

Language Shift and Lexical Merger: a Case Study of Ilàjẹ and Apòì

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Abstract

Threat to indigenous languages largely occasioned by lexical borrowing and shift by small language groups has continued to compel investigations on the extent and implication of such phenomenon. This paper examines patterns of interaction between Apòì, an isolated dialect of Ijaw, and Ilàjẹ, an extant dialect of Yorùbá. Attention is drawn to the level of lexical borrowing, dialectal influence, and semantic narrowing. Data employed for the study were elicited from five native speakers of Apòì and Ilàjẹ who are also additive bilinguals of either Ilàjẹ/Apòì or Standard Yorùbá (SY)/Apòì, using one hundred selected items from the Ibadan 400-Wordlist of basic items. Findings reveal that Apòì borrowed 42 items directly from SY; 14 from Ilàjẹ with traces found in SY, 15 from Ilàjẹ without any linguistic trace to SY, 9 from central Yoruba dialects of Ijẹṣa and Mòbà, and 3 from SY with narrowed semantic interpretations. The paper concludes that Apòì is fast evolving as a hybrid of Ijaw and Ilàjẹ.

Keywords: Lexical borrowing and merger; semantic narrowing; hybridization; language shift; language contact.

1. Introduction

According to Crystal (2000), of the estimated 6,000 languages in the world, over 2,000 are found in Africa with a good number of them having substantial number of speakers. More than 50 of the languages are spoken by more than one million speakers each, and a couple of hundred languages are spoken by small groups of people. Only 600 of the 6,000 or so languages in the world are 'safe' from the threat of extinction. Another account says 6,703 separate languages were spoken in the world in 1996. Of these, 1000 were spoken in the Americas, 2011 in Africa, 225 in Europe, 2165 in Asia, and 1320 in the Pacific, including Australia. These numbers should not be taken at face value because information about many languages is lacking or outdated and very often, it is hard to distinguish between languages and dialects. However, most linguists agree that there are well over 5,000 living languages in the world and that, in about a century from now, many of the languages may be extinct (Batibo 2005). While some linguists believe the number may decrease by half, some others say the total could fall to mere hundreds as majority of the languages – most of which are spoken by a few thousands of people or less – may give way to languages like English, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Indonesian, Arabic, Swahili, and Hindi. By some estimates, 90% of the world's languages may vanish within the next century (Crystal 2000).

Lewis, Simons & Fennig (2015) listed 520 living and 7 extinct languages in Nigeria. Such threat to indigenous languages largely occasioned by lexical borrowings and shift makes it necessary to begin and continue to examine and document the extent of such borrowing from bigger languages. This forms part of the motivation for this study which aims at a careful examination of loans in Ìlàṣẹ̀ and Àpòì, especially those sourced from Standard Yorùbá (SY).

In this survey, five native speakers each from Ìlàṣẹ̀ and Àpòì constitute the subjects. The consultants are additive bilinguals of either Ìlàṣẹ̀/Àpòì or SY/Àpòì. One hundred (100) items were selected using Ibadan 400-wordlist of basic items based on 11 near-semantic fields namely; body parts, food items, fruits,

domestic items, places, natural items, verb, animal, persons, adjectives, and others. The data were elicited in a focus group for each of the dialects to provide opportunity for group interactions among the consultants in the quest to arrive at consensus on lexical equivalents in the dialects.

2. The Ìlájẹ people

Language is the unique identity of every speech community. It is the emblem of solidarity, the unifying and common factor for socio-linguistic loyalty. In other words, carelessness with one's language which may lead to total loss is tantamount to suicide attempt at ones identity.

All Nigerian indigenous languages can be referred to as mother-tongue in the geographical area where their native speakers traditionally reside (Bamgbose 1976). Coincidentally, in the southwestern part of Nigeria, Yorùbá is the major language, a kind of lingua-franca across the states of Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun. However, studies in sociolinguistics particularly in the area of dialectology reveal certain conflicting facts as to the status of certain language forms in that part of the country. Such include Ìlájẹ, northern Àkókó lects such as Arigidi and Igashi, and Awori, etc. (see Eades 1980, Peil 1991, Salako 1999, Oyebade & Agoyi 2004, Oyetade 2004 & 2007, and Fadoro 2010). Awobuluyi (1998) is a helpful resource on the classification of Yoruba dialects into the following five groups:

- i. North-West Yoruba [NWY] – Èkó and Àwòrì (Lagos), Ègbádò (Ogun), Òyó and Ònkò (Oyo), Òṣun (Oṣun), Ìgbómìnà (Kwara).
- ii. South-West Yoruba [SWY] – Sáàbẹ-Kétu (Anago), Ifẹ (Togo)
- iii. Central Yoruba [CY] – Ifẹ and Ìjẹṣà (Osun), Èkìtì and Mòbà (Ekiti)
- iv. North-East Yoruba [NEY] – Ìyàgbà, Ìjumu, Òwòrò, Òwè (Kogi)
- v. South-East Yoruba [SEY] – Ègbá and Ìjẹbú (Ogun), Ìlájẹ, Ìkálẹ, Òndó, Òwò and Òbà-Ìkàré (Ondo)

This classification indicates that Ìlàjẹ is a dialect of Yoruba. Findings in the course of this study have however also shown that contacts between Ìlàjẹ and Ijaw especially Àpòì and Arògbò dialects, occasioned by age long trading and fishing relationships among the linguistic communities, has played vital roles in influencing Ìlàjẹ to such an extent that there exist certain level of mutual intelligibility between Ìlàjẹ on the one hand and Àpòì and Arògbò dialects of Ijaw on the other. Therefore, one may conclude that contemporary Ìlàjẹ has a blend of Yorùbá, Àpòì, and Arogbo.

The Ìlàjẹ people are a distinct linguistic group of the Yorùbá stalk made up of 8 kingdoms:

- i. Mahin under Amapetu of Mahinland
- ii. Ugbò-ńlá which is under Olúgbò of Ugbò Kingdom
- iii. Aheri under the Maporure and Etikàn under the Onikàn of Etikàn
- iv. Odò-ńlá under Alagho of Odò-ńlá
- v. Obenla under Olubo of Obenla
- vi. Obe Ogbaro under the Odoka of Obe-Ogbaro
- vii. Ìgbókòdá under Olu of Ìgbókòdá and
- viii. Igbo-egunrin under Odede of Igbo-egunrin.

History has it that these groups left Ilé-Ifẹ, their place of origin, sometimes around the 10th century and settled around the Atlantic coastline of the present Ondo State. Thus, they are referred to as the 'sea savvy people'. Ìlàjẹ land is bounded by Ijẹbú to the west, Ikálẹ to the north, Itshẹkiri to the east, Àpòì and Arògbò Ijaw to the north-east. Atlantic Ocean formed the southern boundary. Ilajẹ has an area of 1,318 km² and a population of 290,615 as at the 2006 census. Ìgbókòdá, Ìlàjẹ Local Government headquarter, is fast becoming an international trade centre as its popular market attracts traders, not only from other parts of Nigeria, but also from neighbouring countries such as Togo, Benin Republic, Ghana and Cameroon. Gbòngán Ayétòrò is said to be a free town of sort where the different clans of Ìlàjẹ are mixed. This is because history has it that most offenders are exiled to Ayétòrò from all of the Ìlàjẹ kingdoms in the past as a form of punishment. Such offenders,

as a practice, usually ran to Ayétòrò to avoid being killed. Ayétòrò is therefore symbolic of the linguistic situation prevalent in refugee camps.

3. The Àpòì people

The Àpòì people, according to Iroju (2012), are ‘an ethnic group in the Southeastern part of Yorùbáland. Geographically, they share boundaries with the Yorùbá speaking groups of Ìkálè, Ìlàjè and non-Yorùbá-speaking group of Arogbo-Ijaw. Presently, the Àpòì sub-ethnic group of Ijaw has its homeland in Èṣẹ-odo Local Government Area of Ondo State. Figure 1 below shows border contacts between Ìlàjè LGA (with Ìgbókòdá as headquarter) and Èṣẹ-Odo LGA with (Ìgbekebo as headquarter). Obviously, there is no direct link road from Ìgbókòdá to Ìgbekebo due to the river that separates and leaves them with water transportation option only. The shaded portion constitutes the study area consisting of nine settlements; Igbobini, Ojuala, Ikpoki, Inikorogha, Oboro, Shabomi, Igbotu, Kiribo, and Gbekebo (Alagoa 2005).

Fig. 1: A map of Nigeria showing Ìlàjè and environs

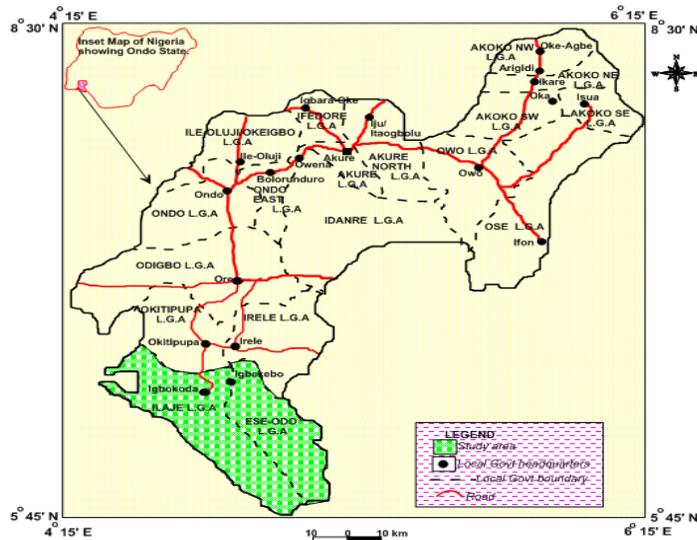


Fig. Map of Ondo State showing the study area.

Iroju (2012) identifies two popular accounts surrounding the origin of the Àpòì people. The first claimed they were of Yorùbá descent, while the other held that they were of Ijaw extraction.

Obviously, Àpòì could be grouped as a dialect of Yorùbá considering the level of lexical borrowing from Yorùbá. However, considering their history of migration from central Delta and their long period of settlement at Ùkómú, now known as Fùrùpaghà, it seems more appropriate not to regard Yorùbá but Ijò as the proto-language of Àpòì. The fact only remains that it has borrowed lexical items heavily from Yorùbá and other surrounding dialects of Yorùbá such as Ìlàjẹ and Ìkálẹ̀ on the one hand, and Arògbò dialect of Ijaw on the other. Iroju (2012) therefore claims that Àpòì may be genetically classified under Ijaw language which points to it as having the same ancestral language with other Ijaw dialects. Alagoa (2005) maintains that migrants from Eastern Àpòì clan from Bayelsa state established the western Àpòì clan in Ondo state hundreds of years ago. This may however be difficult to substantiate given facts deducible from Apoi linguistic data elicited for this study.

4. Contact situation

Languages come in contact for various reasons. Batibo (2005:10) identified pastoral migration, trade contact, demographic pressure, politically motivated and religious wars as factors of language contact in most West African societies. He cited the examples of Peul or Fulfude, ‘... who roamed across many parts of West Africa in search of grazing grounds’ and the Maasai that ‘... moved constantly in many parts of East Africa in search of better grazing land’. Another example Batibo gave is the influence of inter-ethnic trade and commerce in bringing many groups together which was obvious in the wide use of Dyula and Songhay as trading languages in many parts of West Africa.

Instances of contact of indigenous languages with colonial or foreign languages are commonplace in Nigeria. This has accounted for the various reasons Nigerian languages are dying by the day, as evident in studies on linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992). In support of this, Bamgbose

(2000) maintains that many parents would not even mind if the level of fluency of their children in their own mother tongue is inadequate. This is because these (indigenous) languages are not accorded much prestige if any in terms of social advancement, job opportunities or the wider world. Hence, many African Union declarations and regional resolutions on the promotion of indigenous languages have not been given enough attention.

In the same vein, a situation of linguistic cannibalism may occur, a scenario where an indigenous language oppresses, suppresses, dominates and causes another indigenous language to die (Bamigbade 2008). It is incontrovertible that the kind of relationship that exists among human languages with the specific challenge in multilingual society with strong passion for language loyalty is one of the strongest motivations for sociolinguistic investigations, especially, studies on language choice, use, and attitude. Banjo (1995:186) asserts that

there is a serious attitudinal problem militating against the status of the indigenous languages vis-a-vis English and, unfortunately, those who should be in the vanguard of linguistic enlightenment perpetuate the wrong attitudes. The general populace is being encouraged to go on believing that English is the only possible language of modernity while the indigenous languages are those, at best, of atavism.

5. Language shift

Fasold (1984) sees language maintenance as the other side of the coin of language shift. Fasold maintains that both are long-term collective results of language choice. Language shift occurs when a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one. According to Fishman (1991), language shift and language maintenance should go hand in hand in that the essence of studying language shift should be to reverse the situation and stabilize the threatened language.

In his own view, Edwards (1994) posits that the shift has to be a complete movement from one language variety to another without retaining the first in some bi-dialectal or bilingual accommodation. In other words, when a community gives up a language completely in favour of another or begins to choose a new language (L2) in domains formerly reserved for the old (L1), language shift is in progress. Crystal (1997) defines language shift as a gradual or sudden move from the use of one language to another. Batibo (2005: 87) explains language shift as ‘a situation when speakers abandon their language, willingly or under pressure, in favour of another language, which takes over as their means of communication and socialization’.

6. Data presentation and discussion

In this section, we present the elicited data employed for the study reported in this article.

Table 1: Evidence of lexical shift

| S/NO. | ENGLISH | YORÙBÁ | ÌLÀJẸ | ÀPỌÌ |
|----------|-------------------|--------|-----------|---------------------------|
| A | Body Parts | | | |
| 1 | Head | Orí | Oríhó | Orí [YOR] ¹ |
| 2 | Hair (head) | Irun | Ìronorího | Iron [ILA.I] ² |
| 3 | Eye | Ojú | Ojú | Ojú [YOR] |
| 4 | Ear | Etí | Etí | Etí [YOR] |
| 5 | Nose | Imú | Imọn | Imọ [YOR] |
| 6 | Mouth | Ẹnu | Ẹrun | Ẹnu [YOR] |
| 7 | Tooth | Eyín | Eyín | Eghín [ILA.I] |

¹. (Yorùbá), Items borrowed from Yorùbá

². (ILA. I), Items borrowed from Ìlájẹ dialect

| | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|----------|------------|----------------------------|
| 8 | Tongue | Ahòn | Iwuan | Ìwón [ILA.I] |
| 9 | Jaw | Àgbòn | Ìgbàn | Ìgbàn [ILA.I] |
| 10 | Chin | Èrèké | Èbáctí | Ìgbàn [ILA.I] |
| 11 | Neck | Orùn | Oràn | Oràn [ILA.I] |
| 12 | Heart | Okàn | Okàn | Okàn [YOR] |
| 13 | Blood | Èjè | Èjè | Èjè [YOR] |
| 14 | Thigh | Itan | Àgbàlútan | Babari [ÀPÓÌ] ³ |
| 15 | Leg | Èsè | Èhèn | Ehè [ILA.II] ⁴ |
| B | Food Items | | | |
| 16 | Food | Óunjẹ | Eijẹ | Ejije [ILA.I] |
| 17 | Soup | Ọbẹ | Ọbẹ | Bíní [ÀPÓÌ] |
| 18 | Meat | Èran | Èran | Èrẹn [YOR] |
| 19 | Salt | Osa/iyò | Oun | Iyò [YOR] |
| 20 | Yam | Iṣu | Isun | Uṣu [MOB] ⁵ |
| 21 | Cassava | Ègégé | Kpúkúrú | Kpúkúrú [ILA.II] |
| 22 | Maize | Àgbàdo | Ìgbàdo | Àgbàdo [YOR] |
| 23 | Beans | Èwà | Èwà | Èwà [YOR] |
| 24 | Pepper | Ata | Ita | itábó [ÀPÓÌ] |
| 25 | Plantain | Dodo | àbàtíyàn | Ìbàtíyàn [ILA.II] |
| C | Fruits | | | |
| 26 | Banana | Ọgèdè | Ọgèdè | Èso [L.NAR.] ⁶ |
| 27 | Orange | Ọsàn | Ọro | Àlumóyín [ÀPÓÌ] |
| 28 | Coconut | Àgbòn | Kòkòdià | Ìkòkòdià [ILA.II] |
| D. | Domestic Items | | | |
| 29 | Stick | Igi | Igi | Igi [YOR] |
| 30 | Firewood | Igiùdáná | Igiiná | Igiùdáná [MOB] |
| 31 | Charcoal | Èédú | Èdúndún | Èdídú [YOR] |
| 32 | Fire | Iná | Iná | Uná [MOB] |
| 33 | Smoke | Èéfín | Èfífí | Èéfín [YOR] |
| 34 | Water pot | Amu | Úsà | Úsà [ILA.II] |
| 35 | Cooking pot | Ikòkò | Ìsà | Ukòkò [MOB] |
| 36 | Grinding stone | Ọlọ | Ọmọlọ | Ọkúta [L.NAR.] |
| 37 | Pestle | Ọmọ ọdo | ỌmàỌgúnýán | Ọgíyán [ILA.II] |
| 38 | Knife | Ọbẹ | Ọbẹ | Ọbẹ [YOR] |
| 39 | Machete | Ada | Ìdàbó | Ìdà-èpó [ILA.II] |
| 40 | Mat | Èní | Èní | Èní [YOR] |
| 41 | Trap | Pàkúté | Ọpà | Obiriki [ÀPÓÌ] |
| E. | Places | | | |
| 42 | House | Ilé | Ilé | Ulé [MOB] |
| 43 | Village | Abulé | Ilu-ibile | Àgó [ÀPÓÌ] |
| 44 | Well | Kànga | Àgè | Kanga [YOR] |
| 45 | Road | Ọnà | Ọnà | Ọnà [YOR] |

³. (ÀPÓÌ), Items that cannot be traced to either Yorùbá or Ìlájẹ

⁴. (ILA. II), Items borrowed from Ìlájẹ with no trace to Yorùbá

⁵. (MOB), Items borrowed from Ìjẹsà/Mòbà dialect

⁶. (L.NAR.), Items whose meaning has been narrowed to an object which is a part of the general object

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| | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 46 | Market | Qjà | Qjà | Òbòn [ÀPÓÌ] |
| 47 | Farm | Oko | Oko | Oko [YOR] |
| 48 | Wilderness | Aginjù | Aginjù | Elujù [ÀPÓÌ] |
| | F. Natural Items | | | |
| 49 | River | Odò | Eri | Ere [ILA.II] |
| 50 | Mountain | Orí-òkè | Orókè | Òkítù [L.NAR.] |
| 51 | Rain | Òjò | Ojo | Qjà [ÀPÓÌ] |
| 52 | Sun | Òòrùn | Orun | Òòrùn [YOR] |
| | G. Verb | | | |
| 53 | Work | Iṣé | Iṣé | Uṣé [MOB] |
| 54 | Sleep | Sùn | Hùn | Hùn [ILA.I] |
| 55 | Cook | Dáná | Hehun | Hehun [ILA.II] |
| 56 | Remember | Rántí | Yèrè | Yèrèmi [ILA.II] |
| | H. Animal | | | |
| 57 | Animal | Eranko | Eran | Ìdéregbè [MOB] |
| 58 | Goat | Ewúré | Èkéregbè/ikéegbè | Èkéregbè [ILA.II] |
| 59 | Sheep | Àgùntàn | Àgùntàn | Àgùntàn [YOR] |
| 60 | Snail | Ìgbín | Ìgbén | Ùngbín [MOB] |
| 61 | Dog | Ajá | Ajá | Ajá [YOR] |
| 62 | Cat | Olóngbò/Músù | Omade | Músùrú [YOR] |
| 63 | Rat | Èkuté | Ekútélé | Ekútélé [ILA.I] |
| 64 | Snake | Ejò | Ejò | Ejò [YOR] |
| 65 | Mosquito | Èfon | Emurén | Òtònbòlò [ÀPÓÌ] |
| 66 | Bird | Èyè | Èyè | Èyè [YOR] |
| | I. Persons Items | | | |
| 67 | Person | Èèyan | Aráyé | Iráyé [ILA.II] |
| 68 | Old person | Arúgbó | Arúgbó | Arígbó [MOB] |
| 69 | Name | Orúko | Orúko | Orúko [YOR] |
| 70 | Husband | Okọ | Okọ | Okọ [YOR] |
| 71 | Wife | Ìyàwó | Aya | Ìyàwó [YOR] |
| 72 | Father | Bàbá | Iba | Bàbá [YOR] |
| 73 | Mother | Ìyá/Màámi | Iye | Màámi [YOR] |
| 74 | Child | Ọmọ | Ọma | Oma [ILA.I] |
| 75 | Children | Àwọn-ọmọ | Àhan-oma | Àranomà [ILA.I] |
| 76 | Son | Ọmọ okúnrin | Omaokónrẹn | Omaokinrin [ILA.I] |
| 77 | Daughter | Ọmọ obìnrin | Omaobìrẹn | Omaobinrin [ILA.I] |
| 78 | In-law | Àna | Àna | Àna [YOR] |
| 79 | Friend | Ọré | Ọré | Ọré [YOR] |
| 80 | King | Ọba | Ọba | Ọba [YOR] |
| | J. Adjectives | | | |
| 81 | Wet | Rẹ | Rẹ | Rẹ [YOR] |
| 82 | Dry | Gbẹ | Gbẹ | Gbẹ [YOR] |
| 83 | Hot | Gbóná | Gbóná | Gbóná [YOR] |
| 84 | Cold | Tutù | Titù | Tutù [YOR] |
| 85 | New | Titun | Titan | Titan [ILA.I] |
| 86 | Good | Dára | Hàn | Ohàn [ILA.II] |
| 87 | Bad | Burú | Éhàn | Gburú [YOR] |
| 88 | Heavy | Wúwo | Wíwo | Wówo [YOR] |
| 89 | Full | Kún | Kón | Kán [YOR] |

| | | | | |
|----------|---------------|---------|---------|------------------|
| 90 | Strong | Lágbára | Óní | Óní [ILA.II] |
| K | Others | | | |
| 91 | Money | Owó | Owó | Ogbó [ÀPÒÌ] |
| 92 | Door | Ilẹ̀kùn | Ilẹ̀kùn | Ilẹ̀kùn [YOR] |
| 93 | Story | Ìtàn | Ìtàn | Ìtàn [YOR] |
| 94 | Harmattan | Oyẹ́ | Àkpàkpà | Àkpàkpà [ILA.II] |

- i. [YOR] – {42 Items}
- ii. [ILA. I] – (Ìlájẹ I): Items borrowed from Ìlájẹ dialect with structural similarity with the Yorùbá equivalent { 14Items}
- iii. [ILA. II] – (Ìlájẹ II): Items borrowed from Ìlájẹ dialect with no trace to SY {15Items}
- iv. [MOB] – (Mòbà): Items borrowed from Ìjẹ̀sà/Mòbà dialect of Yorùbá {9 Items }
- v. [ÀPÒÌ] – (Àpòì): Items that cannot be traced to either SY or Ìlájẹ {11 Items}
- vi. [L.NAR.] – (Lexical Narrowing): Items whose meanings have been narrowed to an object which is a part of the general object (3 Items)

6.1. Discussion

From the data presented in Table 1, seven categories of lexical forms were observed in Àpòì as enumerated above, though items borrowed from SY are more attested in Àpòì. Items borrowed from SY are 42 in numbers from the selected 94 items. This is followed by items borrowed into Àpòì from Ìlájẹ with structural similarity with the SY equivalent. This category labeled [ILA.I] has 14 items based on the number of items represented in our data, for instance, *omọ* in SY and *oma* ‘child’ [T1, 74]⁷ in Ìlájẹ and consequently in Àpòì.

Eleven items were observed from the data in Àpòì not to have any structural relationship with either SY or Ìlájẹ. This group is classified as [ÀPÒÌ]. We conclude that items in this category must be of Ijaw origin of which Àpòì is a dialect. This is attested in some other dialects of Ijaw considering the comparative data in Table 2 below, adapted from Iroju (2012).

⁷Table 1, item 74

Table 2: Ijaw/Apoi comparative lexical data

| S/N | ENGLISH | IJAW | ÀPÒÌ |
|-----|------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Thigh | Buwoabiri | Babiri |
| 2. | A kind of fish | Ubuiyoro | Ibiyoro |
| 3. | Snake fish | Agbaaru | Ogboro |
| 4. | Court | Ugulawari | Ugula |
| 5. | Name of town | Ugbobini | Igbobini |
| 6. | Name of fish | Tan iyoro | Tanyoro |
| 7. | Fish trap | Ijaw-ite | Ijaw-ite |
| 8. | Water grass | Tuke | Tuke |
| 9. | Fish trap | Aridi | Ariri |
| 10. | Edible insect | Okuka | Okuka |
| 11. | Type of fish | Eba | Eba |
| 12. | Fish trap | Igun | Igun |
| 13. | Mosquito Net | Ibapo | Ibapo |
| 14. | Water grass | Itebetebe | Tebetebe |
| 15. | Type of wine | Ijawwuru | Ijawwuru |
| 16. | Lantern | Otukpa | Otupa |
| 17. | Rib | Agasara | Agasara |
| 18. | Coconut | Ikokodia | Kokodia |
| 19. | Fish trap | Obiriki | Ibiriki |
| 20. | Type of fish | Ikpiri | Ikpiri |
| 21. | Type of tree | Iupo | Iupo |
| 22. | Leech | Akula | Akula |
| 23. | Chain | Ogioro | Ogioro |
| 24. | Tilapia fish | Odia | Odia |
| 25. | Type of fish | Epele | Epele |
| 26. | Type of fish | Iyoro | Iyoro |
| 27. | Wilderness | Aluju | Eluju |
| 28. | Tortoise | Lukeluke | Alukeluke |
| 29. | Weaving material | Idorou | Idorou |
| 30. | Mud | Okpoto | Kpotokpoto |
| 31. | Water Thorn Leaf | Kokorou | Kukoro |
| 32. | Mosquito | Òtònbòlò | Òtònbòlò |
| 33. | Market | Òbòn | Òbòn |

Group (iii), named [ILA.II] has 15 items that are directly borrowed from Ìlajẹ of which no trace of linguistic form could be linked to SY at all. Such items include *kòkòdìà* ‘coconut’ [T1, 24 & T2,18]⁸, *hehun* ‘cook’ [T1,55]⁹, *èkéregbè/ikéegbè* ‘goat’ [T1,58]¹⁰, *eri* ‘river’ [T1,49]¹¹, *àbàtíyàn* ‘plantain’ [T1,25]¹², and *kpúkpúrú* ‘cassava’ [T1,21]¹³. Further research is needed in this area to identify the contact situation from which such lexical items emerged.

Group (iv) reveals 9 items in the Àpòì data that are borrowed from Ijesha/Mòbà dialect of SY. These items manifest substitution of the initial vowel [i] which is a common phonological phenomena in some CY and SEY dialects such as Mòbà and Ijesha, e.g. the substitution of initial vowel [i] for [u] in *isẹ* to *usẹ* ‘work’ [T1,53]¹⁴, *ilé* to *ulé* ‘house’ [T1,42]¹⁵, *ikòkò* to *ukòkò* ‘water pot’ [T1,34]¹⁶, *iná* to *uná* ‘fire’ [T1,32]¹⁷, *igi-idáná* to *igi-ùdáná* ‘firewood’ [T1,30]¹⁸ and *isu* to *usu* ‘yam’ [T1,20]¹⁹. Group (vi) attests 3 lexical items that are SY words but with extended meaning. For instance *òkitì* [T3,1]²⁰, *èso* [T3,2]²¹ and *òkúta* [T3,3]²² have referents in SY as ‘heap made by termites for home’, ‘general name for fruits’ and ‘all kind of stones’, respectively. However, in Ìlajẹ, the meaning has been narrowed to mean ‘mountain’, ‘banana’ and ‘grinding stone’. This is

⁸Table 1, item 24 and Table 2, item 18

⁹Table 1, item 55

¹⁰Table 1, item 58

¹¹Table 1, item 49

¹²Table 1, item 25

¹³Table 1, item 21

¹⁴Table 1, item 53

¹⁵Table 1, item 42

¹⁶Table 1, item 34

¹⁷Table 1, item 32

¹⁸Table 1, item 30

¹⁹Table 1, item 20

²⁰Table 3, item 1

²¹Table 3, item 2

²²Table 3, item 3

illustrated in Table 3:

Table 3: SY/Ìlajẹ comparative meaning data

| S/N | Item | SY meaning | Ìlajẹ meaning |
|-----|-------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. | òkìtì | heap made by termites for home | mountain |
| 2. | èso | general name for fruits | banana |
| 3. | òkúta | all kind of stones | grinding stone |

7. Conclusion

The paper has attempted to show that there is evidence of language shift and endangerment in Àpòì. It drew attention to factors such as migration and isolation of Àpòì in Yorùbáland. The noted danger primarily is from the domination of Standard Yorùbá, the regional lingua franca in Southwest Nigeria and most especially, Ìlajẹ, which is the language of immediate community (LIC) in the locale. These coupled with the fact that SY is more prestigious and has educational, economical and political advantage, are factors pointing to the negative effects of language dominance. The study therefore showed that Àpòì has lent itself to large lexical borrowing from SY and other dialects of Yoruba such as Ìlajẹ, Mòbà, and Ìkálẹ̀. It suggested and concluded that Àpòì is fast emerging as a hybrid of Ijaw and Ìlajẹ with much of the findings having implications for language shift and endangerment of Àpòì. Further future study with more extensive data may reveal more on the lexicostatistics count and cognate percentages with reference to the genetic and historical relationship between Àpòì, Standard Yorùbá, and other dialects of Yorùbá.

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