; this represents 40.8% while 85 of the respondents representing 44.5% of the total number of respondents claimed to speak two other languages. In addition, 25 and 3 respondents representing 13.1% and 1.6% respectively claimed to speak between 3 and 4 languages in addition to their mother tongue.

Question 2: What is the Language Combination?

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Language Combination in the Sabongida-Ora

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yoruba/Bini	17	8.9
Yoruba/Etsako	11	5.8
Yoruba/English	58	30.3
English/others	105	55.0
Total	**191**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The above table reveals that out of 191 respondents in Sabongida Ora, 17 respondents representing 8.9% claimed to combine Yoruba and Bini languages in addition to Ora, 11 of the respondents representing 5.8% responded in favour of Yoruba and Etsako, 58 respondents claimed to combine Yoruba and English which is 30.3% of the respondents, while 105 respondents agreed they combined English Language and other languages like Ebira, Nupe, Igala and even Igbo in addition to their mother tongue, Ora.

Question 3: When and how do you speak any of these languages you have acquired?
The analysis of the motivation for the acquisition of second languages above leads us to the next crucial question of how these languages are used in Sabongida-Ora. In other words, what factor(s) constrain the choice of any of the languages in interaction at a given moment? This is where the theoretical framework adopted for this study comes to play. How speakers attune their speech to accommodate other interlocutors in order to achieve desired communicative objective. The data in the table below gave us an insight.

Table 3: Sabongida-Ora

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Topic	68	35.6
Domain	79	41.4
Role-Relations	43	22.5
Others	1	0.5
Total	**191**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2015

In Sabongida-Ora the respondents who claimed to be influenced by topic were 68 amounting to 35.6%, domain had 79 respondents with 41.4% and role-relations 43 representing 22.5%. Domain is the dominant factor in language choice in this setting, however topic had equally strong influence on language choice as shown above. Therefore, the range between the interlocutors who accommodate others by domain and those who do so by topic was close. Therefore, these two factors are critical in language choice in Sabongida-Ora.

Discussion of Findings
A careful consideration of the preceding data on multilingualism in Sabongida-Ora and the analysis thereof which was aimed at determining language choice on the part of the individual speakers and the social and contextual variables constraining this choice, it is clear that the model adopted for this study recognizes that choice between or among alternate codes is prevalent in multilingual settings, depending on the various factors in speech events.

In addition to the data collected through questionnaire, information was equally obtained through interaction on a number of communication situations both formal and informal, observation of language behaviour as it took place. In the process, the researcher became curious in any instance where a language other than the mother tongue was being used.

This in turn led to a number of discussions about the contexts of use of other languages. It should be noted however, that it is not the aim of this study to completely predict code choices among the speakers of this community, which is the reason why more than one code can be employed in every communicative event.

In Sabongida-Ora, the Yoruba influence appeared to be waning as many speakers between the ages of 5 and 25 may not be able to speak the language like the elderly ones. However, most of them still bear Yoruba names, for instance the two informants used for this research in Sabongida-Ora both bore Yoruba names; Owolabi and Tunde even though they are natives. In addition, certain areas or streets are named in Yoruba, for example there is a place called Óké New, Oke in Yoruba means upland. The older people admitted that they learnt Yoruba largely through the missionaries as Christianity seemed to have spread to the area through Yoruba land, the bible and the hymns they used were all written in Yoruba. This is the reason why the second most significant factor for acquiring or learning a second language in that setting is necessity.

In addition, observation revealed that Ora was largely used by children and their parents at home in Sabongida-Ora, while the playground elicited a combination of Ora and Yoruba with English predominantly used at school. Among adults, however, a combination of Ora and Yoruba were used at home, while office and school elicited a combination of Ora and English depending on the co-interlocutors. The church revealed more of Ora with occasional switch into English, while the leisure period elicited a combination of Ora, Yoruba,Etsako and Nigerian Pidgin English.

From the findings, it is revealed that language choice is influenced by the following factors:
(a)   The domain of interaction.
(b)   The topic or purpose of discourse.
(c)   Relationship between interlocutors.
(d)   That code-switching is rampant in this community as this has been observed to be the only way out of this linguistic quagmire, particularly when they get to a point where they cannot find relevant words to express certain phenomenon in their mother tongues.

Conclusion
In the finally analysis, language or code choice in Sabongida-Ora is constrained by mutually reinforcing factors such as topic, domain, role-relations and status of interlocutors. The findings and analysis revealed that code-switching and/or mixing is the only way by which speakers escape linguistic difficulties, particularly when they get to a point where they are stuck.

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