

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Semiotics and language interlarding in Yoruba traditional wedding bilingual discourse**

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The paper discusses the traditional Yoruba wedding ceremony among bilingual Yoruba speaking families, with the following aims: (i) to throw more light on the discourse content and structure of the traditional Yoruba-English wedding bilingual discourse; (ii) to identify the place of semiotics and signage in the wedding discourse. Sociolinguistics and discourse analysis provided the theoretical framework for the study while two recorded wedding transactions were used as empirical data. Moreover, participant observation by the author, a Yoruba bilingual as well formed part of the research methodology. The findings show that: (i) a typical traditional Yoruba wedding in the twenty-first century almost always involves Language Interlarding, since it is practically impossible to identify pure Yoruba monolinguals at such weddings; (ii) Features of bilingualism are prevalent in the traditional Yoruba wedding discourse; (iii) Yoruba dialectal greetings or English greetings in their Yoruba equivalents are rampant in the traditional Yoruba wedding discourse; (iv) Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle find expression in this interesting speech event; (v) social semiotics – whether verbal or non-verbal - and signage, also feature prominently in this speech event; (vi) conclusively, Yoruba traditional wedding is in itself, an evolving register with an 'inner circle' of users.

**Key words:** Language Interlarding, traditional Yoruba wedding, semiotics, 'alaga ijoko', 'alaga iduro'.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Yorubas have a rich cultural heritage. Also, the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria seems to be the tribe in which most multicultural wedding transactions have been and are still being contracted. Issues of bilingualism and biculturalism therefore come to the fore in discussing the traditional Yoruba wedding ceremony.

Language use reflects the culture and world view of its users while a particular people's world view also affects their culture. Speech variation occurs due to a number of factors or variables such as language contact, social context, age, gender and social or educational status of participants/interlocutors. Some of these variables account for the peculiar features of language use that we find in the speech event discussed in this essay.

Also, in discourse analysis, texts are analyzed as language use 'above the sentence' and not only as sentences, sentence elements or a conglomerate of ideas (literary or otherwise) that are generated through sentence elements or structures. Olateju (1998), quoting Coulthard (1977), states that the largest unit of discourse

will overlap with the largest unit of grammatical organization, as seen in Table 1.

Atolagbe (2010), discussing the discourse elements for monologues/speeches, argues that speech acts make up speech events and the elements of conversation identified by Olateju (op.cit) may be summed up into these two discourse units: Speech Acts and Speech Event. A speech event could be a dialogue, a wedding transaction or a lesson, for example. In analyzing discourse texts that involve conversations, it is often assumed that the Cooperative Principle by Grice and the Politeness Principle by Leech and their maxims are assumed to be understood and taken for granted by interlocutors.

This article aims to achieve the following goals:

- (i). Discover the discourse structure and content in the traditional Yoruba-English wedding bilingual discourse.
- (ii). Identify the place of semiotics and signage in the wedding discourse.

**Table 1.** Discourse – grammar units of a conversation.

Discourse	Grammar
Lesson	
Transaction	
Exchange	Sentence
Move	Clause
Act	Group
	Word
	Morpheme

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociolinguistics and Discourse Analysis provide the theoretical base for this essay. Sociolinguistics exposes the inter-relationship between language and culture in a society: how both interact and influence each other (Hymes, 1964). This essay explores such intricate relationship among the Yorubas, their language and their culture, as reflected in the traditional Yoruba-English wedding bilingual discourse.

Also, Conversational Analysis, which discusses aspects of conversations and dialogues, as well as other concepts in the field of discourse analysis, provides the meta-language upon which the discussion is hinged.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In discussing and analyzing discourse texts such as speech events, empirical data (the two wedding transactions observed) are observed and discussed as language in use 'above the sentence'.

Thus, the traditional ethnographic techniques, which are interpretive and which involve participant observation and informal questioning methods, were used for data collection. Apart from personal experiences and knowledge gathered over the years by the researcher being a native of Yoruba and as a participant in Yoruba traditional weddings, two live tape recordings of such weddings in 2011 provided data for this study. Spontaneous conversations and dialogues among Yoruba English Bilinguals (YEB) at the weddings were analyzed. Both families at the two weddings recorded had literate couples and parents respectively; none of the parents had below secondary school education. Any monolinguals in the audiences had no specifically significant roles they played at the weddings. The spokeswomen for either side at both weddings were also bilingual and literate, as expected.

The data collected were analyzed by looking at the sociolinguistic and discourse features which characterize this speech event (Yoruba traditional weddings) as distinct and as an emerging register. The findings are discussed in the following sections.

## THE YORUBA TRADITIONAL WEDDING

The Yoruba people can be found in different parts of the world, especially in Southwest Nigeria: in areas such as Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti, Ogun, Lagos, Kwara, parts of Kogi and Edo States. They are found as natives also in

Republic of Benin, Republic of Togo, Sierra Leone, while some Yoruba diaspora relics are in Cuba and Brazil.

They speak Yoruba Language in any of its various dialects, which are as many as fifty dialects or more. Yoruba Language belongs to the Kwa family of languages, under the Benue Congo or Niger Congo family. The Yorubas believe that it is the entire extended family, and not just the nuclear family that gives out a 'son' or a 'daughter' in marriage and both families of the bride and groom become one after such a marriage. Also, they believe that both families should be fully represented at the marriage ceremonies, the 'Introduction' where family members from both sides are introduced one to the other, and the 'Engagement' which is the proper wedding.

## Participants

The participants at the Yoruba traditional wedding include the following, in order of importance:

- (i) The bride and the groom
- (ii) Parents of the bride and parents of the groom, or any close aunt or uncle representing any of the parents who may be deceased.
- (iii) Siblings of the bride and groom; grandparents of the bride and groom; relations such as cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces and household members.
- (iv) Friends of the bride and groom; colleagues, neighbours and all informed acquaintances.
- (v) All wives married into that family and all in-laws of the family.
- (vi) Spokeswoman (or rarely a spokesman) for the bride's family – 'Alaga Ijoko' (that is sitting chairman) and spokeswoman (or spokesman) for the groom's family - 'Alaga Iduro' (that is, 'standing chairman').
- (vii) Any priest or religious/traditional representative who comes, as one of the categories of participants mentioned earlier and doubles partly as an officiating minister. Priests are usually not invited in the capacity of officiating minister at such a wedding, but they are usually called upon to perform such rites along the line.

All participants come out in their very best, to portray the side to which they belong- bride or groom, in very good light- as rich or well-to-do, enlightened, educated, well mannered persons, highly placed or notable persons in the society, etc. All this 'show' is intended to create a lasting impression in the minds of the guests – the groom's family, which may be coming from a different cultural/dialectal background, or the hosts- the bride's family. The wedding is generally hosted and sponsored by the bride's family, in their house or any other designated venue. Sometimes however, the groom's family might decide to assist in sponsoring the wedding financially if they are well-off and particularly want to

show this to the bride's family which may not be as wealthy as they are.

### Discourse structure

In the Yoruba traditional wedding, not all participants at the wedding play significant roles as far as verbal communication is concerned. It is presumed that every invited participant has come to felicitate with the bride, the groom or their respective families, so both the bride and groom have to respond to every greeting from anyone and everyone that turns up at the wedding, whether familiar or unfamiliar to them. The same goes for parents of the bride and groom.

The chief interlocutors at the wedding are:

- (i) The spokeswoman for the bride's family –Alaga Ijoko (or sitting chairman) who directs the course of the discourse and speech event all throughout the twin ceremony of introduction and engagement.
- (ii) The spokeswoman for the groom's family –Alaga Iduro (or standing chairman) who speaks on behalf of the groom's family and ensures that the discourse follows the prescribed and anticipated patterns, thus checking the Alaga Ijoko intermittently, as the former responds to the latter in the course of the conversations or dialogues.

Secondary interlocutors are the bride and groom who are called upon to speak sparingly at certain points during the ceremony, as well as their parents who have to pray for the couple: they say a few words at certain points of the wedding celebration. Close relations like the siblings talk only when they have to introduce themselves.

All other participants communicate verbally in chorus with others while greetings of different individuals, groups or families are going on, or when appropriate songs at each juncture are being rendered by either of the two sides – the bride's or the groom's side.

The discourse structure takes the form:

1. A: Spokeswoman for the bride's family (Initiation)  
B: Spokeswoman for the groom's family (response)
2. A: Spokeswoman for the bride's family, to any individual, group or family member of the groom's family (Initiation)  
B: Spokeswoman for the groom's family (Prompt)  
B1: An Individual, group or family member of the groom's family (Response)
3. A: Spokeswoman for the bride's family to an individual, group or family member of the bride's family (Initiation)  
A1: The individual, group or family member of the bride's family (response).  
That is: A - B; B - A; B - A<sub>1</sub> - A; A - B1 - B; B - A.

'A' always initiates each 'turn' in the discourse. Hardly

can A1, B1 or even B initiate a 'turn' as a discourse fragment. If 'A' – the spokeswoman for the bride's family- becomes over bearing, bossy or is digressing in any way, 'B' – the spokeswoman for the groom's family- is the only one who can politely or tactfully put her in check; otherwise the family of the groom or the groom in particular may face certain sanctions such as paying some fines, or being delayed or humorously being punished – like prostrating for a longer period than is necessary. Even members of the bride's family have to 'bid' for a turn informally if they must initiate any dialogue and that must be with the implicit approval of 'A', spokeswoman for the bride's family.

This discourse structure shows the powers of the 'Alaga Ijoko' in particular and her counterpart 'Alaga Iduro'. However, such powers are exercised in concert with parents of the bride and the groom respectively, who must approve directly or tacitly such powers. The two spokeswomen are paid by parents on either side and how well they perform at the end of the day determines their pay check and whether or not they get more of such invitations. It must be stated here, that there are professional 'Alaga Iduro' and 'Alaga Ijoko' nowadays, who do not necessarily have to be relations of either the bride or the groom. All they need to perform effectively is a short 'brief' or 'terms of reference' as it were, given to them by the parents or family on either side. The 'Alaga' is introduced to key figures in the family, given strict instructions on aspects of the celebration that must not be compromised such as the list of goods expected and money to be paid by the groom's family, the time to be spent at the ceremony, etc.

### Discourse content

The wedding starts off with the bride's family all seated at the venue, excluding the bride and her close friends. Next comes the arrival of the groom's family, which is heralded by singing, dancing up to the door steps of the groom's house or the venue. They are led by 'Alaga Iduro' – spokeswoman 'B' and then the entourage is stopped and challenged by 'Alaga Ijoko'- spokeswoman 'A' and her team who want to know from the visitors their 'joyful mission'. Before this is concluded, some statutory amount must be paid by the groom's family through their spokeswoman, after which the groom's family is welcomed and ushered in. Notably, the groom must be conspicuously absent until he is sent for by the Alaga Ijoko or else such an act could be seen as an affront on the bride's family, which would deserve a fine.

From this point onwards, the discourse takes the form of (1) A →B; (2) B→ A; (3) A →B1; (4) B (Prompt) B1 → A, (5) A (Prompt) A<sub>1</sub>→ B, A (Prompt) → A1 →B1, (6) B (Prompt) → B1→A1.

That is,

1. Alaga Ijoko speaks to Alaga Iduro who responds: A

→B.

2. Alaga Iduro speaks to Alaga Ijoko who responds: B → A
3. Alaga Ijoko speaks to members of the family of the groom, to some member(s) of the groom's family or the groom himself: A → B1.
4. Alaga Iduro prompts the groom's family, group or individual, who then responds accordingly in chorus or individually to the Alaga Ijoko: B (Prompt) → B1 → A.
5. Alaga Ijoko prompts the bride's family, group or individual, who then responds accordingly, in chorus or individually, either to the Alaga Iduro, or to members of the groom's family. A (Prompt) A1 → B or A ([prompt) A1 → B1.
6. Alaga Iduro prompts the family, group or individual from the groom's family, who then responds accordingly to the family, group or individual from the bride's family: B (Prompt) → B1 → A1.

Throughout, an appropriate song or two, a greeting or two accompanies each exchange or discourse fragment as illustrated as follows.

### **Exchange/dialogues**

A: Eyin wo ni yen o? Ewo le ba wa o?

(Who are those? What have you come for?)

B: Awa lati ile Odeyemi, ni ile Abija, ni Osogbo ni a wa jise fun awon baba wa Oloye, Ololajulo Owolabi.

(We from Odeyemi's family, Abija compound in Osogbo, have come to deliver a message to our father, chief, highly revered Owolabi).

A: Le wa n'pariwo bayen!

(Is that why you are making so much noise?)

B: E ma binu, ayo wa lo kun, nitori omo baba wa, Olawale, o ri ododo kan ni ogba yin ni o.

(Please don't be offended, we are so joyful because of our father's son, Olawale, who saw a rose flower in your garden); metaphorically, the rose is the bride.

### **Exchange 2**

A: My dear, Funke, ngbo se o mo arakunrin yi?

(My dear, Funke, do you know this gentleman?)

A1: (The bride, smiling): Ehn, Oko mi ni.

(yes, he is my husband)

A: Ah ah! Wale, you see, mo ti so fun e pe oo gba permission l'owo daddy, ko to maaa le aburo mi. In fact she's calling you her husband already. Fine e maa gaa gan. (Ah ah! Wale, you see, I had told you that you didn't take permission from our father before you started wooing my younger sister. In fact, she's calling you her husband already. Your fine will be much higher).

B: (Prompting groom to prostrate, apologize) to B1: (prostrating): 'sorry ma'.

B: (chanting): ka ma rii, ewo

(May it never happen; that's a taboo; that is, 'He couldn't have done that without permission').

### **Exchange 3**

B (leading her side to sing repeatedly as the groom dances in with his friends): Olawale te le o mo re o (Here comes Olawale whom you say you don't know)

B1 (chorusing): Te le o mo (Whom you say don't know)

B (singing with her side): A wa yin o, Olorun wa,.....

(A Christian hymn)

Na like this, na like that, shake your waist, e ko mole se.

(it's like this, and like that, shake your waist, dig it and dance I say).

### **Exchange 4**

A: So now, eyin alejo wa, eyin ana wa, e ma introduce ara yin, so that awon family wa le mo yin dada (so now, visitors, in-laws, introduce yourselves so our family can know you better).

B (prompts groom's parents) → B1/groom's parents, (then others in turns):

Awa ni chief and chief Mrs Olayinka Odeyemi, from Abija's compound in Osogbo, etc.

B: Baba o, baba o, baba o, oluwa da baba si fun wa (Father, oh father, oh father, lord spare our father's life for us).

Mama o, mama o, mama o, oluwa da mama si fun wa.

(Mother, oh mother, oh mother, lord spare our mother's life for us).

As the discourse progresses, the followings feature intermittently, at specific points, as part of the speech event:

1. Plenty of music, dancing and greetings. Traditional drummers with talking drums and local instruments, singing and chanting at every prompt of either of the 'Alagas' – Ijoko or Iduro.

2. A lot of money exchanges hands, especially in envelopes from the husband's family to the bride's family or as offering collections from the participants, for the 'Alagas' – Ijoko or Iduro, or for the bride and groom as they dance and are formally joined together.

3. Different items and actions function semiotically.

4. Bilingual discourse between the 'Alagas'- Ijoko and Iduro and the bride and groom who at some point are joined together in prayers as husband and wife.

All of these features enhance the 'plot' and the transactions that make up this speech event.

### **Semiotics and signage**

The relationship between language and culture is such

that one can describe the ways of life of a people, simply by studying the language of the group in question (Bello, 2008:17). Culture, according to Ogunsi (2001) is 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society'. Sociolinguistics examines the interaction between these two aspects of human behaviour: use of language and the social organization of behaviour. Sociolinguistics attempts to explain linguistic attitudes, uses and beliefs. And in line with Adegbiya's (1994:27) submission, 'the social, cultural, political, economic and historical contexts in which we have grown up and interacted through languages have a decisive impact in the moulding and shaping of our attitudes'.

Humans have the capability to regulate and reshape the semiosphere anytime they want, unlike the biosphere and that is why cultures are both restrictive and liberating. These claims are evidenced in the practices that make up the Yoruba traditional wedding, because an already fixed system of 'signification' exists in the Yoruba culture with regard to marriage celebration. A 'sign' is something that stands for something or someone else in some capacity (Danesi, 2004; Van, 2005). We can talk of objects as signs, specific language use as signs (for example, metaphors, irony, metonymy), visual signs, non-verbal signs such as facial expressions, gestures, body language and music. Narratives, myths or mythologies can also function as signs.

At the Yoruba traditional wedding, the 'Alagas' make use of so many of these signs semiotically and wittingly. In observing the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) and the Politeness Principle (PP), both spokeswomen try to ensure the various conversations and actions that take place are felicitous, when considered as speech acts. Where face threatening acts occur inadvertently, such as the groom attempting to shake the hands of the Alaga Ijoko (which is regarded as disrespectful), the concerned Alaga promptly mitigates the effects of such face threatening acts tactfully.

Materials used include: 'oyin' (honey), 'aadun' (local corn cake), 'obi' (kolanuts), 'orogbo' (bitter kola), 'Ata wewe' (alligator pepper), sugar, salt, the Holy Bible (or the Holy Koran), water, wine (optional for some Christians), assorted drinks, goat(s), or a cow, wedding rings, and the bridal gifts of yams, fruits, drinks, cash, a box or suitcase of wears, etc. for the bride, and so on and so forth. Most of these items are semiotic and must be used or be made available, otherwise adequate money/cash replacement can be accepted by the bride's family if allowed by the older generation of family members. The honey signifies a happy 'sweet' fulfilled life, as well as the sugar. The kolanuts and the bitter kola signify longevity and the fulfillment of purposeful tradition and culture in the life of the couple. The alligator pepper signifies inaccessibility to witches and wizards. The salt also signifies a purposeful, useful and fulfilled life. The

fruit signifies fruitfulness in the marriage (children, prosperity, etc). Water signifies the source and fountain of life to which the couple are being committed as they are joined together, while the wine, which is used in prayers, signifies the approval of the 'gods' and their protection over the couple.

The Holy Bible or Holy Koran which the bride must always pick out of all the gifts when asked to pick what she likes best out of the gifts, signifies a promise to obey God's word as she enters the marriage contract. Lastly, the wedding rings seal the vows of the marriage between the couple while the gifts and cash make up the dowry. A few families refuse to collect the cash, maintaining that their daughter 'is not for sale' and should not be treated as such. Most of these items are touched and used in praying for the couple.

Other important signs are music, dance, money and greetings. These are discussed in the following sections.

### ***Music and dance***

Music is a form of artistic expression that could suggest positive meanings or feelings such as joy, happiness, fulfillment, etc. It could also be used to express sadness or sorrow as we find in dirges or at burial ceremonies where the mourners sing slowly and mournfully, with intermittent shouts or outbursts. Music may also be enjoyed simply as a form of relaxation. At the Yoruba traditional wedding, the first use of music- an expression of joy, rejoicing, happiness and fulfillment is the main purpose. There is a lot of singing on both sides, accompanied by dancing. The 'wives of the family' (that is any female married into the bride's family or the groom's family-'iyawo Ile') - run all the necessary errands: errands of carrying the gifts in or out, collecting offerings periodically from guests, serving all the participants and even chorusing the songs or chants by their spokeswomen. All these activities make the wedding very lively and interesting from the beginning to the end. The native drummers also add pep to the celebration by beating the talking drum to traditional or Christian songs that are very popular and simple to follow, at every opportunity or prompting of the Alagas. However, most Yoruba Muslims opt for a 'Nikkai' (Muslim wedding), but where they do not, indigenous Muslim songs and prayers are offered in place of Christian or traditional songs.

### ***Money***

Money is central to the transactions and the exchanges that make up this speech event. The groom, his parents and family members or friends are usually stretched to the limits in attempts to get as much cash as possible from the groom's family. This is particularly so if the groom's family is wealthy or if they appear to be stingy.

Unfortunately, apart from the statutory amounts demanded by individual families from a groom's family and which come enveloped already, most of the money collected goes into the purses of the 'Alagas', especially the Alaga Ijoko.

Only once or twice throughout the entire two to four hour ceremony, is money collected for the bride, and then all participants are expected to give her something obligatorily, unlike all other non-statutory collections that are optional. Whatever the groom receives, as he dances around, greeting his in-laws and his family, or while dancing with his bride, is all that is his and much of this is still wittingly taken from him under so many guises by the 'Alagas'.

### **Greetings**

Adegbija (1993) and Odeunmi (2005) agree with Firth (1972) that greetings and farewells have the following major themes: production of attention, identification of the interlocutor and the reduction of anxiety in social contract (Firth, 1972); and begin a series of communication acts, define and affirm identity and rank, and manipulate a particular relationship for achieving particular ends (Firth, 1972).

These greetings are enhanced by positive politeness strategies in the Yoruba traditional wedding. More importantly, they are used to lubricate the channels of communication as the speech event progresses.

From the beginning of the celebration, when the groom's family arrives and are welcomed, till when the couple have been pronounced husband and wife, prayed for after exchanging wedding rings and the closing prayer offered, there are greetings from one person to another, or from one side to the other. The 'Alaga Ijoko' in particular, uses greetings:

- (i) To begin a series of communication acts or exchanges as stated earlier,
- (ii) To define and affirm identity or rank of participants,
- (iii) To manipulate a particular relationship in order to 'advance the plot' of the speech event, and
- (iv) To create or gain attention.

As noted by Adegbite (2007) and Adegbija (1993), not only is Yoruba richer numerically and perhaps, even qualitatively in the varieties of greetings it has for pragmatic situations, Yoruba bilinguals find it difficult to render such Yoruba greetings in standard English. Hence, most of the greetings at the Yoruba traditional wedding are rendered in Yoruba, and sometimes in the dialect of either the bride or the groom's family. We hear expressions such as:

E ku ijoko o; E kaa bo o; E ku inawo o. E ku idide o. E se o; meaning: you are well seated/ you've been sitting for a

while and we appreciate you; you are welcome; You've spent a lot and we appreciate you; Thanks for coming; Thank you/ thanks a lot.

Most of these greetings are sometimes translated into English by the 'Alaga Ijoko' for the benefit of the guests, especially where one of the families is not Yoruba, or if they have members of their extended family as non-Yorubas. This is to show some class, finesse and sophistication. As argued by those who champion the cause of Nigerian English, whether in its standard or non-standard form, this variety of English is familiar to most Nigerians at formal or public functions and is acceptable to them irrespective of their ethnic affiliations.

### **Bilingual features and language interlarding**

From the foregoing discussion, especially in the sections of exchanges/dialogues and greetings, it is obvious that a lot of code mixing and code switching go on throughout the course of the traditional Yoruba-English bilingual wedding. This fact is due to the role of English in formal education in Nigeria today. As shown in Adegbite's (2007) empirical study, hardly do we find pure Yoruba monolinguals today.

Due to so many socio-economic and political factors, most Yorubas like other Nigerians, are bilingual; the English lexicon has crept into their linguistic repertoire.

Also, most of the women who serve as 'Alaga' are educated, having a minimum of secondary school education, are good orators with some religious background and have been exposed to different cultures (some of these are the qualities that qualify them for the task in the first instance). In fact many of the 'Alagas' are professional teachers who augment their hitherto 'poor' wages with the proceeds of such an enterprising and rewarding exercise that could come up every weekend.

Language interlarding involves the switching of two codes of communication, or two languages, within the same discourse context. This could be inter-sentential or intra-sentential. In other words, code-mixing and code-switching are involved as core features in a particular discourse: this act characterizes bilingual speech.

Some of the bilingual features of the dialogues or conversations are:

1. Translations of indigenous greetings into their English forms, either in standard or non-standard English forms.
2. A mixture of indigenous and English Christian /religious songs or hymns, especially simple songs with choruses.
3. Code-mixed sentences, (intra-sentential or inter-sentential) especially by the Alagas when talking to the bride and groom who usually have some form of formal education.
4. Long stretches of English sentences by the Alaga

Ijoko, at intervals, serve as a brief summary of what has been done or said so far, especially where there appears to be a lot of non - Yoruba participants or guests in the audience; this can be ascertained from the dressing or looks of the guests.

5. Brief English summary of witty sayings, narratives or mythologies that may have been alluded to in the course of the exchanges between both sides.

As affirmed by Adegbija (1989) that there is sometimes, tension between universal and language specific means of showing politeness, it must be stated here that sometimes, the actions or inactions of either side, family members or the spokeswomen, may trigger off some tension. The wits and tact demonstrated by either of the Alagas are often the saving grace. For example, if after opening an envelope from the groom's family and the statutory amount expected is short by some amount, the father or grandfather of the bride might threaten to suspend the wedding transactions. It is the duty of the 'Alaga Ijoko' to mediate swiftly, tactfully, wittingly and politely, ensuring that normalcy is restored and the wedding succeeds. Behind the scene moves can take place and the discourse structure can then be altered as occasion demands. At the end of it all, the speech event must be successfully concluded, whatever CP rules, or conversation rules, language(s) or culture(s) are broken or trespassed in achieving the desired goals.

## SUMMARY

From the discussion above, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Despite the fact that the key participants in the traditional Yoruba wedding are Yoruba English bilinguals and it might be difficult to identify who really are Yoruba monolinguals among them from their language usage, language interlarding is totally unavoidable. In fact, such interlarding occurs at different parts of their sentences, especially in the utterances of the spokespersons for the two families- the 'Alaga Ijoko' and the 'Alaga Iduro'. This is supported in the findings of Adegbite (2007) and Ogunsiji (2008).

2. As an offshoot of the above conclusion, features of bilingualism are prevalent in the discourse of these participants at the Yoruba traditional wedding. Some of these bilingual features include code – switching and code –mixing of English and Yoruba at different degrees of inter on intra–switches, the presence of integrated assimilated or unassimilated words (under borrowings and loan words), the use of brief translations of discourse fragments, from the indigenous language into English or vice –versa. Abdullahi- Idiagbon (2007), Adegbite (op.cit) and Ogunsiji (op. cit) support these observations.

3. With regard to the variety of Yoruba greetings that occur in this speech event, it is pertinent to note that the

Yoruba greetings and hardly English, particularly the relevant Yoruba dialectal greetings are preferred by the main interlocutors – the 'Alagas'. This preference may be due to Adegbijas' (1989) position that Yoruba is richer numerically and perhaps even qualitatively in the varieties of greetings it has for various pragmatic situations; and as Adegbite (2007) corroborates that these Yoruba greetings often have no direct Standard English equivalents. Indeed, they add beauty and linguistic colour or verve to the speech event. For example – "Okun o' in an Ijesa setting or 'Ekun o' in an Igbomina setting or the common Yoruba – Oyo standard variety 'E ku ijoko o' would certainly receive a warm response from all the guests, unlike its English equivalents- 'you are well seated' or 'you have been sitting for a while and we appreciate you'.

Moreover, greetings serve the following functions in this speech event:

a. Primarily to begin a series of communicative acts by the spokespersons (the Alagas), to create or gain attention, or to manipulate a certain relationship in the discourse context for achieving particular ends; and

b. Secondly to identify the interlocutors, for phatic communion, and to reduce anxiety in the process of sealing the social contract of the marriage celebration.

4. Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) as well as Leech's Politeness Principle (PP) finds expression in this interesting speech event – the traditional Yoruba-English bilingual discourse wedding. This is apparent from the overt expressions of politeness, deference and redressed face threatening acts that occur or are exhibited in the course of the conversational interactions between both families and their spokespersons. Exchanges 1 and 3 attest to this. Odebunmi (2005) and Adegbija (1993) had earlier demonstrated that positive politeness and deference characterize the speech of South western Nigerians (Yorubas), whether they were medical doctors as in Odebunmi's findings, or whether they were simply Yoruba youths or adults as in Adegbija's findings.

5. Social semiotics and signage also feature prominently in this speech event, whether as 'verbal' or 'non-verbal semiotics. From the objects used for the 'wedding proper' (honey, salt, kolanuts etc.) the display of money/ wealth, music, body language and choice of language, or even the attire /dressing of the couple and other participants (as discussed in the sections above), one can decipher so much 'signification' that is unique to the Yoruba culture, in contrast to the English culture, habits or worldview.

## Conclusion

In line with de Beaugrande's (1993) treatise on evolving a theory for the concept of 'Register' in discourse studies, the speech event discussed in this essay should provide supportive empirical data for such a theory. This is to suggest that the bilingual discourse of Yoruba traditional wedding is in itself an evolving register to which can be

ascribed an 'inner circle' of users. To be a successful participant at the Yoruba traditional wedding therefore, one must belong to this 'inner circle users' of a fast emerging register that can be learnt or acquired through frequent participant observation by any Yoruba- English bilingual or anyone that is interested.

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