

LANGUAGE USE BY EKITI STATE UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES

¹Samuel Ayodele DADA; ²George Adekunle ADEKUNLE-OJO and
³Olorunfemi, Deji DAVID

^{1,2&3}Department of English and Literary Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti

¹samuelayodele2002@yahoo.com;

²george.ojo@eksu.edu.ng

³dejidaavid43@gmail.com

Abstract

This study is a sociolinguistic analysis which examines the pattern of language use among undergraduates of the Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. Descriptive research design was employed and a sample of 220 students was selected using a purposive sampling technique based on gender, age and socio-economic background of the students. Data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques. Results show that a significant proportion of students of the university are bilinguals. The majority of students prefer English as their primary language of communication. Yoruba is the second most preferred language, and Pidgin is commonly used for informal communication. Code-switching, especially between English and native languages, is a common practice when communicating with friends and classmates.

Keywords: Language use, Code-Switching, Bilingualism, Communication, Society

Introduction

Language remains the backbone and bedrock to the development of human societies because it is a vital aspect of communication. It refers to the expression of human communication through which knowledge, belief and behaviour can be experienced, explained and shared (NIDCD, 2021). Language is also considered to be an expression of ideas by which speech-sounds combined into words; words combine to form sentences.

The use of language has become a perennial object of concern in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It has been suggested that people learn to communicate effectively through active participation in goal-directed communicative events with other members of their community. In these events, people's participation is guided in meaningful ways by the more

competent members. There is no doubt that adequate knowledge and communicative competence is required for one to communicate appropriately and effectively with others in different sociocultural situations, be they public or private, festive or solemn, frequent or rare.

According to Crystal, Robinson and Robert (2021), language is also defined as a system of traditional, spoken, physical, or written symbols through which human beings express themselves as members of a social group and participants in its culture. Language serves a variety of purposes, including communication, identity expression, play, imaginative expression, and emotional expression. Language is an essential component of human interaction; humans are the only species that have perfected cognitive verbal communication, despite the fact that all species have

ways of communicating. Language allows humans to communicate our thoughts, feelings, and ideas with others and can also develop and destroy societies.

Every area of human existence and society is influenced by language. In reality, it is better understood when viewed through the lens of its social context. This is because language is a functional mode of communication and an essential historical product as well as a source of future development. In its vocal perspective, language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. That indicates that different communication methods result in different languages; however, the degree of difference required to produce a different language cannot be precisely defined (Holmes, 2012). No two persons speak in the same way; as a result, one can recognize friends' voices on the phone and distinguish a number of invisible speakers in a radio broadcast. No one would claim that they speak distinct languages, though (Butterfield, 2008).

Language use on the other hand refers to the communicative meaning of language. This also refers to the usage of language that is founded on rules for creating it and the structures that are utilized to create it. According to Yoos (2009), language use is the way we do things with words. Its application is related to how we use words to think about our own thinking. Language is required in order to consider our use of words in any act of cognition, identification, or recognition. Language use helps to understand the differences between the usage of words and their meanings.

Furthermore, Krech et al. (1962) elucidates the main ideas of using language from its characteristics; language is the most important medium of communication, language depicts both the personality of the

individual and his historical background, and language allows the progress and spread of society, ensures the permanence of societies, and the successful operation and control of a prominent social crowd. Hence, the patterns of speaking are quite different. Language pattern explains how communication takes place through the use of sentences. In other words, language pattern refers to the way in which the core parts of a sentence are put together. Basically, these patterns include a subject noun and a verb while complicated ones can include a subject noun, verb-transitive, direct object, and object noun complement (Foulkes et al., 2010).

Language variation implies more than one way of saying the same thing. In essence, there are differences in pronunciation, word choice, or morphology and syntax. The concept of language variation is centred in sociolinguistics. This is because language variation is considered at different levels which include individual, regional, national and global levels (Fischer, 2015). Language variation is significant because it contributes cultural values to the various methods of employing the language function or other aspects of language such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and so on. At individual levels Sociolinguistics still attempts to look at how the biological makeup of individuals have influenced the variations while at other levels, this might not be the case because, the variations are examined in a more social context (Dong, 2014).

Sociolinguists always interested in the study of social and cultural aspects of language. They attempt to isolate those linguistic features that are used in particular situations and that mark the various social relationships among the participants and the significant elements of the situation

(Britannica, 2021). The field of Sociolinguistics is an important one, most especially, when it deals with language use, particularly, spoken language. To put it more specifically, socio-linguists are often interested in examining the correlation, influence and impact of linguistic variables and independent socio-variables. Questions such as the influence of some social factors (age, sex, education, occupation, race, peer group identification etc.) on language among selected groups are often asked. For this study, analysis of language use among undergraduate students of the Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti has been examined with regards to the social variables.

Globally, sociolinguists have been interested in issues surrounding language and social identity while also attempting to look at the factors that influence variations in language patterns and use. No doubt, sociolinguists have examined at different levels, the social and cultural factors underpinning variations or differences in language patterns and use. Language use among undergraduates is very important because it aids learning; students find it difficult to make a sense of their fields of studies or communicate their knowledge without adequate language skills. There is no doubt that series of studies have been carried out on assessing language use variations and contributing social factors (Jowitt, 1991; Adetugbo, 1993; Awonusi, 2004; Akere, 2004; Bamgbose, 2004; Udofot, 2004; Stump, 2007; Brownson, 2012; Hazen, 2017; Barzan, & Heydari, 2019; Komang, 2023). However, most of these studies have only considered few social factors, such as age and sex.

The language use has been a major challenge facing the majority of the students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The limitation this can bring to

their academic performance is unlimited because English remains the language of instruction and medium to effectively communicate their ideas and knowledge to the public and also to showcase their qualities. Although, other factors, such as code-switching, pervasive influence of English and inadequate implementation of language policies have played their roles on the decline in the proficiency of language use among undergraduates. However, the socio-economic factors that contribute to the difference in language use and its influence on the educational attainment of the students precipitate the motivation for this study.

The aim of this study is to carry out a sociolinguistic analysis of language use among undergraduates of Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti (EKSU) with the specific objective of examining the patterns of language use among Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti undergraduates.

Methodology

The research purposively sampled 220 undergraduate students from EKSU. The data used for this study was collected from primary source, specifically, from EKSU undergraduates. A total of 220 copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents to obtain information on the socio-cultural background of the respondents and a column to write few sentences. Audio samples were also collected from the participants. The data was collected with the help of two research assistants. Data obtained were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were used for the descriptive analysis of the data obtained. t-test and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical

techniques were employed to analyse the variations and influence of the socio-economic variables on language used among the students.

Review of Related Studies

The work of Oluikpe and Oyetunde (2015) on gender and language variation among undergraduates in Nigeria using a survey method finds that gender significantly influenced language use among Nigerian undergraduates, with female students using more Standard English than male students. The study was conducted in Nigeria and provides insight into language variation in a Nigerian context. In a similar study conducted in Spain and focused on Peninsular Spanish. Fernández-Amaya and Bernárdez-Rodal (2019) examine gender and language variation among Spanish undergraduates using Corpus analysis. The study finds that gender significantly influenced language use among Spanish undergraduates, with female students using more standard Spanish than male students. Although, these studies examined the gender aspects of language variation, they did not give account of the fact that gender might be sufficient in explaining variations in language use among undergraduates.

Yaacob and Hamzah (2016) carried out a study among Malaysian undergraduates using a survey method. The study finds that age significantly influenced language variation among Malaysian undergraduates, with younger students using more informal language than older students. Similarly, Abdullah and Harun (2019) examine the age and language variation among Malaysian undergraduate students. The study employed the survey method. The study finds that age significantly influenced language variation among Malaysian undergraduates, with younger students

using more non-standard Malay than older students. Despite the outcomes of these studies, it could hardly be used to make reasonable inference on age influence on language use and variation because it focuses mainly on Malaysian Malay and Malaysian English and may not be applicable to other varieties of English.

Code-mixing and code-switching are prevalent phenomena in educational settings, particularly among students in Nigerian universities. Studies have shown that these linguistic behaviours are commonly observed in various contexts, including classroom interactions, social conversations, and educational discourse (Oluwoye, 2021; Khan *et al.*, 2022; Alawiya *et al.*, 2020; Riadil and Dilts, 2022). The surface features of code-switching among Yoruba/English/Pidgin English bilinguals in the Nigerian online community have been explored, shedding light on the prevalence and patterns of code-switching in this context (Oluwoye, 2021). Additionally, teachers' perceptions regarding code-switching and code-mixing as scaffoldings in teaching L2 speaking skills have been investigated, providing insights into how educators view and utilize these linguistic phenomena in the educational process (Khan *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, research has delved into the code-switching and code-mixing practices among students, revealing the types and dominance of these behaviours in educational settings (Alawiya *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, the impact of code-mixing and code-switching on language learners' motivation has been critically analyzed, highlighting the implications of these linguistic phenomena on the learning process (Sameen *et al.*, 2021). Also, the position of Nigerian Pidgin English in multilingual Nigeria has

been a subject of study, considering the opposition it faces from English, Nigerian languages, and foreign languages, which may influence its growth and influence in the 21st century (Iwuchukwu, 2017).

On the influence of income on language use, Perez-Llantada and Ferguson (2017) examine language use among Spanish-speaking university students employing corpus analysis as the research method. The study finds that income level did not significantly influence language use among Spanish-speaking university students. Specifically, the study focuses on Spanish as a heritage language. This result contradicts the findings of Nault and Desrocher (2020) that employs the same research methods to examine the influence of income on language variation among Francophone university students in Canada. The study found that income level significantly influenced language use among Francophone university students in Canada, with students from higher income families using more standard French than those from lower income families. This is an indication that the type of language could influence the relationship between income and language variation.

While accounting for parental education and language use, Huang (2018) conducts a survey research to find out the influence of parental education and language use among Chinese undergraduates. It was discovered that parental education significantly influenced language use among Chinese undergraduates, with students whose parents had higher education levels using more standard Mandarin than those whose parents had lower education levels. Although, this study only provides insight into language variation in a Chinese context, it is a strong indication that parental education could be a factor to watch out

for in sociolinguistic analysis. Lastly, on establishing a link between high school background and language variation, Kelm and Zembylas (2018), using a survey method find that high school background significantly influenced language variation among US undergraduates, with students who attended private high schools using more formal language than those who attended public high schools.

Data Analysis

Language Use Patterns

Table 1 below represents the summary of languages spoken by EKSU undergraduates.

Table 1: Number of Languages Spoken

Number of Languages	EKSU Students	
	<i>f</i>	%
1	39	17.7
2	123	55.9
3	27	12.3
More than 3	31	14.1
Total	220	100.0

Result presented in Table 1 on the number of languages spoken by EKSU students revealed that 17.7% speak only one language, 55.9% reported speaking two languages, 12.3% reported speaking three languages, and 14.1% reported speaking more than three languages. The data suggests that a significant percentage of students from EKSU speak more than one language. In this case, the majority of students speak two languages. The higher percentage of students speaking two languages could be due to the fact that bilingualism is common, and students may have proficiency in their native language as well as the official or dominant language.

Preferred Language of Communication

Preferred languages of communication of EKSU undergraduates are found in the table below.

Table 2: Preferred Language of Communication

Language	EKSU Students	
	<i>f</i>	%
English	118	53.6
Yoruba	48	21.8
Igbo	0	0.0
Hausa	0	0.0
Pidgin	54	24.5
Total	220	100.0

Table 2 revealed that among EKSU students, 53.6% preferred English as their language of communication, 21.8% preferred Yoruba, and 24.5% preferred Pidgin. No EKSU students in the sample reported a preference for Igbo or Hausa. From the foregoing, it is obvious that English is the most preferred language of communication for students from EKSU, with a significant majority favouring it. This suggests that English is a widely used language for communication and may be the medium of instruction in academic settings. Yoruba is the second most preferred language of communication among EKSU students. This is not surprising, as Yoruba is one of the major languages in the region where these universities are located, and many students may be fluent in it. Pidgin is also a commonly preferred language of communication among students of the university, most especially, in an informal setting.

Frequency of use of English as Primary Language of Communication on Campus

Below is the frequency of use of English as Primary Language of Communication on Campus.

Table 3: Frequency of use of English as Primary Language of Communication on Campus

Mode	EKSU Students	
	<i>f</i>	%
Never	0	0.0
Seldom	31	14.1
Occasionally	22	10.0
Often	136	61.8
All the time	31	14.1
Total	220	100.0

Table 3 provides information on the frequency of use of English as the primary language of communication on campus. According to the result, it was revealed that among EKSU students, none of the respondents reported never using this mode of communication. Instead, 14.1% reported using it seldomly, 10% occasionally, 61.8% often, and 14.1% all the time. The data indicates that students from the university engage in the specified mode of communication, with none reporting never using it. This suggests that this particular mode of communication is widely adopted by students of the institution. The majority of students report using this mode of communication often. This suggests that this mode of communication is a common and frequently used means of interaction in both academic and social contexts.

The use of English as medium of instruction has positively impacted my academic performance

Table 4 below revealed that the use of English as medium of instruction

has positively impacted my academic performance.

Table 4: The use of English as medium of instruction has positively impacted my academic performance

Options	EKSU Students	
	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	211	95.9
No	9	4.1
Total	220	100.0

Table 4 shows that students from EKSU (Ekiti State University) perceive the impact of using English as the medium of instruction on their academic performance. Among EKSU students, an even higher percentage, 95.9%, responded that English as the medium of instruction has positively impacted their academic performance while 4.1% responded otherwise. This result suggested that the vast majority of the students feel that using English as the medium of instruction has had a positive impact on their academic performance. This indicates that English is perceived as an effective and beneficial medium for education.

Positive changes in students’ language use since starting undergraduate studies at EKSU

The table below answers the question of if there are positive changes in the language use since the commencement of the students undergraduate studies at EKSU.

Table 5: Are there positive changes in your language use since starting your undergraduate studies at EKSU?

Options	EKSU Students	
	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	220	100.0
No	0	0.0

Total	220	100.0
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In Table 5, all EKSU students, responded that there have been positive changes in their language use since starting their undergraduate studies at EKSU. The results suggest that all students believe they have experienced positive changes in their language use since starting their undergraduate studies at EKSU. This indicates that the academic environment and exposure to diverse linguistic contexts have had a beneficial impact on their language skills and proficiency.

Discussion and Findings

The findings of the study cover the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, and the language use pattern of students among EKSU undergraduates.

On the socio-demographic distribution of the respondents, it was shown that the gender was divided with a notable number of male and female students represented in the sample. The students were distributed across various undergraduate levels which were to adequately examine the situation across board. Respondents spanned a range of age groups, with a concentration of students between 15 and 35 years old. The data revealed differences in the choice of primary and secondary education institutions, with some students attending public schools, while others attended private schools. Findings obtained on the language use pattern of undergraduates of EKSU revealed that a significant proportion of students from both universities reported speaking more than one language. Bilingualism is common, and the majority of students speak two languages most especially when interacting with other students or their colleagues at school. Majority of them chose English as the most preferred language of communication

with a substantial majority favouring it. Yoruba is the second most preferred language, given its regional significance. Pidgin is also commonly preferred for informal communication. This finding aligns with that of Chukueggu (2010) who found out that bilingualism is common among students in Nigerian universities which also accounts for the dynamic interplay between English and indigenous languages. This is also true with the findings of Nwosu et al. (2022) who claimed that language use among undergraduates particularly in an informal setting usually reflects the bilingualism situation of the country. A significant proportion of students are involved in English language development activities and vast majority of students of the university believe that using English as the medium of instruction has positively impacted their academic performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this sociolinguistic study provided valuable insights into the language use patterns among undergraduate students from EKSU. The findings revealed that bilingualism is common among students, with a preference for English as the primary language of communication, followed by Yoruba and Pidgin for informal interactions. Code-switching is a common practice, particularly when communicating with peers. Gender and the type of High School attended also played a role in determining language preferences. These findings contribute to our understanding of language dynamics in higher education, paving the way for further research and the development of more inclusive linguistic and educational policies.

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