



A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Kólá Akínlàdè's *Owó Èjè*

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Abstract

Numerous scholarly papers have been written on 'Yorùbá films', with emphasis on thematic, cultural and social issues that border on the society. However, from the sociolinguistic point of view, only few of such works have been done. In fact, from observation, none of such works has been analysed through the 'Communication Accommodation Framework'. This paper therefore analysed Kólá Akínlàdè's *Owó Èjè* (literally meaning 'blood money' that is, 'ill-gotten money, involving bloodshed'). Gile and Coupland (1991)'s Communication Accommodation Theory was used as theoretical framework. The researcher carefully watched the film and extracted fifteen lexical items (words), which were transcribed for analysis. The basis for the selection was the occurrence of 'l' intervocally which was mispronounced as 'r' by the protagonist of the film (Súlè). The concept 'convergence', which is key to the 'Speech/Communication Accommodation Theory;' (S/CAT) formed the basis for analysis. Súlè's inability to discriminate between /l/ and /r/ which are different phonemes in Èbirà and Yorùbá (his first and second languages respectively) resulted in 'disarticulation' of 'l' as 'r'. Crystal (1987) describes this as 'RHOTACISM'. Súlè's admirers' attempt to adjust their speech to be similar to his own results in 'convergence'. They deliberately pronounce 'l' as 'r' in words like: /Súlè/ → /Súrè/, /l'ókè/ → /r'ókè/, /ilé/ → /íré/, and /Wálé/ → /Wáré/, etc. to 'accommodate' Súlè's speech defect. To accentuate this, they also demonstrate through their actions that Súlè is welcome, rather than being discriminated against.

Keywords: Owó Èjè, Linguistic accommodation process, Convergence, Communicative behaviour, Rhotacism

1. Introduction

As hinted in the abstract above, much has been done with regard to analysing Yorùbá films adapted from novels and plays, especially, from the literary/sociolinguistic perspective. Some examples



will suffice here: Jolaoso (2012), Kékeréogun (2011), Olúwadorò (2019 a & b), Oyèbámijí & Adéjùmò (2019), etc. Only a few has been done from the perspective of the Speech Accommodation/Communication Accommodation Theory SAT/CAT. This paper analysed Kólá Akínlàdé's classic detective novel: 'Owó Èjè' as adapted in the film titled *Owó Èjè*, with the aim of filling this academic lacuna. Before going into details, let us present a brief synopsis of the film. The film was carefully watched by the researcher after which the relevant data were transcribed and analysed.

2. A Synopsis of Kólá Akínlàdé's *Owó Èjè*

A young Èbìrà farmer mysteriously died after complaining of stomach trouble. Autopsy revealed that he died of food poisoning. Police investigation revealed that he ate cassava paste (ẹ̀bà) with vegetable soup along with his friend, Joseph, in the afternoon. In the evening, he drank a cup of gin in Chief Olówójẹunjẹ́'s house, after which he was offered a cigarette by Lawrence Awólà̀nà and then, a cup of palmwine by Bàbá Wálé (his landlord).

This serial eating, smoking and drinking resulted into serious puzzle for the police and the detective. After series of interrogations with the three suspects – Chief Olówójẹunjẹ́, Bàbá Wálé and Lànà, the police found it difficult to detect the murderer among the trio. However, through the intervention of Akin Olúshinà, the police detective, it was discovered that Bàbá Wálé was the much hunted criminals. His motive for killing Súlè was that Súlè's cocoa was thriving and flourishing. Knowing fully well that Súlè's farm would be inherited by him after the former's death, he cunningly poisoned him.

3. The Phonological Process

Crystal (1987) refers to a defective use or /r/ as RHOTACISM and the articulation of vowels with a 'r' – colouring (Tserdanelis & Wong, 2001). Súlè's inability to discriminate between 'l' and 'r' makes him to misarticulate 'l' as 'r' and this makes his speech to sound funning. His admirers, instead of making jest of him often try to talk like him, this result in 'convergence'.

4. The Theoretical Template

The theoretical template used in this paper is the Accommodation Theory. It has been observed that in conversation, a speaker's attitude towards his/her listener can influence the way such a speaker speaks. This variation in language can be explained by a social psychological approach known as the

Accommodation Theory - more precisely 'Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT). In recent times, there is a slight modification of the theory tagged 'Communication Accommodation Theory' (CAT).

The theory developed in the early 70's. It could be traced back to Giles's Accent Mobility Models of 1973, which developed to demonstrate the value of social psychological concepts to understanding the dynamics of speech. It seeks to explain the motivations that underlie certain shifts in people's speech styles during social encounters and some of the social consequences arising from them. It focuses on the cognitive and affective processes underlying individuals' 'convergence' and 'divergence' through speech. See Giles and Powesland (1975), Giles (1980) and Giles and Ogay (2007), for detailed discussion on 'SAT' and 'CAT'

According to Giles and Coupland (1991), the theory aims at providing an explanation on why speakers accommodate (i.e., change the manner in which they speak in face-to-face interaction. In other words, when people interact, they 'adjust' their speech, their vocal patterns and their gestures to accommodate others. The theory explains why people EMPHASISE or MINIMISE the social differences between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal and non-verbal communication.

4.1 Assumptions of CAT

- There are speech and behavioural similarities and dissimilarities in all conversations.
- The way we perceive the speech and behaviours of another determines our evaluation of the conversation.
- Language and behaviour have the ability to communicate social status and group belonging between people in conversation.
- Norms guide the accommodation process, which varies in degree of appropriateness (Giles & Ogay, 2007).

4.2 The Concepts of SAT/CAT

There are two key concepts in the theory which are:

- Convergence, and
- Divergence.

Convergence asserts that when people talk to each other, their speech often become more similar, that is, each person's speech converges towards the speech of the person they are talking to (Holmes 2008). Convergence is a linguistic accommodative process in which a speaker modifies his/her own speech to resemble more closely the addressee's speech. That is, convergence is a strategy through which individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviours to minimise their social differences. The opposite of this concept is 'divergence' in which a speaker linguistically moves in the opposite direction in order to make his/her speech sound more unlike that of the person (s/he) is talking to.

An instance in which individuals ACCENTUATE the speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and their interlocutors. This is deliberately choosing a code not used by one's addressee. For example, when the Arab nations issued an oil communiqué to the world not in English, but in Arabic, they were making a clear political statement. They no longer wished to be seen as 'accommodating to the Western English-speaking power (Holmes, 2008). Olúwadòrò (2019) asserts that when an adult talks to a child, he deliberately 'condescends' to the level of the child by talking like him/her, so that the child will easily understand him/her. According to him, this is convergence.

In this paper, the concept 'convergence' captures what Súlè's admirers did when they were interacting with him. This manifested in scene 4 when Bàbá Wálé met Súlè on the farm where he was working and called him 'SÚRÈ', instead of 'SÚLÈ'. This was to assure him that he does not hold him derision. Even though, it eventually turned out that this is far from the truth.

Another instance was when Súlè brought his new bicycle to the 'palmwine drinking joint' in Oòndó town. There, he met three friends who were feasting on 'pepper soup' and palmwine. The moment the men saw him, they chorused:

È wo SÚRÈ (instead of 'SÚLÈ')

Ọmọ ọba RÓKÈ IRE.

Instead of 'L'ÓKÈ ILÉ'

(Here comes Súlè, the prince of Oke Ilè).

The men demonstrated their admiration for Súlè by entertaining him lavishly with a plate of pepper soup and a keg of palmwine. Súlè in turn offered to 'wash', that is, celebrate his new bicycle with them.

This is a clear case of convergence through verbal and non-verbal communication. In Bàbá Wálé's case, he followed his utterance by warmly embracing Súlè.

Cases like these clearly demonstrate that convergence does not only take place in speech, it also manifests in gestures. Thus, the modification of 'SPEECH ACCOMMODATION' as 'COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION', WHICH CAPTURES both 'verbal' and 'non-verbal communication is appropriate.

4.3 Data Presentation

Scene 1

Súlè admires his new bicycle, polishes it and sings.

Iré bàbá mi mo rè,

Iré, írè o, màá múre déré

House, house, I'll take blessing home

Ilé bàbá mi mo rè

Ilé, ilé o, màá múre délé.

Instead of:

(I go to my father's house, sweet home, I'll go back home with blessings)

Scene 2

Súlè whistles and signals to Bísí (his lover)

Adébísí, Adébísí

Kèké mi tuntun

Ká pàdé níré Baaré ìgbìrà r'áré

Instead of:

Adébísí, Adébísí

Wo kèké mi tuntun

Ká pàdé n'ílé Baálè ìgbìrà l'álé.

(Adébísí, see my new bicycle, let us meet in Ebira district head's house in the evening)

Scene 3

Súlè meets Bísí at night

Greets Bísí with a warm embrace and kisses her

Tells her about his encounter with Chief Olówójeunjéjé in underpants and short shirt with a heavy load on his shoulder.

Adébísí, Mo rí Oróyè Orówójeunjéjé

Meaning: Mo rí Olóyè Olówójeunjéjé.

(I saw Chief Olówójeunjéjé)

Ó wọ Sòkòtò péńpé

He wore knickers very short

Ó gbé ẹ̀rù sí èjìkà

He carried load on shoulder.

Mo rí àwọ̀n ọ̀rọ̀pàá

'Mo rí àwọ̀n olọ̀pàá'

I saw those policemen.

Wọ̀n n sàré ọ̀

'Wọ̀n n sàré ọ̀'

(I saw policemen running helter-skelter, looking for thieves).

Scene 4

Súlè was working on his farm, Bàbá Wálé (his landlord) came to visit him. Bàbá Wálé hailed Súlè and embraced him.

Sùrè, o kú iṣé o.

Instead of:

Sùlè, o kú iṣé o.

And he responded:

Háà, Bàbá Wáṙé.

Instead of:

Háà, Bàbá Wálé.

Ẹ kààbò o.

Ẹ kààbò o.

(Sùlè, well-done, Háà, Bàbá Wálé, you are welcome).

They discussed for a short while. Bàbá Wálé handed some money to Wálé to give it to his friend, Joseph. He asked him when he would see Joseph, Sùlè told him he would see him on the third day.

Màá rí i rọ́tùnṙa

Màá rí i lọ́tùnጁa

I will see him in the next two days.

Scene 5

Sùlè rides his bicycle to a palmwine drinking joint where he met three friends who were drinking palmwine and eating pepper soup. When they saw Sùlè's new bicycle, they hailed him and chorused:

Ẹ wo Sùre

You look Sùlè.

Ọmọ ọba rọ́kèṙé

Child king at Òkè Ilé.

(Take a look at Sùlè, the prince of Òkè ilé).

Instead of:

Ẹ wo Sùlè

Ọmọ Ọba lókèèlé

They congratulated him on the purchase of his new bicycle and drinks palmwine together.

4.4 Data Analysis

We select the following words for examination.

1	Àláké	→	[àràké]	(Name)
2	Olóyè	→	[orójè]	(Chief)
3	Olówójeunjéjé	→	[orówódʒɛũdʒédʒé]	(Name)
4	Olópàá	→	[ɔrɔ kɔpáa]	(Police)
5	Olè	→	[orè]	(Thief)
6	Òtúnlā	→	[ɔtũra]	(two day's time)
7	lọ	→	[rɔ]	(go)
8	Baálè	→	[baárè]	(district head)
9	Ilé	→	[iré]	(house)
10	Súlè	→	[súrè]	(Name)
11	Wálé	→	[wáré]	(Name)
12	Íókè	→	[rókè]	(on the mountain)
13	d'élé	→	[déré]	(reach home)
14	Íálé	→	[ráré]	(at night)
15	Pèlèpèlè	→	[kɔpèrékɔpèré]	(gently)

Our data above is made up of 10 nouns, 4 of which are proper nouns – names of individuals. These are (i) Súlè (ii) Wálé (iii) Àláké (iv) Olówójeunjéjé. The remaining are common nouns;

1 Verb – lọ 'go' (No. 7)

1 Adjective – Olóyè 'chief' (No. 2)

4 Adverbs

- (i) Òtúnla 'two days' time'
- (ii) Lókè 'on the mountain'
- (iii) Lálé 'at night'
- (iv) Pèlèpèlè 'gently'

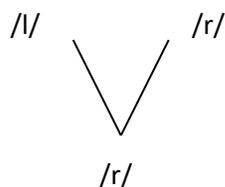
In each of the above data, the linguistic variable is the voiced lateral approximant 'l', which Súlè consistently misarticulated as trill /r/. The two sounds are closely related in voicing, place and manner of articulation. They are both voiced, alveolar and approximants. In fact, in Igbo language, there are dialects that attest /l/ and /r/ as allophones of the same phoneme. Thus:

míli, and

mírì

refer to the same item: 'water'.

This process is a kind of 'convergence'.



In Súlè's speech, the process is a special kind of convergence in which two different phonemes are merged. The implication of the above is that in this paper, the concept 'convergence' is viewed as both phonemic and sociolinguistic. Thus, we have 'phonemic convergence' because two different consonants are realised as one. This is diagrammatically exemplified above. On the other hand, when Súlè's admirers tried to speak like him, there is a sociolinguistic convergence. See this as explained above under the theoretical framework.

5. Conclusion

Two important concepts came out clearly from the foregoing. One, the concept ‘Neutralisation of phonemic contrast’, which came to the fore in Súlè’s pronunciation. His mother tongue, Epira has the Alveolar Lateral Approximant /l/ and the Alveolar trill /r/ which is also an Approximant as separate phonemes; just like in Yorùbá (Súlè’s second language). In Súlè’s speech, the phonemic contrast between the two consonants is neutralised, since he pronounces both sounds as /r/.

/Súrè/ (Súlè); /àràkè/ (Àlàkè) /orójè/ (olóyè), /ṛókpaá/ (olópàá), Wáré (Wálé), /iré/ (ilé), etc; See data on page 8 Some scholars would refer to this as ‘overlapping’ or ‘merging’. In this paper, we refer to it as ‘phonemic convergence! (See page 9 above).

Secondly, is the issue of sociolinguistic ‘convergence’. This is where the theoretical template used in this paper: ‘Speech Accommodation Theory’ (SAT, later modified by psycholinguistic scholars as ‘Communication Accommodation Theory’, comes out clearly. Súlè’s admirers, rather than mocking his speech defect, tried to adjust their speech to become more like that of Súlè. They did this by articulating /l/ as /r/ just like Súlè. Bàbá Wálé first demonstrated this by hailing ‘Súlè’ as ‘Súrè. Not only that, he embraced him warmly. (Though this gesture was later revealed to be deceptive.) The three jolly friends: Òkè, Àjàyí and Òjò, who were wining and dining at the palmwine joint also demonstrated this in their song, cited above on page 7 above We represent this below:

‘Èwo Súrè

Ọmọ ọba rókè ire.

Instead of:

Èwo Súlè

Ọmọ ọba l’ókè ilé.

(Behold Súlè, the prince from Òkè Ilé). They did not stop there. They congratulated him heartily and entertained him lavishly with pepper soup and palmwine. That is, the convergence was not only in speech, it also manifested in non-verbal gestures. Here the appropriateness of ‘Communication Accommodation’, instead of ‘Speech Accommodation’ (Theory) becomes accurate.

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