Ecolinguistic Perspective: Dialectics of Language and Environment

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Abstract
It is an eclectic study of the dialectics of language and environment, which accounts for the eccentric use of linguistic and/or stylistic variations, in language use. It highlights the relationship that exists among linguistic, cultural and biological lines, in order to have integrated biocultural front: to safeguarding the biodiversity on earth. The paper is therefore built around macrolinguistics which is interdisciplinary study that accounts for a wide range of ecowarriors in different areas, who are trying to build bridges and synergies among the groups whose concern is on developing world languages and cultures to preserve our biohabitat. This paper seeks to explore language 'variationism' as a potential recourse in highlighting highly complex ecosystem, through the network of co-ordering of human cultural consciousness.

Introduction
The sociopsychological perception or makeup of a society is highly dependent on its world views and value systems. Society is formed based on these behavioural elements which form the social strata and spectrum of ideas and thoughts. And language is the epicentre of the expression of all these social realities or variables to give meaning to the specific ideas or
situation in a physical environment of a particular social domain. In fact, language is the centripetal and centrifugal force that controls the pendulous content of thought or culture of a given society. This helps in understudying the anthropological thought process of people especially their biodiversity of patterns in the body of their experiences, which reveal their social and physical (environment) situations. Dell Hymens author of The Scope of Sociolinguistics, states that there is more to the relationship between sound and meaning than is dreamt of in moral linguistics theory”, therefore, “in meaning there is social as well as referential import. Sociolinguistics has concerned itself with the topical issues which account for different historical, social praxis and as the part of the specific socio-cultural order. It is observed that varies forms of cultural determinism engender various forms of knowledge (science) and the overshadowing in toto. Bang and Door assert that:

Relations between scientific praxis and culture are dialectical. A dialectical relationship is one in which the participant in the relation co-condition each other and inter-act; one part (sic) dominates the others, and the relations, historically and dynamically; and the whole collapses if one part is annihilated, removed from the unity, or reduced to a critical seize (sic) of functional level(53).

Observable facts have shown that linguistic science is a life-science that studies human linguistic behaviour and communication in particular.
These communication variables are inherent in macrolinguistic level where the speaker's role could be understood within the system of language, especially during meaning decoding or perception. Ammaria Derni, author of the Sociolinguistic Paradigm: An integrationist Trend in Language Study, points out that for effective meaning perception there must be “overlapping interest from the study of language with other fields of enquiring like sociology, psychology, biology, ethnography and ecology. Linguistic behavior is explained in terms of one of the many disciplines that may interfere in language use” (21-22).

Meaning of a text is determined by the linguistic behaviour of the language context. The context includes the culture of the users and the situation of the language use. These paralinguistic elements are so indispensible in determining the meaning of a given text critically. This implicates that an utterance is not neutral rather; it is generated from various ideological experiences of the language users. Bloor and Bloor assert therefore:

The context of culture includes the traditions, the institutions, the discourse communities, the historical context and the knowledge base of the participants (which may, of course, be mono-cultural, cross-cultural or multi-cultural). Like situation, culture is under a process of continuous change. Cultural and situational elements are often so closely intertwined that it is extremely difficulty to see them in isolation (27).

So, we can extrapolate that the meaning of a text can be derived from the strong relationship with ideology.
This ideology can include “attitudes, set of beliefs, values and doctrines with respect to religion, political, social and economic life which shape the individual's and group's perception and through (sic) which reality is constructed and interpreted (Nwafor 25).

**Theoretical Framework**

Every functional element of language use is a function of an ideological perspective or different ideological perspectives. So, interactants in a given language community demonstrate variegated linguistic behaviour, which is closely related to their social positioning. In fact, Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on the social power that language is used to influence dominance, discrimination, manipulation and all other aspects of social inequality. Kress opines:

> No text is ever the text of a simple speaker or writer. All texts show traces of differing discourses, contending and struggling for dominance. Texts are therefore the sites of struggle and in being the sites of struggle texts are the sites of linguistic and cultural change. Individuals … are the bearers of and agents of that struggle (32).

CDA introduces the social concerns through a range of techniques which enable the readers to develop the “awareness of language and ideology and provides practice in analytic skills applied to various types of discourse” (Bloor and Bloor 1). It, therefore, enables the language users to be more sensitive to the functions of discourse as the centrigugal and centripetal force of society. More so, it enables the users to appreciate the deeper ways of understanding language to
persuade and manipulate the human person or social groups. As such, the language users will be aware of their “roles as participants in conventional discourses and thus to engage effectively in discourse that work towards social justice” (Bloor and Bloor 1). Van Dijk, therefore, asserts that:

CDA is a critical perspective on doing scholarship. It is so to speak, discourse analysis with attitude. It focuses on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse and domination (96).

Critical Discourse Analyst is always conscious of the contextual influences on the extraction of meaning though in some specific situation, it may not be feasible to have a full contextual analysis. Therefore, what he does is to identify those specific elements of the context which control and rekindle those interactional processes that occur in language, for example, language used to control other individual persons in order to direct or persuade them.

For analysts of a discourse, “meaning is best regarded as a complex of relations of various kinds between the component terms of a context of situation” (Firth 113). As said above, these component terms are the paralinguistic elements which influence the meaning of a specific text. These elements or components, according to Firth, are the setting of the event, the people involved (that is the participants)” and behaviour, including the speech, or conversation, that is taking place (Bloor and Bloor 26). Firth infers that:

The force and cogency of most language behaviour derives from the form grip it has an the ever-recurrent typical
situations in the life of social groups and in the normal social behaviour of the human animals living together in those groups (11)

**Linguistic Interdisciplinary Correlation.**
The influence of social structure on language has created a brilliant correlation between language and social context. This linguistic behavior has engendered many interdisciplinary relationships, for example, psycholinguistics which studies language as a product of interpersonal and intrapersonal motive which also explains linguistic behavior in correlation with the human mind and the different psychological mechanisms” (Derni 22). The relationship between language and biology helps to determine the biological traits of an individual person that enables him to enquire and equally make use in a particular verbal system of communication. These innate biological qualities can be subjected to objective analysis Ethnolinguistic vitality covers a wide range of “factors, objective and subjective, seen as determining the ability of a community to maintain its identity and form of speech in the face possibly contrary pressure” (Mathew 128). Besides, its assumed social status, size, etc are all subsumed into a macro society. These trigger the factors that link linguistic bahaviour to ethnographic findings which take language as a cultural phenomenon.

Ecolinguistics perceives language use as being unconstrained and unpredictable, in so far as it captures the interest of the physical environment.

Ecolinguistic criteria like the affiliation of language to of the identity of the speaker and the ecological structure he belongs to,
as a member of a particular speech community, living in a given environment characterised by identical social and cultural values and governed by an ecological milieu, do bring to light the conditions under which linguistic forms are used (Derni 22)

**Language and Social Milieu**

Language distinction helps the user to specify priorities in his language. For example, there are various words for the referent 'snow' in Eskimo, because they want to make linguistic distinction of various types of snow in their sociocultural environment. But, in our sociocultural environment, such distinction is not obtainable (Okafor 34). This is true perception of reality which takes its sway in the linguistic repertoire of the culture and subculture of a given environment. Sapir-Whorl hypothesis asserts that an individual person (learns or) acquires the language of his immediate culture or subculture and all its environmental realities or relationships that exist in that context “and this focus affects that category system in the memory” (Okafor 84). This hypothesis emphasises linguistic relativity and determinism. Linguistic relativity states that the world is interpreted in various ways by various cultures, and that these differences are encoded in languages. So, the world is divided up in arbitrary ways by language and experience. “Some cultures will perceive all water as being the same while others will see important differences between different kinds of water (such as rain, flood water and still water…)” (Singh 24). He further asserts that the difference in perception is quite obvious in the language, because the speakers express their
thoughts based on the experiential knowledge of the world around them. This develops and influences their lexical difference relatively (24).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis furthers states that the language we use grossly influences our thought processes. So, language provides the framework for our thoughts. “We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose us to certain choices of interpretation (qtd in Lucy 22). On that note, Singh states that “Once a linguistic system is in place … it influences the way in which members of that speech community talk about and interpret their world” (24). Halliday writes:

We should say that linguistic structure is the realisation of social structure, actively symbolising it in a process of mutual creativity. Because it stands as a metaphor for society, language has the property of not only transmitting the social order, but also maintaining and potentially modifying it. Variation in language is the symbolic expression of variation in society it is created by society, and helps to create society in its turn (78)

Mbieske affirms that “there is determination of social behavior by speech behaviour to some extent when one follows the tradition of Whorf” (186), which assets that “a change in language can transform our appreciation of the cosmos” (Whorf 190). Moreover, Sapir averres that to a large extent, the real world is “unconsciously built up on the language habits of the groups” (98), therefore, the social learning of language conditions the social behaviour and social perception (Bernstein 132)
It is believed the choice of language repertoire depends wholly on the social values of our worldview and social forces or demands of the language community. The general assumption is that the choice of a style depends on the speaker's characteristics and environment, in other words, on various intervening social factors; these represent varying restrictions for speech behaviour (Mbisike 186-87). Mbisike further reiterates that there is correlation between speech behaviour and social behaviour and this necessitates “a dialectal link between speech behaviour and social environment (187).

**Ecology and Language**

The study of language through the eye of macrolinguistics has brought in a wide range of concerts, which encompass almost all levels of human life. This makes the application of language study an elastic spectrum of analysis. So, language can be analyzed in different forms, as it reflects the communication variables. Ecolinguistics studies the environmental influence on the language; through physical variables that condition the mind of the speaker, in the expression of the universe and men's position within it. The term came into fore in the 1990s as a new concept in the language analysis, to account for the intra-personal, inter-personal and extra-personal relations of language and environment. “This new trend in the conceptualization of human language eventually leads to linguistic criteria to overlap with many other aspects that correlate with linguistic behaviour” (Derni 22).

Before 1990, Haugen coined the term language ecology to mean “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment” (57), this implies that language should be studied best in its social situation. Such situation
determines the appropriacy of the language forms to be used. To Derni, “This scrutiny of linguistic ecology determines relations between what is said or written and the circumstances under which discourse is produced” (26). So, going by the definition of Haugen, ecolinguistics accounts for environmental interactions or relationships, especially paralinguistic relationships of language and cosmic variable (environment).

**Communication and Social Change**
Language variation is the centripetal and centrifugal forces that influence the communicative roles of language. It subsumes and expresses the immediate developmental changes in order to achieve social changes. It is “used to direct or lead a group towards a particular cause of action; it can be used to motivate or create a conducive or enabling environment in which people would want to organize themselves as a group” or as an individual to influence the environment positively (Ndimele 136).

Communication is the epicentre that enables the human persons to understand each other and their environment in which they live in, “Earth Planet” (Salu 2). It is the soul and heart of every society for its survival and growth, because it is the only medium in which any activist can enshrine or entrench his values or aspiration in the fabric of society.

Ecowarriors use communication effectively in expressing the environmental degeneration caused by human and natural agents, which they use to highlight the cause and effect of the environmental degradation. This implies using the right words or language that can elicit attention that attract the interest of the relevant people or organization, to formulate change or regeneration. This therefore engenders partnership and participation for development of the human person that is his
physical well-being, in order to satisfy his social needs through the interaction of others (Ndimele 138) Similarly, according to Klapper, it:

… can lead to reinforcement to conversation, to minor and major adjustments of attitude, to long-term or short-term effect and to those which are unintended as well as those intended (qtd in Mboho 117).

Communication is an indispensible tool that fosters developmental processes in human dimension, which helps to achieving behavioural changes both in a human person and in society at large. Ndimele avers that social scientists believe that human behavior is a complex reality, and therefore the communication process that can influence behavioural change must be (138) “a complicated process of human action, reaction and interaction” (Gorre-Dale et al 5). Communication being the hub of information transfer therefore it is meant to change group action towards the well-being of an organisation” (Ndimele 138).

Ecolinguists use communication effectively as the important instrument for social change of which for them, it is the source for change (Farounbi 19). This change is geared towards a particular cause of action that can help “to motivate to create a conducive or enabling environment in which people would want to organize themselves as a group, so as to contribute their quota towards achieving set goals” (Ndimele 139). See what could have happened, if there is no communication, Monaghan (qtd in Akpan):

If we had no communication of information to us our lives would be static, there would be no growth, no transformation. We would not be
enlightened, we would live in total ignorance. Life would not be worth living … Without communication we humans… became impoverished, less strong, something less than humans and we lose the ability to extend ourselves and to change (3-4).

Language and Environment

The speculation above has shown that ecolinguistics deals with language in social milieu, which correlates language to society. Language does not only function in a physical environment but also in psychological, economic, social and other environmental-driven situations.

… ecology is therefore psychological: its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers. Another … is sociological its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication (Haugen 57).

The linguistic behaviour of a speaker is somewhat sociological and psychological therefore it allows linguistic relationship to exist between “physical and natural environments including the social milieu and the mental and the emotional press that necessitate certain choices in appropriate contexts” (Derni 27). It, in addition, emphasizes association of language ecology to language diversity. According to Derni, “this diversity is suggested through the use of the word minds in the plural form, since not all humans conceive thing and behave in the same way” (27). This can be further explained by Sapir-Whorf hypothesis as defined in Wikipedia:
The idea that the varying cultural concept and categories inherent in different languages affect the cognitive classification of the experienced world in such a way that the speakers of different languages think and behave differently because of it. This assertion presupposes that the way we use language is influenced by the way we “observe and classify physical phenomena”. Therefore, it would be a great advantage for one to be able to speak more than one language, because a multilingual can supplement one language or the other “thereby giving us more comprehensive view of reality than a monolingual can have” (Banjo 11-10). Ecolinguistics is multidisciplinary language study of language in interaction which interprets language behaviour in terms of cultural mores, social strata, political standpoint and other forms that are peculiar to a given environment. It is a trend that concerns itself with the interrelations between languages in the individual person's mind (that is, the sum total of his experiential knowledge) and in multilingual societies. Sapir further affirms with others that the association of linguistic elements with the physical and geographical areas within a social context makes the linguistic diversity and biodiversity.

… can act directly only on an individual and in those cases where we find that a purely environment influence is responsible for a communal trait, this common trait must be interpreted as a summation of distinct process of environmental influence on individuals … The important point remains that in actual society even the simplest environmental influence is either
supported or transformed by social force (13).

This is to corroborate what others have said, to appreciate the environment, the social domains must be determined by the sociocultural experiences of the community. These domains are influenced by the paralinguistic variables of sociology and geography. So for ecolinguist, environment involves both physical and societal phenomena in the universe. Natural environment is beyond the place where human lives, because his behaviour depends on the phenomena that are part of physical and geographical areas, which have profound influence in his linguistic inquires. “If the characteristic physical environment of a people is to a large extent reflected in its language, this is true to an even greater extent of its social environment” (Sapir 17).

The social environment, which is part of the physical environment under the influence of geographical characters, determines the communal traits. These traits are the social elements that determine the choice of certain linguistic forms or phraseology over some others. In affirming this, Haugen points out:

… might lead one's thoughts first of all to the referential world to which language provides an index. However this is the environment not of language but of its lexicon and grammar. The true environment of a language is the society that uses it as one of its codes. Language exists only in the mind of its users, and it only functions in relating these users to one another, and to nature, their social and natural environment (57).
The thrust of human language is inherent in natural social forces which are in effect “defined by individual use of language and psychological criteria” (Derni 23). Bang and Door propound Situation Model that explains out environmental constitution of human language. They employed three dimensional social praxis, which include an ideo-logical, a socio- logical and a bio-logical one. Ideo-logies accounts for the individual mental, cognitive and psychological aspects. Socio-logics concerns itself with the collections of individuals ranging from the family, which is the basics of social organization, to include members of neighborhood, speech communities, and whole societies: Bio-logics is about biological collectivity and coexistence between humans and other being (Derni 23)

**Ecoliterary Overtures**

The evolving globalisation which is drawing time-honoured values and order, and its attendant industrialisation has the entire human population in the web of scotching pressures. These pressures take their toll on ecosystem (natural habitat) by gradual depleting the spectrum of species of the life on earth.

Ecoliterary style engages language as the tool to combat, influence and sensitise the mind for readiness in protecting the future. Literary ecowarriors select to choose their language in order to aglow their core belief and cause. They connect non-human nature, by praising nature unrealistically and also laud human control of nature. Osundare states:

> Former-born (sic) peasant bred, I encountered dawn in the enchanted corridors of the forest suckled on the delicate aroma of healing herbs and the pearly drops of generous moons. Living in those early day (sic) was rugged
barns brimmed with yam fattened by merciful rains and the tempering fire of the upland sun (xi)

Here, Osundare connects reality and the relationship between the human person and his environment (non-human nature). He highlights the interaction of man with the physical aspects of nature.

“Forest Echoes”, one of Osundare collection of poetry, which depicts what is to come, where a human person wanders in the forest and was overwhelmed with nostalgic feelings of the natural landscape. Now, the forest is barren as a result of destruction of the land and the trees by loggers or lumbermen. He therefore bemoaned the situation that “these economic trees have been reduced to more stumps as a result of exploitation” (Jeff 68). Jeff further states that:

Osundare depicts man the land animal, (sic) plants (in fact all of nature) interacting and celebrating in one festive mood at this time of universal productivity. It is set in the past but it is meant to enhance our understanding of present (69)

Okpewho laments in the “Tides” the deprivation meted out to some communities in the Niger- Delta region by citing two industrial projects in the area. This is meant to improve the economy of the country but conversely it affects their traditional local economy (Bagu 188).

First there is the Kwarafa dam which has severely reduced the volume of water flowing down the Niger and so curtailed the fishing activity in the delta -and our people are nothing if not fishermen. Secondly the spillage of crude petroleum from oil rigs down there .... has proved an absolute menace to agricultural life.
for many farms are practically buried in thick layers of crude, which kills off many fishers (sic) and other forms of life (Okpewho 2)

**Recommendation /Conclusion**
Language is relevant to other areas of inquiry. As a result, its study has affected human behaviour, by shaping and reshaping the cause of history. Linguistic behaviour has affected positively in the improvement of the environment in an integrationist and the interactionist way. The hype, the consciousness and the campaign are ruffling the world leaders to do the something to safeguard the natural habitat and future of the world.
So language being part of the environment, its study should be contemplated and speculated within the confines of these three: intra, inter and extra- relations, in relation to the social properties of the environment.
Works Cited


