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Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Abstract

Prior to this time, little attempt has been made in sociolinguistic research to investigate the peculiarities of the language of marketing in Nigeria. The few available studies in this area are the works of the norm and deviation stylisticians who often perceive the language of marketing as a deviation from or a distortion of 'normal' standard. The perception of those linguists cannot be given a place in sociolinguistic research as it does not account for the sociological factors that often condition the use of language in this important domain of human activities. It is against this background that this work is aimed at studying the language of marketing from the sociolinguistic point of view. Effort is geared towards unraveling the manifestation of sociolinguistic issues like: bi/multilingualism, euphemism, interference, code-switching and slangs, to mention just a few, in marketing discourse. Furthermore, the study examines how these terms are determined by the culture of the marketers.

Keywords: Ibadan, bilingualism, honourific, marketing, euphemism, VARIES model

Introduction

A market is a melting-pot of people from different socio-cultural backgrounds for the purpose of business transaction. In a bid to buy and sell goods, marketers tend to communicate, the most powerful determinant of which is language. Kotler and Armstrong (1996:6) define marketing as Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

a “social... process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others”. The import of the above is that marketing is a means of social interaction. In agreement with this, Kotler and Armstrong (1996:6) proceed to postulate that people interact “as they are shaped by culture”. The instrumentality of such interaction is language which is a social and cultural phenomenon. Any study of language therefore, must take cognizance of its social as well as cultural context. This is why Trudgill (1983:34) postulates that “Sociolinguistics represents an attempt to relate language to society”.

But in the process of business transaction and bargaining, it is not unlikely to hear diverse languages which are replica of the socio-cultural milieu of the marketers. A closer view of the languages may reveal that they are persuasive, vocative or emotive. We may, as well, discover that such marketing languages contain metaphoric and euphemistic expressions. Finally, we may find some of the buyers and sellers code-switching and code-mixing in the course of haggling. That is why our preoccupation in this study is to unravel the sociolinguistic issues in the language of marketing in Ibadan, a metropolitan and the biggest city in West Africa.

Evolution of the First Market in Ibadan

Before the death of Lagelu, the founder of Ibadan, he and his children left Oke’badan hill very close to Eleyele water dam and migrated to Oriyangi. Oriyangi was renamed Labosinde market and later Oja-Iba (*Iba Market*) after Bashorun Oluyole who ruled the present Ibadan between 1836 and 1850. According to Yoruba culture, a king’s palace must have a market. That is why the Oja’ba market lies between the palaces of Baale Oluyedun Labosinde (1830-1835) and Bashorun Oluyole (1836-1850). It was the same market that expanded to Orita-merin during the reign of Balogun Beyioku Akere (1867-1869) and Mapo during the tenure of Baale Dada Opadare (1904-1907). In 1976, the state military government under Colonel David Jemibewon, ordered the livestock sellers in Oja’ba market to move to another new market located at Oranmiyan area of Ibadan. This action set the stage for further (future) decentralization of the market. At present, the market has spread to Gbagi/Ogunpa (Ibadan South East); Challenge/Elewura, Apata (Ibadan South West); Bodija (Ibadan North); Agugu/Gate, New Gbagi (Ibadan East) among others. The Oja’ba market still retains its old site at Ibadan Central.

Methodology

The research instruments adopted for this study are oral interview and participatory observation. The researcher is a Yoruba man who grew up in the culture. Therefore, he is familiar with the language, culture as well as socio-economic activities of the people. A few matured marketers were selected for interview to determine some implications of certain props used by the sellers in the course of advertising their wares. The researcher also took a great deal of time to watch the marketers haggling while paying particular attention to their use of language and paralinguistic features.

Theoretical Framework

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

The theoretical framework adopted for this study (i.e. the VARIES model) stems from a sociolinguistic principle which holds that human society is stratified along different social variables of age, sex, geography, education, religion and politics among others. Our linguistic choice within a social situation is conditioned by these variables which researchers (Trudgill, 1983; Adeyanju 2002; Nilsen and Nilsen 2006) have developed into the VARIES model, a set of sociolinguistic acronym which incorporates Vocational jargons, Age related language, Regional (including Religious) language, Informality/Formality, Ethnic language and Sex language. As noted by Adeyanju (2002:529), the task before a sociolinguist is to investigate and describe features of language or verbal interaction peculiar to each identified social class. Since the social situation is the most powerful determinant of verbal behavior (Elgin 1979:106), sociolinguists "... have learnt to classify speakers" according to their different social groups and linguistic varieties (Trudgill 1983:34). This is because language, at times, may be "a means of identifying a person's position on a social or cultural scale"(Bamisaye1997:21). The theory is therefore relevant to our study because through its application, it is possible to discover the people who speak, the way their lives are influenced by their language and how their language is, in turn, affected by their lives; all these are the emphasis of sociolinguistics.

Data Analysis

This section has two major parts. The first part concerns the study of the general Nigerian elements in the language of interaction and, or, of transaction in the market which reflect the bilingual and bi-cultural nature of the participants. The second part is a careful examination of the sociological variables accounting for linguistic variability among participants.

Traditional Nigerian elements in the language Ontological beliefs of the participants

These manifest in the following expressions by some sellers:

- (a) *Iyako mi, se mi lowo-* my mother -in-law be my first customer
- (b) child get me broom
- (c) I beg, bring water, let me wash off evil feet.

All the underlined expressions above are culturally determined because they are found in Nigerian culture and experience. It is cosmologically believed in traditional Yoruba culture that the 'spirit of misfortune' will trail a seller throughout the day, if his first customer does not buy a priced good from him; hence, the use of 'broom and water' to sweep off and wash away such evil feet respectively.

Terms of Address

Kinship Terms

It is believed in Nigerian context that by identifying with a customer's culture and family a seller will be able to sustain his interest; hence the use of kinship terms like:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

<i>Ba mi raa, oko iya mi</i>	My mother's husband, buy from me.
<i>Omo baba mi</i>	My half brother/sister.
<i>oko mi, o wa</i>	My husband, I have.
<i>Buroda, e wo bi</i>	My brother, see this place
<i>Iyekan mi</i>	My kinsman/woman

Honourific language

Use of pronoun “they” and plural “you”

This is a common phenomenon in marketing discourse and it is traceable to the transfer of the Yoruba pronouns “*awon/won*” and “*eyin/E*”; to “they” and “you” in English. (Akindele and Adegbite 1992). This practice is culturally determined in Nigerian context because it serves as a marker of deference. An average Nigerian is expected to respect his elder, a visitor or a buyer. Thus, in marketing expressions, a respected customer feels elated and prefers a seller who uses honorific language(s) to a disrespectful seller as in the following discourse where SL, NE, SBE indicate Source Language, Nigerian English and Standard British English respectfully:

SL	NE	SBE
<i>E ba mi raa</i>	<i>You</i> (plural) buy from me	Buy from me
<i>Won ni e mu eja kan wa</i>	<i>They</i> said <i>you</i> (plural) bring one fish.	He said you should bring one fish.
<i>E wo tiyin nibi</i>	<i>You</i> (plural) see <i>your</i> (plural) own here	check here (for yours)
Buyer: <i>Olose, e mu wa.</i>	Soap seller, <i>you</i> (plural) bring it,	(soapseller) bring it
<i>E gba meta ten naira</i>	(<i>You</i> -plural) should let me pay ten naira for three.	Can I pay ten naira for three?
<i>E fi won sile ti won ko ba setan lati taa.</i>	Leave <i>them</i> alone if <i>they</i> are not ready to sell it.	Leave her alone if she is not ready to sell it.

The cultural belief underlying the above is that of respect. And since ‘respect begets respect’, buyers too use similar terms like ‘they, them’ and plural ‘you’ to address sellers in return. Thus, ‘they and them’ as well as ‘you and your’ (italicized) are culturally determined among the Yoruba as markers of deference. This is not applicable to English in similar contexts except the people concerned are many.

Interference

Interference and the transfer theory go together. Transfer is a term used by psychologists in their account of the way present learning is affected by past learning. That is, is there any carry over from the work in task A to task B? If there is, then the word transfer becomes relevant. There are two types of transfer. First, when the source and the target languages are similar, a positive transfer known as facilitation is expected. However, if the languages are different, there is a negative transfer which is largely believed to be interference. Weinreich (1953) sums up the above by postulating that a bilingual’s deviation from the norms of either language, due to language contact will be considered an interference phenomenon. The following cases of

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

interference are noticeable in marketing discourse. We should note that *B* stands for buyer while *S* stands for seller in the data: summarize

- (1)
- B. *Elo ni redio* (How much is radio set?)
 S. *Hundred naira ni* (It is one hundred naira)
 B. *Station meloo 'lo le gbe?* (How many stations can it relay signals from?)
 S. *Mefa* (Six)
 B. *Band meloo lo ni* (How many bands has it?)
 S. *Three*
- (2)
- B. *Elo ni rula* (How much is ruler?)
 S. *Teun naira* (It is ten naira)
 B. *Se kin san sebun naira* (Can I pay seven naira?)
 S. *Aje, e kuro ni titi* (It's alright, leave the street)
- (3)
- B. *Mama oniyo* (Salt seller)
Mi o like ohun ti e se lanaa (I didn't like what you did yesterday)
E o l'adehun rara (You are not dependable at all)
 S. *Dakun iyako mi* (Please my mother-in-law)
Mo mo pe mo giliti (I know that I am guilty)

Codeswitching

Codeswitching is the term used to identify alternatives of linguistic varieties. (Myers-Scotton 1993:1). It manifests in the following marketing discourse:

- (4)
- B. *Se e ni lace material* (Do you have lace material:)
 S. *O wa ni store* (It is in store)
Fifty naira l'opa (It's fifty naira per metre)
- (5)
- B. *Me nama, nawon guda* (Meatseller, how much is one?)
 S. *Alah gaskiya ten naira ne* (God bearing me witness, of a truth, it is ten naira)
- (6)
- B. *Se e get material ti mo ni ki e ba mi find out lana?*
 (Did you get the material I said you should find out for me yesterday?)
- S. *Se e rii, as I just got to the shop this morning ni mo remember*
 (You see, as I just got to the shop this morning, I remembered)
- B. *To be candid, o dun mi gan.* (To be candid, it pains me)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

E disappoint mi too much. (You have disappointed me too much)

- S. *E ma binu. I don't really mean to disappoint you.*
(Please don't be angry, I don't really mean to disappoint you)
E woo, ko wa intentional rara (See it was not intentional at all)

One notable feature of codeswitching is that the speakers have so mastered the languages in such a way that changes occur at word level (see 4 above), at phrase level (see 4 and 5 above) as well as at clause level (see 6 above).

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is evident through interference, code-mixing and code-changing as examined above. Notwithstanding, an attempt is made here to examine the extent of the bilingual nature of the participants in marketing discourse through the following bilingualism typology:

True Bilingualism

This is a case in which the speakers use both languages with equal competence. It manifests in the following discourse:

- (7)
S. *Se e rii, I brought all the goods yesterday*
(You see, I brought all the goods yesterday)
- (8)
B. *To be candid, mi o ri awon oja yen sa*
(To be candid, I didn't get those goods)

In (7) above, the compound sentence is broken into two clauses in different codes. However, the clauses complement each other. Similarly, in (8) above, the adverbial phrase 'to be candid' equally complements the discourse such that both languages reveal equal competence on the side of the speakers. True bilingualism reflected above, is what Ferguson (1959:15) has termed compound bilingualism.

Incipient Bilingualism

This is a situation whereby the speaker is fluent in one of the languages while he has not gained mastery over the other. The following are cases of incipient bilingualism in marketing discourse:

- (9)
B. *Madam, e o wa 'ja lanaa*
(Madam you didn't come to the market yesterday)
- S. *Mo wa* (I came)
- B. *Sengi ti mo maa gba lowo yin nko?*
(How about the change I have to collect from you?)
- S. *Se teun naira?* (Is it ten naira?)
E ma binu, mo mo pe mo giliti
(Don't be angry, I know that I am guilty)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

Mo ti de titi ki n to ranti
(I have got to the street before I remembered)

From the above text, it is clear that the speakers in (9) are incipients. This is evident from the discourse which reveals that they have a good mastery of the Yoruba language but could only adapt few words of English into Yoruba discourse. Thus, words like: ‘change, ten, guilty and street’ are produced as “*sengi, teun, giliti* (and) *titi*” respectively.

Slang

Discussing the etymology of slang, Ayto and Simpson (1992:5) submit that slang is initially “a colourful, alternative vocabulary. It bristles with humour, vituperation, prejudice, informality...” But soon after the mid-eighteenth century, according to them, the meaning of slang broadened to include the special vocabulary or phraseology of a particular profession. Furthermore, they observe that in the early nineteenth century, the term slang came to be applied much more generally to any language of “a highly colloquial type considered as below the level of standard educated speech and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some new special sense.” (Ayto and Simpson, 1992:5). Buttressing the above, Warriner (1982:302) says: “slang consists of new words, or old words in new uses that have made their ways into the language because they are vivid or colourful.” Slang in marketing language manifests in the following discourse:

(10)

- B. How much is your pen?
S. *Better life* for one (Here better life is a slang for fifty naira note in Nigerian context)

(11)

- S. *Mo gbopo wazo, wazo ni o*
(I sell at cheaper rate, it costs fifty naira each)
Wazo above also assumes fifty naira
B. *Se ki n san Muri kan?* (Do I pay twenty naira?)
Muri here is a slang for twenty naira
S. *Gbe owo e sohun* V-boot (Take your hand away V-boot)
V-boot , a slang in this context is a derogatory term for a woman with big buttocks.

Metaphor

Crystal (1997:70) opines that metaphor consists of “two unlike notions (which) are implicitly related, to suggest an identity between them.” Metaphorical expressions in marketing discourse include the following:

(12)

Eyin - afe (beloved teeth) buy your toothpaste here
Idi-ileke (beaded waist) come, check your jewellery here
Eji (diastem) I have good toothbrush

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

Ibadi-aran (Silky buttocks) check your silk and lace material here.

The above metaphorical expressions (underlined) are used as *vocatives* to persuade and sustain buyers' interests. They are complementary terms with positive connotations. On the other hand, certain derogatory metaphorical terms are used (by sellers) to insult any customer who refuses to purchase a priced good after long bargaining.

(a)

Go away from my shop *elese osi* (left-legged).

Take your hand away from my goods *olowo-osi* (left - handed).

(b)

Mister man if you will buy, buy

If not, go away *Alaronura* (he who goes into trance before purchasing)

(c)

Leave my shop *suegbe, pako, alaroro*

(Leave my shop *moron, wood, good for nothing person who prices incessantly without purchasing*)

Phatic Communion

Almost every discourse in the markets studied opened with adjacency pairs (in form of greetings and questioning) to sustain interest and foster relationship between buyers and sellers. In most cases, this method of interaction always ends in prayers.

Good evening everybody.

Old man, how's market?

Mama, hope you make sales?

How're your children?

What of your husband?

Iyampo (goddess of soap-making)

will prosper us today. Amen.

Euphemism

While speaking on taboo and euphemism Holder (1995:7) accentuates:

Euphemisms are by their nature closely associated with taboo, and the taboos of one generation are not necessarily those of the next, although those connected with sexual behaviour or defecation have shown remarkable staying powers.

As a corollary, Holder (1995:7) gives a working definition of euphemism as “(the use of) a mild or vague or periphrastic expression as a substitute for blunt precision or disagreeable truth.” In the light of Holder's assertions above, we may view euphemism as a means of expressing unpleasant phenomena through pleasant methods (words) in the markets studied. It is a taboo in Nigerian context to express certain words literally, hence the use of euphemism in such situations. For example:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

Seller: Good evening everybody
Our mothers, owners of this world
 sent us to you
 They said:
 It is a thing of shame for a young man
 To be *sucking only orange inside vehicle*
 But could not apply *accelerating pedal*
 and put *the vehicle on the run*
 Or he puts the vehicle in gear one
 But could not press on to gears two,
 three, four
 Before *engaging the reverse gear*
 They said we should tell you
 That it is the work of pile
 Here is its *husband*
 Just twenty naira.
 The key terms italicized above have the following connotations.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| our mothers | - | the witches |
| sucking | - | kissing |
| orange | - | breast |
| accelerating pedal | - | penis |
| put the vehicle on the run | - | ejaculate |
| engaging the reverse gear | - | withdrawing
from sexual
intercourse or retraction
from coitus |
| husband | - | medicinal cure (antidote). |

The message of the text is simply that pile renders a young man ineffective during copulation. So, its medicine is sold for just twenty naira.

Sociolinguistic Variables in Marketing Discourse **Religion**

The following texts reflect the different religious background of the marketers:

(a)

Help me buy it because of *Prophet Mohammed*
 (This is an appeal by a Muslim seller. Thus it is
 reflecting Islamic religion).

(b)

Oga Pastor what do you want?
 Ask, he who asks receives.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

I have incense, Hymn books, Bibles and candles
(This is an appeal by a Christian seller who quoted Matthew 7:7 in the Holy Bible to persuade a Christian buyer).

(c)

- (i.) *Iyamapo a gbe o* (the goddess of soap-making will prosper you)
- (ii.) *Ogun n gbo, iye ti mo raa niyen* (the god of iron is listening, I bought it for that price)
- (iii.) *Sonponna ni yoo pa eni to ta fake* (the small pox god will kill whoever sells fake)

Texts (C i - iii) above reveal the polytheistic nature of the Yoruba African worshippers as the speakers worship “*Iyamapo, Ogun and Sonponna*” respectively.

Occupation

Various occupational endeavours of the marketers manifest in the following expressions (of the marketers):

Iyamapo a gbe o (goddess of soap-making will prosper you).

By the term “*iyamapo*”, we may establish that the speaker is a soap-maker or that the interlocutors are talking in the context of soap-making.

Oju gbooro - (You’ll have smooth lines on that hair)

The above reveals the occupation of hair dressing

Buyer: *Are pa o* (I wish you a successful hunting expedition)

Seller: *Ogun a gbe e o* (the god of iron will prosper you)

The above text reveals hunting occupation.

Sex

Meanwhile, certain notable occupations in the markets studied, are peculiar to men. For example, plank selling, butchery and hunting. Also, textile, dyeing and raw-food selling are peculiar to women who, in the course of haggling, use persuasive words and flattery to entice buyers. Such expressions include:

Oko mi ba raa (My husband, buy it from me)

Iyekan mi, o wa.. (My kinsman, I have...)

Iyako mi, kin le fe ra (My mother-in-law what do you want to buy)

Male marketers on the other hand employ such expressions as:

Baba kin le fe (old man what do you want?)

Aya mi, wa woo (My wife, come and see)

Aunti mi seja wa (My sister, do you have fish?)

However, both male and female marketers use paralinguistic features like eyeing, head-nods and finger-taps to draw customers’ attention and to sustain interest. But while whistling is common to men, genuflecting is peculiar to women.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

Age

According to the interview conducted, the average age brackets in the markets studied are: six to twenty as well as twenty and above. These are regarded as the adult and young marketers (sellers and consumers) respectively. The mature sellers are emotionally balanced and possess persuasive words. In the same vein, the adult consumers are good at bargaining. However, the under twenties are full of insults and abusive languages. For example:

Agba iya-(good for nothing man)
Go away!
E wa gbee- (come and carry it -sarcastically)

As a result of the above, adult customers prefer adult sellers to the immature ones when it comes to bargaining. This is also culturally determined as it is unthinkable for an adult to be haggling with a young boy or girl.

Geographical variability

In many traditional Nigerian communities, different foodstuffs are grown locally to reflect the peculiarity of such geographical setting. This necessitates the employment of certain communicative devices like panegyric in praise of such communities and the specific foodstuff grown there. For example:

Elubo Oyo wa nibi o (yam powder from Oyo is here)

It should be noted that Oyo, which was the political headquarters of the ancient Yorubaland, is the chief producer of yam powder. Oyo is situated in the northern bloc of the Yorubaland.

Gari Egba ti de o (Baked cassava flour from the Egbaland has been brought)

The Egbas are a major tribe in Ogun State reputed for the production of ‘gari.’ Abeokuta, the major Egba town, is the current state capital of Ogun and it lies in the Western bloc of the Yorubaland.

Eja Sawa /Igbosere wa o (We have Sawa/ Igbosere fish)

Sawa and Igbosere are two towns in Lagos State (The old Federal capital of Nigeria and a commercial centre) reputed for fish production due to their closeness to the lagoons and the Atlantic Ocean. Lagos city is in the South-Western part of the Yorubaland.

Conclusion

We observe from the analysis carried out in this study that the language of marketing, like language in general, is not a monolithic entity. As it is not profitable to study language merely in its internal pattern or as a self contained form so is it subjective and thus improper to study the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

language of marketing (in Nigeria) in a mono-directional way. In conclusion, it was found, in the first place, that the Nigerians' use of language in the markets studied reflect their bilingualism and biculturalism as well as their hybridity; and in the second place, that there are sub-varieties of the language reflecting the occupation, age, religion and geographical location of the participants, i.e., the marketers.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria

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Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Department of English
College of Humanities
Redeemer's University
Kilometer 46, Lagos/Ibadan Expressway
Redemption Camp
Mowe, Ogun State
P.O. Box 7914, Ikeja
Lagos
Nigeria
West Africa.
iodebode@yahoo.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Idowu Odebode, Ph.D.

Sociolinguistic Strategies in Marketing Discourse in Ibadan, Nigeria