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Language Maintenance in the Face of Identity Shift – Some Insights from Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigated the influence of politics on the linguistic and ethnic identities of some Ilorin people of Yoruba ancestry and showed the variations that exist in individuals' degrees of allegiances to that ancestry. It paid particular attention to ethnic converts; individuals who have crossed ethnic boundaries while at the same time, maintaining linguistic allegiance to their ancestral ethnicity. Survey and ethnographic methods were used. Proportional sampling method was used for the selection of 100 questionnaire respondents from the three local government areas constituting Ilorin. Structured interviews which were conducted with 15 purposively selected respondents with sufficient knowledge of their identities and community were ethnographically analysed. A uniform pattern of linguistic identity was established in favour of the Yoruba language but not so for the Yoruba ethnic identity. A mosaic pattern of identity was established as 53.3% which constitutes eight of the fifteen respondents, preferred a civic identity; 26.7% of the respondents preferred their sole ancestral ethnic identity; Yoruba; two respondents which constituted 13.3% of the respondents preferred hybrid ethnic identities; Yoruba-Ilorin while there was also the case of an ethnic converts who claimed non-ancestral ethnic belongingness (6.7%). Heritage language maintenance did not translate into the maintenance of ancestral ethnicity for a number of respondents as political allegiance was central to their ethnic claims. Non-allegiance to an ancestry whose language is dominant in Ilorin demonstrates that humans are not at the mercy of their heritage languages even when such languages are the dominant medium of expression for their community.

Key words: *heritage language, ethnic identity, allegiance, belongingness*

Introduction

Beyond its primary role as an instrument of communication, language also plays a significant role in the way that individuals identify themselves and also in that they are identified and/or perceived by others. That is, language equally shapes people's perceptions of themselves and others in their environments. Edwards (2009) posits that since language is central to human condition, and since many have argued that it is the most salient

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distinguishing aspect of the human species, it seems likely that any study of identity must surely include some consideration of it.

Deckert and Vickers (2011) describe identity as a non-static quality of an individual, which is also a flexible, fluid, and multi-aspected co-construction that is only partially (if at all, in some instances) representative of an individual's sense of self. Co-construction according to Jacoby and Ochs (1995:171) is the "joint construction of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion or other culturally meaningful reality". Deckert and Vickers further explain that though the co-construction implies that more than one individual is responsible for the construction, it does not however also imply that all of the constructions are necessarily affiliative or supportive. Identity then is co-constructed in ongoing interactions in relation to the specific contexts (relational, social, cultural, ethnic, political, etc.) in which the particular interaction is occurring. This shows that there could be wide gaps between peoples' real identities and those perceived and even projected by the co-constructors or "others". The foregoing therefore illustrate the point that, language is an important tool in the construction manifestation and perception of identity, its role in identity formation makes it a critical component of this study as well. The subject of this paper is the examination of the influence of politics on the linguistic and ethnic identities of Ilorin people of Yoruba ancestry and to bring to the fore, the variations that exist in individuals' degrees of allegiances to those identities. That is, the paper seeks to investigate how a group's maintenance of their ancestral language did not translate into the maintenance of their ancestral ethnicity by all members of the group. The role that politics has played in the coming into being of that asymmetry is equally of great importance.

A Brief History of Ilorin and its People

Politics and by extension, different political leaderships (represented by the traditional leadership system with its pervading influence on modern governance) has contributed in no small measure to the complexities of identity patterns in Ilorin. The reason is that, in the 19th Century, the city experienced a leadership change from the Yoruba traditional leadership system headed by an *Oba* to the Emirate system headed by an Emir.

The history of Ilorin, especially the one on the ethnic identity of its founder, has different accounts. Despite its geographical location on

the Southern axis of Nigeria, Ilorin is politically and administratively considered a northern city (recognised to be in the north-central geo-political zone of Nigeria) and that label also applies to the whole of Kwara State. On the differences in the accounts of its founders, Omo-Ikokoro (1911), for example, claims that the founder of Ilorin was a Baruba hermit (from Bussa Kingdom in present- day Niger State) before he was later joined by Ojo, a Yoruba man who was an itinerant hunter from Oyo-Ile. According to Omo-Ikokoro (1911), Ojo, also known as Ayinla, was reported to have found a well-positioned rock near the place where the Baruba man lived and the rock was found remarkably suitable for sharpening tools. He then decided to erect a transit camp at the site where he found the rock. This rock, being a good metal sharpener, was called *Ìlo-Irin*, (meaning iron sharpener) by the Yoruba. The name Ilorin is therefore believed to be a contraction of *Ìlo-Irin.*

Another account on the founder of Ilorin is that offered by Johnson (1921), which asserts that a Yoruba man by the name Laderin founded Ilorin around 18th century thus making Laderin, the builder of Ilorin. According to Johnson (1921:199):

> The late Afonja was a native of Ilorin. The city was built by his great grandfather, Laderin, whose posterity bore rule in her in succession to the fourth generation. Laderin, the founder was succeeded by Pasin, his son, a valiant chief… Alagbin the son of Pasin succeeded his father and in turn, handed the government to his valiant son, Afonja, with whom the rule ended.

Johnson further adds that Ilorin is sometimes spoken of as Afonja's Ilorin. This he says is because he was the most renowned of her rulers, and not only so, but also because it was he who made it into the large city that it is now. Therefore, the Yoruba people had been established in Ilorin long before the arrival of the Fulani. Johnson (1921:193) equally asserts that "Afonja invited a Fulani Moslem priest named Alimi to Ilorin to act as his priest who in responding to Afonja's call came with his Hausa slaves and made Ilorin his home". According to Hermon-Hodge (1929), little is known of the pre-Fulani history of Ilorin. Indeed, all but the period immediately preceding the Fulani conquest is wrapped in obscurity.

An equally important personality in the founding of Ilorin whose ancestry has also been a major source of debate is Solagberu. Solagberu and his followers resided at Okesuna, one of the four indigenous political quarters of Ilorin. Solagberu was an Islamic cleric who commanded a very large following and was an active gladiator in Ilorin during the era of Afonja. According to Johnson (1921), Solagberu was a Yoruba man while Jimoh (1994) reports that he was a Kanuri man (also known as Beri-beri) whose actual name, Al-Tahir, was overshadowed by the nickname "Solagberu" given to him by the Yoruba people. The third gladiator in the modern history of Ilorin was Alimi Al-Salih (popularly referred to as Shehu Alimi), a Fulani Muslim scholar who was invited to Ilorin by Afonja. He later became the head of the Fulani dynasty in Ilorin. It is interesting to note that Ilorin, like Johnson (1921) noted, is often referred to as "Ilorin Afonja" i.e Afonja's Ilorin while it is also referred to it as "Ilorin, *Geri* Alimi" i.e. Ilorin, Alimi's town.

Due to the afore-mentioned contentious issues on the founders of Ilorin, Danmole (2012) posits that it would be safe to treat these historical accounts with caution. In Danmole's (2012) opinion, a thorough assessment of a variety of literature which exists on the origin and subsequent development of Ilorin before an emirate was established in the 19th century shows that they are full of obscurities.

The people of Ilorin are of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Apart from the Yoruba people whom Jimoh describes (1994:55) as the "aboriginal Yorubas", there are also Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Kannike, Kanuri and Baruba peoples in Ilorin. Jimoh further explains that with the passage of time, the city became multifarious following the influx of multiple cultural and sub-cultural groups. Each group lived semi-autonomously in their different quarters with their ethnic heads. The Yoruba people lived in Idi-Ape with their head. The Hausa, Nupe, Gwandu, Baruba and Kemberi people lived in the Gambari quarters with their head. The Fulani people lived in the Fulani quarters with their head while the Kanuri people lived in Okesuna with their head. However, unlike the earliest times when each ethnic group strictly resided in its own quarters, intermarriage and migration of aborigines to different quarters within and outside the emirate have dissolved ethnic borders such that people are no longer restricted to their traditional quarters anymore (Saliu and Jawondo; 2006, Danmole; 2012). It is however important to add that this study aligns with the accounts which posit that Ilorin was founded by a Yoruba person because it is the most plausible position

in the literature on the founder of Ilorin. The fact that the community is below the River Niger also lends credence to the present study's stance as the position of Nigerian communities in relation to the Rivers Niger and Benue was the basis for the classification of the communities into Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914.

The Language Situation in Ilorin

Ilorin, the capital city of Kwara State like most capital cities in Nigeria plays host to people from different ethnic backgrounds both within and outside Nigeria. As a result of this, languages spoken in Ilorin include but are not limited to English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulfulde, Batonou, Ninzo, Eggon, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Arabic, Nupe, French amongst others.

As the language of the immediate environment, the Yoruba Language is taught as a school subject in Ilorin. This is with a view to complying with the National Policy on Education (NPE) which according to Igboanusi (2008), provides for a multilingual policy involving the learning of a child's L1 or language of the immediate community (LIC), one of the three major or national languages (i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) and English. Since the language of the immediate environment is in this case, one of the national languages, it therefore follows that two of these languages are taught as subjects in Ilorin schools. These are the English and the Yoruba languages.

Ilorin's indigenous ethnic languages are those that are native to its early settlers and these include the Yoruba, Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri Languages. Today, the Yoruba language is the first language of the city. However, the Hausa language still subtly thrives in Gambari in Ilorin where it is often acquired as a second language but rarely as a first language while Fulfulde is on the verge of extinction because it is only spoken as a first language by Fulani people who come to the capital city from villages like Gaa-Alaanu in Moro Local Government Area which is outside of the capital city. The gradual process of language loss led to the death of other indigenous languages like Kanuri in the Emirate though they are still spoken as first languages in other parts of Nigeria. Even in the palace where the Emir is Fulani by ancestry, the Yoruba language is the language of the palace and past Emirs are known to have borne Yoruba names. For example, the current Emir is Alhaji Ibrahim Kólápò Zulu Gambari.

Besides the general prevalence of the Yoruba language in Ilorin, other languages spoken are: English (the language of Western Education from primary to tertiary levels and which is also used in the home by some parents as L1 to their children), Arabic, Hausa, Fulfulde, Batonou, Nupe and French languages. It should however be added that the English language, apart from being Nigeria's official language, has also acquired the status of a Nigerian language because it has become the first language in some Nigerian homes. Hence, the English language is the community's language for administration, education, government, mass media amongst other formal functions.

The presence of Arabic in Ilorin is closely related to Ilorin's association with Islam, which is the faith practised by the overwhelming majority of Ilorin people. The language is also used as the medium of instruction in Islamic institutions of learning. French is taught as a subject in both primary and secondary schools but mostly, in privately-owned schools and offered as a course of study in tertiary institutions located within the city. The use of Hausa is still mostly perceivable in Gambari Quarters where few of those of Hausa ancestry learn it as a second language. The Yoruba language is the dominant language in most mosques and local markets while churches predominantly use the English language and in a few cases, the Yoruba language or the predominant Nigerian language of the congregation. The English language and Nigerian Pidgin are the languages for inter-ethnic communication. Batonou and Nupe are also spoken by people from the northern part of Kwara State who are resident in Ilorin for interpersonal communication.

Review of Related Studies

This paper is anchored upon the fact that different ethnic groups have different political and historical experiences and the link between language and identity cannot be the same for all ethnic groups or even for individuals within the same ethnic group as their different political and historical experiences are bound to shape their identity constructions, perceptions and manifestations in different ways. Hence, just as the relationship between language and identity would vary from one group to another, so would it be for individuals.

With the changes of season and weather comes growth and death, blossoming and weakening. Therefore, just like language shift is a downward language movement (Baker, 2003; 58), (ethnic) identity shift is the downward movement in the sense of attachment of a

people to their ancestral ethnicity. Although language and identity shift happen together in a lot of cases as evident in the case of the Suba people of Kenya and the Nkoroo people of Rivers State, Nigeria, they need not necessarily be conceived of as phenomena that go hand in hand. As shall be shown later in this study, identity shift can take place without language shift. In essence, identity shift can occur even when there is a relative stability in the number and distribution of the speakers of a language, its proficient usage by children and adults, and its retention in specific domains (e.g. home, school, religion) due to intervening social and political factors.

Recognising the controversial nature of the relationship between language, ethnicity and identity, Bamgbose (1991) suggests four possible positions. The positions as summarised by Nwagbo (2014) are as follows: that language is a powerful factor in the determination of ethnicity; that language is dispensable in the construction of group identity and that race, political class affiliation are more important factors in the determination of ethnicity; that language is merely one of the cultural elements or symbols which determine ethnicity and not the only one and lastly; that the relationship between language and ethnicity varies depending on the state of the group involved.

Bamgbose's (1991) second position that language is dispensable in the construction of group identity and that race, political class affiliation are more important factors in the determination of ethnicity strongly holds true for the Ikwerre people of Rivers State, Nigeria, as the Ikwerre people offer another reason that language should not be straightforwardly equated with ethnicity and identity. Many Ikwerre people usually insist that they are not Igbo people despite the mutual intelligibility between what they now consider the Ikwerre language (the same speech form is considered the Ikwerre dialect of the Igbo language by other speakers of the Igbo language) and other dialects of Igbo. Ikwerre first names and names of traditional gods for example are same as those in other dialects of Igbo but the Ikwerre people insist on a distinct ethnic identity – the Ikwerre. In fact, the 1979 constitution gave official recognition to the Ikwerre people as a separate ethnic group in Nigeria.

Bamgbose's position above tallies with Fishman's (1998) who states that "ethnicity" is used to signify the macro-group "belongingness" or "identificational dimension of culture", whether that of individuals or of aggregates per se. He adds that ethnicity is narrower than

culture and more perspectival than culture as there are many aspects of culture that are not (or are no longer) viewed as aggregratively identificational. This perspectival quality of ethnicity means that its specification or attribution is fundamentally subjective, variable and very possibly, non-consensual. Fishman offers an example in which some individuals who are described as *X*ians by others (who consider themselves to be *Y*ians) may actually not consider themselves to be *X*ians at all. And some of those who do not consider themselves *X*ians now, may come to consider themselves *X*ians five or ten years from now, or in the next generation. Finally, for some of those who do consider themselves as *X*ians, their Xianship may be much more central or salient in consciousness and self-identity than it is for others. This variability in perceived and experienced ethnicity also leads to variability in its association with language.

That languages and the identities they carry with them generally imply a boundary-marking function whereby the same identity prevails where and for as long as the same language is spoken has been questioned by Tabouret-Keller (1998) who submits that it certainly is no longer true today. He however adds that the longer a territorial identity is perceived as embedded in the use of an idiom - more often than not subsumed under a unique term that might designate the territory, the people, and their language - the stronger the representation of a highly focused unit of internal coherence. The strength of such a representation does not depend on permanent variation and change in language use. On the contrary, it helps to overlook these in favour of a unique identity supported by this unique term.

In a similar vein, Fishman (1998) adds that it is obvious that there should be some link between language and ethnicity since the major symbolic system of the human species must be associated with the perceived dimensions of human aggregation. If people group themselves into differently speaking collectivities, as they naturally must as long as large numbers of monolinguals exist, then their languages become both symbolic of as well as the basis for that grouping. However, just as ethnicity itself is perspectival and situational, and therefore variable in saliency, so the link between language and ethnicity is also variable. For some, (and in some historical and situational contexts) language is the prime indicator and expression of their own and another's ethnicity; for others,

language is both merely marginal and optional (i.e., detachable) vis-a-vis their ethnicity (and that of "others" as well).

The situation in Ilorin leans strongly towards Bamgbose's proposition that language is sometimes dispensable in the construction of group identity and that race and political class affiliation are more important factors in the determination of ethnicity. It however becomes pertinent to add that, the dispensability of language in the construction of identity in this paper concerns the behaviour of individuals within the group and not the group as a whole.

Theoretical Framework: Revised SIT/ELIT

Oakes (2001) reviewed the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (ELIT) and made some modifications to both theories leading to the birth of a revised framework encompassing the features of both the SIT and ELIT and even much more. In essence, the modified framework not only built on the strengths of both the SIT and ELIT, it also introduced the additional elements of integration, bilingualism and biculturalism. It is this modified framework that will be adopted in the analysis of the data generated in the course of this research. The modified framework is the Revised SIT/ELIT.

Part of the modification done to the SIT/ELIT by Oakes is the reclassification of the notions of social mobility and social creativity into those of convergence and divergence. He also broadens the scope of linguistic and non-linguistic boundaries in order to be able to use them to account for the negotiation process which takes place between different dimensions of national identity. Lastly, he introduces the concept of different linguistic arenas.

According to Oakes (2001:41), "the notions of convergence and divergence have their roots in Speech Accommodation Theory" (Giles, 1973; Giles et al., 1977; Giles and Coupland 1991) which later became known as Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1987) to enable it encompass non-verbal as well as discursive dimensions of social interaction. Giles and Coupland (1991:63) describe communicative convergence "as a strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviours in terms of a wide range of linguistic/prosodic/non-vocal features, including speech rate, pausal phenomenon and utterance length, phonological variants, smiling, gaze and so on". Within the framework of the

Revised SIT/ELIT, Oakes (2001:42) posits that convergence is used "to refer to some form of cultural movement towards the majority outgroup". Convergence as an additional element of Revised SIT/ELIT will be needful for the present study as a means of highlighting and discussing those areas where respondents demonstrate preference or ownership of features or behaviours that are known to belong to outgroups indigenous to the emirate. In addition however, the present study shows that cultural movement is not necessarily always towards the majority outgroup; members of the majority outgroup also converge culturally towards the minority out-group.

On the contrary, divergence refers to a situation whereby individuals or minority group members choose to emphasize their group's communicative style thereby accentuating differences between them and the dominant outgroup. The difference between the notions of social mobility and creativity and that of convergence and divergence is that whereas the former fails to recognise the possibility of mutual acculturation and or integration, the latter expands the former to accommodate instances where majority and minority groups mutually embrace each other's features without necessarily putting their ingroups' features at disadvantages. This new concept gives recognition to intermediate states of acculturation and/or integration on the part of both groups involved unlike in the original SIT/ELIT formulation where such is taken to imply complete assimilation. In essence, the convergence/divergence concept recognises the possibility of individuals retaining elements of their original group identity even while converging towards the other's identity. This mechanism will be useful for the present study in that it will enable one to account for areas of distinctiveness between respondents from different ancestral groups. This will show how members of different groups have maintained or accentuated certain features which serve as a point of difference between them and other groups within the same geographical entity regardless of the extent of acculturation that has taken place over the years.

Minority groups can adopt convergence mechanisms such as assimilation, acculturation/integration and overcommunication of dominant group's culture (in the case of bicultural individuals). Divergence mechanisms from dominant out-group include the re-definition of previously negatively-viewed symbols, creation of new, positively-viewed symbols, selection of an alternative, less favourable

out-group for comparison and undercommunication of dominant group's culture.

The scopes of linguistic and non-linguistic boundaries were broadened to encompass hard and soft boundaries and these two in turn, rest upon the concepts of social mobility. The interaction of the notions of hard and soft boundaries creates four types of categories which are: hard linguistic boundary, hard non-linguistic boundary, soft linguistic boundary and soft non-linguistic boundary. Groups with hard linguistic boundaries have distinctive languages, those with hard non-linguistic boundaries have other distinctive identity markers like religion and culture, groups with soft linguistic boundaries adopt others' languages yet, they retain other ethnic features while groups with soft non-linguistic boundaries adopt other ethnic features besides the language of the dominant out-group.

The Hutterites and Amish in North America according to Oakes (2001) are examples of ethnic groups in Category A: they have a distinctive language (hard linguistic boundary) and religion (hard non-linguistic boundary). Category B would include the Irish, who have adopted another language which is English (soft linguistic boundary) yet, they retain other ethnic characteristics (hard non-linguistic boundary) which distinguish them from the English people. Following from this, it is obvious that the loss of language need not therefore imply the loss of identity (Edwards 1992; Liebkind 1996). It should also mean that the loss of other identity markers besides language should equally not imply a loss of identity.

The newly introduced concept of different arenas for the construction of national identity recognises the fact that even when different groups converge and diverge simultaneously on different dimensions, they can also do so within different arenas such as on ethnic, national and global scales. These arenas can be considered as existing independently of one another while they can also overlap. In the case of the former, such independent existence is possible because the status of a group may differ from one arena to the next such that a group may be dominant at the national arena but considered a minority at the continental and global levels.

Presentation and Analysis of Research Findings

It is important to state that, the analysis of respondents' responses obtained through questionnaire as will be shown in this section will be accompanied by findings from structured interviews. The reason

for combining these research methods is to see if there will be any form of disparity in the responses gathered through both means and in case there is not, to see if the outcomes are mutually reaffirming. In essence, both instruments will be used in order to check the extent of the reliability of information collected for this purpose of this research.

Table 6.1(a): A Table Showing the Relationship between Respondents' Mother Tongue/First Language and Local Government Area

			Local Government Area			
			Ilorin South	Ilorin East	Ilorin West	Total
Your mother tongue/First language	The Yoruba language	Count	30	30	40	100
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	The Hausa language	Count	0	0	0	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Fulfulde	Count	0	0	0	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0 %	0.0%
	The English language	Count	0	0	0	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Others	Count	0	0	0	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total		Count	30	30	40	100
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The table above shows that the Yoruba language is the first language/mother tongue for all respondents from the three local government areas in the city. This equally goes to show that Yoruba is the language of the city. This linguistic allegiance to the Yoruba language expressed through responses to the questionnaire is also corroborated by interview respondents as shown in the following responses:

Researcher: Which language is your first language?

Moshood: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Which language is your mother tongue?

Moshood: The Yoruba language too.

Researcher: What LGA are you from?

Moshood: Ilorin East LGA.

Researcher: Which language is your first language?

Tawa: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Which language is your mother tongue?
Tawa: It is still the Yoruba language.
Researcher: Which LGA do you hail from?
Tawa: Ilorin West.
Researcher: What is your first language?
Tinuke: My first language is the Yoruba language.
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?
Tinuke: The Yoruba language is also my mother tongue.
Researcher: Which LGA do you hail from?
Tinuke: I am from Ilorin West LGA.
Researcher: What is your first language?
Ameenat: The Yoruba language.
Researcher: Which language is your mother tongue?
Ameenat: My mother tongue is also the Yoruba language.
Researcher: Which LGA do you hail from?
Ameenat: Ilorin West LGA.
Researcher: Which language is your first language?
Ismail: My first language is the Yoruba language.
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?
Ismail: My mother tongue is also the Yoruba language.
Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?
Ismail: Ilorin West LGA.
Researcher: Which language is your first language?
Yahya: My first language is the Yoruba language.
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?
Yahya: It is also the Yoruba language.
Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?
Yahya: Ilorin West LGA.
Researcher: What is your first language?
Mohammed: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Is the Yoruba language also your mother tongue?

Mohammed: Yes, the Yoruba language is also my mother tongue.

Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?

Mohammed: Ilorin East LGA.

Researcher: Which language is your first language?

Taiwo: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Which one is your mother tongue?

Taiwo: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?

Taiwo: Ilorin South LGA.

Researcher: Which language is your first language?

Zainab: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Which one is your mother tongue?

Zainab: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?

Zainab: Ilorin South LGA.

Researcher: Which language is your first language?

Ibrahim: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Which one is your mother tongue?

Ibrahim: The Yoruba language.

Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?

Ibrahim: Ilorin East LGA.

These interview extracts corroborate findings from the quantitative data in that it shows the prevalence of the Yoruba language as the first language/mother tongue across the city. Having established a uniformed pattern of linguistic identity for all respondents, it is imperative to to juxtapose this with their constructions of their ethnic identities. Hence, the following reveal respondents' constructions of their ethnic identities.

Table 6.1(b): A Table Showing the Relationship between Respondents' Mother Tongue/First Language and Preferred Ethnic Nationlaity

			If asked to describe your ethnic nationality, please indicate your first, second and third priority by writing first, second in the provided boxes				Total
			No response	Northerner[1]	Southwesterner	Other	
	The Yoruba language	Count	0	38	62	0	100
		% of Total	0.0%	38.0%	62.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	The Hausa language	Count	0	0	0	0	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Fulfulde	Count	0	0	0	0	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	The English language	Count	0	0	0	0	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total		Count	0	0	0	0	100
		% of Total	0.0%	38.0%	62.0%	0.0%	100.0%

As seen in the table above, ethnic identity is represented in terms of belongingness to the region where the ethnic group could be found in Nigeria and in this case, linguistic identity has no significant correlation with ethnic identity. This is because, the overwhelming favourable disposition towards the Yoruba language (100.0%) was not replicated on the question that bothered on respondents' ethnic nationalities where 38.0% of all respondents denied the Yoruba ethnic identity by claiming they were not southwesterners.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents (62.0%) considered themselves southwesterners despite 100.0% linguistic allegiance to the Yoruba language and this clearly demonstrates the variance between linguistic and ethnic identities in Ilorin. With this analysis, language cannot be considered the marker of ethnic identity for Ilorin people. The following are respondents' interview responses to the question of their ethnic belongingness.

My mother tongue is Yoruba Language but I would not describe myself as a Yoruba person. I prefer to identify myself as an Ilorin person although I am of Yoruba ancestry… My family progenitors are from Igbeti but I strongly prefer the Ilorin identity... (Moshood).

My mother tongue is Yoruba Language but I cannot describe myself as a Yoruba person. I prefer to identify as Yoruba-Ilorin. (Tawa).

My mother tongue is Yoruba Language but I prefer to identify as Yoruba-Ilorin. My progenitors are of Yoruba ancestry... (Ameenat).
My first language and mother tongue is the Yoruba language because I am an Ilorin person of Yoruba ancestry… I prefer to identify as a Yoruba person... (Mohammad).

My first language is Yoruba and so is my mother tongue. I am a Yoruba person from Ilorin... (Taiwo).

My first language and mother tongue is Yoruba. I would not identify myself as a Yoruba person. Rather, I would identify as an Ilorin person... (Ismail).

My first language and mother tongue is the Yoruba language... I am a Fulani person. (Yahya)

The question is, why would a people that constitute the majority ethnic group in a community that is native to them maintain their linguistic identity but discard their ethnic identity? The answer to this according to Oakes (2001), lies in the notions of convergence and divergence which have their roots in Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973; Giles et al., 1977; Giles and Coupland 1991). Speech Accommodation Theory which later became known as Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1987) to enable it encompass non-verbal as well as discursive dimensions of social interaction. Giles and Coupland (1991:63) describes communicative convergence "as a strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviours in terms of a wide range of linguistic/prosodic/non-vocal features, including speech rate, pausal phenomenon and utterance length, phonological variants, smiling, gaze and so on". Oakes (2001:42) posits that convergence is used "to refer to some form of cultural movement towards the majority out-group". This convergence mechanism enables one to understand respondents' demonstration of preference or ownership of features or behaviours that are known to belong to out-groups which are also indigenous to the city.

A slight point of departure between the present research and Oakes' position however is that, the present study shows that cultural movement is not necessarily always towards the majority out-group; members of the majority out-group also converge culturally towards the minority out-group. In essence, the present study expands the scope of convergence to cater to those uncommon occasions in which members of a majority group move towards minority out-groups in terms of ethnic identification. The present study therefore establishes the need to differentiate between the usages of the terms "dominant and majority" and "dominated and minority". That is, the interchangeable use of "dominant and majority" and "dominated and minority" is not always correct. The reason is that "dominant/non-dominant/dominated" is a function of access to power or otherwise while "majority/minority" has to do with the numerical strength or weakness of a group. The fact that in most societies, the group with the higher population is also usually the one with access to power does not mean that it is a phenomenon that is obtainable in all communities. In essence, dominant is not always synonymous with majority and dominated is not always synonymous with minority as well. For instance, in South Africa, Afrikaner is the dominant ethnic group while their language, Afrikaans, is the dominant language despite the fact that Afrikaner is not the group with the majority population. Therefore, a group in a community could be a dominant/minority, a dominated/minority, a non/dominant majority or a dominated/majority.

Giles and Coupland, (1991) posit that this level of acculturation as demonstrated by convergence, enables some Ilorin people of Yoruba ancestry to construct for themselves, non-Yoruba identities which reflects a lack of emotional attachment to their ancestral ethnicity thus, giving huge credence to Glaser (2007:267) who posits that "language ability can certainly be assumed to be less important for a sense of belonging than ancestral connections". The position of this paper is therefore in consonance with Woodbury (1993) who asserts that the analyses of language shift have constituted an interesting argument against the thesis that lexico-grammatical language shift engenders full-scale assimilation. The case of identity shift experienced by some of the respondents discussed above, happened in spite of language maintenance. Therefore, ability to maintain an ancestral language does not automatically translate into an ability to maintain an ancestral ethnic identity by groups or individuals.

It is however worthy of note to add that, there were variations in the levels of respondents' ethnic conversion. For example, Moshood, identified as Ilorin in spite of his Yoruba ancestry. Though there is no such ethnic group as Ilorin but Moshood's construction of an Ilorin identity instead of his ancestral Yoruba identity is an indication that he did not want to associate himslef with his ancestral ethnicity. Moshood's case proves that being of a particular ancestry and being able to speak the language of that ancestry does not guarantee a sense of attachment to that ancestry. Thus, variations in the degrees of convergence affected the way ethnic converts handled their ancestral ethnicity and their "new" identities.

The most radical case of ethnic conversion in this research is that of Yahya. Unlike other respondents who acknowledged their ancestral backgrounds but simultaneously constructed for themselves different ethnic identities, Yahya's case was different. This was because not only did he express belongingness to the Fulani ethnic group, but also wrongly claimed that his fore-bears were Fulani people and went ahead to express preference for the northern region. This sort of overcommunication (by Yahya) to his desired ethnic group showed the extent to which he is willing to go just to deny his ancestral ethnicity. Attitude similar to Yahya's was noted regarding individual Sorbian identities by Elle (1992b); Ela (1998a). In their works, more than half of those in the Protestant area who indicated Sorbian language ability identified themselves as German, even though a majority of them came from Sorbian or mixed homes.

Conclusion

Politics, like any social factor, plays an important role in identity construction and manifestation. With its intervening role in Ilorin's history, people of the same ethnic background now have different nomenclatures for referring to themselves. Hence, within the same ethnic group, language does not play a central role for everyone in identity construction. This is not to however completely rule out the significance of language as an identity marker, rather, it is its centrality to identity that this paper argues should be treated with caution; other identity markers are equally as important as language in the ethnic identity construction of groups of people.

The significance of the dichotomy between majority/minority and dominant/dominated was also brought to the fore. While the former is strictly a matter of the number of a group, the latter is on the other hand, a matter of access to the instrument of power through

political leadership (even if it were political influence from the past). What this means is that a group could be the dominant group without necessarily having a superior numerical strength in the community because such a group has access to power and vice-versa. This demonstrates the extent to which access to power and authority can affect either positively or negatively, the status of an ethnic group within a multi-ethnic community. It therefore follows from this that the transient nature of power affects the status of any group as the change of power could also determine the group with the dominant status.

Recommendations

The study recommends the recognition of the significance of all ethnic identity markers in general such that no identity marker is deemed as synonymous with identity. This is because in a world where all identity markers have become more and more fleeting in nature, attaching central significance to any identity marker would lead to the erroneous conclusion that identities are gained and lost when identity markers are gained and lost as well. The study therefore, recommends that no identity marker should be considered as central to identity because of the influence of various social and political factors on identity construction, perception and manifestation.

NOTE: The use of "northerner" and "southwesterner" to refer to ethnic nationalities here is because in Ilorin, those two words correlate with people's perception of all ethnic nationalities from the North and Yoruba people respectively. The need for the target respondents to easily understand the concept necessitated these usages.

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