

SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION BETWEEN AGED AND YOUNG WOMEN IN AWKA: A STUDY OF AMIKWO AND UMUOKPU

Ngozi Clara Chinwuba

&

George E. Onwudiwe

Dept. of Igbo, African & Communication Studies

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

This study dwells on the examination of sociolinguistic patterns of dialectal variations, social constraints on language attitudes between the native Awka old women that speak pure dialect and younger women that do not speak original Awka dialect. The effect of age on lexical choice in Awka have been found to be contradictory and problematic. This is because the prestigious dialect is not necessarily the standard variety. It is observed that there is no form of variations in speech among women in Awka then but the reverse is the case in speech form amongst speakers of Awka dialect as seen from today's speakers of the same Awka dialect. This, as a matter of fact, gave rise to this research. The objective of this study is to delve into the inner workings of local linguistic system in pursuit of a better understanding of the interface in sociolinguistics by adding the cognitive approach. The data used for this work were sourced from the responses of those under study. They spoke and the speeches were taken and analyzed. The researcher used descriptive method in analyzing the data. The collected data were quantitatively studied and it was found that variation is not mechanical or automatic, but is based on personal conscious choices. This was achieved through systematic observation and analysis of the speaker's use of language in natural situations. The researchers choose Amikwo and Umuokpu villages in Awka and speakers were subcategorized into two groups of native older women of Awka between the ages of 50-75 and younger women of Awka between the ages of (35-49) and commonly used words were elicited in two or more different locations. The study adopted the theory of generative grammar as Theoretical framework. It was discovered that as the native younger women associate and mingle with other people in the society, their speech pattern change. This research will be of great importance to Awka speech community because, it will help to restructure their language. It will also aid them to adapt fast in learning the Standard Igbo both in speaking and writing. The informants were chosen using judgment sampling procedure. The speech of the speakers was investigated using face to face interviews. It was also found that age is one of the most important social factors correlating with lexical variation.

Introduction

Sociolinguistic variation is the study of the way language varies in communities of speakers and concentrates in particular on the interaction of social factors such as age, gender and degree of integration into the community and linguistic structures such as sounds, grammatical forms, intonation features and words. The study of sociolinguistic variation has its roots in dialectology, emerging in the 1960s partly as a

result of inadequate methods in earlier approaches to the study of dialect, and partly as a reaction to Chomsky's generative programme. This holds true of every aspect of human life and language is no exception. Again, the only thing that is constant is change. Change is a common experience in man's activities. Language as a process of communication inherently changes from place to place, time to time and person to person. This work will focus on the concept of linguistic variation and change in Awka speech community. Linguistics is the scientific study of language which comprises very many fields of investigation. This research is based on sociolinguistics, which is the study of the relationship between language use and the structure of the society. It also takes into account such factors as the social background of both the speaker and the respondent, that is their age, social class and region that have been observed to influence the choice of variants of the variables as would be seen later in this study.

Language is variable. In other words, every language exhibits considerable internal variations and speakers, who are aware of their social significance, make use of the many possibilities offered to them. In fact, one of the amazing facts about human communication is the demonstrated ability to analyze the inherent variation within every spoken or signal message in processing the linguistic signal. The current study is aimed at investigating the existence of language variation in Awka speech pattern of Igbo and social factors such as age, region and social class, which influence the observed variables.

This work would focus on the concept of linguistic variation and change in Awka speech community. This research is based on sociolinguistics, which is the study of the relationship between language use and the structure of the society. It also takes into account such factors as the social background of both the speaker and the respondent, that is their age, social class and region that have been observed to influence the choice of variants of the variables as would be seen later in this study.

Language change is the central aspect of language. Language itself is so central to human behaviour that is, the study of language in any way, shape or form puts them into a complex web of relationship with many other disciplines (Kess, 1993:2) and hence, any analysis of language change incorporates many related areas. The study of language change is the study of how languages change and evolve over time. In this way, language is essentially like everything else in the world around us that is constantly changing.

Coates (1992:169) sees language change as 'tending to be led by certain social group, not by the lowest or highest social classes in society as we might expect, but by the central social groups'. That is, the upper working and lower middle classes. She also says that linguistic change can be said to have taken place when a new linguistic form, used by the same sub group within a speech community, is adopted by other members



of that community and accepted as the norm. In fact, it was not until the advent of sociolinguistics a half century ago that the admission of language variation became more than a footnote to linguistic description. The study of language change is now one of the most rapidly expanding subfields of linguistics with a well established worth of researchers, regular conferences, and scholarly journals, but its status is still somewhat marginal within theoretical linguistics, notwithstanding the resistance of Labov (1966:201) that the study of language variation is central to the solution of fundamental

problems in linguistic theory. Chambers, (2013:6) states that there can be language variation, which does not result in language whereas there cannot be language change without language variation preceding it.

An essential constraint in the study of linguistic variation is the linguistic variable; a structural unit that includes a set of fluctuating variants showing meaningful co-variation with an independent set of variables. Linguistic variation was explicitly set forth in early variation studies Labov (1966) found that upper working class and lower working class speakers tended to be the leaders of unconscious linguistic changes that were more common in casual speech, and that the lower middle class led changes towards overtly prestigious standard forms. The present research represents one of such attempts at examining observed language variation occasioned by social factors and their possible connection to linguistic change in an Igbo speech community of Awka.

The fact that most if not all speech communities are more or less socially and linguistically heterogeneous, is a complexity which makes things much more difficult to any linguist wishing to describe a particular variety.

Awka dialect of Igbo has overtime shown variation in several aspect of speech such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. This may have been influenced by some social variables like age, region, identity and social class. Despite the variations inherent in Awka dialect, it has received little or no attention by scholars in the field of linguistics. Therefore, the problem of this study is to unravel the social factors that inform the linguistic variations within the Awka dialect.

This study focuses essentially on some topical issues within linguistic variation which include the concept of dialect, language, speech community, language variation and mutual intelligibility.

In addition, the researcher has restricted the study to the language variation in Awka speech community, using only age, region, identity and education as the sociolinguistic variables. It is also within the scope of the study to observe and analyze language in its social context. So, the importance of this study is underscored by the fact that language variation is a universal phenomenon.



The main purpose of this study is to observe language variation in the speech pattern of Awka speech community of the Igbo language and factors influencing their existence.

The specific objectives include;

- a. To determine the pattern of linguistic variation and change in the rural speech community of Awka
- b. To determine the social factors that influence linguistic variation in a rural speech community of Awka spoken as used by older and younger women in Awka
- c. To know some identified linguistic variations between the older women and younger women in Awka speech community

The findings of this study will serve as a useful information to all educators and add to increase their knowledge about linguistic variation since research on variation in Awka has not been examined by scholars.

Also, the research will immensely be of benefit to the present and future generations of language scholars, particularly those interested in synchronic and diachronic linguistics so as to formulate theories about the nature of language variation, because this work will serve as a guide in future research through the knowledge in it.

To avoid constraints in my findings, the researcher concentrated on the spoken words.

Literature Review

This session focuses on the key concepts in the title of this study such as the concepts of language, dialect, speech community, language variation and social variables.

The Concept of Language

Ndimele (1999) says that there are ten characteristics of language; creativity, arbitrariness, duality, versatility, genetic transmission, pattern congruity, total feedback and displacement. These characteristics which are fundamental to human language give human language the edge it has over other form of languages especially animals language. Language being part of culture plays some fundamental functions in society.

The need which a language is expected to serve in a society is related to the quality of such language used; whether it is used just for personal or interpersonal communication; for academic and specific purposes or as a national/cultural heritage.

Dialect

Joseph and Taylor (2015:79) opine that “dialect is distinguished by its vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation where distinction can be made only in terms of

pronunciation”. The term accent is appropriate, not dialect (although in common usage, “dialect” and “accent” are usually synonymous).

Merriam Webster (1970:67) says that dialect is a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary and pronunciation from other regional varieties and constituting together with them a single language.

Milroy and Gordon (2003:35) assert that dialect is a form of a language that is spoken in a particular part of a country or by a particular group of people and that contains some words grammar, or pronunciation. That is to say that it is the way in which words are said that are different from the forms used in other parts or by other groups.

More also, Ash (2018) notes that the prevalence of regional dialects in the United States and their resistance to the corresponding effect of technological advancement can be explained by social factors of the populations, including socio-economic status, sex and ethnicity, as well as features involved in the construction of personal identity in relation .

Speech Community

According to Williams (2016) each speech community reveals several varieties of language. In some cases, the varieties may represent different occupations or interest specialization. These varieties could be in the area of pronunciation or choice of restricted lexical items which are not known by a member of the broader community.

Nnama (2014) points that speech community tends to emphasize arrays of different phenomena which are however complementary rather than contradictory so far as their common aim is to set a people who have common norm, common language or dialects, interaction by means of speech in a given range of varieties and rules for using them, and a given range of attitudes to varieties and items.

From these definitions, speech community is therefore defined as a coherent group of people who share the same language or languages and more or less the same norms of language use. The members of a speech community form a network of interacting individuals who communicate linguistically with one another frequently and more intensively than they engage with outsiders. That is to say that for a group of speakers to represent a speech community, it requires a degree of unity and cohesiveness both on the level of the language systems and on the level of interpersonal interactions.

Language Variation

No human language is stable, unvarying or uniform; all languages present internal differences. Actual usage varies from people to people, and user to user, in terms of the pronunciation, or the choice of lexicon and the meaning of those lexicon and even the use of syntactic rules. For example, Americans ‘English varies from the English of the Britain. The most noticeable difference between American and British is

vocabulary. Example, Americans go on vacation, while Brits go on holiday. It is noticed that the speech of these two groups in turn is distinct from the speech used in Australia. If a language is used differently by two different groups, they are often said to speak different dialects of a language.

From the foregoing definitions, language variation is therefore defined as different ways in which people of the same community, with same culture, speaks in diverse ways especially ways by which older people talk; which makes it different from the way younger people talk in their thoughts expressions.

Social Variables

One of the social variables that have influenced variation in language use is age. Language use varies greatly among the children, youths, middle age and the old in any given speech community. Age as a social factor according to Nwosu (2013), has been shown to correlate with linguistic variable in quantitative studies to show the correlation between age and linguistic variation.

Romaine (2011) was the first to introduce systematic methodology for investigating social dialects and the first large-scale sociolinguistic survey of an urban community. Unlike previous dialectological studies which generally choose one person or representative of a particular area.

Elewell (2016) suggests that variable is a characteristic that varies in value or magnitude along which an object, individual or group may be categorized.

Richard (2017) defines variable as a measurable trait or characteristic that is subject to change under different conditions.

Educational Status and Language Variation

Several sociolinguists view educational status as influencing language variation among speakers of the same language with their speech varying in terms of its closeness to the standard form or its distance from the standard form for the educated speakers and uneducated or fairly speakers respectively. The level of one's education plays a major role in shaping one's language use. Indeed, people speak according to their level of education according to Richards and John (2016)

Culture and Language Variation

How we view the world is shaped by the beliefs, values and experiences of prior generations of our respective families. In cultures, certain words are considered taboo words and speakers are restrained in their choice of language by such cultural practices.

Theoretical Studies

This study adopts a generative grammar theory which is also known as transformational grammar theory introduced by Noam Chomsky in 1950s. The principle has been devoted to the attempt to develop a theory of language structure that a grammar of a language is a model of the linguistic competence of the fluent native speaker of a language.

According to Frank Parker and Kathryn Riley (1961) generative grammar is a kind of “unconscious knowledge” that allows a person, no matter what language they speak to form correct sentences and also describe language as it is actually used including the study of dialectal variations. Hence, William (2009:146) states, “All speech occurs in an interactive context in which interactants make choices from the linguistic system” He states that there grammatical choices express appropriate experiential meaning that is, meaning concerned with the construal of the world of experience.

In sociolinguistic variation therefore, these theories helps to account for such relationship as language variables where every language exhibits considerable variation in speeches and speakers who are aware of their social significance, make use of the possibilities offered to them.

Liliane (1994) in her own posites that the native speaker may not be able to formulate the general principle that underline the sentences he produces, but he has an unconscious or tacit knowledge of such principles, he has internalized a grammar of the speaker. She further says that the native speaker’s tacit knowledge of a grammar of his language is the focus of enquiry for the linguist working in the Chomskian tradition.

Nnama (1993) explaining the origin of dialectal variation says that social dialect is originated from social groups and depends on a variety of factors, the principal one apparently being social class, religion and ethnicity. He is saying that dialectal variation can emanate from social groups and can be facilitated by factors like social class, religion and ethnicity.

On the other hand, Essien (1990) says that dialectal variation results from the incomplete diffusion of linguistic changes. Each point of different stems ultimately from the failure of innovation to be adopted by all speakers of the language when two or more languages become sufficiently divergent, they are said to be genetically related languages.

Akmajian et al (2004) define dialectal variation as being pervasive that it becomes apparent that there is no such thing as single Igbo language (dialects and idiolects) depending on who is using the language and what the context of use is. Idiolects means the form of a language spoken by single individual. He provides some of these examples which are typical of the sort of dialect variation found in the vocabulary of British English and American English as shown below:

BRITISH

Car park
Coach
Garage
Lay by
Lorry
Petrol
Minerals

AMERICAN

Parking lot
Bus
Service State
Rest area
Truck
Gasoline
Soft drinks

The observation that variation is far from being a “defect” of language actually reveals its true nature. Human language is a rule-governed system within which an enormous of flexibility or creativity is possible, variation is linguistically natural, and there is no evidence that “non standard” dialects themselves are less adequate as a means of communication than the so-called standard language. In other words, variation in language does not entail any inferiority in language. Instead, the problem lies in the attitudes of the language community towards the speakers of these forms.

Empirical Studies

The earliest study on variation was carried out by Labov (1966) on Martha’s Vineyard. He demonstrates the existence of systematic difference between speakers in their use of some linguistic variables. He notes a shift in the phonetic position of the first elements of the diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/. By studying the frequency and distribution of phonetic variants of /ay/ and /aw/ in the several regions, age levels, occupational and ethnic groups within the Island, Labov concludes that a linguistic change was in progress, saying that the ongoing sound change was in form of a movement away from the standard New England’s realisation of the vowels a centralized pronunciation of the second element of the diphthong associated with the conservative and characteristically, vineyard speakers.

The post-Labovian sociolinguistics is what Romanie (1984) refers to as variation studies in a primarily European setting. It was founded as an attempt to break away, from the status based theory and direct correlational methodology of Labov scholars.

Trudgill (2000) on his own assertion on language variation says that between the speakers of any language there is variation in the way that speakers use their language. that is to say that, there might be only slight variations between forms of a language – such as minor pronunciations of words or slight changes of grammatical structure that do not inhibit intergroup communication.

Agbedo (2005) studies variability in Enugu-Ezike Igbo variety. In his study, he observed three linguistic variables and their variants. The researcher discovered the use of the (r) and (u) variables as being determined by the degree of contact that

members of the Enugu Ezike speech community have with the speakers of the standard variety. On the whole study, he shows a direct correlation between the social variables of region, contact and the phonological variable, they are;

	Lexical	Variable
(ga)	[ga]	[na]
(ma)	[ma]	[ka]
(maa)	[maa]	[naa]
(ba)	[ba]	[na]
(m)	[m]	[n]

The Methodology

The study composes the variation in the speeches of native older women and younger women speakers of Awka. This explains the procedure used in carrying out this research. A work like this involves eliciting commonly used words from relevant sources, which includes both primary and secondary sources. Awka people were consulted, and Awka materials written by Awka people were also consulted for the completion of this study.

In the collection of data, the researcher adopted theory of generative grammar approach where the researcher interviewed her respondent's, get at the sociolinguistic factors responsible for their variation in speech. The researcher conducted interviews using stratified random sampling method. Here, individuals of different ages were selected and interviewed, individuals of diverse levels of education and region were also selected and interviewed. And all of them were native speakers of Awka speech community. The hypothesis stem from personal observation and pilot speeches. People have therefore, been observed over a long period of time before embarking on the research. The data collected will be presented in tables for easy and better understanding.

Word List Presentation

In this section, we make a presentation of word list collected during the field work.

S/N	English (noun)	Standard Igbo	Older Awka dialect Phonetic transcription	Younger Awka Dialect/phonetic transcription
1.	Cover	Mechie	Kwuchie (kwutsie)	Kpuchie (kputsie)
2.	Come	Bia	Bia (biɑ)	Bia (biɑ)
3.	Go	Gaa	Jeebe (dzeevbe) Nanje (nandze)	Jee/gavba (jee/gavbe)
4	Eat	Rie	Lie (lie)	Lie (lie)
5.	Sit	Noro	Nodu (nolu)	Nolu (nolu)
6.	Kill	Gbuo	Gbuo (gbuo)	Gbuo (gbuo)
7.	Comb	Mbo	Mvo (mvo)	mvo (mvo)
8.	Take	Were	Weli (weli)	Weli (weli)
9.	Swallow	Loo	Noo (noo)	Noo (noo)

Cursory look at the list shows a number of variation between standard Igbo, older Awka women and younger Awka women dialect. These will constitute the basis of our analysis

The variations observed in Awka Dialect of Igbo language

Lexical variation. The researcher observed from the above data, that there are some lexical variations between the older speakers and younger women speakers of Awka dialect. This has to do with the vocabulary of the language. In this context, lexical variation brings to light things that are called by different names in Awka by younger generations, other than what they are called in the standard form of Awka dialect.

S/N	English	Older Awka dialect	Younger Awka dialect
1.	Pounded cassava	Mgbaduga (mgbaduga)	Akpu
2.	Plate	Ewu (eku)	Avbele (avbele)
3.	Spoon	Nkobo (nkb)	Ngaji (ngaji)
4.	Court-yard	Mbala-obu (mbalaobu)	Mbala (mbala)
5.	Here	Nkaa/ikaa (nkaa) (ikaa)	Ebee/ibee (ebee/ibee)

The similarities observed in Awka dialect of Igbo language

From the table above, we find out that there are similar words or vocabularies that older and younger women in Awka speak together. The instances are as follows:

S/N	English (Noun)	Standard Igbo	Older Awka dialect/Phonemic transcription	Younger Awka dialect/phonetic transcription
1.	Heart	Obi	Obu (obu)	Obu (obu)
2.	Bush	Ohia	Ovbia (vbia)	Ovbia (vbia)
3.	Take	Were	Weli (weli)	Weli (weli)
4.	Swallow	Loo	Noo (noo)	Noo (noo)
5.	Said	Siri	Shiri (tʃiri)	Shiri (tʃiri)
6.	Odor	Isi	Ishi (itʃi)	Ishii (itʃi)
7.	Land	Ala	Ana (ana)	Ana (ana)
8.	Show	Gosi	Zuko (zuko)	Zuko (zuko)

The differences observed in Awka dialect of Igbo language

This is a type of variation in pronunciation that affects the phonetic level of the grammar. The following are some of the phonological variations observed in the dialect of Awka

S/N	English (noun)	Older Awka dialect Phonetic transcription	Younger Awka Dialect/phonetic transcription
1.	Here	Nkaa/ikaa (nkaa) (ikaa)	Ebee/ibee (ebee) (ibee)
2.	Bye-bye	Mgboo (mgboo)	Naagboo (naagboo)
3.	Mirror	Enyo (eyoo)	Enyinyo (eyoo)
4.	Old person	Okeokpa (okeokpa)	Nnekwu (nnekwu)
5.	Cook	iwu (iwu)	Ishi (isi)

Social factors that influence speech variation in a moral community

There are some social factors that influence speech variation in moral community. Old women in most cases prefers indecent/direct names to decent/indirect while young women prefers better ways that show decency.

	Words	Standard Igbo	Old women	Younger women
1.	Penis	amụ	utu	Oke
2.	Vagina	ọtụ	ọhụ/ikpu	ike
3.	Death	onwụ	Onago	Okpemego
4.	Women	nwanyị	okeibiri (okibiri)	agbala (agbala)
5.	Dance	egwu	egedege (egedege)	awantịlọ (awantịlọ)

From the above analysis, we find out that euphemism directly implies the existence of a particular taboo expression. What is considered a taboo word in one socio-cultural setting may not be considered so in another setting, certain parts of human body are generally considered taboo words, and societies have created euphemisms to keep a social decorum and maintain politeness in all social contexts.

Summary

The study looked at the patterns of variations in Awka dialect among the native older women and the younger women generations. The variables in the phonological and lexical levels of variation found in Awka speech community are said to be as a result of external factors that correlate to the selection of each variant. Age as a social variable is observed to influence the speaker's use of some linguistic variable. Between the speakers of any language, there is variation in the way that they use their language. This variation is demonstrated by linguistic differences in terms of sound (phonetics) and structure (grammar). There might be only slight variations between forms of a language such as minor pronunciations of words or a slight changes of grammatical structure that do not inhibit intergroup communication.

Conclusion

This work has been able to show that there is actually a prevalence in the use of Awka words among old women generation and the younger women generation of Awka community. Similarly, this research also shows that there is a decline in the quality of spoken Awka dialect, as the number of younger women in Awka speakers are gradually out numbering that of older women speakers. However, it is pertinent to conclude that variation in language use correlates more or less with the social factors of age in Awka speech community

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