Tertiary Institution Students' Competence in Form and Use of more than Two Languages in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study investigated the linguistic repertoire of undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions. This study also takes a specific interest in examining the linguistic status of the undergraduates in terms of monolingualism, bilingualism and multilingualism.The descriptive design was used for the study. The participants were undergraduates students from three tertiary institutions in Ekiti State namely College of Education, Ikere Ekiti, University of NigeriaNsukka, Ikere campus and Crown Polytechnic, Ado Ekiti. Instrument used was a structured questionnaire on the selected sample. A total of 180 questionnaires were administered, while 153 questionnaires were returned by the respondent. Five research questions were answered at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analysed using ANOVA, and the results revealed that the extent of undergraduates being multilingual was insignificant; about 98% undergraduates were bilingual. Hence, about 1% speak more than two languages, including English as a second language. Furthermore, the extent of code switching and code mixing among the bilingual undergraduates was significant at .038 level of significance. Also, undergraduates tend to code switch from the L1 to the L2 during communication at home. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made that proper implementation of the Language Policy on Education at all levels of education, the administrative resurrection of acculturation programmes in tertiary institutions with emphasis on undergraduates studying Language Education and governments' intervention in the increase of admission quota of applicants intending studying Nigerian Languages in Nigerian Universities and Colleges of Education.

Key words: Linguistic repertoire, Undergraduates, Code-switching, Dialect, Multilingualism.

Introduction

The linguistic status of a nation is determined by the number of its citizens who communicate in more than one language. Nigeria is a pluralistic country with diverse cultures and different languages; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo being the three major languages spoken by its citizens. They are used as regional languages or lingua francas, i. e. with the Hausa language in use in the North, the Yoruba language is in use in the West and the Igbo language being predominantly used in the South-Eastern Nigeria. This is aside other languages and dialects. In fact, the recent data from Ethnologue (2017) listed 526 languages in Nigeria; other estimates place the number between 500 and 600. The over five hundred Nigerian languages, as expected, cannot all function as the official language of Nigeria (Igboanusi& Peter 2005).

Hence, this study examined undergraduates' linguistic repertoire in terms of its sociolinguistic influence in achieving social, economic and, academic integration at three tertiary institutions of learning in Ekiti State. As expected, many tertiary institutions across the world are microcosms of culturally plural societies revealing students who are diverse in their cultural, social, gender, age, racial, economic, religious and psychological status. Furthermore, the general assumption that these students, on gaining admission to these tertiary institutions, are bilinguals, to say the least, are expected to have acquired a first language (Mother Tongue) and a second language as a prerequisite for gaining admission and also, as a means of being linguistically adequate to integrate into the socio-academic society.

Scope of the Study

The study covered 180 students in three tertiary institutions (College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ikere Campus and Crown Polytechnic, Odo, Ekiti State in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

The result of the study will be significant to educational planners at various levels of policy making and implementation in Nigeria with a view to improving and encouraging balanced integration and utilization of both English as a second language and more indigenous Nigerian languages. Furthermore, the significance of the study underscores the need of the emergence of a multilingual society as proposed in the Language Policy on Education and urgent steps to prevent language loss of Nigerian local languages.

Statement of the Problem

The dominance of English language in the Nigerian society, its use as a language of instruction in schools, and it being a prerequisite subject to be passed before admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria shows the high level of importanceaccorded the language. A credit pass in it is required for admission and that ordinarily makes most students bilingual at the entry into higher institutions. Also, students tend to come in contact with several other languages and dialects on campus. This situation breeds overgeneralization in the use of the term 'multilingualism' as it often refers to existence of many languages in a speech community without due consideration to the socio-linguistic effect that thrives in use of the languages in practice amongst students in tertiary institution. Researches have delved into the importance of being multilingual and bilingual in Nigeria, but very few have taken a cursory look on the linguistic practice of students in higher institutions in Nigeria as a cosmopolitan setting. Consequently, this paper investigatedthe extent and degree of undergraduate students' competence in form and use of more than two languages.

Research Questions

This studyprovided answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent are male and female undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions bilingual?
2. To what extent are the undergraduates male and female multilingual?
3. To what extent do undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions communicate in English and their

MT?

4. To what extent do undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions alternate between L2 and dialect when conversing with course mates of similar ethnic background?

Review of Related Literature

Linguistic repertoire has been keenly viewed from various perspectives by linguists. Becker (2014) and Busch (2017) view linguistic repertoire as the set of language varieties used in a speech community. In other words, the linguistic repertoire of a speech community includes all the linguistic varieties (registers, dialects, styles, accents, etc.) which exist in this community. The community being focussed in this sense, logically, comprises individuals existing in a linguistic context where each of the participants has various linguistic varieties utilized for a number of purposes. The number of languages the individual has and knows extrapolates into a monolingual, bilingual or multilingual society. In monolingual speech communities, as reported by Becker (2014), this repertoire is made up of varieties of one single language. In multilingual speech communities, it may be comprised of several languages and may include linguistic varieties of all these languages.

Furthermore, Busch (2017) reiterates on the level of the power of selection which is limited by commonly agreed on conventions which serve to categorize speech forms as informal, technical, vulgar, literary, humorous. The social etiquette of language choice is learned along with grammatical rules and once internalized it becomes a part of the individual's linguistic equipment.

The understanding of multilingualism is defined as an abstract tool of communication with territorial and cultural boundaries (Weber & Horner, 2012). Not only that, multilingualism, as a form of what Garcia (2014) terms as translanguaging, is the coexistence, interaction and contact of different languages and may be at societal or individual level. In his assertion, Bayiga (2016) refers to multilingualism as the use or upkeep of more than one language in certain contexts in which many languages are spoken.

The realisation that individuals or communities could possess more than one such entity prompted the convention of counting. The process of counting of languages then motivated the use of terms such as "bilingualism", "trilingualism", "plurilingualism" and of course also "multilingualism" (Weber & Horner, 2012) to mark plurality. In addition, many studies have been carried out on the link between individuals' linguistic repertoire and the effect of multilingualism on their existence in communities; examples of such studies include Ludi (2010), Alshenqeeti&Alsaedi (2012) and Bayiga (2016). Bayiga (2016) investigated into the linguistic resources students bring to the tertiary classroom which, perhaps, could assist in explaining much of the communicative practices encountered among multilingual students, and in developing their linguistic resources for adequate use in academic and professional domains. Similarly, a host of sociolinguists revealed a tilt towards the linguistic repertoire being predominantly a multilingual context where individuals, especially in the formal learning environment are capable of having more than two language varieties in their 'linguistic cupboard (Busch, 2012; Asya, 2015; Christopher & Kerfoot, 2013; and Becker, 2014). This implies that an interlocutor is capable of speaking at least a second language along with his mother tongue. Also, it suggests, further, the linguistic possibilities and advantages a multilingual undergraduate may have over a non-multilingual undergraduate in the academic context (Konnikova, 2015).

Advantages of being a bilingual/multilingual include improved reading ability. Bilingual students find it easy to transfer reading skills across similar languages. Examples are some word in English that have their etymology in French. Words such as garage, chauffeur, abattoir, adieu, coup, beau e.t.c when encountered in either of the languages will be able to infer the meaning of such words from the other language. Such similarities in bilinguals facilitate reading and learning. Another merit of bilingualism is better metalinguistic awareness which refers to the understanding that language is a system of communication, bound to rules, and forms the basis for the ability to discuss different ways to use language (Baten, Hofman, &Loeys, 2011; Bialystok, 2011). Furthermore, being a bilingual student helps in having higher executive functions than monolingual students. These executive functions are those cognitive processes such as problem solving, mental flexibility, attention control, inhibitory control, and multi-tasking Executive functions in real-life include: real-life multitasking environments (for example, driving and talking) require responding only to high-priority tasks and ignoring low-priority tasks, mathematical abilities (and many other aspects of learning) are also dependent on executive function (Pelham and Abrams, 2014).

The English language is a language of convenience, which has helped to wield together the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country (National Policy on Education, 2013). As facilitating as this tends to be, the language has also relegated to the background the use of Nigerian indigenous languages even where intelligible communication cannot be achieved with the language. Linguistic pluralities resulting from the language situation above made Nigeria adopt English language her official language. The English language is a language of convenience, which has helped to wield together the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country (National Policy on Education, 2013). As facilitating as this tends to be, the language has also relegated to the background the use of Nigerian indigenous languages even where intelligible communication cannot be achieved with the language. Kennedy and Eremie (2016) observe that the 'three elephants', Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba need not fight as their peaceful co-existence and mutual cross-linguistic interpenetration is more dependable in order to face the threat posed by English. In spite of the overwhelming dominance of English in the academia, and as used as a means for communicating in and out of the classroom context, students tend to face the choice of selecting a language variety. As earlier mentioned in this paper, there appears too much emphasis of literature on societies' acceptance of multilingualism as a perquisite for linguistic balance and diversity. Nevertheless, positing that this could be a possible over generalisation can be regarded as academic. Going further, some studies in sociolinguistics put it in the right perspective by stressing the linguistic context of assigning language varieties according to the

socio-cultural needs of the interlocutors.

According to Chukueggu (2010),the act of choosing a language or variety with which to communicate, at any given time is a common feature of bilingual or multilingual communities. In such societies, people are always faced with communicative situations, which demand that they choose an appropriate code with which to express themselves. Definitely, this scenario is one of a community where individuals, expectedly, are not monoliguals, especially in a formal learning context where English is expected to be one of the language varieties in their linguistic repertoire. Hence, Chukueggu(2010) presents diglossia as a linguistic situation, where two varieties of a language exist side by side in a speech community, with each having a definite role to play. Furthermore, in a diglossic situation, the two varieties of the language are distinct. One of the varieties is the standardized high variety (H) but the other variety is the low variety (L), which may or may not be standardized (British Council, 2018).

Multilingualism is a global phenomenon, and in many spheres being multilingual is viewed as a considerable advantage, even an indication of intelligence. Multilingualism might hold numerous cognitive benefits, including protection against dementia, enhanced executive control functioning, and enhanced creativity (Bialystok, 2011). This statement can lead one to argue that learning more than one language is beneficial to a person's future and can even be a key element to future success. The implication of Bialystok's (2011) statement veers towards an ideal linguistic context where it is expected that bilinguals tend to be more successful in v arying contexts of life than monolinguals. He concludes that not minding the benefits of multilingualism, parents of many African learners value their children's fluency in a colonial language more than they value well-developed literacy skills in the mother tongue. His conclusion, though possible, would be near-perfect if the various linguistic setbacks in terms of standardisation of local languages in Nigeria are addressed.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive research design of survey type which focused on the linguistic repertoire of undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions.

Sampling and sampling procedure

The sample procedure was multi-stage.Random sampling technique was used to select one institutionfrom each stratum in Ekiti State. Simple random sampling was again used in selecting 60 out of the students in each of the tertiary institutions used for the study. This sample comprises:

1. College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti
2. University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ikere Campus
3. Crown Polytechnic, Odo, Ekiti State

The research instrument used for the study is Linguistic Repertoire Questionnaire Indicate reliability index. The questionnaire was designed to elicit relevant information on the linguistic repertoire of undergraduates. The questions for the study were adapted from Olaoye (2007). The questionnaire consisted of a three-point self-reporting scale which awarded 1,2,3 starting from Very Often, Often and Seldom with 23 items.

The questionnaires were administered by the researcher with the help of a research assistant. The research instrument was administered to the selected students at the various tertiary institutions and retrieved after a three-day interval due to the location of the private polytechnic involved. Out of the 180 questionnaires distributed, 153 were returned for data analysis.

The data collected were analysed using Analysis of Variance(ANOVA)

Results and Discussions

Research question 1: To what extent are male and female undergraduates in Ekiti State higher institutions bilingual?

Table 1: ANOVA showing theextent of bilingualism among male and female undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Study level	Between Groups	20.746	2	10.373	14.029	.000
	Within Groups	111.650	151	.739		
	Total	132.396	153			
Speaks only two languages	Between Groups	.014	2	.007	0.031	.970
	Within Groups	10.486	47	.223		
	Total	10.500	49			

Table 1 shows the extent of bilingualism of male and female undergraduates. The result shows that gender is significant at [$F_{(1,153)} = 4.009, p<0.05$]. The result shows that gender is significant at 0.04 and virtually all are bilingual.

Research question 2: To what extent are the male and female undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions multilingual?

Table 2: ANOVA showing the extent of multilingualism among undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	21.538[a]	8	2.692	3.521	.001
Intercept	.000	0	.	.	.
LGA	.000	0	.	.	.
Religion	.000	0	.	.	.
Home location	.034	1	.034	.044	.834
Schooltype	8.976	1	8.976	11.740	.001
Level of mulltilinguali sm	1.636 32.864 34.500	2 2	.818 .699	1.170	.319
State of origin	.000	0	.	.	.
Gender	.102	1	.102	.134	.715
Age	3.754	2	1.877	2.455	.009
gender * age	2.275	2	1.137	1.488	.229
Error	110.858	145	.765		
Total	1075.000	154			
Corrected Total	132.396	153			

Table 2 shows the extent of multilinguism of undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions. The result shows that the extent of multilingualism is insignificant at [$f_{(1.170)}$, $p < 0.05$] and the p value is 0.319.The findings reveal that the undergraduates are not multilingual.

Research Question 3: To what extent do undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions communicate in English and their MT?Table 3: Extent undergraduates communicate in English and their MT

		Sum of Squares	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Study level	Between Groups	20.746	2	10.373	14.029	.000
	Within Groups	111.650	151	.739		
	Total	132.396	153			
Communicate in L2 & L1	Between Groups	1.055	2	.528	.671	.516
	Within Groups	36.945	47	.786		
	Total	38.000	49			

Table 3 shows the extent undergraduates communicate in English and their MT on campus. The result shows that the extent undergraduates communicate in English and MT is significant at [$f_{1,153}$=.671, $p>0.05$] with p=.516. This indicates that undergraduates communicate significantly using the L2 and MT on campus.

Research question 4: To what extent do undergraduates alternate between L2 and dialect when conversing with course mates of similar ethnic background?

Table 4: ANOVA showing the extent of language alternation between undergraduates of similar ethnic background

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
*Alternate between L2 .> dialect with similar ethnic background	Between Groups	.343	2	.171	.569	.570
	Within Groups	14.157	47	.301		
	Total	14.500	49			
LGA	Between Groups	.007	2	.003	.002	.998
	Within Groups	233.117	151	1.544		
	Total	233.123	153			
Religion	Between Groups	.000	2	.000	.	.

From table 5, the result shows the extent undergraduates alternate between the L2 and dialect with mates of similar ethnic background. The result indicates that the extent of undergraduates linguistic alternation between L2 and dialects with course mates of similar background is not significant at [$f_{1,153=}$.569, $p > 0.05$] when $p = 0.57$.

Discussion of findings

The results from the findings of the study reveal quite a number of issues about the linguistic repertoire of undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions.

Table1 reveals a significant presence of bilinguals of male and female undergraduates. The mean square of .007 within groups and .223 between groups indicates a high level of bilinguals in the population of the study. The implication of this result is that the L1 and L2 (English) are predominantly in the linguistic repertoire of the undergraduates and are retrieved depending on the socio-cultural context they find themselves in.

Table 2 points to the predominance of bilingual undergraduates over the insignificant number of multilinguals. The findings may be considered as stunning in the sense that only 2 undergraduates are multilingual. This is represented as about 1% of the sampled population of the study. This linguistic phenomenon may be based on the premise, among others, that the required implementation of the language policy as contained in National Policy on Education (1977 -2013 editions) has been unable to attain the language development from pre-basic levels to the tertiary levels of education in Nigeria. In other words, infant bilingualism, childhood bilingualism, adolescent bilingualism and adulthood bilingualism appear not to have been achieved due to multifarious reasons.

Table 3 presents results of findings that reveal significant use of English and their mother tongues while communicating on campus. This implies the essence of utilizing English as a second language for academic purposes , and perhaps, for social esteem as an undergraduate, while the L1(mother tongue) becomes a platform for social and cultural integration among themselves and colleagues of similar linguistic cum ethnic background. This linguistic phenomenon further reinforces the assertion that bilinguals prefer conversing in their L1 due to the bi-cultural significance over the L2 (Dada, 2007). Also the findings in this study contradict findings reported in a study by Bamgbade (2012) on students' preference for English language using the indigenous language prevalent in the South Western Nigeria; which is Yoruba. It was found that the students' preference for English language was unmatched at the expense of the indigenous language (Yoruba) being spoken in the region.

Table 4 reveals results of findings based on the use of code switching involving the L2 (English) and the L1 while out of school. The results suggests that undergraduates switch to a significant extent from English, being their second language(L2) to their mother tongues while at home and this could be based on the premise of linguistic comfortabilty and diversity in socio-cultural and religious contexts.

Table 5 brings to the fore the extent dialects paly in the alternation of languages used by undergraduates while at home. The findings from Table 5 suggest a significant alternation between English and dialects for socio-cultural reasons such as commercial, religious activities, solidarity and neighbourhood purposes. Despite the fact that undergraduate interlocutors opt for the L2 on campus, a shift from the academic environment would, expectedly entail a code shift to a language they would easily communicate with, especially among people who may not be as proficient in English as themselves. Further studies in this area of linguistic and communicative importance would, perhaps, provide information on the issue of code mixing and shifting among undergraduates selected for this study. Going further, the undergraduates of the study revealed data suggesting their ability to use both English and their respective mother tongues for communicative purposes despite the abysmally low number of multilinguals in the institutions selected for the study. The major issue arising from the findings in the study revolves around the near-absence of multilinguals in the context under study. This suggests a linguistic tilt towards the acquisition of dialectal varieties of the L1 or MT as well as the learning of a second language (English being preferred over languages like French) rather than an indigenous Nigerian language different from their MT.

Conclusion

An outstanding revelation of the study in the linguistic repertoire of undergraduates in Ekiti State Tertiary institutions of learning shows the predominantly bilingual nature of the students. Generally, the expectation of the researcher of the linguistic repertoire of the undergraduates being studied was, initially that a significant number of students in tertiary citadels of learning should be able to interact in various social milieu in English and two other indigenous languages. However, the findings of the study showed a significant number of monolinguals and a few cases of bilingualism. Based on the objectives of the Nigeria National Language Policy, citizens are expected to become multilingual right from the post-basic stage of education. Unfortunately, it appears a significant number of undergraduates in Ekiti State have not reflected the linguistic cum national identity intended by the National Policy on Education(2013) as regards multilingualism in the Nigerian space.

Recommendation

On the basis of the findings in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The proper implementation of acculturation programmes for undergraduates in Ekiti State tertiary institutions should be resurrected by the appropriate government agencies responsible for tertiary education. Such programmes should be organised for both new intakes and final year students regardless of their academic discipline
2. Application of punitive reprimands on children for the use of vernacular at the primary and post-primary levels of educations should be abolished. The Quality Assurance Unit of the Ministry of Education responsible for the monitoring of these programmes should be encouraged, making frequent unexpected visits to schools.
3. The government should increase the admission quota of applicants for Nigerian languages in Nigerian universities and Colleges of Education.

4. The National Policy on Education (1999-2013) should be abided by the relevant stakeholders as regards the implementation of the language policy on education, with special emphasis on the Nigerian Languages.

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