YORUBA-ENGLISH BILINGUALISM IN CENTRAL LAGOS – NIGERIA

BY
DR. EMMANUEL ADEDAYO ADEDUN
&
DR. MOJISOLA SHODIPE

Both of the
Department of English
University of Lagos
Akoka – Yaba
Lagos – Nigeria
Email: eaadedun@yahoo.co.uk
Mobile phone: 2348023414410
YORUBA-ENGLISH BILINGUALISM IN CENTRAL LAGOS – NIGERIA

Abstract

This article examines the language repertoire and linguistic behaviour of the inhabitants of Central Lagos in Nigeria. It is noted that the linguistic composition of Lagos can be attributed to the history of language contact and the peculiar settlement pattern of various Lagos dwellers necessitated by a complex process of socio-cultural integration, ethnic diffusion and linguistic assimilation. The article identifies the factors that shape the linguistic character of the Lagos Island speech community as a coagulation of Yoruba ethnic communities, influx of Nigerian linguistic groups, influence of religion and pre-colonial immigration history. The article concludes that the language repertoire in Lagos is reflective of the truly cosmopolitan nature of the city with its attendant transforming influence on Yoruba-English bilingualism.

{Key Words: Bilingualism, Linguistic Geography, Yoruba-English, Pidgin}. 
I. Introduction

The Lagos Island speech community is a largely indigenous Yoruba community situated in the heart of Lagos city, Nigeria. It covers most of the geographical area known as Central Lagos, Nigeria’s most influential coastal city and the nation’s economic nerve centre. Despite losing its status as Nigeria’s capital city to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory since 1993, Central Lagos has retained its socio-political status and political importance. Surrounded by the 180-kilometer long Lagos Lagoon, with an outlet to the Atlantic Ocean, Lagos Island covers a densely-populated commercial and residential area which begins at the foot of the Eko Bridge at Apongbon and stretches through the bustling business district along the Marina, down to the indigenous settlements of Isale-Eko.

The Lagos Island speech community comprises five major areas or sections each with its unique social and cultural definitions. These are: Olowogbowo which consists of Isale-Eko (the traditional and cultural nucleus of the community), Offin and Idumota areas; the Brazilian Quarters of Popo Aguda otherwise known as Great Campos; Lafiaji which includes neighbourhoods like Obalende, Onikan and Okesuna; Okoofaji covering areas from Isale Eko to the fringes of Epetedo, the fifth section which got its name from the early settlers who were mainly returnees from Epe, a Lagos suburb. Among the indigenous inhabitants of Isale-Eko, fishing and other coastal activities are the dominant occupations and the mainstay of the local economy. The central business district which includes Broad street and the Marina constitute the corporate nerve-centre of the nation’s economy with the characteristics glistening skyscrapers and shopping centres which daily host an endless flow of vehicular and human traffic from all over the West African Coast and beyond. These represent the dual character of Lagos Island, a community which is an interesting blend of colourful indigenous Yoruba culture and the sophistication of modernity and foreign lifestyle. Both have co-existed for centuries, underscoring the bicultural character of contemporary Lagos – a unique feature which makes the community an excellent location for a sociolinguistic study of bilingual speech behaviour.

II. Linguistic Geography of Lagos Island

The linguistic composition of this community has been largely influenced by a history of language diffusion and assimilation occasioned by language contact. This contact has occurred largely within the present cosmopolitan Lagos, its suburban areas and the surrounding towns and districts. On a larger sociolinguistic scale, there has been a tremendous contact situation occasioned by the advent of colonial rule and the coming of the missionaries to the city of Lagos in the 18th century. The historical dimension to this issue, according to Akere (1982:160), involves the influence of acculturation brought about by the early contact with foreign languages like English, Portuguese and Creole.

The peculiar linguistic character of Central Lagos is thus of a multidimensional nature which involves the dynamics of language interaction at various levels. An important dimension of this, according to historians (cf. Fashinro, 2004; Aderibigbe, 1975, Brown, 1974, Barnes, 1974, Echeruo, 1977, Folami, 1982), is the external dimension represented...
by the effect of the contact situation of the early and mid 19th Century when the first settlers in Lagos came in contact with foreigners, mostly Portuguese who came on trading expeditions to the West African coast. Then came the period of the early European incursions when the English language was introduced to West Africa along with Christianity by the missionaries. It was also the period which witnessed the systematic immigration into Lagos of freed slaves from different parts of Europe and America. Early Lagos was thus characterized by linguistic contact of Yoruba with languages like English, Portuguese and Sierra Leonean Creole.

A second dimension of the linguistic diffusion of Lagos involves the intra-ethnic contact between the Eko dialect (the indigenous dialect of Yoruba spoken in Central Lagos) and a variety of other Yoruba dialects like Ijebu, Egba, Oyo, Ijesha, Ekiti, Igbomina, Ilaje, among others. This has been brought about by the endless migration into Lagos by people from other dialect-speaking areas of Yoruba-land. These are mostly people who stream into Lagos from the hinterlands in search of greener pastures. This trend has remained a permanent feature of Lagos urban life from as far back as the mid 19th Century. This has consequently evolved a unique form of urban spoken Yoruba which Akere (1977) describes as Common Yoruba (CY), a variety which is a significant component of the linguistic repertoire of present day cosmopolitan Lagos.

This is also the inter-ethnic dimension of language contact which has influenced the linguistic character of present day Central Lagos. This involves contact between Yoruba and other Nigerian languages spoken by the various ethno-linguistic groups who have established stable residence with large populations in different parts of Lagos. These include Igbo, Edo, Efik, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Egun, Tiv among others. Many of these ethnic groups have, in addition to acquiring the Yoruba language (particularly the younger generation who learn to speak Yoruba with native-like fluency from childhood) equally acculturated with the indigenous Yoruba through intermarriage as well as socio-cultural and political affinity. This is not so surprising since Lagos is a largely Yoruba based city where not less than 85 percent of non-Yoruba speak Yoruba (Myers-Scotton, 1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1993).

Thus, the linguistic composition of Lagos can be attributed to the history of language contact and the peculiar settlement pattern of Lagos dwellers. Naturally, the various ethnic and foreign groups which converge in Lagos have undergone a complex sociolinguistic process involving socio-cultural integration, ethnic diffusion and linguistic assimilation. All these are salient constituents of the bilingual character of this cosmopolitan setting.

III. Bilingualism in Lagos

Bilingualism has indeed taken root as a widespread phenomenon in most cosmopolitan cities of the world. The bilingual situation in Central Lagos provides an appropriate setting for the exploration of an African bilingual context with its own interesting linguistic peculiarities. As is the case in many African nations where English is the main official language, the Nigerian experience is typified by the Lagos sociolinguistic context where the bilingual status of speakers involves the use of English with one of over 400
different indigenous languages spoken by people from various parts of the country. The two ‘dueling’ languages are usually an indigenous language and a European language which emerged as a result of colonialism and missionary adventurism.

Bilingualism thus becomes inevitable as a consequence of language contact situation where individuals must necessarily interact with members of other ethno-linguistic groups which converge on most urban cities (Agheyisi, 1984; Bamgbose, 1971). At the macro level, the general bilingualism profile of urban Lagos is as varied as the multiplicity of Nigerian indigenous languages represented in the speech repertoire of this community. Bilingualism in urban Lagos is thus characterized by the use of dual languages like Igbo-English, Hausa-English, Urhobo-English, Efik-English, and so on. However, the bilingual situation in urban Lagos is uniquely characterized by the prevalence of English, the official language, and Yoruba, the indigenous language of the people of South West Nigeria. Thus, Yoruba-English bilingualism is the established speech norm among the majority of Lagos dwellers, involving the use of English and an urban variety of Yoruba known as Eko, the dialect of the indigenous people of Central Lagos.

Shodipe (2010) thus describes the Yoruba-English bilinguals of Lagos as a characteristically mixed group consisting of people from different parts of Yoruba-land (and beyond) who speak English as an official language and maintain their indigenous language mostly for in-group social interactions. Yoruba-English bilingualism is also the established speech norm which developed as part of the linguistic assimilation process in urban Lagos whereby Lagos dwellers of non-Yoruba descent (e.g. Igbo, Hausa, Urhobo, Efik, etc.) acquire native-like competence in Yoruba by virtue of long association and as a consequence of the imperatives of everyday communication in a Yoruba-dominant speech community. This is otherwise known as the linguistic process of acculturation (Akere, 1977). In this regard, it has been observed that more than 85 percent of non-Yoruba in Lagos speak Yoruba while the vast majority of Lagos dwellers speak the same second languages: English (77%) and Pidgin English (74%). (Myers-Scotton, 1990, 1993) . A large number of these Yoruba-English speakers simultaneously retain Pidgin English as the language of wider communication (e.g in markets, communal gatherings, grassroots mobilization, awareness campaigns, etc.) especially in situations where multilingual mother tongues present a riot and the use of English only represents an elitist choice.

In view of the prevalence of the co-existence of two languages in most urban cities of the world, linguists have constantly posed the question: what function does the urban variety of a language fulfill for its speakers that its more traditional form does not? In this regard, Swigart (1994) observes that:

The use of a vernacular language mixed with a European language marks the speaker as educated, of relatively high socio-economic status, and as someone who values both their indigenous and their more international status.
Linguists who have documented the phenomenon known as language mixing or language switching in Africa, South Africa and other parts of the world have described this as an unmarked fluid language which represents a kind of ‘signalling’ used by its speakers (Myers-Scotton, 1988a; Poplack, 1988; Sridhar, 1978; Kachru, 1978). The prevalence of code-switching in the Lagos speech community can be said to be not only an index of social patterns of interaction but also a significant emblem of cross-generational language variability. The choice of preferred codes in different situations is equally as significant to the explication of language use as the linguistic components of the two languages in use, with attendant social implications. The increasing emphasis in sociolinguistic research on the study of speech usage within the context of a speech community makes it possible to examine and analyze code-switching within a dynamic theory of language use. To this end, our sociolinguistic perspective in this study maintains that verbal interaction is a social process in which speech forms are selected from the community verbal repertoire in accordance with socially recognized norms and conventions. In other words, there is a significant ethnographic dimension to the study of code-switching and its linguistic implications in a speech community. This is perhaps even more salient when viewed against the background of the unique socio-cultural components of speech usage in an African cosmopolitan setting like Central Lagos. In this regard, Gumperz (1972) observes that in the analysis of verbal interactions, social categories and social roles such as status, role relationships, social and cultural identities, etc can be treated as ‘communicative symbols’. These are usually indicated in the act of speaking and have a function in the communicative process. The interaction between linguistic forms and social categories in the communication process varies from one society to another. According to Akere (1977), the notion of societies can be constructed from linguistically ‘homogenous’ monolingual communities, at one end, to linguistically heterogeneous communities with widespread multilingualism, at the other end.

In many communities worldwide, the phenomenon of code-switching is often regarded with perceptible hostility and sometimes rejection for the simple reason that it is a hybrid degenerate form of communication (Bamiro, 1996a). Code-switching is viewed as a mark of ‘incompetence’ at many levels of usage, especially in the speech of the younger generation. This kind of linguistic incompetence is thus described as unsystematic result of not knowing at least one of the languages involved very well. This kind of attitude toward code-switching is typically observed in former colonial communities where the language of the colonial power is regarded as having been imposed at some historical point in time (Bamiro, 1996b). When stretches of the foreign language (single words, phrases, or sentences) are injected consciously or unconsciously into an utterance or discourse being made in the speaker’s indigenous language, this hostility is normally aroused. This kind of attitude is illustrated in the following example of bilingual code-switching recorded during the Lagos language survey:

A politician is addressing some party members in a meeting. He displays his bilingual status by speaking in Lagos Yoruba mixed with English. His speech is punctuated by frequent switches to English which attracts the annoyance of his listeners:
Politician:

“Ise ti a fe se ni constituency yii, o require a great deal of tact and diplomacy. In fact, ti a be fe, pick credible representative lati ibi yii, a maa make selection from the list provided. This is because……”

The work we need to do in this constituency requires a great deal of tact and diplomacy. In fact, for us to pick a credible representative from here, we shall make a selection from the list provided. This is because….

Crowd:

“E joo, e joo, e wálé ná. Kònse gbogbo wa la lo si Cambridge”!

Please, please, come down to our level. Not everyone here has been to Cambridge!

A similar attitude was noted by Gumperz (1982:74) in his study of Hindi-English contact situation where the use of foreign loan words and language mixing is considered “a threat to the purity of Hindi and a threat to the preservation of traditional values”. A number of scholars have also noted a similar disquiet among educated Yoruba elite who expressed anxiety about the relative preference of English to their mother tongue. Code-switching in Lagos like any other Yoruba community is a feature of the major consequence of Yoruba-English language contact (Bamgbose, 1982).

The Yoruba-English bilingual situation in Central Lagos can be said to exemplify a considerable measure of stability, considering the long history of coexistence and complementarity shared by these two languages. Though English remains the language of official and formal communication with higher prestige and international acceptability, the indigenous Yoruba language, which serves more domestic and informal purposes, has maintained a high level of acceptability in the bilingual discourse of Yoruba-English speakers in this community. This has been enhanced mostly by the sustenance of the Yoruba supra-culture in spite of the incursions of modernization and western culture. Indeed, the influence of Yoruba traditional norms has enhanced the sustained importance of the language in the dynamics of bilingual communication. Thus, the enduring indices of the indigenous Yoruba tradition have maintained vibrant expression in the colourful festivals, traditional ceremonies, rituals, and dances from which a great deal of sociolinguistic evidence daily emanates.

The coexistence of Yoruba and English in this community can also be described as diglossic. Diglossic languages and diglossic language situations are usually described as consisting of two (or more) varieties that coexist in a speech community, where domains of linguistic behavior are parceled out in a kind of complementary distribution. These domains are usually ranked in a kind of hierarchy from high valued (H) to less valued (L). Diglossic situation involving two different (i.e. genetically unrelated) linguistic codes such as Yoruba and English is sometimes referred to as ‘extended’ diglossia. In this case, the dominant language, the H code, has the greater prestige and international status, or is the language of the local elite or dominant group(s). The ‘L’ code on the
other hand is the language of informal communication and domestic interaction. This situation is otherwise known as non-genetic diglossia.

Scotton (1988a, 1988b) however proposes the terms ‘narrow’ for definition of diglossia (i.e genetically related), and ‘broad’ for expansion of the discussion (i.e. genetically unrelated). Scotton further argues that few truly diglossic communities actually exist because to meet the criteria, two conditions must hold:

“i. Everyone….. speaks the Low variety as a mother tongue and;

ii. The High variety is never used ……. in informal situations.”

While Scotton’s first condition holds true for Lagos Yoruba, the second does not however hold for Lagos English. Therefore Scotton’s perception of non-genetic diglossia as ‘broad’ cannot be said to represent the Yoruba-English situation in Central Lagos. It is worth noting however that the range of dichotomies drawn between genetic and non-genetic diglossic situations should be viewed beyond the scope of these dualisms. Rather, the differences relate more importantly to power relations of the two languages as they operate in different communities. In the case of Yoruba-English bilingualism in Lagos, although both languages fit into the High (English) and Low (Yoruba) categorization, the formal-informal dichotomy cannot be said to hold totally true for the functionality of the two languages. Generally, just as English, the perceived formal variety, is being adopted for many informal situations, (e.g. home/family interactions, (especially among the educated elite), Yoruba, the perceived Low variety is equally being used in many formal contexts such as broadcasting and journalism as well as in political discourse. This phenomenon is aptly described as ‘shifting domains’ where one variety encroaches on the domains previously restricted for the other. Thus, the Yoruba-English bilingual situation in Lagos can be seen as that in which speakers use both the High and Low varieties in complementary situations. This means that all Yoruba-English speakers in this community exhibit diglossic behavior, using the low variety as a mother tongue and having to learn the High variety as a second language.

The sociolinguistic import of the High and low categorization of English and Yoruba respectively is also reflective of the dynamics of power and solidarity in specific social exchanges. For instance, the use of Yoruba as a Low variety can be interpreted as an expression of solidarity among speakers of equal social standing. However, such solidarity may not easily apply to interaction with speakers who are perceived to be of superior social position. Similarly, the use of English as a High variety may be the only appropriate variety in certain contexts (e.g. addressing a press conference) because speaking English in such situations would imply exclusive solidarity with members of a particular social group. Conversely however, the use of English in response to an exchange initiated in Yoruba would be deemed to carry different social meanings. It could be an attempt to put down the interlocutor, thereby establishing social distance or disdain. It could also be regarded as an attempt to reject the perception of a person as linguistically inferior by the initiator of the dialogue. For instance, during one of the interview sessions with some Yoruba-English speakers in this community, the interviewer had introduced herself to a respondent in Yoruba to gain the confidence of
the respondent. As they settled down for the task, the researcher proceeded to ask a question in Yoruba. The respondent, a young man with school certificate education, reacted in a hostile outburst in English: “Do you think I can’t speak English?” Obviously, the respondent had misconstrued the interviewer’s choice of language as an attempt to classify him as ‘illiterate’ and ‘unable to communicate in English’. The social imputations of power and solidarity generally depend on a variety of factors which range from gender balancing and in-group/out-group perceptions to generational differences.

The social configuration of language status can also be gleaned from the viewpoint of possible loss of linguistic features and their implication for speakers’ attitude to the use of one variety over the other for specific communicative functions. From a macrosociolinguistic and ethnographic perspective the coexistence of Yoruba and English in the Lagos bilingual situation has remained fairly stable or balanced in view of the complementary usage of both languages for higher social functions such as in religious and sociopolitical domains of discourse. The code-switching to be studied here largely involves English and Yoruba though some examples may include pidgin usage.

Ufomata (1991) in her article ‘Englishization of Yoruba phonology’ observes that the adoption of certain loanwords from English has effected a fundamental change in the phonological system of Yoruba. This includes the violation of the restriction on the occurrence of high tone on the first syllable of Yoruba vowel-initial words as in the following examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Yoruba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>[édentI]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine</td>
<td>[endźnii]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>[áyoonu]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>[ɔfisa)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these examples, it is evident that stress in English words is converted to a corresponding set of tonal patterns when borrowed into Yoruba. Another feature of the influence of English on Yoruba in the use of loan words is the establishment of pitch and segment correspondences between the two languages. According to Ufomata (2004), in most instances, loans simply take on these correspondences while consonant clusters which are absent in Yoruba phonological system are resolved by epenthesis or deletion as in the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Yoruba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
barber          Bábá
soldiér        Soja
Half penny     Eekpini
Street         Titi
Kettle         Ketu
bicycle        Baisiku

(2004:580-581)

At the semantic level however, there are notable exceptions to the correspondences discussed above. In such cases, Yoruba tonal patterns actually keep meaning apart in homonymous English loans e.g.

baby          [bèbì]          ‘pretty young lady’
[bébì]         baby
“cocoa”       [kókò]        cocoyam
[kòkò]         cocoa
“Party [páti]  political party
[patí]         ‘party, social gathering
“Father[fádà]  male parent
[fádà]         reverend father
“sister”[sístà] reverend sister
[sístá] older female   (2004: 583-584)
IV. Pidgin English in Lagos

Pidgin English is the linguistic outcome of contact situation between Nigerians and European traders of the colonial period. For several decades, it has remained a major tool of socio-cultural communication in many Nigerian urban centers for many reasons. It is the first language for many Nigerian speakers even though it is not necessarily their mother tongue or native language. (Ofulue, 2004). In the Nigerian contemporary sociolinguistic setting, Pidgin English competes favourably with English, not only as a recognized lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication but also as a tool for wider communication among people of diverse social, political or educational backgrounds. For instance, the prevalence of formal education in the urban areas is largely responsible for the growth of the elite group, and this has deepened the dichotomy between English on one hand, and pidgin and the various mother tongues on the other. Therefore, the uneducated naturally adopt pidgin as a means of maintaining their social relevance in the changing world dominated by the educated elite. Thus pidgin English serves as convenient tool of accommodation for numerous people who need to communicate, on a daily basis, with others who either do not speak English or with those who do not belong to their ethnic or social groups.

Pidgin English is the preferred speech norm in most urban markets as a necessary tool of linguistic cohesion amid the multi-ethnic constituents of urban existence. It is also the variety widely embraced as a first language in many Nigerian speech communities and especially among the various ethno-linguistic groups of the Niger Delta area despite the existence of ethnic mother tongues in these communities. Consequently, pidgin English is prevalent in a growing number of social registers (such as the language of comedy, grassroots mobilization and youth militancy) as an indispensible tool of social integration. This trend has been described as creolization in Nigerian pidgin, a situation whereby a pidgin becomes the native language or first language of a speech community (Ofulue, 2004). Although some scholars have queried the adequacy of this definition (Mafeni, 1971; Shunkal and Marchese, 1983) with regard to the first language criterion, a peep into the sociohistory of Nigerian pidgin from the precolonial to present day shows considerably that the process of creolization can be adequately accounted for by linguistic changes motivated by changing attitudes of speakers as well as usage practices (Oloruntoba, 1992). For instance, part of the development in the status of Nigerian pidgin in contemporary Nigeria can be observed in its growing relevance and effectiveness in previous English-based domains like broadcasting and popular Nigerian music. In these domains, the use of Nigerian pidgin has become established and accepted as a productive strategy for mass appeal and commercial success.

However, Donwa-Ifode (1983) has argued that creolization cannot be advanced as a feature of Nigerian pidgin. According to her, although Nigerian pidgin is the first language for a large number of people, it is not necessarily their mother tongue or native language. A crucial part of Donwa-Ifode’s argument is that it is unlikely for these speakers to choose Nigerian pidgin over their indigenous languages for intra-ethnic communication since it is not native to them in the same way as their mother tongues. These arguments notwithstanding, it is evident that Nigerian pidgin serves unique communicative purposes for the different speakers in different parts of the country.
according to the demands of the interactive situations. Moreover, there is no doubt that speakers of Nigerian pidgin within the same geographical space cannot possibly possess the same level of competence, nor will they apply the variety to the same situations and purposes.

V. Lagos Speech Repertoires

Although the imperatives of socio-cultural integration has resulted in the evolution of an urban variety of the Yoruba language, the Eko dialect; the contact situation occasioned by the advent of English as an official language in Nigeria has gradually led to the entrenchment of bilingualism as a significant feature of Lagos cosmopolitan language behaviour.

Naturally, individual and group linguistic behaviour are bound to be influenced by the prevailing sociolinguistic environment. Code-switching and code-mixing have thus become predominant features of bilingual behaviour in this community as is the case in most cosmopolitan settings worldwide. The linguistic repertoire range of the Yoruba-English bilingual of Lagos is thus subject to the influence of the various socio-economic and socio-political changes which have characterised the development of the community over the years. Since the development of a language or dialect is usually closely associated with the socio-cultural life of the community in which it is used, linguistic behaviour is often a reflection of the peculiar social structure and interactive patterns in the community. In this regard, it is necessary to highlight the socio-cultural indices of the Lagos Island speech community and illustrate how they have contributed to the language repertoires of the area.

1. The Dialectal Dimension

Lagos speech can be said to be deeply eclectic in terms of the various dialectal infusions in the speech repertoire of the community. The dialectal influence comes mainly from conglomeration of different Yoruba-speaking people of Western Nigeria in Lagos, thus creating a Yoruba dialect diversity involving the infusion of phonological or lexical components of Yoruba dialects like Ijebu, Egba, Ekiti, Oyo, etc. into the emergent Eko or Lagos Yoruba. These dialect groups have gained a foothold in Lagos metropolitan life through migration, trade or intermarriage. Dialectal variation at the lexical level can be observed in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Lagos</th>
<th>Dialectical Variant</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mouse</td>
<td>eku/ekuté</td>
<td>ofon-on</td>
<td>Oyo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cow leg  eseran  bokotoo  Oyo
tripe  Shaki  shakoto (a variety of tripe)  Oyo
to be angry with  binu si  laifi  Oyo
to run  ja/sa lo  ho  Oyo
broom  Igbale  owo  Ijebu
to marry  fife  nine  Ijebu
to spoil  Baje  boje  Ijebu
who’s that?  ta ni yen?  le si yen?  Egba

Akere (1977): 183 identifies lexical assimilation in Yoruba words of Ijebu origin as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ijebu</th>
<th>Ikorodu</th>
<th>Eko/ Standard Variant</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ese</td>
<td>oode/odede</td>
<td>oode</td>
<td>verandah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eji</td>
<td>Ojo</td>
<td>Ojo</td>
<td>rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eke</td>
<td>Ada</td>
<td>Ada</td>
<td>cutlass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uru</td>
<td>Eron</td>
<td>Eron</td>
<td>meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ule</td>
<td>Ile</td>
<td>Ile</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obu</td>
<td>Obun/oja</td>
<td>Oja</td>
<td>market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akode</td>
<td>Fila</td>
<td>Fila</td>
<td>cap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oluku</td>
<td>Ore</td>
<td>Ore</td>
<td>friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orup/ozi</td>
<td>Yara</td>
<td>Yara</td>
<td>bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serika</td>
<td>Kokoto</td>
<td>Kokoro</td>
<td>key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogorupu</td>
<td>Ibusun</td>
<td>Ibudun</td>
<td>bed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. The Ethnic Dimension

The ethnic dimension is seen in the linguistic assimilation of features of Nigerian ethnic languages, especially Igbo and Hausa as exemplified in the following:

**Igbo:** okrika (second hand), ebeano (a good thing), akposhe (suede fabric), Chineke (God), mba (no), odinma (o.k.) nwanyi (old person), etc.

**Hausa:** megida (boss), kudi (money), baabu (not available), sanma (heaven), keremin (small), ganni (to see), aboki (friend), etc.

3. Influence of Immigrant History

The pre-colonial immigrant history of Lagos is characterised by the settlement of freed slaves from different parts of Europe and America in various parts of old Lagos. The descendants of the returnees have, over the years, established distinct cultural and linguistic identities which have evolved into symbolic communal representations in different neighbourhoods. For instance, the descendants of the Sierra Leonean returnees, otherwise called the ‘Saros’ constitute the group largely domiciled in the Olowogbowo area with their characteristic European life-styles and idiosyncracies. They bear English names like Lisk-Carew, Davis, Coker, Williams, Bickersteth, Bucknor, Martins or compound names with Yoruba components such as Akerele-Bucknor, Akinbo-Savage, Akodu-Elliot, Aboyade-Cole, Alaaja-Browne, Fatai-Williams, Yemisi-Coker, Kumolu-Johnson, etc. Through the Saro influence many English words became assimilated into the Eko dialect through a process of relexification. These include kórójì (crewman), pón-wùn (pound), éékpin (half penny, pronounced /eipni/), kóbò (copper), korobá (crowbar), fárià/ iyéfun (farina: powder). The Brazilian returnees on their part had tremendous influence on the early architecture of Lagos with the Brazilian style of buildings known as sobrados, a prominent feature of the Brazilian Quarters which was replicated in other parts of the city. The Brazilian Quarters covers the South-West of Tinubu Square including Odunlami, Bamgbose, Tokunbo, Upper Kakawa, Igbosere and Campos Square. Like the Saros, the Agudas also express their desire for reintegration and assimilation into the Yoruba culture through Brazilian names like Dacosta, Da Rocha, Marinho, McGregor, Dasilva, etc as well as through cultural artefacts such as the Campos carnival mascot (the bull), known as meboi, meals such as bomfin, camjika and frejon and a colourful masquerade show called caretta.

4. Influence of Religion

Both the Islamic religion and Christianity have exerted considerable influence on the development of bilingual speech repertoire of contemporary Lagos. The assimilatory influences of the Islamic religion on Lagos urban society have remained more or less constant. For instance, personal naming system in contemporary Lagos is characterized by a sequence of Muslim (Arabic) first name, Yoruba middle name and Lagos surname such as Musiliu Abiodun Salvador, Lateef Adediran Kosoko, Muyibat Ajoke Balogun etc. Non-literate speakers have introduced some phonological assimilation into most
Arabic-based names such as Latifu for Lateef, Akiimu for Hakeem, Kudiratu for Kudrat, Moliki for Maleek and Yusufu for Yusuff,

Another interesting aspect of the Islamic influence is the incorporation of features of the Arabic language, the main medium of the propagation of Islam. The Arabic influence however transcends the realm of the Islam community as it permeates the larger socio-cultural life of Yoruba-English speakers. Thus, the systematic infusion of Arabic lexical items into the Lagos speech norms is observable in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Lagos (Eko)</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zakat</td>
<td>Saka</td>
<td>Freewill offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As-salam</td>
<td>Salamo</td>
<td>Greetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raadan</td>
<td>Ramadani</td>
<td>Month of fasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecca</td>
<td>Moka</td>
<td>Holy land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-janat</td>
<td>Alujanna</td>
<td>Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>Haramu</td>
<td>Forbidden act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumat</td>
<td>Jimoh</td>
<td>Friday prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Id</td>
<td>Yidi</td>
<td>Religious congregation for muslim festivals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nabiyy</td>
<td>Nobiu</td>
<td>Anniversary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-barka</td>
<td>Alubarika</td>
<td>Good fortune</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of the role of Hausa/Fulani evangelism in the spread of Islam to Yorubaland, some of the Arabic entrants into Lagos speech were initially assimilated into Hausa from Arabic thus exemplifying double assimilation. Such words include *ganni* (to see or witness) *halaali* (an abominable act), *sunna* (Muslim name), *bismillah*: (in the name of God).

The impact of Christianity in Lagos dates back to the pre-colonial period when the pinnacle of Lagos socio-cultural life was closely associated with the influence of the returnee slaves from Europe and parts of America, most of whom had embraced Christianity abroad. The descendants of these returnees today constitute the ‘elite’ class of Lagosians, who set the pace of socio-economic life, widely emulated by others. Thus, the adoption of western-oriented Christian way of life has expanded the linguistic repertoire of Lagos speech and has equally witnessed the influx of Christian-based lexical
items into the repertoire range of Yoruba English bilinguals. Such words include ‘*kwaya*’ (choir), ‘*soosi*’ (church), ‘*keresimesi*’ (Christmas), ‘*itebomi*’, (baptism), ‘*idamewa*’ (tithing) ‘*ajinde*’ (resurrection) and ‘*ikore*’ (harvest) among others. A significant feature of the assimilatory influence of Christianity is also the introduction of western type of education which has transformed the Lagos citizenry into not only an enlightened society but also a bilingual community.

Generally, since Christianity has flourished alongside Islam and the traditional religion over the years, specific aspects of Lagos social life have undergone significant changes at both individual and group levels and these have implications for language acquisition and L1 attrition.

**VI. Conclusion**

The nature of Lagos that accommodates various ethnic, tribal and religious groups accounts for the present state of its language repertoire which emphasizes Yoruba-English bilingualism. The fact that various groups had easy access to Lagos in order to carry out religio-cultural, socio-economic and political activities is what is today responsible for the cosmopolitan status of the city. In conformity with other urban cities of the world, issues of diversity, hybridism and prestige have cropped up in the discussion of the language situation in Lagos. Without any doubt, Lagos is a pot-pourri of different peoples and tribes and these have had noticeable impacts on the linguistic repertoire, language choice and language shift in the area. The traditional Yoruba dialect of Central Lagos known as Eko has received the penetrating influence of other Yoruba ethnic groups as seen in the infusion of phonological and lexical components. This arguably has changed the dialect from its pure form but has also enriched it with the phonological and lexical contributions. In spite of these infusions, Eko dialect is imbued with a great amount of prestige and admiration from other Yoruba ethnic groups simply because of the urban nature of the dialect and because of its association with education and class. As stated earlier, Lagos Yoruba prides itself as elitist and this is obvious in the communicative interaction of its users as they simultaneously use it along with English resulting in the mixing and switching of codes. This situation presents a unique bilingual phenomenon which permits the language user to combine English and Yoruba on the wider plane. However, in the restricted sense, the form of Yoruba chosen may permit a combination of Lagos Yoruba and any other Yoruba dialect. We have to state here that Lagos dwellers who are natives of other Nigerian linguistic groups speak Lagos Yoruba and this is what they combine with either English or their own native languages in their verbal interactions. In conclusion, the essence of the Nigerian nation is captured in Yoruba-English bilingualism as encapsulated in Lagos. This is due to the fact that English is officially and compulsorily shared by every educated Nigerian and because Yoruba language in Lagos is also attractive, not only to other Yoruba ethnic groups but also to other Nigerian linguistic groups. This attraction is a consequence of the prestige associated with Lagos as a cosmopolitan city and the pre-supposition that Lagos symbolizes value, acceptance and quality.
References


