Naming Among Yoruba Bilingual Migrants in Abidjan: A Case of Integration or Endangerment?

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Abstract

Bilingualism is a natural phenomenon in migrants' communities. The 0000-0003-4237-246X -French minority group in Abidjan are regularly plagued with the problem of identity which is reflected in their language use and naming patterns. Previous studies on migrants' settlements have focused mostly on language shift leading to language endangerment. This study examines patterns of naming among the Yorùbá in Abidjan which has received little attention from scholars. The study employs a descriptive survey methodology to investigate patterns of naming among the Yorùbá migrants. The theoretical framework for this study are social identity and accommodation theories. The study reveals three different types of names among the migrants: some write their names according to Yorùbá spellings, some spellings are usually patterned after French spellings rather than Yorùbá and the third are those who give their children francophone names instead of names that will reflect their Yorùbá ancestry, The desire for identity among their francophone neighbours has impacted negatively on language use and naming practices of the Yorùbá migrants who have settled among the Ivorians. It is believed that this practice promotes accommodation and access to certain benefits as citizens. However, the attitude of the Yorùbá migrants to the Yorùbá language is positive as many among the older generation claim they love the language and employ it in inter-personal communication. The study concludes that although the naming pattern demonstrates integration to the new environment, it threatens the continued survival of the Yorùbá language and culture in Abidjan. The paper calls for linguistic and cultural revival among the people especially as naming reflects both linguistic and cultural background.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Migrants Communities, Integration, Identity, Linguistic Revivalism.

Introduction

Migration is the movement of people from one locality to another, especially from their primary background to another environment. The search for upward mobility in life encourages migration of people from across the globe. On settling in the new community, necessity is placed on them to learn and assimilate into the host community. Sometimes, the shift occurs as

a result of forced or voluntary immigration to a place where it is not possible to maintain one's native language… or as a result of conquest" (Romaine 1994:53).

Migration may result from an ethnic group extending its domains to other areas, thereby subjugating the small groups in the area. Oyetade (1990:100-101) cites the reports of Brosnahan, (1963), Dorian (1980) and Fasold, (1984). Here, Rome according to Brosnahan extended her domains to the area of Italy and the islands of Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica. Latin became the language of administration, civilization and trade and then replaced the local languages. Moreover, industrialization brought English immigrants to Wales during 1861 to 1911. Fasold (1984) notes that in Oberwart Felso in Hungarian many peasant farmers are bilinguals.

Newman, (1970) reports that Tera speakers in Adamawa and Taraba states are not originally speakers of the language. He reveals the fact that the language was acquired by the host community. The migrations of the people to the place at different times have also facilitated this shift and there is historical evidence to support their claims of different origins. Agyekum (2019) explained that several reasons are behind migration in Ghana,. These include Escape from war zone area is the first instance. He notes that the Konkoba and Nanuba war in the Northern region of Ghana in 1994-1995 led several people to migrate to southern Ghana and subsequently adopted the language of the host community. Economic factors also come to play. Many people, especially the youths are compelled to leave their communities to the cities and urban centres for job opportunities and economic activities.

The Yorùbá migrants in Abidjan are regularly plagued with the problem of identity as they interact with their neighbours in French language because bilingualism is a natural phenomenon among them. The desire to be recognized as members of the community and not perceived as strangers is reflected in their language use and naming patterns. In addition, the phenomenon of language shift is also very common. This study is a survey of the dynamics of language contact or societal bilingualism in Abidjan, Cote D'Voire. Many studies on migrants' settlements have focused mostly on   language shift leading to language endangerment.

Existing literature on urban sociolinguistics have concentrated more on language shift among migrants neglecting the issue of social identity in inter-group relations. This is because several people who migrate on a daily basis to the urban centres are usually multilingual in nature. Little interest has been shown in investigate naming choice patterns of migrants in such communities. This shows a dearth of the study of this nature especially among the Yorùbá who

have made Abidjan their second homes. The few existing works on the Yorùbá communities provide information on the language practices of the people.

Majority of the Yorùbá who have settled in Abidjan have integrated into the French language and culture are often faced with the problem of language conflicts and identity as evidenced in their language and naming choice patterns. On one hand, the choice of naming their wards in francophone language of the host against the mother tongue may open ways to some benefits in the community, ranging from economic to political. On the other hand, deciding not to use the host language or integrate into the host community also has its potential challenges. In such situations, language shift becomes an inevitable means of self-defence, including naming patterns that favour the language of the host environment.

According to Aharpour (1999) social psychologists, chose to study people's behaviour from an intergroup perspective, because many of our everyday encounters with people are driven by our respective social identities. But in order to avoid the oppression, the speakers abandoned their mother tongue as well as their ethnic identity (Grenoble 2006). In such situations, language shift becomes an inevitable means of self-defense. This sis the extreme form which should not be encouraged.

This challenge relates to the problem of identity. Total integration may lead to problem of identity especially for those who are proficient in the French language. Giles and Saint Jacques (1979) opine that language and ethnicity are the basic elements of the identity and individuality of a human being and at the same time stand at the forefront of social interaction. Minority Immigrants always aspire to maintain their original identities and the maintenance of relations with other groups.The study employs a descriptive survey methodology to investigate patterns of naming among the Yorùbá migrants. In Ẹléṣhin-Ajíkòbi (2025), the Olukumi speakers in are influenced by Igbo and Esan/Edo languages, the paper recommends the revitalisation of the language to prevent its extinction in the future.

The Yorùbá in Abidjan

The Yoruba migrants have lived peacefully with their Ivorian hosts for over One hundred (100) years. They are mostly traders, artisans and skilled workers who have moved to settle in this community. Eighty (80%) percent of the total population of Nigerians in Ivory Coast are Yorùbá although there are people from other ethnic groups too. Adéníran (2010) deliberated on the Yorùbá in Abidjan and the social networks they create for themselves with their hosts.

He observes that the Yorùbá migrants have created double identities for themselves in that while in the homes, they communicate and do other activities normal like a Yorùbá but in the neighbourhood, they speak more of French and other local Ivorian languages such as *Bete* and *Baure* and dress like the Ivorians. His respondents confirmed that they do this for economic gains in order to look similar to their host and in that process become accepted in the community.

Adéníran remarks:

> Of all the languages, the colloquial Abidjan French is mandatory. Respective migrants" relatives, tribal friends and neighbors often perform a significant role in this respect. As soon as one could speak a native language, residence permit is normally processed through the Oba. The *card identete*" (permanent residence permit) is compulsory for all foreigners; without it you cannot get anything in Cote d'Ivoire *(FGD, Female, 40+, Abidjan, 26/06/10; Observations, Abidjan, 28/06/10). (Adeniran, 2010.p.7)*

This excerpt succinctly captures the linguistic situation in Abidjan. This situation has also impacted on the naming patterns of the Yorùbá people in Abidjan. This phenomenon explains the concept of accommodation theory Adéṣínà and Adébáyọ̀ (2009) investigated the economic contribution of migrant Yorùbá in Abidjan, They maintained that their migration to Abidjan was necessitated by the positive news of economic bloom in the area and the desire of the people for upward mobility and Bauer, (1954) assert that the "Yorùbá traders of southwestern Nigeria present an important alien commercial class in Cote d'Ivoire and some other West African States. Yorùbá nationalities in Abidjan from Èjìgbò constitute the majority of the population and have continued to make significant contributions to the economy of the country.

Naming

Naming is an integral aspect of the Yorùbá life. Everything and anything is named in Yorùbá. Humans, plants, animals are given names. Ọ̀nádípẹ̀-Shalom (2023) remarks that names are considered to hold great significance and are important players in the destiny of the bearers, including influencing their lives. Before a child is named among the Yorùbá, several factors are considered, major one being the events and circumstances happening in the family at the time the child is born. This is demonstrated by the popular axiom, *ilé ni à ń wò kí á to sọ ọmọ ní orúkọ*. We look at the circumstances of the house before naming a child. The child is presented basic naming items such as water, sugar, palmoil, kolanuts, dried catfish bitter cola and palmwine among others, in contemporary times, the families may add the Bible or the Qur'an according to their religious inclination. Naming also is not only for individuals but collective identification. During their naming ceremony, the family and community welcome

a new child and accept joint responsibility for raising it Cerchiaro (2017) examined the naming of children born into mixed families. The study is made of eighteen families in Chicago states which show that naming practices reflect how their choices were connected with couples racial, ethnic and faith. The author revealed that the names given to the children demonstrate their ethnic and religious background. This study corroborates Onadipe-shalom (2023a, 2023b). These papers also demonstrate the use of names to construct multiple identities, in that these names convey their ethnic and religious identities. Fakuade, Friday-Ọ̀tún and Adéọ̀ṣun (2019) in their study of personal names maintain that names tell stories of families.

Naming is far more than an identification marker. Kayode (2022) indicates that " beyond identification tags, Yorùbá names serve aesthetic, historical, religious and socio-cultural purposes (p15) .like every other aspect of culture naming is a communal festive occasion celebrated   jointly   by   relatives,   friends   neighbors,   acquaintances   and   well-wishers (p.72)/Kayoed (2022) remarks that negative names can impact negatively on the child for the rest of his or her life.

Akinọlá (2014) adds that apart from the parents family members are also given the honour of giving names to the child, hence the many names children are giving at naming ceremonies. These names include bestowed names, circumstantial names. Names by profession, names by family belief or worship, names by nobility, royalty or wealth deliberate or freely given names, praise names Àbíkú names appellations.

In Gaya (2022), the study indicates that identity formation is in two parts, the single and the hybrid identity. The paper reveals that socio-economic status affects mixed families in the process of identity formation. Mensah, Inyabri and Nyong (2020) decry the abandonment iof indigenous (African) first names and preference for Western European names by the youths. His investigation reveled that they do this to challenge the traditional practice and also to portray their "style, personal taste, creativity, religious conversion and the flow of other social capital" (pg2)

Theoretical Framework: Social Identity and Accommodation Theories

The two theories employed for this study are Tajfel's (1972) social identity theory and Giles (1973) accommodation theory. The social identity theory states that as "the individual's awareness that she or he belongs to a certain social group together with the evaluative and emotional significance of that membership" (1981, p. 255). It follows from this that individuals may be judged on the basis of the value of the group (or groups) they belong to. Moreover,

Tajfel proposed that individuals look for "a positive valued distinctiveness from other groups" (Tajfel 1972 3), adding to the identification process the motivation of positive self-esteem.

Secondly, this research employed the Accommodation theory by Giles (1973) and later developed by St. Clair (1979). The accommodation theory explores the various reasons individuals emphasise or minimize the social difference between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal and non-verbal communication. In essence, "Accommodation is to be seen as a multiply-organized and contextually complex set of alternatives regularly available to communicators in face-to-face talk. It can function to index and achieve solidarity with or dissociation from a conversational partner, reciprocally and dynamically." Giles and Coupland (1991:60-61)

The accommodation theory I premised on two concepts-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 one's interlocutor or to show ethnic differences. The theory has the following sub-theories:

Similarity-support- attraction processes

This theory posits that "the more similar our attitudes and beliefs are to certain others; the more likely it is we will be attracted to them (Giles 1980:106). Groups with whom we share some similarities are therefore more likely to support our views and it is also very likely that we "reward" them with our appreciation, as well as feel attracted to them because they give us certainty about ambiguous situations

Social Exchange Process

This theory posits that "prior to acting, we attempt to assess the rewards and costs of alternate courses of action." (Giles and Clair 1979:48). Social exchange theory attributes accommodation to the speaker's envisaged rewards. In other words, attempts at adjusting one's speech to another's are only due to the benefits accruable from the action.

Causal Attribution Process

This process examines the motive behind the speaker's intention to adjust to his interlocutor's speech style. Giles and St. Clair (1987) aver that we interpret other people's behaviour and evaluate the individual themselves in terms of the motivations and intentions that we attribute as the cause of their behaviour.

As we progress in this study, it will be demonstrated that all these play significant roles in the naming choice patterns of the Yoruba in Abidjan.

Methodology

This study examines patterns of naming among the Yorùbá in Abidjan which has received little attention from scholars. The study employs a descriptive survey methodology to investigate patterns of naming among the Yorùbá migrants. Thirty (30) popular names were randomly selected for the study, respondents fall under the age-group of 18-25yeras.

Presentation of Data

The study reveals three different types of names among the migrants: some write their names according to Yorùbá spellings, some spellings are usually patterned after French spellings rather than Yorùbá and the third are those who give their children francophone names instead of names that will reflect their Yorùbá ancestry. This presentation focuses on the second category.

(i)   Religious names with French spellings
Names in English spellings   Names in French spellings

Names in English spellings	Names in French spellings
Racheal	Rachille
Moses	Moise
Rashidat	Rashidatou
Zainab	Zenabou
Sherif	Cherif
Aisha	Aicha
Bintu	Bintou
Asaka	Achaker

(ii)   Yorùbá indigenous names with French spellings

Names in Yoruba spelling   Names in French spelling

Names in Yoruba spelling	Names in French spelling
Kunle	Kounle
Kunbi	Kounbi
Funmi	Funmie
Kemi	Kemie
Toyin	Touine
Ladele	Ladeule

Balogun	Balogoun

Discussion of findings

The data above reveals the naming patterns of the Yoruba. It covers not only the Christian and Islamic religions, but the indigenous Yoruba names are intentionally or unintentionally in French. The desire for identity among their francophone neighbours has impacted negatively on language use and naming practices of the Yorùbá migrants who have settled among the Ivoirians. Children whose birth certificate bears francophone names are treated as members of the community and are open to more opportunities than those who are not, It is believed that this practice promotes accommodation and access to certain benefits as citizens such as in education and politics. Moreover, it is observed that even with names that are purely Yorùbá, the spelling are not in line with Yoruba language. The similarity-attraction theory postulates that the more similar we are to the other people, the more we will be accepted by them. It is important for the migrants to demonstrate positive attitudes towards their host language and culture. Using both the social exchange and causal attribution processes, we come to understand the motivation behind this development. Parents are pre-occupied with the rewards their wards stand to gain with these naming patterns which unfortunately are not likely to be available to them in their homeland,

There is a negative aspect to this development. Some of the young mothers who were born in Abidjan and familiar with only the French; Some of the young parents are not familiar with Yorùbá writing even when they speak it because they learn French in school and communicate more in French language. In contrast, some of the older generation/parents who have their birth certificates in Nigeria are illiterates, so at the registration of their ward's birth, municipal officers wrote the names in French and the child continues with it. Inspite of the fact that this allows the Yorùbá children to have opportunities, they may have difficulty accessing certain benefits in Nigeria, especially in their native town as it clearly reveals that they are not 'born and bred' in the area.

Conclusion

The paper is a study on migration and naming patterns of the Yorùbá in Abidjan. The study reveals that the Yorùbá in this community have existed from about a century and most of them are Yorùbá-French bilinguals. The research concludes that although the naming pattern demonstrates integration into the new environment and gives them opportunity for inclusivity. It threatens the continued survival of the Yorùbá language and culture in Abidjan. Clearly,

Yoruba names are endangered in this community. Clearly, Yoruba names are endangered in this community. Parents should be intentional in the spelling of their children's names so that the Yorùbá language can be documented and preserved unlike what is obtained today. The paper calls for linguistic and cultural movement where these issues are addressed among the people especially as naming reflects the identities, prayers and all the expectations of the parents concerning the child.

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