

LANGUAGE, A CULTURAL IDENTITY OF COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDY OF SÉNOUFO AND MALINKÉ PEOPLES

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ABSTRACT: An exploratory study shows that the language a community speaks determines who he is and what he thinks. To be stick to our case of study, Sénoufo and Malinké people who are according to geography respectively farmers and traders can be identified as such through their speech; the metaphors of their languages. The question put forward by such an observation is the way communities can be identified through their speech. The purpose of this paper is to point out the linguistic characteristics that expose the identity of Sénoufo and Malinké people. The methodological approach used to carry out this work is based on an interview. Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis is the theory that will be used to elucidate the relationship between language, culture and identity; that is language and culture constitute the identity of a people. The intended results show that as well as Sénoufo and Malinké people are identified by their sector of activity, in that order as courageous farmers and persevering traders, they are also identified as such through the metaphors of their language.

KEYWORDS: language, culture, identity, metaphors, behaviour, thought, community

RESUME

Les communautés Ivoiriennes sont très souvent identifiées par leurs secteurs d'activités en tant que commerçants, paysans, tisserands, éleveurs. Une étude exploratoire a montré que le langage détermine l'identité et la pensée d'un peuple. Pour rester focalisé sur notre cas d'étude, les Sénoufos et les Malinkés qui sont selon la Géographie paysans et commerçants peuvent être identifiés en tant que tels à travers les métaphores de leurs langues. La question qui découle de cette observation est comment les communautés peuvent être identifiées à travers leurs langues ? L'objectif de cet article est de montrer les caractéristiques linguistiques qui exposent l'identité des peuples Sénoufos et Malinkés. L'approche méthodologique utilisée pour mener à bien ce travail est basée sur un entretien. La théorie de Sapir-Whorf est celle qui est utilisée pour expliquer la relation entre le langage, la culture et l'identité. Cette étude postule que les Sénoufos et les Malinkés, identifiés respectivement comme des paysans et des commerçants, et

qualifiés de courageux et persévérants, sont également identifiables en tant que tels à travers les métaphores de leurs langues.

Mots Clés : langage, culture, identité, métaphores, comportement, pensée, communauté

INTRODUCTION

Defined as the whole features attributed to a person or a community and influencing his behaviour and social relations, the meaning of identity still remains divided as far as the viewpoints are concerned. But this sociologic standpoint seems to better tackle the notion of identity developed in the frame of this work. In Côte d'Ivoire, communities are generally identified by their activity sectors which determine them. Thus, Baoulé and Sénoufo people are identified as farmers, Malinkés' as traders'; just to quote the few, depending on their Geographic location. However, it is worth noticing that they are also identified as such through their culture. This goes along with D. Throsby (2001, p.4) who stated that culture should be used in anthropological or sociological framework to portray the characteristics of a group as in form of signs, symbols, texts, language, artefacts, oral and written tradition and by other means. Talking about culture is also tackling language. As such, they are identified by their language. A. Coultas (2003, p.18) asserted: " The way we use language also mirrors our own personality, (...) and we each try to make sure not only that we are using language appropriately within a particular context but also that we are being true to ourselves ". In other words, the language a community speaks determines who he is and what he thinks. Language is the canal by means of which culture is transmitted to the people. In order to better emphasizing on our case study, Sénoufo and Malinké people who are according to geography respectively farmers and traders can be identified as such through their speech; the metaphors of their languages. Metaphors are pieces of speech that convey information, communicate abstractions and help to understand new concepts. The question that comes out from this observation is: how can communities be identified through their speech?

The purpose of this paper is to point out the linguistic characteristic that exposes the cultural identity of Sénoufo and Malinké people. In other words, how their languages mirror their thought and culture. The methodological approach used to carry out this work is based on an interview that will allow collecting natural speech that are in the form of metaphors. Sapir-

Whorf Hypothesis is the theory that is used to elucidate the relationship between language, culture and identity; that is language and culture constitute the identity of a people. The intended results show that as well as Sénoufo and Malinké people are identified by their sector of activity, in that order as farmers and traders, they are also identified as such through the metaphors of their language. From these results, we will implement a linguistic policy to sustain and promote Ivorian local languages through the constant teaching and use of metaphors at home since; it is difficult to teach all of them at school. In that respect, every native speaker of Ivorian will be aware of his language metaphors.

1. Methodology

1.1. Research Methodology

In order to know the way communities can be identified by their speech, specifically, the way Sénoufo and Malinké people are identified by the language they speak, two variables have been considered. These variables are ethnic group and metaphors. The relation between these two variables is a relation of membership. Each metaphor belongs to a given ethnic group.

1.1.1. Ethnic Groups and Participants

Ten participants categorized in five per ethnic group took part in the collection of data. The participants were selected randomly and their age, educational background and sex were not taken into consideration because in that way, we can know the impact of metaphors on users.

The choice of two different ethnic groups was motivated by my interest in investigating how metaphors can allow recognizing a community's sector of activity and the qualities that determine it.

1.1.2. Data

The data of this research paper are metaphors from the chosen ethnic groups. These metaphors mirror their thought and culture and by so doing reveal their identity. Originally regarded as rhetorical devices, metaphors use images, stories or tangible things to represent less tangible things or an intangible quality or idea. Metaphors are comparisons. They make

comparison between two unlike things and at the same time, show similarities in one important way between those two things that are not alike in most ways.

Metaphors are not only used as style in language, but also used as thought and action. In fact, metaphors shape the way we think about the concept we are describing. Human conceptual system (thought and action) is metaphorically structured in nature. Like this, it is our thought or our action which are metaphorical in nature. Metaphors convey information, communicate abstractions, and help to understand new concepts. The most important to retain is that metaphor is not only a matter of language, thought also is metaphorical. This idea is better explain by the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. The theory explains that one can be determined by the language he speaks and holds that language determines thought; that is one can only think in the category of the language which allows him to think.

In expressing the hypothesis, E. Sapir (1970, p.69) mentions that “human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity(...) but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society”. For him, life in society cannot be possible without language. He thinks that language is not only a means for ensuring communication among members of that society. The society itself is mainly built up on the language habits of the members of that society. In the same line of idea, A. Coultas (2003, p.18) thinks that the way communities use language reflects their personality. She notes it in these words " The way we use language also mirrors our own personality, beliefs, attitudes and values and we each try to make sure not only that we are using language appropriately within a particular context but also that we are being true to ourselves". From this standpoint, different societies built up on different social realities, see and understand the societies differently. Thus, E. Sapir (1970, p.69) indicates “the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds”.

In this work, data in the form of metaphors are collected from participants selected randomly. Those metaphors are taken from two languages that are Sénoufo and Malinké.

1.2. Method and Data Collection

1.2.1. Method of Data Collection

The research of metaphors requires a survey of the population. So the participants were submitted to a guided interview. This interview concentrated on questions related to relevant questions on metaphors.

The choice of the population was motivated by my interest in investigating whether or not Sénoufo, as courageous and agricultural people and Malinké, as traders and motivated people who want to be rich at any cost, can be recognized as such just through their language.

I conducted the interview. Appointments were faced with each interviewee at his residence, office or the place he himself gives appointment. It had not been so easy since, in the most cases, data were obtained after many failed appointments. Another difficulty was the fact that certain informants were illiterate and so we needed a translator. We met the interviewees in different places: Bouaké and Botro.

1.2.2. Presentation of Data

The study of the relationship between language and identity through the impact of metaphors on Sénoufo and Malinké people has permitted us to conduct a survey among the population in accordance with their ethnic groups. The objective is to establish a relation between metaphors from local languages and their identity. From the two languages understudied, we have interviewed ten participants.

The results of the survey have permitted us to identify about thirty metaphors. But, we find among the thirty, ten metaphors suitable for the explanation of the relationship between language and identity. Table I gives the different ethnic groups of the survey and the number of metaphors collected.

Table I: Number of metaphors

Ethnic groups	Number of metaphors collected
Sénoufo	5
Malinké	5

Personal Construction

The metaphors are transcribed phonetically using the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA) in order to keep the originality of the languages, and translated in English. They are presented in the following table:

Table II: Metaphors from Sénoufo

metaphors	Translation into English	Meaning
wo dʒæræwæ nĩ dʒãrĩ di fælo	The beauty of a young man is work	Encouragement of young man at work.
tæræ ko te fælæ fãnyĩ	Soil never dupes	Encouragement and trust in agriculture to return to agricultural works
mæ dʒo mō bæwĩ pɛɛ lɔnerenã wĩ welĩ mĩ wĩ kã wĩlĩ wĩtĩŋ mĩ nã mĩ wĩ pɛɛ	The well-fed ram is given a price	Good work is given a value.
mɔ æ gbã koro kæ:æ mæ si zãyimi kækãmæ kã segi ni i	you cannot stay home and know that it rains in farm	you cannot understand something without getting involved in it
sele:lige ŋpɔrɔ tiele:lige n æ	a far farm is better than a far market	success requires hardwork

Personal Construction

Table III: Metaphors from Malinké

Metaphors	Translation into English	Meaning
sɛgɛ kwɔ e ɛræ le ye	After suffering it is happiness	Work brings happiness
nĩ be borĩ tɔnɔ le kɔ	Soul follows interest	Man life is defined by objectives to be followed
nĩ tæ:mã mã bæ, bro fri te se kæ bã	As long as walking is not ended, arms will not stop swinging	Man life is a constant fight to happiness
sɔbɛyæ tɔnɔ le ye sɪnĩ le ye	Seriousness is for tomorrow	What someone does determines him in the future

ni i mā sæ, ko bε ɖɜurɔ bi i læ	If you do not die, everything can happen	Man has right to what he need and when he is alive
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Personal Construction

2. Results and Discussion

The collected data allow us establishing the relationship between language and identity, in other words, how can people be identified by the language they speak? In order to answer this question, it seems important to establish the relationship between language, thought and culture.

2.1. Language, Thought and Culture: people Identity

The study of the phenomena of language, thought, and culture demonstrates that they are strongly interwoven. E. Sapir (1921) shows the conscious characteristic of language. According to him language is purely human; it is the product of human's mind and not instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions by means of voluntary produced signs. Language is a code used by human to interact; it is the means by which people express their thought and culture. E. Sapir (1970:6) defines language as the perfect medium which communicates a community culture and thought. The relationship is evident so that language cannot be conceived separately from culture. He asserts that: "the content of every culture is expressible in its language" p.6. Language is so to say the very instrument which exposes culture and so reveals people's identity.

H.D. Brown (1994) considers language and culture as two coterminous phenomena. For him language cannot be imagined without culture and vice versa, for, using them separately makes them loose their significance. Furthermore, language and culture cannot be defined independently from thought.

By the same token, for A. Coultas (2003) language is the means by which people of the same community share customs and culture. It cannot be used out of the realm of society since it is the society which makes out their custom by means of language. It is worth mentioning that the rules of these societies (some written or oral rules) affect the way one use language in both spoken, written and electronic. For him, language is context bound. Therefore, language

and social contexts are how we use language to relate to other people within our communities. As it is said above, language is a means of communication, but it is used depending on the context within which it is used. Each situation and place in which the user finds himself, requires him to use language in a subtly different way, hence the use of metaphors.

It is reasonable to assert that there is a link between language, culture, and, thought and they are interdependent since it is through language that culture is taught. Therefore, culture is the externalisation of thought through language use. Language is not simply a tool for communication but also the carrier of the entire worldviews, the repository of culture and identity. Each individual belongs to a special group and he reflects his own thought and culture. He reflects in fact, the thought and the culture of the whole group. Following this analysis, it is Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which highlights the close link between language and thought.

2.2. Language, a cultural Identity

Life in society is governed by a process of Socialisation which is the process by which we learn how to behave within our society according to the viewpoint of A. Coultas 2003. However, in this process of socialisation, language is the means by which people of the same community share their customs and culture. Language is used in many different contexts and for many different purposes. In our case of study, language is used through metaphors in order to give advice, in order to teach behaviour. This way of doing is proper to each community; it represents their culture, their cultural identity. It is what they live by according to G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980); that is, the realities they experience in everyday life.

The two chosen communities in the frame of this research work display numbers of metaphors in their languages that for us constitute a great sign of recognition wherever they are. They use them by translating them in any language like in French, the official language, but they are straightaway identified by their thought which is most of time linked to their situation of farmers and traders and also to their personality as correspondingly courageous and persevering.

2.3. Language as Sénoufo and Malinké Cultural Identity

2.3.1. Language as Sénoufo cultural Identity

Sénoufo people are from North of Côte d'Ivoire and they are known as farmers according to what their geographical location and what their main activity describes. However, as it is said above, that human conceptual system is metaphorically structured; it just means that our actions and thought are metaphorical in nature. These metaphors convey information or describe new concepts which are in reality their thought and their culture and consequently reveal their identity. Thus, Sénoufo people are identified as farmers through the metaphors of their language.

Like all the other people of Côte d'Ivoire, Sénoufo people educate their children on the basis of their culture; hence the use of metaphors that constitute a cultural knowledge that they transfer from generation to generation. Thus, metaphorical sentences and concepts are frequently used in their communication. Here are some few examples of the most used metaphors from Sénoufo people to illustrate our idea:

- 1) Metaphor: wo dʒæræwæ nĩ dʒãrĩ dɪ fælo, Translation: The beauty of a young man is work, Meaning: Encouragement of young man at work.
- 2) Metaphor: tæræ ko te fælæ fãnyɪ, Translation: Soil never dupes, Meaning: Encouragement and trust in agriculture to return to agricultural works.
- 3) Metaphor: mæ dʒo mō bæwɪ pɛrɛ lɔnerenã wɪ welɪ mɪ wɪ kã wɪlɪ wɪtɪŋ mɪ nã mɪ wɪ pɛrɛ, Translation: The well-fed ram is given a price, Meaning: Good work is given a value.
- 4) Metaphor: mō æ gbã koro kæræ mæ si zãyimi kækãmæ kã segi ni i, Translation: you cannot stay home and know that it rains in farm, Meaning: you cannot understand something without getting involved in it
- 5) Metaphor: sele:lige ŋpɔrɔ tie:lige n æ, Translation : a far farm is better than a far market, Meaning : success requires hardwork.

As you can observe, all these metaphors turn around their main activity which is farming. Sénoufo people are farmers, in that way they teach their people on the basis of what identify them. This teaching is done throughout life not because they are teaching, but just because metaphors are part of their daily life. Let's take the following example:

- 1) Metaphor: wo dʒæræwæ nĩ dʒãrĩ dɪ fælo, Translation: The beauty of a young man is work, Meaning: Encouragement of young man at work

In this sentence, 'beauty' is compared to this radiant future (richness and glory achieved thank to work) that one work will permit him to have. Therefore, work, whatever it is, must be

the priority of a young man, for, the achievement of this aim will depend on his work, but his well-done work. Another metaphor that explains the close relationship between language and identity is metaphor number 2:

2) Metaphor: *tæræ ko te fælæ fänryı*, Translation: Soil never dupes, Meaning: Encouragement and trust in agriculture to return to agricultural works.

There is a relation of cause to effect in this metaphor. As long as ground will receive a seed, it will give more than what it has received. Therefore, with a bite courage and devotion to work, we can have a satisfying result.

Generally speaking, Metaphors are perpetually present in the speech of people and they always follow and give meaning to their actions. As we can see S noufo people can be easily identify by the language they speak as farmer. Therefore, these metaphors are usually found in S noufo people speech as advice given to their children by the parents or as a recall of their culture by children. Apart from the agricultural aspect, these metaphors present S noufo people as courageous one. We can see that it is courage that characterizes this community.

2.3.2. Language as Malink  People Cultural Identity

Malink  people are from North of C te d'Ivoire and they can be considered as nomadic people because of their social activity that permits them to be everywhere in the country. In fact, they are traders who are looking for suitable place for the development of their activity and also for their blossoming. So, in order to teach this activity to their children they used metaphors in their daily conversations. These metaphors represent voices that ring in their mind as to recall them that they have to follow them in their life.

Language is used in many different contexts and for many different purposes. Thus, Malink  people used it to teach their people about trade which is their life. Therefore, in our case of study, language is used through metaphors in order to give advice, and to teach behaviour. It is in the same vein that as S noufos, Malink  people use metaphors to teach their social behaviour to their children. Thus, these are some of their well-known metaphors:

6) Metaphor: *s g  kw  e  r  le ye*, Translation: After suffering it is happiness, Meaning: Work brings happiness.

7) Metaphor: nɪ be borɪ tɔ̃nɔ̃ le kɔ, Translation: Soul follows interest, Meaning: Man life is defined by objectives that need to be followed

8) Metaphor: nɪ tæ:mã mã bæ, bro frɪ te se kæ bã, Translation: As long as walking is not ended, arms will not stop swinging, Meaning: Man life is a constant fight to happiness

9) Metaphor: sɔ̃bɛyæ tɔ̃nɔ̃ le ye sɪnɪ le ye, Translation: Seriousness is for tomorrow, Meaning: What someone does determines him in the future

10) Metaphor: ni i mã sæ, ko bæ dʒuro bi i læ, Translation: If you do not die, everything can happen, meaning: Man has right to what he needs and when he is alive

In the sixth example, we can note a relationship of condition between the two entities. The condition is that to reach happiness, one must face obstacles. In fact, suffering in this sentence refers to sacrifice, it is the sine qua none condition to reach the ultimate state of life that is happiness. Malinké people use metaphors to teach their social behaviour to their children. As traders, as determined people, Malinké people teach their children to constant reach of happiness. This is observed in thinking and behaviour that they never give up in doing their principal activity which is trade. This idea is expressed through the following metaphor:

8) Metaphor: nɪ tæ:mã mã bæ, bro frɪ te se kæ bã, Translation: As long as walking is not ended, arms will not stop swinging, Meaning: as long as we live, there is always hope.

This metaphor is a warning to tell the learner that everything you start as activity will not always have success rapidly, but keep working because effort is rewarded. That is why we can observe from them that every activity as banal as it can be for others communities is important for them. Thus, you will see that every Malinké is a trader even the students who are supposed to study. They never give up and time always shows that later they become great traders. In the same vein, they usually say:

10) Metaphor: ni i mã sæ, ko bæ dʒuro bi i læ, Translation: If you do not die, everything can happen, meaning: life is a constant fight, as long as you are alive, you have the possibility to achieve your dreams.

As the other examples, these metaphors focus on an important aspect of the culture of Malinké people. It is about perseverance. From these metaphors, we retain that Malinké are determined as far as their objective are concerned, they never give up until they reach what they

have in their mind. It is obvious in the activity that qualified them. Since the little age, determination is taught to children through these metaphors that make of them traders. As we can understand, as well as Sénoufo and Malinké peoples are identified by their sector of activity, in that order as farmer and trader, they are also identified as such through the metaphors of their language.

In these metaphors, identity is perceivable in the sense that they enable to express their culture, belief, and customs; by this way, their education transmission becomes a feature of identification. They make sense of their actions and activities through their language turning them into advices.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, language has been described as an important aspect of the cultural identity of Sénoufo and Malinké people. In other words, it has been described the way their languages identified them respectively as farmers and traders. The research findings have shown that the people of the chosen languages, when expressing themselves use metaphors to illustrate their ideas.

The metaphors resound in the mind of the speakers as a voice to recall what they have to do. The metaphors stress on who they are, their thought and their qualities. The metaphors they use generally turn around their principal activities. Thus, thanks to these metaphors we can imagine immediately through their languages that they are farmers and courageous for Sénoufo people and traders and persevering for Malinké people.

Seeing the number of ethnic groups that Côte d'Ivoire is composed of and also the difficulty to teach all of them at school, the tentative results of this paper may contribute to make the promotion of Ivorian local languages through the teaching of those metaphors to the native speakers and their implementation in their behaviour first. Thus, being impregnate of the metaphors of their own different languages, local languages will be easily taught, for, the teaching of a language requires the knowledge of its culture.

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INTER-TEXTUAL