

The Streams and Lines of Inter-Relatedness of Speech Communities

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Abstract: As a core concept in empirical linguistics, Speech Community is at the intersection of different views and definition which obviously negates the substantive definition of its scope. Using the theoretical concept of Gumperz and Labov and Kachru's three circle model, the paper traces the streams and lines that define a speech community enlisting various notions on speech community and problems associated with them. Findings show that speech community is defined largely not by the homogeneity of the immediate language of interaction but by agreement in the use of linguistic elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms: these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour, and by uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage. The paper submits that the concept of speech communities extends from a group of people living in the same location that employ the same code, speak the same dialect or variety of language, to include very large scale communities such as entire nation states and the entire national or international community of language users.

Keywords: *speech community, three circle, homogeneity, Language of interaction*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Language is basic for human interactions. It is central in every society, regardless of time and location. Language is both an individual possession and a social possession; therefore, certain individuals behave linguistically like other individuals; they might be said to speak the same language, same dialect or the same variety, i.e., to employ the same code, and in that respect to be members of the same speech community. According to scholars such as Halliday (1975), language could be defined in various ways depending on whether one is interested in dialects and those who speak them, words and their histories, the differences in language as an art medium, uses of language and the like. However, to Osisanwo (2008), Language is human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication. Azikiwe (1995), opines that Language is a fluid, dynamic and negotiable system and learning it is as a result of interaction and integration of a number of factors. Within the confines of descriptive and structural linguistics, it is best to think of language from the perspective of Okata (2016), which views language as a vehicle that transports thoughts, emotions, feelings and ideas from one entity to another for the purpose of communication. This can be in form of oral, written, sign or body language and must be acceptable by the members of a speech community.

There are many ethnic groups with its different indigenous languages in Nigeria. The coming of the English language joined all the ethnic groups together which fostered inter-ethnic communication. Having this in mind, therefore, English Language can best be described as the language of unity. This being said does not guarantee that there is unity in Nigeria because a group of people speak one language. But it is simply saying that English is the common language which plays a vital role of inter-ethnic communication, which is why it is said to be the language of unity. Apart from national unity, English has achieved international unity for Nigeria.

Human Language has the properties of productivity and displacements and relies entirely on social convention and learning. Language and social interaction has a reciprocal relationship: language shapes social interactions and social interaction shapes language. This is the major concern of Sociolinguistics who attempts to study language in relation to society in view of social reality. To them, language describes society and the society in turn, defines language.

The microcosm of a society is a group and a group must have at least two members but there is really no upper limit to group membership. People can group together for one or more reasons which may hinge on; social, religious, political, cultural, familial or vocational affinity. The group may be temporary or quasi permanent and the purposes of its members may change. They may also belong to other groups and may or may

not meet face-to-face. The organization of the group may be tight or loose and the importance of group membership is likely to vary among individuals within the group, being extremely important to some and of little consequence to others. In the face of mutual agreement with a common front, a speech community emerges. This paper therefore strives to locate the nexus that constructs the nooks and caprices of a speech community.

Speech Communities

Before we can convincingly address the concept of speech community and possibly identify the streams and the lines of inter-relatedness of a speech community, this paper will first of all locate the basic concepts of 'Speech' and 'Community'. According to Oxford English Dictionary, Speech can simply be defined as the "oral presentation of feelings, thoughts and expressions. Or the verbal means of communicating". "The faculty of uttering articulates sounds or words and the ability to speak or to use vocalizations to communicate". It involves; articulation, fluency and voice. While, community is defined as "a group of people living together who share the same norms and values for mutual interaction". It is a group sharing a common understanding and often the same language, manners, tradition and law. Cohen (1985: 12) believes that communities can be understood by their boundaries, since they are identified by both their uniqueness and difference. What is fundamental to both speech and community is that a system of interaction and symbols is shared, learned and taught, and that participants and members are aware they share this system. Speech community in turn, is viewed from different perspective according to individual scholars.

Early Definitions of Speech Community

To Arnold Lakhovsky (1935), early definitions of speech communities tended to see it as bounded and localized groups of people who live together and come to share the same linguistic norms because they belong to the same local community. He maintains that it has been assumed that within a community a homogeneous set of norms should exist and that speech communities can only be defined by the ability for the members to be sharing community membership and linguistic communication. These assumptions have been challenged by later scholarship that has demonstrated that individuals generally participate in various speech communities simultaneously and at different times in their lives. Therefore, each speech community has different norms that they tend to share. Moreover, communities may be de-localized and unbounded rather than local, and they often make up different sub-communities with differing speech norms. Speech communities may be a set of people who only share both particular sets of vocabulary and grammatical conventions, as well as speech styles and genres, and also norms for how and when to speak in particular ways. On the other hand, modern scholars such as Gumperz (1964), states that any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal or sign language regardless of the linguistic differences among them, is a speech community. To him, speech communities are groups that share values and attitudes about language use, varieties and practices. Speech community, as it is defined so far by different sociolinguists, can be regarded as a group of people living in the same location or scattered, who recognize a dialect or language as a medium of interaction. The emphasis here is that speech community is the product of prolonged interaction among those who operate within shared belief and value systems regarding their own culture, society, and history as well as their communication with others. The adoption of the concept 'speech community' as a focus of linguistic analysis emerged in the 1960's. This was due to the pioneering work by William Labov, whose studies of language variation in New York City and Martha's Vineyard laid the groundwork for sociolinguistics as a social science. In his studies, it was revealed that class and profession were not only clearly related to language variation within a speech community, but socio-economic aspirations and mobility were also of great importance. Prominent sociolinguists who have worked on speech communities according to Lyons (1970:326) include William Labov, John J. Gumperz, Lesley Milroy and Robin Lakoff. This offers a definition of what Gumperz calls a 'real' speech community, to mean; 'all the people who use a given language (or dialect).'

Theoretical Model

Within this notion as postulated by Gumperz (1964), spammed the frame work for this paper where speech community is defined largely not by the homogeneity of the immediate language of interaction but rather, by the degree, varieties or classification of the English language use- first language, second language or foreign language as determinant of the bound of the individual speech communities and this, the paper captures within Kachru's (2006) three circle of English language speakers- the Inner, Outer and the Expanding circles.

According to Gumperz (1964), there are four important components of speech communities which include that; its members share both a set of linguistic forms and a set of social norms that govern the use of those forms. The linguistic range, which has to do with the degree to which the linguistic systems of the community differ, make the speech communities multilingual, diglossic, multidialectal or homogenous. This is largely dependent on the degree of difference among the language systems used in the community. Finally, he sets the notion of compartmentalization describing the degree to which the use of different varieties of language use were set off from each other as discrete system of interaction and this spams the different types of speech communities.

Types of speech communities

The importance of the clear understanding of the identifying mark of a speech community remains the focus of this paper; the concept of speech community does not simply focus on groups that speak the same language. Rather, the concept takes as fact that language represents, embodies, constructs and constitutes meaningful participation in society and culture. And this agreement can vary within a language and among various languages. Members must be socialized to learn the language symbols of that community and how and when to use them. Cohen (1985) argues that "a reasonable interpretation of the word's use within a speech community would seem to imply two related suggestions: that the members of a speech community are a group of people who have something in common with each other, which distinguishes them in a significant way from members of other putative groups". This is why speech communities are one way that language ideologies and social identities are constructed.

William Labov views speech communities as a hybrid of Gumperz' focus on shared norms and notes that; there are three major types of speech communities, namely: Monolingual Speech Community, Bilingual Speech Community and Multilingual Speech Community.

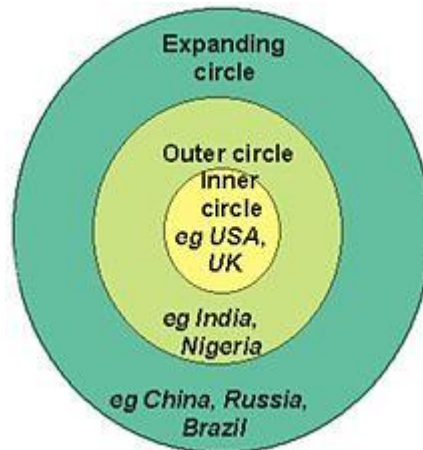
Monolingual speech community exists where one language is being spoken and used by a certain community. Bilingual speech community occurs when two different languages are used by the same or different community at the same time. On the other hand, multilingualism denotes speaking or using different languages by particular communities. Multilingualism is a common phenomenon because of today's language diversity. This linguistic diversity is one of the major facts of human life. This diversity however gives way to the norm multilingualism. In this way, most communities in the world are multilingual. Monolingual speech communities are rarer. So there are majority and minority languages, dominant and oppressed languages but there is hardly a country in the world which only one language is spoken. Gumperz (1982) postulates that linguistic community is "a social group which may either be monolingual or bilingual, held together by frequency of social interaction patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the line of communication". However, Gumperz later introduces the requirement that there should be some special linguistic differences between the members of a speech community and outside. Hence, the criterion of communication is added, if two communities both speak the same language but had no contact at all; they are regarded as different speech communities. On the other side of the coin, a speech community could be a group of people who are scattered in many locations but maintain contact in abstraction by adopting one language. For instance, Nigeria, a large region is a speech community having a large population of people speaking different dialects in several geographical areas having English language as the major string binding their general communicative understanding. Kachru's three circles of English Language speakers are hinged on the expanded form of this notion.

Braj Kachru's classification of speech community

Kachru's concept of classification of language takes its root from this perspective that; English is considered a twice born again language because its original mother is England and its second mother is whichever socio cultural context that indigenizes it. This is why we have different types of English spoken all over the globe. We have American English, British English, Ghanaian English, Nigerian English etc this owes to the fact that two individuals cannot speak in the same way, the same form of English is not possible and cannot co-exist in different countries or continents because of the various factors which can be traced to environmental, educational, geographical, cultural and personal idiosyncratic conditions. These factors influence the way the language is perceived, encoded and decoded and spoken in different areas otherwise known as speech communities. This has a lot to do with the spread of the language, that is, the point, manner and nature of the contact. Hence, the spread of English around the world is often discussed in terms of three distinct groups of users, where English is used as; native language, second language and foreign language.

According to Crystal, D., (2007), there is about 75 territories in the world where English is spoken as first language (L1), second language (L2) or as foreign language especially in the field of government, law and education. It is difficult to specifically place the total number of Englishes in the world as new varieties of English are being developed and discovered. English is perceived as the primary language of the majority of the population of the country. That is, English is perceived as the Native Language (ENL) of the speakers in this particular sector. The majority of the population located among this group is in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. This group is identified as members of the inner circle (Kachru, 2006). After the first, comes the second group of English speakers who use English as a second Language (ESL). Within this group, English is seen as an additional language to an existing language. Here English is imbibed as the language of intra-national as well as international communication in communities that are multilingual. The countries that can be located within this realm are; India, Nigeria, Singapore, Ghana, etc. most of these Englishes developed as a result of imperial expansion that brought the language to the various parts of the world. This group Kachru identified as members of the outer circle. The third is the groups that use English as a foreign

language (EFL). Within this group of speakers, English is used almost exclusively for international communication, such as in Japan, Russia, and China. This group is identified as the members of the expanding circle. This grouping is further expanded in a circle thus;



Braj Kachru's Three Circles of English.

The most influential model of the spread of English is captured in terms of three Concentric Circles of the language: The Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. (Kachru 1992).

The Inner Circle speech community

To Kachru, the inner circle is 'norm-providing'; that means that English language are developed in these countries. The inner Circle refers to English as its original abode which took shape and was spread across the world in the first diaspora. In this transplantation of English, speakers from England carried the language to Australia, New Zealand and North America. The Inner Circle thus represents the traditional historical and sociolinguistic bases of English in regions where it is now used as a primary language: ie., in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Anglophone Canada etc. These communities of Inner circle English speaker shares the norm providing position and therefore classed as a speech community.

The Outer Circle Speech Community

The outer circle which is mainly the new Commonwealth countries are identified by Kachru (2006) as 'norm-developing'. Among this group, English was produced by the second diaspora, which spread the language through imperial expansion by the Great Britain in Asia and Africa. In these regions, English does not occupy the role of a native tongue, but rather serves lingua franca among ethnic and language groups. The education, especially in the higher levels, the legislature, judiciary and the national commerce are carried out predominantly in English. The group includes India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania, Kenya etc. These countries are bound by the norm-developing status and this status also classed them into an expanded speech community.

The Expanding Circle speech community

According to Kachru, The Expanding circle (which includes much of the rest of the world) is 'norm-dependent', because it relies on the standard that is set by the native speakers or the inner circle. This group captures countries where English plays no significant or historical, or governmental role, but used as a means of international communication. The countries under this group include, China, Russia, Japan, Non-Anglophone Europe, South Korea, Egypt and territories Indonesia etc. According to Kachru,

The total in this expanding circle is the most difficult to estimate especially because English may be employed for specific, limited purposes, usually in a business context. The estimates of these users range from 100 million to one billion. (2009)

II. CONCLUSION

Communities can be defined and identified in terms of space, place, affiliation, practices and any combination of these terms. For example, while the term "community" is generally used in reference to a social unit larger than a household, it can also refer to a national and international group. Online communities can exist where members are in the thousands and there may be no physical, visual or auditory contact among members. Hence, a speech community may emerge among all groups that interact frequently and share certain norms and ideologies. These groups can be villages, countries, political or professional communities, communities with shared interest, hobbies, or life styles, or group of friends.

Finally, the paper submits that based on Kachru's three circle of speakers, the boundaries of a speech community can be extended to include, the inner circle of English speakers who are norm-providing, outer circle

English speakers otherwise known as norm- developing and the expanding circle known as the norm-dependent group. This mirrors the definition of speech community as postulated by Gumperz (1964), where he posited that; there are four important components of speech communities which include that; its members share both a set of linguistic forms and a set of social norms that govern the use of those forms. The linguistic range, which has to do with the degree to which the linguistic systems of the community differ, make the speech communities multilingual, diglossic, multidialectal or homogenous. This is largely dependent on the degree of difference among the language systems used in the community.

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