

ASSESSMENT OF DIALECT USE IN AGRICULTURAL MESSAGE DISSEMINATION IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: The study was conducted to assess the use of dialect in agricultural message dissemination in Ogun State; and examine farmers' understanding of language as currently used by extension agents. A total of 84 extension agents and 140 farmers were randomly selected from a list of extension agents and farmers provided by the Ogun State Agricultural Development Programme (OGADEP). Experimental procedure was adopted to assess extension agents' use of dialect during agricultural message delivery. Data was collected on personal characteristics of all respondents; extension agents' perception of essentiality of dialect use; as well as farmers' understanding of extension agents' language use. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results revealed that all but one of the extension agents did not use dialect in message delivery. However, majority (71.4%) of them were in positive agreement as to the essentiality of knowledge of dialect to effective agricultural message dissemination. Results further revealed that a large proportion (91.4%) of farmers have high understanding of language as currently employed by extension agents. The study recommends that the Extension Department of Agricultural Development Programme should identify, compile and teach peculiar technical dialect terms of agricultural interest, in common use in each linguistic community area. This will enhance easy interactions with farmers and ensure easy and quick understanding of agricultural messages, while extension agents are encouraged to speak the dialects of their target farmers, if only to demonstrate their identification with the farmers and improve ease of acceptance by the farmers.

Keywords: Dialect use, Agricultural message, Dissemination

INTRODUCTION

Dialect according to Comrie (2008) is a variety of a language spoken by an identifiable subgroup of people, among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria. There are as many dialects of the common language among Yoruba people. They are the Ekiti, Ondo, Ikale, Ijesha, Oyo, Egba, Yewa and Awori dialects among others. The dialects are the idiolects of standard Yoruba Language (which is one of the urban version), devoid of the phonological peculiarities of dialects. In exemplification of the above assertion, Osisanya (1978) observed that the Ijebu child in Lagos hears and speaks his mother tongue, Ijebu, spoken in his home, and also standard Yoruba, spoken generally in Lagos. Not minding the existence of a general language form among people of the same ethnic or racial background, dialects still constitute a significant factor in communication and could very well be the source of semantic noise. Further evidence also comes from Awa (1980), who states that in low technology nations, where differences in dialect can affect both phonology and vocabulary, solving the translation problem is even more difficult than in societies with a common vocabulary and fewer dialects. In one of his own surveys in Nigeria, he found startling variations in the ways in which familiar artifacts were designated by various dialect groups in many samples from Ibo and Ibibio language communities.

Awa (1980), citing Rogers and Lynne (1969) commented about this problem in Eastern Nigeria

and especially its effect of widening the heterothallic gap between individuals using different dialects of the same language. Rogers' report is about an Ibo extension worker who was employed 70 miles from his home village but who, because he spoke an Ibo dialect different from his clients, he was forced to communicate with them in Pidgin English, which only a few of his clients understood. Akpan (1980) sums this phenomenon up with the assertion that meaning is not in the symbol, but in the users of symbol in different places and situations. This will seem to imply that competence in the general Yoruba language in a Yoruba setting may not be enough guarantee that an extension agent is capable of effective communication with the farmer, who more often than not, lives in the rural area where the use of dialect is heavily predominant.

Agricultural extension services are aimed at getting farmers to acquire messages - skills, attitudes, knowledge, and technology - in order to increase their productivity through enhanced competence in agricultural practices. The tool central to this Endeavour is communication, which is the process of interaction that enables messages to be exchanged between extension agents and farmers, and among various organizations involved in agricultural activities.

Communication as a process of interaction has been given various explanations. These range from the view that it arises simply as response to a stimulus in the environment; to the explanation that it is a complex set of interactions consciously initiated to evoke a desired effect or change. According to James et al (1990), communication is a process involving the passing of messages through the use of symbols, which all the parties in the communication encounter understand. Today, a special designation "Agricultural Communication" has been assigned to the conscious processes of interaction initiated by participants in the agricultural industry in order to achieve comprehensive development. According to Adebayo (1997), there are three distinct levels of stratification in the agricultural industry. These are the researchers and policy makers, the extension agents, and the farmers. The various forms of interaction among these sets of people constitute what is today known as agricultural communication. This has become necessary because the implication of stratification in the agricultural system is that messages, production recommendations, field problems and innovations transferred from one system to the other; as well as within each system have not been effective in achieving a commensurate development in agriculture.

Agricultural extension is the conscious effort at transmitting beneficial agricultural messages to

farmers. It takes place necessarily in the farmer's natural environment and it is driven by the farmer's situation - his needs, resources and capabilities. It takes into consideration the farmer's physical, social and economic life situations while aiming to show him how to better his situation himself. According to Martaamidjaja and Rikhama (1996), as a system of education, agricultural extension is concerned not only with transferring technology, but with educating farmers to become development-oriented. Its basic goal is to assist farmers to help themselves in solving their problems. While agricultural extension is a learning engagement, communication is the vital tool for learning and understanding. This thus implies a strong relationship between the use of communication and achievement of the goals of agricultural extension.

Just as communication is central to agricultural extension services, language is one of the major tools through which communication is made possible. Communication is the only tool of interaction between two or more people, and language, be it oral, literal, or symbolic, is the only means of communication (Awodele and Ojuola, 1999). Language is the vehicle that provides a common representational system for our thoughts and ideas, as a result, making it possible for these thoughts and ideas to be conveyed to other members of the society who share common understanding of the representational system. Communication is said to be effective when the message is able to get to the receiver intact, transmitting the intended meaning successfully, thereby eliciting the intended change or response. Schihl (2008) especially takes this into consideration when he explains communication as a process in which a person, through the use of signs/symbols (language), verbally and/or non-verbally, consciously or not consciously but intentionally, conveys meaning to another in order to affect change.

Explanations of the communication process have always taken into consideration that there exists impediments or barriers to achieving effective communication. These barriers are referred to as "noise". According to James et al (1990), noise is a technical term for all forms of obstacles, which conspire to reduce the fidelity of communication. In other words, noise reduces the amount of information, which is sent between those who are communicating. Semantic noise is the unintentional distortion introduced into the communication process by the information source; it may be explained as all of the articulatory, grammatical and semantic errors carried by the information source (Akpan, 1980). Semantic noise is closely identified with the information source because it is part of the message that the transmitter sends out. Its root is in the

original transformation of stimuli into mental symbols. It impairs effective communication as a result of the relationship between language, meaning and communication - transfer of meaning. It is through the medium of language that a message is encoded. The message, on getting to the receiver, is expected to transmit a pre-conceived meaning, based on expected shared understanding of language and meaning, between sender and receiver. Semantic noise comes into the system when improper language is employed in the message encoding process. The message may get to the receiver quite intact, but he will be unable to make meaning of it.

Problem Statement

Agricultural extension is all about achieving effective agricultural message transfer from extension agents to farmers and vice-versa, and language competence is necessary to achieve this effective message transfer. However, the preponderance of dialects in various communities makes it difficult to depend on assumed communicative effectiveness with the general language form in agricultural message delivery. Examining the influence of dialect in achieving effective agricultural message delivery from extension agents to farmers is desirable. Bearing the foregoing in mind, the purpose of this study is to investigate the place of dialect in the communicative interaction between extension agents and farmers in Ogun State.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to: (a) describe the respondents personal characteristics (b) examine the use of dialects by extension agents in agricultural message delivery (c) assess the competence of extension agents in the use of dialects during agricultural message delivery (d) examine the perception of extension agents about essentiality of dialect to effective agricultural message delivery (e) examine farmers' understanding of language as currently used by extension agents

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was conducted in Ogun State, Southwest Nigeria. The State is located within latitudes 6.2°N and 7.8°N, and longitudes 3.0°E and 5.0°E. The state consists mainly of the Yoruba ethnic group, peopled predominantly by the Egba, Yewa, Awori, Egun, Ijebu and Ijebu Remo. There are other Nigerian ethnic groups and other nationals from within and outside Africa, living in various parts of the state (Oyesiku and Kojeku, 1992). According to the Ogun State Government (2006), the main languages of communication in the State are Yoruba and English.

Population, Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The population of the study consisted of farmers and extension agents of the Ogun State Agricultural Development Programme (OGADEP). OGADEP is divided into four administrative zones: Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Ikenne and Ilaro. The sample frame for extension agents was the 126 Village Extension Agents (male) and 20 Block Extension Agents (female). There was a random selection of 84 extension agents, representing 60% of the sample frame of extension agents. Fifteen male and six female extension agents were selected in each operational division. There was also random selection of 140 farmers for the study. Five villages were randomly selected per operational division: Odeda, Obada Oko, Ijale Papa, Wasinmi and Coker in Abeokuta division; Ijebu Ode, Odogbolu, Ago Iwoye, Abigi and Ijebu Ife in Ijebu Ode division; Simawa, Ajegunle, Someke, Ogunmakin and Kajola in Ikenne division, and; Idolehin, Ado Odo, Ayetoro, Alari and Imasai in Ilaro division. Seven farmers were randomly interviewed in each of the villages, a total of 35 farmers per division, and 140 farmers in all. The total sample size was 224 respondents.

Measurement of variables

Personal Characteristics of Extension Agents

(a) Age: the actual age of extension agents in years was assessed. (b) Sex: the sex of extension agents was assessed as male =1 and female = 2. (c) Academic qualification in the indigenous language: this was measured as indigenous language not studied = 0, Indigenous language passed = 1, Indigenous language passed at credit level =2, and Indigenous language passed at distinction level = 3. (d) Years of experience: the actual number of years of experience of extension agents was assessed.

Extension agents' use of dialect in agricultural message dissemination

A standard text of agricultural message was produced from OGADEP Extension Bulletins. The extension agents were required to present the English standard text in the indigenous language. They were enjoined to present the text exactly as they would to their farmers, bearing in mind the need to employ the use of dialect if that was part of their normal language of agricultural message dissemination. The delivery was tape-recorded and analysed for dialect ability. The ability to make the presentation in the dialect of the target farmers was scored on an index of the following items: (a) attempt to use the dialect of the farmers in the presentation (b) correct use of dialect, and (c) sustained use of correct dialect throughout the presentation. Each item attracted a score of one. Thus the maximum score was three and the range of scores presented four categories of: three (3) - high

competence, two (2) - moderate competence, one (1) - low competence, and zero (0) - incompetence.

Extension agents' perception of essentiality of dialect to effective agricultural message dissemination

A perceptual statement was made out about the essentiality of dialect to effective agricultural message delivery; the statement was scored with 5 point Likert Scale along the following categories: Strongly Agree (SA) - 5, Agree (A) - 4, Indifferent (I) - 3, Disagree (D) - 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1. The extension agents were required to indicate their agreement with the statement.

Personal characteristics of farmers

Age

The actual age of farmers was assessed.

Sex

Farmers were asked to indicate their sex as male =1 and female = 2.

Highest Level of Formal Education

The farmers were grouped into the following categories: No Formal Education; Primary School Education; Secondary School Education; Tertiary School Education and were asked to indicate the highest level of education.

Length of Exposure to Extension Service

The actual number of years of exposure to extension service, of farmers was assessed.

Farmers' understanding of extension agents' language use

This variable was measured with an index of four perceptual statements. The response of farmers was scored with the 4 point Likert Scale along the following categories: Strongly Agree (SA) - 4, Agree (A) - 3, Disagree (D) - 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1. The total favourable perceptual score was 16. This led to a classification along four categories: non-understanding; low understanding; moderate understanding, and; high understanding of extension agents' language use.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics using measures of dispersion, frequencies and percentages were used to describe the personal characteristics of extension agents and farmers, and likewise to describe the distribution of extension agents among the categories of dialect use, as well as the distribution of farmers along the categories of understanding of extension agents' language use.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal characteristics of extension agents

Personal characteristics of extension agents as shown in Table 1 indicate that the predominant age group is made up of those in the 41 – 50 years age bracket (64.3%). While this advanced age and maturity may presently favour successful interaction with farmers, this may indicate that young sets of extension agents are not being recruited to tap from the experience of the present crop and ensure continuity of extension effort. The ratio of male to female extension agents in the study is 2:5, 71.4% are males while 28.6% are females. The modal class of respondents on WASC score in Yoruba is the Credit Pass in Yoruba group. Close to a third (32.1%) did not study Yoruba at all. On years of extension experience, the predominant group is made up of those having between eleven and twenty years experience on the job (64.3%), suggesting that the extension agents are well experienced enough on the job for efficient performance.

Extension agents' use of dialect in agricultural message dissemination

As shown in Table 2, only three extension agents, males, in the 51-60 years age group with ordinary WASC "pass" in Yoruba and between 21-30 years extension experience made an attempt and used the correct 'Remo' dialect in their presentation. Even at that, the dialect was only interspersed in the delivery and was not sustained. Clearly, differences in personal characteristics had nothing to do with non-use of dialect during message delivery as the comparison in Table 2 indicates. Almost absolutely, extension agents in the study did not employ the use of dialects, the general form of the indigenous language was the medium through they made their delivery. The position of the extension agents was that the general form of Yoruba was sufficient to convey their messages clearly to the farmers, as all the farmers very well understood it. More so, they explained that they have to deal with farmers of diverse Yoruba dialect origins, sometimes together in the same group, and so, the unifying language medium applicable to that kind of general situation is the general form of Yoruba. Particular note was made of the fact that non-use of dialect by the extension agents in agricultural message dissemination was not because of inability in dialect use. In Ijebu zone, extension agents were observed to have freely conversed with elderly OGADEP Office staffers in the Ijebu dialect, while in Ikenne, they joked and exchanged banter among themselves in the Remo dialect.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by their Personal Characteristics

Age in Years	Frequency	Percent
20 – 30	06	7.1
31 - 40	21	25.0
41 - 50	54	64.3
51 - 60	03	3.6
Total	84	100.0
Sex	Frequency	Percent
Female	24	28.6
Male	60	71.4
Total	84	100.0
Extension Agents' WASC Score	Frequency	Percent
Yoruba Not Studied	27	32.1
Ordinary Pass In Yoruba	12	14.3
Credit Pass In Yoruba	36	42.9
Distinction Pass In Yoruba	09	10.7
Total	84	100.0
Years of Extension Experience	Frequency	Percent
1 - 10	21	25.0
11 – 20	54	64.3
21 – 30	09	10.7
Total	84	100.0

Extension agents' perception of essentiality of dialect to effective agricultural message dissemination

To the assertion that knowledge of dialect is essential to effective agricultural message dissemination, majority of responses were in agreement with the assertion. From Table 3, 71.4% of responses were in positive agreement: 32.1% "agreed" and 39.3% "strongly agreed". These high positive responses underscore an important point to note. Despite the fact that extension agents posited that they did not have to transmit their messages in indigenous dialects for farmers to understand, it indicates that they quite agree to the beneficial purpose of knowledge of dialect to effective agricultural message dissemination. In a particular instance in Ijebu during data collection, an extension agent recalled that his closeness to his elderly farmers at the onset of his extension career facilitated his acquisition of the names of crops in the native Ijebu dialect. He narrated that after an extension visit one day; his client farmer opted to offer him a gift which he referred to as *ibonyin*. The extension agent did not understand the tag *ibonyin*, but waited patiently to see what the name would translate into. It was when the farmer returned with a bunch of plantain that the extension agent understood that *ibonyin* was the Ijebu dialect for *ogede agbagba* in general Yoruba, i.e.

plantain in English. He said he expressed his surprise to the farmer, and the farmer went ahead to teach him other such Ijebu dialect names for crops, such as *siigun* for *ibepe* in general Yoruba, i.e. pawpaw in English. The extension agent explained that the knowledge subsequently proved very beneficial to his work.

Personal characteristics of farmers

The predominant age group according to Table 4 consists of farmers aged between 41-60 years (constituting 61.4%). This corroborates the general opinion that the farming population in the country is ageing; due to the non-attractive nature of the engagement in recent times, the youths are no longer encouraged to take up farming. There is predominance of males (66.4%) among the responding farmers. The most predominant educational group consists of those with no formal education (40%). Farmers with between one and ten years of exposure to extension predominate, constituting 54.3%. Only five respondents representing 3.6% had between thirty-one and forty years of extension experience. Their exposure to extension pre-dated the emergence of OGADEP (established in 1980). The farmers explained that their contact with extension was through extension agents from the Department of Agriculture of the old Western Region Government.

Table 2: Extension agents' use of dialect compared with their personal characteristics

		Age				
		20-30 Years	31 -40 Years	41-50 Years	51-60 Years	
Attempt to use dialect	-	-	-	-	3	
Correct use of dialect	-	-	-	-	3	
Sustained use of correct dialect	-	-	-	-	-	
		Sex				
		Male	Female			
Attempt to use dialect		3	-			
Correct use of dialect		3	-			
Sustained use of correct dialect		-	-			
		WASC Score in Yoruba				
		Yoruba Studied	not Ordinary Yoruba	Pass in	Credit Pass in Yoruba	Distinction Pass in Yoruba
Attempt to use dialect	-	-	3	-	-	-
Correct use of dialect	-	-	3	-	-	-
Sustained use of correct dialect	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Years of Extension Experience				
		1-10 Years	11-20 Years	21-30 Years		
Attempt to use dialect	-	-	-	3		
Correct use of dialect	-	-	-	3		
Sustained use of correct dialect	-	-	-	-		

Table 3: Extension agents' perception of essentiality of dialect to effective agricultural message dissemination

Response category	Frequency	Percent
Highly favourable perception	33	39.3
Favourable perception	27	32.1
Indifference	09	10.7
Unfavourable	12	14.3
Highly unfavourable	1	3.6

Table 4: Personal Characteristics of Farmers

Age in Years	Frequency	Percent
1 - 20	8	5.7
21 - 40	32	22.9
41 - 60	86	61.4
Over 60	14	10.0
Total	140	100.0
Sex	Frequency	Percent
Female	47	33.6
Male	93	66.4
Total	140	100.0
Level of Formal Education	Frequency	Percent
No Formal Education	56	40.0
Primary Education	47	33.6
Secondary Education	25	17.9
Tertiary Education	12	8.6
Total	140	100.0
Length of Exposure to Extension Service	Frequency	Percent
1- 10	76	54.3
11 -20	44	31.4
21 -30	15	10.7
31- 40	5	3.6
Total	140	100.0

Table 5: Farmers' understanding of extension agents' language use

Index Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Clear message transmission ability of extension agents	75.7%	24.3%		
Extension agents' clear and effective response to questions and comments	62.8%	34.3%	2.9%	
Easy understanding of extension agents' message	90.7%	9.3%		
Understanding of extension agents' Yoruba	87.1%	12.9%		

Farmers' understanding of extension agents' language use

The first index item measured the opinion of the farmers about clear message transmission ability of extension agents. As presented in Table 5, an overwhelming majority (75.7%) of farmers "strongly agreed" while the remaining 24.3% "agreed" with the assertion. The fact that no unfavourable category featured in the responses indicates positive endorsement by the farmers of the ability of extension agents to transmit their messages clearly. The second index item measured extension agent's clear and effective treatment of feedback generated from his message delivery. Farmers' responses show that once again, positive responses dominated, with farmers in positive agreement constituting 97.1% of respondents. Only 2.9% of respondents "disagreed" with the assertion. The third index item measured farmer's easy understanding of extension agent's message. The farmers once again had positive responses to the assertion; a large proportion (90.7%) of them "strongly agreed" while 9.3% "agreed". The fourth index item measured farmer's understanding of the extension agent's spoken form of the indigenous language. To the assertion that the Yoruba (or its dialect) spoken by your extension agent is an exact kind that you understand, all the farmers were in positive agreement; 87.1% "strongly agreed" while 12.9% "agreed" with the assertion. This is an affirmation that language as currently used by extension agents (i.e. Yoruba in its general form, and not dialects) is understood by all farmers, with no farmer in disagreement with its utility in the current form. Summing up the perceptual scores to classify the farmers into categories of understanding of extension agents' language use, an overwhelming 91.4%, have high understanding, while the remaining 8.6% have moderate understanding.

Preponderance of dialects is a prominent feature of the Yoruba speaking Southwest Nigeria. However,

dialect is not employed by extension agents in agricultural message dissemination in Ogun State. The general form of Yoruba is the language medium of extension message delivery.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that farmers understand the language of message delivery of extension agents as it is, as an overwhelming 91.4% of those interviewed had high understanding of extension agents' language use. The study concludes thus that use of dialect is not obligatory for effective agricultural message dissemination in Ogun State. The general form of the Yoruba language is sufficient to achieve effective communication with farmers. This dispels the concern of dialect acting as obstruction to effective agricultural message dissemination as raised by Rogers and Lynne (1969). However, that is not to discountenance the positive influence of dialect. Knowledge and use of dialect is beneficial in achieving extensive understanding of the cultural peculiarities of individual farming communities. It follows thus that dialect even if not obligatory, is complementary to achieving effective agricultural message dissemination.

Efforts should be made by OGADEP to identify and compile peculiar dialect terms of agricultural interest, in common use in each dialect area. These should be taught to extension agents to ease their interactions with farmers and ensure easy and quick understanding of agricultural messages. Extension agents are encouraged to speak the dialects of their target farmers, if only to demonstrate their identification with the farmers. It will in essence improve ease of acceptance by the farmers.

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