

A comparative study of Igbo and Chinese lexemes and terms for clothes

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Abstract

This paper studies the sociolinguistic aspect of the Igbo and Chinese terms for clothing. Its objectives are to identify what constitutes clothing in Igbo and Chinese as well as identifying the similarities and differences between Igbo and Chinese clothing. The Chinese data used for analysis were elicited from the Chinese teachers at Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (UNIZIK) whereas those of Igbo came from introspection since the researchers are native speakers of Igbo and also through the instrumentation of questionnaire as one of the methods of data collection. The framework adopted in the paper is Linguistic relativity also known as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or Whorfianism which holds that the structure of a language affects its speaker's worldview or recognition. The scope of study is limited to clothes in Igbo and Chinese languages. The paper adopts the descriptive survey research design. The research finds out some cultural differences in clothing terms between the Igbo and Chinese language. Our findings include some clothing which are prominent in the Chinese culture but are not in the traditional Igbo culture. They include: 牛仔裤 (jeans), 卫衣 (hoodie), 吊带背心 (camisole), 比基尼 (bikini) etc while some clothes which are in the Igbo but not in the Chinese culture include: ogodo (wrapper), coral beads, loincloths etc.

Introduction

Language and culture are interrelated. This explains why every cultural activity is represented or named with a language. This is a position of linguists which adopt a social approach to language study. Sociolinguists believe that there is a relationship between language and society (cf. Wardhaugh, 2010; Agbedo, 2015). One of the relationships that exist between language and society as identified by sociolinguists is that language influences the society. Prominent in this view is the Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis. The Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis is hinged on the claims of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, which states that the structure of a language affects its speaker's world view or recognition. Sapir and Whorf believe that people's language constructs a thought process that forms their philosophy about the world and life in general.

On the other hand, as individuals have different languages and worldviews, they also have different cultures. Culture, as has been generally defined, is the people's way of life. One of the aspects of culture is dress code. According to Olaoje and Bello (2016:12):

Dress or clothing is a kind of garment worn by people of all cultures since prehistoric times. Different peoples of the world have their unique dress culture. The materials used for making dresses range from cotton, wool, silk fabric to flax fabric and rubber.

In essence, dress code is culture specific. Instances where a particular kind of clothing is seen across cultures can be attributed to culture borrowing. Culture borrowing often times occurs when people come in contact. More so, cultures that have the same climatic conditions tend to have the same mode of dressing. Other factors that influence people's mode of dressing, as highlighted by Olaoje and Bello (2016), include the availability of materials, cost of materials, technology of the period, religious traditions, modernity and colonization.

The Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria have their own mode of dressing and the terms they gave to this clothing. The same thing can be obtainable with the Chinese people of Asia who have their own mode of dressing and terms for their clothing. The major objective of this paper is to identify: the terms and the nature of clothing that the Chinese and Igbo people have in common and their area of differences and possibly suggest why these

differences and similarities exist. This research will enable us to understand the convergence and divergence that exist between and across cultures.

Literature review

Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf endorsed the language-culture relationship and it is also called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. It was first put forward by Sapir (1921) in his *Language: An introduction to the study of speech*. This was advanced in 1929 by Benjamin Lee Whorf. This Sapir-Whorf hypothesis explains that the way one reasons is mainly determined by his language and specific views conveyed in one language and cannot be understood by other language users. Sapir recommends that learning to walk is not the same as learning how to converse in a language. Walking is an innate ability of any living being regardless of one's cultural upbringing, the child learns to converse thoughts only based on the precise society where the child grew up. Sapir proposes that if the child is taken to another society where a different language is used, that his speech will be entirely altered from that of his original culture and would be shaped by his new location.

Benjamin Lee Whorf (Sapir's student and acquaintance) brings forward Edward Sapir's notion on language and culture. The relationship between language and thought was thoroughly explained by Whorf. Whorf (1956) states that the way man views the world is strongly dependent on his structure of language. Whorf's knowledge of some languages such as Aztec, Hopi and Maya stretches his notion on how the thought process of the users of these languages is connected to the structure of language. Consequently, one's lifespan is formed by linguistic structure into precise methods of viewing truth. Whorf also stated that one is fluent in a language does not certainly entail linguistic knowledge. For one to know a language, one has to know its structure, orderly processes and background occurrences. The "Linguistic Relativity" principle proposes that thought and perceptions of a speaker are influenced by his language.

The Linguistics Relativist Principle is for viewing each language completely according to its own terms. Language is established by grammar but it goes beyond grammar. It is a reflection of culture in its representative society of the world. Sherzer (1987:295) defines Sapir-Whorf hypothesis thus: "Language (that is, grammar) constitutes the means with which individuals think and therefore, especially as stated in its strongest form, language (that is, grammar) conditions or determines cultural thought, perception and world view." The way one views the world is determined by one's language which means that every language has inside it the culture's system of values upon which its social, economic, and political discourses are formed.

Methods

This research makes use of questionnaires as instruments for data collection. 30 questionnaires were given to Igbo people to identify clothing terms in Igbo whereas 10 questionnaires were given to Chinese tutors (of Chinese origin) at the Confucius institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The data was analyzed using Sapir-Whorf linguistic relativist hypothesis.

Data presentation and analysis

Table 1: Clothing terms that are worn by Chinese and Igbo

S/N	English	Chinese	Igbo
1	Bathing suit	游泳衣 (yǒng yī)	Uwe ịsa ahu
2	Belt	腰带 (yāodài)	Beelutu
3	Bikini	比基尼 (bǐjīnī)	Bikini
4	Boot	长靴 (cháng xuē)	Akpukpo ukwu
5	Boxers	四角裤 (sì jiǎo kù)	ịba ime

6	Brassiere	胸罩 (xiōng zhào)	Akpa ara
7	Canvas shoes	帆布鞋 (fān bù xié)	Kwaaji akpukpo ukwu
8	Dress	衣服 (yīfu)	Uwe
9	Dress shirt/ blouse	女衬衫 (nǚ chèn shān)	Uwe elu nwanyi
10	Gloves	手套 (shǒutào)	Uwe aka
11	Handkerchief	手帕 (shǒu pà)	Handikachifu
12	Hat/cap	帽子 (màozi)	Okpu
13	Hoodies	卫衣 (wèiyī)	Akwa mkpuchi isi
14	jacket	上衣(shàng yī)	Jaket
15	Jeans	牛仔裤 (niú zǎi kú)	Jins
16	Leather shoes	皮鞋 (pí xié)	Akpukpo anu akpukpo ukwu
17	Pajamas	睡衣 (shuì yī)	Uwe ara abali
18	Pants	库 (kù)	Iba Ogologo okpa
19	Rain boots	雨靴 (yǔ xuē)	Akpukpo ukwu mmiri ozuzo
20	Rain coat	雨衣 (yǔ yī)	Uwe nche mmiri
21	Sandals	凉鞋 (liáng xié)	Akpukpo ukwu
22	Scarf	围巾 (wéijīn)	Ichafu
23	Shirt	衬衫 (chènshān)	Uwe elu
24	Shoe	鞋 (xié)	Akpukpo ukwu
25	Skirt	裙子 (qúnzi)	Uwe mwuda
26	Slippers	拖鞋 (tuō xié)	Akpukpo ukwu
27	Sneakers	运动鞋 (yùndòng xié)	Sniika
28	Socks	袜子 (wàzi)	Soks
29	Sweat shirt	运动衫 (yùndòngshān)	Uwe
30	Sweater	毛衣 (máoyī)	Uwe nche oyi

31	Swim trunk	泳裤 (yǒngkù)	Uwe igwu mmiri
32	Trouser	裤子(kùzi)	Uwe ụkwụ ogologo
33	T-shirt	体恤山(tǐxùshān)	Uwe elu
34	Underwear	内衣 (nèiyī)	Uwe ime
35	Vest	汗衫 (hàn shān)	Uwe
36	Windbreaker	风衣 (fēngyī)	Uwe ifufe ezumike

Table 1 above contains clothing terms worn by Chinese and Igbo. The possible reason for this similarity is that both China and Igbo borrowed these clothes because of their contact with the Western world. The Igbo people of Nigeria were colonised by the British and during the time of colonisation, Igbo people borrowed the dress codes of their colonial masters. In present Igbo society, people wear foreign wears to traditional marriages. Due to the fact that these clothes were borrowed, most of them were “igbonised” because they are not originally Igbo clothes. On the other hand, due to the fact that America and other Western countries are the world powers, their way of dressing dominates the entire world. In essence, culture contact entails dress code exchange.

Table 2: Clothing terms peculiar to Chinese

S/ N		S/ N	
1	Hanfu (汉服) Traditional Han clothing	6	Tangzhuang (唐装) Traditional Tang dynasty clothing
2	Magua(马褂) Mandarin jacket	7	Qiuku(秋裤) Autumn pants
3	Changpao(长袍) Chinese robe	8	Yurongfu(羽绒服) Feather padded jackets
4	Qipao(旗袍) Cheongsam/Mandarin gown	9	Chaofu(朝服) Court dress
5	Denglongku(灯笼裤) knee length trousers	10	Changqun(长裙) Long skirt

The above contents in table 2 are some of the clothing terms which can be found among the Chinese people but not among the Igbo people. The reason is because of their climatic condition and their cultural disposition. For example, the Tang dynasty's Tangzhuang and the Han dynasty's Hanfu have remained important symbolic Chinese clothing because of the influence these dynasties wielded when they ruled China. This is in line with the Linguistics Relativity hypothesis which holds that cultures are specific and things or entities entailed in culture are what they have term for. This is why Chinese have terms for these clothes listed in tables 2 while Igbo does not.

Table 3: Clothing terms peculiar to Igbo

S/N	Clothing terms	S/N	
1	Ukwu akwa	6	Ọgọdọ (wrapper)
2	Uwe isi agụ	7	
3	Ákà	8	
4	Okpu mmemme	9	
5	Jigida	10	

In table 3, the above terms which are peculiar to the Igbo people cannot be found in China. The reason is because of the cultural activities present in the Igbo land. The clothes are worn mainly during cultural activities like coronation, traditional marriage, burial e.t.c.

Conclusion

In summary, the Chinese and Igbo people have different cultures as it is reflected in their mode of dressing. This is as a result of their way of life and mode of doing things. In china, there are four climatic conditions namely spring, autumn/ fall, summer and winter while in Igbo land, there are three climatic conditions which are rainy season, dry season and Harmattan. The Chinese clothes are relatively influenced by the seasons but this cannot be said to be same with Igbo. The Chinese have varieties of clothes, hence, more terms for clothes than Igbo because of their environment which is in line with the Sapir-Whorf linguistic relativity hypothesis.

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