



An Appraisal of Language Discrimination on Accommodation in Ibadan

Babatola Oyetayo^{[a],*}

^[a]C/O Department of Linguistics & African Languages, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

The choice of language to convey specific message with the intention of influencing people is vitally important. As we all know; human experience involves so much migration and blending of people with different ethnic and language groups over time. This is important because it reminds us that differences in treatment of ethnic and language groups are based on social distinctions, not innate biological distinctions. Thus, we specifically explore respondents' tussle to secure public accommodation and the infringement of right on accommodation in Yoruba on language discriminations. The paper adopted interview as a means of data collection with 10 respondents that cut across different government parastatal, institution, self-employed and artisan within Ibadan. The respondents' interactions that were recorded were subjected to transcriptions. It was observed that the non-native speakers of Yoruba in Ibadan were discriminated against based on their ethnicity or language affiliations. This has exceptionally creates gaps, propelled disunity and hatred between the native and non-native speakers of Yoruba in Ibadan. Hence, the non-native speakers of Yoruba in their views opined that, if they can be permitted to live in the environments surrounded by their ethnic or language affiliations, there will be mutual intelligibility and it will give them advantage to interact effectively and peradventure, if quarrels emanates, they will be able to know the possible means of settling them. The paper concludes that, public awareness and enlightenment should be organized constantly by the host community; and that government should re-visit the issue of national language.

Key words: Accommodation; Discrimination; Stereotypes; Linguistic human rights

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the key to a person's self-identity. It enables the person to express emotions, share feelings, tell stories, and convey complex messages and knowledge. Language is our greatest mediator that allows us to relate and understand each other (Imberti, 2007). Whenever languages are in contact, it is likely that one finds certain prevalent attitudes of favour and disfavour towards the language involved. These can have profound effects on the development of the individuals or the community and on their use of the language or dialect. However, attitude towards languages or in a particular language or dialects often imply the extension of these attitudes towards the speakers of the language as well.

Language discrimination is transcendental which is discriminating against a given language or "Linguistic Inequality" as it is substituted for language discrimination by Crisanti (2002), the prohibition of the use of a given language or dialect in a particular context, and discriminating against the users of a given language or dialect because of their accents or manner of speaking. As language is the premier tool for self-expression and communication, it can be a target of prejudice and discrimination; Igboanusi (2007) observes that disparities, biases, discrimination, inequalities and unfairness are some of the markers of every human society. Oha (2002, p.66) says, where language coincides with ethnicity, we often find that the former is used in identifying ethnic

outsiders and discriminating against them or victimizing them.

Although, language discrimination is less evident than some challenges confronting people around the world today, including poverty, hunger, health care, and safe housing, it does have lasting implications on emotional well-being and development, as well as healthy relationship and meaningful employment (Meyer, 2009). This paper examines accommodation discrimination experienced by respondents who are non-native speakers of Yoruba and resident of Ibadan. We aim to ascertain general codes that will make the members of the host community desist from discriminating.

A. The Study Area

Ibadan was created in 1829 as a war camp for warriors coming from Oyo, Ife and Ijebu. It is located in South-Western and assumed to be the largest indigenous city in Africa. Ibadan is the capital of Oyo state. It is situated in 78 miles inland from Lagos, and is a prominent transit point between the coastal region and the areas in the north. Ibadan metropolitan area covers a total land area of 3,123km² of which the main city covers 463.33km². These include the banks of streams as well as isolated wetland areas that dot the city, which is enclosed by valleys and swamps. The overall population density of Ibadan metropolitan area is 586 persons per km². Parts of the city's ancient protective walls still stand till today, and its population is estimated to be 3,800,000 according to 2006 estimates (Fourchad, 2001). According to Christopher (2010), Ibadan is the capital of Oyo State and still occupies an important place in the Yoruba speaking areas of Nigeria which is made up of six states (Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, Kwara, Lagos and Oyo). It had been the centre of administration of the Old Western region since the days of the British colonial rule. Ibadan has eleven local government areas grouped together in what is called the Ibadan metropolitan area dividing into five urban local governments in the city and six semi-urban local governments in the fewer cities. The local government is recognized by the 1999 constitution and they are the third tiers of government in Nigeria. The principal inhabitants of the city are the Yoruba. Therefore, the predominant language is the Yoruba language. In everyday life situations, most listeners may be tuned to hear one speak in Yoruba more than they would expect to hear English (Yusuf, 2009).

B. Statement of Problem

The persistent racial inequality in securing accommodation in a land that is different from one's native community cannot be over-emphasized in any community has it renews interest in the possible role of discrimination. Importantly, some non-native speakers' right could also be infringed in their place of abode based on their linguistic affiliation. This is why the paper tends to proffer solutions to the landlord and landlady who by

virtue of language difference discriminate or infringe on the legitimate rights of the non-natives speakers of Yoruba in Ibadan and assign prominence to native speakers' in the area of accommodation. In the recent time, it has generated disunity among different language speakers in the same vicinity. The study tends to achieve the following objectives.

C. Objectives of the Study

- i) Examine the extent of language discrimination on accommodation in Ibadan.
- ii) Consider the sociolinguistic implications of language discrimination on accommodation in Ibadan.
- iii) Suggest ways of ameliorating language discrimination on accommodation in Ibadan.

D. Research Questions

- i) To what extent has non-native speakers of Yoruba been discriminated against in the area of accommodation in Ibadan?
- ii) What are the sociolinguistics implications of language discrimination on accommodation in Ibadan?
- iv) What are the possible measures of ameliorating language discrimination on accommodation in Ibadan?

1. ACCOMMODATION DISCRIMINATION

The right to choose where one wants to live have been a historical concept that is entrenched in our history of expansion and modern suburbanization. The freedom to choose where one wishes to live is not a concept which has resonated for a significant portion of non-native speaker. It is in this regard that Clark Kenneth cited in Harriet Tuberman (1996) states that "Housing is no abstract social and political problem, but in extension of man's personality". As residential racial segregation further permeates our society, the prospects of improving race relations continue to dwindle, thus preserving the existence of negative racial stereotypes.

The word segregation characterizes the present lives of many minorities in any community. It is attributable to the present lack of affordable housing in safe and economically prosperous communities. The existence of isolated and racially segregated housing has preserved racial mistrust, furthering ignorance stereotypes that inhibit our society from attaining true racial equality. As Thomas Petigrew (1996) states that: Residential discrimination has proven to be the most resistant to change of all realms- perhaps because it is so critical to racial change in general. Residential segregation, in turn, becomes both the point of origin of discrimination and the perpetuating cause of racial distrust and ignorance.

Racially segregated housing patterns exist to a large degree as a result of intentional discrimination against the

minorities. Typically, landlords who do not want to give their house to minority who are seeking accommodation may give excuses that are not tangible for not given out the apartment. Thus, accommodation discrimination takes various forms: From landlords discouraging home seekers from seeking apartment from the other language group other than their own; and unfairly levying additional costs on minorities for language, ethnic or racially motivated reasons in giving out such accommodation for rent.

However, discrimination in securing public accommodation is an unfortunate reality that continues to burden society, and contradicts the cultural ideals of fairness and justice for all. Non-intentional or societal discrimination is an unequally serious problem contributing to the racial imbalance in getting accommodation. Even though non-intentional discrimination is not based on evil motives, minorities are still harmed, both economically and socially. Thus, minorities who live in racially homogenous communities are faced with disadvantages beyond the present economic and social inequalities associated with minority neighbourhoods.

1.1 Previous Work on Language Discrimination

Adekanmi (2009, p.18) describes linguistic human rights as a sociolinguistic subfield that promotes language rights in the society. It is the right to investigate how social inequalities are legalized and realized on the basis of language inequalities. At the linguistic communities, Phillipson et al. (1994) cited in Adekanmi (2009) posit that it is the collective right of people to maintain their ethnolinguistic identity and alterity, that is, their differences from the dominant society. However, linguistic human rights negate the assumption of entrenching cohesion in a multiracial society through the imposition of only one language. Schneider (2005, p.17) stipulates that human beings irrespective of national origin, colour and race have equal language rights. The right states that: All human beings are equal and have equal basic human rights. All languages are of equal value. Identification with and development of a person's mother tongue is a basic human right.

1.2 Stereotype

Gibson (2004) posits that language is a dual means of protecting our own identity and a means for others to project onto us their own perceptions of the way we are. This is to aver that stereotypes are actually imposed identities which are mainly negative. However, the imposition is not the exclusive preserve of the majority group; minority groups are also used to impose identities on fellow minority groups as well as on majority groups. Stereotypes are ethnic or national labels used by groups to identify other groups (T. Bloor & M. Bloor, 2007). Thus, to say of a member of another language group that "he or she will always exhibit a certain characteristic

behaviour is to offer a stereotype" (Wardhaugh, 2006). Such labels are mainly negative, all-encompassing and borne out of prejudice, as stated by Bloor and Bloor (2007, p.128). "One outcome of prejudice is the creation of stereotypes. Certain qualities, real or imaginary, are taken as typical of the target category, and there is an underlying assumption that all members of the category conform to this stereotype".

This is an indication of the fact stereotypes are hyperbolic constructs meant to emphasise a salient social behaviour. It is hyperbolic because it tends to unnecessarily exaggerate a trait by the process of inclusion. Thus, a character trait exhibited by one or few individuals is used to classify the entire group, sometimes without exception. Such character traits, or what Hayakawa (1972, p.7) calls "abstractions" are mainly negative constructs and includes aspects of physical characteristics, styles of behaviour, morality and other criteria like social class, skin colour, language, ancestral origin, social custom (Fairclough, 1995; T. Bloor & M. Bloor, 2007). Hayakawa (1972, p.68) identifies a dual system of analyzing labels which he terms "informative and affective connotations". The informative connotation is a statement of the fact while the affective connotation is a judgement on the fact. These assumptions lead their holders to behave in the same way. Some of these behaviours are feelings of cultural superiority whose effect is to look down or devalue other cultures.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted both primary and secondary source in data collection. The primary source was based on in-depth interviews with a view to generating more open responses from the respondents. The secondary source is through the use of published and unpublished materials, Journals and Articles. The respondents were between 20-50 years old. We sample the opinions of ten (10) respondents of non-native speakers of Yoruba based on their experience on accommodation discrimination in Ibadan. They are civil servants from the university of Ibadan (U.I) and National Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), self-employed, Student, caretakers and landlords/landladies. The study employed writing papers, pen and voice recorder. Hence, the analysis of data was done through the descriptive interpretations of the interviews. These respondents were selected owing to the fact that are the likeable people that could either discriminate or being discriminated against.

3. RESULTS

In the following lines, we will analyze the experience of accommodation discriminations obtained from the respondents who were discriminated against through the

in-depth interviews. All the Ten interviewees explained their different encounters on the study under investigation and castigate the marginalization of landlord/landlady's perceptions towards the non-native of Yoruba in Ibadan whenever they aspire to secure accommodation on the one hand and those who has accommodation, how they are being treated and handled by their landlords or landladies. It was observed that, all the participants were not fairly treated. They posited that, if what was done to them is reciprocated to all the Yoruba people outside their domain, it may lead to disintegration of the country which eventually can results to inter/intra ethnic rivalry. We present the interviews succinctly.

Nyang, forty year old, an indigene of Akwa Ibom who works as an administrative officer posits that his experience with a particular landlord was purely assumptions and not fact. He said, *a landlord denied him accommodation on the account that he came from Igboland. The lordlord admits that Igbo people are tough and they are not easy to live with, /IDI/male/official/U.I/IB/16/*. He argues that, by virtue of this assumption, he was discriminated against without considering his personality as a prospective tenant.

Ibe, forty-one year old, maintained that his experience as regards accommodation was ridiculous and abnormal. He said that a nasty ideology was behind his denial. He explains that; *he had already secured an accommodation through his Yoruba friend who initially occupied the room, that friend of mine have paid the house rent on my behalf, but, when I was about to move in that the landlady came to see the new occupant and spoke to me in Yoruba thinking I was a Yoruba person, and I could not respond to her words; then, she asked the State I came from and I said Ebonyi, she screamed and shouted at me angrily, that she doesn't want another tribes other than Yoruba in her house. Thereafter, she asked me to come for my money the following day, /IDI/Male/Official/NISER/IB/16/*. The respondent therefore said that this singular act has made him had bad impression about the landlords and landladies in Ibadan; thus, he categorized them as the same.

Adigwe, thirty-five, a civil servant in Ibadan. He said, *that he came in contact with a landlord who told him categorically that he cannot give his house to a non- Yoruba; he admits that, the landlord profess that he would not be satisfied and comfortable in the house. Most importantly, he is afraid his house could be hijacked by a stranger. IDI/Male/Official/NISER/IB/16/*. The respondent maintained that the accommodation discrimination against non-native speakers is very rampant in Ibadan; it did not only happen to him but also to some of his friends that resides in Ibadan.

Uchendu, twenty-nine, who hails from Delta said, *because he was unable to respond to the landlord's language, he insulted and abused him; this later generate serious fight between them. He was unable to secure accommodation which originally should have been his*

if there was no discrimination. IDI/male/official/NISER/IB/16/. The respondent points out that how he was denied accommodation was scandalous, what should have been given to him by right was denied him as a result of the language barrier.

Ihaenacho, thirty-two, an accountant in government establishment complained about the attitude of a landlord *who told him that he purposely denied him accommodation because he came from Igbo land, he said the reason is that, Igbo tenants are recalcitrant in the payment of house bills other than their rent. And if they are asked to vacate their rented apartment, they will be threatening the landlord with court, IDI/male/official/NISER/IB/16/*. In respondent's point of view, as long as we are in the same country, we should cultivate a spirit of oneness and shun disparity against other ethnic groups.

Obong, thirty-five, an Akwa Ibom by birth and a businessman in Ibadan. He criticized his landlady that *out of the twelve tenants in the house, he was given a quit notice for unnecessary excuse that whenever (she) landlady wants to speak with him on any matter in the house, she always look for an interpreter; hence, she cannot tolerate that again, /IDI/Male/Self Emp/IB/16/*. He admits that in this kind of situation, the underlying discrimination is often actually based on language or dialect differences.

Amaka, thirty years old, works as a secretary in government establishment. She opines that *a landlady told her that she does not want kojokoto in her house that they are tough and likes fighting. The landlady then told her to seek for accommodation elsewhere; /IDI/Female/official/NISER/16/*. The respondent said the landlady later told her the meaning of the word "kojokoto" i.e. a strange who doesn't speak common language of a particular community.

Asukwo, an employee in the University of Ibadan. He said, his own experience concerning language discrimination on accommodation is that *he was denied accommodation twice from different landlords in Ibadan on the ground that he speaks Igbo and especially that he is not a Yoruba. When he eventually got where he lives now, may be because he told the landlord that he works with Uuniversity of Ibadan that was why the landlord considered him for the accommodation. /IDI/Male/official/U.I/16/*. The respondent asserts that this act of language discrimination can only widens the gap between him and Yoruba speakers he is associating with. He further stressed that, as Nigerians, we should stop discriminating even though everybody knows that in any competition in Yoruba land between the native speakers and the non-native counterparts, the latter will always have edge over the former; those that are on the safer side should try as much as possible to accommodate others and not allowing them to see their woes.

Anayo, fifty-one, works as an Electrician in Ibadan. He said that several landlords he approaches for accommodation always denied him of accommodation.

And the reason why he runs around for accommodation himself was because agents are not sincere with him, they will collect impression fee and in the end will still not give a satisfactory accommodation that he desires. He said, *he recalled of a landlord he approaches for accommodation, who said, he would rather leave the house empty than giving it out to a non-Yoruba. Why? The landlord claimed that those people he has formerly given accommodation from his State are too dirty and noisy. I try to convince him, but he didn't respond to my plea, /IDI/Male/self EMP/IB/16/.*

Delight, a student of university of Ibadan narrated her experience of accommodation discrimination; *she said that her friend was sick and she rushed her to the clinic; unfortunately, she forgot her identification card in the hostel; as she could not present her identification card on her way back, the porter deny her from entering the hostel. Why she was waiting in case she sees any of her floor mates, she saw this porter allowing other students without identification card to gain access to the hostel. This made her to approach the porter angrily and said that, if the woman was God she will be partial; the porter was furious about the assault and it led to fight and abuse. Later, a colleague of hers intervened and allowed her into the hostel. /IDI/Female/Student//U.I/IB/16/.*

DISCUSSIONS

The experience on language discrimination in multi-ethnic community like Ibadan plays a significant role in formulating the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents in the area of accommodation. Thus, the analysis emerged from the interviews in which the respondent's stereotype was reflected. On the account of language discriminations on accommodation, it was gathered that, there are landlords and landladies that are recalcitrant except they are convinced beyond reasonable doubt that they prefer to give their rent to those from their language groups they can confide in. Landlords or landladies who do not want to give their accommodation to non-native speakers of Yoruba do give flimsy excuses such as inability to speak landlord or landlady's language, inability to participate in house cleaning, non-payment of Nepa bills, transgressing the terms and conditions in the tenancy agreement, damaging house facilities and expect landlord or landlady to repair it, giving house to a single person and being occupied with too many people. Speaking biasness and racially discrimination experienced by the respondents; it demonstrates prejudicially attitude to non-native speakers by denying them accommodation. On the other hand, we have respondent whose right was infringed upon on account that she could not present her identification card to the porter, of which the student is not a stranger to the porter; whereas the same porter allows those who speak her language to have access to the hostel without identification card. This is why Johnson

(2007) examined that using situation testing that the homeseekers were long banned since they did not meet ethical standards. By leaving out all forms of personal contact other than those we have complete control; we can eliminate some of the elements that potentially create biasness. A particular respondent reacted to the attitude of house owner in Ibadan as ill human feelings. He said, what should have been given to him by right was denied. The same advantage seemed to be problematic when a landlord rate particular tenant over the others which are done by intuition without scientific measure and technique to actually predict really good prospective individual or cooperate.

According to Brama (2007) some research on discrimination was mainly based on individuals' introspection of being discriminated; this is not different from the experience of respondents that said that, some landlords and landladies see non-native speakers of Yoruba who are tenants in Ibadan as being rigid to accommodate. They may have the ability to afford the first payment but the subsequent payments will be hard to pay; failure to comply with the do's and dons of the house. Because of the landlords and landlady's abnormalities, some of the respondents thus prefer to reside in the house built by their fellow language groups for certain reasons; first, there is room for togetherness, and whenever there is a relational dispute, they will know how to settle it among themselves. Second, they will feel secured against landlords and landladies enforcement and threat. Third, unforeseen circumstances such as war, living together as language groups will help safeguard one another in time of troubles. While some see this act as disunity in making, when extended to the native speakers of Yoruba who are outside their domain can result in disintegration.

However, language discrimination on accommodation can also go undetected, although, those landlords and landladies that were interviewed claimed their attitude to their prospective tenants were personal and not discrimination; whereas those that were discriminated against are the ones that could see it as discrimination.

In the same vein, most landlords and landladies in Ibadan engage the services of caretakers to help them monitor and handle their houses for them; they act as an intermediary between landlords/landladies and those seeking for accommodation. Their role cannot be underestimated. Most caretakers at times are the ones poisoning the heart of the landlords and landladies. Whatever they tell the landlords and landladies that are what they do. And when, the prospective tenant gets to the landlords/landladies, they have no options than to reject them. And most of them do this because of their pockets. Some respondents having experienced discrimination at some time in their life actually know that the inability to secure accommodation or the infringement they encountered in their place of abode was as a result of the language barrier. As confirmed by a respondent

from the University of Ibadan who said he was denied accommodation twice because of his language and the last one he eventually got was because he told the landlord that he was a staff in the University of Ibadan. Thus, it was gathered from the interviewees' point of view that few out of several non-native speakers of Yoruba that reside in Ibadan that were affected barely took actions; the least they hardly do was to complain to the person that discriminated against them.

CONCLUSION

The contention in this study was to consider the magnanimity of discrimination against the non-native speakers of Yoruba who intend to secure accommodation in Ibadan and was denied vis-a-viz discrimination the non-native speakers of Yoruba encounter in their place of residence as a result of language discrimination. It was observed that those who seek for accommodation are discriminately marginalized; landlords or landladies are fond of giving their apartments to those who speak their language only and hardly will you see landlords or landladies threatening/ disregarding native speakers of Yoruba; except for few who do not consider language as a yardstick to accommodate new tenants. By and large, occupants of a particular apartment who are not native speakers of landlord or landlady's language group may likely be discriminated against than the native speakers. Therefore, it is evident that language discrimination on accommodation is uniquely intractable and to know that the economic harm caused by this discrimination is massive and could be disastrous. This can be a major setback to national development in the area of integrating schools, expand job opportunities, reduce urban sprawl and increase minority homeownership rates. Therefore, since we simply do not know what might best encourage landlords and landladies to behave in nondiscriminatory ways. Hence, there should be a law in place to check discrimination against the perpetrators and anyone found guilty of this act must be sanctioned.

To solve this chaotic situation, First, we should endeavour to spread the news of togetherness as a tool for nation building. Second, openness of mind to accommodate other people from other communities and acceptance to associate with them must be our utmost priority. Thus, government should continue to constantly enlighten the people and revisit the issue of national language.

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