

SOCIOLINGUISTIC TERMINOLOGIES USED BY TRICYCLE OPERATORS IN LAFIA METROPOLIS

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.19482.59846

Abstract

The paper is an analysis of the sociolinguistic terminologies used by tricycle operators in the Lafia metropolis in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The ethnography of communication theory was applied as a frame of analysis with the use of primary method based on participatory observation by using recording and informal interview to acquire data. The data were primarily sourced within Lafia metropolis, the main area of the focus of the paper. The analysis was basically by qualitative explanation and description of the data used and the findings reveal the nexus between language and the environment in which it is used. Keke operators in Lafia have developed unique linguistic nuances that are sociolinguistically tied to their occupational environment, social environment and, equally, their educational background.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Tricycles Operators, Lafia, Language

Introduction

Language is one of man's valuable assets used to mark identity, express thought and preserve culture. The view as such is shared by Bloch and Trager (5) who see language as a "system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates". Language is a social art, one of the hallmarks of social behaviour. It is basic to social interactions and significantly represents important aspects of social behaviour and human interaction. Language helps sustain interpersonal relationships. People use language to disseminate important information about who they are, what they represent, and where they come from. Language use varies among social classes and that is one of the reasons

why people's character, background, affiliations and personalities are judged based on their choice of language/dialect.

However way we may define language, we should know that definitions of language and society are not independent: the definition of language includes in it a reference to society. Language and society are like Siamese twins. They work hand in hand to examine how and why people use language in different social situations because people speak differently in different social contexts.

The metropolitan nature of Lafia, Nasarawa State

Lafia is the state capital of Nasarawa State, Nigeria and its history and early growth is closely tied to her solid mineral. From a small town of less than 5,000 in 1930, the population grew to over 100,000 in 1973 and to over 400,000 in 1991 (NPC, 1998). Today the population of the city is estimated to be over 1.3 million people. Lafia is a poly-nucleated metropolis due to the several settlements from which it has grown from and have grown and changed over the years, there exists high density settlements in various locations, such as in, Bukan Sidi, Umbi I, Umbi II, Shabu, Sabon Pegi Shabu, Azuba Bashayi, Mararraba/Akunza, Waakwa, kantsakuwa, Agudu, Gandu, etc. Lafia is a major town in the North Central area of Nigeria, and inter-city roads linking urban areas to the south, north and east have attracted development along her corridors. The city is thus expanding rapidly along the Lafia-Jos Road axis; the Lafia-Shandam road axis, and the Lafia-

Makurdi Road. Lafia plays host to Nigerians from different states and diverse ethnic groups who have settled in and are contributing to the rapid development of the city.

Historical Background of Keke Operation in Nigeria

Tricycles known as 'keke' in local parlance, was first introduced in to Nigeria in the late 1990s by the then military administrator of Lagos State, Colonel Buba Marwa under General Sani Abacha. Prior to this time, the common means of public transportation was the use of taxi cabs with commercial buses joining as the population increased. It was then named after Marwa for introducing it and called 'keke Marwa' until the name was changed to 'keke Napep' during the time of President Olusegun Obasanjo when the National Agency for Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) under the headship of Dr. Magnus Kpakol

imported large quantity of tricycles for the teeming unemployed able - bodied youths as a poverty eradication scheme.

The history of 'keke' as well as the antecedent issues that led to its introduction and popularity in Nigeria necessitates that attention should be given to the language, which the work force engaged in this sector use in communicating among themselves and to the public. More so, an inquiry of this nature is bound to provide insights on how language works in different contexts, the societal factors that contribute to language development and the various purposes which language serves.

'Going Operators' language

Commercial transport workers in Nigeria are certainly aware of the public assessment of their way of life. They know that the society to which they belong does not accept them on moral grounds and that there is the general tendency to brand their language - dirty talk, street language, garage slang etc. However, the influence of language on the understanding of who is a member of the commercial transport community is unmistakable. It is perhaps in this sense that the idea of keke operation extends semantically to the street, so that what is couched in a rather accommodating formal term of discourse may simply be referred to in lay terms as street talk, with slangs and denigrating sleazy parlance in it. The present domain would indeed seem to be one of the most vivid illustrations of how language undertakes the process of carving out a group's social identity. Keke operation in Lafia started in 2012. The then governor Tanko Almakura constructed many inner-city roads and this opened up opportunities for keke business in the city. There are two unions who control the operation of keke drivers in Lafia - Nactamoras (National association of Tricycle and motorcycle association) and Toan (Tricycle owners association of Nigeria). According to the Chairman Mr Sule Abubakar, there are 500 registered keke operators in Lafia.

The study seeks to provide insights on the way 'going' operators in Lafia construct language patterns to serve their purposes and the effects of their non-standard and linguistic variables on language. It focuses on the communication and linguistic behaviours that take place among keke drivers on Lafia road. The entire apparatus of Road transport work is probably non-existent without the commuters and passengers who constitute the clientele at the receiving end of its

services. A close analysis of the data gathered however reveals such common linguistic variations and strategies used within the environment of their job to include the ploys of deceit, costly humour, affectations, impersonation, sarcasm and face-threatening acts among others.

Literature Review

Bernard Spolsky defines sociolinguistics as a branch of linguistics and sociology which examines the individual and social variation of language. Just as regional variation of language can give a lot of information about the place the speaker is from, social variation talks about the roles performed by a given speaker within one community. Hudson asserts that sociolinguistics is also considered as a branch of sociology in that it shows the relationship between language use and the social basis for such use. It differs from sociology of language in that the focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of the society on the language, whereas the latter's interest is on the language's effect on the society. There are numerous definitions of sociolinguistics. However, each of these definitions does not fail to acknowledge that sociolinguistics has to do with language use and a society's response to it.

Sociolinguistics examines why men speak differently from women, why rich people speak differently from poor people, and why educated persons do not use language the way uneducated people do. It also examines why people adjust the way they speak to suit different social situations. Hudson defines it as "the study of language in relation to society." Every society or group of people have their linguistic codes that are acceptable for interaction. Sociolinguistics shows how groups in a given society are separated by certain social variables like ethnicity, religion, status, gender, age and level of education and how adherence to these variables is used to categorize individuals in social classes.

Sociolinguistics and Language Variation

Language, as it is described in books on semantics and morphology, is often introduced as a uniform entity. Variation is central to linguistics. Indeed, there would be very little for linguists to study if, for instance, a computer had designed language and made everything completely orderly. But languages aren't designed as perfectly regular systems. They take their shape in the way speakers use them in social and interpersonal contexts. The variation within and between speakers that we observe is partly the result of interactions between

linguistic factors (that is, aspects of the grammar and phonology of the language) and partly the result of interactions between social factors and language (who the speaker and addressee are, whether the talk occurs in a formal or informal context). A close study of variation involves taking all the social and linguistic factors into account, and for this reason the study of language variation is generally described as a form of sociolinguistics.

Social Identity

We categorize objects in order to understand and identify them. In a similar way we categorize people in order to understand their social environment. People are assigned to a category that tells us things about them and where they belong. Generally speaking, the more central the place of an individual in a group, the stronger their adherence to the group's norms of behaviour and the greater the normative influence of linguistic variables or forms, associated with that group (Foulkes, Scobbie and Watt, 709).

Their behaviour is referenced to the norms of the group they belong to. This is called social identification where people adopt the identity of the group they are categorized in, conform to the norms and begin to act in ways they believe the group acts.

Code

Code linguistic behaviours seem inevitable when two languages albeit ethno linguistically different, are in constant contact. This is the scenario in Nigeria, a multilingual country where various local languages that are representations of the diverse ethnic groups found in the country exist alongside a foreign language (English). This research work therefore examined code-mixing and code-switching in spontaneous conversations. It also looked at the patterns of mixing and switching and the motivational factors for mixing and switching. A code is a system that is used by people to communicate with each other. When people want to talk each other, they have to choose a particular code to express their feelings and thoughts. Sometimes people want to communicate only to certain people, community or group they belong to. To avoid the other community or people interfering their communication, they may try to exclude those people by using a language that not everybody knows/masters.

Pidignisation

It is a well-known sociolinguistic fact that when two or more languages come in contact, different kinds of sociolinguistic chemistry take place. Sometimes a diglossic situation may result, or language shift, or even language death. In some other instance, it can lead to formation of a pidgin, or even birth of a new language altogether. A pidgin is a language with no native speakers: it is no one's first language but is a contact language. That is, it is the product of a multilingual situation in which those who wish to communicate must find or improvise a simple language system that will enable them to do so. Very often too, that situation is one in which there is an imbalance of power among the languages as the speakers of one language dominate the speakers of the other languages socially. A pidgin is therefore sometimes regarded as a 'reduced' variety of a normal language, with simplification of the grammar and vocabulary of that language, considerable phonological variation, and a mixture of local vocabulary to meet the special needs of the contact group.

Pidgin is a language system created with amazing rapidity. Very often, it came as the distinctive by-product of European colonial exploits, though it should be stressed that there is a whole range of possible situations which might stimulate this kind of language formation. A paradigm case of pidginisation arose with the transportation of slaves from a variety of linguistic backgrounds to an isolated plantation. The resultant linguistic chemistry created the need for a shared *lingua franca*, especially as the opportunities for learning a fully-fledged second language became severely limited.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, the adoption of the ethnography of communication is made and applied. Ethnography of communication is the study of communication within the background of social and cultural practices and beliefs. First introduced by Dell Hymes in 1962, he describes it in detail in his article 'Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communications', which was published in 1964. This was to accommodate the verbal and non-verbal characteristics of communication. However, ethnography of communication researchers tends to focus on the speaking because it is considered to be the most prominent aspect of communication.

Hymes developed the SPEAKING model which analyses speech in its cultural context:

S – Setting and scene - the physical location where the speech takes place.

Setting refers to the time and place, i.e., the concrete physical circumstances in which speech takes place. Scene refers to the abstract psychological setting, or the cultural definition of the occasion. For the purpose of this research, our setting and scene are the following; (keke and the designated routes they ply daily)

P – Participants - the people who take part in the speech.

These include various combinations of speaker–listener, addressor–addressee, or sender–receiver. They generally fill certain socially specified roles. A two-person conversation involves a speaker and hearer whose roles change; a ‘dressing down’ involves a speaker and hearer with no role change; a political speech involves an addressor and addressees (the audience); and a telephone message involves a sender and a receiver. (Keke drivers, Nactoramos, Nurtw officials, passengers)

E – Ends - the purpose and the outcome of the speech.

Ends refer to the conventionally recognized and expected outcomes of an exchange as well as to the personal goals that participants seek to accomplish on particular occasions. (business of transporting passengers from one point to another and movement from one destination to another)

A – Act - the speech acts and the sequence in which they are carried out.

It refers to the actual form and content of what is said: the precise words used, how they are used, and the relationship of what is said to the actual topic at hand. In this context, the Acts are the following; (calling and picking passengers, calling out bus stops and destinations, paying road taxes, collecting fares, manoeuvring and beating traffic lights)

K – Key - the tone and manner in which the speech is carried out.

Key also refers to the spirit in which a particular message is conveyed: light-hearted, serious, precise, pedantic, mocking, sarcastic, pompous, and so on. The key may also be marked nonverbally by certain kinds of behaviour, gesture, posture, or even deportment. (harsh, appealing, persuasive, insulting)

I – Instrumentalities - the medium of communication used.

It is the choice of channel, e.g., oral, written, or telegraphic, and to the actual forms of speech employed, such as the language, dialect, code, or register that is chosen. One may employ different instrumentalities in the course of a single verbal exchange of some length: first read something, then tell a dialect joke, then use an expression from another language, and so on. In this context, the instrumentalities include the following; (Oral communication, verbal and facial expressions, gestures)

N - Norms of interaction - the rules of speech, interaction and interpretation.

It is the specific behaviours and properties that attach to speaking and also to how these may be viewed by someone who does not share them, e.g., loudness, silence, gaze return, and so on. These norms may vary from social group to social group.

In context, the following are the norms of interaction for this group of people. (eccentric diction, street attitude, uncultured linguistic forms and behaviour)

G - Genres - the type of speech and its cultural contexts.

This refers to clearly demarcated types of utterance; such things as poems, proverbs, riddles, sermons, prayers, lecture, and editorials. In this context, genres are the following; (slangs, insults, salutations, prayers, swear words, curses, apologies)

Methodology

Given the noisy nature of the research environment, the researcher used recorded expressions and unstructured interviews obtained from 'going' operators, both at motor parks and on the road in gathering the data analysed in the study. Participatory observation method was applied to observe and partake in linguistic conversations that involved the use of these forms, variables and linguistic expressions. It involved the researcher plying through the designated sample routes to identify instances of data for the study. The aim of the researcher was to collect and document factual information on the study and proffer answers to the research questions. With the data gathered in the field, it helped the researcher present possible recommendations to the problems this study tends to address.

This study covers five major parks in designated areas within the metropolis. The parks include College of Agric park which covers (the state polytechnic,

Shabu, Sabonpegi, Azuba Bashayi), Akurba Park, Mararaba Park covering (Federal University), Emir's palace and old and new markets.

Analysis/Findings

The analysis here is centred on how Lafia 'going' operators construct their social identity around their work environment and how to identify their speech, variant forms and linguistic behaviours. a factor that preoccupied the analysis in this paper is how the language of the keke operators reveal their identities. thus, the proceeding analyses present a list of examples illustrating the forms of expressions which articulate some speech and social identity of these operators.

1. *Mudagarinmu*

Meaning - The land belongs to us or in pidgin 'na we get our land' This is common among 'going' operators when they beat traffic and passengers caution them. It literary means "the land belongs to us and we can get away with whatever we do".

2. *Kwaaro*

Meaning - My guy This is a form of salutation used by keke operators in College park. Operators attached to College park cover routes from Poly, college, shabu, Azuba bashayi. When they meet themselves in the line of duty they call out 'Kwaro'. This shows a form of solidarity among them and gives them a sense of group identity.

3. *Mutabanki*

Meaning - Always on speed This is a name tagged to operators who drive speedily on the road. It is very usual to hear their members call them 'Mutabanki'. In some cases they put such inscriptions on the body of their tricycle for easy recognition.

4. *Bird man*

Meaning - One that cannot easily be trapped as he is constantly in flight. This is used in same case as No 3 above.

5. *Duniya ba hutu*

Meaning - We have come to this world to work and we will work till we die. This expression is normally used when an operator is asked to take a break or rest from a busy day's schedule or after many trips, he retorts 'duniya bah utu!'

6. *Ba wasa*

Meaning - No play, No joke.

This shows how resilient and hardworking this group of people are. Their doggedness in carrying out their duties cannot be compromised for anything. This expression tells the public and their colleagues that they do not joke or play with their business.

7. *No time to look time*

Meaning - A stylistic way of telling commuters to hurry into their keke so they can move.

8. *Sharp sharp*

Applicable in the same context as No 7 above. It is also used when a passenger is taking so much time to alight from a keke possibly because of too much load.

9. *Kwal(awa)*

Meaning - Police.

In Hausa language, Police is called *Dansanda* however, this group of people have coined a name for police officers which only people within their work environment use and understand.

10. *Confirmed fine boy*

This phrase is used by a couple of operators as a means of identification. Their colleagues call them this adopted name and in most cases they put the inscription on the body of their keke. In some cases, where a passenger wants to employ the services of any of them, it is easier for the person to identify the keke operator by the name especially at the park.

11. *Dan auta*

Meaning - Last born

12. *Dan faari*

Meaning - First Born

Nos 11 and 12 are applicable in the same context and situation with No 10 above.

13. *Nothing do you/me*

Meaning- No problem (show of approval; loyalty to the group).

It is also another way of salutation among operators when they see themselves drive on the road.

14. *Inaruwanranka*

Meaning - What is your business or concern?

The expression appears to serve as a retort against gossips and inquisitive passengers. Most keke operators overload their tricycle, instead of having just three passengers at the back and the driver at front, the rider carries as much as five passengers. This they do by placing stools at both ends of the front row in

the keke. Usually, this sitting arrangement causes discomfort to the driver when driving however, when asked why they do such, they retort 'Inaruwanka'

15. *Yau gareku*

Meaning - Today is your day.

This expression is used among keke operators to crack jokes and tease themselves. When a colleague makes great profit after a day's job and possibly counting his money in the presence of his mates, it is normal for him to get the remark 'yao gerinka'.

16. *Yau ka caba*

Meaning - you have made so much money today. This is also applicable as in No 15.

17. *Dan Sarauta*

Meaning - Son of the king/ Royalty

This is another means of identification by keke operators. The bearer of this name does not come from royalty neither is he a child of any king but he impersonates this identity for personal interest and group identification. They also go ahead to place this inscription on the body of their tricycle.

18. *Infinity*

Like no 16 above, this is also used as a means of self-identification; a nickname.

19. *Nwanne gbado anya, eke dey road*

Meaning - Be watchful, police/road safety is ahead.

This expression is used by Igbo keke drivers to warn their brothers to be mindful of Policemen or road safety on the road. 'Eke' in igbo language is python but is used as a cover name or slang for Police. The implication of this variation is that police is likened to a snake or python that bites or stings.

20. *So mai sonka*

Meaning - Love who loves you.

This expression depicts sarcasm and is also used for identification and as a means of salutation.

21. *Yakwa*

Meaning - To get balance or debt on one's head

This expression is used by operators when they are trying to explain why they cannot get into any unexplainable venture that will put them in trouble or at loss.

22. *I no get change fa*

Meaning - I do not have change

In hausa, 'fa' is used at the end of a sentence to emphasize how serious something is. Therefore, when a keke man says he doesn't have change and adds

the prefix 'fa', he is invariably saying he means it and no passenger should present a big denomination.

23. Ruusheshe

Meaning – fat or a plus sized person.

This expression is used to mock or crack jokes among keke operators when referring to a fat passenger or any of their fat colleague.

24. Kanawa gwaranku

Meaning – I belong to the people of Kano; it is better for you

This expression is used by going operators in Lafia who are from Kano state in Nigeria. The researcher was able to identify two operators who placed this inscription on the body of their tricycle. They use this expression to show solidarity and belonging as indigenes of Kano which makes for easy identification among themselves. They have also adopted this as a name for identification and it is also used for salutation.

Findings

The findings from the above analyses reveal both the linguistic variations and code choice which occur in the language of 'going' operators, as a result of the expected behaviour in the environment of their job. The findings show that since their job environment influences their behaviour and attitude, there is also a correlation in the manner with which they communicate. It is perceived not to be a profession for a calm and gentle person. Therefore, it is expected of every operator to exhibit these behaviours, know and use these deviations and non-standard language as it helps them relate among themselves and build their social identity. It also shows the nature/characteristics of the profession or operators as something practiced by other ethnic groups such as the Igbo in Lafia metropolis as instantiated by one of the data.

The expression 'Bird man' which is a code name and used by the keke operators means 'One that cannot easily be trapped as he is constantly in flight; it shows the swiftness and speed with which they can get away from the scene of any wrong doing and crime. On the positive side though it also shows that they are time conscious, can meet with a client's timing and can beat deadlines in their duty. 'No time to look time and Bawasa which means No play, No joke' are variables that show how resilient and hardworking this group of people are. Their doggedness in carrying out their duties cannot be compromised for

anything. This expression tells the public that they are a group of serious people who do not joke or play with their business.

Conclusion

This paper examined linguistic variables and language patterns in the speech of keke operators in Lafia which portrayed some of the group-based ideological patterns that underlie the sociolinguistic construction of such language, within the speech community. It also looked at the role played by such linguistic variables and behavioural practices in creating the identity of the group, of its members as well as of the occupation itself. The study therefore buttresses the position that social identity is the cumulation of a group of peoples' chart of activity, self-expression and engagements, in relation to those of other groups in society, and within context of the generally understood placement of the parties involved within society, through language.

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IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol. 7. No. 1. ISSN: 2488-9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online) 2021.

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