

**COMMUNICATIVE CONVERGENCE IN LINGUISTIC
ACCOMMODATION AMONG HAUSA SETTLERS IN AMA-HAUSA,
OWERRI: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY**

By

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Abstract

This paper focuses on communicative convergence in linguistic accommodation among Hausa settlers in Ama-Hausa, Owerri Municipal local government area, Imo state. The paper examines the use of language against another in certain contexts. The paper hopes to unravel the degree of linguistic convergence in this community and its implications for inter ethnic relationship. It examines the extent of the Hausa language speakers' accommodation of the Igbo language both in their private or public discourses. It helps to determine whether Hausa speakers are likely to identify with their host or they prefer their distinct identity. The paper adopts 'Communication Accommodation Theory' for data collection and analysis. Questionnaire with frequency tables and simple percentage will be used for analysis. The study intends to expose the positive or otherwise of the sociolinguistic impact of migration on the Hausa language.

Key words: *convergence, communication, language, Ama-Hausa, Hausa and Igbo*

1.0 Introduction

Language is the principal method of human communication, consisting of words used in a structured and conventional way and conveyed by speech, writing or gestures. Convergence is linguistic change in which speaker adapts to the linguistic features of his interlocutor as a result of prolonged language contact or personal interest. Turner and West, (2010) avert that Convergence is a process where a person shifts his or her interaction speech patterns in order for them to resemble the speech patterns of his or her interlocutors. This change can be noticed through various features of communication, language use, pronunciation and pause length, non-verbal behaviors et-cetra. Convergence in conversation is used based on people's perception of their interlocutors what their background is and other features along those lines. One of the factors that trigger convergence is attraction. If conversationists are attracted to each other, the convergence in their conversation will most likely appear.

As the Similarity Attraction Theory (SAT) states, people are more attracted to each other when they share similar beliefs, behaviors and personality. Hence, when a person perceives convergence in a positive way, it is very likely that both speakers involved will be attracted to each other. It can then be said that convergence is about a person's aspiration for social confirmation from his or her interlocutors (Giles and Coupland, 1991 in Adewale, 2021).

It is obvious that, a person's need for approval grows, so also will his need for convergence. However, attraction is not the only factor that increases the need for convergence, other factors are contingency of future interactions, the interlocutor's social status and interpersonal variability for the need of social consent (Giles and Coupland, 2010). It is more likely that a person with lower social status will converge with a person of higher social status than the other way round. Cann and Giles, (2006) assert that older bankers are seen to be more non-accommodating than young bankers. In other words, while linguistic divergence is common among older bankers, younger bankers tend to be more convergent in their linguistic behavior. Convergence is a very good way of increasing the efficiency of communication, lowering uncertainty, interpersonal anxiety and increasing mutual understanding which is also a motive for people to converge. Convergent linguistic behaviors indicate social solidarity and reduce social distance. It is used to achieve social approval or acceptance. Interestingly mutual convergence can foster communicative innovations at the lexical, grammatical and non-verbal levels which may serve to enhance shared couple and family identities as well as emergent small group identities Giles and Ogay, (2007) and Adewale, (2021) among others.

1.1 Ama-Hausa

Ama-Hausa simply means Hausa quarters. It is a popular Hausa settlement in Owerri Municipal area council of Imo state. It was Eze Njemanze of Owerri autonomous community directed his cabinet members to allocate settlement to Hausa people at "Mporo Miri", a thick bush, located southwest of Eze Njemanje's palace. Malam Saidu and about ten other Hausa settlers accepted this offer and finally erected their thatched houses in the area. That is the present Ama-Hausa/Hausa quarters along Douglas Road Owerri, Imo State (Fagge, 2012).

The cordial relationship between Hausa and their host led the colonial government to appoint the Hausa community leader, Mallam Yahaya, as a warrant Chief. According to Alhaji Ahmadu Buzu, Mallam Yahaya was the first Hausa warrant Chief in Eastern Nigeria. He was the only Hausa member of Owerri customary court. He contributed in the court mainly in the areas that affected Muslims. This situation continued up to the time Nigeria got her independence in 1960. The descendants of Mallam Yahaya, up till now, are the ruling class of the Hausa community in Owerri (Fagge, 2008 and 2012). Mallam Yahaya's grandson, Alhaji Auwalu Baba Sule, is the present Sarkin Hausawa of Owerri. In an interview with a journalist, Alhaji Auwalu Baba Sule states that:

“Our forefathers who came from Kano had settled in this area since 1898 which is over 120 years and inter married with the natives. The Owerri people regard us as their six clan otherwise called Owerre ‘Nchi Ishi’. (Punch online Newspaper 19th May, 2018)”.

Ama-Hausa is very popular as a business empire for operators of ‘Bureau De Change’. It is the place where all kinds of people visit on daily basis to change foreign currencies into Naira. Also among the major businesses are: suya support, vendors of all manner of foods, clothes, jewelries and et cetera.

1.2 Hausa Language

Hausa is the Chadic language spoken by the Hausa people mainly within the territories of Northern Nigeria and southern Niger republic. It is West Chadic language group under the Afro-asiatic language family. Hausa is one of the three languages of Nigeria accorded the status major language, the other two being Igbo and Yoruba. Apart from its number of dialects, Hausa language has reached a level of standardization. It is taught as a subject at the various levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary), (Musa, 2014).

1.3 Igbo Language

Igbo language belongs to the ‘Kwa’ group of ‘Niger-Congo’ family of languages. It is the dominant language of south eastern Nigeria, which is the lingua franca of the region. Igbo is one of the three languages of Nigeria accorded the status major language, the other two being Hausa and Yoruba. Like that of Hausa, apart from its number of dialects, Igbo language has reached a level of standardization. It is taught as a subject at the various levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary), (Anyanwu, 2007).

2.1 Theoretical Frame-Work

Communication Accommodation Theory by Howard G. (1991) was adopted in analyzing all the necessary data in this study. This theory emphasize on the adjustments that people does while communicating. It is when people try to emphasis or minimize the social difference between the others whom they interact with.

The factors that led to the accommodation activity are adjustments which can be through verbal communication or through gestures. The theory was evolved from the speech adjustment theory, which demonstrates the value of psychological concepts to understand concerns the behavioral changes that people make to attune their communication to their partner the dynamics of speech (Agbedo, 2015:72).

Communication accommodation theorists focus on the patterns of convergence and divergence of communication behaviors, particularly as they relate to people’s goals for social approval, communication efficiency and identity. The assumptions of this theory are:

- a. In all conversation, there are speech and behavioral similarities and dissimilarities.
- b. It is how people perceive the speech and behavior of other people that determines the evolution of the discourse.

- c. Language and behavior serve as indicators of social status and group belonging.
- d. The accommodation process varies in degree and appropriateness and it is guided by norms.

This social approach is relevant since the paper is an investigation into the language behaviors of Hausa settlers in Ama-Hausa, Owerri.

2.2 Methodology

The paper use both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Questionnaire with frequency tables and simple percentage is used in the data presentation. Respondents from different demographic background such as: age groups, sexes, level of education and occupation. Fifty respondents represent hundred percentages to assess different variables pertaining to convergence in the area. That is to say the paper use three means of eliciting data such as: questionnaires, interviews and participatory observation.

3.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the analysis of data. The first analysis is the analysis of data obtained through interview and questionnaire on demographic information of the respondents using age, sex, level of education, occupation and religion. The second analysis is the analysis of data also obtained through interview and questionnaire that represents two different situations which are the home and place of acquisition of the Igbo language (i.e. the school, the market and the neighborhood). The third analysis is the questionnaire on respondents’ reasons for imitating the speakers of Igbo language. The fourth analysis is the analysis of data obtained through questionnaire on situation of respondents readiness to learn the Igbo language if they do not speak it. The fifth analysis is the analysis of data obtained through questionnaire on respondent’s language ability

3.1 Demographic Information

Demographic information provides data regarding representative sample of the target population for generalization purpose. This is to present the demographic information of respondents using age, sex, level of education, occupation and religion.

Table 1: Distribution of Correspondents by Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	60	60%
Female	40	40%
Total	100	100%

The table shows that male constitute 60% of the respondents, while the female constitute 40% of the respondents. The difference between the two is because the male are accessible than female.

Table 2: Distribution of Correspondents by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20 – 30	30	30%
31 – 40	30	30%
41 – 50	20	20%

51 – Above	20	20%
Total	100	100%

This table shows that 30% of the respondents are young adult that are between the ages of 20-30. 30% of the respondents are young youth that are between the ages of 31-40. 20% of the respondents are matured youth that are between the ages of 41-50. While the other 20% of the respondents, are elderly of the ages of 50 and above.

Table 3: distribution of correspondents by level of education

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Religious	10	10%
Primary school living cert.	20	20%
WASSC	25	25%
NCE/DIP	20	20%
BA/ED/BSC	20	20%
MA/MSc	5	5%
Total	100	100%

The table shows that 10% of the respondents without formal education but only religious schools education that enable them to practice their religion proper. 20% of the respondents with primary school level of education. 25% of the respondents with secondary school level of education. 20% of the respondents with NCE/Diploma level of education. 20% of the respondents with first degree level of education. While 5% of the respondents with second degree (M.A./M.Sc.) level of education.

Table 4: Distribution of Correspondents by their Occupations

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Schooling	30	30%
Business	40	40%
Civil Servant	15	15%
Teaching	5	5%
Others	10	10%
Total	100	100%

The table shows that 30% of the respondents are in the process of schooling. 40% of the respondents engaged into businesses. 15% of the respondents are civil servants in various government agencies. 5% of the respondents are in teaching profession. 10% of the respondents that fall into other column are those engaged into mechanics, laborers etc.

Table 5: Distribution of Correspondents by Religion

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Islam	70	70%
Christianity	20	20%
Others	10	10%
Total	100	100%

The table shows that 70% of the respondents are Muslims. 20% of the respondents are Christians. 10% of the respondents are traditionalists.

3.2 Language Information

Language Information is about the use of one language against another in certain context. This is for the fact that certain codes are more appropriate than others depending on different situations. The questionnaire represents two different situations which are the home and place of acquisition of the Igbo language (i.e. the school, the market and the neighborhood).

Table 6: Language Spoken at Home

Language	Frequency	Percentage
Hausa	65	65%
Igbo	15	15%
English	10	10%
Others	10	10%
Total	100	100%

This table shows that 65% of the respondents speak Hausa at home, while 15% of the respondents speak Igbo at home, 10% respondents speak English at home, while 10% respondents speak other languages at home. The table shows that, though the number of respondent who speak Hausa is higher, a good number of people speak Igbo. This definitely impact positively on the level of convergence between the Hausa and Igbo speakers in Ama-Hausa, Owerri metropolis.

Table 7: Place of Acquisition of the Igbo Language

Place of Acquisition of the Igbo Language	Frequency	Percentage
At Home	10	10%
At School	10	10%
In the Market	30	30%
In the Neighborhood	40	40%
Others	10	10%
Total	100	100%

It shows that 10% of the respondents acquire Igbo at home, while 10% respondents acquire it in school. 30% respondents acquire Igbo in the market. While 40% of the respondents indicate that they acquire it in the neighborhoods. With this, we can calculate that the degree of convergence is higher in markets and

neighborhoods. This due to the facts that most of the Hausa people in Ama-Hausa engaged into business activities.

3.3 Respondents Reasons for Imitating the Speakers of Igbo Language

One of the major means of integration is language. This is to indicate whether the Hausa speakers’ reason for convergence when speaking with Igbo speakers is for integrative or instrumental purposes.

Table 8: Why do you imitate speakers of the Igbo language when talking with them?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Because I want to have sense of belonging	40	40%
For interaction purpose	25	25%
For better understanding of Igbo culture	15	15%
To promote unity	10	10%
I like the way the language sounds	10	10%
Total	100	100%

It shows that 40% of the respondents engage in convergence because they want to have sense of belonging. 25% respondents engage in convergence for interaction purpose. 15% respondents engage in convergence for better understanding of Igbo culture, while 10% respondents converge to promote unity. 10 respondents converge with the Igbo speakers because they like the way the language sounds.

3.4 Readiness to Learn Igbo Language

The questionnaire here represents situation of respondents readiness to learn the Igbo language if they do not speak it.

Table 9: Are you ready to learn Igbo?

Context	Frequency	Percentage
If you did not speak Igbo, would you like to learn it?		
Yes	85	85%
No	15	15%
Total	100	100

85% of the respondent would like to learn the Igbo language while only 15% that not interested. The table shows that the degree of convergence will definitely be high since the majority of the sample populations show their readiness to learn Igbo.

Table 10: Wishing to speak Igbo first to Igbo native speaker.

Context	Frequency	Percentage
In your communication with Igbo native speakers, Do you wish to speak Igbo first to them?		
Yes	90	90%
No	10	10%
Total	100	100

The table shows that 90% of the respondents agreed to speak Igbo first to the Igbo native speakers. 10% of the respondents declined. This shows that linguistic convergence is dominant among the Hausa settlers who seen as their second home.

3.5 Language Ability

Table 8: Ability to speak Igbo and Hausa languages

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
I speak Hausa better than Igbo	50	50%
I speak Igbo better than Hausa	20	20%
I have equal ability in the two languages	30	30%
Total	100	100

The table shows that 50% of the respondents agreed that they can speak Hausa better than Igbo. 20% of the respondents agreed that they can speak Igbo better than Hausa. Those who have equal ability to the two languages are 30%. This implies that many of the respondents are likely to engage into linguistic convergence.

Summary

The paper revealed the following: In all the domains of linguistic convergence in interview namely: home domain, school domain, market domain and the neighborhood; there is high degree of convergence by speakers of Hausa language when speaking to Igbo speakers of Igbo language. Although, there are minor differences in pronunciation, it is evident that the languages spoken are Igbo and Pidgin English. It has been observed also the language is the same when Hausa speakers engaged in linguistic convergence when speaking with Igbo speakers of Igbo language.

The analysis of the Questionnaire administered also revealed that sixty-five percent of the respondents speak Hausa at home; fifteenth percent of the respondents speak Igbo at home. This shows that linguistic convergence is made possible among Hausa settlers in as those that speak Igbo among them will definitely want to engage in linguistic convergence with their Igbo host.

It has also observed that all the respondents can speak Igbo in one way or the other. Ten percent of the respondents acquire Igbo at home, while ten percent of the respondents acquire it in school. Thirty percent of the respondents acquire Igbo in the market. While 40% of the respondents indicate that they acquire it in the neighborhoods. With this, we can posit that the degree of linguistic convergence is higher in markets and neighborhoods. This is due to the facts that most of the Hausa people in Ama-Hausa engaged into business activities.

All the respondents have one reason or the other to engage in linguistic convergence when speaking with their Igbo host. 40% of the respondents engage in convergence because they want to have sense of belonging. Twenty-five percent

of the respondents engage in convergence for interaction purpose. Fifteenth percent of the respondents engage in convergence for better understanding of Igbo culture, while ten percent of the respondents converge to promote unity. Also ten percent of the respondents converge with the Igbo speakers because they like the way the language sounds.

It has been observed that eighty percent of the respondents would like to learn the Igbo language. This shows that the degree of convergence will definitely be high since the majority of the sample populations show their readiness to learn Igbo.

It has further discovered that fifty percent of the respondents agreed that they can speak Hausa better than Igbo. 20% of the respondents agreed that they can speak Igbo better than Hausa. Those who have equal ability to the two languages are 30%. This implies that majority of the respondents are likely to engage into linguistic convergence. With this linguistic convergence is believed to be common when Hausa settlers talking with the Igbo language speakers.

Conclusion

The forgoing discussion discovered that the Hausa settlers in Ama-Hausa, Owerri Municipal area, engage into linguistic convergence from time to time when they are in conversation with native speakers of the Igbo language in Ama-Hausa community of Owerri metropolis. Many of the respondents who filled the questionnaire and those interviewed have been observed to have the ability to speak the Igbo language; many of them also have one reason or the other to engage in linguistic convergence with their Igbo host. Those that can not speak Igbo fluently are ready to learn it. Majority of the respondents wish to speak Igbo first to the Igbo native speakers. A quite number of the respondents indicate their equal ability to speak both Hausa and Igbo. Surprisingly some percentage among the respondents indicates that they can even speak Igbo better than Hausa; this is due to the fact that they never been to Hausa land; they were born and brought-up in Igbo land. Therefore, it is not surprising that the linguistic convergence is highly prevalent among Hausa speakers when speaking with their Igbo host. It has been established that linguistic convergence is well pronounced when speakers of Hausa language interact with speaker of Igbo language in Ama-Hausa area of Owerri metropolis.

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