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MORPHOPHONOLOGICAL PROCESSES OF THE C'LELA NOUN

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Abstract

This article discusses some aspects of the morphophonology of C'lela nouns. It will be shown that the addition of inflectional affixes to certain noun stems in C'lela, sometime motivate certain phonological processes. The analysis demonstrates that when the plural suffix [-**nV**] attaches to animate nouns in C'lela, it triggers certain morphophonological processes such as *vowel copying, metathesis, vowel lengthening, final-vowel deletion, and initial-consonant deletion*. For example, the paper argues that in plural formation, stem final-vowel sometimes undergoes *metathesis* when the plural marker /-nV/ attaches to a noun stem, thus; *àrmá̰* 'man' + *na* becomes *àrá̰m-nà̰* 'men, as against the rule of *vowel epenthesis* assumed in (Dettweiler 2012). In addition, the analysis discovers that the processes of metathesis and vowel lengthening are simply conditioned by phonological structure.

Key Words: morphophonology, vowel copying, metathesis, vowel lengthening

Résumé

Ce travail de recherche parle de quelques aspects de la morphophonologie de noms en C'lela. Il montrera que quand les affixes infléchis sont ajoutés à certains noms (radicaux de noms) en C'lela, ils motivent quelquefois certains processus phonologiques. L'analyse démontre que si le pluriel du suffixe [-nV] s'attache aux noms inanimés en C'lela, il declenche quelques processus morphophonologiques tels que *copiage de voyelle, métathèse, allongement de voyelle, délétion de la voyelle finale* et la *délétion consonne*. Par exemple, la recherche soutient que dans la formation du pluriel, voyelle finale du radical des fois subit une métathèse si le marqueur du pluriel [-nV] s'attache à un radical du nom, ainsi ; *àrmá̰* "homme" + *na* dévient *àrá̰m-nà̰* "hommes" au contraire de règles *d'épenthèse de voyelle* postulées dans (Dettweiler 2012). L'analyse découvre que les processus de la métathèse et l'allongement de voyelle sont conditionnés par la structure phonologique.

1.0 Introduction

C'lela, listed with the code ISO 639-3 [dri] (Lewis et al. 2015), belongs to group 7 (G) of Western-Kainji, Benue-Congo, Volta-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Niger-Congo together with Reshe, Kamuku, Kambari, Basa, Baushe, Gurmana, Banganci (Lyase or Gwamhi-Wuri cluster), Fakkanci (Peka-K∂ri-Wipsi-Geeri Cluster) and Duka (Williamson 1989, Gerhardt 1989). However, more recent classification places C'lela as Northwest, Kainji subgroup of Benue-Congo, together with Hun-Saare (Duka), Ut-Ma'in (Fakai), and other languages within Gwamhi-Wuri cluster (McGill and Blench 2012, Lewis et al. 2015). It is the language of the Lelna (or the Dakarkari) people spoken by a majority of the inhabitants of Zuru emirate, located in the eastern part of Kebbi State, Nigeria. This article examines the phonological processes taking place within a noun stem in C'lela. Henceforward, the first mention of any language will include its ISO 639-3 codes in square brackets.

The C'lela noun consists of stem(s) and affixes. The majority of the nouns have class affixes in both singular and plural, but sometimes, nouns may either have a singular or plural form only. Descriptions of the noun class system exist in Hoffman (1967), Dettweiler (2012) and Aliero (2013). This paper focuses on the plural suffix [-nV].

It is to be noted that in the C'lela writing system, noun prefixes are marked with the close-mid central (schwa) vowel [ə] as proposed by Hoffman (1976: 240-241). The schwa vowel is post-posed on the noun class markers at phonetic level in order to distinguish them from pronouns and pronominal affixes (Dettweiler 2012). However, the Committee for the Standardization of C'lela Orthography (CSCO) prefers the use of an apostrophe /'/ in place of the schwa vowel when making a citation. The CSCO perhaps prefers the use of an apostrophe in place of a schwa for reasons of familiarity and ease of writing and/or typing. Certainly, the schwa vowel is a special character that is hardly to be found on an ordinary typewriter, which the CSCO probably used in its work.

Yet again, probably based on the principles of convenience, harmonization and familiarity/acceptability as proposed by experts such as Williamson (1984), Simons (1994) and Barnwell 1998); the CSCO suggests the use of underscored e, to represent the phoneme [ɛ], o to represent [ɔ] and a to represent the near close-mid central vowel [ə] in the current language writing system. Some related Kainji languages like Kambari [tvd] (Stark 2010, Crozier 2012), Tyap [kcg], and Tsureshe [res] (Harley 2012, Blench and McGill n.d) have adopted this type of alternate vowel representation. In these languages, like C'lela, the schwa central phoneme [ə] is orthographically represented as the underlined symbol **a**; while the Ut-Ma'in [gel] current orthography uses the underlined vowel u in place of the near close-mid central

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vowel [ɘ] (Smith 2007). This study adapts the current proposed writing system for C'lela.

In the description of the morphophonological problems presented by the data in this work, we adopt the generative phonology framework Chomsky and Halle (1968); however, in some instance, the paper attempts combining it with a nonlinear Autosegmental approach Goldsmith (1976) to account for some data, specifically in vowel lengthening.

Additionally, the study adopts a stem method or unitary base hypothesis as against root method. In the unitary hypothesis, the base of a given word formation process comprises a unitary and specified morphosyntactic word with no disjunction in the specification of the base (Baba 1998, Aronoff 1976). Therefore, in accounting for the morphophonological process in this study, we consider a complete word (stem) as the basic underlying form. The paper is organized into four sections: Section one introduces the paper. Section two examines the phonological problems that are motivated when an inflectional affix comes in contact with a noun stem, while section three forms the conclusion.

2.0 Morphophonological Processes of the C'lela noun

In C'lela, the plural suffix [-**nV**] is the commonly occurring affix that marks plurals for animate nouns. The study shows that the addition of the plural suffix marker /-**nV**/ to animate noun stems in C'lela sometimes triggers various phonological processes, which include vowel copying, metathesis, vowel lengthening, and final-vowel deletion, each of which we discuss below.

2.1 Vowel Copying in Plural Formation

A process where certain affixes have vowels that derive their pronunciation from nearby vowels is identified as "vowel copying" (Stark 2010:53). Vowel copying, sometimes called vowel harmony is considered as an assimilatory process which typically involves vowels which occur within a word. This vowel copy harmony often shows assimilation for all vowel quality features affecting backness, rounding, height, and tongue root advancement or retraction, as well as harmony for all vowel place features (Rose and Walker 2011:251-256).

Vowel copying is an archetypical feature of C'lela morphology. The vowel copying process in the language most frequently occurs with the plural suffix [-nV] and past tense suffix [-kV]. It occurs with the perfective suffix as in /rìgà̰+kV/ → [rìgkà̰], /bèkḛ́+kV/→ [bèkḛ́kè] 'jumped over' etc. In the present study, it can be observed that the vowel of the nominal suffix -**nV**, in each case in example (1), is formed by copying the quality of the final vowel of the noun stem to which it is attached, thus:

	INPUT		VOWEL COPY	GLOSS
(1)	a. /bíngí-nV/	→	[bíngínì]	'male donkeys'
	b. /zúgdá-nV/	→	[zúgdà.nà]	'large buttocks'
	c. /zìmíná-nV/	→	[zìmínánà]	'ostriches'
	d. /mànkà-nV/	→	[mànkànà]	'old men'
	e. /cóntò̩-nV/	→	[cóntó̩nò̩]	'kinds of birds'
	f. /mùkú-nV/	→	[mùkú.nù]	'midges'.

This vowel copying process, as observed from the above examples in C'lela, appears to be a common phenomenon in Niger-Congo as is evident in various languages in the family. Some of the languages that employ vowel-copying mechanism similar to C'lela, albeit not with noun inflection for this type of process include Kambari, a Western-Kainji language. For instance, in Kambari, Stark (2010:53) observes that, when the verbal iterative marker /-**sV**/ is suffixed to the verb root, the vowel of the suffix copies the features of the vowel that immediately precedes it. The following examples from Auna Kambari show the phonetic outcome of the addition of the suffix to the verb root, as given in (2) below:

Kambari

(2)	a. **dàná**	'say'	[dànì-sá]	/dàná + sV/	'say repeatedly'
	b. **kècé**	'count'	[kècì-sʃé]	/kècé + sV/	'count repeatedly'
	c. **sòró**	'pound'	[sòrù-só]	/ sòró + sV/	'pound repeatedly'
	d. **sùkú**	'send'	[sùkù-sú]	/sùkú + sV/	'send repeatedly'.

(Stark 2010:53)

Equally, the vowel copying process, as observed from the examples in C'lela and Kambari above, occurs in Cicipu [awc], another western-Kainji language. In this language, vowel copying employs when a causative suffix /**sA**/ attaches to certain verb stems. The following examples in (3) taken from McGill (2009:221) illustrate this.

Cicipu

	Verb		**Causative**	**Gloss**
(3)	a. **yuwo**	'fall'	**yuwo-so**	'cause to fall'
	b. **sukulu**	'move'	**sukulu-su**	'cause to move'
	c. **hina**	'ripen'	**hini-sa**	'cause to ripen'.

(McGill 2009: 221)

Similarly, the vowel copying process occurs in Igbo [ibo], an Igboid, Benue-Congo language. In Igbo, the process applies when a benefactive suffix /-rV/ attaches to some verb roots (Onukawa 1999:115), as shown in the examples in (4) below.

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Igbo

		Verb		Benefactive	Gloss
(4)	a.	**zú**	'buy'	**zú-ru**	'buy for'
	b.	**bè**	'cut'	**bè-re**	'cut for'
	c.	**zà**	'sweep'	**zà-ra**	'sweep for'

(Onukawa 1999:115-120)

Also in Basa [bas], a Bantu language, vowel copying occurs when a reversive suffix combines with certain verb stems (Hyman 2007: 152), as can be seen in examples (5):

Basa

		Verb		Reversive Form	Gloss
(5)	a.	**teŋ**	'attach'	**tiŋ-il**	'detach'
	b.	**kɔb**	'fix a hook'	**kɔb-ɔl**	'unhook'
	c.	**at**	'unit'	**ad-al**	'divide'

(Hyman 2007:152)

2.2 Metathesis in Plural Formation

Metathesis is a Greek term for 'transposition', which refers to re-arranging or re-ordering of segments, mainly of sounds or syllables in a word. Sometimes it involves re-ordering of words in a sentence (Crystal 2008 and Buckley 2011). Metathesis, according to Chomsky and Halle (1968: 36), "is a perfect common phonological process"; by which the linear ordering of segments switches; in which case the original order is considered the output, and the other order resulting from metathesis, the output (Hume 2001: 1, 2004: 203, 2007: 2). Buckley (2011: 64) observes that although metathesis is perceived as one of the phonological processes, where the specific change is expressed in terms of phonological categories, some types of metathesis require reference to morphological context. He further notes that CV metathesis often appears to occur in the presence of a particular morphological trigger even if the re-ordering that occurs can be defined phonologically. Hume (2007: 2) further highlights that two sounds usually undergo metathesis under certain conditions which include; perception; structural conditions; contextual probability; word frequency; generalization; and expectation.

Metathesis is of two types: i) adjacent metathesis (or local metathesis) which involves the exchange of two or more contiguous sounds, and ii), the non-adjacent metathesis (long-distance metathesis) where the exchange involves non-contiguous sounds. Adjacent metathesis occurs for some words in C'lela.

2.2.1. Adjacent (CV) Metathesis

We find in C'lela the occurrence of adjacent metathesis where final CV transposes to VC in a morphological context. From the data below, we may rightly observe that the process of plural formation, which attaches the [-nV] suffix to noun stems, creates the environment for reversal of stem-final, nasal/liquid-vowel sequence in the output. The rule for this CV metathesis in plural formation is that it occurs only on a noun stem that begins with a (C)VC syllable type, and ends in a nasal/liquid-vowel sequence. This results in the syllabification process, characterized by the Sonority Sequencing Principle, which is a model used in "defining the well-formed sequences of phonological segments" (Kenstowicz 1994: 260). This metathesis in C'lela and the rules that motivate the process appear quite unique to C'lela in the Niger-Congo family. Here are some examples:

		INPUT		METATHESIS	GLOSS
(6) a.	**ma** > **am**:	/sàr**mà**-nV/	→	[sàr**à̱m**nà̱]	'tsetse flies'
		/à̱r**má**-nV/	→	[à̱r**ám**nà̱]	'men/males'
b.	**mu** > **um**:	/bùl**mù**-nV/	→	[bùl**ùm**nù]	'midges (type of insects)'
		/rùg**mú**-nV/	→	[rùg**úm**nù]	'rams'
		/kyùr**mù**-nV/	→	[kyùr**ùm**nù]	'deaf persons'
		/rùs**mú**-nV/	→	[rùs**úm**nù]	'black stinging ants'
c.	**na** > **an**:	/kwèc**nà**-nV/	→	[kwèc**àn**nà̱]	'carpet vipers'
d.	**la** > **al**:	/òb**lá̱**-nV/	→	[òb**á̱l**nà̱]	'snakes'
e.	**ri** > **ir**:	/mà̱c**rì**-nV/	→	[mà̱c**ìr**nì]	'grandchildren'
f.	**ri** > **ir**:	/kà̱m**rì**-nV/	→ [kà̱m**ìr**nì]		'fathers-in-law'

The following rule represents the above adjacent metathesis (e.g. sàr**à̱m** + nà̱ 'tsetse flies'):

(7)   /sàrmà̱ + nV /   input
     /sàr**mà̱** + nà̱ / → [sàr**à̱m**nà̱]   metathesis

Structural Description :
     / s   à   r   **m   à̱** - n   a /
     / 1   2   3   **4   5**   6 7 → 1   2   3   **5   4** 6 7 **/** output: [sàr**à̱m**nà̱]

The rule in (7) states that noun stem final CV transposes to VC before a plural suffix.

The metathesis for the nasal/liquid-vowel sequences [**mà̱**] and [**à̱m**], [**mu**] and [**um**], [**là̱**] and [**á̱l**] in (6) above show the pattern in the sonority hierarchy that is most preferred in C'lela since metathesis occurs on these forms. We could also assume

here that the vowels [**a** and **u**] precede the liquid/nasal [**m** and **l**] sounds in the metathesis because vowels are inherently more sonorous than the nasal/liquid sounds. Other similar metathesis processes obtain in Elmolo [elo], a Kenyan Lowland Cushitic language and Sidamo [sid], a Highland Cushitic language (Hume 2004). In Elmolo, metathesis takes place in the plural formation by the addition of the plural suffix /-o/ to the nouns beginning with the obstruent stop as in (8) below, while in Sidamo, the process occurs before suffixes with initial sonorant /-n/ as shown in (9) taken from (Hume 2004:208).

Elmolo

	SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
(8) a.	**tikir**	**tirko**	'catfish'
b.	**deker**	**derko**	'horn'
c.	**mukul**	**mulko**	'iron'.

(Hume 2004: 208)

Sidamo

	INPUT	SURFACE	GLOSS
(9) a.	**gud-nonni**	**gundonni**	'they finished'
b.	**dod- nanni**	**dondanni**	'he will run'
c.	**it-noommo**	**intoommo**	'we have eaten'

(Hume 2004:208)

Another robust case of adjacent metathesis, somehow parallel to C'lela, is found in Fur [fvr], a Nilo-Saharan language. In Fur, this type of metathesis is triggered when a mono-consonantal prefix such as /**k**-/ 'we' is affixed to certain consonant-initial verbs (Hume and Mielke 200: 141). Consider the Fur metathesis where an underlying CV changes to VC under prefixation in (10):

Fur

	PREFIXATION		METATHESIS	GLOSS
(10) a.	**k-ba-**	→	**kab-**	'we drink'
b.	**k-teer-**	→	**keter-**	'we forge'
c.	**k-saar-**	→	**kasar-**	'we expose for sale'
d.	**k-neen**	→	**kenen**	'we bewitch'.

(Hume and Mielke 2001:141)

However, Dettweiler (2012: 22) treats this metathesis phenomenon as "epenthesis" of the vowel /a/, which according to him "occurs when necessary to avoid a two-consonant coda that violates the Sonority Sequencing Principle". This study argues for metathesis rather than vowel epenthesis since the data above do not show insertion

of an additional sound into such words, but a swap of two sonorous segments on the same segmental tier, which is an important feature of metathesis. After all, there exist catalogues of several non-sonorous two-consonant coda segments that do not undergo metathesis, as is evident in the examples in (11):

(11) a. **órgò-nV**   **órgnò**   'termites'
     b. **rùktù-nV**   **rùktnù**   'kinds of locust'
     c. **pèntà-nV**   **pèntnà**   'songbirds (bulbul)'
     d. **zúgdá-nV** **zúgdánà**   'large buttocks'

Consider examples of metathesis in the following sentence structure.

(12) a.   **nòk-kàn u'ròg̱àncó _àrmá̱_**
       go-PST market   man
       'The man went to the market.'

     b.   **_àrá̱m-nà̱_ nòk-kàn u'ròg̱àncó**
       man-PL go-PST market
      'The men went to the market.'

(13) a.   **làg̱à-m còm kyùr_mù_**
       let-me send deaf person
       'Let me send the deaf person.'

     b.   **làg̱à-m còm kyùr_ùm-nù_**
       let-me send deaf person-PL
       'Let me send the deaf persons.'

2.3 Vowel Lengthening

There is a situation in C'lela where noun inflection triggers vowel lengthening. In the formation of plurals for animate nouns, the short vowel of monosyllabic noun stems usually undergoes lengthening when the plural suffix /-nV/ attaches to the noun stem.

	INPUT		VOWEL LENGTHENING	GLOSS
(14) a.	/cwè̱-nV/	→	[cwè̱è̱nè]	'musk shrews'
b.	/gò-nV/	→	[gòonò]	'white oryxes'
c.	/kò-nV/	→	[kòonò]	'frogs'
d.	/pà-nV/	→	[pàanà]	'hawks'
e.	/pí-nV	→	[píinì]	'weevils (grain eating insects)'

We can formulate the vowel lengthening rule in C'lela as in (15) below:

(15) **Vowel Lengthening**

-**V**   →   **V**   / __n**V** #

X   X'   X
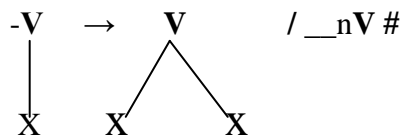
The rule in (15) specifies that the short vowel of a monosyllabic noun stem may undergo lengthening when followed by a suffix plural marker.

The process in (14) above is analogous to the way in which addition of the plural suffix /-ri/ to the noun stem in Dagaare [dga], a Gur language, is accompanied by high vowel lengthening. Another similar example to the one in C'lela also comes from Cicipu [awc], where in the nominal derivation, the addition of the nominal suffix /-ni/ to verb stem, results in the lengthening of short vowel of the final syllable of the verb.

The vowel lengthening process seems to occur only in isolated languages in the Niger-Congo; however, more evidence for this process could be found in Kainji languages. Compare the following examples of vowel lengthening from C'lela in (14) and those of Dagaare in (16), and Cicipu in (17):

Dagaare

		SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
(16)	a.	**bì**	**bíí-rí**	'child'
	b.	**tì**	**tìì-rí**	'tree'
	c.	**kù**	**kúú-rí**	'wild rat'

(Anttila and Bodomo 2007:5)

Cicipu

		VERB		NOUN	GLOSS
(17)	a.	**kó**	'to die'	**ù-kóo-ní**	'death'
	b.	**ùngó**	'to rise'	**nùu-úngóo-ní**	'resurrection'

(Modified from McGill 2009: 204)

2.4 Vowel Deletion in the Plural Formation

The plural formation in C'lela, as already mentioned above, often triggers a phonological process, which deletes a noun-stem-final vowel in front of the plural suffix. This would imply that suffixation of the plural marker /-nV/ to the noun stem, sometimes results in the deletion of the final vowel of such a noun stem. This happens provided that the first syllable of the singular noun is not of (C)VC structure, and that

its final syllable does not end in a liquid/nasal-vowel sequence, in which case, a process of metathesis occurs.

	INPUT		VOWEL DELETION	GLOSS
(18)	a. /jánká-nV/	→	[jánknà]	'donkeys'
	b. /cà̰wíimà̰-nV/	→	[cà̰wíimnà̰]	'crocodiles'
	c. /hyà̰nsú-nV/	→	[hyà̰nsnú]	'monitor lizards'
	d. /là̰gù-nV/	→	[là̰gnù]	'rat'
	e. /ká̰cì-nV/	→	[ká̰cnì]	'chickens'
	f. /cìckî-nV/	→	[cìcknî]	'pimples/rashes'
	g. /kó̰rkótò̰-nV/	→	[kó̰rkótnò̰]	'lice'
	h. /máagè-nV/	→	[máagnè]	'bricklayers, potters'.

Looking at the examples in (18) above, we can observe, for instance, that the vowel deletion process applies on the noun stem in (18a), **jánká** 'donkey', because it does not end in a liquid/nasal-vowel sequence even when it begins with a CVC syllable, and it applies on (18b) **cà̰wíimà̰** 'crocodiles' because it does not begin with a CVC syllable, even though it ends in a nasal-vowel sequence. This affects several other similar examples as in (18) above. However, metathesis, instead of vowel deletion, may occur on a noun stem whose initial syllable is of (C)VC structure, and the final syllable is of a liquid/nasal-vowel sequence, before a plural suffix as in *sàrmà̰ + na → sàrà̰m-nà̰* 'tsetse flies'.

The final vowel deletion rule can be formulated as in (19).

(19) **Final Vowel Deletion**

     -V → **Ø** / ___ nV #

The rule in (19) specifies that the vowel at noun stem final position deletes before a plural suffix.

It is worth noting that apart from the stem-final vowel deletion resulting from the process of suffixation, we also noticed that there are other sets of nouns whose final vowel shows resistance to the deletion phenomenon. However, a close appraisal of the C'lela data shows appreciable cases of vowel retention in Riba dialect, a variety spoken at the periphery. This is to say, that stem-final vowel deletion, as confirmed in Aliero (2013), is prevalent in the Zuru dialect, which is the central dialect. Additionally, it can be noted that the process of plural formation of the animate nouns sometimes triggers tonal modification of the input stem, whereas the plural suffix, "has low tone lexically assigned to it" Dettweiler (2012:23-24) with a few occurring with a falling tone.

This vowel deletion phenomenon seems to be restricted to a few languages in the Niger-Congo family. Some of the occurrences of vowel deletion process somehow similar to C'lela in (18) obtain in Kambari (Stark 2010: 51), and Lobala [loq], a Bantu language of Zaïre (Morgan 1993: 51). In Kambari, when two vowels come together across morpheme boundaries, the first vowel is deleted, and the second one is realized as in (20), while for Lobala, Morgan (1993) shows that the addition of the stative verbal extension suffix to the verb, for the derivation of the stative verbal forms, results in the deletion of the verb stem final-vowel as in (21). The motivation for the vowel deletion from Kambari and Lobala differs from that of C'lela, in that the deletion occurs in these languages only when two vowels merge at a boundary, which is not the case in C'lela. Consider the following examples:

Kambari

(20) a. /ikebe i le/   money NCM their   [ikeb-ile]   'their money'
      b. /urana u və/   day NCM my   [uran-uvə]   'my day'
      c. /ucira u və/   power NCM my   [ucir-ovə]   'my power'
      d. /ulinga u le/   work NCM their   [uliŋg-ule]   'their work'.

(Stark 2010: 51)

Lobala

	STEM	STATIVE FORM	GLOSS
(21) a.	**bul-a**	**bul-uŋgana**	'be mixed up'
b.	**cil-a**	**cil-iŋgana**	'hurry'
c.	**zol-a**	**zol-oŋgana**	'be stirred'
d.	**wal-a**	**wal-aŋgana**	'fall from a height'

(Morgan 1993: 51)

3.0 Conclusion

The paper has explored the phonological processes taking place in noun inflection in C'lela. They include vowel-copying, metathesis, vowel lengthening, and final-vowel deletion. In addition, it was shown that C'lela has a distinctive inflectional feature. This is evident in a few phonological requirements or conditions that must be met for phonological processes to occur in plural formation, as in the case of metathesis, as well as the rules, which stipulate that the short vowels of monosyllabic nouns encounter lengthening when succeeded by a suffix plural marker.

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BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE IN LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IN AFRICA

Olushola B. Are

Abstract

This paper examines the increasing concerns about language endangerment in Sub-Saharan Africa, and assesses the necessity and practicality of language revitalization efforts in some situations in the region in light of a number of practical problems of implementation. The paper identifies the need for a clearer paradigm of revitalization efforts, and recommends an approach that recognizes the hard reality that not all endangered languages can receive attention toward functional restoration due to the practical matters involved. The paper proposes archival preservation in such cases, while strongly supporting functional revitalization where the concerned languages a meet some suggested thresholds of viability.

Key Words: African languages, language revitalization, language endangerment, language death.

1. Introduction

Language is central and fundamental to communication, culture, and the very essence of people's collective identities. The permanent loss of any language is therefore a serious matter. A caption on the Web Site of the Hans Rausing Endangered Language Project, which describes language death, says quite succinctly, "…every last word means another lost world."

   It is clear though that the dominant perspective among the experts is to view language shift as inimical to human society, and to suggest measures to revitalize the vulnerable or endangered ones. This is the perspective of Fishman (1999, 2007), Crystal (2000), Obiero (2010). Agitations by language rights advocate who take up the cases of "marginalized" minority languages have recently fueled the revitalization train (Are 2011). In the case of the latter, 'revitalize' often means the restoration of

the use of such languages. The positions of the scholars cited above hinge on the belief that there is enormous good in preventing languages from dying. For example, Crystal (2000), lists and extensively discusses the socio-cultural, historical, scientific, and identity related values of preserving languages.

African languages tend to generally thrive better than languages of other continents (Blench 1998; Mous 2003). Yet, there are a number of instances of endangerment as will be presented in a subsequent part of this paper. In these cases, clear paradigms of response toward maintenance are needed. Reports of successful language maintenance and revitilisation efforts in Africa are paltry. In this regard, Obiero (2008) argues that while reports on language shift and death in Africa are rife, there are no clear-cut accounts of language revival projects. Indeed, he argues further that on a world wide scale, only Hebrew and some Hawaiian and Maori languages have really been brought back from the brink to become normal mediums of communication in speech communities. This suggests the need for more effective and realistic paradigms of revitalization efforts. This paper is intended to be contribution toward solving this. It proffers a solution that emphasizes the need to face the reality that language death is a natural element of the ecology of languages and in many instances may be extremely difficult if not impossible to reverse. In this wise, a system that helps to avoid wasting time and effort on trying to revive the use of doomed languages is proposed. This proposal favours the use of technology to archive such languages, while reserving real conservation for struggling languages that still have some reasonable chance of surviving. A method of determining the current condition of the concerned languages is also proposed.

2. General perspectives on language shift, language endangerment and language maintenance

Knooihuizen (2006) argues that language shift has been a research topic within linguistics for approximately half a century, but a clear and universal definition seems to be lacking. Two key issues however govern different definitions. The first issue is the fact that language shift involves changing patterns of language use. The second issue is that language shift happens in a situation of language contact. With these in mind, one can safely posit that language shift refers to a situation where a speech community gradually changes its pattern of language use, such that there is a gradual gravitation from the language of that community to another language with which it is in constant contact. This often leads to threats to the existence of the language being ignored. When a language in this situation begins to fall out of use, it can ultimately become endangered, and it may eventually die. To prevent this, linguists often prescribe measures to reverse the process of shift. Such measures amount to language maintenance or language revitalization.

The rate at which languages of the world disappear is quite alarming. Several scholars are of the opinion that up to 90% of the world's languages may well be replaced by dominant languages by the end of the 21st century, which would reduce the present number of almost 7,000 languages to less than 700 (Brenzinger and De Graaf 2005). This is the kind of grim prospect that troubles linguists, anthropologists and other interested scholars.

Fishman (1991) provides some foundational insights into the nature of this problem. Significantly, he explains the cultural loss associated with language death but expresses optimism about the possibility of shift reversal. He gives examples of successful attempts at language shift reversal, arguing forcefully against those who claim that attempts to reverse language shift are futile and unnecessary. Fishman also provides an intergenerational transmission theory, which provides a framework for understanding the status of languages in terms of how secure they are from shifts that can lead to endangerment.

In the same direction, Crystal (2000) also emphasizes the benefits of language shift reversal. He identifies the need for linguistic diversity, arguing that humanity should strive for linguistic and cultural diversity because such diversity is inherent in human nature. This, he points out, is as crucial as agitations for the preservation of biological species to keep eco-diversity. Crystal also stresses the need to recognize the value of language as a strong factor of collective identity, and the fact that the loss of identity which language death brings can be a problem for many people. In addition, he points out that language must be valued for its role as repository of historical and scientific knowledge. Crystal therefore expresses strong views in favour of maintenance and revival efforts for dying languages. These, according to him, would primarily involve getting all the relevant statistics about the languages in question and then implementing six steps, which include:

- Increasing the prestige of the threatened/ endangered language among its speakers
- Economically empowering the speakers relative to the dominant groups
- Politically empowering the speakers
- Giving the language a presence in education
- Putting the language into writing (if this is not yet done), and
- Using electronic technology as may be required to document

These steps, according to Crystal, are based on observations of interventions in different parts of the world towards reversing language shift. This approach is significant as it involves a practice-based blue print for intervention.

Adegbija (2001) identifies a number of practical intervention measures, which include the need to fashion out an articulated philosophy of Reversing Language Shift (RLS). He also raises the need for the affected communities themselves to be involved

in revitalization efforts, and the need for governments to institutionalize multilingualism as a policy. This must go beyond the tendency to recognize (officially) major languages at the expense of the smaller ones. This, according to Adegbija (2001) is crucial because one of the major factors responsible for language shift in Africa is the "inferiority syndrome" created by the dominant and prestigious position of not only the European languages but also the recognized local major languages.

The increase in interest in this issue has been phenomenal since the publication of Fishman's work in 1991. The sub discipline called RLS has had an impact worldwide, particularly at the level of the United Nations (UN) where several declarations and initiatives have been made. These include:

- the *Declaration of Vienna* of the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), affirming the right for "persons belonging to minorities to use their own language."
- the call of the General Assembly of the United Nations for more attention to multilingualism (December 1999);
- resolution 56/262 (Part II) of the General Assembly of the United Nations focusing on the preservation and protection of all languages; and
- the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations at its fifty-eighth session (2003), on measures to protect, promote and preserve all languages.

The specific UN organ involved in direct effort regarding the above is UNESCO, and it has come up with a number of policy guidelines that have formed the bases of concerted international efforts to reverse the trend of language deaths. These include the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Recommendation on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (for example) aims at:

- sustaining linguistic diversity and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages;
- encouraging linguistic diversity at all levels of education, and fostering the learning of several languages from the youngest age;
- incorporating traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge; and
- encouraging universal access to information in the public domain through the global network, including the promotion of linguistic diversity in cyberspace.

The works of the scholars cited above (as well as the UN efforts) are based on the notions that humanity developed and needs diversity, and that language reflects past experience and is a tool for socializing and for expressing and transmitting social and cultural practices. They also involve the belief that language contributes to human knowledge and is an amazingly rich and diverse product of the creativity, which serves as a strong factor of identity. The need for maintenance or revitalization is therefore largely considered by most stakeholders to be pertinent.

3. Language endangerment in Sub-Saharan Africa

Although the phenomenon of language endangerment exists all over the world, it is believed that in percentage terms, the rate of language endangerment and extinction in Africa is less than what obtains in other parts of the world (Blench 1998; Mous 2003). This is quite ironic because Africa is more linguistically diverse than any other continent. In addition to this, the linguistic dynamism in Africa is such that new linguistic systems continue to evolve to enhance the peoples' ability to negotiate through the social complexities engendered by multilingualism. Kiessling and Mous (2014) document the case of some urban "youth languages" in different parts of Africa. Though the categorization of these emergent systems as languages and not mere pidgins-in-progress is somewhat problematic, their emergence further reflects the unique dynamism of the African situation.

Yet, the need for one form of intervention or the other in language shift still exists in some parts of Africa. The continent has big languages and small languages, with the big languages often serving as lingua francas to aid communication between peoples whose languages are mutually unintelligible. This situation has historically placed the smaller languages under pressure as society becomes more modern and interconnected, such that the dominant languages that serve as bridge builders tend to become dominant at the expense of the smaller ones (Blench 1998).

In recent times, human society has tended to favour languages that enhance people's economic, social and political connections to the wider society. Are (2011: 11) argues that:

> Traditionally and historically, languages have emerged and survived to serve the primary role conveying the thoughts, ideas, concepts and world view of peoples in such a way that internal connections are guaranteed. Today, however, it appears as if closer contacts between peoples have engendered a situation in which the communicative value of a language is becoming more and more a function of how the language is able to help people to connect to a wider world. Globalization involves reaching out, and only languages that reach out may

survive. Those that cannot reach out will contract, become moribund, and eventually become history.

The above comments depict a crucial reality in language ecology which society needs to come to terms with where necessary.

The challenge in this regard will get more urgent as the nations of Africa develop. Amano et al. (2014) in a new study, empirically prove that there is a clear relationship between the per capita GDP of nations and the extent of language extinction. The higher a society's GDP, the higher the rate of extinction. This is because higher GDP and the attendant developmental advancement enhance many of the social processes that precipitate language extinction. Such social processes include the crucial factor of urbanization, which moves people to areas of population concentration where they naturally opt for the dominant languages that will enhance their social and economic integration and empowerment. Ironically, development, which Africa needs so desperately, is a potent threat to her cherished linguistic diversity.

The rates of endangerment vary in different parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Figures obtained from the eighteenth edition of *Ethnologue* are presented in the table below. The table reveals the number of languages that have institutional support, the number that are developing and the ones that are vigorous. It also reveals the number of languages that are in trouble and the number that are out rightly dying.

Table 1: Language virility and endangerment in Sub- Saharan Africa

	West Africa	Central Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa
Institutional	58	32	83	14
Developing	221	157	136	6
Vigorous	501	350	139	19
In Trouble	57	96	53	3
Dying	49	41	21	6

The figures above reveal that while most languages in Sub-Saharan Africa are still quite stable, a number of languages are in trouble or dying. It must be pointed out though that it is not a simple cut and dried matter to determine that a language is in trouble or at risk of dying. There are different stages and processes a language can be going through for it to be so classified. This of course informs Fishman's Graded Inter-generational Disruption Scale, which identifies eight stages in the process of language loss. This is explained later in this paper.

The prospects for endangered Sub-Saharan languages are getting dimmer because most of the factors associated with their recession continue to play out in their sociolinguistic context. In the specific case of languages in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria, Blench (1998) identifies a number of factors of language disappearance that continue to affect small languages. These include: assimilation to larger and more powerful surrounding languages, assimilation to smaller but culturally more powerful languages, assimilation to English and demographic crises caused by labour migration/ urbanism. Mous (2003) identifies similar reasons for language loss on the entire continent. He adds that the demise of traditional economies, central to the identities of groups, has also led to shifts to dominant languages.

A 2003 report submitted to the South African Ministry of Education by a ministerial committee on the development of Africa languages as medium of instruction in higher education makes an interesting general observation. It states that "preference for English instead of African languages in all formal sectors of society both private and public continues unabated in general social practice" (p.4). This situation is described in the report as a crisis situation when viewed within the context of attempts at the preservation and maintenance of African languages. Largely, the endangerment of African languages is a direct consequence of language shift.

Different efforts are being made to improve the fortunes of endangered languages. Quite recently, for example, the West African Linguistics Society in conjunction with the Linguistics Association of Nigeria organized a conference on this matter. The conference was themed "Research, Documentation and Sustainability in the Development of West African Languages." The conference explored how language documentation can advance the course of bringing attention to the very important aspects of description, development, modernization and integration of local (West African) languages with global information infrastructure. It is in view of the current push that this paper is pertinent at this time.

4. Problems with theory, policy and implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa

There are many ideas about language revitalization out there (as exemplified by Fishman 1991, Adegbija 2001, Crystal 2010). Yet, it is important to note the fact that there remains a need to fine-tune some grey areas of implementation in Africa.

A crucial factor in this regard is the matter of establishing the clear need, if any, for any form of intervention. This issue must not be taken for granted. 'Smallness' in terms of number of speakers is not an absolute factor of endangerment. Languages with as few as 500 speakers are known to be surviving quite well (Austin 2006: 4). There is a need to go beyond raising alarm on the basis of mere conjecture. Scientific studies with hard data are required in order to determine the true state of languages. Yet, there is a paucity of this kind of study.

In addition to this, there are some other foundational issues, which are yet to be sorted out in many instances. For example, African linguistics is still bedeviled by the problem of ascertaining the criteria for determining which linguistic systems are languages on their own and which ones are dialectal variations of other languages (Blench 2013). Blench points out that there are as yet no foolproof scientific ways of carrying out the absolute categorisation. The criteria of mutual intelligibility, lexicostatistic count and sociolinguistic factors remain problematic. Accordingly, Blench concludes that the only feasible option is to base classification on the judgments of individual linguists and the views of the speech communities, though such may not conform to any unitary standards. The summary of this is that we are yet to ascertain clearly the identity of many of the languages in question, and how they are used in the different interacting communities where they are found. This is hardly the ideal situation for revitalization efforts.

Another practical hindrance is the matter of the financial implications of maintenance, especially in societies where there are more pressing basic survival issues. Prioritizing language issues can be problematic in these places. Crystal (2000) describes arguments in this regard as "spurious" on the basis that language is a human asset, which from the perspective of the human capital theory, must be preserved even where the benefits are not really quite tangible or concrete.

The big question is: can this kind of "human capital" view be pursed in conditions where the choices are between expending resources on thing that are not so tangible, and expending them on basic issues of hunger, shelter, basic education and infectious diseases? The reality is that in Africa, some of the views that linguists relentlessly express will remain practically problematic for politicians and administrators who draw societies' scales of preferences, as well as for NGOs.

One instance (albeit extreme) that can illustrate these difficulties very clearly is the case of Adamawa State in Nigeria. The state has at least 58 languages, most of which are not on a sound footing in terms of long term viability. They are under severe pressure due to the dominance of Hausa and Fulfulde in the state (Seibert 2013). The threats to these languages increase as more and more people learn to use English via western education. Is it realistic for a state with a poverty-stricken citizenry and an average annual budget of less than $580 million to plough resources into conservation of over 50 struggling languages, while its citizens endure the pangs of hunger? Assuming Nigerian politicians really want to help the people, it is doubtful whether they would feature language revitalization on their list of priorities in the near future. It would simply be immoral for them to do so! Obviously, the same could apply to many governments in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Fishman (1991) recognizes the difficulties in this kind of situation. He observes that questions can be raised about the wisdom of expending much on language preservation, pointing out that:

> When some nations at still at each other's throats while others are belatedly preoccupied with headaches of working out their own approaches to pluralism in government and in production, when cities the world over are crumbling due to crime and industrial pollution, when drugs are decimating the young, when poverty and incurable illness are ravaging millions throughout the world…is this the time to worry about, much less try to do anything on behalf of threatened languages…whose history and majority of their own former speakers have (apparently) confined to the dustbin of history (p.2).

Apart from the matter of financial priorities, it is important to recognize the intense politics involved in language management issues. Languages are often tied to strong ethnic sentiments that politicians are understandably reluctant to offend. Often, African governments who more often than not struggle with seething ethnic tensions, see the language issue as a sleeping dog that is better left to lie. Adedimeji (n.d) explores this reality, using the Nigerian situation as a microcosm. He points out as illustration the deep disaffections generated by the mere constitutional recognition of three major Nigerian languages to the exclusion of the hundreds of small languages. Even where the threats of social disharmony may not be very palpable, the issue of resources will still show up. Plowing resources into the study and maintenance of languages, which sometimes have less than 500 speakers, is always going to be problematic for people in charge of these nations' resources.

As painful as this may sound to linguists and some other concerned advocates of language conservation, it may never be possible (from the economies of scale perspective) to devote enough time and resources to the required work needed if all endangered languages are to be preserved. It is therefore imperative to clearly understand the kind of preservation works that are possible or feasible for different languages. In other words, the preservation objectives must be understood. It is suggested here that there are two possible choices of objectives from which to choose.

The first objective may be to aim at ensuring the survival of languages as continuing means of communication in a speech community. This can be referred to as *functional preservation*. This is the objective that would involve such language enhancement strategies as role allocation to threatened or endangered languages and the attendant language material development. For example, role allocation helps to entrench the use of a language by 'forcing' the relevant community to use it more and more.

The other choice of maintenance objective can be called ***archival preservation***. This objective does not involve any attempt to retain the language as a living system of human communication. It involves simply keeping the knowledge of the languages for posterity. This perhaps is the kind of practice which Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998), cited in Walsh (2010), condemned as a technical fix which actually impedes "genuine training and interaction." The hard truth is that for many struggling languages, this is the only alternative to complete extinction.

The archived language can still be immensely useful to humanity. For example, some historical knowledge has emerged from the study of ancient languages via their writing systems, despite the fact that such languages or writing systems are no longer in use. It is important to lay strong emphasis on the place of archival preservation because some scholars often discuss reversal of language shift as if it is possible to keep all languages going in their various speech communities. This is pure fantasy. Fishman (2001) acknowledged that a return to the "golden past" should not be the aim of attempts to reverse language shift. He argues rather that it is about achieving "greater self regulation over the process of socio-cultural change which globalization fosters" (Fishman 2001: 6). Actually, the truth needs to be put more bluntly. Many languages appear to have really gone over the edge and beyond redemption for day-to-day use. Roger Blench in his website does this quite succinctly. He opines that "…there are a large number of genuinely endangered languages, many of which are moribund. Spoken only by a small number of old people, often with few teeth and wayward enunciation, recovering their language is often difficult. These languages are not going to be revived…" Frankly, languages like these may only be redeemable purely for archival purposes.

Making this distinction between functional preservation and archival preservation is the key to sorting out the confusion of impracticality that characterizes many good intentioned and lofty proposals regarding language maintenance. When this background principle is perfectly understood, a number of criteria can be drawn up and used to rate threatened languages, such that a dispassionate decision can be made to determine the kind of preservation effort suitable to them.

This would involve understanding the fact that the matter of endangerment is not an absolute concept. It is more of a process, such that what is to be done about a language would depend on the stage it is at in the long process between being virile on one side of the continuum and being moribund on the other side. Fishman (1991) suggested a Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale as a standard to assess the extent of endangerment. Other scholars have severally revised this eight-stage scale. The merits or otherwise of these scales should not be an issue. The important thing is to identify some criteria to place languages' level of virility or otherwise as a prelude to making decisions on the kind of intervention to pursue.

Such criteria could include the following:

- *Level of intergenerational language transmission.* This involves the extent to which a language is being transmitted from one generation to the next. This is indeed the most commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language.
- *Absolute number of speakers.* Although some tiny language groups have been known to survive for long periods, the general trend is that very small ethno-linguistic groups are more prone to disappearance in the face of migration due to economic factors, warfare, or natural disaster than larger ones. Such languages may also easily merge with larger neighboring ones. Languages may be rated in accordance with this factor.
- *Proportion of speakers within the total population.* The number of speakers of the ancestral language in relation to the total population of an ethno-linguistic group is a significant indicator of language vitality.
- *Nature of shifts in domains of language use.* The survival chance of a language is also, to some extent, a function of how and where the language is used in different spheres of society. The more it is used in different spheres, the better its chances of survival.

These criteria can be easily measured via statistical tools. For example, a rating scale can be created to score the status of the languages in question on the set criteria. The first benefit of a process like this will obviously be a clearer picture of the true state of the languages involved, freeing the attendant decisions from the menace of being conjecture based. More significantly, decisions can then be made to the effect that the most viable languages can be chosen for functional preservation while the 'poor performing' ones may receive archival preservation efforts.

It must be said, though, that the financial and logistic requirements of archival preservation are huge and may overwhelm governments, researchers or NGOs in any African country. It is suggested here that having established which languages are suitable for archival preservation, a scale of preference may be drawn up in such a way that the most at-risk ones are addressed first, to ensure that essential data are collected while the opportunity exists.

With regard to functional preservation for the most viable languages, the questions may be asked: is it not wiser and more urgent to try to help the most vulnerable in a list of endangered languages? It may be argued that the sickest and most at risk patients often receive the most urgent and most intensive care in the hospital. Indeed, doctors are sometimes pulled away from less endangered patients to manage emergency cases.

This researcher posits that the management of threatened and endangered languages should be handled the other way round. The suggestion being proposed here is best

illustrated by the situation of a farmer whose poultry are sick with a life threatening infection. Assuming he has a thousand birds sick but only has the drugs to treat five hundred, he would have to decide which five hundred to treat. Obviously, it would not be wise for him to start with the ones that are almost dead, as they may not make it anyway. In that case he would have no drugs left to treat the healthier ones. The conditions of the healthier ones would subsequently deteriorate and they would die too. It would be more reasonable for him to start his treatment with the birds with better chances of survival, and ignore the birds that are already half dead. This is the logic of the selection recommended here. Indeed, the fate of the struggling languages is to some extent a function of a natural process of linguistic selection similar to Darwin's theory of natural selection. Human intervention must be measured dispassionately, especially where resources are scarce, to avoid unnecessary waste.

In summary, it is proposed that where it seems most certain that a language is doomed (having empirically calculated its situation in accordance with the proposed system) no effort of functional preservation should be attempted. Archiving would be a better option.

5. Archival preservation

Preserving the knowledge of the structure, the folklore, science and attendant historical and cultural treasures of a language has become much easier today than it was several years ago. This is a result of the explosion in computer technology and its possible applications to language. There are several areas in which computer technology can be deployed to preserve a language. Some of them are mentioned and discussed below.

5.1 Documentation

Language documentation is one of the key issues in any attempt to preserve a language. It involves assembling a comprehensive record of the elements, characteristics and systems of a language such that there can be standard, credible and citable sources of data on the language. Modern advances in computer technology have made available means of documenting endangered languages fast and efficiently (Russell 1992). In modern times the chief method of studying the system of a language is corpus linguistics, which largely depends on the use of computer programs. Today, there are electronically readable corpora, making it possible to do in seconds the kind of linguistic analysis that would normally take months. Today, it is possible to use computers to generate the corpora of languages and preserve them for posterity. Hundreds of years down the line when such languages may have disappeared as normal means of day to day conversation, their systems can still be understood and subjected to detailed study where the need arises.

A number of benefits arise from this. Computer based programs are now used to write in previously non-written languages, produce dictionaries, and compile digital and hard copy folk literature and history which can remain accessible for ages. Russell (1992) refers to a situation where within two weeks of exposure to computer language tools, five Kom speakers in Cameroon produced a 2,000 word dictionary from a 25,000 word body of literature they wrote in those two weeks.

This is an illustration of the kind of contribution that computer technology has made to language documentation and by extension, archival preservation. As earlier said, even when such languages are long gone from the real world, they can still be with us in the virtual world. People who do not speak those languages would still be able to enjoy their literature and knowledge, still using computers. This bring us to the crucial issue of machine translation.

5.2 Machine translation

The availability of computer based machine translation technology presents the possibility that a language that ceases to exist as the communication tool of any community could still be understood many years down the line. Of course, that is if the engineering and computational challenges of integrating such languages into translation software are overcome while the languages are still being used by some people. This brings to mind the urgency of focusing on the digital capture of the systems of all natural languages while this may be done. Odejobi and Adegbola (2010) highlight the enormity of the challenge in view of the complexity associated with translating one language to another and the difficult task of computationally encoding "the processes underlying the expertise of a human translator." (Odejobi and Adegbola 2010: 878)

These difficulties would only require more urgent efforts. Obviously, the very fact that computer based machine translation is today an integral part of computer mediated communication gives room for optimism. The imperfect nature of these systems is all too obvious, but they provide the best opportunity to make it possible for future generations to experience (in their own languages) texts of languages that are no longer spoken. Indeed, it would even be possible to hear close semblances of what these languages sounded like when they were spoken. This would be available via digital recordings and *text to speech* technology.

5.3 Text to speech

Text to speech is an aspect of speech synthesis, which involves the conversion of letters to sound or speech form. These systems are language specific and must be developed for each language. The beauty of it in the context of archival preservation is that where it exists, it can be used to convert written text of language into the sound

equivalents many years after the disappearance of the speech community. Future generations can locate written texts and hear what they sound like. This is a developing technology. Today, the sound outputs of text to speech facilities often sound unnatural, lacking some of the essential supra-segmental features of speech. However, they continue to get better.

This technology, like the previously mentioned ones, is only applicable to language conservation in a context where the attendant challenges have been addressed. These challenges include computational challenges, engineering challenges, and human resources challenges (Odejobi & Adegbola 2010).

6. Concluding Remarks

Linguistics is awash with studies of threatened and endangered languages, and in recent times, there appears to be a sense of urgency characterizing the discussions. The overriding consensus that languages need to be preserved is lofty and credible. Yet, there is a need to remind African scholars of some practical consideration that need to go into preservation efforts in order to bridge the gap between theory and policy on one side, and practical implementation on the other side.

While the practical problems identified in this paper cannot be eliminated from any language development program in Sub-Saharan Africa, a lot of progress can be achieved if the countries concerned can articulate clear-cut criteria for preservation efforts, thereby making the decision processes less political, and the implementation process more realistic and achievable. It is in this light that the approach explained in this article is advocated.

In order to fine tune a discussion of these issues, this paper earlier identified a number of questions to be addressed, which relate to the necessity or otherwise of language maintenance and revitalization, their practicality, as well as the question of the type of maintenance and revitalization that would be suitable. Obviously, efforts remain vital in cases where endangerment is clearly and scientifically established and not where it is merely assumed. However, revitalization in the sense of restoring the speech community is not always feasible. Therefore functional or archival preservation should be deployed as appropriate.

One must add, though, that the basic issue of identifying dying languages remains problematic in many instances in Sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, there are still situations where scholars argue vehemently over the very existence of some languages as well as their true states. This situation can no doubt hamper any attempt to intervene meaningfully. More studies are needed in order to unravel some of the abiding mysteries regarding many language situations especially in complex situations like the Mambila Plateau area (Connell 1997). Concerted efforts must be made to come up with uniform standards for identifying languages and distinguishing dialects, such that

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individual discretion and language speakers' views would not be the determining factors.

Many aspects of language preservation work may not necessarily involve governments directly. Much important language research work has been done and is being done simply via post graduate work in universities, and via funding by non-governmental organizations as well as wealthy members of the affected speech communities. This is crucial as a way of freeing governments from the decision challenges that often arise. Such options must continue to be pursued vigorously.

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AN ANALYSIS OF SUBJECT AGREEMENT ERRORS IN ENGLISH: THE CASE OF THIRD YEAR STUDENTS AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO

Mampoi Irene Chele

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to study the linguistic environments in which subject-verb agreement errors occur in students' academic work. The paper also aims to find out if these errors were competence or performance errors. The study was conducted at the National University of Lesotho (NUL).

The study had a two stage research design. In the first stage, students wrote a test in their field of study. In this test, no focus on subject-verb agreement was included. The test scripts were used to identify subject-verb agreement errors and the linguistic environments in which such errors occurred. In the second stage, a follow up test was given to the same group of students. They were given sentences which were a mixture of correct, incorrect and ambiguous sentences and were asked to evaluate the grammaticality of the sentences by putting a tick after the correct sentences and a cross after the incorrect ones. For the incorrect sentences they were to underline the error and give the correct answer. The main findings of the study were: subject-verb agreement errors are prominent in simple sentence constructions and in complex linguistic environments. The study also found that performance errors appear frequently in simple sentence construction (simple errors) while competence errors are found to be prominent in complex linguistic environments.

Introduction and Background

"Every time Obama opens his mouth, his subjects and verbs are in agreement," says Mr. Logsdon, *"If he keeps it up, he is running the risk of sounding like an elitist"* (Borowitz 2008).

Error free use of language is important. If all that was important was to make oneself understood, it would be easier to decide which mistakes mattered. However, writers are judged by grammatical correctness. Hudson (1999) emphasizes that it is important

to write grammatically for reasons of face, of respectability. Incorrect grammar gives a negative impression of the writer.

Lesotho is one of the countries where English is used as one of the two official languages. Due to this fact, English has gained prestige in the country and is therefore introduced as early as pre-school. However, these children only get exposed to English when they are in school. Back home and in meetings with friends outside school, communication is done in the first language, Sesotho. English has gained such high status that it has become one of the preliminary requirements for students' entry into the National University of Lesotho. According to the requirement, an applicant should have passed English with credit. With such high caliber of students, one would expect that grammatical errors would have been eliminated at high school. There is, however, continuing prevalence of a wide range of errors in students' writing. Lecturers, especially those who teach communication skills, receive endless complaints from lecturers in other courses about the incorrect grammar that is reflected in students' writing. The kinds of errors that students make are frequently subject-verb agreement errors. Typical agreement errors as found in a pilot study prior to this study are:

- He want to pass the message but in a short form
- He or she know that they will listen
- The speaker can create new texts which reminds people of other texts that were written before

In English, as in many other languages, one of the grammar rules is that the subjects and the verbs must agree both in number and in person. Subject-verb agreement therefore refers to the matching of subjects and verbs according to their number (Greenbaum and Nelson 2002: 141). This means that a singular subject must be matched with a singular verb form: *the child cries,* and a plural subject must be matched with a plural verb form: *the children cry.* Quirk (1973: 176) elaborates that there are, however, many special and difficult cases relating to this rule. The complexity is especially reflected when there are words and phrases intervening between subjects and verbs. Examples:

- The dishes in the kitchen is/are dirty
- The reason for the decline in Basotho working in South Africa mines is/are that mines are closing down.

The Concept of Error

The concept of error is very problematic in that there is no single definition that could be said to apply in all situations. This is because nowadays the concept of 'World Englishes' has developed. This means that English is used in many parts of the world and by many people who are not native speakers. As a result, there are different varieties accepted in different speech communities. Corder's (1974: 260) definition of error as "the use of a linguistic item in a way which a fluent native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning" may not be considered comprehensive as the native speaker cannot be used as the only model anymore. The study therefore prefers the following working definition: An error is a form of English which is unacceptable in a particular speech community, representing deviation from the standard which is taught in that community. For example, British and American standard varieties of English differ. Corder (1974: 25) distinguishes between performance errors which are once off violations of grammatical conventions and competence errors which are consistent in an individual's speech or writing and indicate an internalized system different from that of a target language. In other words, the individual does not know how to use the correct form. Fisiak (1981: 224) says performance errors are deviances due to factors such as memory limitations or fatigue and they can be self-corrected when attention is drawn to them.Similar studies have been done to address this topic elsewhere. For example, Bock and Miller (1991) studied subject-verb agreement errors in speech. They had realized that the rule that says subjects and verbs in English must agree in number is sometimes violated in sentences such as *the cost of the improvements have not yet been estimated*. They examined whether the incidence of such errors was due to the plural noun phrase or was dependent on whether the noun phrase was animate, or if it was caused by the fact that the utterance is lengthy and consequently separates the verb from its subject. Data was collected from English native speakers at Michigan State University. The study found that errors were most likely when a nominal post modifier separated the head from the verb and the number of the noun nearer to the verb differed from that of the head noun. Errors were most likely to occur when the head noun was singular and the local noun plural. The occurrence of agreement errors was not affected by the length of the post modifier. Errors were just as frequent after *the bridge to the islands* as they were after *the bridge to the popular coastal islands*.Pittman (2005) embarked on a similar study of subject verb agreement errors. The main reason for conducting the study was to investigate whether a non-subject or local noun that is also a plausible subject for the verb will cause more agreement errors than an implausible local noun. In other words, she wanted to find out if *the boy near the dogs is/*are running away* will cause more errors than *the boy near the trees is/*are running away.*

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The difference between the two sentences is that in the first sentence the subject and the local noun can both do the action of running while in the second sentence the local noun tree cannot do the action of running. The study found that a non-subject that is also a possible subject caused more agreement errors than an implausible local noun. That is, *the boy by the trees is/*are tall* caused more errors than in a sentence that reads, *the baby under the blankets is/*are young.*

   The main focus of the above articles was to find the influence of the post-modified subject, which is one of the linguistic environments which increased the likelihood of agreement errors. This paper, (through the method that was used) was able to come up with not only the post-modified subject as a possible factor in agreement errors, but it was also designed to reveal any other linguistic environments which possibly influenced students into making subject-verb agreement errors. The other direction which the paper took was to try to find out if the agreement errors were a result of carelessness, which would classify them as performance errors, or if they occur because students simply do not know the correct form, which would classify such errors under competence errors.

Methodology

The study had a two-stage research design. The first stage involved the identification of subject-verb agreement errors in students' writing and the linguistic environments which affect such errors. In the second stage, the same students were given an exercise which was meant to provide evidence of which errors in the first stage were performance or competence errors.

First Stage

Data was collected from third year Historical Studies students in the National University of Lesotho. All the 55 students who were doing an elective course titled 'Environment and Conservation in Africa' were used as research subjects. The study deliberately chose students who are doing this course because, unlike many Historical Studies courses which report their events in the past tense, this particular course is reported in the present tense because it relates to issues which are occurring in the present, even though the past has a bearing on them. Subject-verb agreement applies mainly to present tense verbs.

   The students wrote a test in their field of study. In this test, no focus on subject-verb agreement was included. The test scripts were used to identify subject-verb agreement errors and the linguistic environments in which such errors occurred. All subject- verb errors were recorded according to their script number. The names of the owners of the scripts were deleted and substituted with numbers according to the order in which they appeared. This was done so that the subjects' names could remain anonymous.

As each script was analysed, a comment was made on any factors in the linguistic environment that appeared to have contributed to each agreement error. The scripts were thereafter returned to the concerned lecturer so that she could proceed with the marking of the test.

Second Stage

In the second stage, a follow up test was given to the same group of students. This time the number was 41, as some had failed to attend the class. Thirty sentences were picked from the test they wrote. These sentences were a mixture of correct, incorrect and complex or ambiguous sentences. There were 11 sentences without errors, 15 sentences with subject-verb agreement errors and 4 complex/ambiguous sentences. The incorrect sentences which were picked were the ones which had types of agreement errors which were found to be common in many scripts. The incorrect sentences were the main target; they were meant to see if the students could recognize the error and correct it. With the ambiguous sentences, the purpose was to see if the students could correct them despite their ambiguity. The correct sentences were used as distracters.The exercise was given to students and they were asked to evaluate the grammaticality of the sentences by putting a tick after the correct sentences and a cross after the incorrect ones. For each of the incorrect sentences, they were asked to underline the error and give the correct answer. No attention was drawn to subject agreement.

The Findings

Subject verb agreement errors are prevalent in students' writing. There are several linguistic environments that appear to contribute to this high rate of errors. Many subject-verb agreement errors that students made can be classified as simple errors. The simple errors are directly related to the inappropriate omission or addition of the third person inflection. Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman (1983: 36) confirm that the subject-verb agreement poses a problem mainly in the present tense, where the third person singular forms are inflected while others are not. Leech (1994: 262) asserts that some learners view the third person singular number as "troublesome, tantamount to slip of the tongue and lengthens the word and pronunciation" and wish they could be allowed to omit it. Another source of error found in students' writing emanates from words that come between the subject and the verb, especially when such words do not agree in number with the main subject of the sentence. In sentences such as *an example of living things are mountains*, many students chose the verb that agrees with the noun nearer to it. Leech (1994: 262) classifies this error as an error of attraction. He says this is a situation where the verb tends to agree with the noun or pronoun that closely precedes it. He calls this feature 'attraction' or 'proximity' because the last

noun attracts a certain form in the verb and upsets the subject verb agreement rule. There were also errors which occurred in an environment where there is usage of a collective noun such as 'community' or indefinite pronoun such as 'everyone' everybody' 'every individual' and 'each and every'. The traditional prescription maintains that singular subject-verb agreement applies in such cases because 'each' and 'every' (one) are grammatically functioning as singular subjects. Problems concerning the correct usage of subject-verb agreement arise because the collective nouns and indefinite pronouns are conceptually plural but grammatically singular. Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman (1983: 44) argue that the reason for the problem is that subject-verb agreement has both syntactic and semantic aspects. There is therefore potential conflict when a form is syntactically singular but semantically plural or vice versa.According to the collected data, subject-verb agreement is especially problematic when there is a subordinate clause in a sentence structure. Students seemed to struggle with the referent of the relative pronoun 'which' when it introduces a subordinate clause. There is uncertainty as to whether the pronoun 'which' refers to the immediate noun or the initial noun that began the sentence. Greenbaum and Nelson (2002: 179) explain that a relative pronoun describes the noun that immediately comes before it and that such a pronoun is singular or plural depending on the noun it refers to. However, students referred to an incorrect noun phrase. Example: *This is one of the factors which encourages people to impact the environment negatively.* The students have interpreted the referent of 'which' to be 'one' and not 'factors' as it should be. The research subjects in this study seemed to have a problem in identifying a specific noun that the pronoun 'which' refers to in a clause and may sometimes be attempting to use it to refer to the whole preceding clause. For example: *Natural resources are faced with the problem of pollution and exhaustion which in turn becomes dangerous to human lives.* This attempt to use 'which' to refer to the whole clause sometimes leads to the wrong choice of subject verb agreement.

Performance versus Competence Errors

The following table shows the number of errors interpreted as performance and competence errors. This was done through counting how many students corrected the error when they saw one, and how many recognized a well-constructed sentence. It is assumed that performance errors appear in constructions where most students have corrected the errors while competence errors appear in constructions where only a small number of students have noticed and corrected the errors.

PERFORMANCE ERRORS	COMPETENCE ERRORS
15	13

According to the data above there is an almost equal number of performance and competence errors. This shows that subject-verb agreement errors are very common in students' writing, and that depending on the linguistic environment they are faced with, they may make errors that may be due to performance or to lack of competence. Performance errors seem to be mostly reflected in correct sentences. This shows that students are able to recognize a grammatical sentence even if they do not always construct their own. This in turn shows that comprehension comes before production, as proved by O'Grady (1996: 466) when he says people's ability to comprehend language is more advanced than their ability to produce sentences of their own. In correction of incorrect sentences, performance errors are also realized in simple constructions where there is no specific linguistic environment which seems to be affecting the error (simple errors). This then helps the researcher to conclude that in simpler constructions and in sentences which are already correct, the majority of the students are able to use or recognize the correct form of the verb. However, due to carelessness, and lack of habitual checking of subject-verb agreement in sentence constructions, some students still make errors.Competence errors seem to be prominent in linguistic environments such as the following:

- Where the subject is coordinated;
- Where the subject is post modified;
- Where the sentence has a subordinate clause that begins with a relative pronoun 'which';
- Where the subject is an indefinite pronoun;
- Where there are plural nouns coming after the verb;
- Where the subject is a mixture of both coordination and post modification.

These findings are similar to the findings in the study which was done by Bailis (2006). It found similar linguistic environments which increase the possibility of subject-verb agreement errors. The collected data provide evidence that in quite complex linguistic environments, subject-verb agreement becomes a challenge to students, but in simpler constructions they are able to recognize or construct a well formed sentence with subjects and verbs in agreement. Errors that are made in these simpler constructions are likely to be through carelessness and could be done away with if students could proof read their work effectively. The failure to notice simple errors still has to do with the fact that students are careless and overlook things.

Summary of Findings

The students in the department of historical studies who are doing a course titled 'Environment and Conservation in Africa' seem to encounter serious problems when it comes to the construction of grammatical sentences with subjects and verbs in

agreement. Out of the 55 scripts that were analysed only 7 scripts were free from subject-verb agreement errors. Most of these errors were simple errors, but other errors seemed to be influenced by specific linguistic environments such as: post modification, relative pronouns, starting the sentence with 'there', nouns after the verb and indefinite pronouns occupying the subject position. The students appeared to be easily distracted by the words that separate the subject and the verb. Moreover, the relative pronouns that are used to begin a subordinate clause posed a problem to students; they did not know which noun the relative clause referred to and as a result made subject-verb agreement errors. Another contributory factor involved the position of the subject in a sentence; if the subject was postponed, as in a sentence that starts with 'there' or 'here', the students could not easily identify the subject and therefore made errors. Also, nouns such as collective nouns and indefinite pronouns cause errors when they occupy the subject position because they are semantically plural but are grammatically singular. Performance errors were mostly realized in sentences which were already correct and in simple sentence constructions where no specific linguistic environment is recognized. However, competence errors seemed to appear where the subject-verb agreement was found in complex linguistic environments. Looking at the two stages of data, it can be concluded that subject verb agreement errors are found in simple sentence constructions and in complex linguistic environments. Some of these errors are performance errors while others are competence errors. Time pressure, carelessness and lack of habitual proof reading of one's work lead to performance errors; however, lack of sufficient knowledge of subject-verb agreement rules consequently leads to competence errors. The study has shown that subject-verb agreement is a problem for learners even at the higher level of study. Sometimes they know what they are doing but are just careless. There are, however, instances where the students do not seem to know what the correct form of the verb should be.

Conclusion

Firstly, this paper intended to find the linguistic environments in which subject verb agreement errors occur. Based on the findings, the paper concludes that subject-verb agreement errors are increased by linguistic environments such as; post modified subject, relative pronoun 'which', collective noun, reversed order or 'there'+ verb construction, indefinite pronoun and nouns after the verb. Some errors are simple; there is no linguistic environment that seems to have influenced the error. The other objective of this paper was to find out if the agreement errors that students make are performance or competence errors. According to the findings, students make both performance errors and competence errors. The paper therefore concludes that due to carelessness and/ or stress students make performance errors. Fisiak (1981: 224) says

performance errors are deviances due to factors such as memory limitations or fatigue, and can be corrected if attention is drawn to them. Other errors, however, are competence errors which appear to be influenced by a complex linguistic environment. These errors emanate from insufficient knowledge of verb agreement and indicate an internalized system different from that of a target language.

Recommendations

There is a need for teachers and lecturers to be made aware of the difference between performance and competence errors so that appropriate measures can be taken to help eliminate these subject- verb agreement errors. It is also important to train tertiary level students in proof reading.The study has discovered a possible source of error which does not seem to have been mentioned by other researchers. This has to do with the influence of the relative pronouns, which have contributed to students' making errors. I therefore strongly recommend that another study on subject-verb agreement could be carried out but this time with special focus on the influence of the relative pronoun. If all these suggestions are taken into account, perhaps, the prevalence of subject-verb agreement errors might decrease.

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'WHO WILL EMPLOY THEM?'
QUESTIONS AS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN
NIGERIAN JOB PORTALS ONLINE

Rotimi Taiwo

Abstract

This study investigates the use of questions for engagement by writers in discussions in online job portals. Based on a mini corpus of 40 postings together with their comments consisting of 139,104 words extracted from *Naijahotjobs* and *Nairaland* job portal discussions, the study addresses the functional use of questions in the presentation of writer's stance, the possible variation of questions with the topics being discussed, the rhetorical functions of questions and the use of question clusters in discussions. The analysis shows that two major kinds of questions were frequently used for engagement – *wh-* and *yes-no* questions. This represents two levels of complexity in interrogation – open-ended and closed-ended levels. It also reveals that the two most prominent groups in the discussions (motivational writers and graduate job seekers) used questions differently for engagement purposes. Motivational writers who typically assumed the position of experts used questions to engage the cognition of readers and sometimes to threaten their face, while graduate job seekers tended to ask information-seeking and confirmation questions based on issues agitating their minds about their unemployment situation. In addition, graduate job seekers asked what I refer to as 'protest questions', which focus on social issues connected with unemployment. This study therefore shows that beyond networking and getting relevant information about how to secure employment and advance in a career, job portals have provided a space for interrogating, confronting and guiding job seekers on the social problem of unemployment in Nigeria.

Introduction

Identification of rhetorical processes in spoken and written discourse has been the focus of various studies on interactional discourse. Halliday (1985) identifies the interpersonal component of language which deals with how speakers and writers maintain as they build relationships through discourse. Discourse is essentially interactional, because in the process of constructing discourses, language users consciously make choices from the interpersonal systems of language (Hyland 2005a, 2011). In the digital age, paper-based media are gradually being substituted with electronic interactive media and the research focus is being widened to identify these interactional elements in online discourse. Discussion boards or message boards which are online forums where users can share and discuss information and opinions afford participants the opportunity to develop their own position and self-presentation and to signal a relation to others as they get involved in public discussions. Myers (2010) observes that discussion boards help many people to express their own ideas and receive the opinions of others, and almost anyone who has access to the internet has the opportunity to read and comment in the several discussion boards online. Studies on writers' engagement have been carried out on academic writing focusing on writers' mode of initiating interaction with their readers (Hyland 1999, 2005a; Hyland and Guinda 2012). Scholarly works on screen-based media writing have largely concentrated on asynchronous learning environments (Hewings and Coffin 2007; Hewings 2012; Webmann and McCauley 2014). A few others have focused on the description of writer-oriented features in interaction in journalistic commentaries and public blogs (Arrese and Perucha 2006; Langlotz and Locher, 2006; Myers 2010; Rahimpour 2014). Authorities have agreed that writers engage their readers cognitively and affectively through the use of stance features, such as cognitive verbs, stance adverbs and discourse particles. These are regular features of online discussions.

The use of questions underlies the essential dialogic nature of conversation and allows writers to stimulate the involvement of their readers. Since online discussion can be seen as involving the social process of interaction, it can be assumed that writers look for ways of inviting engagement and leading other participants to their viewpoints in the discourse (Hyland 2002b). In addition, questions are used engage people cognitively and affectively (Hawkins 1995).

This study assumes that the use of questions as a strategy for engagement and the distribution of their functions will vary in different threaded discussion topics in online job portals just as they vary across academic disciplines and genres, as reported in Hyland (2002b). The study therefore investigates the manifestations of question as

an engagement resource by writers in discussions of different topics in online job portals.

Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Youth unemployment is a world-wide phenomenon. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) recently indicated that "the world is facing a worsening youth employment crisis: young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults" (http://www.ilo.org). However, this challenge is more pronounced in the developing economies of the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (*World Youth Report* 2011) and Nigeria is said to have one of the worst youth unemployment rates in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus according to a United Nations report published by *Premium Times* of September 13, 2012, "two in five Nigerian youths are unemployed". The rate of graduate unemployment has particularly been growing in the last few years due to the increase in the number of tertiary institutions in the country. Nigeria currently has 123 universities with several hundreds of polytechnics and colleges, which turn out an annual average of 2.8 million fresh graduates, with only 10% being sure of securing employment (Ochonma 2011).

In order to create a network for Nigerian job seekers and those seeking to advance their careers, a number of websites have sprung up in the last seven years. Some of the popular ones are Naijahotjobs, JobsSearchNigeria, Nigeriajobslink, Nigeriabestjobs, CVShore, Ngcareers.com, Joblistnigeria, Hotnigerianjobs, Latestnigerianjobs, Jobberman, Gblcareers, and Naijabestjobs. In addition to serving as platforms for job seeking, some of these websites have discussion groups or boards, where some of these issues arising from the acute unemployment problem in the country are being discussed daily.

The process of discourse production by the participants in these portals is not free from the social conditions of production of such text. In the process of discussions, participants in the job portals engage other participants through different rhetorical strategies, such as expressing their authorial identity, questioning and directing them. These interactional engagements are not unconnected with the nature of topics being discussed and the participants' perception of the rhetorical context.

Discussions in Jobs Portals Online

Job portals online, also called employment websites, are websites designed for job position placements, job search and career advice. They are also designed in such a way that a job applicant can load their application and credentials to potential employers and recruiters for review. Job portals offer different services, such as

providing access to job advertisements, advice on how to get recruited for a desired kind of job, tips on how to answer interview questions and so forth. Most job portals require people to register in order to enjoy the benefits they offer. Job portals also provide opportunities for members to share and discuss issues related to their experiences in discussion forums. The idea of job portals has existed in the United States since the early 1990s, however it did not get to Nigeria until about fifteen years later. This popularization of job portals is not unconnected with the challenge of youth unemployment that the country has been facing in the last one and a half decades. These job portals have sprung up to cater for the needs of the growing number of the unemployed Nigerian youths. Many of these youths who are graduates from Nigerian universities, monotechnics, polytechnics and colleges of education participate in the several discussions that go on daily on the discussion boards in these job portals.

Discussions typically centre on their challenges in securing employment in the country. One of the major challenges faced is that of exploitation by the numerous employment consultants who extort money from jobseekers, promising to secure employment for them. Discussions will normally be generated by any posting by a member about a recruitment exercise that is about to take place or has taken place, some educative or motivational writings for members, job vacancies, news items, and so forth.

Membership of most job portals can be categorised into three groups. The first group, which appears to be the largest, is the unemployed graduates, who have registered in order to have access to information on job opportunities and tips on how to get their desired kinds of job. The second group is the motivational writers, who sometimes claim to be employment consultants. They provide information on job vacancies and write to motivate the job seekers. The last group is comprised of some employed graduates who want to advance in their careers. They sometimes share their personal experiences on employment.

The number of responses and the directions of discussions are determined by how interesting the posting is to the participants. Sometimes discussions become argumentative, with members trying to position themselves on the crowded terrain of other bloggers and commenters (Myers 2010). During arguments or debates, members are typically divided along the lines of their strong feelings and attitudes towards any particular proposition. In the process of argument, negatively marked online behaviours, such as flaming,[1] trolling[2] and thread jacking[3] are commonly displayed (du Preez 2014; Taiwo 2011; Taiwo 2014).

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[1] Flaming is an aggressive behaviour in which participants in online discourse expresses intense anger manifesting in the use of profane and insulting language aimed at causing targets mental pain,

Interactional Engagement

Engagement or positioning within the discourse and the rhetorical functions enacted by language users have been the focus of linguistic research over the last few decades. A group of researchers have conceptualized interactions between text producer and their texts and between text producers and users. They are particularly concerned with the way an author engages with and positions him/herself in relation to other voices in the discourse. The systemic-functional framework has provided insights and theoretical support for such research efforts (Halliday 1994; Eggins, 1994). Engagement, which is a subsystem of appraisal, deals with how writers/speakers position themselves in the text. Engagement aims at building a connection with participants in a discourse in order to stress solidarity. It has to do with how writers/speakers make predictions about how readers/listeners are likely to react to their arguments and craft their texts to explicitly address them (Hyland 2001a).

Different terms have been employed by researchers to refer to the linguistic resources employed to foster writer/speaker-reader/listener interaction in discourse. Some of the terms include: *stance* (Biber and Finegan 1989; Kärkkäinen 2003; Hyland 2005; Biber 2006), *metadiscourse* (Crismore 1989; Hyland 2005b; Hyland and Tse 2004), and *appraisal* (Martin 2000; Rothery and Stengling 2000; Macken-Horarik 2003). While a number of scholars have reported studies on non-academic interactional discourse, especially in online contexts (Arrese and Perucha 2006; Langlotz and Locher 2006; Myers 2010; Rahimpour 2014; Putman, Ford & Tancock 2012), many research efforts have been directed at investigating stance taking in academic writing as a social and communicative activity, and they generally examine the various ways writers project themselves into their work to signal their communicative intentions.

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embarrassment and disgrace. Such messages, which are called "flames," may be posted within online discussion forums or newsgroups, or sent via e-mail or instant messages.

[2] Trolling is the act of purposefully antagonising others on the Internet with the primary intent of provoking them into an emotional response. The goal of trolling is to bait and provoke other group members, often with the result of drawing them into fruitless argument and diverting attention from the stated purposes of the group. Trolling is common in an online community such as a forum, a chatroom, a blog, and so forth.

[3] Thread-jacking is the taking over of a thread on a discussion forum or message board and twisting the subject of the original posting in such a way that participants now respond to the thread jacker's input.

Interactional discourses are characterized by interactive features which reveal how writers engage with readers. These features are generally referred to as metadiscourse. Hyland (2005b: 37) defines metadiscourse as:

> the cover term for the self-reflective expression used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community.

Hyland also identifies three key principles upon which the model of metadiscourse is based. These principles are: (i) that metadiscourse is distinct from propositional aspects of language; (ii) that the term metadiscourse refers to those aspects of the text that embody reader-writer interactions; and (iii) that metadiscourse distinguishes relations which are external to the text from those that are internal. According to Hyland (2008: 155), the interactional metadiscourse features

> impart an interpersonal tenor to a piece of writing: signaling the level of personality a writer invests in a text through self-mention, hedges, attitude and the markers of reader involvement...

Hyland (2005b) proposed a model of metadiscourse which comprises two categories: interactive and interactional categories. The interactive category of metadiscourse deals with writers' awareness of their receivers, and their attempts to accommodate their interests and needs, and to make the argument satisfactory for them. The sub-categories of interactive metadiscourse are listed below:

Transitions - express relations between main clauses (e.g., *in addition, but, thus, and*);
Frame markers - used to indicate text boundaries (e.g., *finally, in conclusion*);
Endophoric markers - refer to information in other parts of the text, typically pro-forms;
Evidentials - refer to information from other texts (e.g., *according to…*);
Code glosses - devices used to elaborate propositional meanings (e.g., *that is, namely, such as*).

The interactional part is about writers' attempts to make their views explicit, and to engage readers by anticipating their objections and responses to the text. They are:

Hedges - used to withhold commitment and open dialogue (*perhaps, might, possibly*);
Boosters - used to signal certainty or close dialogue (e.g., *obviously, of course, definitely*);

Attitude markers - appraises the text producer's attitude to a proposition (*unfortunately, surprisingly, certainly*);

Self-mentions - refers to the self-presentation of the author through first person pronouns and possessives (*I, me, we, my, our*); and

Engagement markers - address readers explicitly (*you can see that, note that, consider*).

Hyland in another study (Hyland 2005a) notes that interactions in academic writings are managed through stance and engagement. Stance, which has to do with the expression of textual 'voice', involves the use of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. Engagement, on the other hand, which deals with how writers relate to their readers with respect to the positions advanced in the text, employs the rhetorical resources of reader pronouns, directives, questions, shared knowledge and personal asides (Hyland 2005a: 177). This study focuses on the use of questions as engagement resources and for rhetorical purposes in online job portal discussions.

Investigations of features of interpersonal engagements have shown that various texts and languages manifest different ways of engaging the participants. The main features of stance and engagement could significantly influence styles of writing For instance, different academic writings manifest a variety of rhetorical functions which are realized by different linguistic resources. Some aspects of academic discourse that have been researched include research articles (Dahl 2004; Toumi 2009); dissertation acknowledgements (Hyland 2003); book reviews (Alcaraz-Ariza 2002); abstracts (Hyland and Tse 2005; Gillaerts 2010); journals descriptions (Hyland and Tse 2010), L2 writing (Hyland 2004), EFL textbooks (Alemi and Isavi 2012), and so forth. Investigations of the features of writings show that successful writer-reader rapport is negotiated through the use of hedges (Hyland 1998), imperatives (Swales et al. 1998), evaluation (Hunston and Thompson 2000), self-representation (Hyland 2001b), directives (Hyland 2002a), and questions (Hyland 2002b).

Ken Hyland in many of his studies has described the deployment of metadiscursive elements in different kinds of academic writing. He describes metadiscourse as "self-reflective linguistic expressions referring to the evolving text, to the writer, and to the imagined readers of that text" (Hyland 2004: 133). In his study of doctoral and masters dissertations written by Hong Kong students, he proposed a model of metadiscourse as the interpersonal resources required to present propositional material appropriately in different disciplinary and genre contexts. He was also able to show how metadiscourse can be seen as a means of uncovering something of the rhetorical and social distinctiveness of disciplinary communities.

Different patterns of metadiscourse use have been found in different genres of academic discourse. Self-mention a major engagement strategy identified in academic writing. According to Hyland (2001: 223),

> first person pronouns and self-citation are not just stylistic optional extras but significant ingredients for promoting a competent scholarly identity and gaining accreditation for research claims.

Scholars have identified the possible functions self mention can perform in research articles, such as, creating a research space, organizing the discourse, outlining procedure and/or methodology, explaining the researcher's previous work, reporting or summarizing findings, disputing other researchers' findings, or indicating potential future directions for research (Harwood 2005; Krapivkina 2014). It is also agreed that the use of self-mention differs in different disciplines (Hyland 2001) and it is conditioned by the specific cultural context in which the academic writings are produced and distributed (Dueñas 2007).

The use of directives is also a subject of investigation in academic writing. Hyland observes that despite the fact that directive forms are considered as being potentially risky devices for interpersonal engagement due to their threat to the face of the reader, they are still employed to guide the reader through the text. Likewise,

> the weight of their imposition varies between the functions expressed by particular devices, the authority relations constructed in different genres, and the conventions of preferred disciplinary argument forms. (Hyland 2002a: 236.)

Hyland (2002a) noted that the use of directives in students' research reports is considered risky because it suggests claiming authority, which these students did not wish to display. In textbooks however, "directives invoke a solid and competent writer in full command of the material" (Hyland 2002: 222) - the primary knower (Berry 1981), therefore, they are used to lead readers to the mastery of new skills and knowledge.

Questions in Interactive Discourse

Discourse studies and other functionally oriented analyses have examined the use of questions in conversations and identified their roles in eliciting verbal responses, thus marking power relations in asymmetrical discourses, such as teacher-pupil interactions and courtroom cross-examinations (Harris 1984; Raymond 2003, Smart and Marshall 2013). The use of interrogation in interactional discourse has also been studied in political interviews (Bull 1994; Gago and Silveira 2006) and doctor-patient talk (Harres 1998; Strivers and Heritage 2008).   Several   studies   have   also

examined the use of questions in academic writing (Webber 1992; Hyland 2002b). For instance, Hyland (2005a) analysed 240 research articles of eight different disciplines and found that questions were more prominent in the science and engineering papers, while reader pronouns were common in soft discipline papers due to their appeal to scholarly solidarity and presupposition of a set of mutual, discipline-identifying understandings. In another related study (Hyland 2002b), he investigates the use of questions in academic writing and found that while questions were a common strategy of engagement in expert-novice interaction, which is represented by textbook context, they were less frequent in other genres, such as research articles and student research reports. He also notes that questions are more frequently used in softer disciplines (philosophy, sociology, applied linguistics and marketing) than the hard ones (biology, physics and engineering). He relates this difference to the social and epistemological variations in these disciplines. Maintaining an effective degree of personal engagement with the reader is important for soft knowledge writers as their writing is more explicitly interpretive and less abstract than in the science and engineering.

Other studies on academic discourse demonstrate that questions are a "minor way of establishing a niche" in research article introductions, though generally seen as strategies to be avoided (Swales and Feak 1994: 74). Questions in academic discourse generally mark the presence of what Thompson (2001) calls 'reader-in-the-text', "whose attention is captured and selectively focused on key points or moments in the writer's argument" (Hyland 2002b). Webber (1994: 266) also notes that:

> questions create anticipation, arouse interest, challenge the reader into thinking about the topic of the text, and have a direct appeal in bringing the second person into a kind of dialogue with the writer, which other rhetorical devices do not have to the same extent.

The use of interrogation in online discussion is the focus of Taiwo (2009). That study identifies the predominant use of interrogatives in political and culture-related threads to express sentiments, critique and lampoon and sometimes to project a comic conception of the society. While the study examined discussions in general purpose web portals, the present study investigates job portals discussions.

Interactional discourse studies conceive of interrogatives as multifunctional structures, whose exact functions are defined by their local interactional and sequential context. Some existing studies have focused on the use of questions in the asynchronous textual context of the computer-mediated environment (Waugh 1996; Muilenbeurg and Berg 2000; Blanchette 2007). Among other things, these studies

identify the linguistic structure and cognitive functions, as well as identify the pedagogical and communicative characteristics of questions asked in an online environment. Other issues that dominate the use of questions in online classrooms are frequency of questions and the cognitive level of questions. Blanchette (2007) for instance reports that participants in an asynchronous learning environment use fewer syntactic forms when compared with what obtains in face-to-face classrooms. Participants also exhibit higher levels of cognition. She then concludes that questions at higher levels of cognition stimulate more interaction, and more rhetorical questions are used to persuade, think aloud and indirectly challenge other participants.

While existing studies have agreed that the change in learning context from the familiar face-to-face environment to the computer-mediated environment affects the cognitive and affective processes, thereby affecting the types and functions of questions, the use of questions in non-educational online contexts has not received much attention. Linguistic studies of the use of questions for interactional engagement in online job portal discussions are almost non-existent. This may be due to the fact that online job portals communication is a relatively new experience. This present study will demonstrate how questions are used to express writers' purposes, organise texts, evaluate arguments and set up claims in online job portal discussions. The study is therefore interested in investigating the functional use of questions in the presentation of writer's stance, the possible variation of questions with the topics being discussed, the rhetorical functions of questions and the use of questions clusters in discussions.

Data and Methodology

This study is based on a mini corpus of 40 postings together with their comments consisting of 139,104 words extracted from two online discussion boards. They are *Naijahotjobs* and *Nairaland. Naijahotjobs* is a Nigeria graduate jobs and vacancies career forum, designated as a forum for job searchers and people who want to boost their career advancement. It is reputed to be the largest website for jobs and vacancies in Nigeria. It has four major sections: Hotjobs, which features job vacancies placements, Career Talk Centre, where educative and motivational information are placed, General Discussion, where people share their employment related experiences, and the Xtras, where participants can place their testimonies and suggest changes. The forum had 278,405 topics, 585,464 posts and 294,429 members (as at July 8, 2014). *Naijahotjobs* can be found at http://www.naijahotjobs.com/

Nairaland is a general interest website with several discussion sections, like entertainment, politics, romance, jokes, culture, religion, education, jobs/vacancies, fashion, sports, and so forth. I focused on the job/vacancies section, where activities

are similar to what obtains in *Naijahotjobs*. *Nairaland* is Nigeria's largest online forum and discussion portal. *Nairaland* had 1,197,966 members, 1,537,878 topics and more than 600,000 page views per day (as at July 8, 2014). The website can be found at http://www.nairaland.com/. The dialogical and conversational styles on the discussion portals reflect discourses characterized by exchanges of views and opinions. The members of these two forums are seen as having formed a virtual community that is characterized by linguistic as well as social variation.

Participants in these portals discuss several issues, mainly those related to their job seeking and career advancement. While some postings attract several comments, others do not. Postings that address topics that are generally debated offline tend to attract more comments than those that are merely informational in nature. As observed by Myers (2010: 265), "threads tend to fray over time, leading on to other discussions, either because of a deliberate deviation from the topic by one commenter, or because of the gradual mutation of one topic into another". Also, as is typical of most discussion forums, there are trolls who start threads with controversial postings which usually generate heated debates. There are also trolls who wait for others to make postings before they bring in their disruptive comments (Taiwo 2014: 69).

Some of the topics that dominate discussions in the portals are: age requirements for employment, aptitude tests for job applicants, discrimination against mono and polytechnic graduates, the use of a quota system to fill vacant positions, desperation of graduates for white-collar jobs, employment agencies scams, class of degree and prospects of securing jobs, and how recruitment tests are conducted.

Findings and Discussions

An online community of graduate job seekers is a virtual community of people who share a common concern and are ready to share any information that will be beneficial to members. Questions were often used for inviting engagement and enabling members to share information. There were 345 questions overall in the corpus. The dominant question types were the *wh-* and *yes-no* forms. There were only two tag questions and one alternative question. Most of the questions were *wh-* forms (56.7%). Table 1 below shows the distribution of the question types.

Table 1: Frequency of question types

Q Type	Frequency	Percentage
Wh- Question	198	56.9
Yes-No Question	147	42.2

Tag Question	2	0.6
Alternative Question	1	0.3
Total	348	100

The results showed that *wh-* questions, which are generally referred to as open-ended questions, because they generally permit an unrestrained or free response, were predominantly used. *Yes-no* questions on the other hand are referred to as closed-ended questions, because they are restrictive and can be answered in a few words, typically one word or short phrases were next in terms of usage. Below are some of the kinds of questions typically asked:

1. **Guys, have you heard about joblink nigeria and xeenal recruitment agency?** I think they are all fraudsters.
   (NHJ 17: 419 recruitment agencies)
2. **Why should someone who is qualified for a job be denied the opportunity to get the job simply because he/she is above the stipulated age?** In this country of ours where the government of the day is not bothered about job creation, the employment field should be made a level playing ground for all qualified persons to get employed irrespective of their ages.
   (NHJ 07: Age requirement is unconstitutional)
3. i got an invite frm uniosun. for those who have written b4, **did dey allow u to use calculator for ur maths?** pls i'd appreciate ur response.
   (NLD 33: UNIOSUN … who else got this?)
4. **Pls house does any1 have idea whether gtbank accept neco result?** cos i can see people emphasizing so much on waec. pls i nid rply ASAP.
   (NLD 26: GT Bank test of Wednesday 20th June)

One major question that immediately comes to mind is this – what determines the kind of questions asked in online communication? The study reveals that the question types asked are closely connected with the kind of topic being discussed as well as the topic flow. As mentioned earlier, two prominent groups in online job portals are motivational writers and job seekers. Findings reveal that these groups used questions for different engagement purposes. For instance, most questions in motivational writings were rhetorical and they were typically used to engage readers' cognition. Take for instance the following questions from the corpus:

5. The bottom line is, **why are you still unemployed in spite of your serious efforts and strong desire to get the job of your choice?** Many expect a simple, short and

precise answer. Unfortunately there is nothing like that. The reason for this is that the employment process is complex, and usually in stages.
(NHJ 23: Things that can Go Wrong with your Job Search)

6. **Are you ambitious, serious minded, student, jobless or you are having financial difficulties?** This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. It is a never before exposed secrets compiled in the INTERNET MONEYMAKING Ebook.
(NLD 28: Job seekers group)

7. when your resume reveals a record of perhaps six jobs in eight years or when you are considered too young, too old, too short for heavy etc. **What is your defence for these questions and other uncomfortable questions that may come up?**
(NHJ 9: Job search fundamentals)

The questions in 5 – 7 are not just the typical information-seeking questions. They were used to bring the readers into the discourse arena in order to lead them to the writer's viewpoint. They were employed to challenge the reader to think about the issues being stressed. For instance, the question in 5 was used in the introductory paragraph of the motivational writing as an initial frame to foreground the discourse which was to come later. The entire discourse in 5 was meant to highlight things job seekers would need to know in order to secure their desired kind of job. The use of question here is a persuasive strategy for engaging the reader's interest. In 6, the polar question, which is also a frame for the two declarative sentences that follow, clearly identified the addressees – ambitious, serious-minded, student and jobless persons. The focus of this question on the problems potential readers can identify with is an attention-getter which has the potential of creating curiosity in the readers. In addition, it indirectly performs the act of promising by embedding some benefits for those who will eventually purchase the book being advertised. The question in 7 was constructed based on a hypothetical case and used to bring readers into an imaginary interview scenario. Findings also reveal that motivational writers used questions more as experts and primary knowers, "the person who already knows the information" (Berry 1981: 126). Their questions are mostly cognitively demanding, sometimes reflecting an authoritative discourse of experts as seen in the pedagogic schoolroom. Sometimes these motivational writers ask questions that threaten the face of their readers in order to drive home their points, as can be seen in 8.

8. Bottom line is, it's never too late to take a new step into building your own empire or life and give your children everlasting security, **what is your ambition, what drives you, what is your dream,** ask yourself, people are retiring, resigning or

been retrenched everyday from their JOB (Journey of Borrowers) with a peanut for pension and are thrown into the misery of poverty they thought they already guarded again cos they thought they had a job. **Is this not enough example, is the picture not clear enough that the journey you're about to set on is going to end in poverty. so why are you working,** ask yourself, **is it not to get richer and have a good life, so why does it always end in illness and strokes? I have a billion example of people who ended up like that.**
(NHJ 2: 80% job seekers failed NNPC aptitude test)

The title of the piece this extract was taken from is 'Mind Assassin Part 1'. The title of the write up depicts the goal of the writer – to manipulate the minds of readers by expunging an existing thought from it. The goal of this manipulation is obviously to get readers to change their job-seeking mentality and become employers themselves. The opening sentence, "NB: If you fail to read this extract, you can never be successful, ever again" sets the frame for the entire discourse. This, unlike earlier instances of questions, is an illegitimate expression of power through discourse. The writer went all out to use questions ranging from mild ones (the first three highlighted in the extract) to face-threatening ones (the fifth question) to engage the readers and lead them to the writer's viewpoint. In using face-threatening questions, the writer was trying to exercise social control of the readers by first trying to discursively control their minds, their beliefs, and then indirectly control their actions (van Dijk 2006).

Job seekers' questions can typically be divided into three kinds. The first one is information-seeking questions which typically come from job seekers in the forum. These questions sought answers to questions agitating the minds of the participants, which they believed other members of the forum could answer. There were also questions that arose in the context of debates, which were raised to demand cognition from others in the course of arguments. The third kind of questions is what I call 'protest questions', which implies that the enquirer was thinking aloud through the medium of interrogatives on some social problems. The last two were typically rhetorical. These question types are illustrated respectively in 9 – 11.

9. I just received invite from Uniosun for a test on saturday. I don't have my application letter wit me. **How did ʊ guy do yours?**
(NLD 33: UNIOSUN … who else got this?)
10. That was an unwise decision to take.. My God! Marriage as the Bible says, is Honourable before the Lord. **Are we saying that God that brought her a husband can't provide for them?**
(NHJ 10: Bride abandons wedding for NNPC job test)

11. Youths who have left sch 4 a long time and engaged in so many struggles in life are called to write exams under stress and confusion. What do the management expect?
   (NHJ 2: 80% job seekers failed NNPC aptitude test)

Since these unemployed graduates are operating in the context of socio-economic exploitation and uncertainty about text messages they receive, they often need to verify the authenticity of the messages. Employment scammers within the recruitment process have continued to pose a threat to the chances of many jobless Nigerians in securing jobs. It is not an unusual experience for job seekers to receive SMS alerts inviting them for interviews, only to be scammed by the senders. An online portal therefore is not just a network for job seekers to socialise. It also provides them an avenue for getting informed about how to ensure they do not fall prey to job scammers. Participants feel very confident to ask questions due to the intimacy they share in their community. Questions such as 9 were quite common in the corpus. They allow participants to share their experiences and get well prepared for future interview encounters. Protest questions were tied to social issues that the participants are daily interrogating in their discourse, such the failure of the state to care for them, the conditions under which they wrote aptitude tests, discrimination against them in employment, exploitation by job consultants and scammers, and so forth.

A closer look at the distribution of *wh-* question types reveals that *what-* and *how-* questions were more frequently used than others. Table 2 presents the frequency of *wh-* questions.

Table 2: Frequency of *wh-* questions

Q Type	Frequency	Percentage
What	82	41.4
Why	18	9.1
How	70	35.4
Who	15	7.6
When	5	2.5
Where	8	4.0
Total	198	100

What questions were generally used to demand for the crux of the matter and they were found to be predominant in a thread with the title "Job seeker's corner", which

was actually an information seeking thread. The thread allowed job seekers to ask any question on employment and career issues. The thread featured 17 out of the entire 82 occurrences of *what* questions (20.7%) in the corpus. Below are some of the questions asked.

13.   **pls what is d best question to ask ur interviewer anytime u r asked to ask dem questions?**
14.   **What do you know about this company?**
15.   **What does the local labor market look like for jobs in your career field?**
16.   **What is the difference between a resume, CV and cover letter?**

   How questions were predominantly asked in a thread with the topic "GT Bank Test of Wednesday 20th June" (17: 24.3%). The job test in question was conducted by GT Bank, one of the top commercial banks in Nigeria. On the 14th June, six days to the day of the test, a participant posted the question: "Has anybodi been called for GT test of Wednesday 20th June? Kindly give info on d structure of the test. If anyone has done it b4, kindly give required info". This question sparked off the interest of many other members who started to ask further questions, such as:

17.   **hw did u guys apply? Can I still apply?**
18.   **How was the documentation? Hope we all had a feel of gtbank...our next employer**
19.   **Pls, how did you guys submit your C.V?**
20.   **@Ayoola01 how long does it take for them to call for Interview...On the average....Since you've had an experience in the process..**
21.   **@labyboy, phirmmzy, joboy how many were in ur set. We wer six @ mine**

These kinds of questions were used to circulate information on the application and text procedures, thereby preparing members who had been invited for the interview for preparation.

   Yes-no questions were used mainly to seek confirmation in the discussion. As earlier mentioned, the nature of some of the threads encouraged the use of *yes-no* questions. A good example is the thread with the topic "419 recruitment agencies".[4]

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[4]419 derives from the section of the Nigerian law that deals with different kinds of criminal acts of obtaining money and materials from others by pretence or fraudulently, usually through electronic mail messages. "419 recruitment agencies" are therefore fraudulent agencies which pose as job consulting firms and take advantage of desperate job seekers by scamming them.

The posting that started the discussion thread, which was written to alert members of the activities of job scammers in the country went thus:

22. HEY GUYS,WANT TO INFORM YOU ALL TO BEWARE OF 419 RECRUITMENT AGENCIES LIKE JOBSEARCH CONSULTANCY SERVICES-THEIR WEBSITE IS THEY ARE INDEED SHAMELESS FRAUDSTERS CASHING IN ON THE HIGH UNEMLOYMENT SITUATION IN NIGERIA BY ASKING JOBSEEKERS TO BUY THEIR SCRATCH CARDS OF N500 TO BE REGISTERED WITH THEM.THEIR TESTS AND SELECTION PROCESSES ARE A SHAM,AND THIER CLAIM OF CONNECTING APPLICANTS TO EMPLOYERS IS TRICKISH,THOSE TO BE 'SELECTED' ARE WELL KNOWN TO THEM.THINK-GENUINE CONSULTING FIRMS LIKE KPMG, PHILIPS CONSULTING,ETC. WILL NEVER ASK YOU TO PAY ANY FEE OR BUY A SCRATCH CARD TO BE ABLE TO UPLOAD YOUR CV OR BE REGISTERED IN CONSIDERATION FOR JOB OPENINGS-THEY HAVE BEEN ADEQUATELY PAID TO DO THEIR SELECTION JOB BY THE CORPORATIONS THAT WANT THEM TO RECRUIT ON THIER BEHALF.ONCE AGAIN BEWARE OF HUNGRY PEOPLE LIKE STAFF OF JOBSEARCH CONSULTANCY SERVICES.

The posting written in all capitals reflects the writer's emotional stance towards the issue – emphasizing as well as shouting to warn other members. This underscores the importance of the posting to members. The thread was bombarded with a series of questions seeking to confirm the status of some of the recruitment agencies members were familiar with. A total number of 19 (61.3%) out of the 31 questions asked in the thread were *yes-no* questions. In "Job seekers corner" also 38% of the questions were *yes-no*. Below are some of the questions asked:

23. did anyone ever heard of primesav solutions. Are they real?
24. hey guys is GSE real or a scam like jobsearch consultancy?
25. guys, have u heard of joblink nigeria and xeenal recruitment agency? i <u>think</u> they are all fraudsters.
26. ever heard of consultingcapable.com? they're one of those on prowl too... so beware.
27. Hello, pls this samnetrecruitmentonline is it for real or another 419
28. Has anybody done anything Genuinely with GSE_ Can we have an answer from anybody in the house?
29. anybody heard of tilt list dot com ? does any body have anything on them..seems like they are very geniune and professional at what they do. someone please respond.

The findings also show that sometimes participants used clusters of questions, that is, serial questions. These questions were used for probing, reflective and rhetorical purposes. Most clusters of questions occurred in motivational postings where they were used to demand readers' cognition.

30 If you are looking for a job that will pay you N400,000 p.a., **how much should you invest to make it happen this year, and not next year?** If your current pay is N400,000 p.a., **how much should you invest to get a N1.2 million job instead of a N600,000 pa job?** In the same vein, **do you realise that looking for a job is, indeed, a full time job if you are unemployed? Are you ready to work at it, and continue to work hard until you get results? Are you adequately prepared? Are you doing enough research?**
(NHJ D09: Job search fundamentals)

31.   If you are not going to anywhere in particular, any road will lead you there. **Where, in terms of which sector or industry or company or geographic locale would you like to work?** If we assume that you have your job target, the question then, **how to do you reach this objective? How do you get a shot at your dream job without which you stand no chance of getting it at all?** Job seekers who want to succeed will have to do the knocking, the digging, the searching.
(NHJ D23: Things that can go wrong with your job search)

"Job search fundamentals", where **30** was extracted from was a serialized motivational posting that chronicled what job applicants needed to do to secure their dream jobs. It addressed issues like setting personal goals, best ways to prepare a resume, writing application letters, and preparing well for aptitude test and job interviews. Extract 30 is a classic example of clustering of questions - a paragraph of six sentences and all the six sentences are questions (2 *wh-* and four *yes-no* questions). The questions were meant to direct the reader's cognition to the points being made, which was an invitation to one of the numerous seminars being organized for unemployed graduates. In comparison, extract 31 has fewer clusters - just three *wh-* questions addressing the issue of job search skills.

As noted by Hyland (2002b) in his study of the use of questions in academic writing, our findings clearly show that questions may convey authority where the writer assumes the position of an expert, as it was in the case of motivational writers and sometimes employed graduates who felt they had some rights to transfer knowledge. For example:

32.   When was the last time you saw job advertisement from Guaranty Trust Bank, NNPC,   CBN, Shell, Dangote Group, etc? Employers expect that you actively look for them, and declare your interest and intention to work for them.

(NHJ D09: Job Search Fundamentals)

33.   do you realise that looking for a job is, indeed, a full time job if you are unemployed?

(NHJ D09: Job Search Fundamentals)

The writer of extract **30** above assumed the position of an expert who knows what employers expect from job seekers and what job seekers could do to secure the job of their choice. Sometimes face-threatening questions can be directed to job-seekers in order to demonstrated this authority of an expert by the motivational writers.

34.   my Uncle is the National legal Adviser to PDP all over Naija, since i graduated, I have not gotten any sensible job, nobody go help, na you go decided your future, do you want to end this year the way you spent last year? do you have dreams, goals or ambitions in life at all, don't you ever want to be your own boss?

(NLD 08: Stop this Craziness)

35.   look at Adenuga, look at Dangote, do you no envy them, do you not respect them? are you not motivated by their achievements, don't you want to be a creator of job instead   of a worker who waste all his life building another man's business for him?   they would use you from 25 years old up to 60 years old, you would live and die in a rented flat or bungalow at most..**is that success..?** wake up and let your situation challenge

(NLD 08: Stop this Craziness)

On the other hand, the use of questions by the unemployed graduates in the discussions was guarded by intimacy in a consciously cultivated relationship, seeking collaboration and solidarity (see extracts 9, 13, 18, 23, and so forth). These questions sought for confirmation and clarifications from other participants in the forums, thereby creating rapport and intimacy

Conclusion

In this study, it has been argued that questions were used for engagement purposes in job portal discussions. The two major kinds of questions that were predominantly used for this purpose – the *wh-* and *yes-no* questions represent the two extreme levels of complexity in interrogation – open-ended and closed-ended levels respectively. The two most prominent groups in the discussions used questions differently for engagement purposes. Motivational writers, who are typically job consultants and some employed graduates, assumed the position of experts and used questions to

engage the cognition of the reader and sometimes to threaten their face. Graduate job seekers tend to ask either questions that genuinely demanded answers to or seek to confirm issues agitating their minds about their unemployment situation and what I refer to as 'protest questions', which focus on social issues that the participants are daily interrogating in their discourse. This study therefore has shown that beyond being a forum for networking and getting relevant information about how to secure employment and advance in career, job portals have provided a space for interrogating and confronting social problems. It is also worthy of note that while activities of job scammers can easily fester through job portals, circulation of information, which job seekers obtain through their interrogation can minimise the rate at which people become victims of job scams. This underscores the importance of social awareness which is brought about by the sheer number of connected individuals through the digital media.

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Acknowledgement

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