

Evaluating the socio-cultural expressions of ideology and identity construction in the Ẹdo (Benin) guilds

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of Edo language to mark the linguistic identity of the guild and to express their cultural ideology in the Ẹdo (Benin) society. The Edo guild system is a professional body associated with the Edo (Benin) socio-cultural and political institutions revolving around the Monarchy. The guilds further represent the association of the brass and bronze casters and are organized and located in Igun Street along Sokponba Road in the Benin metropolis of Edo State. Bucholtz and Hall's Socio-Cultural Linguistic Approach was adopted as the theoretical framework. This theory was adopted for a better appraisal of the ideological and identity issues addressed in the study. Data were collected through in depth interview of three (03) principal informants (individuals with knowledge of the activities of the guilds so examined) and direct observation of interaction between the members of the different guilds. The data collected were subjected to discourse and lexical analyses. The cultural tenet of the guild's (ideology) is responsible for the secret nature of their activities which has contributed to the emergence of the distinct register mentioned here. The guilds can be grouped ideologically as one but in terms of identity, different groups exist due to the specialized nature of their activities as seen from their use of the Ẹdo (Benin) language. The implication of these findings from the guild system is that the choice of language use is determined by some ideological orientation which in the context of this study is synonymous with the cultural values of the society that creates such distinctions between royals and commoners' identities.

Keywords: Linguistic Identity, Linguistic Ideology, Variation, the Ẹdo (Benin) language, Guild System.

Introduction

This study investigates the Edo guild system with reference to the concepts of ideology and identity which emerge from language use. This is due to the fact that very few works exist on the social or sociolinguistic aspects of Edo (Benin) language especially from the perspective of group and intergroup relations and the cultural aspects of language use. The present study seeks to account for the discourse patterns of the guilds in the Edo (Benin) society in the course of intergroup relations with a view to discerning their ideological orientation and the process of identity construction through group interaction. The study also seeks to navigate the link between ideology and identity in the course of language use and the effects of the former on the latter in group and intergroup discourses and social relations.

The concepts of identity and ideology fall within the grouping of external linguistics and represent the major theme of any ethnolinguistic investigation. These two concepts are highly connected yet maintain some levels of distinction and are often used in association with each other in most studies in Sociolinguistics (Ajayi, 2016). The theory of social identity can be traced to the works of Tajfel (1975, 1978). It emerged some decades ago as a socio-psychological concept for theorizing social processes, (Capozza and Brown 2002). It is a theory about the self with emphasis on individual and group distinction in any social setting.

The paper examines the interactions of ideology, identity and variation in the Edo (Benin) society and how this in turn affects the use of the language. Emphasis will be on the ideological features of the Edo (Benin) society which create such group identities as the ‘Guild’ whose use of language with some special and secret codes generates a variety of the Edo (Benin) language. In other words, the study will examine the ideological structure of the Edo (Benin) society and how this has created different group identities with their own varieties of the language. It is important to mention here, based on a pilot study, that the guilds use different registers, which is a reflection of their differing activities in the society (Aigbedo 2022). So there exists no joint register as they operate independently of one another but controlled by the same palace societies with the same ideological orientation.

The Edo (Benin) People

It is worthy of note here that the name ‘Edo’ was introduced during the mid 15th Century when the then Oba, Ewuare I named the kingdom, known then as ‘Ubini,’ after his friend and saviour, ‘Edo’ as a result of the love shown by the latter to the Oba. But because this name had not gone into popular circulation as at the time of the Portuguese arrival, towards the end of Oba Ewuare’s reign, the land and people were referred to in their accounts and documents as ‘Benin’ from ‘Ubini’ which was the well-known name of the place then and this became known to the outside world. The result of this historical event led to the use of the two names simultaneously as Edo (Benin) with the former referring to the people and language while the latter refers to the seat of government and the monarch.

The Ẹdo (Benin) people are distributed over an area of 10,371 square miles and presently occupy the Seven Local Government Areas of Edo State which constitute the Edo South Senatorial District. They are:

- 1) Ego, with headquarters at Uselu
- 2) Ikpoba-Okha, with headquarters at Idogbo
- 3) Oredo, with headquarters in Benin City
- 4) Orhionmwo, with headquarters at Abudu
- 5) Ovia-North-East, with headquarters at Okada
- 6) Ovia-South-West, with headquarters at Iguobazuwa
- 7) Uhunmwode, with headquarters at Eho

As stated before now, Ẹdo is now the name of the language spoken by the people under the present study with historical connection to other languages now called ‘Edoid’ (Elugbe, 1986). This language was classified by Greenberg (1963) as a member of the ‘Kwa’ branch of the ‘Niger-Congo’ phylum and by Elugbe (1986) as a member of the ‘Central-Edoid’ group of languages. This classification by Greenberg (1963) above was modified later by Williamson and Blench (2000) as the West-Benue-Congo under the South-Volta-Congo (Proto-Benue-Kwa) phylum. This therefore places Ẹdo (and Edoid languages generally) in the same group with Yoruboid, Akokoid, Igbooid, Nupoid and others.

The language has a well-developed writing system, which is as a result of the activities of early Christian missionaries and other linguists like Melzian (1937), Egharevba (1966), etc. The present orthography, which is widely used and referred to as the ‘Standard Ẹdo Orthography’, was based on the recommendation of an Ad-hoc Committee on the language at the University of Lagos in 1974. This has been modified to its present form by Omozuwa (2010) and is the one adopted for this research.

The Ẹdo Guild System, Language, Ideology and Identity

It is on record that quite a few investigations have been carried out on the guild system both in the Ẹdo (Benin) language and a related language, Yoruba. There also exists a lot of literature covering the concepts of ideology, identity and variation either as separate entities or joint issues in sociolinguistics particularly in ethnographic studies. These are themes dwelling on the ever important issues of discourse structure, social hegemony and variation at the individual (idiolectal), regional (dialectal) and social (sociolectal) levels in the society (Aigbedo & Igboanusi 2022).

The concept of language ideology has its origin in the North American Linguistic Anthropology as a framework within which to explore the ‘mediating links between social forms and forms of talk (Johnson and Milani, 2010:4). In other words, different sections/segments of a society could possibly possess different orientation about a language in addition to the general norms regarding the language. This is why some sections of the society may see language as the tool for the portrayal of the group’s solidarity while others

may see it as the expressions of the behavior of the group. This disparity can be linked to the disparity in the society caused by age, gender, social class, profession (occupation) and literacy.

The issue of linguistic differentiation has also been treated as the core of language ideologies and practices of speakers (Hollington, 2015). Language ideologies comprise all sorts of ideas, practices and beliefs about a language, linguistic practices and speech forms and in turn it relates to attitudes of speakers, identity, aesthetics and epistemology (Schieffelin et. al. 1998). It can therefore be viewed and treated as the intersection of the different social factors that create distinction in a language and a society.

The impact of language on social identity has been examined in different domains across the world. For example in such domains as classroom (MacRuairc 2011), in nation building (Chua, 2010), in the market place (Chew 2014), in the refugee camp (Nwagbo, 2014), in the workplace (Nair-Venugupal, 2000), in the online community (Warschauer et. al. 2006) and in a political setting (Oloso, 2017). There exists an intricate relationship between language and identity which reflects the social division of individuals or groups in a community. There are several literatures devoted to this concept due to its relevance in the fields of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982) and discourse analysis (Chew 2014).

These different views of identity have highlighted amongst other things the issue of individualism whether, ethnic, social, religious or racial which serves to distinguish one from another. In other words, identity can be closely associated with the phenomena of convergence and divergence or employing the terms of Giles and Johnson (1987), ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’ distinctions which determine the choice of language use in a society. This leads to differences in language use and eventually gives way to variation in the language. The issue of identity is a socio-cultural linguistic phenomenon because it is a product of social interaction regulated by cultural norms (ideology).

Methodology

The present study utilizes two instruments for the collection of data: the interview method and observation method. These instruments were chosen for the sake of having a direct contact with informants and getting information that reflect the ideology, identity and attitudes of these informants for the purpose of fulfilling the research objectives of this paper. As a result of the nature of the present research and in the light of the research instruments utilized, the population of persons interviewed consisted of three (03) principal Benin Chiefs (two of whom also double as the heads of the guilds being described). These informants were purposively selected based on their wealth of experience in the affairs of the palace societies and the guilds in particular. The setting for the data collection was in the residences of these principal chiefs who are heads of the guilds being studied. These residences also housed the workshops where the main activities of the guilds are carried out and a collective point for the different members of the guilds. All interview sessions were recorded using a digital audio and video device for the sake of clarity and consistency and to make further verification

easier for the researcher. The collected data were organized, presented and discussed using discourse and lexical analysis under the socio-cultural linguistic frame of evaluation.

The language used by the Guilds: Er̄onmw̄o, Emat̄on (Ugb̄oha) and Ogbelaka

In this section, we will be evaluating the discourse practices of the different guilds and presenting their register side-by-side with conventional Edo usage to be able to portray the differences that exist between the two. The data will be presented on clausal bases which are extracted from larger discourse with emphasis on those expressions that portray the identity of the guilds (their profession) and their distinctive register. The guilds are therefore presented below in an alphabetical basis.

Igun Er̄onmw̄o - The Bronze Casters' Guild

The basic textual analysis of the clausal data obtained will be done in line with the principles of socio-cultural linguistics approach (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). This will involve the evaluation of the content of the text and the significance of certain items used in discourse. The distinct lexical items, which will constitute for this study, the register of the guild and their identity markers are underlined in the clauses. Let us consider some of the data from the guilds below:

- 1 Osaz̄e ya mu onw̄o nii ye ov̄en ne u gbe.
OSAZE GO CARRY HONEY THAT IN SUN THAT YOU BEAT
Osazee go and carry that honey and beat it in the sun
'Osaze carry that honey and spread it in the sun'
- 2 Efe ye nene onw̄o ya rue akpa nii.
EFE USE THE HONEY TO FOLD COIL THAT
Efe use the honey to fold that foetus
'Efe use the honey to make that coil'
- 3 Uyi ya suen ek̄en na ya gue ̄ere.
GO MIX SAND THIS TO COVER IT
Go and start the sand to cover it
'Go and mix the sand to cover it'
- 4 Ozo Do mu ona na ya khion ye erhen.
OZO COME CARRY ART WORK THIS IN HEAT PUT FIRE
Ozo come carry LG and LG in fire
Ozo come and carry this artwork and heat it on the fire

- 5 Osazẹe mu inwina ne ọ rre uwe erhen rre ovien ne.
 OSAZẸE CARRY WORK THAT IS BE INSIDE FIRE BRING COOKED
 HAS
 Osazẹe carry the work that is on the fire LG already
 Osazẹe bring the work that is on the fire for it is already cooked

It will be observed from the presentations above that the translation is in three parts: the first level (in caps) represent the lexical or word for word translation, the second level the literal or conventional Edo translation while the last level which is the free translation represents the point of view of the guild in question. So from here there is a direct contrast between the meaning of an item in the guild and that same item in conventional Edo usage. While this may not constitute a direct variation from the common Edo used by the generality of the public (because these expressions are still intelligible to a number of Edo speakers), they represent the core of the present study which is identity creation. These usages by the guilds (register) therefore constitute an identity marker as they are used to beside showing group's affiliation demonstrate the distinction between this group and other groups in the Edo (Benin) society.

Igun Ematọn (Ugbọha)-The Blacksmith Guild

In this section, we present the data obtained through the direct observation of the guild (Ugbọha) communication in the course of carrying out some of their assignments. These are presented in sentential/clausal forms and represent the careful and deliberate extraction of certain expressions considered different from common Edo usage in the discourses recorded. The data are presented below in clausal structures:

- 6 Larre ne a ya rrie itaemwi vbe Eguae
 COME THAT WE GO TAKE WORK IN PALACE
 Come that we go take talk in palace
 'Let us go and take our assignment from the palace'
- 7 Osayomorre, ye afian ya fian ematọn nii
 OSAYOMORRE USE CHISEL TO CUT IRON THAT
 Osayomorre, use a cutter to cut that iron
 'Osayomorre use a chisel to cut that iron'
- 8 Eħigie kakabọ kpee ekue na
 EħIGIE INTENSITY HIT BELLOW THIS
 Eħigie intensity hit bellow this
 'Eħigie is pumping the bellow very well'

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Èbẹn rre oḍe isekpokin, iran khian se ohian yo
SCEPTRE BE PLACE LEATHER THEY GOING SEW LEATHER ON
The sceptre is at the place of the leather-worker they will sew the leather
'The sceptre is at the leather-worker's place, they want to fix it'

10 Oṭenmwe ye ava ya dia ematon nii
MY BROTHER USE SPATULA TO STRAIGHTEN IRON THAT
My brother use LG to straighten that iron
'My brother/friend help me use a spatula to fix that iron'

This conversation involves a guild supervisor and some apprentices after getting an assignment involving a particular iron work from the palace. The underlined lexical items in structures above are the special usages by this guild (as mentioned before now) which are quite different from the common Edo usage by the rest of the population. It will be observed that in some instances there is no direct equivalence of the guild term in the common Edo thereby constituting what is known in lexical semantics as a 'Lexical Gap (LG)' as in 2-5. It is believed that these lexical items and the resultant LG in the corresponding common Edo version is an aspect of functional variation between the guild and the common Edo usage as these items are parts of the lexicon of the Ugbōha guild practitioners. While these expressions are generally used to obscure the activities of the guild from the eyes of the general guild, they also represent a demonstration of the professional outlook of their work.

It will be observed in this later transcript that there are a lot of lexical gaps when rendering the text from the GE to CE. While some of these structures are proverbial in nature which is one of the communicative styles of many of the guilds in the Edo society, some others are important to the guild in carrying out their daily activities which are not present in the society. It will be observed that in some instances, there is no corresponding rendition of the Guild text in Common Edo, the reason for this being the absence of an equivalent representation of these in the latter from the former. Though something close to it can be obtained in the language, the communicative effect would have been dented and misconstrued by then.

Igun Ogbelaka – The Guild of Royal Musician

The data here will be from the guild of the royal musician (Ogbelaka), one of the very important guilds in the Edo (Benin) society due to their prominent roles especially during festivals, coronations and funeral of the monarch or any member of the royal family. As we did for the other guilds before it, the data will be presented first in clauses with the unique lexical items underlined and these will subsequently be analyzed in the light of their use in the guild vis-à-vis conventional Edo usage. Consider the examples below:

- 11 Wa *fi emwi*
 YOU HIT DRUM
 Drive the drum
 ‘Hit the drum’
- 12 Wa *de obo yi.*
 YOU STOP DRUM
 You hold your hands
 ‘Please stop the drum’
- 13 Ovbie *obo ne o guan.*
 CHILD HAND THAT BE TALK
 The child of the speaking hand
 ‘Praises of the effect and efficacy of the drum’
- 14 Gia se ode *ogbe.*
 LET REACH ROAD HOUSE
 Lets us go to the inner section of the palace
 ‘Let us go home’
- 15 Gia *rrae.*
 LET JOIN CHORUS
 Let us raise it
 Let us join the chorus

A close look at this guild will show us copiously that it is dominated with certain lexical items such as: drums, maracas, gong, player and tones of drum beats which is a reflection of the nature or scope of their activities as one usually associated with musical instruments. This data like the preceding ones are translated on three levels: lexical, literal and free with the first representing the concept-concept translation or rendition, the second reflecting the general Edo rendition while the third and last represents the translation from the point of view of the guild.

The guilds as markers of cultural ideology and projection of social identity in Edo (Benin)

In this section we will be presenting the language used by the guilds as their ideological inclination (culturally) and identity marker in the Edo (Benin) society which is used to set them apart from each other on the one hand and from other members of the society on the other hand. These will be done with recourse to three of the principles of the socio-cultural linguistics approach to identity which are: emergence, positionality and indexicality.

The Edo guild system is a social or professional class of individuals whose use of the language reflects the socio-cultural orientation of group. The identity of the guild system is therefore derivable from the groups' interaction with members and non-membership through the use of their distinctive register in discourse. Identity as an emerging trend from concrete social interaction therefore revolves around the social cultural world of an individual on the one hand and the social context of interaction on the other hand.

The affiliation of the guild system with the Benin Monarchy and the constraint on membership has in the end projected them into a prestigious social circle which is a positive one for the guild's identity. This is a reflection of the positionality principle of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) which advocates the social positions of actors in a discourse as a determinant of their social influence. That is identity includes macro-level demographic categories such gender, age, social class. It also at the same time, includes local, ethnographic/cultural positions. And lastly, identity is being represented by temporary and interactionally emerged roles (joke teller, listener and so on). In the case of the guilds, their use of Edo project them as a group familiar with the cultural and social dictates of the Edo world with a mastery of the standard variety of the language.

The nature of the guilds discourse as a reflection of language ideology

Thus far, we have examined the different manifestations of the guilds' register in the course of group discourse. This is with a view to demonstrating how identity is marked through the use of certain lexical items to reflect the activities/functions of each group for the purpose of members' inclusion in groups activities as well as for the exclusion of non-members.

An instance of the expression of a superior ideology by the guilds is in certain ritual practices and rites such as festivals. In the Edo (Benin) society, festivals are generally carried out at the instance of the Oba, who is the political and spiritual head of the people or by any of his representatives at the village level (Odiṣṣwre 'oldest man' or Enogie 'duke'). In other words, no other individual has the power or authority to initiate a rite, festival or any ceremonies without the authorization of these institutions. This case is different in the guilds, as our preliminary investigation reveals that the different guilds have their individual rites/festivals different from the ones generally practiced by the Edo (Benin) society. These festivals are peculiar to the different guilds that practice them as shown by the extract of the interview conducted with a representative of the blacksmith guild (igun ematoṣ) below.

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Q: Are there any festivals or rites associated with this guild?

R: There are a lot of rituals/rites carried out in the guild because every year we do what we call the *Ihekpṣu* festival which all members of the guild must participate in. It is done around the period of bush clearing especially around the month of March. That

is when farmers normally bring their wares for amendment and making new ones and this is the boom period. The festival is done with Chief Obasogie buying a dog, a sheep, goat, tortoise, snail, cock, fish and kolanut. The Ogun workshop where we work is decorated with fresh palm fronds. This is the dress of Ogun while a white chalk is used to decorate the place with all the animals slaughtered hurriedly in no particular order by severing their head from the body. Other members are also required to get a dog too and other items they can afford but the Chief must get everything mentioned above. This is when members of the guild pay homage to Chief Obasogie as their head by bringing him a cock. This ceremony is done around all the different principal guild members' homes.

In the interview extract above, the respondent actually went on to identify the different components of the festival as a way of buttressing the fact that just like the Monarch, they also have the authority to initiate any festival in line with their profession along with the different components of it. The respondent equally emphasized at the beginning of the response that there are several other festivals and rites associated with this guild besides the one mentioned here. The other point worthy of note here is that, these rites/festivals are carried out much the same way the regular Edo rites are conducted with the important part being the homage paying to the Monarch which in the case of the guild is to the supervisor or head of such a guild. The implication of this is that the guilds enjoy a lot of social and political statuses that confer on them the authority to carry out certain functions reserved exclusively for the Monarch and this is responsible for the special and powerful identity of these groups of craftsmen. The mention of the *ogun* attire here is a reference to the nature of the work engaged in by the guild as they are iron/steel workers and this deity represents the 'god of iron' for the group. Another point worthy of note in this extract is the reference to *ogun* which is one of the main deities worshipped by the Edo (Benin) people and worshippers of this deity even in modern times are still feared and respected by the populace. This is another case of the projection of a superior ideology through the use of festivals and deity worship.

In line with the socio-cultural linguistic approach to identity (Bucholz and Hall, 2004), this extract represents a collection of ideological opinion of the *ematon* guild. The opinion subsists by placing the guild as one with the products that sustain the Edo society, group whose services are indispensable to both the palace and the general society at large. In the first instance, the respondent went on and on about the fact that his guild *ematon* was one of the original guilds in the Edo society basing this on the fact that the discovery of iron ore (the basic ingredient of iron works) led to the formation of different professional social groups of craftsmen in the Edo society. Appraising this position is the complex of ideological superiority and supremacy as this guild on the other hand strives to maintain a leading position which unfortunately is occupied by the bronze casters *igun eronmwọ*.

This is what Tajfel (1978) referred to as 'Psychological distinctiveness' as a group strives to assert itself from others by placing itself at the head of others. In other words, this guild regards her profession as a dimension of comparison to others which we call 'outgroup'.

As claimed by Oakes and Turner (1980), seizing an opportunity to adopt strategies of differentiation in an intergroup situation allows one a more positive self-concept as a result. We can therefore say that this group *ematɔn* has a positive self – attitude and hence of vitality. We should quickly mention here that the use of the term *ematɔn* for the guild of blacksmith is for consistency sake as this is the name with which the common Ẹdo know the guild as the guild is known among members as *ugbɔha*.

The rendition of the different texts from the guilds' interactions gave us an insight into the composition of the register of the guilds from the clausal data examined before now which were extracted from the recorded conversation of guild members in their workshop. This has also enabled us to see the differences and otherwise between some lexical items in the guilds and their counterpart in common or conventional Ẹdo usage. Here, lexical items in bold are used to represent the special usages by this guild which is quite different from the common Ẹdo usage by the rest of the population. It will be observed that in some instances there is no direct equivalence of the guild term in the common Ẹdo thereby constituting what is known in lexical semantics as a 'Lexical Gap (LG)' as in b-e (Aigbedo 2022). It is believed that these lexical items and the resultant LG in the corresponding common Ẹdo version is an aspect of functional variation between the guild and the common Ẹdo usage as these items are parts of the lexicon of the *Ugbɔha* guild practitioners. While these expressions are generally used to obscure the activities of the guild from the eyes of the general guild, they also represent a demonstration of the professional outlook of their work. These expressions also follow the translation variables highlighted in Uwajeh (2007) which are: Who? What? Why? Where? and Whom? in this case. These variables represent the path of departure between the conventional Ẹdo usage of these terms and the Guild's usage which is responsible for the variation between the two. As mentioned before now, the overriding reason for this usage is the cultural constraint on the activities of the guilds being disclosed to other members of the society (Ẹdo and non-Ẹdo alike) who are not members of the guilds.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from this study we can conclude here that the Ẹdo guild is a distinct social group with high social status catering for the need of professional craftsmen specialized in different productive endeavors in the Ẹdo (Benin) society. It has also been observed that the existence of the guild is a case for the presence of a variety of Ẹdo (Benin) language since the guild as a professional social group disguises its activities from the members of the public and one of the ways to do this effectively is to employ a means of communication that is not comprehensible to others who are not members of the guild. We will then draw the curtain on this study here by saying that the need for group vitality by the guilds in the Ẹdo (Benin) society and social comparison between different groups are responsible for the emergence of a variety of the language used by these guilds which we

term in this study ‘Guild Edo’ as a functional variety of the language employed by the guilds in the course of carrying out their cultural duties in the society. We will also like to recommend the use of the term *igun* as a reference to the guild system (which was previously used to refer to the bronze casters’ guild) from the perspective of the Edo (Benin) language.

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