

Patterns of Language Choice in Contact Situations between Nigerian Secondary School Refugee Children in Koza

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the domains of language use and choice of the children of refugees in koza. The analyses are crucial on the basis of the fact that language choice and use have been a debated issue whenever languages come into contact. It also argues that the indigenous language of the refugee students may be threatened as they try to integrate the host community linguistically and socio-economically. It uses Fishman's (1968) domain analysis following the different domains in which respondents' languages choices within the community. The findings revealed that the respondents relatively maintain their mother tongues but have largely succeeded in integrating the host community's activities and may likely lose their indigenous language and identities progressively in the process of continuous stay and integration. The results also indicated that the participants may gradually lose their identities and the indigenous language could be endangered because some of them have positive attitudes towards the host community's language and prefer to stay permanently in Koza.

Keywords: Contact, Identity, loss, endangered, language shift

INTRODUCTION

Minority language speakers naturally wish to safeguard their traditional language and culture not only to preserve their group identity and culture, but also desire to use other languages to enable wider communication and socioeconomic advancement. A community may progressively abandon or alter its language and cultural way of life, including its socio-economic activities, situations of inter-ethnic wars, incidence of disease and natural catastrophe, settlement in high risk zones, change of attitudes and values in order to be absorbed by another community for survival. Some of the children of Nigerian secondary school refugees that settled in Koza seem to be progressively losing their languages due to the need to be linguistically and socioeconomically integrated into the host community.

In situations whereby communities have detached themselves either voluntarily or by force from their traditional socioeconomic way of life like the Nigerian secondary school refugees in Koza, their levels of language maintenance are being progressively affected. This is because, in most cases, they have to become dependent on the host community in order to be socioeconomically fulfilled in their new environment. Koza, a locality found in the

Mayo Tsanaga Divison in the Far North region of Cameroon received speakers from some neighboring communities fleeing the Boko Haram insurgency.

Migration due to poverty or natural disasters and crises like Boko haram forced some people to seek refuge in neighboring tribes like the case of refugees who have been residing in Koza. Many communities, especially those that are socioeconomically disadvantaged and speak minority languages, were caught up in that critical dilemma, as they had to choose between survival of their languages and access to economic and social benefits or resources (Batibo, 2001, 2005). In this study, it will be demonstrated that some of the refugee secondary students are progressively shifting to the dominant languages like Fulfulde, French and even Mafa in their quest for education, social services among other opportunities in Koza. When language shift occurs, a more or less noticeable mismatch (depending on the degree of shift) between the language that parents speak to each other, on the one hand, and to their own children, on the other, must be expected (see Fishman 1991: 87-109). However, a discrete divide – interactions among parents in one language and with children in a different one – is not the rule. Even when shift is at an advanced stage, different types of interactions

may still be observed and those isolated instances where the parents still speak the minority language, both with each other and with their own children can still be found. This rarely occurs. However, when it does, it is associated primarily with the after-effects of individual, sporadic forms of language loyalty: an open rejection of the language shift process. At the other extreme, there are those parents who use the dominant language as their sole variety of interaction, and this is transmitted to their children. When the entire population follows such a behavioral pattern, language shift is said to have reached its final stage and the chances of reversal are minimal (Fishman 1991).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is grounded on domain analysis by Fishman (1972:244). as an appropriate theoretical approach to the study of language choice by some Nigerian refugee children. This domain analysis, in simple terms, refers to “*who speaks what language to whom and when*” (Fishman 1972:244). It is suggested that in a multiannual context like Koza, for instance, the respondents have several languages at their disposal which they use in different situations. Thus, one language may be more appropriate than the other in certain domains and usually it is the dominant or prestigious language that is used in high domains, while the minority language is selected and used in low domains (cited in Hsi-nanYeh et al., 2004:80). According to Fishman, “proper usage indicates that only one of the theoretically co-available

languages or varieties will be chosen by particular classes or inter locator son particular kinds of occasions to discuss particular kinds of topics” (1972:244). According to Chatterjee, quoted by Columns (2005: 126) “ridiculous or sometimes comical will be the effect if the norms of situational selection between the two are violated”. This study analyzes language patterns of language choice in contact situations among some Nigerian refugee children in Koza. It is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that looks at how the informants select different languages in different contexts. The choice of languages might be unconscious but any speaker’s choice is made depending on the subject matter, the respondents’ relationship with the interlocutor, the mode of communication, the context of discourse and other variables Batibo (2005:43). Thus, the migration of the refugees to Koza brought about the constant contact between their languages and those spoken in Koza and this gave rise to language competition, overlap and has in turn certainly created complex dominance patterns and linguistic marginalization.

METHODOLOGY

Selection of Participants

Data for this study was obtained from a total of 70 respondents both pupils and students in Koza.19of the subjects were primary school pupils, 26 from Government secondary school while 25 were selected from Government Bilingual Government Bilingual High school as presented in table 1 below.

Table1. Number of respondents from the selected schools at different levels in Koza

	Schools	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary	19	27.1	27.1	27.1
	Secondary	26	37.1	37.1	64.3
	High school	25	35.7	35.7	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

The table above shows that the respondents of both sexes were selected from Primary, Secondary and High schools in Koza. While the least 19(27.1%) were from primary schools, 26(37.1%) were from secondary and 25 (35.7%) were from High school. The analysis is an indication that some of the pupils and students were more in secondary and high schools than in primary school. One of the questions sought to determine the respondents’ length of time spent in Koza as presented in the following table.

The Survey Items

The questionnaire was the main instrument that was used to collect data for this study. To address phenomenon of under investigation, some questions were carefully designed to find out respondents’ language use patterns. The questionnaire had six questions. The first question was designed to find out respondents’ educational institution and level and the second intended an exploration of the participants’ family background information in order to determine whether their Mother Tongues (MTs)

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were being maintained or they are shifting to dominant languages. The second section was designed essentially to assess participants' language use patterns in some proposed contexts. The last section evaluated not only the respondents' degree of multilingual competence in the proposed languages, but also the factors that might have contributed to their fluency or lack of it and the language that can be considered as a potential threat to their MT. A lot has been studied and written about how the

speakers of the smaller languages in a contact situation are progressively losing their linguistic and cultural identity by shifting to a major language or languages that are widely spoken in the locality. Some of those settled in Koza from different localities were pupils and students. One of the questions was intended to find out the respondents who were in primary, secondary and high schools and the results are presented in the tables below.

Table2. Respondents' duration in Koza

Number of Years		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Two years	1	1.4	1.5	1.5
	Three years	15	21.4	22.1	23.5
	Four years	31	44.3	45.6	69.1
	more than four years	21	30.0	30.9	100.0
	Total	68	97.1	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.9		
Total		70	100.0		

As presented in the table above, 1(1.5%) of the respondents has spent two years in Koza, and 15 (22.1%) have stayed for three years, 31(45.6%) have spent four years, while 21(30.9%) have been living for more than four years in Koza. The numbers of years ranging from two to five years are sufficient for refugees' children who

are adapting to a new environment to learn the language of the locality. Although some of the respondents have spent more time than others in Koza, they have relatively learnt the languages spoken in the community to different degrees as shown in the following table.

Table3. Respondents' language use in selected domains in Koza

Languages Used	Freq.	In the market	At home	In the church	In the mosque	With classmates in school	With people of this community	with your neighbors
French	F	/	/	4		59	5	1
	%	/	/	11.8		84.3	7.1	1.4
English	F	/	/	/	/	2	/	/
	%	/	/	/	/	2.9	/	/
Pidgin English	F	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
	%	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Fulfulde	F	37	4	14	26	6	36	37
	%	52.9	5.9	41.2	86.7	8.6	51.4	52.3
Mafa	F	33	17	15	1	3	29	31
	%	47.1	25.0	44.1	3.3	4.3	41.4	44.3
Mother tongue	F	/	47	1	3	/	/	1
	%	/	69.1	2.9	10.0	/	/	1.4
Total	F	70	68	34	40	70	70	70
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

This table shows the languages that the respondents use in different domains such as, markets, home, church, mosque, school, community and the neighborhood. The analysis of data in the market domain revealed that the majority 37(52.9%) of the respondents use Fulfulde in the market while a few, 33(47.1%) use the Mafa language. These results reflect the real context of Koza where Fulfulde, the region's lingua franca dominates in commercial

activities between buyers and sellers in the market as well as Mafa which is used mostly by the indigenes among themselves.

In order to determine the language used at home, a question was posed on the languages of communication in the family (i.e. between children and their parents). This domain is significant particularly since it helps in indicating the degree of intergenerational transmission and/or endangerment of the

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respondents' mother tongues. The results of data analyzed in this domain indicate that the majority 47(69.1%) of the respondents use their respective indigenous languages at home while only a few 4 (5.9%) and 17 (25%) use Mafa and Fulfulde respectively. The high percentage in the home domain could be an indication that most refugee children are still using their respective languages with their parents at home while a few who were fast in learning Fulfulde and Mafa probably use them occasionally at home. The need to be fully integrated into the host community may be one of the reasons why some parents may not be transmitting their languages perfectly to their children at home and consequently, they may develop negative attitudes towards their own mother tongue and this may lead to its endangerment.

Concerning religion, the analysis show that some use French 4 (11.8%), others 14(42.2 %) use Fulfulde and 15(44.1%) use Mafa. The majority of those who were neutral were certainly non-Christian or pagans. As refugees, some of the churches they used to attend in their home country may not be available in Koza. With regards to the Mosque, the data indicate that the majority of them 26(86.7%) of the respondents use Fulfulde while other 40 were still neutral. These results are indication that most of the respondents were not very concerned with issues of religion.

In the educational domain, the results of the analysis clearly showed that the majority of them 59(84.3%) use French while 2(2.9%) use English and 6(8.6%) use Fulfulde. The dominance of French in school following the

results of the data might be due to the fact that it is the region's first official language and is also the main medium of instruction in education while English is taught only as a foreign language in schools. Although only 8.6% of the respondents claim to use Fulfulde in school, more respondents use it in and out of school since it is one of the widely spoken languages of the region.

As far as the language of interaction with people of the community is concerned, the majority of the respondents 36(51.4%) use Fulfulde which is spoken and understood relatively by different ethnic groups in Koza followed by Mafa 29(41.1%), community's main language and a few 5(7.1%) who claim to speak French. The results analyzed here still indicate that Fulfulde is a lingua Franca widely spoken and some of the refugee parents and children were already relatively knowledgeable in using it in their daily interactions.

The last domain investigated was respondents' use of language with their neighbors. The analysis of the data revealed that the majority of them, 37 (52.3%) use Fulfulde while 31(44.3%) use Mafa. The impressive number who speak Mafa, the indigenous language spoken in Koza is a clear indication that the respondents are not only learning the Mafa language, but also Fulfulde and are progressively integrating the community. The results of this analysis are also buttressed by those in table 4, which clearly indicate that the respondents are relatively adapting to the linguistic and cultural traditions of Koza.

Table4. Respondents' adaption to the linguistic and cultural traditions of Koza

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	2	2.9	6.1	6.1
	Yes	31	44.3	93.9	100.0
	Total	33	47.1	100.0	
Missing	System	37	52.9		
Total		70	100.0		

As table 4 reveals, 2(6.1%) of the respondents have not yet adapted to the linguistic and cultural traditions of Koza, while 31(93.9 %) were relatively adapting and the majority 37(52.9%) were undecided or neutral. The neutrality of some of the respondents was probably due to their loyalty to their respective indigenous languages or because they were still

learning the host community's language and cultural values. Even though some of the respondents did not openly indicate whether or not they were adapting to the linguistic and cultural traditions of Koza, a question was asked to find out if they were comfortably settled in the area and the results are presented in the following table.

Table5. Percentages of respondents' comfort in Koza

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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	Very comfortable	21	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Less comfortable	11	15.7	15.7	45.7
	Comfortable	38	54.3	54.3	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

This table clearly shows that 21(30%) of the respondents are very comfortably settled while 11(15.7%) feel at ease and 38(54.3%) feel comfortable. Since a majority 38(54.3%) feel at ease, it is probably why some are learning their languages while others might prefer to stay indefinitely in Koza in order to be more socio-economically integrated into the locality's way of life. This implies that the more they stay in

Koza, the better they may master the host community's languages and the greater they may forget their respective languages. Concerning the possibility for the respondents to return to their respective home countries after the stabilization of the Boko Haram insurgency, the results of data analyzed are presented in the table below.

Table6. Respondent s' parents plan to return to their home country

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	32	45.7	71.1	71.1
	Yes	13	18.6	28.9	100.0
	Total	45	64.3	100.0	
Missing	System	25	35.7		
Total		70	100.0		

As can be seen in the above table, the majority (71.1%) of the respondents do not plan either to remain in Koza indefinitely or to return to their communities of origin, while only 13 (28.9%) were not planning to go back and 25(35.7%) were indifferent or undecided. The few respondents who wish to go remain in the area may be those who have succeeded relatively in integrating the linguistic and socio-cultural life of Koza. The findings reveal that the respondents relatively maintain their mother tongues but have relatively succeeded in integrating the host community's activities and languages and this might lead to the loss of their indigenous languages and identities but may also endanger the language in the face of the respondents' prolonged stay in the host community. In effect, if the respondents do not return to their community, there is a possibility for their language to be displaced in future.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study has revealed that most of the respondents are relatively maintaining their indigenous languages and progressively learning the languages spoken in Koza to different degrees in order to integrate the socio-economic life of the community. Although their mother tongue is still used in their respective homes, it may be endangered if they do not return to Nigeria. The choices that the respondents make indifferent languages in different situations largely depend on the topic of discourse and the respondents' relationship with the interlocutor,

and the mode of communication. This is evident from research findings which indicate that the majority the majority 59(84.3%) use French, 36(51.4%) use Fulfulde widely spoken by different ethnic groups in Koza while a some 33(47.1%) use Mafa. In Koza, Mafa and Fulfulde languages have entrenched themselves to an extent that most of the respondents find both languages appealing and that could probably the reason why some of the respondents are already learning them in the community and French at school.

The results corroborate those by Myers-Cotton's (1993), findings which conclude that knowing and speaking more than one language in one conversation in one day is the rule rather than the exception in Africa. While comparing Africa and the West, Myers-Scotton (1993), notes that one can survive with one language; in Africa, this is virtually impossible. Schmieid (1991) also indicates that in the West, bilingualism is the result of being taught a second language at school but in Africa, bilingualism is the norm and a way of life.

The data was analyzed under the analysis of Fishman's (1972) theoretical approach which considers domains as institutional contexts in which one language is more likely to be appropriate than another and is to be seen as constellations of other factors such as topic, location and participants. The sociolinguistic notion of domain was formalized by Fishman (1972), who stressed that different settings

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characteristically call for the use of different languages in a multilingual society (or varieties of the same language in a monolingual society). Fishman's (1972) theoretical approach was used because it is relevant to the language choices the respondents face in their interactions in the host community. Although different domains are employed in different studies, this paper analyzed language use in the market, at home, in the religious domain, in the community and in the neighborhood.

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the patterns of language use and choice of refugee students in Koza. The findings of the study indicate that there is relative transmission of the respondents' indigenous languages in the family although it is possible for it to be endangered because of their socioeconomic integration and their need to survive in the host community. The analyses generally showed that the majority of the respondents have succeeded linguistically to integrate the socio-economic activities in Koza as a means of survival. The linguistic context of Koza is another demonstration of the multilingual nature of most African communities as far as language choice and use is concerned. Although the respondents respond to interlocutors according to the mode of communication and the context of discourse, it is not just the official language like French that is likely to endanger their languages, but also Mafa and Fulfulde.

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