

Pronouns as a Strategy for Language Domestication among Yorùbá

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Abstract

Language is indissolubly linked with members of the society in which it is spoken. The relationship between language and culture is immeasurable. Hence, an understanding of the acceptable ways through which a language is spoken (used) in a speech community without considering its grammatical rule is a way of domesticating the language, especially English among the Yorùbás. English as a language is a garment which has been converted to a personal use by borrowers in order to suit their purpose. Thus, this paper discusses the feature of Yorùbá pronouns as a strategy for domesticating English among the Yorùbás. It examines the various dimensions of domestication as applicable to interactions among the people. The data used were drawn mainly from the Yorùbá speaking communities and the available literature texts. The data were analysed and explained on the tenets of structural functionalism on how pronouns are domesticated to reflect the culture of the environment where it is used. The aim is to find out the reasons for domesticating the use of pronouns among Yorùbá at the expense of grammaticality rules. The study declared that domesticating pronouns is a good way of ensuring peaceful coexistence in the society. The paper concludes and recommends that a good understanding of the cultural values of a people can help in maintaining linguistic harmony in a speech event among the people.

Keywords: *culture, domestication, language, pronoun, strategy*

Introduction

English is arguably the most widely spoken language in the world today, hence its recognition as a global language. It is a language that is used for international functions. The colonization of Nigeria by the British government has made English to become an official language of the country. Even after sixty one years of independence, Nigeria has not been able to replace English with her various indigenous languages. It has become the most prestigious language and plays the role of national language by default. It is not a gain saying that there is an “overuse” of English and an “underuse” of the indigenous languages, Ogunsiji (2017). Despite the linguistic dominance of English, the fact remains that “an indigenous language can be found that has more speakers than English” (Bámgbósé 2004). This is supported by Akpochafo (2017) when he refers to English as a variety in which a bilingual person conducts his every

day activities but shares this role with another language in which the speaker has greater linguistic facility or intuitive knowledge. The language has the socio-cultural function of serving as an instrument of forcing bilingualism and biculturalism on its user, country or society and turning such society into a special second language speech community of the language. Consequently, a Nigerian bilingual, in his or her attempt communicates intelligibly and lucidly in English and at the same time encounters some difficulties that border on interference from his mother tongue. Such interference is expected, because the Nigerian bilingual thinks and reasons in his own mother tongue while s/he is only compelled to express such thought in a language that is considered foreign to him. Langacker (1973:3) rightly observes that “language permeates our thoughts, mediates our dreams.” This further explains why language is an important part of human culture. Language according to Ògúnsíjì (2017) is something that is so close to us, so ubiquitous that we do not fully appreciate its overriding importance. Ogúnsíjì further stated that language is a carrier of our culture as well as the vehicle for conveying thought. It would therefore be impossible to think or appreciate our culture without language.

Domestication according to Adégbìjà (2004:20) is “acculturation,” ‘nativisation’, ‘indigenisation’, ‘adaptation’ and application of English for home use to suit our various conveniences, experiences, nuances and sensibility.” It is important to add that English language is no longer foreign to Nigeria, for it has been effectively appropriated. The use of pronouns is one of the means by which English has been appropriated or domesticated among the Yorùbás as stated in Olájìrè (2004) in the example such as, “They are calling you” when “They,” which refers to one person, is used in a plural way. The paper therefore examines the use of both the long and short pronouns as a strategy for the domestication of English language among the Yorùbas. The data were presented and analysed based on two dimensions of courtesy and power on the use of pronouns as a strategy for domesticating English among Yorùbás.

Conceptual Clarification

Culture

Culture is a complete way of human life. It is defined as the particular systems of art, thought and custom of a society. It is the whole way of life of a people, the social heritage that the individual acquires as a member of his group. It is the entire attitude, perception and specific traits of civilization that confer to a people and its place in the universe. These traits are speech norms, etiquette, ideologies, ethics, stereotypes, artifacts, technologies, intellectual production

e.t.c. Culture is considered by Famuyide (2008) as the learned behavior of a society. It includes how such learned behaviour are shared and transmitted from one generation to the other among the people of the society. This view is corroborated in Awolayo (2017) where he submits that, culture is a way of life and a learned behaviour which reflect in various aspects of the society in form of rules and regulations, songs, religious beliefs, language, dance, arts and crafts, moral behaviours and other various ways of doing things. Language and society are intertwined, hence the need for understanding of social constraints to be maintained in using language in a discourse.

Domestication

Adamo (2010) used the word nativisation to explain the word domestication which involves integrating a language into the culture of a community or integrating the culture of the community into a language for the expression of the experience and the worldview of the community. This is what Bámbósé (2004:20) means when he says “the English language has been pidginised, nativised, acculturated and twisted to express unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction.” Domestication confers on individuals the liberty to adapt the English in such a way that suit their linguistic rule and cultural values

Language

Language is an integral part of human life. Oláoyè (2013) posits that language is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interactions are carried out. It is capable of destroying or mending relationships. Language whether foreign or indigenous is thus an indelible mark of a person's identity. It is the basic element of human society. Ògúnsíjì (2017:65) states that:

We cannot imagine a society without language. It is a series of natural phenomenon and a medium by which thoughts are conveyed from one person to another. Language is the glue that holds the human society together, it is also the only thing that makes it possible for man to interact and live together in a culturally developed society.

Pronouns

Pronouns are words used instead of a noun. There are both long and short pronouns in Yorùbá language (Awobuluyi 1978, Bamgbose 1990)

Strategy

Strategy is a measure taken to combat a situation at hand. As mentioned or highlighted in the study, it is a measure or means in which something is done. The use of pronouns in this study is considered as a measure or means of language domestication among Yoruba.

Methodology

The primary source of data for this study is structured interview while the secondary data was sourced from available relevant textbooks. The respondents were interviewed on the two types of pronouns in both object and subject positions. The population consists of both male and female who are fluent and cultured at indigenising pronouns in line with environment without minding the grammatical rules. The data were collected in different social interactions among the interlocutors. The data in (a) is drawn from normal interaction between an elderly and the younger one. Here we have domestication of plural pronoun to refer to an individual as against the grammatical rule. The data are presented below.

(a) i They are calling you—>Wọ̀n ní pẹ̀ yín (wọ̀n, yín) singular + honorific

ii They are driving—>Wọ̀n ní wa ọ̀kọ̀ (wọ̀n) singular + honorific

iii They asked me to come—>Wọ̀n ní kí n wá. (wọ̀n) singular + honorific

iv They are going—>Wọ̀n ní lọ. (wọ̀n) singular + honorific

When 'they' (wọ̀n) you (yín) refers to one person

v Tọ́lá told them—>Tọ́lá sọ̀ fún wọ̀n. (wọ̀n) singular + honorific

vi I told them not to go—>Mo ní kí wọ̀n má lọ. (wọ̀n) singular plus honorific

When 'them'(wọ̀n) refers to one person

vii We shall do it as expected—>A ó ẹ̀e bí ó ti yẹ (A) singular + honorific

viii We shall take care of you—>A máa tọ́jú yín. (A, yín) singular + honorific

When 'we' (a) you (yín) refers to one person

ix That book is theirs —>Ìwé yẹn ti wọ̀n ni.

When 'theirs' (wọ̀n) refers to one person

The data in (b) below portrays a situation in which a politician was canvassing for votes from the electorate. The domestication of pronoun here that is, the use of plural pronoun for an individual is either based on position or power dichotomy which is out of the grammatical rule as in the use of pronouns

(b)	Vote for our governor	È dibò fún gómìnà wa
	To win for a second term	Kí wọn wọlé è̀ẹ̀kejì
	If you vote for them	Bí ẹ bá dibò fún wọn
	You will equally enjoy them	Èyìn nàà máa gbádùn wọn

The data in (c) is the interaction between a leader and the subjects as found in “Kò Kúmọ̀ Ọmọ Ọdọ̀ Àgbà” a Yorùbá drama text.

(c)	Kábiyèsí: Sáré lọ bá mi pe gbogbo àwọn ijòyè mi wá sí ààfin. Mo ní òrò pàtàkì bá wọn so (Kébé sáré jáde...	Run quickly and tell my chiefs to report in the palace. (Kébé rushed out)
	Jagun: Kábiyèsí, kára ó le o, kí adé pé lóri, kí bàtà pé lẹ̀şẹ̀. A rí onişẹ̀ yín. Şẹ̀ kò sí nńkan o?	(Kábiyèsí, may you be strong, may the crown last on your head. We saw your servant. Hope there is no problem?)
	Kábiyèsí: Kò sí láburú kankan. È sàà şe sùúrú kí àwọn olóyè yòókù dé	(No problem at all. Just exercise patient for the other chiefs to come)
	Alásà: Işẹ̀ yín ni mo gbọ̀ bí mo şe ní ti ìrìn-àjò dé, ẹ̀ ó kó wa jẹ̀ pé o	(I received your messages immediately I returned from a journey, may your reign be long).
	• Kábiyèsí: Èyìn ijòyè mi, yóó yà yín lẹnu wí pé mo ránşẹ̀ sí yín ní ọsán gangan...	(My chiefs, you would be surprised that I invite you this afternoon...)

(Adéníyí, 1995:24)

The pronoun ‘yín’ and ‘ẹ̀’ as used by Jagun and Alasa in the interaction above is referring to Kábiyèsí as an individual in a way of domesticating to honour him based on the position he occupied.

The (d) data is a discourse between two interlocutors meeting each other for the first time in a filling station.

- (d) i È jòwọ̀ ẹ̀ bá mi pè wọn a fẹ̀ repo (Please call **them** for me we want to buy fuel)
- ii Wọn ní kí ẹ̀ má bínú sí àwọn, pé ẹ̀rọ amúnátàn ló bàjẹ̀

The data presented above shall be explained and analysed to form the basis of our discussion in this discourse.

Theoretical Framework: The Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism is a sociological model of analysis. It stresses the fundamental functions of society as a whole system. It elucidates relationships that occur between various set of societal variables which interpret and

walk together to make up what a given society is. That is to say, the theory is fundamentally developed on the inter-relation of the various structural traits such as education, health, security, government, information and communication under which peoples' thought and beliefs are facilitated, and religion. Hence, it analysed social and interrelatedness of various arms of structure that make a whole system on the basic proposition that, our lives are guided social structures which are relatively stable pattern of behaviours, hence social structure gives shapes to our lives (www. wikibooks.ng). For example, use of language in passing information/ communication gives structure to our daily lives. Hence, the use of language performs function of socialization, promotion of interpersonal relationship, and inculcation of cultural rooted acceptable behaviours. The theory believes that institutions are dependable on one another. That, the network of such relationship determine why society functions the way it does. The theory explains the functionality of the political world on the structure or state, organization of an established system. To Nweke and Okoronkwo (2014), structure is "a set of relatively stable and patterned relationship of social unit on the one hand. Function, on the other hand, is described as the consequence of social activities which makes for adaptation or adjustment of a given structure or its component parts." As a functional system, the theory embraces input-output analysis.

Part of the basic tenets of this theory is that, society is the basic or primary unit of functional analysis. Its application examines how people have related and made use of various society institutions such as family, religions, language choice, political system, ethnicity, education, social and economic institution that are available or at people or citizens' disposal function for the advancement or survival of the society. As explained by the sociologist, Woodger (1948) and Merton (1968) cited in fisher (2010, p. 75). In this present study, structural functionalism is applied to examine and discuss the appropriateness in the use of language specifically honorific use of pronouns as a means for language domestication among Yoruba. The structural functionalism is chosen in this study because of the belief that it will open insight into how the contextual use of pronouns can be used to achieve and sustain a smooth co-existence among Yoruba. The data for the study were through interview as a source of primary data while the secondary data were through relevant textbooks.

The Yorubá Pronouns

Two types of pronouns are very significant to this paper. Here we shall briefly discuss the grammatical nature of the pronouns. The pronouns are long and short. Awóbùlúyì (1978) as found in Abíódún (1992:101) categorically stated that:

Of all the grammatical categories in the language only the pronouns have the peculiarity of being overtly marked for number and person. Both the emphatic and the non-emphatic pronouns are capable of function as subjects and objects of verbs and preposition and as noun qualifiers. The non-emphatic pronouns also have allomorphic variations depending on the syntactic function with a sentence

The pronouns are presented below:

1. Long pronouns

	Singular	Plural
1st	èmi	àwa
2nd	ìwọ	ẹ̀yìn
3rd	òun	àwọn

2 Short pronouns

(a) Subject Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
1st	mo	a
2nd	o	ẹ
3rd	ó	wọ̀n

b Object Pronouns

1	Singular	Plural
1st	mi	wa
2nd	ẹ/ọ	yin
3rd	unz	wọ̀n
(c)	Pronoun Qualifiers	

1	Singular	Plural
1st	mi	wa
2nd	ẹ/rẹ	yin
3rd	ẹ/rẹ	wọ̀n

A cursory look at the grammatical feature of the pronouns depicts that for an utterance to be grammatically correct, there must be agreement in grammatical

number and person with the syntactic position of subject, object or qualifier. If otherwise, then we can say such an utterance is ungrammatical. But our position in this paper is to align with the claim of sociolinguistics as stated in Abíódún (1998:39) that:

...to know a language does not stop at knowing the grammatical rules that generate infinite number of correct sentence, They contend that it extends to knowing the social constraints that make an utterance acceptable

The assertion above shows that the understanding of an acceptable way by which a pronoun is used in Yorùbá language is a way of domesticating English among the Yorubas. Here the plural forms of pronouns in both object and subject positions are the basis of our analysis on two different dimensions of power and courtesy recognizable in this paper.

The Effectiveness of Pronoun in English Domestication

Language and society are inseparable, and for effective communication to take place there is the need for competence, understanding and appropriateness of language to the setting or context in which it is used. Since it is of cultural value to maintain linguistic harmony between interlocutors in speech event, therefore it will be difficult to separate Yorùbás from their culture as stated by Abíódún (1998). To this end, there is the need for domestication of English through the use of pronouns as a strategy among Yorùbás.

The social etiquette in the promotion of unity among the Yorùbás is found in the use of pronouns which is a means of domesticating or indigenising English among the Yoruba. That is, a speech event where an individual is addressed with plural pronoun such as the use of 'They' (plural) 'Èyin' for an individual as against 'You' (singular) 'Ìwọ' in line with grammatical rule of the language. According to the finding, an attempt to deviate from this social constraint is an attempt to breakdown the existing harmonious relationship between the interlocutors. The grammatical rule in the use of pronouns in English is specified by the use of singular and plural as enunciated in our previous discussion. An avoidance of grammatical rule in the use of plural pronouns for an individual is a means of domesticating the language which is culturally acceptable among Yoruba. This further affirms the benefit of conflict avoidance found in the use of honorific pronouns. It is also important to state that management and resolution of conflict is equally found in the use of pronouns among the Yorùbás. This is because it is out of social etiquette for a child to address his father or mother using a singular pronoun, though this is grammatically right in the use of English.

Interpretation of Pronouns Usage for Domestication

Two types of pronouns are relevant to this study. These are long and short pronouns in the plural form of both subject and object positions. Here we shall discuss the pronouns on two dimensions of power and courtesy as it is relevant to its usage in this paper (Fádípè 1970, Abíódún 1992).

The power dimension

Brown and Gilman (1960) in Abíódún (1992:104) discussed the use of Indo-European languages with particular reference to English when he states that:

The interesting thing about such pronouns is their close association with two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of social life—the dimensions of power and solidarity

Brown and Gilman (1960:255) in Abíódún (1992:104) states further that:

One person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other. Power is the relationship between at least two persons and it is non-reciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behaviour

The basic factors for power in the Yorùbá social setting include age, wealth, education, institutionalized role in the state. Whosoever holds power as explained above is considered superior while others are subordinate. Abíódún (1992:105) maintains that, “pronouns are used along the power dichotomy... The superior is referred to with a plural (P) pronoun.” In such context where pronoun is domesticated, the plural pronouns like ‘wọ̀n’ and ‘yín’ will bear the feature of singular plus honorific as illustrated below.

(a) i They are calling you—>Wọ̀n ní pè yín (wọ̀n, yín) singular plus honorific

ii They are driving—>Wọ̀n ní wa ọ̀kọ̀ (wọ̀n) singular plus honorific

iii They asked me to come—>Wọ̀n ní kí n wá. (wọ̀n) singular plus honorific

iv They are going—>Wọ̀n ní lọ. (wọ̀n) singular plus honorific

When ‘they’ (wọ̀n) you (yín) refers to one person

v Tólá told them—>Tólá sọ̀ fún wọ̀n. (wọ̀n) singular plus honorific

vi I told them not to go—>Mo ní kí wọ̀n má lọ. (wọ̀n) singular plus honorific

When ‘them’(wọ̀n) refers to one person

vii We shall do it as expected—>A ó ʃe e bí ó ti yẹ (A) singular plus honorific

viii We shall take care of youA máa tójú yín. (A, yín) singular plus honorific

When ‘we’ (a) you (yín) refers to one person

ix That book is theirs—>Ìwé yẹn ti wọn ni.

When ‘theirs’ (wọn) refers to one person

If we consider the examples in (a.i-iv) above, pronouns ‘they’ (subjectP) and ‘you’ (objectP) are used in an plural way as ‘wọn’ and ‘yín’, “them’ (objectP) as ‘wọn’ in (a.v-vi), ‘we’ (objectP) as ‘a’ in (a.vii-viii) while “their’ (objectP) in (aix) as ‘wọn’, all referring to one person as against the rule in the use of pronoun. It is the power dichotomy recognizable in the social context that permits the use of pronoun in such manner among the Yorúbás. The power dichotomy could be as a result of age difference (Abiodun (1992:105). The younger one is expected to address an elder in such manner as shown in the data presented above. The power dichotomy could as well be politically motivated which would give a flag bearer of a political party to address the electorates in a political rally as in example (b) below.

(b) Vote for our governor È dibò fún gómìnà wà

To win for a second term Kí wọn wọlé èṣẹkẹjì

If you vote for *them* Bí ẹ bá dibò fún wọn

You will equally enjoy *them* Ẹyìn náà máa gbádùn wọn

When ‘them’ (wọn) refers to one person

The use of ‘them’ (wọn) for a person as illustrated above is unconditional but rather based on the recognition and acceptance and total submission to the power of the superior by the subordinate. The power dimension is evident in (b) above. It is the political power vested or that will be vested on the addressee in (b) above that makes the addresser to address with plural pronoun (them) while the addressee is just a person as shown in the underlined plural pronoun above. For further illustration, see the discourse below between the king and his chiefs.

Kábíyèsí: Sáré lọ bá mi pe gbogbo àwọn ìjòyè mi wá sí ààfin. Mo ní òrò pàtàkì bá wọn sọ (Kébé sáré jáde...)

(Run quickly and tell my chiefs to report in the palace).

(Kébé rushed out)

Jagun: Kábíyèsí, kára ó le o, kí adé pẹ lóri, kí bàtà pẹ lẹṣẹ.

A rí oniṣẹ *yín*. Ṣe kò sí ǹnkan o?

(Kábíyèsí, may you be strong, may the crown last on your head. We saw your sevant. Hope there is no problem?)

Kábíyèsí: Kò sí láburú Kankan. Ẹ sáà ṣe sùúrù kí àwọn olóyè yòókù dé

(No problem at all. Just exercise patient for the other chiefs to come)

Alásà: Iṣẹ *yín* ni mo gbọ bí mo ṣe ní ti ìrìn-àjò dé, ẹ ó kó wa jẹ pẹ o

(I received your messages immediately I returned from a journey, may your reign be long).

Kábíyèsí: Ẹyin ìjòyè mi, yòò yà *yín* lẹnu wí pé mo ránṣẹ sí *yín* ní òsán gangan...

(My chiefs, you would be surprised that I invite you this afternoon...)

(*Adéníyí, 1995:24*)

The interaction between the king and the chiefs shows the use of pronoun as a strategy for indigenising English language among Yoruba as illustrated in the discourse above. This is necessitated by the institutionalised position occupied by the king. The pronoun 'yin' (them) (p) is used by Jagun and Alásà to refer to the king as a person. This is out of place while considering the grammatical rule in the use of pronouns in English language. The chiefs are subordinate to the king and are bound to submit to the power of the superior which has necessitated the domestication of the pronoun as in the context given above.

The Courtesy Dimension

There is a clear difference between courtesy and power dimension. Courtesy dimension is a matter of favour and not right. Unlike the power dimension, the use of pronoun in the courtesy dimension is a matter of reciprocal relationship. This is further established in Pearson (2009) where courtesy is referred to as "polite behaviour and respect for other people." The fact in the use of pronoun is that both addressee show politeness in the manner of discussion by reciprocating each other with plural pronouns in their speech. There are factors which are responsible for the domestication of pronoun in courtesy dimension. The first instance is when someone is meeting a stranger for the first time, of which such a stranger is not an underage and he or she is cooperate in outlook. It is required here that both should address each other by using the plural pronouns as stated in the examples below

- (d) (i) Ẹ jòwọ ẹ bá mi pè *wón* a fẹ repo

- (Please call *them* for me we want to buy fuel)
- (ii) *Wọ̀n ní kí ẹ́ má bínú sí àwọ̀n, pé ẹ̀rọ amúnátàn ló bàjẹ́*
- (*They* said you should pardon *them* that it is their generating set that is faulty)

The above speech is an interaction between a driver and a man in a filling station showing the use pronoun in the courtesy dimension. The interlocutors are meeting for the first time which demands that their conversation should demonstrate the use of honorific pronoun to maintain harmonious relationship as exemplified above. The underlined pronouns in (di & ii) in the plural form were exchanged for one another. The interlocutors both address each other in their discussion by domesticating pronoun in that context as a social etiquette that must be maintained to ensure harmonious relationship within the society.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Without any iota of doubt, this paper has revealed that language is an important aspect of human culture, more importantly, the use of honorific feature as a strategy and innovation in Yorùbá. The paper has revealed an instance whereby the grammatical rule is set aside in the use of pronoun and where the plural form is exchanged for singular in various dimensions. Since language is dynamic, the issue of domestication or nativisation will enable us to know the variety of English that will be of tremendous value in promoting interaction. Since a native speaker would always think in his own language such domestication or nativisation cannot be ruled out of human existence as it has been revealed in this study. It is therefore recommended that lexical items that have appropriate link and meaning with our culture be encouraged and possibly be incorporated into English dictionary. We further submit that attention should be paid to all these sociolinguistic differences in order to maintain linguistic harmony in Yoruba society. It is hoped that if this is done, our school system will be a force to reckon with as far as teaching and learning is concerned and our society would be a better place to live.

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