

Sociolinguistic Documentation of Endangered Ethnography of Communication in Yoruba Language

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Received: July 8, 2014

Accepted: January 3, 2014

Online Published: March 20, 2014

doi:10.5430/wjel.v4n1p32

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v4n1p32>

Abstract

The ethnography of communication, particularly of greetings, among speakers of some Yoruba dialects is the major concern of this paper. The author observed that the much-cherished, rich culture of greetings, among Yoruba, which the author grew up to know, is fast being eroded by linguistic globalization and modernization. The study and documentation of the sociolinguistic structure of greetings are both anthropological and ethnographic because greetings, as part of Speech Act, belong to the domain of language and culture. Describing language behavior observed daily in different cultures is the purview of an ethnographer. A detailed comparison of greetings among speakers of three Yoruba dialects (Igbomina, Ijesa, Ijebu) can no longer be regarded as a compulsive desideratum, because documentary linguistics is now seen as a salvage work. Our work is therefore that of data collection, organization, transcription, translation and interpretation of the morpho-syntax and semantics of greetings in the three dialects. The rationale for the study is based on our belief that since language is rooted in a speech community, in its history and culture, each language or dialect is unlike any other language, hence no data can be regarded as the same. By the same token, linguistic data are not easily replicable. Because data from extinct dialects are not easily replaceable, documenting greetings in these dialects will make them accessible to others, thus saving them from gradual extinction.

Keywords: *documentary linguistics; accommodation; co-operative-politeness; geo-linguistics; ethnography of greetings; endangered; theosophy; ideational; monumental*

1. Introduction

Documentary linguistics is a new sub-discipline within linguistics. One of the major ways for safeguarding and preserving languages is through language documentation. Ndimele (2010) asserts that documentation is an aspect of language engineering. It is a veritable source of data for linguistic theorizing, and also the basis for orthography development, production of descriptive grammars, extended word lists, and dictionaries. According to Akinlabi and Connell (2008), interest and perhaps works on the state of the world linguistic heritage have increased dramatically as a form of language development or “salvage” work called documentation. Interest in work on endangered languages and dialects dates back to the mid-1990s with Connell’s work in the Mambila Plateau of Nigeria and Cameroon, with the work of Gibbon, Connell and Ahoua in the Ivory Coast on Ega, and with the collaborative work of Akinlabi, Connell and Ndimele on Defaka and Nkoroo in the South Eastern part of Nigeria (Akinlabi and Connell 2008).

Documenting the ethnography of communication, particularly of greetings among the speakers of three Dialects of Yoruba, namely Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa, is the main objective of this research. This involves creating and archiving records of linguistic materials that can serve to teach others about the language. The work also entails interpretation of data in such a way that it is accessible to many people who do not speak the language. Language documentation, as Himmelman (1998) puts it, aims at a record of the linguistic practices and traditions of a speech community. Greetings are regarded as a sociolinguistic behavior based on the culture of the people. The documentation of Nigerian languages and their dialects is therefore indispensable to achieving a deeper understanding of Nigerian languages, cultures, history and societies.

2. Population and Sampling Procedure

The population is drawn from Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Kwara states in Nigeria. Yoruba language has many dialects among which are Ekiti, Igbomina, Ijebu, Ijesa, Oyo, Ondo, Owo, Ikale, Ilaje, Ikare, Yagba, Gbede, Ijumu, Ife, Ikiri, Isabe, Ijo, and Irun. The standard Yoruba is a blend of two closely related Oyo and Lagos dialects. The Ijebu dialect is spoken in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. There are two main varieties, viz: the Emo variety spoken in Sagamu, Oderemo, Ipara, Isara, Iperu and Ikenne; while the Ijebu Central variety is spoken in Ijebu-Ode, Ijebu-Igbo and its environs. The 1991 population census puts the figure for Ijebu at 781,405. Ijesa dialect is spoken in about ten local government areas of Osun State. Some Ijesa speaking villages include Ijebu Ijesa, Enriomo, Esa Oke, Odo, Eti Ori, Ifewara, Ipetu Ijesa, Iye Mogun and Ilesa. The population figure is put at 481,720 (1963 Census).

Igbomina dialect is spoken by the Igbomina who are found in both Kwara and Osun States. Igbomina land is divided into eighty districts, in three Local Government Areas, viz; Ifelodun LGA, with Share as the headquarters; Irepodun LGA with Omu-Aran as the headquarters, and Isin LGA, with Owu-Isin as the headquarters. The population figure is put at 306,573 (1991 census). Like other Yoruba Kingdoms, Igbomina is composed of many towns and villages, and their political organization is bounded in lineage. Several types of Igbomina dialects are spoken in different parts of Igbomina land. The Mosan, Moye, Mohan and Ileko (Eyo Igbomina) are spoken in different areas. The speakers of Mosan variety are found in Isin LGA and in Irepodun LGA of Kwara state while speakers of Moye variety are found in Ifelodun LGA. Ileko variety is spoken at the borders of Ilorin, while Mohan is spoken in Isin and Irepodun LGA.

3. Literature Review

3.1 *Ethnography of Communication/Greetings*

Ethnography of Communication, particularly of greetings, is concerned with the description of the culture and language of a tribe or a race. The subject matter of ethnography of greetings is illustrated with the question “what does a speaker need to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community?” Hymes (1962) uses the acronym SPEAKING to describe the variables which influence communicative competence as follows: Setting (spatio-temporal factors); Participants; Ends or objectives; Act sequence, form and content of speech; Key, tone and manner of speech; Instrument, channels of communication either oral or written; Norms and Genre. According to Olaoye (2007), the prerequisite knowledge that speakers need to have includes not only the rules of grammar and shared rules of interactions, but also knowledge of cultural rules that are the basis for the context and content of communication and interactional process. Greetings require both cultural/and linguistic knowledge. Ethnography of greetings therefore refers not only to the rules of speaking, but also to the ways in which a speaker associates specific modes of speaking to topic or message forms with particular settings and activities.

3.2 *Language Endangerment and Language Documentation*

Emenanjo (1999:80) defines endangered languages as those languages in speech communities ‘where native speakers are threatened because their intergenerational continuity is proceeding negatively with fewer and fewer users’. Ndimele (2010) claims that more than half of natural languages are severely endangered, and many of them may go into extinction in the next few decades. Thousands of these languages in south of the Sahara are vanishing without being documented in any form. Writing on the phenomenon of endangerment Emenanjo (2008) says that human beings, groups and languages become endangered when their original, natural, indigenous habitats, ecologies or environments become hostile. Outlining the factors responsible for language endangerment, Emenanjo (2008) claims that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between language and its environment. He asserts that a robust environment breeds and propagates a robust language, while a deprived one begets an endangered language. Other predisposing factors according to Emenanjo (2008:554) are:

Consumption by predator languages, the existence of indigenous or exogenous languages with numerical strength, economic might, cultural superiority, military and bureaucratic muscles, sociolinguistic vitality in terms of literacy and numeracy...

Kuju (1999) had earlier asserted that language is the surest way through which people can retain and safeguard knowledge, wisdom and the cultures inherited from generation. Endangered languages have varied degrees of endangerment. According to Haruna (2006:7) a language is potentially endangered if the children start to prefer the dominant language and learn the obsolescent language imperfectly. A language is endangered if the youngest speakers are the young adults and there are no child speakers or they are very few. There is serious endangerment if the youngest speakers are middle-aged or have passed middle age. A language is terminally endangered if there are

only a few elderly speakers left and can be regarded as dead when there are no speakers left all together. Agbedo and Omeje (2010) lament that the effects of language endangerment are far-reaching, because people who lose their language lose their identity. Noonan (2005:352) observes that given the rate at which languages are becoming moribund we are engaged in a race against time to preserve as much as possible the world's linguistic heritage. Agbedo and Omeje suggested some linguistic strategies for safeguarding endangered languages. Some of them are:

1. Linguistic strategies to be adopted by the speakers of the language. These include increasing the prestige and value of the language, being loyal to the language, enriching the vocabulary and documenting the language.
2. Linguistic strategies to be adopted by the linguists. These entail organizing enlightenment programmes for the language users, carrying out research and documenting the findings, encouraging university students to write their projects or dissertations on these languages.
3. Strategies to be adopted by government. Government should implement indigenous language policy, organize workshops, establish research institutes, fund researches in higher institutions and give scholarships to students studying language and linguistics.

3.3 Global Views on the Concept of Greetings

Greetings are conventional expressions used for welcoming people or for expressing pleasure when meeting somebody. According to the Chambers English Dictionary (1990), greetings refer to salutations, kind wishes, congratulatory remarks and compliments in general. It involves exchange of pleasantries between two or more people. In greetings, a language is used for the purpose of maintaining good rapport between people. Greetings as aspects of phatic communion refer to the social human desire to signal friendship or, at least, lack of enmity. Greetings are therefore social lubricants used for maintaining a comfortable relationship between people.

Greetings are so important to the Yoruba people that they refer to themselves as "Omo O Kaaro Ojii rebi" which means descendants of those who greet by saying "good morning and how are you?" Daramola and Jeje (1967) assert that it is obligatory for parents to teach their children how to greet politely, as "Omo ti a ba ji lowuro lodo agbalaba ti ko si mo lhun ti o to lati se yoo gba eebu, yoo si gba abuku". This means that a child who wakes up early in the morning without first of all greeting the elders would be rebuked. On the other hand, a child that wakes up and first of all observes the norms associated with greetings would be highly favoured. Greetings however depend on three basic factors, viz: the time of the day, the context of greeting and the people involved especially their age and relationship.

Paralanguage is involved in greetings. Greetings are accompanied by gestures such as kneeling down, genuflecting, prostrating, bowing down, and sometimes hand shake. A younger female person kneels down to greet an elderly person, while a younger male person prostrates and also removes his cap. A breach of this language behaviour is often regarded as an act of rudeness, insolence or indiscipline. The Yoruba people hold greetings in high esteem. This is evident from the proverbs associated with greetings, two of which are: "Ki a rini lokeere, ki a se ariya, o yoni ju onje lo", which means "warm greetings satisfy more than food". The second is "Eniyan ni a ko ti a ko ki, eni ti a ba ki ko tara jeni", which means greeting someone is a privilege, let him that is greeted respond promptly, after all there are people one meets without greeting them.

4. Methodology

Interviews were used as data elicitation method. The native speakers of Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa between the ages of 60 and 100 years, and those who speak the standard Yoruba were the main sources of data collection. Yoruba students of the University of Ilorin and Abuja, and students of some Colleges of Education (COE) such as COE Ila-Orangun, COE Ikere-Ekiti and COE Oto-Ijanikin Lagos were also randomly selected and interviewed. The respondents answered questions on types of greetings which were adjudged by the interviewees as endangered.

The framework of analysis is our model theoretical framework called the Co-operative Politeness Hypothesis, borrowed from Grice (1975) and Leech (1983) and which the author found very apt in describing and analyzing the ethnography of greetings among the Yoruba. The sociolinguistic analysis of some of the greetings was carried out, bringing out the variant forms in the three dialects and the Yoruba Standard Form.

The Co-operative-Politeness Theory finds application in the ethnography of greetings of the Yoruba People. The co-operative principle has it that conversation is usually a co-operative language behaviour. Grice believes that at any point in a conversation, a speaker should be guided by certain maxim: maxim of quality, quantity, relation and manner which govern speech act. Greetings follow Gricean laws or maxims, because Yoruba culture entails a lot of

co-operative interactions which also involve politeness.

Leech's (1983) politeness principle also has four maxims; viz: tact, generosity, approbation and modesty. A speaker is required to be tactful rather than offensive, generous rather than dismissive or insensitive, be modest rather than boastful, and also be socially approving rather than pretentious. In greetings, as in any other communicative event, conformity to societal rules, or code of conduct, especially respect for elders and superiors, reciprocal respect for one another, condescension, accommodation and modesty are instances of the co-operative-politeness principles which interlocutors must observe. Greetings and politeness according to Coulthard (1985) and Leech (1983) are universal concepts which are inseparable and indispensable. They are both levels of conversational interactions.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Types and Forms of Greetings

There are different types of greetings such as daily greetings, periodic/seasonal greetings and those at places of work, greetings for the royalties and pedigree/eulogy (Oriki) greetings.

5.2 The Sociolinguistic Structure of Greetings

There are two prominent structures, the first is considered to be old use, while the second structure is more contemporary.

In the standard Yoruba, the structure is:

- a. Pronoun + ku + time of the day, as in:
'E ku owuro' or 'e k aaro' = Good morning.
"E" is either plural "you" or singular "you" but called honorific plural, used for elders, kings, etc.
- b. 'Ku awuro' or 'kaaro' = good morning, used among mates, or an elder greeting a younger person.

In Igbomina dialect the structure is: Pronoun + kun+ the time of the day, e.g. 'ekun ooro'. The table below shows a comparison of Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa dialects, for both the old and contemporary time.

Table 1. Old Pattern

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	NIGHT
a. IGBOMINA	E kun ooro baami	E Kaasan baami/ babami	E kaale/Ekun ale baami
b. IJESA	Kaa ro baba	Ku osan baa mi	K aale baa mi
c. IJEBU	kaaro baa mi	kaasan baa mi	Kaale baa mi

Table 2. Contemporary Pattern

Igbomina	Ijesa	Ijebu
E Kun ooro/owuro baba mi/baami	In kaaro o baba / in pele o baa mi	Wen/E Kaaro bami
E kun osan baba mi/baami	In kun osan o baa mi	Wen/E kaasan ba mi
E kun osan iya mi/moomo mi/moomi	In pele o yee mi / in kuosan o yee mi	Wen/E kaasan ye mi
E Kun ale baba mi/baami	In kale o baa mi	Wen/E Kaale ba mi
E Kun ale iya mi/moomi	In Kaale o yee mi	Wen/E kale ye mi

5.3 Endangered Yoruba Greetings

The following greetings are endangered:

Festival Greetings

'E ku odun, e ku iyedun, Olorun yoo je kase opo odun laye'. This means happy Christmas, happy Easter, happy Id-el-kabir, or happy Yam Festival, happy Masquiraade Festival, etc. The youths are gradually losing these structures, as they simply say "e ku odun" without adding the other deep sociolinguistic forms.

Marriage Greetings

'E ku I nawo iyawo O, eyin iyawo ko ni meni'. This means well-done for the wedding expenses, may the bride's pregnancy not be delayed. The youths will simply say "E ku inawo" or congratulations. Only the elders go on into the more detailed or more complex greetings, with well wishes or prayers.

Childbirth Greetings

'E ku ewu omo, Olorun yoo da omo naa si'. This corresponds to congratulations on the child's delivery, may God protect the child and keep him safe.

Greetings to Kings

'Kabiyesi o, kade o pe lori, ki bata o pe lese'. Your royal majesty, may the crown stay long on your head, and may your shoes stay long on your feet. This means long live the king! The youth just simply say: "kabiyesi oo" and then prostrate, with their cap removed.

Seasons' Greetings

Dry season: 'E ku ogbele yi'

Rainy season: 'E ku oginitin yi'

Most youths do not even know the Yoruba words for dry or rainy season, or any other season for that matter.

Burial Greetings

a. 'E ku ara feraku'.

This corresponds to "sorry for missing/losing somebody" or sorry for the death of somebody.

b. 'E ku ileede oloogbe, ojo a jina sira won'.

This means sorry for the loss of somebody, may you live long.

House Warming Greetings

'E ku isile, ile a tura o'

This means congratulations on the commissioning of the house, may the house bring you comfort.

Occupational Greetings

The most endangered forms of greetings are those for occupations or trades or professions. The youths hardly ever use these greeting words and phrases:

- Hunter: 'a rin pa a'. This means may you walk and kill games.
- Dyeing: 'are du o'. This means may you soak it dark/black
- Plaiting: 'oju gboro o'. Meaning may you do it (plait) with facility or dexterity.
- Farming: 'a roko bodun de'. May you farm year- in, year out.
 - Tradiing: 'e ku oro aje'. 'Ata gbowo'. Well done in business, may you sell and make profit.
- Palm wine taping: 'igba a yi o'. rope will be strong. Your rope will never cut.
- Blacksmithing: 'aro ye o'. Smithing will bring prospect
- Ifa Priest: 'a bo ru boye o, ebo a fin o'. Sacrifice will be propitious
- Marble (Ayo) playing: 'mo ki ota, mo ki ope', or one asks the players, 'ta ni ope, ani ota'. Who is losing, who is winning?
- Child loser: one whose child has died: 'e ku iroju, omi lo tu, agbe ko fo', which means, sorry, its only the water that has spilled out, the calabash or gourd is not broken. This means take heart because you are still alive, it is only the child that is dead.

ORIKI ORILE (Lineage Pedigree Greetings). These are fast disappearing in the ethnography of communication of the Yoruba. The following praise names are used to greet and inspire people:

- Abeni – female name: A child got through supplication to God/gods.
- Agbeke – female name: A delicate or fragile jewel.
- Aduke – female name: one you hold tenderly to cater for.

- Abeke – female: one you beg to cater for.

Lineage Praise names (LPN) used for greeting can be categorized into four broad- based sociolinguistic types:

- a. Theosophic LPN: Praise names derived from God’s or gods’ attributes, such as:
 - “O, kun, omoluwabi”, hello, God’s own child. This is a form of greeting for a well-behaved child, a descendant of Noah in the Bible.
- b. Testimonial LPN: names that testify to the individual’s fortune, with respect to procreation, good luck, such as:
 - ‘O kun, omo Adedibu’, hello, a child from a royal family that is getting enlarged or expanded. Crown/Royalty has turned to opulence.
 - ‘Pele o, omo Irebaayo’, how are you, child whose birth has brought goodness or fortune upon joy.
 - ‘Omo otedola’, a child whose birth has turned conspiracy into honour and wealth.
- c. Ideational LPN: Praise names that reflect cultural ideas, such as Yoruba concept of man, society, universe, goodness, death, re-incarnation, spirit world, such as:
 - ‘O kun, omo abioje’, Hello, child born into the masquerade cult.
 - ‘Taiye lolu, omo iyamoye’, This is used for greeting the senior of the twins whose mother is regarded as sagacious, prudent or discreet.
- d. Monumental LPN: Praise names derived from parents’ personal achievements, as in physical prowess, wealth, professional excellence, courage, industry, bravery, etc. e.g:
 - ‘Pele O, omo adifala’, Greetings for a child whose father (an oracle priest) has become enriched/prosperous through correct divination.
 - ‘Pele o, omo ajanaku tii mi igbo kijikiji’, greetings for a child whose father is regarded as an elephant (a strong and brave person) whose moves shake the bush/forest very terribly.

6. Discussions

The findings on the endangered Yoruba greetings reveal that the deep structures of greetings are not used by the younger generations. In many cases, the youths do not even know them talk less of using them. The youths use the short-cut forms of greetings and sometimes resort to code-switching code-mixing or the pidginized form. The lexicon of the Yoruba greetings is not well known to the youths. The Yoruba words for dry or rainy season, and other technical terms like passing away, miscarriages, mishap, misfortune, hair plaiting and registers of farming, trade, hunting, burial, dyeing, weaving, fishing, pastime games, palm wine taping, and so forth are difficult for the youths.

The lineage (pedigree) greetings called (Oriki Orile) are not even known by the youths. The educated adults too do not use these lineage greetings every time because “Oriki Orile” requires the knowledge about lineage history, names, exploits of the people and their civilization pattern. On the lineage praise names, only the elderly use them. Educated adults seldom use lineage praise names because they require the knowledge of the Sociolinguistics of the people. Lineages have different historical origin, values and mores. These cultural practices are fast becoming extinct and they need to be documented.

Linguistic globalization has made in-roads into Yoruba language and culture. Many of the syntactic patterns of greetings have been taken over by modernization. The three dialects of Yoruba are facing threat of extinct posed by the almighty parent of the language (the standard Yoruba). This is a case of linguistic murder and linguistic suicide. The latter is occasioned by the speakers of the dialects preferring to speak the standard Yoruba, thus neglecting their own dialects and promoting the standard language. The Igbomina, Ijesa and Ijebu feel shy or ashamed to use their own dialect. To them speaking standard Yoruba is a mark of civilization, a symbol status or a mark of social refinement. Speaking any of the dialects smacks of rustic behavior. The situation is so bad now that the greeting form “E ku ise” (well done) has almost replaced most of the dialectal greetings.

The former happens where the Federal Government fails to implement the indigenous language policy.

Kuju (1999: 37) says that language is the key to the heart of the people. If the key is lost, the people will also be lost. If the key is treasured and kept safe, “it will unlock the door to untold riches.” People’s cultures are embedded in their language. So, when a language is lost, the culture is also lost, hence we need to safeguard our languages.

Ndimele (2010:475) believes that language death is a natural phenomenon and that it is inevitable. "With over half of the languages in the world currently in danger of extinction" Ndimele (op.cit) recommends that conscious efforts should be made to document and preserve the most vulnerable languages before they eventually die. When a language dies without documentation all potentials for the enrichment of human experience embodied in that language is lost. Noonan (2005:352) observes that "given the rate at which languages are becoming extinct," we need to preserve, as much as possible, "the world's linguistic heritage."

7. Summary and Conclusion

The paper described, analyzed, interpreted and discussed the socio-linguistic structures of what the author called the endangered ethnography of communication or greetings in Yoruba language. Three dialects - Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa - were compared with the Standard Yoruba Language. It was found that the grammatical patterns of greetings are different, particularly the differences in the plural markers and the pronouns. Greetings were categorized into time of the day – morning, afternoon, evening and night. Different types of greetings were identified, such as greetings for special festivals, loss of property, greetings for kings and chiefs, and lineage praise names or pedigree and greetings at work. It was also found that pedigree greetings can be divided into four broad categories – theosophic, ideational, monumental and testimonial. Most of these forms of greetings are fast disappearing in the ethnography of communication of the Yoruba, particularly the educated ones. These greetings need to be documented, as salvage research work, to save them from total extinction.

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