

Research Article

A Socio Linguistic Study of Village Associations in Amauzara, ISI-ALA Mbano, Imo State, Nigeria

Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba * 

Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Yenagoa, Nigeria

Abstract

This work examines Village Associations in Amauzari Isi-Ala Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State. Amauzari is a town with Ten Villages, namely: Okwosu, Umueze, Ekwe, Umuagwu, Umudim, Umunumo, Umumpele, Umuechem, Okwelle and Anuzo. Associations do exist in different societies. Associations are platforms on which religious, social, and economic status of individuals and the community in general can improve themselves. The aim of this study is to show that the formation of associations enhance the development of the individual in Amauzari. Data for this study were collected through a random sampling technique using oral interviews and participant observations with elders aged 50-70 years in the ten villages of Amauzari. The researcher conducted oral interviews during village meetings of the different associations. The theoretical framework on which this paper is carried out is Ethnography of communication. This theory is concerned with the linguistic and sociocultural rules that are operational amongst a group of people. Findings reveal that social organizations are training grounds to persons in Amauzari and that associations lead to a communal system where everybody cares for one another. The results reveal that the village associations are socio-political organization where family conflicts between husband and wives, brothers and sisters, and extended family members are resolved. Village associations are peace keeping organization in Amauzara. Peace is a collective effort and responsibility because without peace there will be no development. All hands should be on deck for peace to reign in our society.

Keywords

Associations, AmauzariLand, Culture, Ethnography of Communication, Language

1. Introduction

The crux of this work is to show that village associations do not exist in a vacuum but rather it falls within the ambit of culture. One of the major constituents of culture is the total way of life of a people. Language is the bedrock that expresses and interprets culture while language is patterned by the culture of the people, culture is transmitted through language. Language is the vehicle for the expression of cultural values, beliefs, morals and world view while culture provides

the mirror through which speakers make sense of their language [6].

To further buttress the centrality of language, Uduma, U. posits that “Cultural experience of a people cannot be meaningful unless they are organized or coordinated in language, an activity which itself presupposes an associational ability. [10] Associations and language are fundamental or central to organizing reality and thus a characteristic of all human soci-

*Corresponding author: bleugochi@yahoo.com (Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba), uwasombabu@fuotuoike.edu.ng (Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba)

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eties”.

Language as a communicative tool between the speaker and the hearer is very important if we are to live a meaningful life in an interactive world. [15] Without language, individual men and women will be isolated as island of their own, thus making knowledge impossible. Language is therefore the bedrock of human civilization and development. [16] The structure of language is the structure of the world which is built in the sociolinguistic study. [14] Language shapes our thoughts and emotions and determines our perception of reality, it is the light of the mind a representation of a fundamental expression of social identity.

Ezikeyiaku, P. A. asserts that “Language permeates our lives from birth to death. It is the medium by which we establish and experience our most important human relationship”. [2] The most basic essence of language is communication as that is how humans primarily interact. Any task that requires more than one person can only be successfully completed with communication and it is nearly impossible to go through a day without the use of communication. [9]

Language is the principal thing that distinguishes humans from animals. It is the most powerful and distinct way humans express their thoughts, articulate their rationality, interact and conduct effective communication within a society, community and nation [13]. Language and society are very important in the formation of village associations. Social and linguistic interactions in Amauzari are based on the above roles of language in the society. Language and culture help in binding people together with the end result of having peaceful existence among the individuals in Amauzari. [12]

1.1. Statement of the Problem

There are rules and regulations which must be maintained in every society. Without rules and regulations there are so many problems that people receive from other members of the society such as self-interest by different people in religion, market places, in family, in marriages and during farming seasons generate different problems in the villages. Everyone wants to get the best for oneself and would not want others to benefit from the common wealth in the village. Land disputes and boundary adjustments crises are so common in Amauzari, whenever a man dies, some of his siblings would try to take everything the deceased had without considering the fate of the widow and children left behind. Some relatives try to push the widow out of her late husband's house. The above problems call for the establishment of village association which help to build individual's sense of reasoning and also help in bringing development in the villages. The village associations help in maintaining peace and unity in Amauzari.

1.2. Research Objectives

This paper sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To provide a formal account of village associations in Amauzari.
- 2) To examine the socio-cultural pattern of the village association.
- 3) To examine the socio-linguistic and behavioural pattern of life among the Amauzari Igbo people.
- 4) To examine the developmental progress involved in the village associations in Amauzari.

1.3. Contributions of the Study

This paper will contribute immensely to the growth of Igbo language as one of the major Nigerian languages with a rich cultural background. This work will showcase how people live together peacefully in the rural villages in accordance to the rules and regulations of the village associations. Anybody who violates the laws will definitely pay fine of a stipulated amount by the individual. Scholars of sociolinguistics and socio-cultural studies will find this work useful in their future research. This research calls for further studies to all and sundry in the development and growth of the rural areas. An adage in Igbo says “Anyukomammirionu, yaagbaufufu”, meaning ‘collective urine generates much foam’. Also ‘Nku di nambana-egherembanri’ meaning ‘the firewood in a particular place makes cooking easy for the people’.

2. Literature Review

Sociolinguistic study of village associations in Amauzari presents language in relation to the society. The society relates to the people and the use of language in their domains of activities and operations. [11] Language and social problems and associations are so closely related. Every speaker of a language is part of a community and his idiolect (individual speech) will be determined largely by his environment which in turn will become apparent in his speech. Language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for an individual and the group.

Language cannot be mentioned without reference to the society. This is because it does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it is deeply rooted in a society. In the same vein, a society without a language would be impossible. Members of a society need language to coexist and relate with one another. One can therefore assert that language and society have a symbiotic relationship and depends on each other. This relationship is what makes scholars investigate and examine the codes of communication used and how members of society use these codes. To the sociolinguists, language is a variable phenomenon arising from its use in the society, thus aims to study differences in language in relation to differences in social groups. In essence, sociolinguistics sets out to determine how social institution affects language and how the varied uses of language affect social groups. This led to the

distinction between sociology of language and sociolinguistics as thus: "Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society while the sociology of language is primarily concerned with the study of society and how the society uses language" [1]. They further assert that there is an overlap between the two. It is glaring at this point that society is a very important issue. Different associations use language to interact and carry out their activities in relation to their existence in the environment where they found themselves.

Culture is a body of recipe knowledge that is needed for everyday social living and interaction, including the norms that govern etiquette and dressing mode. [5] This means that culture refers to all the behaviours that a person exhibits which include: the architectural design, agriculture, food types, marriage, names, burials, festivals, clothing, religion, language and so on, that enable him to be a functional member of his society. Culture is the basis of man's education and dictates one's behavioural patterns, language, thought patterns, language attitude to things, values and beliefs. This implies that the characteristics of people in a society are determined by the cultural norms of that society.

"Culture may be described as a socially acquired knowledge, that is the knowledge that someone has by virtue of his being a member of a particular society" [4] This, in other words means that culture is a socially conditioned behavior, which a person lives by, in order to operate as a functional member of a specific group of people. Culture is the characteristic and knowledge of a particular group, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. From the assertion above, it is obvious that culture involves the totality of all that make up a person. From religion to music, dance, paintings, crafts, language, marriage, birth, death, name giving, taboos, and so on and this is the view that this paper adopts.

Culture is a body of knowledge and ways of thinking, feeling, goals, moves and ideals", This means that culture refers to the things that a group of people do by which they can be identified with. One must not fail to mention that cultural elements are not inherited but are transmitted from generation to generation through the training of individuals in the society.

The word association originates from the Latin word *associare*, which means to unite, or ally. It was used in the Medieval English as associate, as a verb, but in the 1600 AD, when the English language stabilized its grammatical form, it had a nominal form association. The Word Association is: "an official group of people who have joined together for a particular purpose". [3] This means that an association is an organization of people who have agreed formally to come together in pursuance of a common interest. notes that alternative terms to the word association are: alliance or consortium. [8] This internet source gives different views by which the term association can be used. Thus, in ecology or biology, association is used to mean a stable plant community including a characteristic group of dominant plant species. In chemistry, association is used to mean the linking of mole-

cules through hydrogen bonding or other interactions short of full bond formation. In psychology, association is known as a mental connection between things. In linguistics, association refers to the co-occurrence of linguistic units which could be: phonological, morphological lexical, syntactic, or semantic co-occurrences. In all these, one can see that the, sense of the use of the word association, involves a connection between one thing and another in a harmonious environment. "Association is a group of persons collected together with some particular aim. It is thus, a concrete group which can be seen; while at work. Thus, in contrary to society, association is a concrete form of organization of human beings". [17] This means that an association is a set of people who have agreed to operate in harmony to attain a set goal. This is the working definition under which the concept association will be considered in this paper.

Some of the functions of an association are:

- 1a. To provide opportunities to meet and engage with peers and colleagues.
- b. To exchange views on a given topic.
- c. To pursue a common goal.
- d. To provide financial aid to members in need.
- e. To educate members on specific areas relevant to the association and
- f. To care for one another.

On the other hand, some of the features of an association are:

- 2a. An association is usually guided by rules and regulations.
- b. An association has some degree of permanency.
- c. An association usually has a legal status.
- d. The membership in an association is usually voluntary.
- e. There is usually a co-operative spirit in an association.
- f. Associations are usually guided by common aims and objectives.

3. Method and Participation

Data for this study were collected through a random sampling technique using oral interviews and participant observations with elders aged 50-70 years in the ten villages of Amauzari. The researcher is a native of Amauzari. She conducted interviews during village meetings of the different associations. She is one of the members of the villages (Anuzo and Okwelle) in Amauzari.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this paper is Ethnography of Communication. Sociolinguistic approach to language study known as Ethnography of Communication was developed by Dell Hymes. Ethnographic study is not concerned simply with the structure of language used in communication, but with its use paying extra attention to underlying socio-

cultural rules that form the basis of the language in use. This means that a competent user of a language must not only acquire the grammar of the language but also the socio-cultural norms that accompany the spoken form of that language. In relation to this paper one of such norms is that a competent speaker must know the family structure that is prevalent amongst the native speakers of a particular language, since it is a reflection of the philosophy of life that is contained in a language. In Ethnolinguistic study, Communicative Language Teaching holds that during language acquisition or learning, what is learnt is not just the linguistic forms, but beyond the linguistic forms are how to properly use them so as to perform the kind of function that people in the society do, using language. [7] Ethnography of Communication, also evaluates the place of language in culture and society. The premise on which Ethnography of Communication is established is that the understanding of an utterance is mainly actualized within the speech event where it is entrenched. By extension, this means that a language embodies all the cultural norms (food, clothing, dance, architecture, associations, marriage, burials, festivals, religion, agriculture, tribal marks, terrain, paintings, sculpture, pottery, and so on), that distinguishes it from other languages. Ethnography of Communication, describes the forms and functions of verbal and non-verbal behaviours within a cultural setting. Thus, based on this theoretical principle above, one will examine village associations in Amauzari, as an aspect of the ethnography of the people.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Village Associations in Amauzari

Recall, that the word association originates from the Latin word *associare*, which means *tounite*, or *ally*. Some notions of the word as used in some fields of study have been briefly mentioned in this paper. However, the notion of the term association as applicable in this paper is that it is an organization of people who have agreed formally to come together in pursuance of a common interest. In the subsections below, the types of association in Amauzari will be presented.

5.1. NdiAmá-àlà (General Village Association)

The NdiAma-ala, which means the General Village Association, is constituted of the entire adult members of the community. This association is headed by a Chairman, called Onyéisióché that is supported by a Secretary called in the Amauzari dialect as 'Ode akwukwo', a Treasurer called, 'Ochekwaego' and the 'Ojézi', called 'the Public Relations Officer'. In this association, the members are registered and have an annual levy which each member pays. If there is any pressing need in the community such as: rural electrification, communal water project, building of community primary and secondary schools, community health centre, community

road project, or any other major thing that the community may want to embark on, such issues are brought to the General Village Association where they are presented to every adult person to be on the know of the need of the present project of the community. Here, members will task themselves of some amount of money to achieve the project. The informants of the corpus for this paper actually confirmed that this method was how the rural electrification project, building of schools, markets, building of roads, and the building of some health centres in the Amauzari community were achieved. Also, if a member of the association dies or is bereaved, members task themselves for some money to support such a member as a token from the association. Where a member dies, the family of the bereaved, buys a cow to be killed for the General Village Association members. Members, who are in dire need of some financial help, can also borrow money from the association with a written agreement to return the money at a set time. The General Village Association, is a regulatory body that checks the activities of its members.

5.2. OtùUmụNwóke (Men's Village Association)

OtùUmụNwóke translated as 'Men's Village Association', is an association that is exclusively for men in the Amauzari Community. In this association, men talk of affairs that are of relevance to them. The association is headed by a Chairman, called 'Onyéisióché' that is supported by a Secretary called in the Amauzari dialect as 'Ode akwukwo', a Treasurer called, 'Ochekwa ego', and the 'Ojézi' called the Public Relations Officer', as his principal officers. Here, they talk of the parcels of land that a village has. They decide on what section of the land to farm on each year. The association sees to it that the gods of the land are appeased before any farming season. The association reveres the oldest man in the community, because he keeps the ofò (the image of the god of the land). It is equally him who pours the libation and offers sacrifice of any type on behalf of the entire village. Any male or female person who commits any crime is first interrogated in their separate clan association before it is brought to the General Village Association. The Men's Association, also has an annual levy, which each member pays. It also has a social welfare scheme which allows members to put down money for thrifts, which are to be taken in turns. From this, members can build financial capital for themselves. Members can help the needy, such as: paying the school fees of some children in the community, building houses for the homeless, helping the orphans and the widows amongst them. Members who are in financial need can be helped, by lending them some money which will be paid at a specified time. In the Men's Association, a male adult person could be advised to take another wife to avoid the temptation of illicit relationship that may earn him a bad identity. These are some of the things that are done in the Men's Association.

5.3. Otù Umù Nwáányị (Women's Village Association)

Otù Umù Nwáányị translated in the English language as, 'Women's Village Association', is an association, that is exclusively for women. It is headed by a Chairperson (a lady), called 'Ony éí ích'è' that is supported by a Secretary called in the Amauzari dialect as 'Ode akwukwo', a Treasurer called, 'Ochekwa ego', and the 'Oj ézí', called "the Public Relations Officer". It is mainly a welfare association and a reconciliatory forum. In the Women's Association, the women have an annual levy which they pay. They meet every two weeks to discuss their pressing needs. The women financially help themselves by having a thrift, which helps them to raise some capital for their personal needs. In the Women's Association, the Chairperson organizes the women and leads out on how to weed the village roads. They support, the old women, by helping to prepare meals for them, cleaning their house, washing for them or caring for their farmlands. When a member is bereaved, they support the person in cash and in kind. When a member is dead, the members also support the family of deceased person by offering to buy the casket for the burial of the member. The women in the association advise themselves to keep their homes neat and be humble to their husbands. They also advise themselves to nurture their children in the right order. Persons, who are in need of money for a pressing need, can borrow some money from the welfare scheme of the association which they are bound to pay back on an agreed time. When a woman has a quarrel with her husband, or any other person, the council makes every possible effort to see to it that the woman and her husband or the parties at loggerheads are reconciled.

5.4. Ndi Isi Opáà (Association of the First Born Sons)

Ndi Isi Opáà translated into the English language as, 'Association of the First Born Sons'. Just as the name implies, it is an exclusive association for the first born sons in a village in the Amauzari community. This association sees to it that their right as the first born son in the family is upheld. Like the previous associations that have been discussed in this paper, the Association of the First Born Son, is headed by a Chairperson called 'Ony éí ích'è' that is supported by a Secretary called in the Amauzari dialect as 'Ode akwukwo', a Treasurer called, 'Ochekwa ego', and the 'Oj ézí', called the Public Relations Officer. This association too has a welfare scheme where members can contribute thrifts for their personal use. Members too, who are in need of some financial help could borrow some money from the association. The association can embark on any project that they want to in the village. Members of the association, support greatly a member whose mother is deceased, because in Amauzari land, it is the first son that performs the burial rites of the mother, thus he is expected to spend much money at the burial of his mother. The Association

of the First Born Son, can also help the resolution of a conflict between a member, and other person (s). They are known in helping to share the property of a late father between a member and his siblings. These are some of the activities engaged in by the Association of the first born Sons.

5.5. UmuOkpu/UmuMgboto (Association of the Daughters Born in the Village Married and Unmarried)

UmuOkpu/mgboto translated into the English language as, 'Association of Daughters', is an exclusively female association of the daughters from every family. This association is headed, by a Chairperson, called 'Ony éí ích'è' that is supported by a Secretary called in the Amauzari dialect as 'Ode akwukwo', a Treasurer called, 'Ochekwa ego' and the 'Oj ézí', called the Public Relations Officer'. The Secretary of the association writes down every minute of the meetings of the association, while the treasurer records and gives account of every financial activity of the association. The Association of the daughters, is a very active association in the land. It equally has a welfare scheme, by which members can be financially helped when in need of money. Since in a land, it is the first daughter that performs most of the burial rites of a dead father, members see to it that they help a member under such a condition, both in cash and in kind. The Association of the daughters, also help the needy in the village, such as: the widow or widower, the elderly and the poor who cannot pay their school fees. These are some of the activities of the Association of the daughters in Amauzari land.

5.6. Ndi Ntòròóbiá (Association of the Youths)

Ndi Ntòròóbiá, translated into the English language, as the 'Association of the Youths'. This association, is made up of the male and female unmarried persons in the village. The association is headed by a Chairperson, called 'Ony éí ích'è' that is supported by a Secretary called in the Amauzari dialect as 'Ode akwukwo', a Treasurer called, 'Ochekwa ego' and the 'Oj ézí', called public relations officer. Their objective is to see that things are rightly done in the village. They can constitute themselves into village vigilantes, by that movement into and out of the village is checking illicit movements in the night. The Association of the youths, are in charge of cleaning the village roads. They can also go to war with another community where there is a boundary dispute or murder of an innocent soul. This association can meet once or twice in a month. The youths can engage in intra-village football matches at the end of the year during the Christmas holiday.

5.7. Ogbáko Umunna (Association of Close Kindreds/Clans)

'Ogbako Umunna' means 'Association of Close Kindreds or Clans', in the English language. This association like the

name implies is constituted of just close kindreds. The association is headed by a Chairperson, called 'Ony éṣ́ íkch è' that is supported by a secretary called in the Amauzari dialect as 'Ode akwukwo', a Treasurer called, 'Ochekwaego' and the 'Oje ózi', called 'the Public Relations Officer'. By close kindreds as mentioned here, means that the members must be biologically related by blood or adoption in a village. Some of the functions of this association are:

- 1) To see that every birth and death within the kindred is recorded.
- 2) That every male and female child is meaningfully equipped with the skills of the local trade.
- 3) That farm lands belonging to the kindred is protected.
- 4) That conflict is resolved amongst members.
- 5) That members are actively involved in the welfare of the old ones.
- 6) That the ́fo, 'god of the land', is sacredly venerated.
- 7) That, a daughter is not given to the wrong man in marriage, nor a son.
- 8) A son is not allowed to take a wayward or lazy woman as a wife, by doing proper investigation before the contraction of any marriage.
- 9) That the burial rite of any member is fully observed.

6. Conclusion

The different associations in Amauzari point to the fact that there are organized groups in Amauzari land that protect the interest of the group for which it is formed and also for the welfare of the people. The General Village Association called 'NdiAma-ala ', poised for the protection of the entire kindreds that constitute a village. They also engage in projects such as the construction of roads, building of schools, hospitals and the electrification of rural communities in Amauzari. The paper also shows that the youth association acts as the local military force in Amauzari. The associations also provide a social outfit for members in Amauzari so that everyone is connected and can receive help from the group that one belongs to. This paper is not exhaustive in all that can be said about village associations in Amauzari land. It rather encourages a comparative research between Amauzari and other communities in the Igbo world or other ethnic groups. The use of the principles of Ethnography of Communication, has shown that the acquisition of the language of a people is intertwined with the acquisition of the socio-cultural set up of the people. Thus, within the cultural domain of a people, one gets to understand the belief system, the taboos, the totems, the values, the ethos, the fears, and hopes, the foods, the traditions, the clothes, the ceremonies, the names and the naming systems and whatever identifies the people by way of their mental and creative outputs: religion, literature, and the arts in general, economic well-being, education and so on". In other words, whatsoever an ethnic group of people are associated with, can be referred to as an integral part of their life style; their culture which is embed-

ded in their language.

This paper has demonstrated that different associations in Amauzari use language to interact and carry out their activities for social growth and development through their cultural norms, values and beliefs.

Author Contributions

Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography

Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Her areas of research interest include: Morphology, Syntax, Nigerian Linguistics (Igbo) and Socio-linguistics.