

Code-Mixing (Yoruba/French) among Ejigbo Migrants in Cote d'Ivoire and its Implication on the Growth of Yorùbá Language in Diaspora

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Abstract

The study investigated code-mixing among Èjìgbò migrants resident in Côte d'Ivoire and its implication on the growth of Yorùbá language in (Africa) diaspora. The study population for this work consisted of Yorùbá speakers, especially the migrants from Èjìgbò in Òsun state, living in Abídjan. The data-collection methodology was via tape-recording utterances of the population involved, which were later analyzed as presented herein. The study discovered that, barring any mitigating intervention, Yoruba will die out in diaspora, with a deleterious domino effect on the rich Yorùbá culture.

Keywords: acquisition, code-mixing, language, Yorùbá language, foreign language

Introduction

Èjìgbò is a town in Òsun state, Southwest Nigeria, and is the headquarters of È-jìgbò local government. The traditional ruler of the town is known as Ògiyàn of Èjìgbò. Prominent communities under the town are Òlá, Ìsokò, Aguodò, Ìnìsà Títì, Ìjìmabà, Màsifà, Ifòn, Ìsúdunrín. All these communities are headed by a traditional ruler known as *oba* under the chairmanship of the Ògiyàn. In this paper, migrants from all these communities are referred to as Èjìgbò migrants and they constitute one of the major bloc of foreigners living in Côte d'Ivoire.

According to *Sunday Punch* (June 2, 2019), the migration of Èjìgbo people to present-day Ivory Coast dates back to 1902, when the first set of the migrants were said to have arrived Treicheville, a suburb of Abídjan, named after a Frenchman known as Treich-Laplène (1860–1890), who discovered the present Ivory Coast. The political capital is Yamasoukro. (It used to be Abídjan, before it was later moved by President Felix Houphoet Boigny.) It bears saying that every Yorùbá settlement in Ivory Coast has an *oba* (king) and a palace where the king stays. It could be a personal belonging. However, once the king stays there, it becomes a palace. The major occupation of this set of people is trading. An estimated two million Nigerians (*Sunday Punch, op. cit.*) currently reside therein, 80 percent of which are Yorùbá and 70 percent from Èjìgbo alone.

Code-mixing is a situation where a speaker of a particular language uses a mixture of distinct language or language varieties in their everyday communication at home and within their immediate community, this time among Yorùbá

speakers in Ivory Coast, a francophone country in West Africa. While the migrants' mother tongue is Yorùbá, they also speak English, and speak French as a foreign language. Ajíbóyè (2002: 9-10) defines foreign language as

. . . a language which is geographically exogenous to the mother tongue[s] identifiable in . . . the community under reference and introduced to the community by choice as a result of a felt need for supra communication or integration.

Data for the study was drawn largely from the Èjìgbò migrant community, the largest bloc of Yorùbá speakers in Côte d'Ivoire, and it was limited to Abidjan. In the study, the author found that hardly could a Yoruba migrant in Abídján make a single sentence in Yoruba without mixing in French, which negatively impacts the growth of Yorùbá not only in Côte d'Ivoire but also in other francophone countries in Africa, most especially in Bénin, Mali, Togo and Burkina Faso, to mention a few places with large settlements of Yorùbá migrants.

Theoretical Framework

The model on which this study is anchored is Craig's (2002, cited by Bèlló, 2007:16) language contact and language degeneration theory. According to Bèlló (*op. cit.*), Craig looks at the various types of language death under different labels, such as *demise*, *drift*, *shift* or *language replacement*, and finds that the death of a language comes in a situation of contact with other language[s] and shifting bilingualism. Thus, the gradual death of Yorùbá in French West Africa is not by a dominating language per se because, in Craig's words:

A category of speakers most typical of the situation of language death is that of the "semi-speakers" defined by Dorian as imperfect speakers with very partial command required to speak it but almost perfect command of the receptive skills required to understand.

In this study we examine how Yorùbá migrants, who are Yorùbá-French bilingual residents in Côte d'Ivoire ("terminal speakers"), contribute to the gradual demise of their mother tongue (Yorùbá) in the diaspora.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, the author was in Abídján and other Ivorian cities such as Marcory, Adjámé, Sanpédro, Korgo, Yopougon, Koumassi and Atiékoúbé observed way and manner in which the migrants spoke—and continue to speak—within their immediate communities. In fact, many of them are more fluent in French than in Yorùbá, their mother tongue. Their utterances were recorded. Many of the informants were semiliterate and multilingual; that is Yorùbá who speak Yorùbá, French and English. However, French is frequently mixed in with Yorùbá in daily usage and interactions. In addition, we limited our choice of informants to Èjìgbò migrants in Abidjan because they are the

majority foreign ethnic bloc, and Abidjan because it has the highest congregation of Yorùbá therein.

Data Presentation

In this section, we try to bring out some of the data collected for the study. These data were collected through a direct contact with the informants. The code-mixed expressions were put forward first, followed by the standard presentation. For the purpose of clarification and understanding, their English equivalents were also put forward. In all, 10 expressions are involved.

Expression I:	<i>Gàó gbàà ni abúrò mí.</i>
Intended expression:	Òmùgò gbàà ni aburo mi
English expression:	My brother is really an idiot.
Expression II:	<i>Àwon toubabou yèn ò fèràn noir rárá.</i>
Intended expression:	<i>Àwọn òyìnbó yèn ò fẹ̀ràn eniyan dúdú rárá.</i>
English expression:	Those whites hate blacks (Africans).
Expression III:	<i>Arábirin bámi ra l'eau glacée wa.</i>
Intended expression:	<i>Arábirin bámi ra omi tútù wá.</i>
English expression:	Lady help me buy cool water.
Expression IV:	<i>Ọmọ mi parler Yorùbá très bien.</i>
Intended expression:	<i>Ọmọ mi ńsọ Yorùbá dárádára.</i>
English expression:	My child speaks Yorùbá very well.
Expression V:	Etudiant ni arákùnrin yi ni Université Felix Houphouët Boigny.
Intended expression :	<i>Ọmọ ilé èkọ gíga ní arákùnrin yi ní ilé èkọ gíga Felix Houphouët Boigny.</i>
English expression:	The young man is an undergraduate at Felix Hoopoe Boigny University.
Expression VI:	<i>Wàhàlà pò ni frontiere Sèmè; awon douanier yèn o wa normal rara.</i>
Intended expression:	<i>Wàhàlà pò ní border Sèmè; àwọn asọbodè yèn o dára.</i>
English expression:	Seme border is too problematic; the Customs men are not friendly.
Expression VII:	<i>Èjé kí a wọ inú ile, àwọn beaux-parents nreti wa.</i>
Intended expression:	<i>Èjé kí á wọ inú ilé, àwọn àna ńretí wa.</i>

English expression:	Let us go inside, the in-laws are waiting for us.
Expression VIII:	Decembre dé tan, Èʒìgbò ni mo màa wa lati se bonjour si àwọn parents mi
Intended expression :	<i>Oṣù Ọpe dé tan, Èʒìgbò ni mo màa wà láti kí àwọn ará mi.</i>
English expression:	The month of December is fast approaching; I will be in Èʒìgbò to greet my family.
Expression IX:	Iyawo mi wa ni hôpital, awon docteur n tojú rẹ lówó lówó báyí.
Intended expression:	<i>Ìyàwó mi wà ní ilé iwòsàn òyìnbó, àwọn oniṣègùn òyìnbó ní tojú rẹ lówó lówó báyí.</i>
English expression:	My wife is in the hospital where she is receiving treatment from the doctors.
Expression X:	Ori ní fọ mí, medicament wo ni mo lè lo?
Intended expression :	<i>Ori ní fọ mí, ògùn wo ni mọ lè lo?</i>
English expression:	I have headache, what medicine do I take?

Data Analysis

The data presented above (items 1-10) illustrate code-mixing among Èʒìgbò migrants resident in Abidjan for proper clarification let us start with expression I, and expression II, the two words, “gao” and “toubabou,” are not standard French words. According to Dialo (2014: 174) in Côte d’Ivoire, three types of French exist: the standard French taught in schools, the popular French (Français Populaire) spoken by the semi-illiterates, and the language of contact (le Nouchi)—pidgin French. While “gao,” which replaces *oḍe* (idiot), is a noun and belongs to Nouchi French, “toubabou” (*òyìnbó*; i.e., the whiteman) is a common noun and belongs to the group of a popular French (le Français Populaire). In expression III, we have “l’eau” (water) which means *omi* in Yorùbá and we have the “glacée” (cold) used to replace the *tutù* in Yorùbá. While “glacée” is *adjectif qualificatif* (qualifying adjective, the word *tutu* is a qualifying adjective in Yorùbá). In the expression IV, the word “parler” (“to speak”) replaces *ńsọ* in Yorùbá. From the expression, the manner of the placement of the word “parler” is wrong because the word being a third-person singular in French, it must be conjugated to reflect the third-person singular word, which is “enfant” (child), *omọ* in Yoruba. The direct translation of expression IV gives us “Mon enfant parler bien le Yorùbá,” which is grammatically wrong in French. The correct version is “Mon enfant parle bien le français.” With this form, the word “parle” goes together with *enfant* (child), which is a third-person singular and the word *bien* (“good”) is *adverbe de maniere* (adverb of manner), which

means *dara-dara* in Yorùbá. Furthermore, in expression V, the word *ẹ̀kọ́* means knowledge, a noun, while *gíga* is an adjective that qualifies *ilé ẹ̀kọ́*, which means high school in English. Furthermore, “étudiant” means undergraduate and it is a noun referring to a male undergraduate since it does not carry the additional “e” like “étudiante” (female undergraduate).

In expression VI, we have the French “douanier” to refer to a male customs officer, which means *asóbodè* in Yorùbá, every public security outfit has a name; for example, a policeman is known as *ólópaà*, “un policier” in French, while an army personnel is *omọ ogun ori ilẹ̀*, “un soldat” in French. In language, the collective term for them is *agbó ofin ro* (security personnel) and in French they are referred to as “les agents de la sécurité.” In expression VII, while *beaux parents* in French carries the article “les,” referring to indefinite article in English because it is a plural masculine noun. In French, indefinite article “the” is divided into four groups:

- a. *Le* used for a singular masculine noun, “le garçon,” the boy (*omọ ọ̀kùnrin*).
- b. *La* used for a singular feminine “la fille” (*omọ obìnrin*)
- c. *L’* is used for a singular masculine noun or a singular feminine noun that starts with a vowel letter, like “ami” (male friend), “amie” (female friend)
- d. *Les* is used for both a masculine plural and feminine plural like “les femmes” (*àwọn obìnrin*)—the women, “les homes” (*àwọn ọ̀kùnrin*) the men

Article does not exist in Yorùbá; the word *àwọn* in the expression is an adjective. In expression VIII, the month of December (“Decembre”) replaces *Oṣù Ọ̀pẹ̀*. According to Àkàndé (2014: 33-34), in Yorùbá, every month of the year has a name, thus: January (*Ṣeré*), February (*Èrèlé*), March (*Èrénà*), April (*Igbe*), May (*Ebibí*), June (*Òkùdú*), July (*Agemo*), August (*Ọ̀gún*), September (*Ọ̀wẹ̀rà*), October (*Ọ̀wàré*), November (*Bélu*), December (*Ọ̀pẹ̀*).

In addition, in expression IX, two French words replace two Yorùbá words: “hôpital” (*ilé iwòsàn òyìnbó*) and “docteur” (*onísẹ̀gùn òyìnbó*). Similarly in expression X, a French word, “medicament” (drug) is used to replace *ògùn*—medicine in English. *Ògùn* could stand for oral medicine or the one that is applied physically to the body.

Implication of the Study

According to Gbónítèè (1977:8), “people can die culturally and linguistically when their language and cultural values are subordinate.”

Also, from Usman (2014: 20):

When a language dies an irreplaceable intellectual and sound wealth of the people also dies and the larger society’s pool of education, social and cultural values is diminished. The death of any language is a greater tragedy.

Similarly, Miyaoka (2004, cited by Usman, 2014) opines:

When a [. . .] culture that has been functioning as an organic loses the language in

which the whole culture infused either it has already stopped functioning or the probability of its total collapse is high. In that sense, we can say that language is the bastion of culture.

From the above, one could see that not only Yorùbá language as used is in diaspora is prone to demise; same goes for the rich Yorùbá culture that is disappearing. Also from the data collected, Yorùbá is becoming endangered in a country like Ivory Coast, not minding the huge number of native Yoruba speakers therein. This applies to other countries with Yorùbá either as citizens like Yorùbá in Benin, in Togo and even in Liberia, or migrant Yorùbá in countries like Gabon, Niger, Burkina Faso. Furthermore, according to Oladokun (2009:21), a language becomes endangered for multiple reasons, such as:

- i. Unprecedented urban mobility and migration, in which children grow up in places where the language is either not generally spoken or where it is no longer taught in the community.
- ii. Economic migration and this applies to Yorùbá migrants in search of greener pastures.

Recommendations

In light of the foregoing, the following recommendations are put forward.

- i. All Yorùbá parents in diaspora should communicate in Yorùbá in the home.
- ii. Yorùbá should be a compulsory language taught in all Nigerian schools established in Côte d'Ivoire.
- iii. The effort of *Eḡbé Akéékòó* Yorùbá in Nigeria should be extended to kids in the diaspora so as to give them the opportunity to participate in Yorùbá cultural activities.
- iv. Finally, Yorùbá language intellectuals in Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Sierra Leone have a great role to play, they need to work together to see that Yorùbá in diaspora is well-taught, well-learned and well-preserved.

Conclusion

This study highlights a distinct linguistics behaviour of French-Yoruba code-mixing among Yorùbá migrants in Ivory Coast. These Yorùbá codemix both tongues in their daily communication, which ultimately leads to the eventual demise and death of the less popular Yoruba, relative to the “superpower” French. Hence, for the preservation of Yorùbá language and culture, especially in diaspora, a lot has to be done.

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