

URHOB0 AND ENGLISH ON THE PATH OF MODERNIZATION IN NIGERIA

Igho J. Onose

*Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University
Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria*

E-mail: *onose.igha@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT

This paper examined rather diachronically the development of the Urhobo language and especially the English language, which became superimposed on the local languages as the language of inter-ethnic, official and international communication. The paper using the English language as a springboard took a look at the changes which the Urhobo language has undergone especially in the area of word formation under the combined influences of neighbouring languages and English. The English language itself is viewed from the same perspective against the background of the domineering influences of Latin and French. The modernization of English today owes much to borrowed words from Latin and French. The Urhobo language however unlike English is still far off from modernization because of the dearth of linguists from the language area and the fact that much linguistic work is yet to be done on the language itself.

Keywords: *Urhobo, english, modernization, superimposed*

INTRODUCTION

When a people for example the Yorubas, the Igbos, the Ijaws are mentioned, what strikes the hearer at first is perhaps, the language of the people mentioned. This is about the most binding factor that holds them as one and makes them unique and different from any other group of peoples. This is perhaps the reason why language groups guard against the imposition of another language on them by way of political domination or military conquest, if they can. Language, apart from identifying a people as a group, is a repository of the cultural norms, belief system and practices of a people. 'In this perspective', says Sadjere (1980) language becomes the most effective bank of the peoples' custom and traditions One of the greatest things that can happen to a people is to deprive or rob them of their language. This situation would simply mean another 'Things Fall Apart'.

The importance of language to a people is very recognized in the Social Sciences as in other branches of study. Language, in the words of Otite, (1982) 'constitutes a principal part of the culture and a chief means and strategy for its preservation and transmission'. In this study an attempt is made to diachronically survey the changes in the Urhobo language since the planting of English as an official language in Nigeria. It must be pointed out that the Urhobo language as a language and term delineating a large expanse of land which encompasses many clans-twenty two in all stands in a hyponymy relation to a conglomeration of many dialects, which as dialects are mutually intelligible. The Urhobo man from Kokori in Agbon clan has a different dialect from 'an Urhobo' man from Abraka, or Orogun or Agbarho.

In spite of these differences which are mainly accentual, and to a lesser extent, lexical, indigenes of these dialect areas can discuss in Urhobo, each in his dialect, and feel satisfied that they have understood themselves well, as indeed they have. The differences among the dialects, as already stated, do not preclude intelligibility. It must be recognized that outside linguistic influences, every language is as intrinsically alive and in 'a state of becoming' as much as its people and their practices are. As if this were not the case, there would be a developmental gap between a people and their language. To avoid this situation, a language must be necessarily as

dynamic as its people. There is no point at which any language is static as long as it serves a people and their culture. This fact is well recognized in the literature. 'The fact of continuous, though gradual change in language at every level, phonetic, phonological, grammatical and lexical, is indisputable; indeed, the assumption, for the purposes of description, of a stage of a language at which no change is recognized as occurring is strictly speaking in the nature of a fictional abstraction' (Robins, 1980).

THE FACTORS THAT PROPELLED CHANGES IN THE URHOBO LANGUAGE

Two influences, namely internal and external, have often been held accountable for the change. Internally, people develop artistically and in taste as well as in other spheres of their cultural life with time. This necessitates a linguistic change. Also externally, it is impossible to always ward off the influences of the neighbouring or politically dominating people and their languages. These two factors, especially the latter, have accounted for the modification that the Urhobo language has undergone. In course of such development says Robins (1980)"... new products often require new designations, and some words pass out of current vocabulary as the particular sorts of objects or ways of behaving to which they refer become obsolete" . The changes in the Urhobo language are going to be reviewed and discussed against the background of the cultural development and shifts of emphasis in the practices of the people through time on the one hand, and against the impact of the adjoining languages earlier mentioned, but particularly the English language, the language of cross-cultural communication in Nigeria and many other countries of the world.

Before Nigeria became colonized and even more during the colonial era, the Urhobos who were predominantly farmers, palmtree collectors and trappers were involved in commercial activities with their neighbours: (the Itsekiris, the Ijaws, the Ukwanis and the Binis). These commercial activities which paved way for intertribal marriages among them cannot be said to have left the language without a mark. One way in which this situation betrays itself is in naming. There are a few Urhobo indigenes that bear Itsekiri, Ijaw or Ukwani names. Some of the objects of commerce also came into the buying land along with their indigenous names. The

focus of this essay is, however, more, than anywhere else, on the impact of the English Language on Urhobo and how the Urhobo Language has survived, the rather inundating onslaught - in terms of concepts and objects -of the English Language.

ENGLISH AND ITS MODERNIZATION EXPERIENCE

One must add here that the English language, itself, has in course of history, come under the influence of other languages, notable among which are Greek, Latin and French. It was so much that at a time the language of scholarship in England was Latin and that of the high table and etiquette was French. The English language itself was castigated as a provincial language of the untutored and ignorant peasants. Thanks to history, however, events unfolded to bring English to the world status that it enjoys today. The scars of its chequered history are discernible in the words still current in the language today. These are words which originally were Greek, Latin or French. One result of the Latin influence on English during the Renaissance was the introduction of a large number of Latin words into the language (Berber, 1965), the peak period was between about 1550 and 1650' .

It is reported that many Latin words came into the language during the Middle English period. These included religious terms like 'requiem' and 'gloria', words from the law courts like 'clients', 'executor', 'conviction' and 'memorandum', medical and scientific words like 'recipe', 'dissolve', 'distillation', 'concrete' 'comet' and 'equator' and abstract terms like 'adoption' 'conflict', 'dissent', 'imaginary' and 'implication'. The saga for borrowing words got more impetus with the inception of science and technology which required terms for new concepts and discoveries. This is how such scientific terms as 'pattern', 'vacuum', 'equilibrium', 'momentum' and mathematical terms such as 'area', 'radius', 'and series 'and' calculus' came into the language. Latin and Greek were not the only sources of borrowed words.

From Italian in the Renaissance period came madrigal' and 'opera' in music, 'sonnet' in literature, 'cameo' and 'relief' in visual arts, 'cornice' and 'cupola' in 'architecture'. In the area of warfare are such items as 'squadron', 'parapet', 'salvo', and 'bandit' and in commerce are Italian loans such as 'traffic', 'contraband' 'argosy' and 'frigate'. Britain's active participation in world trade has fetched words for the language from many

parts of the world. Thus, this has plucked such words as 'pyjamas' from India, 'bamboo' from Malaya', 'maize' from the West Indies, 'budgerigar' from Australia, 'tomato' from Mexico, 'coffee' from Turkey and 'tea' from China.

INFLUENCE OF THE WESTERN WORLD ON URHOBO

The foregoing goes to underscore the influences of contact which one language can receive from other languages. In the case of Urhobo which is the language of appraisal, one will not be surprised if borrowing from English words seems to become the order of the day, especially, as the English language in home truth, is a more technologically advanced language than Urhobo. Since the 15th century when the English language gained a foothold on our land, a lot of changes, though in most cases imperceptible as such changes often are elsewhere, have occurred in the language. These changes, as already highlighted, are partially consequent on the second language and also often a part and process of the normal evolution of a language in consonance with the culture of the people.

To take a very simple but important change in the language, we look at the greeting and its wording in the language. In the words of Otite (1982) evidence of changes in Urhobo language are well known. For example the Urhobo once said 'Nawede' that is 'Migwo' being a salutation, meaning literally 'I kneel for you': The response was 'Bromarikpekpeghe' or 'Naragha' that is 'Vredo' meaning literally 'get up, thank you.' When the whites came to Urhobo land, one of their problems apart from mosquitoes was the language of communication. The Urhobo language was phonologically very different from Portuguese, Dutch or English. In addition to evolving pidgin for communication with the indigenes, the whites, among other linguistic blemishes they wrought on the language, resorted to dephonomization or reinterpretation of the basic sounds of Urhobo and consequently mispronounced long established words and names in the language. This accounts for such anglicized pronunciations as:

Abraka for the local word Avwraka

Kokori for Uhwokori

Sapele for Urhiaphele

Effurun for Evwro and

Ughelli for Ughene

It is normal cultural evolution expedited by colonial influences that altered the numeral system of the language. As stated by Ofua, (1990:31) 'the Urhobo ancient method or process of numbering or computing emanated from the counting of cowries that had intrinsic value of monetary worth'. The counting at the time went as follows:

Ughovo	1 Cowry
Ighava	2 Cowries
Igharha	3 Cowries
Ighane	4 Cowries
Ijorin	5 Cowries
Ighesan	6 Cowries
Igheghwre	7 Cowries
Igherenren	8 Cowries
Ighirhirin	9 Cowries
Ighighwe	10 Cowries
Ufi	20 Cowries
Ogbigho	30 Cowries
Ujorin	100 Cowries
Ochoho	140 Cowries
Uri	200 Cowries
Uchaohava	280 Cowries
Asa	440 Cowries
Eravweavo	640 Cowries
Ebo	840 Cowries
Egwre	980 Cowries
Ibuje	16,800 Cowries
19bogban	25,200 Cowries

Native speakers of the Urhobo language can easily tell that the system above is quite different from that adopted today, the few similarities notwithstanding. For example it can be said that such numerals as 'Ufi' 20, 'Ochoho' 140, 'Asa' 440, 'Ebo' 840, and 'Ibuje' 16,800, do not exist in any morphological semblance in the language today.

EXPANSION OF VOCABULARY IN URHOBO

The emphasis in this paper will be on what factors have accounted for the survival of Urhobo as a language today in the face of the eclipsing presence of English. Two main processes were adopted by the language in order to successfully exist along-side English. These are internal morphological processes to evolve new words for new ideas and objects. For example from the word:

'hwa' which means 'clasp'

Another one 'ahwa' was formed to denote pliers. In the same way from 'va kpo' i.e escape 'ovakpo' meaning window was evolved. Some others are:

yono (teach)	Oyono (teacher)
brorhie (pass judgment)	Obrorhie (judge)
sivwohwo (save mankind)	Osivwohwo (saviour of mankind)
ta ota (talk)	Otata (spokesman)

The second process of word formation was borrowing words from English. These words were accepted in the language. To take a simple example, the English syllable structure is CY as in tea but that of Urhobo is YCY. This is why tea in English has become 'Iti' in Urhobo. In Urhobo, nominals tend to begin and end with a vowel sound. Therefore any word borrowed from English, including names of people, is made to conform to this pattern. Another change is the rhythm. English has a stress-timed rhythm while Urhobo has a syllable-timed rhythm indicated orthographically with tone marks. Thus the English word 'brother' becomes Ibroda' in Urhobo. In many areas of human endeavour, we find out that borrowed words from English into Urhobo which have been made to conform morphologically to the Urhobo pattern. An attempt is made to enumerate some below.

In the area of religion and worship we have:

English	Urhobo
Church	Ishoshi
Rev. Father	Ifada
Bible	Ibaiboro
Catechist	Ikatikisti / Ikatikisi

Pastor	Ipasto / Ipasito
Choir	Ikuaya

Communication media

Radio	Iredio
Television	Iteni vishoni
Telephone	Itenifonu
Telegraph	Itanigofu
Motor	Imoto
Bicycle	Ibasikoro
Motorcycle	Imotosakoro (or recently Imashini)

Educational Establishment

School	Isukuru
Class	Iklasi
Teacher	Itisha
(Headmaster) HM	Eshemu
Dictionary	Idishonari
Ball	Iboro
High jump	Ijopu
Register	Irhejista
Diary	Idari
Ink	Iki

Dressing

Pants	Ipanti
Underwear (Woman)	Odaghwie
Shorts/Knickers	Inika
Trousers	Itroza
Coat	Ikotu
Towel	Itawani
Belt	Ibeti
Shirt	Isheti
Powder	Ipoda

Foods/Cooking

Tomatoes	Itomatosi
Stove	Isitovu
Gas-cooker	Igasikuka
Kerosene	Ikrasi
Magi cube	Imagi
Kitchen	Ikishini
Biscuit	Ibisikiti
Milk	Iminiki
Butter	Ibota
Bread	Ibredi
Mango	Imaigoro
Pawpaw	Ipopo
Pineapple	Ipanaiporo

Medical Staff / Establishment

Doctor	Idokito
Nurse	Inosi
Hospital	Esipito/osipito
Mortuary	Imoshuarhi

Legal Terms

Lawyer	Inoya
Magistrate Judge	Imagistreti Ijoji
Court	Ikotu
Prison	Iprisine

Personal Names

Jesus	Ijisosi / Ijesu
John	Ijoni
Moses	Imosisi
Alice	Anisi
Comfort	Ikofotu
Margaret	Imagreti

It is thus seen that borrowing of words from English to designate objects which are new or relatively new to the people has been a very productive process. There is a seeming inclination to relegate local words to the background in the face of the borrowed English words. Thus for such borrowed words as ipanti, odaghwie, itroza, itawani, ibeti, and idokito there were already adjakrotegba, okoboto, itawore, ikpacha, umuaya and obo respectively. These words became threatened by their borrowed equivalents. In the expression of ideas, many English verbs are also borrowed. Many Urhobos do not know the local equivalents of such verbs as:

'set' in 'set or switch on the radio'
'fry' in 'fry the meat' and
'stew' in 'stew it all'.

In situations necessitating the use of these words, many Urhobos would not shy away from them and others of their type. Every language has her purists and there are in Urhobo. It is to be noted that the 16th century English opposed most of the borrowed words which they termed 'inkhorn terms'. A similar situation is noticeable among Urhobo purists. National consciousness and linguistic integrity have prompted (what in linguistics is called calquing) the formation of local equivalents of the already borrowed, reformed and accepted English words. Thus for:

English	Urhobo
Car	Okoroto
Aeroplane	Okorenu
Television	Ekpetirughe
Radio	Agboro
Teacher	Oyonihwo
Church	Uwevwirega
Judge	Obrorhie

Like English language itself, the Urhobo language has borrowed from neighbouring languages. Thus:

Yoruba	Urhobo	English
Eba	Igari	Gari
Olopa	Ipolisi	Police
Ube	Olumu	Pear
Aganuzo (Ukwani)	Owidjerhe	Bread food

LOST OF WORDS INDUCED BY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The combined impact of the contact with English and the dynamics of cultural evolution have of necessity led to innovation in ideas, practices and artifacts - a fact which has rendered long held ideas and beliefs questionable, if not ridiculous, and expedited the relegation of long cherished household objects along with their names into desuetude. This strand of socio-cultural development has led to the loss of many words in the language and is still, in fact, threatening quite a number of others. A number of such words and what they designate are given below:

Urhobo	Meaning in English
Uvweruvwe	uncircumcised penis
Emerue	a special mat for disposing of house refuse
Ovakpo	widow
Oyoromo	nursemaid
Idoro	cupboard
Eketé	bamboo-bed
Okidiumukpe	oil lamp
Ukoro	coral bead worn on the foot and hand by women
Uwuye	perforated iron sheet for grating cassava
Umumwa	girdle that women use to keep money in
Ogerobo/orara	ladle
Isegade	a planned mud house yet to be walled with marshed sand.

The socio-economic progress of the people and tastes imbibed from contacts with other people has led to the abandoning of such words. Today many houses now have a specially enlarged brass spoon to show for a ladle (ogerobo). Many women, in place of a girdle, now have specially sewn 'U' shaped bags strapped to their waist with a zip on top for keeping their money in. Modern women talk of bags.

This wind of change affected many areas of life. In the sphere of health and health care many words such as if! (a kind of pronounced body rashes) have been rendered obsolete because of improved health care. In the monetary field a lot of change has been recorded. Interest has shifted from the cowries as a unit of monetary value to pounds and shillings and

today people talk of Naira and Kobo. Some of the words rendered out of use in these changes are:

Money value in Urhobo

anini

apini/epini

obovo

utoro

ichibe

inayi

Equivalent

1A kobo

1/2 kobo

1 Y2 kobo

3 kobo

6 kobo

9 kobo.

In the area of games and recreation there are morphological structures left stranded and lying waste in the journey through history. Among these are *ahwe*, *uto* (games by boys) *isiege*, *uyo*, *ubiedje*, and *apa*, *idje*, games more enjoyed by girls. In the area of marriage, modern trends in monogamy are confining such words as *Avwebo* (often confused as *Amebo* with the influence of a neighbouring language) *Avwioriovwe* and *Ayada* to the stock of archaisms. In her turn English has experienced this phenomenon where words are rendered obsolete in course of cultural evolution. Today the English word *sweg* has been totally supplanted by 'noise', *wered* by 'crowd' and we are a witness to how *wed* (now confined to invitation cards) is giving way for the word *marry*, a French loan.

Apart from the English words which are recognized and cited above, there are others which cannot be said to be borrowed yet, but used in Urhobo either unconsciously or as a betrayal of poor performance in the language. Especially among the educated Urhobo people, one hears such English words as *so*, *because*, *but*, and *etc* in their spoken Urhobo. These can hardly express themselves without resorting to this 'code mixing'. To this extent one can justifiably say that such words as cited above have been found handy in the Urhobo language.

THE PLIGHT OF URHOB0 IN THE FACE OF MODERN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Like the rest of the indigenous languages in the country, it is hardly arguable that Urhobo cannot be used as a medium of instruction in our educational system and this is just one among many areas of language

usage. This is because there are very many concepts in English, which are yet to have equivalents in Urhobo. How does one interpret concepts such as latitude, longitude, equator, osmosis, photosynthesis, metathesis, apocope among many in Urhobo. It can be seen that a lot of work, either unconsciously or consciously, is called for if Urhobo is to be able to verbalize the concepts and innovations of the present day. What is true of Urhobo is to varying degrees true of the other Nigerian languages. This is one among many reasons why the question of a national language will be intractable for a long time.

It must, however, be quickly pointed out that 'judgments of backwardness (Ferguson, 1971) or limited development of a language cannot be made on the basis of linguistic structure (but on the basis of development. By development he means the extent of graphization i.e. reduction to writing; standardization i.e. the development of a variety which overrides regional and social dialect, and modernization i.e. the development of inter-translatability with other languages in range of topics and forms of discourse characteristic of industrialized, secularized and structurally differentiated modern societies. Shedding light on a similar topic Unoh (1990) discusses the various developmental stages a language must undergo before it is considered modernized. These, as explained by him are:

- i. They are characterized by well developed, modern and standard orthographies.
- ii. They are characterized by well developed and well-attested traditions of written literature of various kinds.
- iii. They are characterized by systematically developed meta-language, technical terms and other specialized vocabularies for effective communication or information dissemination in various fields of human activity and learning.
- iv. They have dictionaries, encyclopedia and other reference sources that are suitable for use at various educational levels.
- v. They are not only taught but also used for instructional communication at all levels of formal, non-formal and informal education.
- vi. They have several well-developed instructional materials, including comprehensive descriptions of the grammar, which could aid their teaching and learning at all educational levels.

- vii. There are several well-trained experts (including linguists, literary scholars, language artists, language educationists, lexicographers and others) to promote and guide various aspects of the enrichment and use of the language.

It is clear from these canons that the Urhobo language is yet to be on course for rigorous linguistic engineering and scholarly development. Perhaps the best point on the development of any language is made by Williamson (1992) when she admonished the minority language groups that '... the fate of small languages is in the hands of their speakers. If they wish their language to grow and develop, they should take steps not only to use it themselves but to ensure that their children are adequately exposed to it and retain it as their home language to pass on to the next generation.

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