

Linguistic Accommodation among Hausa Settlers in Obalende, Lagos

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Abstract

Obalende is one of the earliest settlement sites for the Hausa people in Lagos State, the former capital of Nigeria. Several works on language use by urban dwellers have focused on the endangerment of minority neglecting the place of accommodation in inter-group relations. This study, examines linguistic accommodation practices among the Hausa settlers in Obalende by investigating their language choice patterns in specific domains with a view to ascertaining the degree of convergence and divergence to Yorùbá and its implication on national unity. This study adopts the speech accommodation theory by Howard Giles (1973). Using the survey research design, a questionnaire was administered to 300 purposely selected respondents of diverse age groups. Interview schedules were conducted with key informants. Observations were made in various domains such as the home, the school, the office and the market within the town to observe language practices. Data were subjected to descriptive, qualitative and quantitative analyses. Seven language choice patterns were identified, namely; exclusive Hausa, Yorùbá, English, Hausa/Yorùbá, English/Yorùbá, Hausa/English Hausa/English/Yorùbá. In the home domain, apart from English, the Hausa was the most preferred language as it took a higher percentage in all contexts than Yorùbá, the language of immediate environment. However, when interacting with their Yorùbá neighbours and friends, Yorùbá was the language of choice. Among the unmarried, convergence to Yorùbá top the table in that more people spoke exclusive Yorùbá with their Yorùbá friends, Although a higher proficiency in Yorùbá is recorded for the older generation, accommodation to Yorùbá language is prevalent among the younger generation, who interacted more with their Yorùbá neighbours either for business or social relationships. Hausa settlers in Obalende accommodated the Yorùbá people through the use of the Yorùbá language in several domains, but diverged in respect to ethnic identity.

1.0 Introduction

The Lagos State of Nigeria was until 1993 the federal capital of the nation Nigeria. As the former capital of the nation coupled with its being the heartbeat of the country, migration of people from different parts of the country is a regular phenomenon. Despite

the decision of the Federal Government to move the nation's capital to Abuja, Lagos still remains the commercial nerve centre of the country, witnessing more migrants on a daily basis. This is necessarily so because of the natural and physical structures available in Lagos as seen in the good climate, good roads, industrial areas, and physical infrastructures available in the state. Also, Lagos is home to the very wealthy and the very poor and has attracted numerous young entrepreneurs and families seeking a better life.¹ Moreover, Lagos offers a conducive and peaceable habitation and environment to migrants who have thus made the city their second home. Lawal (1994:21) remarks that the transformation of Lagos from an essentially rural, swampy terrain then used by some itinerant fishermen and migrant sojourners to a modern metropolis was undoubtedly a function of many factors that were interwoven. The major factors are the inherent accommodative nature of the environment and its autochthonous settlers to strangers. Therefore, Lagos has increasingly become linguistically and culturally more heterogeneous.

The Yorùbá language is the main language spoken in Lagos, Nigeria. It is the language of the Yorùbá people who occupy largely the Southwestern Nigeria as well as parts of Kwara and Kogi States of Nigeria. In Lagos, however speakers of different languages co-exist and daily interact with one another. Adeniyi and Bello (2007:119) also posit that today, "Lagos, for instance, being a commercial neutral ground as conceived by some, does not only provide comfort for residents but also allows for growth, linguistic growth inclusive". Many are oblivious of the role of language in the promotion of habitual peaceful co-existence among people of diverse ethnic groups in urban centres. The Hausa have co-existed with the Yorùbá for over a century in Obalende, one of the Hausa settlement areas in Lagos State, leading to many settlers becoming bilinguals. The few existing works on Hausa communities provide information on their historical and political background with little or nothing on their language practices. Languages come into contact as people move from their aboriginal places to their settlement areas. The people are then confronted with the issues language choice, identity, ethnicity and even their attitudes to their host communities and people of other groups who live within the same community. The study of their language practices can reveal the factors responsible for the relative peace the settlers have enjoyed with their Yorùbá host community. This research work, therefore, examines the linguistic accommodation processes present in Obalende. This will evaluate their level of integration as well as discover the social and psychological reasons responsible for accommodation in this community. This study adopts the method of elucidation of information through a language background questionnaire complemented with interviews and participant observation. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to purposively selected respondents of diverse age groups, gender, level of education, and occupation that had spent at least five years in Obalende. Seven language choice patterns were presented.

2.0 The Hausa People and their Settlements in Obalende

The Sarkin Hausawa of Obalende informs that the Obalende Hausa community was founded over a century. Rafiu (2010) maintains that the migration of the Hausa to Lagos was encouraged by the British official policy which encouraged legitimate trade and markets development. He also records that the Hausa people had begun interactions with Lagosians, as far back as the 18th century and that the wealth of Lagos was already established at this time. This was a great attraction to companies and itinerant merchants from the North. The Hausa migrants settled first in Oyo, before coming down to Lagos. Another factor that could have necessitated their migration to Lagos was their increasing population in the already established native communities in Ota and Shagamu in Ogun State. The Hausa established a community called Ago Hausa from 1853-1900 (Rafiu, 2000:xvii). This was the first Hausa settlement in Lagos which later metamorphosed to the present New Hausa settlement in Obalende. In 1906, Obalende became a resettlement site for soldiers and the veterans of the Royal West Force (RWAFF). Hence, the name, Obalende was given by the natives of the land.

3.0 The Study Area

Our study areas cover the entire Obalende Hausa settlement area. This includes homes, schools, markets and work places. Obalende is one of the many communities under the Obalende/Ikoyi Local Development Council which is an offshoot of the Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos State. At that time, it started from Obalende and extended to Eti-Osa Local Government Councils. The council secretariat also runs other area offices. Obalende community is an urban centre which is not only home to the Yorùbá; who are the natives but also the Hausa, Ìgbò, Urhobo, and even foreign immigrants are some of the people that have made Obalende their second home. The population of the local government at the 2006 census was 287,785. Every facility required for an urban settlement can be seen in this community. These facilities are described in Noah (1994:152) where he equates urbanization to a manifestation of growth or expansion in the spatial status of human habitations towards city status. This indicates the presence of facilities such as water, electricity, transportation, good schools and other privileges unavailable in rural areas. High rate fertility and mortality, the fascination of city life and economic and other privileges enjoyed by urban dwellers and political official factors are crucial factors leading to urbanization. These realities have led to an increase in its population over the years. Moreover, Obalende demonstrates a zero tolerance to religious violence. This serenity as well as the economic potentials of the area has encouraged people of diverse languages, cultures and nationalities to settle in the area.

There is a 'Suya' business which Obalende is noted for. People from different parts of the state come to relax and enjoy the delicacy after work. These businesses run through the night to the early hours of the morning. Other popular businesses which the Hausa are engaged in this community are tailoring and gold merchandise, buying and selling. These socio-economic activities in Obalende have greatly contributed to its development.

Like other cities in the country with linguistic heterogeneity, there are basically three languages spoken in Obalende area, these are Hausa, Yorùbá and English. Nevertheless, a few people communicate in Ìgbò and other Nigeria languages. The Muslims also understand Arabic language because it is needed in Islamic worship. Moreover, there is an Islamic school located within the community. The Hausa language is the mother tongue of the Hausa settlers while the Yorùbá is the language of the natives. The use of Hausa is more prevalent in Hausa homes, but children play and interact in Yorùbá among their friends in the neighbourhood. Although many Hausa are bilinguals, there are still few monolinguals. The prevalence of bilinguals in urban centres is a proof that several countries are culturally and politically multilingual.

4.0 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Accommodation Theory. This theory was introduced in Giles (1973). The accommodation theory postulates that speakers adapt to the speech style of their interlocutors. Basically, the accommodation theory hinges on two premises—convergence and divergence. By convergence speakers adapt to the style of their interlocutors whereas divergence is maintaining one’s language in order to dissociate from ones interlocutor or to show ethnic differences. Divergence has the ‘effect of emphasizing the differences between people’. Divergence can be as a result of asserting speakers identification and ethnic affiliations. In which case speakers of minority languages may insist or adopt a policy, especially the family language policy of speaking their heritage languages in the home.

Beebe and Giles (1984) remark that speakers accommodate the other’s speech style in order to gain one of the following three goals: evoking listeners social approval, attaining communication efficiency between interactants, and maintaining positive social identities. Giles and Coupland, (1991:60-61) describes accommodation as a way of achieving solidarity with or dissociation from a conversational partner, reciprocally and dynamically. We shall attempt in this study to investigate the various domains where the Hausa settlers will adopt the Yorùbá language and why they will rather interact in their mother tongue at other times. The veracity of these claims shall be determined by our research findings in Obalende Hausa community.

5.0 A Review of Relevant Literature on Linguistic Accommodation

Accommodating other people’s speech style is a daily reality not only among people of differing tongues but also those of different age groups; where the older can decide to accommodate the speech forms of the younger. When a speaker adjust is speech to that of his interlocutor, it is termed ‘convergence’. Giles (1993) and James (1993) discuss the issue of upward convergence and downward convergence. In upward convergence, the speaker with the low variety or less prestige language tries to meet up the other speaker who possesses a higher mastery of the language or a more prestige language. According to Giles (1980), upward convergence is the most frequently used of all the categories. Some cases of linguistic and cultural accommodation are cited below.

Anyanwu (2011), reports that Isekiri, Izon, and Urhobo are the main languages spoken in Warri metropolis. Apart from these, English and Nigerian Pidgin (NP) are also widely spoken in the area. However, investigations into language use in different domains such as schools, religion, market, administration, and the home show that NP is the common language used alongside the local languages. In addition, NP is the language of accommodation in inter-ethnic relations since it is considered a neutral language by members of the metropolis. Attempt at accommodating various ethnic and linguistic groups may sometimes lead to a departure from the norm.

Onadipe-Shalom (2013:23) observes the use of NP, in the Akran’s Palace in Badagry is adopted as an accommodation strategy. Although the official language of the palace according to her observation was Ogu, the mother tongue, she remarks that even the presiding Chief spoke in NP. She reports that “I was privileged to observe a hearing session over a land case brought before one of the chiefs in the palace. The prosecutor was an Ibo man who neither spoke nor understood Ogu. Therefore, for fair judgment, the whole session was done in Nigerian Pidgin”.

Sometimes, accommodation is impeded by ethnic consciousness especially in migrant communities where it is taken as a language maintenance strategy, Fishman (1977) and Sachdev and Giles (2000) note that in speech accommodation, the in-group can be regarded as a distinct ethnic group. Bourhis (1999:125) remarks that speech divergence can be seen as language maintenance strategy whereby interlocutors maintain a linguistic distance in order to affirm their ethnic distinctiveness, especially when accommodating the second language is perceived as a threat to their ethnic identity. An example is found in (Dimitros, 1999) where the Arab issued oil communiqué in Arabic instead of the English language as a signal of resistance to the western powers. In the same vein, divergence may be taken as a public display of cultural pride when a respondent deliberately responds in his language rather than that of his interlocutor.

6.0 Data Presentation

In the following sections, we present the findings of this research.

6.1 Demographic Information.

We present the analysis of the data collected for this research. This paper focuses on the linguistic accommodation processes of the Hausa settlers in Obalende community.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	162	54.0
Female	138	46.0
Total	300	100

The males constitute 54.0% and the females are 46.0%. The difference can be attributed to the fact that the male are more accessible than the females. While the men can be found outside in offices and shops, the women are usually at home. Most Hausa women opt for in-house trading and a few others are house wives.

Table 2 Showing Respondents by Ages

Age	Frequency	Percentage
12 years and below	43	14.3
13-19	60	20.0
20-30	79	26.3
31-40	57	19.0
41-50	39	13.1
51+	22	7.3
Total	300	100

Respondents for this study were divided into five groups according to their ages. This table clearly shows that the various age groups in the society are well represented in the sample while those in the ages 20-30 (26.3%) top the table.

Table 3 Other languages spoken at home apart from Hausa

Language	Frequency	Percentage
English	248	82.7
Yorùbá	52	17.3
Total	300	100

Table 3 highlights the major languages spoken at home. The English language tops the table, although some are proficient only in Nigeria Pidgin. Both are referred to as English for convenience here.

6.2 Language Use Patterns in Different Domains

Bilingual settlers are often faced with choosing from the many languages at their disposal. These choices reflect the degree of accommodation in this community. We present four different domains viz: the home, workplace and market. We also present

different possibilities of communicative situations. Seven code options were also recognised. These include exclusive Hausa, Yorùbá, English, Hausa and Yorùbá, English and Yorùbá, Hausa and English, and finally, Hausa, English and Yorùbá, We have also endeavoured to sub-categorize the sampled population for easy analysis in order to reflect role-relations (Fishman, 1982). We categorize language use at home into two distinct groups, i.e. parents and children. We also present language use in school for the students and language use at work for workers. Since language use in religion, is predictable, we have left this out of our investigation, but the general observation on this shall be discussed. We shall commence this analysis with language use at home.

6.2.1 Language use patterns at home

This section investigates the language practice in the home domain. Therefore, parents and children were asked to give their assessment reports on this. This is presented in the tables 4 and 5 below

6.2.1.1 Report on parents self-assessment on language use at home (140)

One hundred and forty adult-parents reported on their language use at home with their children, friends and when discussing important family matters.

Table 4 Parents self-report on language use at home (140)

Context	Hausa	Yorùbá	English	Hausa+ Yorùbá	English+ Yorùbá	Hausa+ English	Hausa+ English+ Yorùbá
When talking with children	42 30.0%	10 7.1%	45 32.1%	12 8.5	-	11 7.9%	20 14.3%
With my spouse	57 40.7%	40 28.6%	25 17.9%	-	-	-	18 12.9%
When talking with my Yorùbá friends	25 17.9%	58 41.4%	25 17.9%	3 2.1%	13 9.3%	2 1.4%	14 10.0%
When talking with my Hausa friends	108 77.1%	5 3.6%	18 12.9%	9 6.4%	-	-	-
When talking with my	28 20.0%	4 2.9%	22 15.7%	5 3.6%	-	-	

domestic servants							
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Table 4 presents self-report on language use at home. A total number of 140 parents report their language use pattern in the home domain. A careful look at the table reveals that majority 45(32.1%) of the sampled population communicate in English with their children. This is closely followed by the 42(30.0%) respondents who speak Hausa, the mother tongue at home. This table clearly shows that the use of Yorùbá in the home is minimally accommodated with 10(7.1%) of people. This table also reveals the dominant position of the Hausa language in the home, while invariably has contributed to its maintenance in a heterogeneous community like Obalende. On the other hand, interactions between spouses are at most times done in Hausa language according to this table. Moreover, quite a number of married respondents speak Yorùbá to each other following far behind is English language with 25(17.9%). Unlike what we have as language use with children, more couples interact among themselves with Yorùbá than with their children. With Yorùbá friends, the use of Yorùbá clearly tops the table, with 58 (41.4%) of the respondents reporting the use of Yorùbá, while far behind is English and Hausa. A greater number of the respondents 108 (77.1%) hinted the use of Hausa among their native members. Those who use Yorùbá are very insignificant in number 18(12.9%). The major languages used among the few with domestic servants (59) are Hausa and English. Many of the domestic workers new members of the community.

Table 5 Language use at home for respondents who are below 20 years (based on 96 respondents)

Context	Hausa	Yorùbá	English	Hausa+ Yorùbá	English+ Yor	Hausa+E nGLISH	Hausa+E nGLISH+Y
When talking with parents	42 43.4	22 22.9%	5 5.2%	11 11.4%	-	9 9.3%	7 7.3%
With grandparents	75 78.1%	9 9.4%	10 10.1%	2 2.1%	-	-	-
With siblings	17 19.7%	19 19.8%	28 29.1%	-	-	32 33.3%	-
When talking with neighbours	23	30	24	-	14	-	5

	24.0%	31.2%	25.0		14.6%		5.2%
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Table 5 reflects language use among the younger respondents in the home. The dominance of Hausa at home with the older generations is clearly demonstrated here. When talking to parents and especially grandparents, the children are favourably disposed to Hausa. Out of the 96 children in this survey, 42 representing (43.7%) hinted that they speak Hausa in the home with their parents, while 75(78.1%) communicate in Hausa with their grandparents. Thus Hausa and Yorùbá, two indigenous languages represent the children’s language choice at home. However, the English language is preferred for communication among siblings and neighbours. This result contradicts the parents’ results. We suspect their reports were simply impressionistic.

Table 6 Language use in the market (300)

Context	Hausa	Yorùbá	English	Total
When buying from a Hausa	159 53%	74 24.66%	67 22.33%	300 100%
When buying from a Yorùbá	59 19.66%	186 62%	55 18.13%	300 100%

This information also shed more light on the accommodation processes prevalent in this community. The three major languages are represented here. The information presented in table 6 shows that 159(53%) of our respondents claim to use their mother tongue in buying from a fellow Hausa seller, while 67(22.33%) said they speak English. We notice a drop in the number of people who interact in Hausa language as compared with those who speak Yorùbá to Yorùbá people. The table also shows that 186(62%) of the respondents entire sampled population would speak Yorùbá to a Yorùbá seller, while 55(18.13%) respondents said they would bargain in Pidgin English, while the remaining 59(19.66%) indicated they would use Hausa. The fact that the Yorùbá language is spoken more by the Hausa to a Yorùbá seller is part of the benefits of speaking the language, as postulated in the social exchange processes of the accommodation theory.

Table 7 Language choice patterns among the single respondents (64)

Context	Hausa	Yorùbá	English	Hausa + Yorùbá	Hausa + English
When talking with Yorùbá friends	5 7.8%	26 40.6%	15 23.4%	18 28.1%	-
When talking with Hausa friends	34 53.1%	-	25 39.1%	5 7.8%	-
When talking with domestic servants	32 50.0%	7 10.9%	9 14.1%	-	1 25.0%

The table shows the language use by 64 single respondents' in the survey. A total of 26(40.6%) out of the 64 speak Yorùbá with their Yorùbá friends followed by the 18(28.1%) who claim to interact in both languages indicating that these Yorùbá friends also understand and speak Hausa language. This also indicates the degree of integration of the two ethnic groups in the community. On the other hand, none of them reported the use of Yorùbá with their Hausa friends. It is noteworthy that the data shows that the use of English is rampant, closely followed by the use of Hausa. Half of the respondents communicate in Hausa with their domestic servants. Overall, language use with domestic servants both for the married and single respondents favours Hausa. This also has contributed to the great influence of Hausa in the home domain.

7.0 Findings and Implication

A careful observation of language use reveals the dynamic use of language in this area. The study also shows that language choice patterns differ in different situations. The study shows that the major languages: Hausa, Yorùbá and English have various domains of prominence. Going by the presentations above, the dominance/preference of Hausa in the home domains is undoubtedly clear. This has invariably contributed to its maintenance in a heterogeneous community like Obalende. The Yorùbá language is never seen as their primary code. Even when they understand the language, they prefer to communicate in Hausa language among themselves. This is to be expected since Hausa is one of the regional languages. Moreover, observations across the community reveal a large number of the Hausa settlers either live or work together. Despite the dominance of English and Yorùbá languages in education domain, our data reveals that the status of Hausa language has not been relegated in Obalende. Hausa is heard in almost every section of the community, to the extent that some Yorùbá kids interact with their Hausa friends in Hausa

language. The phenomenon is not peculiar to the children as there are also some Yorùbá elders who are proficient in Yorùbá and Hausa languages. This confirms the assertion that integration must be perceived “as being a ‘two-way street’ where the onus should not be just on the migrant to adapt and understand the host nation” (Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke (2014). The Yorùbá language is the language of social interaction, being the regional and the language of wider communication. It is also used by members of other ethnic groups within the community. The reports from single respondents establish the cordial relationship which exist among single respondents, who are mainly the youths of the area. This is as a result of the benefits they stand to gain, economically, socially and even politically.’

Our investigation on language use in the market brought to light buyers’ tendency to change codes in a bid to seeking and getting better bargain. In buying from a Yorùbá seller, 62.0% attested to shifting and adjusting to their language to Yorùbá. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The aim is to gain acceptance and eventually a good bargain. This therefore indicates that in the market domain, the Hausa speakers are ready to adjust their code to Yorùbá with a Yorùbá seller. Moreover, sellers give better prices to their customers who speak the same language with them. The same trend is noticed for the two languages confirming the facts of the similarity-attraction-processes. Going by observations and interrogations, conversations of some of those who claim to use Yorùbá with Yorùbá sellers and buyers do not go beyond general greetings as confirmed by some respondents during the interview.

This study therefore suggests that language choice cannot be the only measurement to study language loyalty. Speakers of a language may feel emotionally attached to their language as an ancestral heritage, but daily realities may necessitate the use of other tongues. This is the case of several migrants’ settlements in Nigeria (Bamgbose 1999, Oyetade 1990, Adeniyi and Bello 2007). As a result of the need to communicate in Yorùbá with their Yorùbá neighbours not only for building relationship but also in business transactions, Hausa settlers in this community and indeed other non-indigenes need to acquire and communicate in the language of the host community for survival. There are also people who can only communicate via code-mixing all in the bid to have some relevance in the community bearing the mind the tendency to be attracted to people who are similar to us. Oyetade (1990:375) opines that “so also immigrants in some countries find it more convenient to assimilate the socio-cultural milieu of their host communities for socio-economic reason”.

The Hausa and their Yorùbá hosts have been able to live with relative peace in Obalende, to a large extent, due to the accommodative tendencies among them. This is a crucial prerequisite for national unity in a heterogeneous nation like Nigeria. It is apparent from this research that there are more areas of convergence to the Yorùbá language than divergence. Moreover, the host community has also reciprocated politically, such that the Hausa in this community have been allocated a slot in the local council. This is to avoid

politically motivated crisis as observed in Ìgbòanusi (2004:1). In this paper on minority languages and the domination of the Hausa language in the northern Nigeria, he observes that political and cultural marginalisation are the reasons behind regular ethnic and religious conflicts. In Lagos State, however, such a person is required not only to be proficient in the two languages but must also understand and respect the local cultures before being elected. The Hausa and the Yorùbá in Obalende for the first time elected a Hausa as Councillor for the community in the 2018 Local Government Council election. This gesture shows the level of accommodation the Yorùbá hosts have extended to the Hausa settlers. It is hoped that this level of accommodation will reciprocated to the Yorùbá outside their native regions.

8.0 Conclusion

Settlers and their hosts in any given community must be ready to accommodate one another linguistically and culturally as this is the key to national unity and peaceful co-existence in multilingual communities. We have so far established the language use among the Hausa settlers in Obalende and its resultant accommodation. The study also indicates that convergence to Yorùbá language by the Hausa settlers is not only for integrative purposes but more importantly for its utilitarian values and the benefits they stand to gain. This has impacted positively on the community.

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