Priorities for Research in Socio Linguistics in Africa

Although the following contribution comes in written form, it must be considered as coming from the 'top of my head' (or 'our heads,' for H. A. Gleason saw my list in its rough form and suggested a couple of topics). The topics came more or less by free association; they were organized in the manner presented below after the list was complete. I had spent a few minutes trying to define sociolinguistics and to distinguish it from what Hymes calls 'ethnography of speech' (what kinds of things to say, TOPIC; in what message forms, FORM; to what kinds of people, ADDRESSEE; in what kinds of situation, SITUATION). The exercise may have been a good one, but I don't know exactly in what way it contributed to the drawing up of this list of research topics. Topics 1-16 are primarily concerned with data collection.

Topics

I. Multilingualism, languages in contact

The social factors of 'mutual intelligibility.' Cf. Wolff 1959. [1]


Patterns in the gradual restriction of the use of one's first language. E.g.: Under what circumstances is one's language first replaced by another language in multilingual situations? How does one language gradually take over another language? [5]

Language interaction: e.g. between varieties of a 'single' language (e.g. varieties of English in Liberia); dukaah Swahili with other varieties; isolated varieties of Fula with others. [6]

2. Varieties of speech

Special languages: argots, slang, etc. [7]

Varieties of linguistic skills. [8]

Inventoring African speech styles. E.g.: Almost all Central African societies have no highly stylized forms of speech. Compare this fact with the general lack of artistic development in the crafts, etc. [9]

3. Language change

The rate and nature of speech adaptation in urban areas. E.g.: Sango speakers coming to Bangui, the capital of the C.A.R., are recognized as country bumpkins by their speech. What happens and how fast does it take place? [10]

Changing attitudes toward language 'correctness.' The role of writing (secular and religious) and education in this change. [11]

Socio-cultural correlates of language simplification. Cf. Polonec 1963:504 for Swahili; see also Sango. An examination of language tolerance and language change: e.g. When does a person 'know' a language? [12]

The socio-cultural correlates of 'sloppy speech.' The study of changing linguistic models. E.g.: The Sango of announcers on Radio Centrafrique is considerably different. What do people think of it? Does it serve as a model for the country? [13]

4. Language function

The function of language in self- and group-identification. E.g.: Is there a 'mother tongue' or only a 'village language'? [14]
5. Ethnography of speech


6. Written language

A comparison of sponsored and unsponsored newspapers in urban and rural (e.g. Loma, Kpelle) Africa; their roles, their content, their language. [16]

7. Experiments (i.e. contrastive studies)

Age-grades and their linguistic differences. Compare the language X of communities where there are formal age-grades and of communities where no formal age-grades exist. [17]

Comparisons of the speech of relatively isolated speech communities with the larger, more dynamic communities. E.g. Fula, Yoruba and Lukumi, Gujarati (H. A. Gleason recommends the collaboration of Gujarati specialist, Prabodh B. Pandit of Deccan College). [18]

The contributions of writing to the concept of authority. Compare the impact of secular with religious (Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Muslim) literature. E.g.: Do Protestants consider a written document more authoritative than Catholics? Compare their use of the Scriptures in religious indoctrination. [19]

Inferences of socio-cultural change from old and modern folklore: Social changes and new folklore. E.g.: How do social changes affect the repertoires and content of tales, proverbs, etc.? [20]

Studies of change within and between speech communities, using XIX and XX century samples. [21]
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Four unrelated lgs.

Distinguish between competence and performance, case: we don't want to know what lgs a person can speak but what lgs he does speak.

What accurate information can be obtained from whom and in what way?

Contrast sociological approach (question) and anthropological observation.

Compare detailed and gross studies in different areas. In what ways are gross studies good? How can they be improved?

Ways to study lg. [Fishman]

1. Ferguson: profile approach
2. Stewart: typology
3. Lieberson (sp?): minimal set of census items
4. Fishman: dominance fragmentation approach
5. German work on German lg and communities in E. Europe

Independent vs expatriated Swahili

Urban    Rural
English/French

Control studies, e.g., Hansa
French/English

Wolof
Senegal vs Gambia
1. Voorhoeve
2. Colvet - IFAN. Language usage.
   Obtain questionnaire.

Do people respond to language as to tribe?
Are they the same kind of symbol? Fishman.

Sociologists claim that man is evolving
toward greater group unity.

Sophistication is needed in asking—what is your language?
Surveys must include urban and rural groups
in all studies.

Study the attitudes of people toward them by
countries' lg. policies.
Study of dialects of lgs spoken also in rural area.
Seldean's study of the history of Kituba.

What is lg. competence in a standard lg.?
What are the means for evaluating
lg. competence? One must recognize emergence
of new forms of lg.

Analyze recommendations for language
modification. E.g. Hindi reform—
technical vocabulary, functional words.

Lg. inter-relation: e.g. Bachi Hausa,
Zariri, Kano, Sokoto

Press should be studied for analysis of
variants of standard lg.

Crioulo   Guinea
Portuguese   Cap Verde
Post: Normal