
Investigating into the varieties of language spoken at Benue State University, Makurdi

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Abstract: In a multilingual speech community like Benue State University, Makurdi, where the members thereof have different native language backgrounds and English is chosen to be the official language, members of the university community speak different varieties of language in different domains. The paper entitled 'Investigating into the varieties of language spoken at Benue State University (BSU), Makurdi' is set to examine the varieties of language spoken on the BSU's campus. The survey design was adopted, and questionnaires were used as the instruments for data collection for the paper. The analysis of the varieties of language spoken at the university was based on William Labov's Variationist Theory which claims that differences are featured in the use of language among individuals based on the contexts. Through the analysis of the data, the researchers discovered that English, Pidgin, and native languages such as Tiv, Idoma, Igde, Etulo, Igbo, Hausa, among others, are spoken at the university. The study also discovered that Pidgin is predominantly used at the university despite the fact that English is the official language because academics and lecture rooms may be the only domains and settings that compulsorily enforce the use of English. The researchers, therefore, suggest that more efforts should be made to ensure a predominant use of English on the BSU's campus since it is the official and prestigious language of Nigeria.

Keywords: Multiglossia, Multilingualism, Sociolinguistics, Speech Community, Variety

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1 Introduction

Language is the tool used by human beings to communicate or express thoughts, ideas and emotions. It can be defined as the rule-governed process that facilitates communication between individuals. It is not an overemphasis to say that language and society are inseparable because language is used in the society; the society comes into existence through language, and language is used in carrying out various functions in the society. The assertion that all languages of the world exhibit varieties depending on region, occupation, age, the social group is not an overemphasis. Social and linguistic factors are basically responsible for language variation. The social factors are settlements, geographical boundaries, language contacts, economic activities, social stratifications, social interactions and social practices. The linguistic factors responsible for language variation come as a result of a necessary need to change, some groups of speakers embrace certain changes whereas others are opposed to any change. Continuous use of a new linguistic

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feature by a certain group of speakers which is not obtainable in another group results in the emergence of a dialect. It is imperative to note that linguistic and social factors share a link in the formation of dialects. That is to say, social and linguistic factors, through synergy, bring about dialectal differences.

In a multilingual speech community, the numerous languages in use can be described as different varieties from the perspective of functional classification of languages in a multilingual speech community. The concept of variety used in this study does not refer to one out of many non-standard varieties nor the standard variety of a language; rather it encompasses one out of many separate languages spoken in a speech community as determined by the existing domains. Benue State University is a multilingual speech community due to the fact that her staff, students and business tycoons on the campus have different native language backgrounds alongside English and Pidgin. It is not an overemphasis to say that students of the university speak English, Pidgin, Tiv, Idoma, Iggede, Etulo, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, and so many other Nigerian languages respectively based on domain, setting and topic. Looking at the linguistic scenario, it is not possible to enforce the use of English, the official language, in all contexts. Hence, the study is designed to investigate the varieties of language spoken by the members of the speech community.

The variationist paradigm introduced by William Labov in the 1970s was adopted for the study since the aim of the study was to examine the varieties of language spoken at Benue State University, Makurdi. The variationists claim that the way a language is spoken or written differs across individuals as well as social context. The study is designed to prove the claims of the theory by establishing that there are varieties of language spoken at the Benue State University's campus based on domains, setting, and topic.

2 Literature review

2.1 Conceptual review

Sociolinguistics which studies the connection between language and society is given numerous definitions by different scholars and researchers. However, we would consider a few definitions of the concept. Anyogo (2014) states that sociolinguistics examines speech functions according to the speaker, the hearer, their relationship and the contact situation. This definition implies that sociolinguistics studies how the social structure or context influences the use of language. Wardhaugh (1986/2006) avers that sociolinguistics investigates the relationship between language and society in order to account for the structure of a language and how situations influence the way people use the language. That is to say, sociolinguistics studies language and society with the target of having a better comprehension of the structure and functions of a language in the society. Besides, to say that you will study the structure of any language without recognising the functions of the language in the society may be counter-productive because the variant structures of a language are produced based on the contexts in which the language in question is used.

In order to fully understand the relationship language has with social and cultural values, it is necessary to explain the term 'speech community'. Besides, it is imperative to examine the concept of speech community because the way people speak vary across communities and groups. Taiwo (2017) opines that a speech community is a group of speakers, irrespective of the location of their residence, who use the same language or a certain group of people who communicate with one another through a shared language. He further asserts that a speech community could consist of people working together in a particular profession with unique registers, separate group comprising university students, or even a group of family members, friends and colleagues et cetera. He states that in the contemporary digital world, online and other mediated communities, such as the Internet forums and the group of people who interact with one another through the email, constitute speech communities. It could be understood from the foregoing view that a speech community must be characterised by a shared code. In other words, members of a speech community must share a particular variety of language.

Hymes (1974) affirms that a speech community is a group of people sharing the same knowledge of the linguistic principles for the production and interpretation of utterances. Hymes maintains that such sharing comprises knowledge of at least one form of speech and knowledge of how the form of speech is used in different contexts. This implies that being a member hinges on your knowledge of the language of the community and how and where to use the language. According to Yule (1985/2010), a speech community is a group of people who speak the same language based on a shared set of linguistic norms. Romaine (2000) submits that a speech community is a group of people who do not necessarily use the same particular language in the same manner to exchange ideas but share the same norms and rules for the use of the language. This situation can be found among Tiv speakers living in the Sokoto State of Nigeria, where they probably use English variety, Hausa variety and Tiv variety, switching or mixing one with another in a single conversation according to the context of use. This happens because of their exposure to the norms and rules of the aforementioned varieties.

A lot of researchers have defined the concept of variety but they all agree that a variety has to do with a particular verbal medium of interaction. According to Hudson (as cited in Wardhaugh, 1986/2006), variety of language is a set of

linguistic items that is different from others and is used by a certain group of speakers or in a certain context. Going by this definition, we would say that Nigerian English, British English, American English among others are varieties of the English language. Hudson submits that a variety could be bigger than a single language as well as something smaller than a single language. This view implies that a variety can be the entire linguistic performance of a multilingual speaker or all the languages of a speech community or dialect of a particular language. Gbaaikyo (2019) asserts that multilingualism is a linguistic situation whereby the members of a speech community speak many languages. That is to say, interactions among the people living in the speech community are carried out through more than two languages. Multiglossia refers to the roles and functions assigned to the languages in a multilingual speech community (Adegbija, 2004).

2.2 Theoretical review

The theoretical review covers the Sociolinguistic theory of codes, Variationist Theory, and Communication accommodation theory.

2.2.1 Sociolinguistic theory of codes

Spring (2002), as cited in Agbedo, (2000/2018) submits that code is a set of principles that facilitate the use of language among members of a group. Spring further says that the way people use language in their daily interactions shows and influences the assumptions of the particular social group. Littlejohn (as cited in Agbedo, 2000/2018) claims that Bernstein's model portrays how the assumptions of a certain social group are reflected and shaped by daily use of language. He further claims that relationships found among a group of people influences the way the group uses language, and the type of speech that is used.

Agbedo (2000/2018) states that it was Bernstein who began the study of restricted and elaborated language codes in 1971 in his desire to find out the reasons behind the poor performances of working-class students in linguistic subjects but who were doing very well in other subjects. Bernstein (19971), as cited in Agbedo (2000/2018), states that while learning, forms of spoken language initiate, generalise and reinforce the existing kinds of relationships in the group and thus, produce particular significant forms for the individuals involved. This implies that the way a language is used among members of a group influences the way the people interpret the meaning of the things being discussed. Atherton (2002) as cited in Agbedo (2000/2018), claims that the restricted code is more effective than the elaborated code in situations whereby speakers of the group share particular codes. He further states the restricted code is characterised by the economy of words but rich in conveying a lot of meaning based on the shared knowledge, whereas the elaborated code spells out everything so that everybody can comprehend the message being conveyed. It has to elaborate on situations where the people involved in the discussion do not share a common knowledge of the code. The weakness of this theory is that it focuses on describing the grammatical differences in language use but does not consider the influence of communication domains on the choice of language variety.

2.2.2 Variationist theory

According to Agbedo (2000/2018), William Labov was the first linguist who adopted the quantitative approach in analysing linguistic differences and changes in the sixties. The differences in individuals' speech are amenable to quantitative analysis and also sensitive to various kinds of social structure. Individuals may then be grouped into various social categories by virtue of frequency of occurrence of particular variable features in their speech as constrained by different social contexts. The variationists claim that the way a language is spoken or written differs across individuals as well as social context. This theory departs from the ideas of Bernstein on linguistic differences because it is concerned with the link between society and language rather than variations in grammar. The theory is suitable for the study since the aim of the study is to examine the varieties of language spoken at Benue State University, Makurdi based on domain, setting and topic.

2.2.3 Communication accommodation theory

Communication Accommodation Theory was propounded by Howard Giles who was into the teaching of Communication at the University of California (Agbedo, 2000/2018). This theory holds that people make some linguistic adjustments in the course of interacting with others in order to minimise the social differences between them and others whom they are interacting with. According to Agbedo, this theory centres on the notion of convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to when speakers decide to adopt the communication characteristics of their co-interactants in order to reduce the social differences while convergence is when interactants highlights their verbal and non-verbal differences to show that they are better or more important than others. Going by this, we would say the theory treats varieties that are based on class instead of domain, setting and topic. Hence, the sociolinguistic theory does not support the present study strongly.

2.3 Empirical review

Torkula (1991) compares the Iharev and Kparev varieties of Tiv language and submits that the variation between Iharev and Kparev dialects are phonological manifestations of segmental phonemes. For example, *Ale* /ale/ 'if' (Iharev), *alu* /alu/ 'if' (Kparev), *hile* /hile/ 'return' (Iharev), *hide* /hide/ 'return' (Kparev), *Kerata* /kerata/ 'inside'

(Iharev), *keratô* /keratô/ 'inside' (Kparev). He also asserts that lexical variations occur between Iharev and Kparev as follows: *Ndar* 'bed' (Iharev), *gambe* 'bed' (Kparev), *Tsum* 'hut for taking a rest' (Iharev), *ate* 'hut for taking a rest' (Kparev), *gbar* 'big hoe' (Iharev), *ikyar* 'big hoe' (Kparev), *abu* 'barn' (Iharev), *yumbe* 'barn' (Kparev). Torkula (1991) also submits that Tiv language features syntactic variations based on the Iharev and Kparev dialect classification as follows: (i) *De zaanen iyol ga* 'Do not disturb me.' (Iharev Dialect) (ii) *De kera zaan mo iyol ga.* (Kparev Dialect) 'Do not disturb me.' The Iharev and Kparev varieties of Tiv are noticed at the phonological, lexical and syntactic levels, however, mutual understanding takes place between speakers of the varieties when having a discourse. The submissions by Torkula (1991) only account for the variations in Iharev and Kparev dialects which are varieties of Tiv; a bigger variety. The present study investigates into varieties that are distinct languages but used in the same speech community.

Ayemoni (2002) asserts that the functions of languages in a multilingual speech community are shared according to roles such as official use of language, national identity and solidarity, language for mass communication, diplomatic businesses, teaching and learning in schools and judicial functions assigned to the languages. He states that prestige and status, level of development, historical and political profile, institutional policies, numerical strength; institutions of government, media, commerce, religion, home, audience are the factors which determine the domains of language use in Nigeria. He further submits that English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are given high or prestigious status in Nigeria at the expense of other languages. Ayemoni (2002) further states that Islam promotes Arabic language, the language of Christianity varies based on the denomination, level of academic attainment and linguistic knowledge of most members of the congregation, where the church is located, and sometimes the linguistic background of the pastor. He stresses that it is very difficult to identify the language of home domain in Nigeria because both educated and uneducated parents impose the use of English on their children at home instead of exposing the children to their native languages which are wrongly described to be the languages of the uncivilised people. The previous study is similar to the present study because both of them examined the multilingual speech community. However, there is a point of departure since the previous study was centered on the Nigerian multilingual speech community whereas the present study is centered on Benue State University, being a multilingual speech community just like Nigeria irrespective of the different sizes.

Mckenzie (2015) examines the categories of English and asserts that we have Scottish Standard English, Tyneside Newcastle English, Indian English, Japanese English, Chinese English and Thai English. His focus is on identifying the varieties of English based on a geographical location but has failed to cite the features of the claimed varieties. Mckenzie's submission treats variety as something smaller than a language which could be called a dialect. Adetuyi (2017) submits that Nigeria being a multilingual speech community, has assigned different roles to the languages that are used in the speech community. He asserts that English plays national and International roles, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are regional lingual franca, Edo, Efik, Fulfulde, Idoma, Igala, Ijaw, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv are ethnic languages used in network news and other indigenous languages playing ethnic or sub-ethnic roles respectively. The findings of Adetuyi have shown that in a multilingual speech community, roles are assigned to the existing languages based on different domains. However, calling English a national language in Nigeria is not proper because a national language has to be an indigenous language used by the citizens of a state to show national identity and solidarity.

Babajide (2001) avers that English is the medium of interaction in most situations in Nigeria: home, office, market et cetera. The language is employed by the interactants in all kinds of communication being it official, unofficial, cordial, casual. He further says that looking at the numerous domains in which English is used, it becomes very imperative for any Nigerian who wants to be successful or recognised in economic or political affairs of the nation to either consciously or unconsciously gain some commendable amount of knowledge of English. Jowitt (1991) corroborates Babajide's assertion by stating that English may continue to be the official language in Nigeria for a long time and also continue to perform its numerous roles in the speech community. This implies that English is used in different domains such as offices, churches, homes, markets, et cetera in Nigeria. Alo (2004) collaborates Jowitt's assertion that English plays many roles in Nigeria by highlighting that English is the official language; the lingua franca among educated Nigerians; the language for teaching and learning in schools, the main medium used to facilitate communication, commerce; the language of science and technology and the medium of creative expression.

3 Research methodology

According to Grifficee (2012), a survey design adopts various data collection procedures to enable the researcher to investigate into a problem by doing some observations or asking questions through interviews and questionnaires in order to gather facts or opinions from the respondents. He submits that the term *survey* refers to the act of investigating into an issue through data collection procedures such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The survey design was relevant to this study because it enabled the researcher to discover the varieties of language used at Benue State University, Makurdi. The researchers adopted the survey method and used questionnaires as the instrument for collecting data from 40 members of the speech community who are fulltime undergraduate students of the university and may have been attending Holy Mass or Sunday Service on the campus as well as patronising the university labour markets out of the total population of the speech community which may be more than 20,000 for the analysis. The researchers also used their observations as students of Benue State University from the undergraduate studies, Masters' and the present studies (PhD Studies) to scrutinise and validate the responses got from the respondents through the questionnaires on the use of language in lectures, Holy Mass, Church Service, community of origin, association meetings, friends gatherings (at Law Park, Linguistics Park, Political Science Park, Mass Communication Park),

Labour Markets at the Main and Unity Campus, football field, basketball pitch, volleyball court and students' hostels at Benue State University, Makurdi.

4 Presentation of data and analysis

Table 1: English as a medium of communication at Benue State University, Makurdi

Question 1	Response Item	No of Responses	Percentage
English is the medium of communication during lectures at BSU, Makurdi.	Strongly Agree	35	87.5 %
	Agree	05	12.5%
	Disagree	00	00%

Looking at the above data, we would say that the domain is education, the setting is lecture room and the topic can be any topic in the university curriculum and the variety of language used is purely English because it is the official language of Nigeria.

Table 2: English and Pidgin use during Holy Mass or Church Service at Benue State University, Makurdi

Question 2	Response Item	No of Response	Percentage
Both English and Pidgin are used at Holy Mass or Church Service at BSU, Makurdi.	Strongly Agree	00	00%
	Agree	14	35%
	Disagree	26	65%

By the analysis of the data, we would say the domain is religion, the setting is church and the topic could be salvation, forgiveness, repentance, charity, Holy Trinity, prosperity among others. We would also say that Holy Mass or Church Service is celebrated in English, the official language of Nigeria. However, Pidgin is used at a very low frequency during Holy Mass or Church Service.

Table 3: Native languages as means of communication at Benue State University, Makurdi

Question 3	Response Item	No of Response	Percentage
Benue State University Students Community of Origin meetings are conducted in native languages.	Strongly Agree	40	100%
	Agree	00	00%
	Disagree	00	00%

The above data portray that native languages are the only means of communication during the community of origin association meetings at Benue State University. Therefore, we would say the domain is association, the setting is meeting and the topic could be welfare of members, love, discipline, unity, academic excellence, national convention and so on.

Table 4: Use of Pidgin at Benue State University Makurdi labour market

Question 4	Response Item	No of Response	Percentage
Pidgin is majorly used at Benue State University Labour Markets.	Strongly Agree	13	32.5%
	Agree	27	65.5%
	Disagree	00	00

The data show that Pidgin is majorly used at the BSU labour markets. That is to say Pidgin is the language for business transactions on the campus. The domain is business, the setting is labour market and the topic could be buying or selling, and paying for or rendering services.

Table 5: Use of Pidgin among friends at Benue State University, Makurdi

Question 5	Response Item	No of Response	Percentage
Pidgin is the medium of interaction among friends at Benue State University, Makurdi.	Strongly Agree	10	25%
	Agree	30	75%
	Disagree	00	00%

The above data portray that the domain is friendship, the setting could be students hostels, parks such as Political Science Students Park, Benue Linguistics Students Association (BESULA) Park, Law Students Park, among other parks, and even in the lecture rooms when the students have no lecture. The data also portray that the variety of language used frequently by the students is Pidgin and the topic could be love, movies, politics, National Youths Service Corps issues, marriage plans, family issues, sports issues et cetera.

Table 6: Use of Pidgin during sports at Benue State University, Makurdi

Question 6	Response Item	No of Response	Percentage
Pidgin is used by Benue State University students during sports.	Strongly Agree	16	40%
	Agree	24	60%
	Disagree	00	00%

Going by the above data, we would say that Pidgin is the language of interaction among Benue State University students during sports. The setting could be football field, basketball pitch, volleyball court among others and the topic could be how to score goals in order to win the game or equalise a goal(s).

Table 7: English as the official language of Benue State University, Makurdi

Question 7	Response Item	No of Responses	Percentage
English is the official language of Benue State University, Makurdi.	Strongly Agree	40	100%
	Agree	00	00%
	Disagree	00	00%

From the above data, we would say that the domain is education, the setting is lecture room and the topic can be any topic in the university curriculum and the variety of language used is purely English because it is the official language of Nigeria.

Table 8: Pidgin as the tool for informal discussions at Benue State University, Makurdi

Question 8	Response Item	No of Response	Percentage
Pidgin is majorly used for informal discussions by Benue State University students.	Strongly Agree	27	67.5%
	Agree	13	32.5%
	Disagree	00	00%

Going by the above data, we could say that the domain is friendship, the setting is students hostels and the student's relaxation centres such as Political Science Students Park, Benue Linguistics Students Association (BESULA) Park, Law Students Park, among other parks. The table also portrays that the variety of language used frequently by the students is Pidgin and the topic could be love, movies, politics, National Youths Service Corps issues, marriage plans, family issues, sports issues, et cetera.

5 Conclusion

The study found out through the analysis of the data that English, Pidgin, and native languages such as Tiv, Idoma, Iggede, Etulo, Igbo, Hausa, among others are spoken at Benue State University, Makurdi. The study also discovered that Pidgin is predominantly used at the university despite the fact that English is the official language because academics and lecture rooms may be the only domain and setting that compulsorily enforce the use of English. The study suggests that more efforts should be made to ensure a predominant use of English on the campus since it is the official

and prestigious language of Nigeria. It also recommends that the use of native languages in the discourse of tribal association meetings should be maintained to keep the Nigerian indigenous languages alive among the students of Benue State University. The study adds to Hudson's submission that a variety can be something bigger than a single language or something less than a single language by treating languages such as English, Pidgin, Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etulo, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba et cetera spoken at Benue State University as varieties of the human language; the tool used by members of Benue State University Speech Community for interaction.

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