

LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

ENG: 121

LECTURE NOTE

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THE NOTION LANGUAGE

Every language is characterized by variation within the speech community that uses it. If the resulting speech varieties are sufficiently similar as to be considered merely characteristic of a particular geographic region or social grouping they are generally referred to as dialects, it implies that Nnewi and Ikwerre are usually considered to be dialects of Igbo. Sometimes social, political and historical pressures are such that the varieties are considered to be distinct enough to be treated as separate languages, like Yoruba and Efik or Igbo and Hausa. A particular language may be known by one name to scholarship and another to the speakers; thus the name Afikpo is not generally used by speakers of the language since Afikpo constitute a dialect. More importantly, current estimates put the number of languages spoken around the world to be around 7000. the reason for discrepancy in the correct number due to gaps in our knowledge, especially about languages spoken in inaccessible regions.

LANGUAGES CLASSIFICATION

Languages can be classified in a number of different ways for a number of different purposes. They include the following below:

GENERIC CLASSIFICATION

This approach is one in which languages are classified into families based on divergence from a presumed common ancestor. Good examples are Egu (Benne republic) and Yoruba language. These languages can be shown to descend from a common ancestor, a common protolanguage. More speculative classifications, far from universally accepted, relate more languages families together and hence try to explore language further back in time.

AREAL CLASSIFICATION

Similar features and shared lexicon suggest that the languages in question have been in contact with each other over a long period of time. In a stricter sense, areal classification is concerned with the diffusion of structural features across languages boundaries within a geographical area. The term “linguistic area” refers to a geographical area in which, due to borrowing and language contact, languages of a region come to share certain structural features

and other traits. It is assumed that the reason why the languages of the area share these traits is through contact and borrowing e.g.(1) Benue (Idoma) Ugwu (hill)

(2) Enugu (Igbo) Ugwu (hill).

LEXICOSTATISTIC CLASSIFICATION

It is a statistical method for distinguishing groups and subgroups in genetically related language. It is based on the idea that basic vocabulary is relatively resistant to change, and will be renewed rarely compared to non-basic vocabulary. Most scholars require that basic vocabulary be part of the supporting evidence for any distant genetic relationship. Basic vocabulary is generally understood to include terms for body parts, close kinship, frequenting enchanted aspects of the natural world such as mountain, river and cloud e.g. River (Ikwerre) Eze = king. Abia (Ngwa) Eze = king.

TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION

The main types were isolating which mean that words are monomorphemic and invariable, agglutinating which entails that words are formed by a root and a clearly detachable sequence of affixes each of them, expressing a separate item of meaning it extends to a range of other, linguistic features and to an interest in universal linguistic properties.

DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGES

Languages are not spread evenly across the world, there is a high density of languages in some regions, even though this spreads across continents and Islands separated by expanses of sea. In Nigeria has a high biogenetic density compared to other regions of Nigeria.

MAJOR FAMILIES OF THE WORLD'S LANGUAGES

The languages of the world can be divided into a number of families of related languages, possibly grouped into larger stocks, plus a residue of isolate, languages that appear not to be genetically related to any other known language, languages that form one-member families to their own. Below are six major language families.

INDO – EUROPEAN

The Indo – European languages have been recognized as forming a family since at least the late seventeenth century when Andreas Jager observed in 1686 that Persian and many of the languages of Europe are descendants of a single language. Indeed, Indo-European languages are spoken throughout most of Europe, across Iran, through central Asia and India. With the colonial expansion of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, they spread into the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and Asia in the process, diversifying into numerous dialects. They have become major language in many of the former colonies and are spoken by about half billion speakers.

AUSTRONESIAN

Austronesian is the largest universally accepted language family in the world with over 1,200 languages spoken by some 300million speakers from Madagascar in the West to Eastern Island in the East, Taiwan in the North and New Zealand in the South, with the exception of Australia and most of the Island of New Guinea. It is clear that there is considerable greater diversity in the languages of Taiwan than in all of the rest of the languages. Taiwan is thus the most likely homeland for Austronesian. The languages spread via migrations of people travelling over sea.

AFROSIATIC

Afroasiatic consists of about 353 languages spoken in northern Africa and Southwest Asia by nearly 340million people. It is regarded as the best established of the four families that African languages are now generally divided into, the other three families, Niger-Congo and the more contentious Nilo-Saharan and Khosian.

Afroasiatic is generally divided into six groups: Berber (consisting of 30 languages spoken in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mali including Zengaga) Chadic (made up of nearly 200 languages spoken in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, including Hausa, Miya and Ngizim), Cushitic (with about 50 languages in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania, including Somali), Egyptian (one language, Coptic which became extinct in the fourteenth century, Semitic (consisting of about 50 languages spoken in Ethiopia and Middle East including Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic) and Omotic (with about 20 languages spoken mainly in Ethiopia including Dizi and Ganza).

NIGER-CONGO

It consists of about 1,500 languages, the Niger – Congo family is the largest languages family in Africa. The well known Bantu languages are a subgroup of the Bantoid group. They comprise over 400 languages (including Swahili, Fang, Luganda and Shona) with perhaps 60 million speakers. Bantu speaking people migrated over the next 3,000 years, taking West African yam agriculture with them.

SINO – TIBETAN

It is made up of about 400 languages, Sino – Tibetan is the second largest languages family of the world in terms of the number of speakers with approximately half the number of

speakers of Indo – European. It includes Mandarin Chinese, the languages with the largest number of native speakers. It falls under two groups namely Sinitic which consist of 14 languages including Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese and Tibetan Burman which consist of about 350 languages.

TRANS – NEW GUINEA

New Guinea is the most linguistically diverse region in the world, populated by some 1,200 languages. These are usually divided into two groups, Austronesian and Papuan. Papuan languages fall, into 300 more distinct genetic families and some two dozen isolates. Most of these families are relatively small, with an average of 25 languages and an average of less than 3,000 speakers.

PROBLEMS WITH GENETIC RELATION

New languages emerge as the eventual result of geographical or social separations of speakers of a single language. This model underlies the notion of genetic relatedness of languages, the notion that each languages has a single parent languages from which. It ultimately separated. Sometimes borrowing between languages is as extensive that it obscures the genetic picture. New languages come into being as the result of interaction between two or more languages or rather, between speakers of two or more languages.

PIDGINS

Pidgins are simplified forms of speech that sometime arise in contact situations, when speakers of mutually unintelligible languages come into contact with one another in a limited range of social interactions. These interactions might be for purposes of trade or labour. Many Pidgins arose in the wake of European colonialism, in the Pacific region, the Americas and Africa the lexical items of these Pidgins often derived from the languages of the colonizers, but are usually pronounced according to the sound system of the languages of the colonized, which represent the majority of speakers. Pidgins often show considerable variation across speakers in vocabulary and pronunciation, depending partly on the speaker's mother tongue. The pidgin spoken in Calabar arose in interactions between European settlers/ traders and Efik people. It is also important to note that not all Pidgins arose in contexts of European colonization.

CREOLES

When a Pidgin language acquires mother tongue speakers, it is said to have been creolized, and is a creole. Sometimes Pidgin becomes useful in a wider range of interactive

context, and may take on a role of auxiliary languages and perhaps be given official status. When Pidgins gain extra brood and grammar to cope with the additional uses they are put to, being more complex than Pidgins they are called expanded Pidgins. Creoles are full languages, structurally and functionally comparable with ordinary human languages. The process of creolization is associated with increase in the range and depth of vocabulary and in the structural complexity of the former Pidgins as well as expansion in stylistic range. Interestingly, creoles seem to share more with one another grammatically than they do with other, natural languages, suggesting that those similarities may be attributed to general linguistic abilities shared by all people. In Nigeria for instance, the inhabitants of Benin City predominately make use of creole as a method of communication.

MIXED LANGUAGES

The third group of problem languages is mixed languages, hybrid languages components of which come from different sources. Thus, some aspects (lexicon) indicate that the language belongs to one family, while others (grammar) suggest they belong to another. Perhaps the paradigm example of a mixed language is Orokamu (Benue) an endangered language spoken by a few people in Benue state. Some of the nouns come mainly from Igbo nouns. For instance, one might suggest that the French language borrowed extensively from the English language. That is why some French words are similar or same with English Lexicon.

NIGER – CONGO AS A LINGUISTIC AREA

ADAMAWA – UBANGI

The language grouped together as Adamawa – Ubangi belongs to the Volta-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo family. These languages are spoken across central Africa in an area that stretches from north-eastern Nigeria through northern Cameroon, southern Chad, the Central African Republic, and northern Zaire. The languages fall into two groups Adamawa and Ubangi. The Adamawa languages are found in northern Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad, whereas the Ubangi languages are spoken in Central African Republic, northern Zaire and southwestern Sudan.

EFIK

Efik is one of the better known African languages and was at one time one of the best described African languages. It is spoken today by about 750,000 people as a first language in the south south corner of Nigeria, in and around the city of Calabar, its cultural center. Due to its

location near the Atlantic coast, Calabar and the Efik were encountered early by European explorers, traders and missionaries. Efik is now recognized as part of lower Cross, a subgroup of Cross River which is a branch of the Niger-Congo linguistic Area.

YORUBA

Yoruba is spoken as a first language in Nigeria in virtually all areas in the states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo and in most of the areas in Kwara and Kogi State. Yoruba is a second language in some areas of Delta and Edo States. Outside Nigeria, there are Yoruba speaking communities in the Republic of Togo and Benne. Yoruba fall under the Niger-Congo family.

INDO-EUROPEAN AS A LINGUISTIC AREA

AFRIKAANS

Afrikaans is the youngest fully standardized member of the West Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family. It is primarily spoken in South Africa where it is one of the official languages. Currently, it boasts the third largest speaker population in South Africa with Zulu and Xhosa being more widely spoken.

ENGLISH

Modern English spelling has inherited a mixture of Anglo-Saxon, Norman-French, and classical orthographic conventions, many of which are fixed. English therefore fall within the Indo-European family. English has an enormous vocabulary which continues to evolve every year. English may one day become the world's lingua franca.

FRENCH

French is a member of the romance group of Indo-European languages. Modern French can ultimately be traced back to the Latin of northern Gaul, a Latin that was significantly modified by contact with the language of the pre-Roman Celtic inhabitants of the area and the language of the Germanic invaders who occupied the region after the fall of the Roman Empire. French is currently spoken as a first language by about 100,000,000 people. Significantly, external influences on the vocabulary of French have included English and Latin during the 16th century.

AUSTRONESIAN AS A LINGUISTIC AREA

VIETNAMESE

Vietnamese of the northern type has tones, the southern type five, and central/north central five or six. Although Chinese influence is generally very important, Vietnamese gained ultimate control and the boundaries of the language were advanced until Vietnam reached its

current geographic extension. Vietnamese is not an absolutely monosyllabic language, but one with many compounds and replicated structures.

SANTALI

Santali a member of the North Munda subgroup of the Munda family within the Austroasiatic linguistic group is spoken by about 5 million and 7 million people across several states in eastern and central India. Santali is characterized by a split into at least a northern and southern dialect sphere, with slightly different sets of phonemes, different lexical items and variable morphology.

THAI

Thai language is the national language of Thailand. Thai belongs to the Tai language family, a subgroup of the kadai family. It is important to note that the writing system used was originally designed to represent Sanskrit. The most common sentential word order is subject verb object (SVO).

AFROSIATIC AS A LINGUISTIC AREA

ARABIC

Arabic is the official language of 21 countries in the Middle East and North Africa, from Oman in the east to Mauritania in the west. With about 280 million native speakers, Arabic is by far the largest living representative of the Semitic language family, it is the language of the Koran and thus the liturgical language of Islam. Arabic also plays an important role for more than one billion Muslims worldwide.

ETHIOPIA

The Ethiopian linguistic area is probably the most famous area in Africa. It is often the only African linguistic area discussed by an extent in general works dealing with language contact and areal linguistics (Masics, 1976 et al). Most of the approximately 80 languages spoken in Ethiopia and Eritrea belong to three language families of the Afroasiatic group. There are also certain number of features found beyond Ethiopia and Eritrea in languages spoken in neighboring countries such as Somalia and Sudan.

SINO-TIBETAN AS A LINGUISTIC AREA

CHINESE

Chinese is spoken by about 1.3 billion speakers scattered around the world and they include Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Chinese is then an assemblage of

numerous dialects spreading over different continents and across time zones, some of which are different that their speakers cannot even communicate with one another. Dialects create diversity and local identity, and at the same time interaction. A tension always exists between diversification and standardization of the language. Chinese language is also the language that has the highest number of native speakers in the world. Chinese language epitomizes the Sino-Tibetan linguistic area

BURMESE

Burmese is the national language of Burma/Myanmar and is the mother tongue of the Burman ethnic majority. Burmese belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family,, which comprises approximately 350 languages spoken across a vast territory stretching from the Himalayas to Mainland Southwest Asia. It is widely believed that the round shapes of Burmese letters evolved because texts were traditionally written on palm leaves.

TIBETAN

Tibetan comprises a multiplicity of regional spoken dialects and a standard written language which is the vehicle of a major civilization whose religion is Buddhism. The Tibetan emerges into history in the 7th century AD. It is from that time also that their alphabetic writing system, based on a model of Indian Origin, is alleged to have started. The spoken dialects have usually remained unwritten. Poorly recorded from pre-modern times, they have often developed separately from the written language and from one another.

TRANS-NEW GUINEA AS A LANGUAGE AREA

CENTRAL SOLOMON LANGUAGES

There are four or five Papuan languages in central Solomon Island namely Bilua, Touo, Lavukaleve, Savosavo and Kazukuru which is an extinct and barely documented language of New Georgia. Wurm had linked all the Papuan languages of the islands off the coast of New Guinea into one genetic grouping. These languages share some phonological features.

MANAMBU

Manambu belongs to the Ndu language family, and is spoken by about 2500 people. It falls under the Trans-New Guinea/ Papua New Guinea linguistic are. The origins and the internal classification of the Ndu languages remains a matter for debate. Manambu's closest relatives are Iatmul and Ngala. The trade relationship and marriage exchange with the Iatmal contributed to a large amount of lexical diffusion between the two groups in close contact. Manambu is an endangered language and the people of Manambu are bilingual.

SKOU LANGUAGES

The languages of the Skou family are spoken along the north coast of New Guinea from Skou villages to other villages. There are 16 languages in the family and most of the languages are found along the coast but the orientation of most groups lies inland.

PRIMARY SOURCE

- (1) Keith Brown and Sarah Ogilvie. *Concise Encyclopedia of Languages of the World*, Oxford, Elsevier Ltd. 2009.