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Language choices and distributions in informal public space: A case in Winneba

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Abstract

This paper investigates the influence of linguistic variables on language choices and distributions in Informal Public Space in Winneba. The aim of the study is to bring to light the linguistic choices that are made in Winneba where existing studies have described as multilingual setting. Demographically, the study divided Winneba into Formal Public Space, Informal Public Space and Semi-Formal Public Space. The focus of the study was on the informal public space defined in the study as places such as lorry stations, market places, saloons, dressmaking centers, shops, drug stores, drinking bars, food joints, restaurants, hawkers, hostels, etc. The study is grounded in qualitative approach and rooted in survey as design. In terms of sampling, the study randomly sampled and administered questionnaires to two hundred and fifty (250) respondents operating in twelfth (12) domains which constitute the Informal Public Space in Winneba. From the study, it emerged that, the university community now determines language distribution in the informal public space in Winneba. This new trend has given the English Language the urge to spread from the formal public space across all the other spaces leading to a diglossia. The effect of this new linguistic trend in Winneba is the competition between English language and Fante (Effutu/Guan) for dominance in the Informal Public Space which is highly dominated by non-literates. This competition has led to usurpation of spaces by the two dominant languages with the overall effect being the weaken language; Efutu which faces possible extinction in the near future.

Keywords: Public space; Awashed; Established Migrants; Diglossia; Extinction

1. Introduction

Domains of language use in multilingual speech communities have been a subject of controversy in the field of Sociolinguistics. The issue becomes complex where language choices and distribution are influenced by some linguistic variables (Fasold, 1987). According to Batibo (2005), domains refer to places of language use in multilingual speech communities. Other studies such as Davey, Clark and Jenkinson (2019); Toribio and Edward (1996a) and Mackey (2000); and host of others have all made a case on the relationship between domains and linguistic variables in places where multiple languages display vitality concurrently. The domains in diglossia speech communities have been described by (Fasold, 1987) as official and unofficial. Contrary to Fasold (1987) description, Batibo (2005) puts the domains as high public space, middle public space and low public space in triglosic speech communities. Agyemang (2013) also categorizes the domains of language use in Winneba into home, education, Christian religion and traditional religion. Batibo (2005) and Fasold (1987) both argue that language distributions in either diglossia communities or triglosic communities are influenced by certain linguistic variables such as the status of a language, migration, trade, education, etc.

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Mackey (2000); Myers-Scotton (1993); Toribio and Edward (1996a); etc. have also revealed that, language irrespective of the social domain it is used can only be spoken when there is a contact between speakers. For various reasons, people with different ethnic backgrounds migrate to different places and therefore have to interact with people they come across (Amuzu et al, 2010 and Davey et al, 2019; etc.). Again, migration has been reported in (Toribio &Edward, 1996) to influence linguistic repertoire of the migrants and the indigenous people where linguistic vitality is determined by population network capacity of either the migrants or the indigenous people (Batibo 2005) opines that, in cases where one language is considered to display attributes such as socio-economic prestige, language of education, and to some extent controls the demography of the area, the possibility that people in such multilingual society will shift from their language becomes increasingly progressive. This linguistic alternation in domains has been theoretically described by (Wenger, 1998) as community of practice where the people within a particular domain activate one of the codes used in the multilingual speech community as a result of its social roles. The choices speakers make in multilingual speech communities is also influenced by the social roles within a domain of use (Myers-Scotton, 1998).

The linguistic diversity described above has been confirmed in Abaka (2006) where he reported that Effutu and Fante are the two languages with vicious vitality in Winneba. Agyemang (2013) however indicates a three-tier language use in Winneba and further indicated that the Fante language has stronger vitality than English language and Effutu in all the domains. The incongruity in the findings of the two studies require that a further linguistic investigation is carried out to ascertain the reality on ground. The motivation is that the linguistic vitality in Winneba has been found to be problematic since people do not really know which language has dominance over others, which language is displaying vitality in the various domains and also which language is under threat and faces eminent extension. Again, there is a dense network for languages such as English and Fante as these two languages demonstrate vitality exclusively in the Formal Public Space and Informal Public Space respectively. The depth of the problem is Effutu which also on the street demonstrates vitality across the beaches and the indigenous parts of Winneba such as Ayipe, Penkye and Dwoma (see Abakah, 2006). This irregular language distribution makes it difficult to account for the language situation in Winneba. Drawing from the forgoing conceptual arguments, the present study is set to identify the dominant languages in the Informal Public Space in Winneba vis-a-viz the linguistic variables that influence language distributions and choices.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

This work hinges on Myers-Scotton's Markedness theory propounded in (1998). The theory as described by Myers-Scotton accounts for the relationship between languages and choices people make while using language in multilingual spaces to perform roles and to relate with people. Myers-Scotton (1998) posits that context influences choices that people make in different social settings especially in the multilingual communities. She refers to such contextual language used as marked language (ML) and unmarked (UL). She refers to the Marked Language (ML) as language used in unexpected context, for instance, the use of English language in a Ghanaian chief's palace. On the contrary, the unmarked language refers to the expected language use in a context; such as the use of Asante Twi in a chief's palace or any of the Akan spoken communities or English language in the lecture halls in Ghana. The implication is that, in multilingual setting, each domain (space) has a befitting language that serves a particular social purpose. Therefore, bilinguals and polyglots activate codes depending on the social environment, social network as well as the context of use (Myers-Scotton (2002; 1998).

In this study, the researchers have described the social context or domains of language use as formal public space and informal public space. The informal public space in Winneba which is defined as places such as markets, barbering shops, drinking bars, etc is expected to be dominated by the two indigenous languages which are Fante and Effutu according to the markedness theory. However, the formal public space such as the municipal assembly, schools, banks, hospitals, police station, etc. is also by default expected to be dominated by English language. In effect, any language alternation contrary to these assumptions amount to either marked or unmarked language use as put fore by Meyers-Scotton (1998). The Markedness model entails three useful tenets which are commonly refer to as maxims. These three maxims hold the core meaning of the model and explain that speakers consider all the protocols (including rights and obligations) in the prevailing linguistic setting so as to ensure effective conversation (Myers-Scotton 1998).

These three tenets of the markedness theory have been found to be (1) the unmarked choice maxim, (2) the marked choice maxim and the last one is (3) exploratory choice maxim.

Therefore, the study employs the marked language and the unmarked language dichotomy to share light on the linguistic motivations that drive speakers to activate one code over the others within same multilingual community (Myers-Scotton 1998: 5). As Kieswetter (1995) explains, the unmarked choice is considered as the expected choice within a particular context, whereas making a marked choice often carries extra social meaning.

Drawing from the foregoing argument about the Markedness Model and its application, the researchers are of the view that applying it for the analysis of the data is appropriate since the ultimate goal of the study is to investigate how people in the informal public space in Winneba who Agyemang (2013) describes as multi-linguals make choices of languages as they carry out their daily activities. Again, the study focuses on the social roles that account for choices in such multilingual domains and this is one of the maxims of the markednss model. Lastly, the objectives of the study falls within the ambit of the Markedness model, hence it is considered to offer nuances to account for reality of language distribution in Winneba.

2. Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature because it seeks to offer an understanding to the linguistic situation in the informal public space (Creswell & Creswell, (2019) and Plano- Clark & Creswell, 2008). The study again seeks to elicit hidden information about the linguistic situation in the informal public space in Winneba by interacting with respondents and this research paradigm has been echoed in Creswell (2013). The research is naturalist in nature since the approach to data collection as well as interpretation of the data were predominantly based on the situation on the natural setting in Winneba and such characteristics of research is akin to qualitative research. Therefore, the researchers deemed it fit to adopt qualitative since all the inherent attributes of the study are captured under it (Creswell & Creswell, 2019; Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Isreal & Hay, 2006; Yin, 2003; etc.)

2.1. Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative survey as design due to the underlying objectives that drive it. Survey which is basically non experimental is used to understand the attitude, opinion, or certain characteristic tics of larger population through a well-designed survey questions (Creswell &Creswell, 2019 and Davey et. al 2019; Plano-Clark & Creswell, 20008; Yin, 2003; etc.). The strength of survey design is that it offers researchers the opportunity to select a part from a larger group known as population in order to generalize findings. The choice of this design is appropriate since the researchers through questionnaire attempt to understand the linguistic characteristics of people in the informal public space in Winneba. Creswell & Creswell, (2019) and Fowler, (2002) have established that to use questionnaire to understand a phenomenon in this case, a linguistic phenomenon in a natural setting in Winneba, is best studied through a survey design. Drawing from the above, the researchers deem it worthwhile to use survey as a drive to gather data for a study of this nature.

2.2. Research Setting

The study was carried out within one month in Winneba from 13th April 2023 to 17th May 2023. The selection of the site is strategic since it provides a snapshot of the linguistic phenomenon being discussed. Winneba is traditionally noted for Fante and Effutu languages operating in different domains thereby complementing the linguistic repertoire of the people (Agyemang, 2013). However, the inception of the University in Winneba has led migration of people with different linguistic backgrounds into Winneba and it is estimated that that not less seven thousand (7,000) people migrate to Winneba annually according to the statistical unit of the Effutu Municipal Assembly. The cause of the migration is generally attributed to education and business and these migrants represent all the ethnic groups in Ghana with different language backgrounds and this is captured in the municipal annual migration report (2023).

2.3. Population, Sampled Size and Techniques

The entire population of Winneba according to Ghana statistical service (2023) stands at fifty-five thousand, three hundred and thirty one (55,331). The birth and death department of the Effutu Municipal Assembly projects the current population in Winneba to be around sixty thousand (60, 000) based on population growth rate.

Out of this figure, the study conveniently sampled two hundred and fifty (250) respondents operating in the informal public space. The choice of convenient sampling comes on the back of (Creswell & Creswell, 2019 and Davey et al 2019) who suggest that convenient sampling offers the researchers the opportunity to select from the population those that are readily available. Again, through the convenient sampling, the researcher was able to take away anxiety and disturbances of the sampled and as a result the sampled were ready to cooperate with the researcher (Tashakkori & Crewell, 2007).

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection

A survey approach of data collection was adapted through questionnaire designed from the format of Amuzu (2010). The rationale for the choice of questionnaire spanned from the fact that it presents means to reach out to the sampled population and also to avoid disturbing them especially where they are busily attending to their personal engagements

(Davey et al 2019 and Yin, 2003). Again Creswell, (2013) and Davey et al, (2019) have revealed that questionnaires are more effective when dealing with large sample size. The questionnaire also offers the respondents the opportunity to respond to the questions at their own free time since they do not require the presence of the researcher before giving their response (Davey et al. 2019). It was only in cases where a respondent willingly asks the researcher to administer the questionnaire to them. The foregoing reveal the researchers decision to use question for data collection.

2.5. Procedure for Administration of the Questionnaire and Data Collection

To obtain data that is representative enough so to meet the objective of the study, the researchers used self-prepared questionnaire which was guided by Amuzu (2010). In all, a questionnaire with 25 items that entails the respondents' bio-data, place of birth, educational background, occupation, linguistic background, etc was used to collect data for the study.

Following the linguistic background of Winneba, the study focused on three languages (English, Fanti and Effutu) and their distribution in the informal public space. The decision to settle on these three languages lies in the fact that they are more dominant and display vitality in all the spaces in Winneba (Abakah, 2006 and Agyeman, 2013). To get the true reflection of vitality and distribution of the three languages in the informal public space, the study demarcated Winneba into four demographic zones and this is in agreement with (Agyeman, 2013 and Andoh-Kumi, 1997). This was done with respect to how the awashed education institution has partition Winneba. These demographic demarcated zones are south Winneba, central Winneba, north Winneba and Winneba junction. One significant distinction about the Winneba junction is that, even though it has no campus on its own as the case is for south, central and north, it has a sizeable student population. In all these demographic description of Winneba, the researchers concentrated more on the non-literates who operate in the informal public space than the literates. This study defines non literates as people whose education ended in junior high school. The researchers therefore captured the literates as people who have had formal education beyond Junior High School level. Amuzu (2010) for instance asserts that, a person who has completed senior secondary school or its equivalent should have been exposed to English Language long enough to speak it reasonably fluent.

This decision was taken to find out whether the awashed education institution has influence on the language repertoire of the non-literates as they interact with the literates mostly dominated by the university students who hold both the language which is socio-economically prestigious and controls the purchasing power in Winneba. This strategy was also used to find out whether total man- hour with a language can influence a person's language use irrespective of his or her educational background (see Amuzu, 2010).

Following the above, two hundred and fifty (250) respondents were conveniently selected from twelve different domains which constitute the informal public space. A consideration was given to gender that predominantly operates in each domains (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). In all, two hundred and fifty (250) questionnaires were administered to two hundred and fifty (250) respondents. Out of the total figure, seventy percent (70%) which represents one hundred and seventy-five (175) questionnaires was administered to non-literates operating in the informal public space. The researchers again considered the migration history of respondents based on Labov (1972) which puts migration history of people as; first generation, established migrants and newly arrived. With this, eighty-five (85) respondents were selected from first generation group (stationary people), sixty-five (65) from established immigrants and twenty-five (25) from newly arrived. This was done to find out how pressure, man-hour or how long exposure to a language can influence a person's bilingualism or multilingualism even if they have no formal education.

The remaining seventy-five (75) questionnaires representing thirty percent (30%) were administered to literates who provide and obtain services in the informal public space.

With how Winneba has been partitioned in mind, the researchers administered seventy (70) questionnaires each to people operating in different domains in informal public space at South Winneba, Central Winneba and North Winneba. Forty (40) questionnaires were administered to people in the informal public space at Winneba junction. This was because Junction has no campus and also the population there is small compare to the other three demarcated areas. From the four demarcated zones that is; south, central, north and junction, the researchers administered questionnaires to attendants and care takers operating in thirteen (13) hostels, twenty-five (25) shops, twenty-five (25) barbering and hairdressing salons, twenty-five(25) food joints, seventeen (17) drinking bars, twenty-five (25) dressmaking shops, fourteen (14) drugstores, fourteen (14) mobile money operators, eight (8) lorry stations and twelfth (12) drivers, twenty-five (25) hawkers (water sellers, coconut sellers, fish mongers, etc). The researchers also selected the beach market at south Winneba, Winneba main market at central Winneba, the north Mini market at North Winneba and the market at the junction. Also, questionnaires were administered to fourteen (14) respondents in each of the four selected

markets in Winneba while the remaining seventeen (17) questionnaires were administered to the fisher folks (fishermen). These selected domains represent the most patronized by the people in Winneba and subsequently give a reflection of how the three languages are distributed in the informal public space in Winneba.

One strategy used by the researchers was how they administered a questionnaire to respondents. The researcher deliberately triggered a conversation in English language with non-literate respondents before a questionnaire was either given or administered and this is in line with (Labov 1979). This strategy was repeated in a reversed manner where at this time the researchers triggered the conversation in Fante and Effutu with literate respondents. This was made possible through two research assistants who speak both Fante and Effutu. The respondents' response to the conversation gave the researchers an idea about their language repertoire. It was also an attempt to avoid a situation where a respondent will give false information thereby affecting the outcome of the study (ibid).

With these responses, the researchers stratified the language repertoire of the respondents into English, Fante and Effutu. This was done to find out the level of dominance and vitality of the three languages operating in the Informal Public Space in order to determine which of them displays strongest vitality. It was also an attempt to find out whether there is a language shift as the people continuously use some codes frequently than others (Fasold, 1987).

3. Results

Two hundred and fifty (250) questionnaires were administered to one hundred and seventy-five (175) non -literates and seventy-five (75) literates operating in twelve domains that define the Informal Public Space in Winneba. Out of the one hundred and seventy-five (175) non-literate respondents, seventy-seven (77) respondents were found to use Fante fluently and some level of English to serve their customers. With these seventy-seven (77) respondents, thirty (30) respondents who constitute what Labov, (1972) describes as second generation(established migrants) use both Fante and English fluently to serve their customers. Thirty-five (25) respondents who constitute the established migrants use impeccable Fante and some level of English to serve their customers while the remaining twenty-two (22) respondents who constitute newly arrived migrants use some kind of Fante and English which needs attention to make meaning to serve their customers. In addition, it was also established that sixty three (63) respondents who constitute the newly arrived migrants were found to use English fluently and some level of intelligible Fante. The newly arrived were also found to use both English-Fante code-switching and mixing in some situations where they encounter difficulty in activating one code for effect

The remaining thirty-five (25) who also constitute the first generation respondents; predominantly use Effutu and Fante fluently to serve their customers. It was also emerged that the beach side which is predominantly populated by the indigenous Winneba people, Effutu and Fante enjoy dominance and by that demonstrate vitality across that side with a little or no English language at all. Within the first generation and established migrant groups, it was established that ten (10) respondents largely use Effutu, Fante and English and these people were found to have created a densely immobile isolated community at the beach. Despite the fact that a digrosia is created at communities along the beach of Winneba, Fanti and Effutu were captured to display vitality with Efutu having urge over the Fante in terms of usage. Again, Fante was found to only be activated when there is a conversation between indigenous persons and either established or early migrants especially in time of exchange, thus trading.

The data analysis also pointed out that though numerically, Effutu is spoken by a few people in an isolated places in Winneba, it has resisted pressure from the two giant languages (English and Fante) which are currently dominating the domains and have gradually assumed the status of lingual franca and such finding is in agreement with (Abakah, 2006) and also confirms what (Labov 1972) says about mobility.

With regards to the literate respondents, thirty (30) out of the seventy-five (75) respondents who constitute newly arrived and have spent a maximum of two years in Winneba use only English language for their operations in the Informal Public Space. Majority of this group describe above were found to be students who have migrated from non-Akan communities in pursue of higher education in the University of Education, Winneba. Within same literate group, twenty-eight (28) out of the seventy-five (75) who constitute both second generation and also with Akan language background fluently alternate between English and Fante while the remaining seventeen (17) were the established non Akan background group who have spent a minimum of four years in Winneba and this group speaks English and some level of any of the Akan dialects. The overall analysis shows that two hundred and twenty (220) respondents representing 88% use both English and Fante to perform their activities in the Informal Public Space. Thirty five (35) respondents which represents 14% use Fante and Effutu to carry out their business in the Informal Public Space in Winneba while only ten (10) participants representing 4% were found to use English and Effutu for operations in the Informal Public Space. However, it was found that thirty (30) respondents representing 12% use only English language,

however, none of the participants was found using only Fante or only Effutu for any activity in the defined domains. This Finding therefore corroborate the position of (Agyeman, 2013 and Fasold,1987) that people will shift from their indigenous language to align themselves to the language that is prestigious among the speech community, that has educational undertone, economic power. The English and Fante are found demonstrating vitality since the two languages are considered prestigious and popular in terms of education and economic powers.

The result of the data analysis has been graphically represented in figure one (1) below. The figure gives a pictorial description of the diaglosic nature of the Informal Public Space Winneba. The graphical representation provides evidence for all bilinguals or multilinguals who use English in addition to either Fante or Effutu in the informal public space, all multilinguals or bilinguals who use Fante in addition to either English or Effutu in the informal public space and the bilinguals or multilinguals who use Effutu in addition to either English or Fante in the informal public space (Agyeman, 2013)
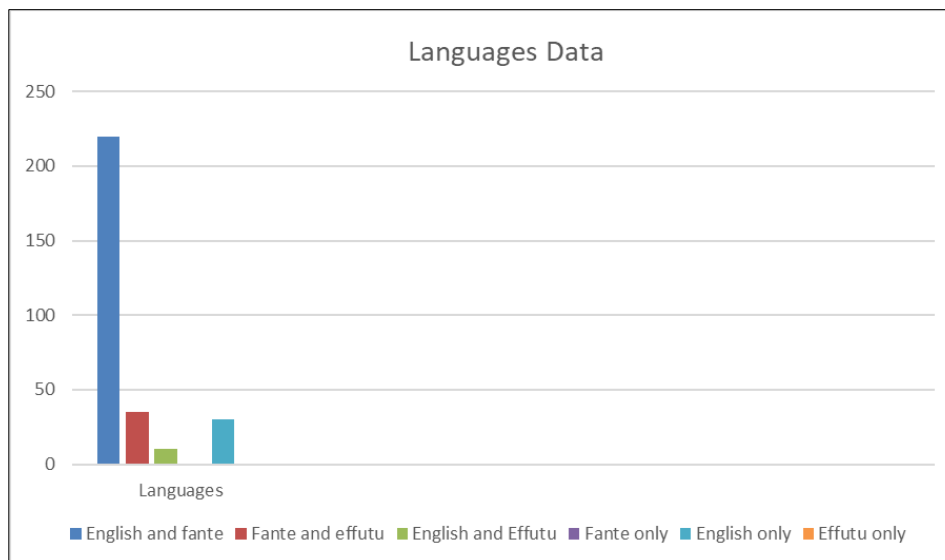
Languages	Fante and English	Fante and Effutu	English and Effutu	Fante only	English only	Effutu only
Total Number of speakers	220	35	10	0	30	0
Percentage out of 250 participants	88%	14%	4%	0%	12%	0%

Source: Fieldwork 2023

Figure 1 Linguistic repertoire of the respondents in the Informal Public Space

The graph shows a competition between English language and Fante in the Informal Public Space in Winneba. However, Effutu, the traditional language demonstrates less vitality in the informal public space as compare to Fante and English language.

4. Discussion

The data shows a diglossic situation in the Informal Public Space in Winneba with English language and Fante competing strongly for dominance. This implies that there is no person in Winneba that is a monolingual and therefore either the people alternate between Fante and Efutu, Efutu and English and English and Fante and this confirms the assertion by (Abakah, 2006 and Agyeman, 2013) who contend that most people in Winneba are either bilingual or multilingual.. This finding is largely attributed to the migration history of the people in Winneba (Labove 1972). The study revealed that two hundred and twenty (220) respondents who form second generation use either Fante or English in the informal public space. Again, it emerged that, thirty-five (35) established migrants also use Effutu or Fante while ten (10) respondents use English or Effutu for their operations in the Informal Public Space in Winneba. Moreover, thirty (30) respondents who constitutes newly arrive without Akan background only speak English language in all situations in the Informal Public Space in Winneba. Though it was established that some thirty newly arrived migrants with no Akan

background use only English language, such people speak other languages which demonstrate minor vitality in Winneba. This finding is in sync with (Meyers- Scotton 1998) who reported that people in multilingual settings clearly make choices of language for effect in domains.

5. Conclusion

The overall analysis shows that the English language and Fante viciously demonstrate strength and vitality in the informal public space in Winneba and this has been captured in Meyers Scotten (1998) and Davey et al (2019). The effect is the usurpation of domains with the overall effect being Effutu which faces a progressive reduction of vitality and possible extinction (Batibo, 2005). The data again revealed that man-hour (the amount of pressure and duration a person is exposed to a language) can influence his or her language repertoire as they socialized with a group and this finding reflects (Bodoma et al 2009 and Eberhard et al (2019). Another striking revelation was that the concept ''non literate'' needs to be critically reexamined since the idea of defining a literate as a person who has been exposed to formal education by Owu-Ewie (2018) has proved otherwise in the face of this study. The linguistic situation in the informal public space in Winneba has demonstrated that exposure to language is equally important in second language acquisition. By inference the researchers however have expanded the definition of literate to cover all those who have acquired a second language through contact variables such as the amount of duration and pressure they are exposed to that language. From the findings and the discussion so far, English and Fante are the two dominant languages which are alternatively used in the unmarked informal public space in Winneba (Meyers Scotton 2000). A situation which has created a chain of language competition in spaces leading to suppression of the weaker language (Agyeman, 2013; Batibo, 2005 and Toribio, 2000). Effutu the language of the indigenous people which is marked language in the Informal Public Space in Winneba (Mayers-Scotton, 1998) is progressively seen losing its vitality in the larger community and this corroborates studies such as (Abakah, 2006; Agyeman, 2014 and Agyeman, 2013). The Fante language and English language have suppressed Effutu in the informal public space in Winneba leaving it to have vitality at three communities at the beach and these communities have been found to be Ayipe, Penkye and Dwoma. From this, the study projects that Effutu stands the high risk of possible extinction if the present trend of language suffocation (Fishman, 1998) in Winneba becomes increasingly progressive.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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