

BILINGUALISM AND IDENTITY IN ETULO

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Abstract

Identity is often reflected in a group's language use and Edward (2004) rightly posits that if a group becomes deeply involved in using the language of another group, there is usually a resultant deep impact on the identity of the group. The main thrust of this study is to explore how bilingualism affects the Etulo identity especially as they are subsumed within a Tiv dominated Local Government Area. The study reveals that bilingualism in Etulo is both subtractive and simultaneous. Using the ethnic identity measure questionnaire and questions relating to language proficiency, it also discovers that being bilingual affects the identity of Etulo speakers in their ethnic behaviours and practices, ethnic identity achievement as well as in their group affirmation and belonging. The Etulos experience identity conflict as well as dual identity.

Introduction

It is becoming increasingly common for individuals from distinctly different linguistic backgrounds to co-exist in a single mixed community. In such mixed society, the role of language is often the main factor of influence on the identity of the distinct linguistic groups. Language marks identity in the field of bilingualism.

Edward (2004) posits that speaking a language means belonging to a particular speech community and that the deeper one is involved linguistically in another community, the greater the impact it has on his or her identity. Our language choice most often reflects not only how we view ourselves but also how we are viewed in the society. Thus the identity of an individual is reflected in various language constructed identities. Usually, the status of a language as majority or minority in a particular society is very important in the identity negotiation of bilinguals within that society. Thus this study on language and identity focuses on the Etulo minority group. It explores how bilingualism affects the identity of

the Etulo people especially as they are subsumed within a Tiv-dominated society.

Etulo language is an endangered minority language spoken in Benue-state. The Etulos' speak their mother tongue which is Etulo language in addition to Tiv language which is the language of the majority often accorded prestige and used in wider communication.

The main thrust of this study is to ascertain if proficiency in the two languages have influence on the identity of the Etulo bilinguals.

Language and identity

Emphasizing the need for heightened awareness of the threat of language death, Crystal (2004) writes that every language is a temple in which the soul of those who speak it is enshrined. This comment highlights the significance placed on language in the process of identity for all of us. From the perspective of those within minority groups, language can be the factor that is seen both as the most obvious and the most emotive symbol of belonging to a group.

Both language and identity are dynamic depending on time and place. Normally, one's perception of him or herself changes with his or her community of practice thus allowing more than one identity within a day or even over the years

Goffman (1963) states that personal identity is defined by how others identify us, not how we identify ourselves. This shows that the self is constructed entirely through discourse, making one's language choice of paramount importance to his or her identity construction.

Social identity and ethnicity are in a large part established and maintained through language. Hamers and Blanc (2000) also posit that language has a key role to play in the establishment and reinforcement of socialization norms that contribute to the identity process. In the same vein, Heller (1987) notes that shared language is basic to shared identity, but more than that, identity rests on shared ways of using language that reflect common patterns of thinking and behaving, or shared culture.

Liebkind (1999) proposes three main reasons why identity and language are so intrinsically connected. Firstly, language is very significant to the individual as an instrument for naming the self and the world. Secondly, a child's upbringing is dependent on linguistic interaction and thirdly, spoken language remains one of most salient characteristics of any ethnic group.

For bilinguals exploring their position both within minority and majority language groups, language can facilitate this exploration, providing unique opportunities for creative negotiation of the social realities represented by language in both groups. For speakers of minority languages, the issue of language is even more central to their in-group identification. Language, then, can be important as a symbol of upholding identities within groups.

Identity

Mendoza (2002) defines identity as the active negotiation of an individual's relationship with larger social constructs. Scotten (1993) explored linguistic identity in a multilingual situation and claimed that a shift in language could signify a shift in identity since the social rights and obligations would change to adapt to the different language.

Identity is defined by our behaviour, values and self concepts. It is reflected in the language we use, our choices of words in identifying ourselves as well as in the words we choose not to use. An individual has both a private and public self. There is the identity that is assumed in public, in relation to other people which may or may not reflect the identity one holds in private. This dual identity may involve choosing one language for private use with family and close friends and another language for use within the wider society. Our identity and the identities of others are produced through a set of relations. Our language choices reflect not only how we view ourselves but also reflects how we are viewed by the society. As individuals, we are a multitude of identities and language provides the foundation for those identities.

Phinney (1992) in studying ethnic identity posits that identity achievement for any ethnic group means acknowledgement of two fundamental problems for ethnic minorities: cultural

differences between their own group and the lower status of their group in society.

She also identified self identification, affirmation and belonging, ethnic behaviours and practices, and ethnic identity achievement as the four components of ethnic identity which apply across groups. Self identification refers to the ethnic label used by an individual to describe him or herself. A positive feeling of kinship and pride in one's group denotes affirmation and belonging. The ethnic behaviour and practice components include social and cultural involvement in one's group activities such as language, social organizations, religion, cultural traditions etc while ethnic identity achievement refers to whether an individual has a clear understanding of and commitment to his or her ethnicity.

Using these four components, Phinney developed the multigroup ethnic identity measure questionnaire as a way to measure ethnic identity. The questionnaire assesses identity on a four point scale.

Bilingualism

In the bilingual world, the significance of language and language choice takes on more complex dimensions as the speaker navigates his or her way through the choices and the sometimes obvious implications inherent in each choice. The meaning and definition of bilingualism varies depending on the situation. Some individuals are bilingual because they live in bilingual regions while some others become bilingual because their home is not the same as the language of communication within the larger community.

Hamers and Blanc (2000) defines bilingualism as 'the constant oral use of two languages' and a bilingual as 'a person using two languages habitually and with control like that of a native speaker'. MacNamara (1967) offers a definition at the opposite extreme to the idea of 'perfect bilinguals'. He suggests that a bilingual need only show a minimal competence in any of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in an additional language.

Later work on bilingualism reflects a realization, articulated by Grosjean (1996), that a bilingual is more than the sum of two monolinguals, and that specific and unique language behaviour develops as a consequence of bilingualism. Throughout their examination of bilingualism, Hamers and Blanc (2000) emphasize the importance of recognizing the continuous interaction between languages in contact, rather than treating bilinguals' two languages as dichotomous. This language behaviour is as a result of the dynamic and culturally located interaction between psychological and societal levels of language.

Bhatia & Ritchie (1999) drew a distinction between simultaneous bilingualism and sequential bilingualism. According to them when an individual acquire two languages at the same time, the bilingualism is referred to as simultaneous. Sequential bilingualism occurs when an individual acquires a second language after already acquiring a native language.

Akindele & Adegbite (2005) identified types of bilingualism based on the following factors user, time, learning situation and purpose. In terms of user factor, they group bilinguals into two types namely societal and individual bilingualism .Societal bilingualism applies where two different languages exist and function independently of the other languages concerned. The two languages dominate the socio-linguistic repertoire of the speech community and are assigned significant roles by the society. On the other hand, individual bilingualism refers to an individual whose repertoire is dominated by two distinct codes of communication

Grosjean (1996) in describing the bilingual's language mode states that bilinguals find themselves at various points along a situational continuum which induce different language modes. At one end, bilinguals are in a totally monolingual mode in that they are speaking with monolinguals of one of the language they know. At the other hand bilinguals are in a bilingual language mode in that they are communicating with bilinguals who share their two languages. This means that bilinguals make use of one language or the two languages depending on the situation, the topic and the interlocutors.

Fishman (1980) in describing bilingualism illustrates with a situation where people use both the high language variety and the

low language variety but for separate set of functions. He posits that such position tends to lead to relatively stable bilingualism. According to him, if this language situation remains unchecked in the future, one of the language will become more powerful and have increasing purpose and domain control while the other language will decrease in its functions and decay in status and usage thereby leading to subtractive bilingualism, the second language is prestigious , powerful and used exclusively in employment and education while the minority language is perceived as low in status and value. Where subtractive bilingualism exists, it is usually associated with a less positive self concept, loss of cultural identity and possible alienation.

Cummins (1996) also points out that such subtractive bilingualism in learning a second majority language by language minority persons, in a societal context that does not value the first language much, leads to the eventual loss of native language ability. Such bilingualism most often results in the minority suffering from unbalanced identity between two languages and cultures.

Methodology

The method of data collection was basically through questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information on the participants' experiences along two threads – one related to language and the other to identity. The selected participants were all Etulo, have both birth parents as Etulo and are all proficient in Tiv and Etulo languages. A total of forty participants were selected on an equal gender ratio. The ethnic identity measure questionnaire developed by Phinney was adapted and used to measure the identity of the participants on a four point scale ranging from (4) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree. Using this assessment, high scores indicates strong ethnic identity.

Questions relating to language proficiency were asked to determine the relative language proficiency of the participants in the two languages. The questions bordered on the listening, speaking, reading and writing competence of the participants. The questions

were close-ended questions. Some of the questions related to language use include:

1. I can relate personal experiences accurately in Etulo and Tiv
2. I can understand announcements and news in Etulo and Tiv languages
3. I understand and make telephone conversations in both languages
4. I write and read letters from friends in both languages
5. I can perfectly read literatures in Tiv
6. When I speak Tiv, people often identity me as a non native speaker of the language.
7. When choosing a language to speak with a person who is equally fluent in both Tiv and Etulo, what language would you choose to speak?

Data Presentation and Analysis

In answering the yes/no questions relating to language use, all the participants answered yes for questions 1-5. They prefer to speak Tiv with other bilinguals and are not often recognized as non-native speakers when they speak. This kind of scenario exists probably because the type of bilingualism obtainable in Etulo can be most suitably described as simultaneous on one hand and subtractive on the other hand.

Table 1: Data on ethnic identity measure involving 40 bilingual respondents from Etulo.

S/N	Questionnaire	SA	A	D	SD
1	Ethnic group membership	15	25	0	0
2	Talked to others about group	10	7	23	0
3	Active in ethnic organizations	7	12	16	5
4	Clear sense of ethnic background	3	13	18	6
5	Think about group membership	5	8	12	15
6	Happy to be a member	9	16	9	6
7	Sense of belonging to Etulo	6	10	7	17
8	Understand group membership	6	15	13	6
9	Talked to others about Etulo group	4	12	16	8
10	Pride in ethnic group	0	14	11	15
11	Participation in cultural practices	10	10	14	6
12	Feel good about Etulo background	11	9	15	5

13	Strong attachment to Etulo group	0	9	15	16
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Table 2: Percentage distribution of 40 bilingual respondents from Etulo

S/N	Questionnaire	SA(%)	A(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
1	Ethnic group membership	37.5	62.5	0	0
2	Talked to others about group	25	17.5	57.5	0
3	Active in ethnic organizations	17.5	30	40	12.5
4	Clear sense of ethnic background	7.5	32.5	45	15
5	Think about group membership	12.5	20	30	37.5
6	Happy to be a member	22.5	40	22.5	15
7	Sense of belonging to Etulo	15	25	17.5	42.5
8	Understand group membership	15	37.5	32.5	15
9	Talked to others about Etulo group	10	30	40	20
10	Pride in ethnic group	0	35	27.5	37.5
11	Participation in cultural practices	25	25	35	15
12	Feel good about Etulo background	27.5	22.5	37.5	12.5
13	Strong attachment to Etulo group	0	22.5	40	37.5

NB: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree

In the table 3 below, the percentages of SA and A sums as **Agree** while D and SD amounts to **Disagree**

S/N	Questionnaire	SA + A TOTAL %	D + SD TOTAL%
1	Ethnic group membership	100	0
2	Talked to others about group	42.5	57.5

3	Active in ethnic organizations	47.5	52.5
4	Clear sense of ethnic background	40	60
5	Think about group membership	32.5	67.5
6	Happy to be a member	62.5	37.5
7	Sense of belonging to Etulo	40	60
8	Understand group membership	52.5	47.5
9	Talked to others about Etulo group	40	60
10	Pride in ethnic group	35	65
11	Participation in cultural practices	50	50
12	Feel good about Etulo background	50	50
13	Strong attachment to Etulo group	22.5	77.5

Questionnaire statement No 1 table 2 shows that 37.5% strongly agree that they belong to the Etulo Ethnic group while 62.5% agree with the statement. This gives 100% agreement with ethnic group membership shown in table 3 above. Thus with regard to ethnic label, the participants identify with their group. However, 57.5% disagree with statement No 2 which dwells on informing others about their group. 52.5% of the respondents are inactive in ethnic organizations while 67.5% do not think about their Etulo group membership.

Higher percentage of respondents disagree with statements 4 which borders on their ethnic background. On the other hand, the fact that one is a member of a group does not automatically give him/her a sense of belonging to the group. Evidence for this comes from respondents agreeing totally with statement No 1 and 60% of respondents disagreeing with statement No 7. Majority of the respondents lack positive feelings of kinship and pride in their group (statement No 10).

Ethnic identity achievement refers to whether an individual has a clear understanding of and commitment to his/her ethnic group. Statement No 8 which borders on understanding group membership has a total of 52.5% of the total respondents' agreement with 47.5% respondent disagreement. This shows that the

respondents have a knowledge that is slightly above average concerning what their identity with their community means to them.

62.5% representing more than half of the respondents are happy that they are members of the Etulo group whereas more than one third (77.5%) of the respondents disagree with having a strong attachment towards the Etulo group. This may be as a result of the fact that speakers of low status language have the tendency of identifying themselves more with the majority language and culture while their identification with their native language and culture is decreased. This also shows that the desire to be accepted and belong sometimes creates confusion in the identity of the minority bilinguals.

Conclusion

This case study assessed the relationship between language and identity. It explored whether being bilingual influenced participants' perceptions of and attitudes towards their ethnic group. Using a convenience sample, the study hypothesized that bilingualism affects identity especially in a context where one of the languages is accorded a majority status. Through the responses to the questions on language proficiency, it is obvious that the participants who are members of a language minority group regard being proficient in Tiv very important because it helps them communicate better with the majority members.

All respondents, report that Etulo is their native language and that they belong to the Etulo ethnic group. They speak both their native language and Tiv at home but speak Tiv exclusively with members of the other ethnic group. This reveals that they have a strong orientation towards the Tiv people and their language. They want to integrate. They consider that very necessary for their future and also relevant if they are to find their place in the society at large. In doing this, there is often shift in identity for the Etulo people because language marks identity in the field of bilingualism and once there is an inclination to a majority language, there is a resultant inclination to identify with the majority. Here, their direct social environment plays a role in their language choice and identity

formation. The Etulos also experience dual identity. They are Etulo at one end and Tiv at the other end. This may be as a result of negative stereotypes often associated with minority language speakers.

Identity formation for minority bilinguals can be conflicting where the social environment is not supportive. This conflict arises as a result of the fact that these bilinguals especially the minorities are faced with negotiating differences in personal values and expectations from two different cultures. Identity development though a complex task for all individuals is usually complicated for those that belong to marginalized ethnic groups. This is due to their membership both in their ethnic group and their mainstream culture. These individuals face an extra problem with identity because they are usually caught between their family's ethnic belief and that of the mainstream society. Ethnic minorities tend to believe that the majority group holds more prestige and status, thus they feel the need to adopt the majority culture and to conform to it.

I conclude on the note that language marks identity and that for marginalized ethnic minorities, identity formation is often a complicated issue because of their involvement in the home language and the language of the mainstream society.

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APPENDIX

Ethnic Identity Measure Questionnaire

In this community, people come from different backgrounds. The majority is Tiv while the minority is Etulo. These questions are about your (Etulo) ethnicity and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please use the number below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree.

1. In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be Etulo
2. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group.
3. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my ethnic group
4. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
5. I think a lot about how my life would be affected by my identifying with group.
6. I am happy that I am a member of the Etulo group
7. I have a strong sense of belonging to the Etulo community
8. I understand what my identity with my community means to me.
9. In order to learn more about my background, I have often talked to people about my language and identity
10. I have a lot of pride in my group.
11. I participate in cultural practices of my group.
12. I feel good about my background
13. I feel a strong attachment towards my own group.