

Language and Stylistic Use of Language in the Yoruba Cultural African Society in Sustainable Development

Taiwo FAWEHINMI

Department of French,

Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

kiddieskiddies@yahoo.com; +2348034154605

Language itself is dynamic and can function diachronically or synchronically. In actual fact, language as a means of communication in every society is indispensable in virtually all ramifications. The use of language is hereby peculiar to each linguistic community without ruling out various non-linguistic means of communication. Each community has its cultural peculiarities. Each of the languages has varieties. Each of the varieties in turn still has stylistic variants, which is the main theme of this study. However, our study reveals that the Yoruba language spoken within and outside the continent of Africa has quite a number of stylistic variants which bring about a semantic and pragmatic change in meaning in the socio-cultural world of the Yorubas in language sustainability based on sustainable development.

Keywords: Language, stylistics, semantics, pragmatics, culture, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Language per excellence may be said to be the tool through which each society moves not only within itself, but also around the world. In fact, it can easily be said that no society is static, that is each one tends towards development no matter the level the said society attains. Areas such as education, culture, social interaction are all products of a developed society. For any group of people to maintain a steady culture, there is need for a sustainable development. In the words of Sid (2021):

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components.

This necessarily entails that the word development cuts across all ramifications. Sid also noted that development though may not be necessarily immediate, includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuous of that change. It may be said that it is in fact this regular and continuous change that manifests itself into a sustainable development of which the Wikipedia dictionary (2023) actually identified four pillars:

- Human sustainability
- Social sustainability

- Economic sustainability
- Environmental sustainability.

We want to note that this four as paramount as they may be to the developmental process in any society, may not see the light of the day without the use of language. We align with Wikipedia dictionary (op cit) that:

Sustainable development is defined as development that meets current needs without jeopardising future generations/ability to meet their own.

We are set to look at the impact of language where it has to meet the current needs of the socio-cultural group because language serves as the tool per excellence through which all other aspects related to sustainable development operates in the society. In this paper, special reference will be made to the Yoruba language spoken in Africa and beyond.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this paper is from the structuralist school of thought while the approach is rather synchronic and not diachronic.

Language and Culture

Language and culture are two entities whereby the existence of one depends on the other. Gwessabi (2017) opines that language is the culture in itself, and the fact that: “the meanings of a particular language represent the culture of a particular social group”.

He further states that interacting with a language means to do so with the culture which is its reference point. For him we could not understand a culture without having direct contact to its language because of their intimate connection.

Language in itself can be seen as that very complex phenomenon with quite a number of definitions. Henry Sweet (2021) cited by Robert Henry Robins (2021) considers language as the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words, which in turn becomes sentences answering to that of ideas into thoughts. Also cited are the American Linguists Bernard Block and George L. Trager (2021) defining language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates.

Basically social groups with a common culture will be said to speak one and the same language. Yet in one sand the same language, varieties are identified which from idiolects become dialects. At the same time, separate cultures embrace separate languages distinct one from the other.

Crystal D (2022) considers language to be far beyond a system of conventional, spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols. It is the means which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. He further states that:

One's language is intimately and in all sorts of details related to the rest of one's life in a community. This is true of all peoples and all languages; it is a universal fact about language.

This entails that culture of any particular community, large or small could be maintained and sustained through a common language use among speakers. Language communicates through culture and vice versa. One will not be independent of the other. Culture is language embedded. Any linguistic community whether rural or urban, will hold these two phenomena in high esteem in order to uphold a well-established sustainable development in all socio-cultural settings.

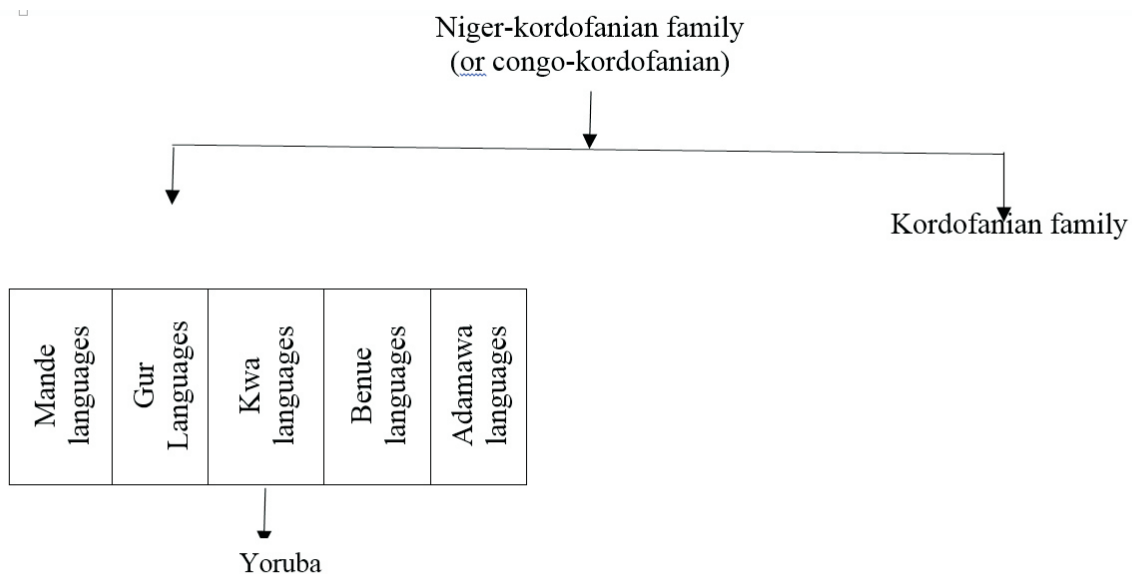
In establishing the relationship between language and culture with the sustainability to development, Ricky (2022) opines that:

Culture is defined as a blend of thought patterns and characteristics of a group of people. It is also defined using external aspects such as language, tradition, religion, arts, cuisine.

This linguist however, still opines that culture is something deeper than the factors above. It actually refers to the way we think and interact with those around us. In fact, perceiving the diverse cultures existing in the society is one's cultural lens, achievable through language use as stated by Rita Mae Brown, cited by Ricky (op. cit), that language is the roadmap of a culture.

YORUBA LANGUAGE AND THE CULTURAL VALUES.

The Yoruba language from genealogy is a tonal language which belongs to the niger-congo group of languages and falls into the benue-congo or kwa family groups. The diagram below illustrates as given by the universal Dictionary:830.



Yoruba language and the dialects	Countries of abode
Anago dialect	Republic of Benin
Lozin dialect	Republic of Benin
Lukumi dialect	Brazil
Dume dialect	Republic of Benin
Ana dialect	Republic of Togo
Mokole dialect	Republic of Benin
Nago dialect	Cuba, America and Brazil
Aku dialect	Sierra Leone
Sakete dialect	Republic of Benin
Yoruba dialect	Trinidad and Tobago
Awori, Egun, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ondo, Akure, Owo, Ilorin, Igbomira, Akoko, Ekiti, Kaba, Ikale, Ilaje, Ijo, Ife, Ile-oluji, Modakeke, Oke-Igbo, Ore, Eko, Egba, Egbado, Igburowo, Idanre, Oyo.	Nigeria

The Yoruba language is widely spoken within African countries and beyond. It is evident as a matter of fact that the Yorubas and their cultures have a great number of influence around the world as viewed by Ade (2006) cited by Agai (2015).

In any case, there is the standard Yoruba language which was formerly the Oyo dialect spoken mostly in Oyo and Osun states of Nigeria. However, for some phonological and socio-linguistic perspectives, the standard Yoruba language changed to language of communication accepted by all, but of no particular native speakers. Although the standard may be said to be very close to the one spoken in Lagos metropolis, safe for the morphemic interchange of the morphemes mi/mo which are mutually exclusive.

Dynamism is a constant phenomenon when it comes to cultural values. These values are classified by Idang (2015) into the following sub-categories. This will be related to the Yoruba cultural heritage for sustainable development.

- **Economic value for sustainable development**

The Yoruba traditional economic culture is based mostly on farming, trading and fishing in water based areas. This may be co-operative in nature, where individuals are expected to pull resources together to

aid one another. This system of economy is passed from one generation to another with meaningful progress from one era to the other.

- **Moral values for sustainable development**

Moral values embrace more of pragmatic gestures as to be seen in the next sub-heading. To the Yorubas as for most of the African cultures perhaps, the use of proverbs for sustainability is most paramount. As Ojode (1985) rightly noted, proverbs represent the quintessence of African life and thought. The diagram below illustrates:

Table III: Language use in proverbs

Proverbs	Interpretation	Purpose
Agbajoowo ni afii soya	Have more than one anchor on the ship.	For encouragement and self-admonition.
Igi kan kii da igbo se	In togetherness the society stands	For societal tolerance and communal love.

- **Religious values for sustainable development**

This set of values teaches the morals of good and evil in the society. Every individual is encouraged to recognise a supreme being who in turn regulates the behavioural pattern in the society.

- **Social values for sustainability**

Social values is that part of culture whereby activities in a particular linguistic community are regulated by the societal norms. The use of Talking Drums for example in the Yoruba culture will downgrade evil doers and uplift the well behaved in the society. There are also set down rules for marriage customs to allow for growth and peace in the community. Closely related to this is the naming culture among the Yoruba people. The situation of current happenings in the immediate or the large family setting, or even in the society at large dictates the type of name to be given a new born baby. All these is a bid to allow for peaceful co-existence.

It is of paramount importance to note that sustainability in the development of cultural values resides greatly in the language use in the linguistic community.

Pragmatic and Semantic Use of Language in Sustainable Development

In linguistics, Masterclass (2023) views that pragmatics is a field concerned with what a speaker implies and the listener infers based on contributing factors like the situational context. This implies that the context of the discourse would dictate the meaning the listener wishes to assign to the utterance.

On the other hand, Nordquist (2020) opines that semantics is the field of linguistics concerned with the study of meaning in language. This is the study of how languages organise and express

meanings according to this linguist. Nordquist (op. cit) argues that linguistics semantics is an attempt to explicate the knowledge of any speaker of a language which allows that speaker to communicate facts, feelings, intentions and products of the imagination to other speakers and to understand what they communicate to him or her.

Pragmatics and semantics both deal with meanings especially as the basic aim of any language gears towards meaningful communication. Semantics deals with the abstract meanings of symbols which pragmatics will rather deal with the contextual meaning. This table illustrates.

Table IV: Semantic and pragmatic use of language outside Yoruba language

Sentence	Semantic interpretation	Pragmatic interpretation
Henry is cool	Henry is nice, good etc (The speaker may not necessarily be in tune with Henry)	Henry is excellent and a friend of all. (The speaker's attitude is positive towards Henry)
Henry is not a man	Henry is probably a boy not a woman.	Henry is weak. Henry is not matured enough to be a man.

Pragmatic meanings in the Yoruba cultural society constitutes a great part of the day to day conversation. This may be traced to the safeguarding of the cultural heritage and its sustainability, an idea which may be alien to non-native speakers of the language. The diagram below illustrate it:

Table V: Semantic and pragmatic use of language as used in Yoruba language

Sentence	Semantic interpretation	Pragmatic interpretation
Ma gbaile ki n to de o. (for a stubborn child)	Don't do the sweeping before I am back.	It is better you do the sweeping before I am back
Gbeounje na, ki o je. (for a greedy child)	You can have the food and eat it.	You had better not touch the food.

As it can be seen from the illustration above, the Yoruba culture is very rich in the pragmatic use of language. The culture has a way of saying the direct opposite of what is meant by the speaker, while the listener easily comprehends, being part of the culture.

Stylistic Use of Language in Sustainable Development

Stylistic in a cultural setting, would study the culture of the individual, the group and that of the society at large. The totality of the individuals' styles would make up for that of the community in general. The Encyclopedia Wikipedia defines stylistics in the following words:

Stylistic is the study of spoken language in regard to the linguistic tonal style, where style is the particular variety of style used by different individuals in different settings.

The Yoruba language with its numerous dialects is very rich in this regard. Individuals and groups make the same linguistic utterances to have the same linguistic values. The Wikipedia dictionary further explained that:

Stylistics is a conceptual discipline that may attempt to establish principles capable of explaining particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language.

There are ready examples of particular choices of expressions spoken in the variety of Yoruba outside the shores of Nigeria as illustrate below:

Table VI: stylistic varieties of Yoruba language

Expression	Variety of Yoruba	Meaning as used in the variety	Meaning in standard Yoruba
se e ti gbenkan je	Anago spoken in Republic of Benin	have you taken your food?	have you committed suicide?
ori e gbale		you must be funny, good of you.	you are a nonentity
? gb?	Ondo Dialect in Nigeria.	Body	Side
Ale		In- law	Concubine
? d?		Be careful/ watch it	liver
Odo		Bottom	River
Wa, ale mi		Just a minute, my in- law	Excuse me, my concubine
Ka ed?		Watch it	Count the livers
Gbeodo/gbe si odo		Put it at the bottom	Put it in the river
Ra egbe e		Clean/birth/cream the body	Buy your side

aw? a yankankan	Yoruba dialect in the Diaspora	Ready to go out	Exonerated from a case
A n?eomo 'ta l?		Going to look for daily bread	Going out as a vagabond
Oga e nk?		How is your wife	How is your boss?
Mo ti nfiori la iku lo		I am going to work	Going to die
?e o ti w?ina?		Has your income been taxed?	Have you enter the fire?
O ?e?e jade ni ile		He kust left the prison	He just left home

In some other variant of the Yoruba language, one finds the following tautologies:

Table VII: Tautologies as variants in Yoruba language

Expression	literal meaning	semantic meaning
Sunkun soju	weeping with the eyes.	weeping
Gbe sokoto sidi	put trousers on the buttocks	Put on trousers
Gbe/fi igo soju	put on the glasses on your face.	Put on glasses
Pon omoseyin	back the baby on your back	Back the baby
Loyunsinu	pregnant with the stomach.	To be pregnant

The Yoruba cultural heritage is rich and of a paramount importance to development not only within the frame work of Yoruba territories but globally as this language is fast becoming the language of communication far beyond the shores of Africa.

Conclusion

We have tried to look at the issue of language use in sustainable development. In this regard, we have seen culture as the yardstick whereby language at various capacities could freely operate in the society. Our point of reference has been specifically the Yoruba language, putting in consideration the numerous varieties given the geographical location. Let us also note here that each of the categories of generations even within the same geographical frame work still distinguishes one from the other by the stylistic choice of words. Current needs and projection into the future needs of any cultural society, be it economic, socio-political, religious needs may not be carried out except through an appropriate language use with a semantic value to allow for sustainable development.

Recommendations

- The government should introduce development and its sustainability in the school curriculum in all Nigerian schools.
- Cultural values in the area of language use should be taught in schools.
- The Yoruba language should be made compulsory emphatically in all Yoruba speaking states of Nigeria, as some of our neighbouring countries speak Yoruba in addition to French.
- The government should run a yearly pedagogical competition among learners on Nigerian languages and the issue of sustainable development.

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TABLES

Table I: Yoruba language and the language family

Table II: Yoruba language, its dialects and countries

Table III: Language use in proverbs

Table IV: Semantic and pragmatic use of language outside Yoruba language

Table V: Semantic and pragmatic use of language as use in Yoruba language

Table V: stylistic varieties of Yoruba language: morphemic and syntactic variants

Table VI: Tautologies as variance in Yoruba language