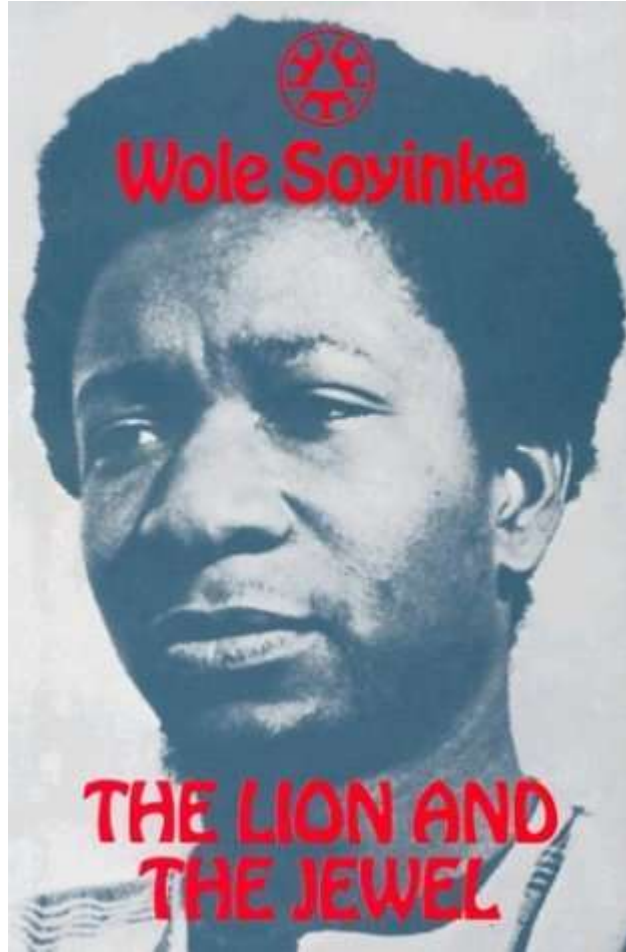


A Study on Language Codes and Sociolinguistic Variables in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

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Abstract

Observation and previous research works have shown that in any social interaction or institution, there are variations in the language codes used by individuals. In a bid to identify the reasons for these variations, this paper conducts a study on the language codes and sociolinguistic variables present in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. To study the language codes and sociolinguistic variables present in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, the conversation/utterances of some of the characters in the play were selected for analysis in order

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to check for the presence of these features using insights from Basil Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis. In addition to this, the analyses involve a consideration of sociolinguistic variables of sex/gender, age, social class, education, religion and ethnicity. The analyses reveal that the elaborated and restricted codes are the major language codes used in the play and that the aforementioned sociolinguistic variables are responsible for the variation noticed in the characters' language choices. It is believed that this study will aid further sociolinguistic studies.

Keywords: sociolinguistic variables, language codes, Deficit Hypothesis, elaborated code, restricted code.

1. Introduction

Language is a social institution basic and central to all human interactions. As observed by Armour-Thomas, & Gopaul-Nicol (1998), language is a social institution that involves shaping the society at large, or in particular the 'cultural niches' in which it plays an important role. The discussion of language codes and sociolinguistic variables implies that there are certain factors that divide the society into different classes and influence individuals' choice of language or linguistic codes. Not only that, A study of language codes and sociolinguistic variables is an indication of the fact that every society has linguistic codes acceptable for communication and interaction at any point in time and that language by its nature is totally a social phenomenon. This has led to the establishment of the fact that there is variation in the use of language among users in the same society and that language fulfils different functions in social institutions and the organisation of societies. These observable features have been reflected in numerous literary texts. These factors gave the motivation to conduct a sociolinguistic study on the language code and socio-linguistic variables present in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*.

The Lion and the Jewel

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* revolves around a beautiful young village belle named Sidi (The Jewel), who had suddenly become proud as a result of her appearance in a magazine photo spread, which has been the cause of some celebrity in the small Yoruba village of *Ilujinle*. Sidi has two suitors, the first is a young, idealistic schoolteacher named Lakunle while

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the second is the Bale of Ilujinle, *Baroka* (The Lion). Lakunle professes his undying love for Sidi and asks her to marry him but she is taken by the teacher in many ways and seems unprepared to give up the power that comes with being a beautiful, young, semi-famous maiden in a small village. Lakunle pleads with her, proposing a modernistic wedding package that includes love, respect, companionship and perhaps monogamy. Rather than accepting this offer, she bluntly informs Lakunle that if he wants to marry her he should pay her bride price. To Sidi, Lakunle is just too lazy to raise enough money for her bride price. She eventually loses her long preserved virginity on Baroka's bed and she ends up as Baroka's youngest wife.

To discuss the language codes and sociolinguistic variables in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, references will be made to Basil Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis and sociolinguistic variables of sex/gender, age, social class, education, religion and ethnicity.

2. Methodology

The data used for analysis in this study are selected conversational extracts of characters in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. The language codes used in the selected utterances were analysed using insights from Basil Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis. In addition to this, instances whereby characters' utterances were influenced by sociolinguistic variables were discussed.

3. The Deficit Hypothesis

The Deficit Hypothesis popularized by Bernstein (1971) was first formulated by Schwartzman and Strauss (1955). It was developed as a theory of restricted linguistic ability to examine the correlation between speech and socialization. According to Dittmer (1976:4), the central idea of the Deficit hypothesis is that:

The social success of members of a society and their access to social privileges, are directly dependent on the degree of organization of their linguistic messages.

This indicates that the proficient use of language determines the social success of an individual. The hypothesis came into being via the efforts of Schwartzman and Strauss who questioned the lower and middle classes on their views after the occurrence of a disaster. They discovered that members of the lower class failed to give an accurate report of the incident.

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Instead of explaining what happened, they exhibited emotional displays and their utterances were characterized by rapid speech and elliptical syntax which made their utterances lack coherence.

On the other hand, members of the middle class fluently gave a chronological, logical, and detailed account of the disaster without any emotional display. This made Schwartzman and Strauss conclude that the members of the lower class conveyed their meaning without clarity while their counterparts in the middle class conveyed their meaning precisely and clearly, leaving nothing to implication as they were less emotional. This conclusion thus laid the foundation for Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis to distinguish between 'a public language' associated with the lower class and 'a formal language' of the middle class.

As observed by Bernstein, the speech habits of the lower class are syntactically and semantically different from that of the middle class. As a result of this difference, he refers to the language of the lower class as *restricted speech code* (public language) and that of the middle class as *elaborated speech code* (formal language). He explains further that the restricted speech code of the lower class is inferior and simple while the elaborated speech code of the middle class is superior and complex.

Ditmars (1976) defines the restricted speech code as a limited range of lingual expression and the elaborated speech code as a language that has the capability of complex and expressive linguistic organization. Bernstein concludes that the differences in the speech of members of the lower class and the middle class are the direct cause of social inequality of opportunities. He submits that the middle class has an adequate linguistic code while the lower class possess inadequate linguistic code which makes it difficult for them to express themselves. The Deficit Hypotheses therefore accounts for the deficiency in the speech of the lower class members in contrast with the speech of the middle class.

4. Restricted and Elaborated Codes in *The Lion and the Jewel*

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the restricted and elaborated codes are the major language codes used. These language codes were observed in the utterances of Sidi and Lakunle. Sidi's speech is a reflection of her social status as the village belle. Her speech can be referred to as the restricted code because they contain instances of direct translation from Yoruba to English:

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I've told you, and I say it again
I shall marry you today, next week
Or any day you name.
But my bride-price must first be paid.
Aha, now you turn away.

But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have
The full bride-price. Will you make me
A laughing-stock? Well, do as you please.
But Sidi will not make herself
A cheap bowl for the village spit.

A cheap bowl for the village spit...
They will say I was no virgin
That I was forced to sell my shame
And marry you without a price. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 8)

Lakunle's utterances on the other hand contain the standard variety of English. He uses Standard English to describe his contempt of the African culture:

A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated ... unpalatable (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 8)

In addition to this, Lakunle's utterances are indications of the fact that the social class of a speaker determines the language benefits of the speaker. For instance, speakers of the restricted code cannot convey qualified information and maintain solidarity while the speakers of the elaborated code can express complex relations, solve problems and convey personal emotions or intentions. This is observed in Lakunle's ability to use the language resources at his disposal to display his knowledge in different fields, express his modern concept about love and adequately criticize African's concept about marriage:

LAKUNLE: No. I have told you not to carry loads
On your head. But you are as stubborn
As an illiterate goat. It is bad for the spine.
And it shortens your neck, so that very soon
You will have no neck at all. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 2)

The scientists have proved it. It's in my books.
Women have a smaller brain than men
That's why they are called the weaker sex. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 4)

LAKUNLE: [*wearily*.] It's never any use.
Bush-girl you are, bush-girl you'll always be;

Uncivilized and primitive -- bush-girl!
I kissed you as all educated men --
And Christians -- kiss their wives.
It is the way of civilized romance. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 9)

Romance is the sweetening of the soul
With fragrance offered by the stricken heart. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 9)

LAKUNLE: [*with a sudden shout.*]
An ignoble custom, infamous, ignominious
Shaming our heritage before the world.
SIDI, I do not seek a wife
To fetch and carry,
To cook and scrub,

To bring forth children by the gross . . . (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 8)

In the play, it is observed that Sidi could not convey her opinion and description about kissing correctly due to her lack of linguistic competence in this aspect:

SIDI: [*backs away.*] No, don't! I tell you I dislike
This strange unhealthy mouthing you perform.
Every time, your action deceives me
Making me think that you merely wish
To whisper something in my ear.
Then comes this licking of my lips with yours.
It's so unclean. And then,
The sound you make -- 'Pyout!'
Are you being rude to me?

(*The Lion and the Jewel*, 9)

This reveals to readers or viewers of the play that Sidi is uncivilized and ignorant of western culture. The use of the restricted code is also noticed in the utterances of Baroka and the girls who came to give Sidi information about the appearance of her pictures in the magazine.

5. Sociolinguistic Variables of Social Class, Education, Religion, Ethnicity, Sex/gender and Age as Observed in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

Sociolinguistic variables can be referred to as important factors that influence or affect individuals' linguistic expression in any setting or context. It is a relatively new addition to the

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toolkit used by linguists for describing, analysing and modelling language structure and use. In fact, the notion of the sociolinguistic variable is as old as language study itself. Coulmas (1998) succinctly submits that:

At the core of sociolinguistics is the fact that human societies are internally differentiated, whether by sex, age, class. These differentiations (and there are others, including education, religion and ethnicity) are all at a 'macro' level, that is, broad groups into which people can be categorised.

The importance of these variables were also stated by Kerswill (2007) as he stressed the fact that at the core of sociolinguistics is the fact that human societies are internally differentiated, whether by gender, age or class. He adds that these differentiations could include ethnicity at a 'macro' level which is, the broad groups into which people can be categorized. Below is a detailed examination of the sociolinguistic variables used for the purpose of this study:

a. Social Class

Theories of class have evolved over the last 150 years, starting with that of Karl Marx (1818–83). Marx relates social class to the position of individuals in relation to their means of production. He defines *capitalists* as those who own the means of production, while those who must sell their labour to the capitalists are the *proletariat* (Giddens 2001). Discussions of class place different emphases broadly on economic factors. The implication of this is that social class emanates from economic factors, such as the means of production and distribution thereby resulting into two broad groupings in the society; the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (in the English society), which in a more familiar term is described as the High and middle/ low class. Generally, an individual's social class or structure determines his or her position in the society. It is measured by the level of education, parental background, profession and the structure of the syntax and lexis used by the speaker. It should be noted that Basil Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis is very important in describing the sociolinguistic variable of social class.

b. Education

Education can be referred to as an explanation of the presence of standard and non-standard accents or dialects in an individual's speech. Maybin (2007) observes that education in

some way expresses the speakers' sense of which group they belong to as a person, through the feelings and emotions being expressed, the value position they are taking up, or the language variety they choose to use. Since education is embedded in language, standard forms of language (including accent) tend to be perceived as the only appropriate vehicles for education and literacy while non-standard forms thrive among those who have little or no formal education. Education therefore ensures the use of formal language in formal meetings and informal language during meetings with friends.

In the play *The Lion and the Jewel*, Lakunle's language is distinct from that of any other character. This difference is as a result of his level of education. Thus he does not belong to the same linguistic class with any other character as a result of his educational status. As a result of this, he uses learned words to express his view of the African culture. An instance is shown below:

LAKUNLE: A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,
Rejected, denounced, accursed,
Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,
Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.
Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 8)

Apart from this, his language is poetic and has much intrusion of hyperbole and extensive verbosity which marks him off among other members of the community. In addition to this, he has the linguistic resource and information, which he draws from different fields ranging from general science to psychology, engineering and relationships in order to describe virtually all he has to say unlike the other characters:

LAKUNLE: ... The scientists have proved it. It's in my books.
Women have a smaller brain than men
That's why they are called the weaker sex. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 4)

LAKUNLE: No. I have told you not to carry loads
On your head. But you are as stubborn
As an illiterate goat. It is bad for the spine.

(*The Lion and the Jewel*, 2)

A close reading of the play also shows that characters like Sidi and the Girls in *The Lion and the Jewel* are uneducated. This is shown in their attempt to make reference to *bicycle, camera, motorbike, pictures and magazine*:

FIRST GIRL: The stranger. The man from the outside world.
The clown who fell in the river for you.

SIDI: The one who rode on the devil's own horse?

SECOND GIRL: Yes, the same. The stranger with the one-eyed box.

[*She demonstrates the action of a camera amidst admiring titters.*]

THIRD GIRL: And he brought his new horse right into the village square this time. This one has only two feet. You should have seen him. B-r-r-r-r.

[*Runs around the platform driving an imaginary motor-bike*]

FIRST GIRL: The images? He brought them all. There was hardly any part of the village which does not show in the book.

[*Clicks the imaginary shutter*]

(*The Lion and the Jewel*, 12)

The use of non-standard variety of English is also found in Baroka's utterances when he attempts to imitate Lakunle's vocabulary:

BAROKA: Akowe. Teacher wa. Misita Lakunle...

Guru morin guru morin, ngh-hn! That is

All we get from 'alakowe'... (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 16)

The deficiency in these characters' use of English can be attributed to their inability to acquire a formal education and the unavailability of those vocabularies in their lexicon.

c. Religion

Religious beliefs are present in every known society but their variety seems to be endless. Two main approaches have been adopted in tackling this issue: the functional perspective and the substantive perspective. The former examines religion in terms of society's needs and thus considers the contribution religion makes to meet those needs while the latter on the other hand is concerned with the content of religion and defines it in terms of supernatural beliefs.

Observation has shown that the linguistic properties of an individual (or a group of people) may be found to contain certain colouration traceable to their religious beliefs. For example, Christians in social conversation or normal daily interaction such as greetings use

phrases such as *God bless you* and *it is well*. While among the Muslims, there is a recurrent use of the word *wallahi*. In the Yoruba traditional religious setting, Ogun is regarded as the god of oaths and justice. Kumar (2011) observes that devotees of Ogun swear to tell the truth by kissing a machete sacred to it. This is due to the fact that the Yoruba consider Ogun fearsome and terrible in his revenge. As a result of these, they believe that if one breaks a pact made in his name, swift retribution will follow. This belief makes devotees of Ogun swear by its name in some cases.

In the play *The Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka includes some religious tradition like oath making on Yoruba pantheon of Gods like Ogun and Sango. In the play, when a girl gives the news to Sidi about her photograph published in a western magazine, at first she could not believe but asks:

SIDI: Is that the truth? Swear! Ask Ogun to
Strike you dead.

GIRL: Ogun strike me dead if I lie. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 12)

Also, at the noon scene when Sadiku “woos” Sidi for her husband, Sidi’s acts make her to pray to the god Sango to restore her sanity:

SADIKU: [*recovering at last from helpless amazement.*] May Sango restore your wits.
For most surely some angry god has taken possession of you. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 22)

Lakunle on the other hand because of his Christian religious background makes utterances such as:

LAKUNLE: A prophet has honour except
In his own home... (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 5)

My Ruth, my Rachel, Esther, Bathsheba
Thou sum of fabled perfections
From Genesis to the Revelations
Listen not to the voice of this infidel. . . (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 20)

What occasioned the differences in the utterances quoted above is that the first set of speakers (Sadiku, Sidi and the Girl) belong to the class of traditional worshipers, hence the lexis of such religious belief influence their language choices and codes. Lakunle on the other hand, is

a Christian. Hence his language code is shaped by the vocabulary of the religion. All these are indications that religion has an influence on an individuals' language code.

d. Ethnicity

It should be noted that ethnicity is defined by social practice rather than personal attributes. Giles (1979) defines ethnic group as those who perceive themselves to belong to the same ethnic category. To him, ethnicity takes cognizance of the fact that there are differences between the use of a given language by its native speakers and other ethnic groups. It also take note of the fact that ethno-linguistic distinctiveness may extend from significant typological language differences to minute details of prosody or restricted lexical differences. In the case of different languages, speakers may make symbolic choices in their language use or manage code switching to signal ethnic identity as observed by Zentella (1997). Also, in the case of intra-language variation the manipulation of particular phonological, morph syntactic, or discourse variables may be used to signal ethnic affiliation. Ethnicity accounts for the fact that certain pronunciations are identified with members of an ethnic group and that when all or most of the markers of the group's accents are present in a particular speaker, one can be fairly certain that the speaker in question is a member of a particular ethnic group by birth, upbringing or both. It is often difficult to separate ethnicity from other social factors such as historical background, region, social class, and other socio-cultural variables. This is due to the fact that ethnicity interacts with a wide array of other social, historical, and socio-psychological factors embedded within an intricate set of socio-cultural relationships, processes, and identities.

In the play *The Lion and the Jewel*, ethnicity sociolinguistic variable is made manifest in the use of Yoruba names such as Lakunle, Sidi, Baroka and Sadiku, use of Yoruba setting of Ilujinle, the traditional title of Bale to refer to Baroka and constant reference to Yoruba deities of Sango and Ogun. The ethnicity sociolinguistic variable is also observed in the use of Yoruba songs in page 64 of the play. All these features gives the work a colouration of Yoruba culture and inform readers of the play that *The Lion and the Jewel* is a pure Yoruba literary text.

e. Sex/Gender

Giddens (2001) defines sex as biological or anatomical differences between men and women. He defines gender as a concept that concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Labov was the first to notice the important role of sex/gender as a sociolinguistics variable. As a method of collecting a reliable, authentic data needed for his sociolinguistics research, Labov (1966) introduced a sociolinguistics interview, carefully designed to elicit different speech styles within a single interview. His studies show a stratification of phonological variables according to sex/gender, age, socioeconomic status (SES), and situational context. In line with this, many research works in sociolinguistics have suggested that in many societies, the speech of men and women are different though such differences sometimes may not be generally noticed, and so probably be taken for granted.

In terms of style, there are certain areas where women have been observed to exhibit more linguistic prowess than men, especially when it comes to phonology where they seem to be better at the articulation of sounds and use of the supra-segmentals than men. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 90) state that:

women's language has been said to reflect their conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurture, emotional expressivity, connectedness, sensitivity to others, solidarity. And men's language is heard as evincing their toughness, lack of effect, competitiveness, independence, competence, hierarchy, control.

In the play; *The Lion and the Jewel* this variable is observed in the utterance of the two leading male characters; Lakunle and Baroka and the two leading female characters; Sidi and Sadiku:

Lakunle: Let me take it
Lakunle: No. I have told you not to carry loads
On your head. But you are as stubborn
As an illiterate goat..It is bad for the spine.
And it shortens your neck, so that very soon
You will have no neck at all. Do you wish to look
Squashed like my pupil's drawing?
(*The Lion and the Jewel*, 2)

Lakunle: Keep away from me old hag
Lakunle: Tell your lord that I can read his mind
... look- judge for yourself... (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 22)

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Lakunle: Voluptuous beast!... (*The Lion and the Jewel*,23)

Baroka: ... Sieze him...

Serve him a slap
To wake his brain

Baroka: Be sharp and sweet (*The Lion and the Jewel*,26)

Sidi: [pushes her off]

Get away from me. Do not touch me.

(a display of emotion)

Sidi: ... He lied to you Sadiku (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 58-59)

Sadiku: She will not, my lord. I did my best, but she will have none
of you (submission) (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 26-27)

Sadiku; The bride price, is that paid

Lakunle: Mind your business (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 36)

From the above utterances, it is observed from Lakunle's speech that he is very assertive and his utterances are characterised with the use of imperative verbs like *let* and *tell*. Baroka's utterances also contain imperative verbs. Examples Are: *seize him*, *serve him a slap*, *be sharp*. Also Lakunle and Baroka are observed to be blunt and authoritative in their utterances. For instance, Lakunle bluntly calls Baroka a *voluptuous beast* without minding the fact that he is the Bale of Ilujinle. He refers to Sidi as *an illiterate goat* and Sadiku as an *old hag* to their very faces. Also, In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the female characters are fond of lengthier words than the male which is typical of feminine speech and except in few instances, the men are usually economical in their use of words.

f. Age

As observed by Llamas (2007), of all global categories employed in the investigations of language variation, age is perhaps the least examined and the least understood in sociolinguistic terms. Eckert (1998), in addition to this notes that inasmuch as social and biological developments do not move in lock step with chronological age, or with each other, chronological age can only provide an approximate measure of the speaker's age-related place in society. Age is a factor both in the ingredients of any accent and in the evaluation it evokes. It is central to human experience. It is the achievement of physical and social capacities and skills together with a continual unfolding of the individual's participation in the world, construction of personal

history and movement through the history of the community and the society. Age is a person's place at a given time in relation to social order. Age and aging are experienced both individually and as part of a cohort of people who share a life stage and/or an experience of history. The study of age in relation to language, particularly the study of sociolinguistic variation, lies at the intersection of life stage and history. The individual speaker or age cohort of speakers at any given moment represents, simultaneously, a place in history and a life stage.

Age stratification of sociolinguistic variables, then, can reflect change in the speech of the community as it moves through time (historical change), and change in the speech of the individual as he or she moves through life. It is observed that when interlocutors of different age groups are into a conversation, their use of language is often different from what obtains when the two of them belong to the same age group. In a situation of the former pair, language appears to be formal while it is more conversational when it comes to the latter.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, it is very easy to identify the age differences between characters as observed in Baroka and Sidi's conversation which is formal and wherein the former constantly refers to her as *my child* and *my daughter*. The use of honorific title such as *Sir* by a younger character to an older one also ensures this as observed in Lakunle's greeting to Baroka:

LAKUNLE: A good morning to you sir. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 16)

Finally, a close reading of the play reveals that age automatically bestows authority on an elder individual to pray for or bless a younger individual in the name of the gods. This is observed in Sadiku's prayer of fertility for Sidi:

SADIKU: [*lays her hand on Sidi's head.*] I invoke the fertile gods. They will stay with you. May the time come soon when you shall be as round-bellied as a full moon in a low sky. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 64)

6. Conclusion

This paper conducts a study on the language codes and socio-linguistic variables present in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. The analyses done reveal that the elaborated and restricted codes are the two language codes used by the characters in *The Lion and the Jewel*. The elaborated code is the standard variety while the restricted code is deficient and the non-standard variety of language. The characters' choices of any of the codes are influenced by

education or illiteracy. Also, sociolinguistic variables of social class, education, religion, sex/gender, ethnicity and age are identified as the reasons for the characters' language variation and choice of language codes. Finally, the identification of the language code of the characters and an analysis of their utterances using the afore-mentioned sociolinguistic variables help in an easy identification of their social status.

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