Sociolinguistic implications of languages in contact: Igala language experience

R. I. Okorji
Linguistics and Nigerian Languages
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

&

F. T. Atadoga
Igala Language and Culture
Kogi State College of Education,
Ankpa

Abstract

Languages in contact are a phenomenon that attracts the attention of linguists all over the world. This phenomenon results in a linguistic situation where more than one language is spoken and used in various communities across the globe. Languages in contact have some serious positive and negative implications on the use of Languages concerned. This paper therefore, examines the concept of languages in contact, its sociolinguistic implications and significance to Igala language and its users.

1.0 Introduction

Language is a dynamic entity which lives and thrives among human beings. Language is a vehicle through which information, knowledge, ideas, thought and culture are communicated and passed on from generation to generation. Man cannot do without language because he is in a continuous quest to relate and interact, conquer and dominate: in business, interpersonal relationship, politics, religion, education and other spheres of life. For this reason, with respect to language and culture, man goes out of his environment to a strange and foreign environment or community to him. He cannot relate and interact without the means of language so, as he moves, he moves with his language and culture to meet other people that have different and strange language(s) and culture(s). This meeting or coming in contact with people is by implication the coming together of or the presence of two or more languages in a particular geographical environment, community or nation. That is, situations where languages of different socio-cultural and linguistic features come in contact and are in use by the natives of a particular linguistic environment. This, according to Emenanjo (1990), leads to a number of linguistic phenomena, which characterize speech communities.

Most often when languages come in contact, it is characterized by certain linguistic phenomena, which have certain adverse effects on the native speakers' use of the secondary language. A good example of languages in such a contact situation is Nigeria, where English was brought in contact with numerous Nigerian languages. This can be traced to the act of colonial masters (the British). Equally, German co-exists with French and Italian in Switzerland. In Cameroon we have English cum French and other indigenous
Cameroonian languages. When two or more languages are in contact, certain linguistic problems will certainly arise. In this paper emphasis shall be placed on the experience of Igala Language in relation to other languages like English, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, which are in constant contact with it as a result of trade, religion, education, politics, geographical location and intermarriages.

At this juncture, it may be necessary to discuss some linguistic terminologies that will help to actualize the purpose of this paper.

2.0 Bilingualism

Some countries and communities of the world are officially bilinguals. Such communities have two official or national or regional languages. Bilingualism, whether official or not can be regarded as a situation where two languages are available for use as media of communication by members of the community or nation. Emenanjo (1990) classifies bilingualism into coordinate and compound bilingualism.

He describes coordinate bilingualism as a situation where two languages function independently and may be said to have two different backgrounds and linguistic features. The example of this is Igala and English languages. In this, a bilingual Igala person is one who has learned each of the two languages at different points, (times) and in different environments. Igala is acquired in natural and informal setting and over a long period of time while English is learned in a structured, and in artificial setting (formal setting).

The compound bilingualism on the other hand has two codes and are available for one semantic reality. This means that both languages exist to serve and express the same background and culture. In this kind of bilingualism both languages are learned under the same circumstance, used in the same situation. Example is the Akpanya in Igalamela/Odolu Local Government Area of Kogi State that uses Igala and Igbo concurrently. These languages (Igala & Igbo) are acquired by them and are used in the

same situation. In the two forms of biligualism; Igala is the dominant language in the Igala speech community.

Lyons (1981) observes that a nation cannot be said to be truly bilingual unless a sufficient number of its members are bilinguals. He goes further to classify bilingualism into two categories:

(a) Perfect bilingualism and
(b) Far from perfect bilingualism.

Perfect bilingualism is a situation where an individuals in a bilingual community is competent in the use of two languages over a fairly wide range of situations. While in the case of far from perfect bilingualism one language will be dominant and the other subordinate. This is the case we have in Igala land where English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are subordinates to Igala.

Many bilingual speakers are more proficient in one language than the other. Therefore in a bilingual situation we have primary and secondary languages. Bilingualism can be an individual affair, as when someone decides to learn a foreign language; it may also occur within a small group of individuals, it may also be societal scope.

3.0 Interference

Languages in contact have some serious implications on the performance of the speakers of dominant languages. An example of such problems is mother tongue interference in the native speakers' realization of the second language. Mother tongue interference is the influence of the linguistic features of the mother tongue on the second language. This is often noticed in the area of the linguistic features of the mother tongue interfering with the linguistic rules of the second language. A good example of mother tongue interference experienced by Igala native learner/speakers of English is phonological interference. Igala tries to eliminate certain phonemic items in the secondary language and also substitutes it with what it has. For example Igala lacks both voiced and voiceless dental fricatives [θ] and [ð] and therefore has difficulty in realizing them. So Igala speakers of English usually substitute /θ/ for /t/, /ð/ for /d/, /v/ for /b/, /ʃ/ for /tʃ/ and /z/ for /dʒ/ as in the following examples:

that → [dat]
author → [autor]
Victor → [bikitor]
should → [tsud]
zoo → [dʒu:]

4:0 Linguistic borrowing

Linguistic borrowing is one of the implications of languages in contact. Linguistic borrowing is a concept employed by linguists in referring to terms relating to western technology and culture, which have become part of the vocabulary of the world languages. English borrowed many words from Greek, Latin and French. Igala borrowed a number of words from English, Hausa, Igbo and so on:

Words borrowed from English

English	Igala
engine	ejini
hospital	achibiti
church	ichochi
school	ichekwulu
photo	ifoto
motor	imoto
victor	ibikito
john	ijọni
corner	ikọna
governor	igọbina

Words borrowed from Igbo

Igbo	Igala	Gloss
ụka	ụka	church
abada	abada	a kind of cloth (wrapper)
abananya	abananya	an inferior, kind of cloth
ụkwa	ụkwa	bread fruit
Ọra	Ọra	name of a person
Ọmada	Ọmada	name of a person
Agbedo	Agbedo	name of a person
egbe	egbe	gun
afa	ifa	oracle
okwute	okwuta	stone
iwe	iwe	a kind of edible leave
ọzọ	ọjọ	a place for selling in the market place
okorobịa	okolobịa	young man
eke	eke	market day
nkwọ	ụkwọ	market day
afọ	afọ	market day

ịtalị	ịtalị	cane
akpa	ịkpa	bag

Words borrowed from Hausa

Hausa	Igala	Gloss
lafia	ọlafịa	health
asana	achana	matches
takada	ọtakada	book
kalatu	okalatu	reading
geskiya	ọgẹcha	truth
kanwa	ọkanwa	calcium
bulala	ibulala	whip
rubutu	olubutu	ink
rankadede	laidadede	live long
madaki	umadaki	unit head
Hasseini	Ocheni	name
albasa	alubacha	onion
Alhassan	Alacha	name
Musa	Omucha	name

Words borrowed from Yoruba

Yoruba	Igala	Gloss
imu	imọ	nose
eti	eti	ear
ori	oji	head
ọmọ	ọma	child

5.0 Code-switching

Code switching is one of the implications of biligual or multilingual situations. Lyons (1981), Akmajian (2003) fi/ey/A: x Bilingualism htm (2005) and Wardhaugh (1986), refer to code switching as a situation in which a speaker uses admixture of district language varieties as discourse proceeds. Kari (2002) asserts that code switching is the complete change from one language or code to another within the same conversational context by the same speakers. Code switching is a daily phenomenon as people are involved in discussion daily. Since most of the world communities are bilingual of one sort or the other they draw from their linguistic repertoires during conversation. Troike (1982) in his contribution defines code switching as a change in languages within a single speech event. From the foregoing we can say that code switching is a change from

one communication medium of discourse to another within or during a particular discourse activity. Code-switching is a major feature in the conversation among the bilinguals and multilinguals.

One may ask, why is code-switching a common feature in the conversation of Igala speakers. The answer is not far fetched. The situation usually determines the code or language of discourse between or among Igala speakers. A conversation in Igala may change to English, Igbo, or Hausa as the conversation progresses. This situational code switching is to ensure that the non Igala speaker is not excluded from the conversation. The reverse can also occur when a non English speaker joins the group. The medium can be changed to Igala to enable the non English speaker benefit and contribute to the discussion.

Examples:

Ojogbe: "Hello, Omanyo, how is everything and why are you at home?
Omanyo: "U ch'ugbede-Ojo, ama kuko wa ko ukolo eche (our teachers are on strike)
Ojogbe: Eun nibi? (what for?)
Omanyo: They are protesting against non payment of their salary.
Ojogbe: Abalee? (is that so?)
Omanyo: What would you be doing now that you have returned from Overseas?)
Ojogbe: Na tene ku fu olai mi date nwu Uchenyo eje (I want to devote the rest of my life to God's work)
Omanyo: I wish you all the best
Ojogbe: Be blessed

6.0 Code-mixing

Kari (2002) describes code mixing as the use of two or more languages or codes interchangeably in a given conversational context by the same speaker. He states further that code mixing is common in the speech of Nigerian bilinguals and multilinguals. Code mixing is a term in a bilingual or multilingual situation when an item(s) is taken from another language into the language of conversation within the speech event. Igala makes use of code-mixing a lot. It draws items from English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and others.

Examples in Igala:

1. Ka Un that u le n (Tell him that I am not going)
2. Ikoduu I a jump l'oji ogolo yi. (He Always jumps over this gutter)

3. Odudu odudu l'a wa yo, tell him (very early in the morning he will come tell him)
4. Daddy we ha? (what about your daddy ?)
5. Daddy.kpai mummy we ha? (How about your daddy and mummy?)
6. Everyday oun l'a che i (He does it everyday)
7. Lewa ke fu letter ko nwu mi (Come and write a letter for me)
8. I de bedroom (He is in the bedroom)
9. U nyi omo but u li n (I went there but I didn't see him/her)
10. U like un at all (I don't like it at all)
11. Adiko ugba meeting a chane? (when will the meeting start?)
12. Mama mi de kitchen a hi ujeun (My mother is in the kitchen cooking)
13. The player number 10 a ra ule dabu Okocha. (The player number 10 runs like Okocha)
14. Pastor ne a quote Bible a luki n'aka oloio (Pastor keeps quoting from the Bible as he preaches)
15. Me chane exam mee? (Have you started exams already?)
16. Ama ch'ukolo ojane kogi chane strike onale (Workers in Kogi State embarked on strike action yesterday)
17. Omanyo, e che nyi school onale? (Omanyo did go to school yesterday?)
18. Ene score penalty le? (Who scored the penalty?)
19. Fi trousers mi iron ta ku wa agba (Please iron my trousers before I come)
20. A wa omo on Sunday (We shall come there on Sunday)

7.0 Functions of Code-Switching/Code Mixing and Borrowing

Code Switching, Code Mixing and Borrowing according to Troike (1982) have a variety of functions within a speech community. Some of these functions include: group identification, solidarity, distancing and redefinition of a situation already being mentioned. They may serve to further strengthen request and command.

Code switching, code mixing and borrowing are used in Igala for their humorous effects, that is, they are used to create humours in conversation. They are also used to drive home some points that cannot readily and easily be expressed in the language of interlocution. Borrowing, code

switching and code mixing are used in excluding and alienating other people within hearing of the topic if it is intended only for a particular audience.

Finally, code switching, and code mixing and borrowing serve as repair strategy when interlocutors realized they have been using an inappropriate code. They can change to the codes that they deem appropriate to enhance a smooth interlocutory session. When code switching, code mixing and borrowing are adopted and used correctly in an appropriate discourse event they usually result in mutual intelligibility and cooperation.

8.0 Pidgin

Pidgin is a result of a situation that has arisen in which people come in contact, having no common language and culture, and one becomes politically and economically dominant over others. Language Varieties Network defines pidgin as "a new language which develops in situation where speakers of different languages need to communicate but don't share a common language". Pidgin is one of the implications or results of languages in contact. Once a stable pidgin has emerged it is generally learned as a second language and used for communication among people who speak different languages. A good example is Nigerian pidgin spoken across Nigerian boarders. Pidgin is usually called contact language, because it reflects the fact that its grammar and vocabulary are reduced. It can therefore be regarded as a deviant form of standard language whose structure, vocabulary and syntax have been reduced. Pidgin is mostly used by Igala in most of the business transactions with Igala, English and other languages. So, it is a common feature to see the Igala struggling to communicate in pidgin with customers who do not understand Igala language. Pidgin therefore is a result of languages in contact whose speakers aim at communicating and relating with one another.

9.0 Conclusion

In this paper an attempt was made to examine the term languages in contact, its implications on the primary language user such as bilingualism, mother tongue interference in the linguistic features of the second language, which is a direct consequence of bilingualism or multilingualism. Languages in contact have equally helped in boosting the lexical and vocabulary items of the primary language via linguistic borrowing as well as exposing the bilinguals to more than a variety of language use.

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