LANGUAGE ATTITUDES: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

Language, a vital communication tool, is a social commodity used to express one's opinions, views, and ideas. It is a code shared by members of a community, and as such, surrounded by diverse attitudes because humans, and by extension, communities, express certain attitudes to whatever is exposed to them. Thus, language attitudes refer to one's perceptions, beliefs or feelings about a language variety and these attitudes are shaped by a complex interplay of influences. With these insights, this study examines factors responsible for language attitudes and the consequences of such factors including power and prestige of the language, the degrees to which the variety has visible vitality, socioeconomic advantages of learning the language, sentimental attachment towards the language especially the mother tongue, appropriateness of the language in a given context, and attitudes towards the culture which a language express. The paper concludes that the consequences of such attitudes are language maintenance and shift, education and learning of the language among others. It is recommended that attention be given to the different areas that inform various attitudes towards language use and attitudes.

Key words: Language, Language Attitudes, Causes, Consequences.

Introduction

Language attitude, a crucial concept, has been over time, assessed in sociolinguistics as a result of its significance in the creation of identities, language maintenance, bilingualism, language planning,

language policy, etc. (Garrett, 2010; Salmon and Menjivar, 2019). Hopper and Fitch (1983) define language attitudes as the evaluative judgements about others' speech language patterns. Penalossa (1981) has also said that what is customarily referred to as language attitude actually encompasses a wide spectrum of attitudes, value, beliefs and emotion regarding language as they are "natural" feelings of the person who holds them and this belief may not have a basis in objective reality or involve aesthetic judgement nor subject to empirical verification. Language attitudes seem to be shared by members of a community. Labov (1972) has said the speech community is not defined by any marked agreement of the use of language elements so much as by participation in a set of shared norms, those norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour. Language attitudes permeate our everyday lives as people often judge our social status, group membership, intelligence and competence by the way we use language (Garreth,2010). To Dewaele (2014), people hold attitudes to language at all its levels e.g. accent, choice of words, speed of speech, grammar, language variety. Dragojevic (2016) adds that language attitudes are generally defined as a set of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural intentions towards different language varieties. Language attitudes refer to one's feelings or perception about one language or the other. The fact that language is not only an instrument for the communication of messages but that in which a language group distinguishes itself generates language attitude (Muysken and Appel 1988). The tendency therefore, is that people will want to prove that one language or the other (especially the mother tongue) is superior to the others and consequently, more expressive and logical.

Sociolinguists are greatly interested in studying language attitudes for cogent reasons. According to Giles et al. (1982), any real understanding of specific language problems needs to study how people react to the language varieties spoken in their locale. As such, studies on language attitudes play great roles in the language planning process. This is because language attitude survey, enables one to do an objective study of language use which is more reliable for language planning than

impressionistic ones(Since it is not always possible to see these opinions in person, researchers frequently use sets of questions to get a sense of how people feel about languages). To Trudgill (1975), societal values may be reflected in judgements concerning linguistic varieties. As such, they give insight into social norms and values. Moreover, Giles et al. (1982) have said that language attitudes come to play a great role in a variety of applied contexts like medical consultations, and legal situations. Also, they affect teachers' attitudes to students and the selection of candidates during an interview. Also, since language attitudes have a long history of influencing language use, language variation and change, language shift and language maintenance (Garrett, 2010; Kircher, 2022; Sallabank, 2013), therefore, understanding language attitudes may help researchers identify positive or negative patterns in attitudes toward languages or regional varieties, The social meanings that people ascribe to language and its users are the focus of language attitudes research, and because of the importance of language attitude surveys, a number of researches have been carried out by sociolinguists e.g. Artamonova (2020); Salmon and Menjivar, (2019) Dewaele et al.(2018); Rezaei, Latifi and Nematzadeh (2017); Dragojevic(2016); Masgoret and Gardner(2003); Gareth(2010); Woolard (1984); Zughoul and Taminian (1984); Ferguson(1968). Indeed, studies abound on attitudes to specific languages, language varieties or certain aspects such as pronunciation or spelling of particular languages.In the remaining part of this paper, we will attempt to discuss factors influencing language attitudes and the consequences of these factors.

Factors Influencing Language Attitudes and the Consequences of Language Attitudes

A number of factors shape speakers' attitudes to the use of one language or the other. In the first place, one must note that language is not only used for conveying information but it is used as a symbol of group membership and identity (Constable, 1975); that is, it is used by a group to distinguish itself from other groups. This generates negative

attitudes in a situation where a group of individuals (nation) does not have a particular language which differentiates them from others. For example, most African nations after their independence as a nation started agitating for the use of their indigenous languages just to avoid being seen as mere colony of the white nations. The consequences were that the language of the colonial masters was seen as the tool of colonisation, and something that should be given little regard. An example is in Tanzania, where Swahili now takes the role of the English language.

The status or prestige of a language also affects people's attitude to it. The prestige of a language, generally lies in its usefulness. To Penalossa (1981), some languages have prestige because of certain supposed virtues that were inculcated in the minds of those who studied them. Thus, for example, Latin allegedly gave one a better grasp of English grammar. Thus, the prestige of a language, tend to make learners have instrumental reasons for its learning as the knowledge of the language will bring socio-economic advantages. For example, Hofman and Cais (1984) discovered that among Welsh children, English is favoured because of instrumental reasons as it is the world language of wider communication.

In the literature, two attitudinal components are usually evident in language attitudes, according to numerous international and cross-cultural research on the subject: prestige and solidarity (also known as social attractiveness) (El-Dash and Busnardo, 2001). While the solidarity dimension is linked to the perception of the researched language as agreeable, amiable, and socially appealing, the status evaluative component is associated with the perception of the language as prestigious, correct, and standard.

It has been argued that language attitude plays a significant role in shaping or influencing second language (L2) (foreign and second language) learning (Artamonova, 2020; Salmon and Menjívar, 2019). This clearly means that learners' attitudes about a second language have a big influence on how well they can pick up that language; and according to Saeed et al. (2014), attitude towards language has long

been recognised as a crucial factor in the process of learning and teaching a language.

Hence, language with low prestige is often downgraded and considered to be an unfortunate and ugly jargon without rules, grammar and structure (Strevens, 1965). Mackey (1968), has in fact said that some speakers do harbour attitudes of disrespect toward their first languages and admiration for their second languages. The explanation for this is not farfetched – it lies in the prestige of the second language.

The fact that a language has a high prestige in a society, does not automatically make it the 'best' in the minds of the speakers. This reflects the intricate relationship between language prestige and individual or community attitudes towards a language, and according to Weinreich (1974), it is because people develop an emotional, pre-rational attachment to the language through which they received fundamental training (home training) i.e. their mother tongues. Labov (1963) in Schilling's (2013a) research on language variation and change demonstrates that speakers' perceptions of their own language or dialect often differ from societal attitudes. For instance, speakers of non-prestigious dialects may still hold strong, positive feelings about their linguistic variety, valuing it for its cultural and social significance. The total situation in which the language is learnt also provides the basis for mastery of the language which is not to be equalled later for any other tongue. As one rationalises, one may conclude that one's native language is richer, more subtle, and more expressive than others. As such, it is natural to speakers to have sentimental attitudes towards their mother tongues. Nader (1968), in his study discovered that under no circumstances did an informant suggest that the dialect of another town was better than his. Such a response, would be considered as being disloyal to one's dialect.

The factor above (i.e. sentimental attitudes to one's mother tongue) causes low status languages to prosper in the face of all odds. This is because speakers, contrary to all expectations, will strive to maintain their languages. Labov (1972) has said that the speakers of the lower prestige styles frequently view these styles unfavourably,

however, they are still maintained by their speakers because non-standard speakers did not want to adopt the dominant groups' norms.

According to Trudgill (1975), informants who initially stated that they did not speak properly and would like to do so, admitted, if pressed further that perhaps they would not really like to as they would certainly be considered unwise, arrogant or disloyal by their friends and family if they did so. This type of contrast is referred to as overt prestige (the prestige of the high-status group) and covert prestige (the prestige of the local, non-prestige group (Trudgill, 1975).

Nader (1968) has also pointed out that apart from prestige factors which make people develop and retain positive attitudes to a language, another is the appropriateness of the language in the context. In his study of Arabic speakers in Zahle and Beirut, the question is not the best form of Arabic, but the one that suits the context. For example, a Zahle dialect would be imitated if one were putting on airs. Giles and Basil (1979) stated that some evidence already exists to indicate that attitudes of nonstandard speakers towards their own variety and standard depends on the context in which they are used. Ryan and Caranza (1979), found that Mexican-American accented English was downgraded relative to the standard more in a school than in a home context.

Fishman (1972), also stated that a speech community's attitudes toward any one or another of the varieties in its linguistic repertoire is likely to be determined by the degree to which these varieties have visible vitality i.e. interaction networks that employ them natively for one or more functions. The more numerous the native speakers of a particular variety are, the greater its vitality. Conversely, the fewer the number of the native speakers of a variety, the more it may be reacted to as if it were somehow a defective contaminated instrument, unworthy of serious efforts and lacking in proper parentage. Such biased views are likely to be self-fulfilling and can lead to a shift in the use of the language and consequently, language loss.

Another cause of negative attitudes to the use of language can be seen in a second language learner who is getting more and more

proficient in this language. According to Lambert et al (1980) this learner will start having a feeling of 'anomie' – feelings of social uncertainty when he becomes more proficient the second language. The individual may discover that his place in his original membership group is being modified. Depending on level of compatibility between the two cultures (expressed by the mother tongue and second language) he may experience feelings of regret if he loses ties in one group, mixed with the fearful anticipation of entering a new group. This point is one of the arguments often used against bilingualism i.e. that it causes the bilingual person to become a cultural hybrid somebody who is cultureless and rootless (Bello, 1989 and Constable, 1975).

Attitudes towards the speakers of a language also affect people's attitude towards the language. Trudgill (1975), has said that value judgements concerning the correctness and purity of linguistic varieties are social rather than linguistic. To him, there is nothing at all inherent in non-standard varieties which makes them inferior. Any apparent inferiority is due to their association with speakers from under-privileged low status groups. Thus, if the users of a language are a prestigious set of people, they will develop favourable attitudes to their language varieties and strive to speak like them. Bello (1989), in her brief description of the history of English Language in Nigeria said that parents even encouraged their children to learn English Language. The reason for this is not farfetched – because they will like to be associated with the colonial masters. The way that language learners view the language and its speakers has a big impact on both the process and the results of their language learning. Research on motivation and attitudes in language learning (Csizér, 2007, Dörnyei, 2009) demonstrates the close relationship between motivation and attitudes. A favourable outlook on the language and its speakers can boost motivation, which in turn produces better learning outcomes and a positive outlook on language learning.

The development of national consciousness which often comes into existence as a result of the demand for independence by people (e.g. Africans) can also be seen as another cause of negative language

attitudes. According to Bello (1989), during the independence period in Nigeria, national consciousness and pride became intense. There was the desire to completely rule out western culture. Some educated elites suggested that English should not be made compulsory in schools. As such, national consciousness often makes the colonized people to displace the languages of the colonial masters, for the native ones. To buttress this point, Awoniyi (nd) reported that when English was to be esteemed for the condition of official business in the Nigerian National Assembly, the military turned the proposal down with the following rejoinder?

> At this point in our development as a nation it is unacceptable to make English the only language of business of our National Assembly and to proceed even further to enshrine it permanently in our constitution. (7)

In fact, the then head of State while talking about the entrenchment of English as the only language of business in the National Assembly said:

> English language is for example, the only medium of expression in some Nigerian homes and this they say is a sign of elitism and sophistication. They claim with pride and misplaced accomplishment that they speak the acquired foreign language better than their Mother tongues (Awobuluyi, nd).

As such, nationalistic feelings/hatred of colonialism make people to hate western and also view western languages as products of imperialism (Zoughoul and Taminian, 1984).

Attitudes towards the culture which a language expresses, also affect people's attitude to the language in question. If an individual is interested in the culture, the tendency is to have a positive attitude to the language. Bello (1989) stated the fact that Nigerians were interested in the English culture had effect on their learning of the language. In fact, during the colonial era, Nigerians rated the western culture and lifestyle higher than theirs. Many gave English names to their children while some changed their names from the indigenous to English ones. Generally, they were willing to be acculturated. The Arabs, on the other

hand, are not interested in learning English language as they view English culture as a destructive and corruptive element on their (Arab) superior cultural values (Zoughoul and Taminian, 1984).

Certain experimental findings can also influence people's attitude to a language. For example, the clamour for the use of the mother tongue for teaching in Nigeria and most countries is as a result of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) findings that a child learns best in his mother tongue (this finding has been proved to be true also in Nigeria as a result of the Ife six-year primary project, Fafunwa, Macauley & Sokoya, 1989). The consequence of this finding for example in Nigeria is that people started agitating for the mother tongue education instead of using a 'borrowed' or foreign language like English.

There are some other consequences of language attitude which can be positive or negative depending on the type of attitude to the language in question. According to Muysken and Appel (1988), in cases where a minority language is in danger of becoming obsolete they (speakers of the language) can publish books in the language they want revised or maintained. A unique example of such an individual language planner was Eliezer Ban-Vehudu (1812 – 1922), who together with a handful of followers tried to restore Hebrew as spoken language. He set examples for others by establishing the first Hebrew – speaking household in the Palestine (47).

To Penalosa (1981), attitudes toward language can have far reaching effects. This is because the speakers of the language may resist any influence from other languages. As the need for new concepts arises, writers or scientists may prefer to coin words from pre-existing roots in their own language rather than adopt words from other languages. For example, modern Turkish or Modern Hebrew have both favoured coining new words from indigenous roots over adoption of foreign words for new concepts. Reactions to innovations in the language such as the use of good as an adverb (He plays baseball real good) for example, instead of being looked at as simple linguistic changes are negatively regarded. Also, at times, when the speakers of

the language discover that their language is becoming obsolescent, the language may receive new leases of life through a rejuvenated language loyalty among their speakers (Weinreich, 1974). Fishman (1978), has also pointed out two major consequences of language attitudes and they are: standardization and historicity.

The standardization of a language is mainly as a result of people's attitude towards it. This is because of the need to speak or write the correct form of the language as opposed to the 'impure' ones. This, consequently, reveals the speakers' attitude to the language in their attempt to 'fix' the variety so that everyone agrees on what is correct (Hudson, 1980).

Historicity: to ensure the autonomy of a language, the speakers will try to give it its historicity. That is, its respectable 'ancestry' in times long past. As such, many speech communities create and cultivate myths and genealogies concerning the origin and development of their language.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the multifaceted nature of language attitudes. It examined the various factors that shape views on language like status and prestige of the language, socio-economic advantages of learning the language, sentimental attachment to a language, attitudes towards the culture the language represents etc. The consequences of these attitudes which include interest in language learning or otherwise, language maintenance and shift were also highlighted.

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