

Functional Definition of Roles in Complex Multilingualism: The Example of Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract—Lokoja, Nigeria is arguably one of the most multilingual communities in the world. The multilingual situation of Lokoja, North Central Nigeria is intriguingly much for its complexity and Lokoja which connects the broad geographical regions of Nigeria as a result of its centrality is resident to people of diverse multilingual backgrounds, such that a typical inhabitant can speak as many as nine Nigerian languages. In the midst of this multilingualism arises the problem of domain of influence and functions of the respective languages which the inhabitants speak and the different functions which the respective languages serve are dependent on a variety of factors which range from formality, familiarity to strict informality. However, there is sometimes role conflict as a result of multi-lingual complexity. The goal of this paper is to examine the socio-linguistic motivational differentials in the functions of the languages in contact in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Index Terms—functional roles, domain influence, role conflict, motivational differentials, code switching and code mixing, language conflict, domain-speaker conflict, multilingual complexities

I. INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism is a prevalent linguistic phenomenon in Lokoja, Nigeria. This is as a result of the convergence of various people with different linguistic backgrounds in the domain. An average language user in this domain speaks a minimum of four to nine languages, some of which are used simultaneously.

The definition of multilingualism is a subject of debate. Some linguists see it as complete competence and mastery in more than two languages. They assume that a multilingual person will have complete knowledge and control over the language before he/she can pass for a multilingual, while some others consider it as being less than native-like, but still able to communicate in two or more languages.

Trudgill (1995) sees multilingualism as ‘the use of different languages within the given recognized geographical entity’ (P.53). In his definition of multilingualism, he is not definite, as ‘different languages’ means assorted languages without a specific number. Therefore, there is no clear-cut number of languages a speaker will have competence in before he or she can be considered a multilingual.

Multilingualism is the linguistic phenomenon in which the member of a speech community is fluent in more than two languages. Multilingual speakers have acquired at least one language from birth, the mother tongue. There are different conditions under which users of language become multilingual: some people grew up in a multilingual home, some married a partner who is multilingual in nature or who speaks a different language from their partner’s, some learn new languages from school, others learn it in a multilingual society.

Lokoja is a speech community where diverse languages and cultures ranging from Yoruba, Epira (Okene), Epira (Koto), Bassa (Nge), Bassa (Komu), Igala, Pidgin, Hausa, Nupe, Igbo, English, etc. co-habit. The languages are used in varying degrees for interactional, transactional, and governmental communication in their respective domains of operation. The residents of Lokoja characteristically speak several languages, perhaps one or more at home, another in the town, another at work, still another for purposes of trade and yet another for contact in the outside world of wider social and political organization. Most of these multilinguals acquire these various languages naturally and unselfconsciously, and the shifts from one to another are made without hesitation.

Each of these languages has its own rules: lexically, phonologically, grammatically, and discourse wise. Therefore, each is used as a code of communication among the people.

II. METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper were got through observation. The researchers took samples of selected multilingual families, studied their language use to know what codes they choose at different situations and what motivated their choices. Families A B C D E F G H I J K L and M were selected for sampling by the researchers. The observations carried out

on these families were done surreptitiously. The researchers spent time with each family and in the course of this discovered that families E J K use only two codes. This does not fit into the definition of multilingualism as portrayed by this paper. Although most of the observations were done in the homes of these subjects, the researchers also studied their choices of codes outside the contexts of their homes: work places, market, streets, and a religious centre.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Code Switching and Code Mixing

In a complex multilingual society like Lokoja, it is normal for words from many languages that co-habit to occur in the multilinguals' everyday speech. Code switching is a language act which involves the movement of language use by a speaker from one language to another within the same discourse. On the other hand, code mixing is the borrowing of words, phrases, clauses, from one language to another within a sentence.

Although these linguistic phenomena are considered as separate entities, some linguists argue that the term code switching may be used to encompass both types of language behaviours.

The term code switching according to Milroy and Gordon (2002), describe a range of language (or dialect) alternation and mixing phenomena whether within the same conversation, the same turn, or the same sentence-utterance.

Each of the two languages has its own distinct phonological, lexical, and grammatical features. People who speak more than one language are generally very sensitive to the differences in the variety of the languages they use and are equally aware that in some contexts one variety will serve their needs better than another, Meyerhoff, (2006). Therefore, the variety they use may change depending on the context.

Many linguists hold the opinion that code switching is associated with in-group membership, an index of solidarity. Therefore, code switching may be associated with a series of unmarked choices when aspects of the context such as a change in topic or in the person addressed make a different language variety more appropriate. In the following, a visitor to Federal University Lokoja Kogi State spoke with one of the security men at the Main Gate in English Language, the usual language for such interactions between and amongst strangers. When the security man discovered the visitor is from his ethnic group, he switched to their joint ethnic language, Igala, which signified their common identity and marked the relationship as the one between "ethnic brethren" rather than strangers. When another visitor approached, the security man switched back to English to address him, when the visitor spoke Yoruba language (which the security man has competence in), he switched to Yoruba language.

This phenomenon of moving between distinct varieties is known as code switching. According to Meyerhoff (ibid) when code switching is constrained by where speakers happen to be, it can be called domain-based or situational code switching.

Multilingualism is highly characterized by predictable domain-based code switching. Lokoja users of language just like other multilinguals around the world choose different languages depending on where they are, who they are talking to and what kind of impression they want to communicate to their interlocutors. The difference between multilinguals in Lokoja and other multilinguals is that the number of languages in which the former have competence is comparatively higher than among multilinguals because of the complex multilingual nature of Lokoja.

A. Language Conflict in the Multilingual Brain

The large majority of Lokoja language users are more or less fluent in four or even more languages. This raises the fundamental question how the language network in the brain is organised such that the correct target language is selected at a particular occasion. A research carried out by Heuven (2008), reveals that multilingual processing leads to language conflict in the multilingual brain even when the multilingual's task required target language knowledge. This finding demonstrates that the multilingual brain cannot avoid language conflict, because words from the target and non-target languages become automatically activated during speaking.

This research paper recognizes the fact that despite the presence of five or more languages in the memory, a multilingual person is able to speak in one language at a time because his or her language system selects words from the target language, and those from the non-target languages are ignored. In most situations, multilinguals are successful in selecting the intended language. However, sometimes a word of the non-target language intrudes and a cross-language speech error arises. This common observation indicates that in the multilingual brain, words from the different languages compete with one another. It is not uncommon to see a speaker of Igala Language in one context unconsciously having words from Yoruba Language intrude into his speech. Such interference between languages can be characterized as language conflict. For instance, Speaker L, a multilingual speaker of about five languages including English, Hausa and Yoruba had the intrusion of both Hausa and Yoruba words in one of his sampled conversations. Here is the conversation between him and a maize seller, a speaker of English, on a street away from his place of work:

Speaker F: Hope your *masara* is sweet today

Seller: It's very sweet, you already know that I don't sell stale things

Speaker F: (mimicking her) "You already know that I don't sell stale things" *Shey* you know that the one I bought yesterday was not sweet. It was as tasteless as wood. *Abi* you want to deny it?

Seller: Smiled.....how many do you want now?

Speaker F: *Daama*, how many do you think I will buy? Give me one *jare*

Seller: Take (hands over the maize to him)

Speaker F: (collects it and hands over money to her)

Seller: Customer, this money is too old o

Speaker F: Go and spend it *lor*, if you reject it now, that will be the end of your money *faa*, *tor*.

From the above dialogue, the Hausa words *masara*, *daama*, *lor*, *faa* and the Yoruba words *shey*, *abi*, *lor*, *jare* intruded into his speech without him being conscious of it.

Another form of conflict realized is domain-speaker conflict. This is the conflict within a speaker of which code to use to be able to get along in a situational context of many multilinguals.

An appropriate example that shows how domain and speaker (addressee) influences can blur into each other are the factors determining which language one might speak at Old Market, in Lokoja. Sellers are likely to show favour in the prices of goods to their buyers with whom they speak the same language. The local community uses people's language skills as a means of identifying in-group members over out-group members to favour them.

On the other hand, if one has business to conduct at the Guarantee Trust Bank, Lokoja, for instance, one should better speak English. Banks draw on a national pool of employees, so many are non-speakers of Igala, Epira, Nupe etc. and simply will not understand the speaker unless they speak English. Therefore, a multilingual who does not speak English will have to look for either an interpreter or an employee who speaks one of the languages he or she speaks in order to be able to make transactions. And when he meets a banker who speaks one of the multiple local languages he has competence in, he is likely to receive more attention, explanation, patience, if the need be, from him.

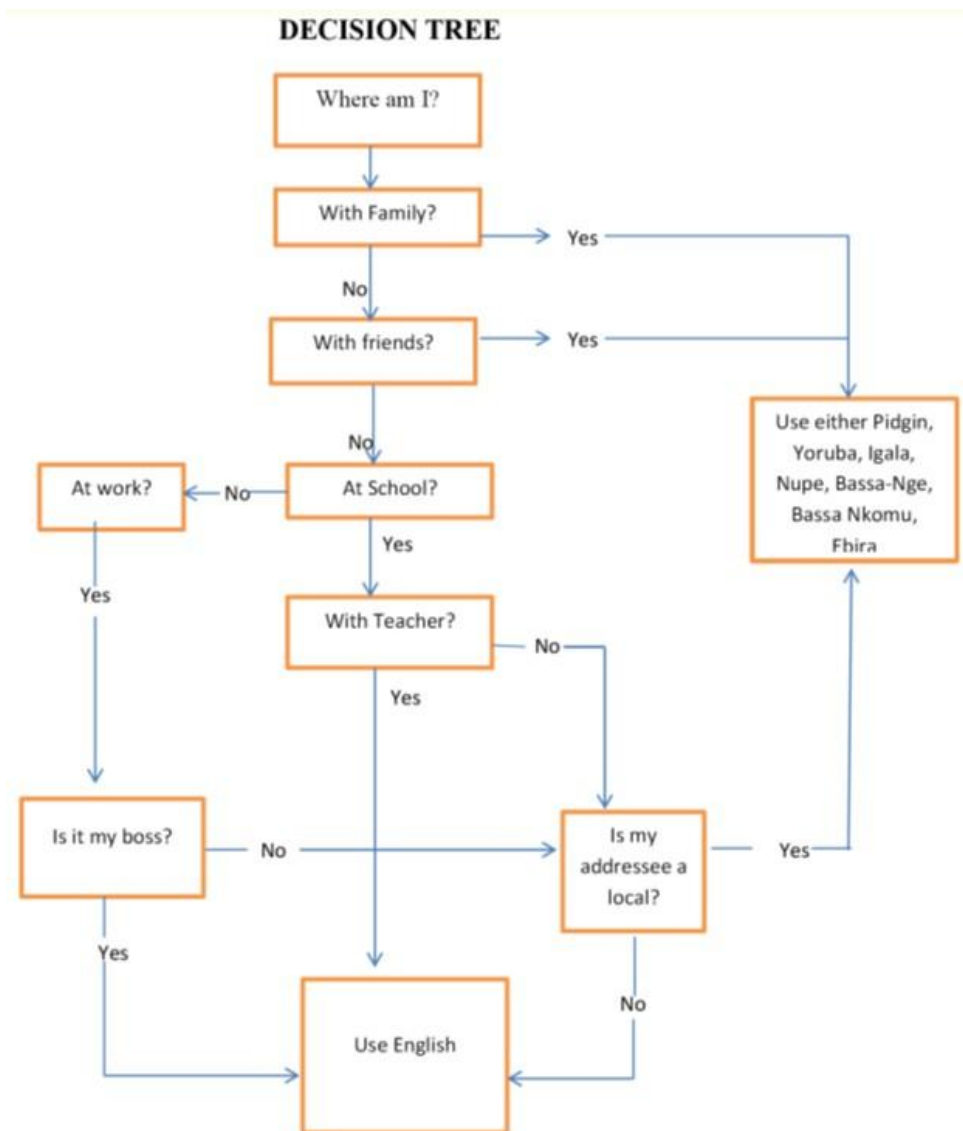
The above examples not only show that domain (where you are) is important in determining which language variety you would choose to use in Lokoja but they also very clearly show that deciding which variety to use requires a good deal of cultural knowledge. The use of English in the bank is not just dictated by the domain, it is also determined by who one's interlocutor is likely to be, their linguistic skills. A multilingual who has a couple of languages in his brain may stand the risk of not knowing the best code to select for use in certain situations. Therefore, using certain codes in some situations may seem inappropriate. Speaker L is a speaker of English, Hausa, Nupe and Pidgin; his superior has competence in English, Hausa and Pidgin. Based on their level of familiarity, they use Hausa as a code of interaction in non-formal situations. However, in a meeting with his superior where he was to explain the content of the proposal he had been directed to write, unconsciously, he did that in Hausa, rather than English which is the language for official matters.

B. Contexts of the Usage of Different Languages

Multiple languages constitute the speech repertoire of most of the members of Lokoja society. Within the members of the society, these languages are assigned similar or totally different roles/functions depending on the situational context the speaker or user finds himself. So for example, speaker F who is Epira attended Government Secondary School, Dekina, a predominantly Igala speaking community. During the period of his studies there, he got to be speaking Igala; he is married to a Bassa (Nge) woman from whom he learnt the language. At a point in his life, he lived in Lagos where he learnt to speak Yoruba. Now, he is surrounded by Hausa – speaking neighbours who greatly influenced his understanding of Hausa. He also has competence in Pidgin. In all, he has competence in about seven languages including English Language. Therefore, he knew that things would work more easily for him with his landlord for him when he asked for the renovation of his house using Pidgin which the landlord has competence in. Furthermore, the same resident who wanted his document signed by the Chief Judge had to use Standard English for him to get along with and get the judge do what he needed to do. However, when he got home, he code switched between Epira and Bassa (Nge), to narrate his ordeal at the court to his wife. Again, going to the pub in the evening, he decided to narrate his experience in Epira language to his Epira- speaking friends.

Deciding when to use which code, speakers may conceptualise the relationship between location, addressee, and in-group identity in different ways. Sometimes the domain and addressee factors, according to Meyerhoff (2006), pile up on each other that speakers felt that one decision follows another before they would come to a decision about which variety to use.

At other times, the decision is simple and a “yes” would take them directly to the choice of one variety rather than another. The table below is modeled after Meyerhoff's Decision Tree. It is used to describe which code or codes are usually selected for use in different situations in Lokoja. Examples of domains could include the family, education, employment, friendship, government administration, religion, street, etc.



Adapted from Miriam Meyerhoff (2006)

The table above is used to explain the various domains in which multilinguals use different codes but it does not describe multilingual complexities such as Lokoja’s. For example, one may not at all times speak English Language with one’s boss at work. The selection of code depends on the purpose of interaction. Speaker B whose subordinate lost his child preferred to use Hausa Language to express his condolences. This is because he felt speaking English Language would not convey the message or would not express the kind of feeling he wanted. Again, one cannot draw the conclusion that when with one’s family members, languages such as Pidgin, Yoruba, Igala, Hausa, Igbo, Ebira (Ebira/Koto), Bassa (Nge/Komu) will be used, as suggested by the table. For example, because speaker C is Yoruba and his wife Igbo, they both use English Language as a code of communication at home.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, multilinguals’ choice of languages is determined by:

1. Interlocutor: the participants in a speech situation would determine the choice of language to be used in a multilingual context. An addressee who is monolingual in nature will be compelled to use that one language he has competence in. Speaker M who is speaker of Nupe, Ebira, Igbo, Hausa, English and Pidgin would rather speak English to his girlfriend who is also a speaker of those languages. He chose to use English with her because English would serve him easier in having a romantic conversation with her though same thoughts can be expressed in other languages he has competence in. Meanwhile, when he wanted to converse with his younger brother, he used pidgin which is the language they were trained in and turning to his friend he spoke Yoruba, which is the language they both use for interaction.
2. Role Relationship: where the same interlocutors have multiple relationships (e.g., a family friend, and a public school teacher), the language choice may be governed by role relationship (Clyne) in Meyerhoff (2006)

One of the variables that come into play in determining language choice in a multilingual society as Lokoja is role relationship. Speaker D, a medical personnel at Kogi State Specialist Hospital, who has his boss as also his confidante, will choose to speak English to discuss official matters with his boss. But when he wants some pieces of advice on private issues from his boss, he prefers to use Igala Language with him. This is because he “feels at home” and more relaxed when he uses his local Language to discuss his private affairs. Another example is speaker F who is a high school girl and who has her class teacher as her neighbour. It is expected of her that when she is in the class she uses Standard English to interact with the teacher but as soon as she gets to their compound, back home, she uses Pidgin or Nupe to communicate with her. A person may be addressed in a different language depending on whether he is acting as a teacher, as a friend, as a father or as a customer in the market-place. In Phase 2, a high-brow residential area in Lokoja for instance, speaker H, a teacher insists on Standard English from his students, his sons use Igala, their tribal language, to communicate with him, his friend, Ade, interacts with him in Yoruba, and while in the market place he is addressed in Pidgin.

In addition, the status of speakers may be relevant in selecting the appropriate code. A high-status official in Lokoja like the Vice-chancellor of Federal University Lokoja will be addressed in Standard English in many contexts. Holmes (1992) opines that typical role-relationships are teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, soldier-civilian, priest-parishioner, and official-citizen.

3. Domain: this is the conceptualized sphere of communication, e.g., home, work, school, religion, transactional, leisure or friendship, community group, Cooper (1989).

Domain is an important determinant of language choice. It is clearly a general concept which draws on three important social factors in code choice- participants, setting and topic. It refers to the context of language use, for instance, that of family, friendship, neighborhood, education, government, transaction etc. Therefore, speaker A, for instance is Bassa but her mother is Nupe and so she understands Nupe, she chooses to interact with her husband in Nupe Language. But because her children are not raised in both Languages she communicates with them in English Language, the national language. So in the domain of her home she uses the two languages. As soon as she comes out into her compound, she changes her choice of code to Yoruba Language, a language she learnt from her mistress, in order to be able to interact with her first neighbor. Furthermore, when she walks down her street to a shop to buy some goods, she chooses to speak Pidgin which at that context seems most appropriate. When she gets to work, she uses Igala as a medium of interaction with her office –mates because most of them are Igala speakers and she also has competence in it.

Religious worships at Lokoja Central Mosque are mostly conducted by the Imam in Arabic and Hausa (there could be a mix of English Language). But the codes change after the worship, at the mosque premises between the imam and one of his congregants who neither speaks Hausa, Arabic nor English when discussing the just concluded worship service.

From the above illustrations it could be drawn that English is favoured by education and employment as domains while Bassa, Nupe, Yoruba, Pidgin, Igala and Epira are favoured in intimate domains such as family, friend, neighborhood, transaction and other informal contexts.

4. Topic: this overlaps slightly with the domain. Different types of experience associated with the languages will cost some people to switch languages, to talk about their jobs, their present leisure activities, school, new technological developments, trade, or particular forms of sport, to give a few examples, Haugen (1966). People may select a particular code because it makes it easier to discuss a particular topic, regardless of where they are speaking. For instance, if X and Y are discussing general matters in the office about their work in English Language, they may decide to change their code when they want to gossip about their colleague. Particular topics may regularly be discussed in code rather than another. The family of speaker I conducts their prayer sessions at home using English Language even though they use Epira Language as a code of interaction at home. The wife of speaker A, cited earlier, a speaker of Nupe Language, when rebuking her kids of a bad act, uses Nupe even though the kids are raised in English Language and do not understand much of Nupe. Therefore, particular situations may require codes or styles that suggest respect, friendliness, anger, fight, secrecy, danger.

5. Channels of Communication: some people who use one language for face-to-face communication will employ another for telephone communication. Some will speak one language to each other but write another. Most multilinguals in Lokoja use different native codes in different situations but prefer to write letters, send phone messages, short notes in English Language regardless of their ethnicity. Also, irrespective of their local codes, when they apply for jobs, they use Standard written English on the application form.

6. Types of Interaction: The kind of interaction a multilingual finds himself/ herself in most cases determines the code(s) he/she uses. Formal situations such as the one in a classroom setting, an interview for official post, administrative and governmental meetings etc. will attract a formal language such as English Language. Although most Heads of Departments in Federal University Lokoja are multilinguals, they use English as a medium of communication whenever they hold meetings with the Vice Chancellor. But they change to less-formal codes right at the venue of the meeting when it is declared closed.

Official languages are often associated with formal interactions and vice versa. For instance, irrespective of an interlocutor's level of familiarity with a public official, when he is on official assignment, the interlocutor will address

him in English. When the Chairman of Civil Service Commission was taken round on inspection in Harmony College, Lokoja, by speaker H, who is the principal of the college and his brother, he used English as a code of interaction to explain the strengths, weaknesses, the developments that had taken place in the school since the last inspection, and answering the questions he was asked. Although the interlocutors are brothers, he did not deem it fit to use the local codes they both share in that context. These local codes are used in non-formal situations such as partying, friendship etc.

Finally, this paper is on the definition of roles in complex multilingualism. It has been able to examine the different roles involved in a complex multilingual setting such as Lokoja. These roles include channels of communication, topic, domain, role relationship and interlocutor. Multilingualism has been seen as a major factor responsible for the issue of code-mixing and code-switching among the dwellers of Lokoja.

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