

Yoruba-English Bilingualism and Cultural Identity in Nollywood Movies: A Sociolinguistic Exploration

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Abstract

Traditionally, Nollywood production involved using indigenous languages with English subtitles. However, current trends reflect a shift toward a bilingual and bicultural structure that mirrors Nigeria's multilingual society. This evolution moves beyond simple subtitles to include diverse linguistic strategies, lending a global dimension to urban Nollywood narratives. While scholars have long noted the use of code-switching and code-mixing in indigenous films, there is a distinct rise in productions—particularly in the Yoruba sector—that are strictly bilingual. By deploying English alongside Yoruba, these films capture the socio-economic realities of contemporary urban existence and the challenges of modernity. Consequently, this bilingualism provides insight into the complex sociocultural dynamics of a bicultural society and the unique identities formed within it. Ultimately, this trend reflects the producers' interpretation of modern sociolinguistic realities and introduces new dimensions to the discourse on language ideology within the film industry.

Keywords: *Nollywood, bilingualism, biculturalism, language ideology, cultural identity*

Introduction

Globally acclaimed as Africa's largest film industry in terms of international recognition and production volume, Nollywood refers to Nigerian cinema created by local production teams for domestic and diaspora audiences. In terms of output, UNESCO (2009) ranked Nollywood as the world's second-largest film industry after Bollywood and noted its status as Nigeria's second-

largest employer. Estimates indicate that the industry produces between 1,000 and 2,000 movies annually, primarily in English. However, hundreds of films are also produced in indigenous languages such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, fostering the growth of mother-tongue cinema.

Yoruba drama possesses a storied history, originating with the traveling theaters of the 1960s before transitioning to television. Pioneer stations like WNBC/WNTV were instrumental during this era as the traveling theater tradition began to wane. Consequently, Yoruba productions flourished on television as local content. This medium popularized classic series such as D.O. Fagunwa's "Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole" and "Ireke Onibudo," alongside works by groups led by Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi, and Jimoh Aliu. Other prominent figures who dominated the screen through the 1990s included Ishola Ogunsola, Ojo Ajisafe, Akin Ogungbe, and Ojo Ladipo. The 1970s saw the emergence of theatrical films by veterans like Ola Balogun, Hubert Ogunde, and Adeyemi Afolayan, setting the stage for the industry's evolution from analog to modern digital production.

Advances in satellite telecommunications have introduced global operators like DSTV and Iroko TV, which rely heavily on indigenous local content. Beyond language, Nollywood's global appeal stems from its authentic Nigerian themes, depicting a rich cultural heritage through a blend of artistic and linguistic forms. Many films address the moral dilemmas facing modern Africans, exploring the consequences of rural-urban migration, the quest for survival, and the tension between traditionalism and modernism. Socio-economic motivations often drive these narratives, portraying the human condition through stories of "get-rich-quick" schemes, rituals, fraud, and corruption. Language serves as the primary tool for expressing these social behaviours, as it is the vehicle through which identity is performed and interpreted.

This paper examines two films, "Eti Keta" (2011) and "Ade Ferrari" (2015), which are scripted in both Yoruba and English. These movies were selected for their bilingual portrayal of individual and social identities both in Nigeria and the diaspora. The study explores the sociolinguistic dynamics of Yoruba-English speech norms within challenging modern settings. Both films offer abundant evidence of themes related to individuality, socio-economic freedom, and personal fulfillment among diverse groups. By projecting the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment against global issues like cross-cultural

relations and immigrant status, these productions move beyond mere commercialism to contribute significantly to cross-cultural discourse and the social construction of contemporary African identity.

Background to the Study

The quest for identity and self-actualization is a central theme in modern portrayals of Africans globally. Filmic representations of identity involve expressing the self in relation to a people, country, or community. Linguistically, this quest manifests through diverse interactive patterns at both individual and social levels, reflecting the bilingual or multilingual nature of modern communication.

The evolution of English in Nigeria is primarily attributed to the colonial experience. Its dominance over numerous indigenous languages is a consequence of Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition. Decades of coexistence between English and local languages have led to the "domestication" of English, resulting in a distinct non-native variety known as Nigerian English. This indigenized variety incorporates features of the Nigerian linguistic environment to express unique aspects of the local culture. As an English as a Second Language (ESL) variety, Nigerian English is characterized by both individual and societal bilingualism. At the micro level, individual bilingualism refers to the acquisition of English as an additional language alongside a mother tongue, serving various formal and informal purposes. At the macro level, societal bilingualism is defined by political and national considerations. English is designated as an ESL language due to its official status in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, regardless of the sequence in which an individual acquires it.

While it is generally assumed that Nigerians use an indigenous language—such as Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba—as their primary means of communication, English is acquired for secondary purposes, including national goals, international integration, and technological advancement. Individual bilingualism allows people to navigate interpersonal and cultural nuances, using speech patterns to position themselves in relation to others. This study demonstrates how Yoruba-English bilingualism in "Eti Keta" and "Ade Ferrari" illuminates the complex socio-economic challenges of Nigerian urban settings. The characters' unique approaches to overcoming these challenges highlight the expressiveness of language within a dual-cultural

environment. Ultimately, this bilingual trend reflects the producers' interpretation of contemporary sociolinguistic realities and introduces fresh dimensions to the discourse on language ideology in the Nigerian film industry.

***Eti Keta*: Synopsis**

Eti Keta (Third Party) *Eti Keta* (The Third Party) tells the story of two brothers, Adigun and Ajadi, who are ensnared by the hardships of urban survival, leading to life-altering and tragic decisions. Ajadi, the hot-tempered yet compassionate younger brother, selflessly funds his elder brother's airfare to the United States after Adigun secures a company-sponsored scholarship. In America, Adigun's dreams of immediate wealth vanish, forcing him to abandon his studies for a second income. He eventually takes a job as a domestic worker for a wealthy American man married to a Nigerian woman. However, the situation turns disastrous when Adigun rejects his employer's wife's romantic advances while simultaneously dating her stepdaughter. Consequently, Adigun loses his job and decides to return to Nigeria. Meanwhile, Adigun's failure to repay the loan causes Ajadi's furniture business to collapse. Desperate, Ajadi moves from Ilorin to Lagos, where he unwittingly becomes a getaway driver for a violent robbery gang. In a tragic twist of fate, the gang's next target is Adigun, who is gunned down on his way from the airport.

Set in contemporary Nigeria and America, *Eti Keta* serves as an instructive metaphor for a tragic web of secrets. Ajadi's involvement in the robbery that kills his brother shatters their family, while Adigun's American ordeal leads him to betray his devoted fiancée, Sheri. Following Adigun's death, Sheri—already a widow from a previous tragedy—is forced to face the hardships of single motherhood once again.

***Ade Ferrari*: Synopsis**

Ade Ferrari is the story of a lazy young man, Suraju, who seeks a better livelihood working as a house-keeper for a rich and flamboyant Nigerian business man, Ade Ferrari. Ade Ferrari's privileged status is characterized by his dual citizenship (Nigerian and American) and dual residency as he constantly shuttles between both countries. The arrival of Suraju in Ade Ferrari's palatial Lagos home takes an interesting dimension when Ade Ferrari

travels to America, leaving the infatuated Suraju in charge of house-keeping and maintenance duties. The young, starry-eyed Suraju wastes no time assuming the personality and life-style of his flamboyant boss. He cruises the town in his boss's exotic vehicles, living large on the gains of his fraudulent exploits. He brazenly engages in acts of extortion, racketeering, obtaining under false pretenses, and impersonation- all for monetary gains. Nemesis comes knocking when he plays into the hands of his bosses' friends and family. Suraju is arrested, jailed and forced to return to the humble life.

Conceptual Considerations

This study adopts an interdisciplinary sociolinguistic perspective, incorporating social science principles to examine language as a social phenomenon (Chambers, 1995). In multi-ethnic environments like Nigeria, language choice is a primary tool for social identification, allowing speakers to negotiate the cultural, religious, and historical components of their identity (Li Wei, 2000). Central to this research is the concept of "acts of identity," where language reflects how individuals perceive themselves and wish to be positioned within society (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985; Norton Peirce, 1995). The analysis further utilizes Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to explore how individuals evaluate "in-groups" and "out-groups." This process involves social categorization to understand social positioning, social identification to foster solidarity and self-esteem, and social comparison to evaluate one's group against others. While comparison maintains self-esteem, it can also trigger rivalry, prejudice, and competing identities (McLeod, 2008).

In the Nigerian context, bilingualism arises from language contact between English—the official medium—and numerous indigenous mother tongues. Bilingualism is viewed here as an individual property reflecting the co-existence of distinct speech communities, though it does not necessitate equal proficiency in both languages (Mackey, 2000). Prolonged contact can lead to biculturalism or multiculturalism, where individuals adopt the norms of a new environment. However, this transition may lead to the subjugation of indigenous languages and cultures.

Cultural identity involves an individual's consciousness of belonging to a group based on nationality, ethnicity, or religion (Gudykunst, 2002). It is expressed through social norms such as food, dress, and communication. Phinney's (1993) model outlines three stages of this development:

unexamined identity (childhood indifference), identity search (conscious exploration), and identity achievement (internalized self-perception and resolution of ethnic conflicts).

Finally, ethnic identity is defined by shared loyalty, heritage, and geography (Evans et al., 2010). It is often influenced by acculturation—the degree to which an individual absorbs a dominant culture. According to Berry (1990, 2002), this occurs through four strategies: assimilation (adopting the dominant culture only), marginalization (rejecting both cultures), separation (retaining only the original culture), or integration (becoming bicultural).

Methodology

This study employs a combined sociolinguistic and ethnographic methodology. The sociolinguistic dimension involves a survey of the Nollywood industry, leading to the purposive selection of two films: *Eti Keta* (2011) and *Ade Ferrari* (2015). These films were chosen because they are scripted in both Yoruba—the dominant speech norm in South-West Nigeria—and English, the nation's official second language.

To facilitate analysis, a video converter was used to digitize the films, allowing for the precise editing and cropping of relevant scenes. The thematic treatment of the Nigerian diaspora experience in these movies provides a framework for investigating how such experiences shape perceptions of identity.

Through ethnographic data collection, this paper explores the socio-cultural dimensions of language use within the Yoruba-English bilingual settings presented on screen. Specifically, it highlights and analyzes the myriad of cultural practices depicted in each film to understand the broader bilingual environment.

Language and the Ideologies of Identities

Ideologies of national identity are a significant component of modern social and cultural identities, which are closely tied to linguistic identity. The concept of national identity therefore has serious implication for linguistic identity, specifically in the ways it indicates the connection between individuals and national belonging in modern societies. In this regard, national identity is quite important to individuals' conception of the self and often constitutes an essential emotional component of individual's awareness of who they are. Scott

and Spencer (1998) observe that ‘racial’ or ‘national’ heritage naturally appear in the list of words which people use to describe their concept of self. Similarly, Anderson (1991) contends that nations are systems of cultural representation whereby people recognize a shared experience of identification with an extended community. According to Anderson (ibid), identity development is achieved through the co-interaction and co-dependence of national belonging and mother-tongue affiliation. Consequently, a common language is a dominant constituent in the formation of nations, and indeed, of national identity. However, some countries specify a unified language ideology whereas societal multilingualism actually holds sway, as in the case of Belgium and Switzerland. Austria and Germany share a common language but each constructs a different national ideology (Giddens, 1987). It would appear then that the idea of a common language is the exception rather than the rule as far as national ideologies are concerned. Other ideologies include those of a common origin, common culture, common value or common citizenship (Giddens (1987; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Piller (2001:273) describes national identity as the product of the nation-state which confers many rights and privileges on those who are described by their affiliation to it. It has been argued that contemporary direction in global language ideologies suggest that linguistic diversity or multilingualism has found primacy in the linguistic and national ideologies of many countries (Garcia, 1997; Quell, 1998) around the globe.

Yoruba-English Bilingualism and the Negotiation of Cultural Identities in *Eti Keta* and *Ade Ferrari*

A central idea in the examination of cultural identities in these two Nollywood movies is the interrogation of language as a tool of social and cultural negotiation by Nigerians at home and Nigerians abroad. The two films share a common sociolinguistic feature in the producers’ artistic representation of the peculiar linguistic constituents of the Nigerian setting - societal multilingualism at the macro level and the bilingual urban speech norm at the micro level.

To this end, the speech norm in the two films is predominantly characterized by English and Yoruba while other ethno-linguistic features are minimally represented in characters like Adigun’s uncle (Hausa), Ifeoma (Igbo) in *Eti Keta* and Lady Tina (Edo) in *Ade Ferrari*. The dominant

deployment of Yoruba –English speech patterns in the two films can be described as the producers’ recognition of the urban speech norm as a necessary ingredient of individuals’ expression of identity in terms of not just the ‘being’ but also of ‘becoming’ (Hall, 1990). In other words, in the projection of Yoruba-English communicative norms, the characters project the urban dweller’s desire to identify with both the contemporary realities of urban existence as well as the opportunities which urbanity presents. Ibrahim (1999) provides an insight into the concepts of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ thus:

The former is an accumulative memory, an experience, and a conception upon which individuals interact with the world around them, whereas the latter is the process of building this conception. (1999:354)

The character of Ade Ferrari (the original) maintains a dual citizenship. He is Nigerian by birth as well as a naturalized American. An international business man, Ade Ferrari shuttles between Nigeria and America where his family resides. His dual national identity is aptly depicted in his name - Ade Ferrari- a combination of both cultures; the ‘Ferrari’ being a nick- name he adopts to depict his level of sophistication and exposure as a widely travelled Nigerian-American. Ade Ferrari portrays his dual national identity through his characteristic dramatic manner of speaking in half Yoruba, half American: When he discovers that his house-help, Suraju, had been impersonating him, he threatens the boy angrily:

Ade Ferrari: Look at this boy, men!.... Iwo n ba mi l’oruko je?
(.....*you have been destroying my image?*....)
I’m gonna deal with you, men, you know what am saying?

Ade Ferrari’s everyday speech mannerism is characterized by style-shifting involving switches between English and Yoruba, another indication of his commitment to both cultures, when he gives instructions to his domestic help, Suraju, as he proceeds on a trip abroad:

Ade Ferrari: Koo make sure pe everything is in order. ... Awon cars mi yen,
o le maa warm won, ma gbe won jade o. Kan maa warm won

ninu compound

(Ensure that everything is in order. Start my cars once in a while
only within the compound , do not drive out my cars).

Ade Ferrari's penchant for Americanisms finds equal expression in his flamboyant life-style: flashy cars, flashy clothes and jewelry and a palatial residence in the city. Little wonder then that Suraju is easily fascinated by Ade Ferrari's 'international' identity and wastes no time in appropriating this charismatic persona the moment his boss travels to America. The transformation of Suraju to Ade Ferrari is therefore motivated by the former's desire to attain an American -affiliated dual persona, even by crooked means.

The concept of national identity which is presented in *Eti Keta* clearly shows how contemporary trends in immigration necessitates a distinction between affiliation through citizenship and affiliation through national identity. Adigun's unplanned sojourn to the United States of America occurs at the instance of a corporate scholarship. The company's motivation is to assist beneficiaries to access Western education for personal self-improvement and of course, the attendant boost to the company's manpower development. To this end, Adigun's excitement when he is selected for the scholarship to America aligns with his personal quest to acquire an American identity which can be described as essentially socio-economic. This socio-economic affiliation is equally expressed in Adigun's naïve expectations of instant wealth in America, a place he perceives as a citadel of limitless opportunities, made possible by Western modernization. When he is faced with the reality of his American dream, however, Adigun expresses his disillusionment with this affiliation in his lamentation to his female co-beneficiary, Francisca Agbabiaka, in America:

Adigun: E mi ro pe maa ma sha dollars ni le ti n ba de'bi ni....

Sugbon lowo ti mo wa yii, ti mo ba ri three jobs ni

ojọ kan, I will do it!

(I thought I would be picking dollars off the streets when I get here..... But right now, I am ready to do three jobs in one day!).

Francisca: Se o le to'yen ni? (Is it that bad?)

Adigun: O le ju beẹ lo! (It is even worse!)

Inter-cultural communication is an important component of the filmic projection of characters and thematic concern in the two films. The conscious acknowledgement of the sociolinguistic diversity of the Nigerian society is vividly depicted in the varying levels of ethnic and cultural representations in the two movies. The richness of the Nigerian socio-ethnic diversity is more clearly depicted in *Eti - Keta* not only in terms of the larger cast size but in the linguistic repertoire range of the dialogue. Virtually all the characters speak a blend of Yoruba and English, depicting the dominant urban speech norm of societal bilingualism. A macro-level multilingual speech norm is depicted in the characters of Ifeoma, (“*Ọmọ Ibo*”), one of Sheri’s friends, who includes Igbo in her linguistic repertoire, and Adigun’s affluent uncle, who engages Adigun in fluent Hausa. In *Ade Ferrari*, Suraju uses Hausa as a “stunt language” in the DPO’s office to create a false affinity with the ‘Sultan of Sokoto’ in a fake telephone conversation:

Suraju: Sultan of Sokoto? *Ina Kwana!* Ina Gejia?
Ọdọ DPO kan ni mo wa nibi..... Yauwa...yauwa.
 (Sutan of Sokoto! Good-day! How are you? I am with
 one DPO here in Lagos ... O.k. Alright)

This linguistic strategy surprisingly changes the DPO’s attitude towards Suraju who had been dragged to the police station on accusations of extortion and fraudulent practices by two of his victims. Stupefied, the DPO switches allegiance and declares that the complainants are not totally blameless, and so dismisses them!

DPO to Complainants: *Şe ẹ gbọ statement ẹnu man yii? O ni oun ko gbe signboard si’ta pe oun n ẹ visa ... To ba tiẹ wa jẹ VC, ẹ o yẹ ki ẹ ko’wo fun ni? ... Ọrọ yin ru’ju!*
 (You heard what this man said? He said he did not advertise himself as a visa procurer... Even if he is the VC, should you give him money? Your case is not clear!)

By summoning a multilingual persona, Suraju succeeds in enhancing his Yoruba-English identity as he reaches for a speech norm that has socially recognized power affiliation (Hausa is the language of the Northern aristocrats and top military officers who wield enormous power in Nigeria). This enables

Suraju, a low-level domestic employee, to fully actualize his impersonation game to the fullest. Not only does he succeed in intimidating his accuser-victims and achieve instant leverage over them, he proceeds to hoodwink the Divisional Police Officer into paying him five hundred thousand naira to process travel documents for the latter's siblings! The character of Suraju here depicts the recognition of language as not just a communicative tool, but as an important instrument of power which can be used to maneuver oneself out of a difficult situation. This is quite instructive, for in that instant, it becomes clear to the accused that the common-core Yoruba-English bilingual identity of all the characters at the police station scene (Suraju, the DPO and the two complainants are all proficient in Yoruba and English) was about to become an albatross, hence the need to summon a more powerful language affiliation.

The ideology of identity being portrayed through language choice in this scene aligns with Bourdieu (1977, 1992)'s conception of language as a "marketplace" where the "economics of linguistic exchange" are daily enacted. According to Bourdieu, the exchange of linguistic capital and the position that agents (speakers) hold within the marketplace depend largely on the 'legitimacy' of *who is speaking*, under what *social conditions* and the nature of what is being said. This idea is supported by Norton Pierce's (1995) argument:

It is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks... (1995:13)

Suraju recognizes the importance of power -wielding social networks within the Nigerian urban setting where he operates, and builds his extortion business around this modern reality. His *modus operandi* involves the deliberate parade of fierce-looking body guards, one of them carrying his numerous mobile phones (to create a façade of diverse international connections); the skillful fabrication of false tales of stupendous wealth; and dramatic telephone conversations with non-existent power-wielders around the globe (the calls are usually made by one of Suraju's cronies). Naturally, name-dropping, bragging and flashy mannerisms are crucial components of Suraju's deceitful escapades, as he bombards the Divisional Police Officer with a plethora of lies:

Suraju: Mi o mọ iru luck ti awọn people yii ni.
Mo ṣẹṣẹ gba visa fun awọn eeyan bii 157 l’anaa ni....
(I just secured visas for about 157 people yesterday, these people just don’t have luck)

DPO: Mo ni awọn aburo meji, wọn fẹ travel lọ si America
(I have two siblings who have been trying to secure American visa for a while now....)

Suraju: Emi ati Obama ṣẹṣẹ sọrọ lanaa ni. (I just spoke to Obama yesterday).

DPO: Eyin ati Obama, the American President!?
(You and Obama, the American President!?)

Suraju: Obama kọ ni mo mọ. Clinton ni mo mọ, t’o introduce mi si Obama.
A jijo lọ si South Africa, ti a lọ ki Mandela ni hospital.
(I am not even familiar with Obama. It is Clinton I really know; he introduced me to Obama. Together, we travelled to South Africa to visit Mandela in the hospital).

In *Etì Keta*, we witness a similar form of language affiliation for power play between Adigun and his garrulous uncle when they meet at Aduke’s place. Thinking that Adigun traced him to the place to harass him for air ticket fare, Adigun’s uncle sets aside his Yoruba-English linguistic identity and switches to Hausa to intimidate his nephew by getting into an unnecessary argument with the younger man. This style-shifting serves two purposes: One, to discourage any act of embarrassment from Adigun in the presence of the former’s female friends; and two, as a means of *excluding* the other people in the room from their brief ‘discussion’. By switching from his Yoruba-English speech norm to Hausa, (a language he shares with his nephew), he succeeds in destabilizing Adigun and reinforcing the unequal power relations between them. Once that is achieved, he switches back to Yoruba-English as he warns Adigun:

Uncle: As the next Baale, mi o le jẹ gbese lori ẹ, ...
Don’t ever look for me in your life!
(As the next in line for our community headship position, I will not allow you to run me into debt! Don’t ever look for me in your life!)

In this brief encounter, Adigun's uncle deploys Yoruba-English bilingualism for the re-establishment of his personal identification with Adigun after he had convinced himself that the younger man was not there to harass him for money. The Yoruba-English norm was momentarily replaced by Hausa for restricted interaction.

Foreign Versus Local Identities

The projection of dual identities in the two films is directly related to the presence of two contending language communities as represented by English and Yoruba respectively, even though the bilingual affiliation operates within a multilingual sociolinguistic milieu. Most of the major characters carry on their daily interactions simultaneously in Yoruba and English. English represents the foreign identity while Yoruba is used to project local or ethnic identity. The inclination of the average urban dweller to project a dual linguistic identity is essentially a reflection of the urban speech norm which accommodates individual projections of identity that reflect the contact between English and the indigenous language of the community. The dichotomies between "foreign" and "local" are socially constructed in terms of perceptions about improved standard of livelihood and access to a superior form of modernity, among other socio-economic advantages provided by the foreign culture. This perception is expressed in the form of the average Nigerian's conscious preference for anything foreign and the conscious snubbing of the indigenous, 'local' identity. The implication of this for interpersonal interaction is the tendency of individuals to use their language choice as a means of expressing social categorization by presenting a sense of their social status (Tajfel, 1979). Thus, the newly 'rebranded' Ade Ferrari (Suraju) thus flies into a rage when accosted at the filling station by an old friend who addresses him as *Suraju ọmọ iya alakara* (Suraju, the son of the bean-cake seller) as he blurts out in 'Americanese':

Suraju: What the hell is happening in this country men?!
Do I look like Suraju to you?

The befuddlement of Suraju's old friend is made even worse when Suraju gets his body-guards to beat up the fellow for this 'embarrassment'. In this instance, Suraju demonstrates his determination to dissociate himself from his poor

background by establishing a superior social identity which he believes is conferred on him by his fake ‘American returnee’ image. In order to improve his original self- image, Suraju seeks to enhance his status by adopting an image based on foreign identity, an image which is inspired by the American life-style of his boss, the real Ade Ferrari.

In *Eti Keta*, Sheri, Adigun’s fiancée, is playfully referred to by her friends as “*Iyawo omọ Yankee*” (American guy’s wife); an expression which clearly distinguishes Sheri from the other ladies in terms of marriage prospect. This position naturally comes with an added expectation of a brighter future when she joins her fiancé in America. At Adigun’s place of work, the word “*returnees*” carries considerable foreign affiliation and attendant prestige. The Managing Director frequently uses the word to refer to beneficiaries of the American scholarship who had completed their training abroad and returned to add value to the company. Since most of the staffers aspire to win the scholarship, everyone looks forward to becoming a *returnee*. Ajadi’s colleagues in the robbery gang promise to elevate his life-style by showing him the distinction between “*ayee local*” (local life-style) and “*ayee foreign*” (foreign life-style); a juxtaposition between Ajadi’s subsisting status and the promise of a better future. Thus, characters consciously align themselves with the social identity which promotes their sense of pride and self-esteem and that which generally enables them to project an image of their belonging to a favourable socio-economic group.

Interestingly, the portrayal of Nigerians abroad in *Eti Keta*’s depicts emotional attachment to the mother-tongue as the Nigerians interact mainly in Yoruba and speak English with the foreigners. English serves a semi-official function among Nigerians abroad specifically in power relationships such as employer-employee, where language alternation is often employed, as in the case of Adigun’s frequent language alternation in his interactions with the Nigerian wife of his American boss. Generally, the characters’ social interactions in the American setting shows that mother-tongue identities are strong among Nigerians abroad.

Personal/Individual Identities

The entire filmic experience in *Ade Ferrari* centers around the transformation of Suraju, a low-level domestic help into a fake replica of his successful boss.

Suraju's idealization of who he wants to be is informed by his conviction that the modern society neither appreciates honesty nor rewards it, hence his decision to construct a fake personal identity. Equally, Suraju's retinue of hapless victims continues to swell as a result of the victims' wrong perception of Suraju's true identity; a perception largely fuelled by the influence of foreign culture on the socio-economic psyche of the many young Nigerians who scramble to travel overseas.

In *Eti Keta*, the character of Abeni presents a very interesting example of linguistic projection of individual identity. Not one to be weighed down by her physical disability (she limps on one leg), Abeni is feisty, stubborn and confident. When she is introduced to Adeola, her male admirer, she responds sharply to Adeola's scrutiny of her disability in an outburst which reinforces the role of personal representation in the projection of the self, especially in face-to-face interactions.

Abeni: What is your problem? Why are you looking at me like that?
Jọọ! Jọọ! Jọọ! ko tii pẹ ju. If you don't like what you see,
you better move to the next bus-stop!
(Please! Please! Please! It is not too late. ...)

In this, Abeni's self-presentation in relation to others, and the image with which she identifies, becomes an integral part of her personal identity, as she confidently extols herself: *Emi Abeni ti ko ni rival* (I, Abeni of unrivalled beauty!).

Beyond the dynamics of social and cultural negotiations of identity, the deployment of a dual linguistic component of the dialogue establishes the bilingual nature of interactions in the two films. Not only are the characters bilingual, they display considerable bicultural affiliations in the daily mix of cross-cultural identifications: English is reserved for official communication in domains like offices and police station; but at the interpersonal level, characters freely alternate between English and Yoruba, even in official communication, as in the heated exchange between Ajadi and his female co-worker:

Co-worker: What exactly is your problem? What are you feeling like?
You stupid impedimental!

Ajadi: Ko dẹ ni daa fun ẹ! Olori buruku! Ashẹwoooo!

(It will not be well with you! Never-do-well! Prostitute!).

The bilingual content of the characters' expressions of individuality can be gleaned from the uses of Yoruba-English bilingualism to establish social boundaries and space. This aligns with the view of Heller (1987) that language constrains access to different social activities and the formation of social relationships. Such spatial delineation is observed in the strained relationship between Suraju and his bosom friend Bosun, who is cut off from Suraju's new world when the latter becomes Ade Ferrari, and begins to speak and dress like an American returnee. In fact, Suraju jettisons all of his old friends and uses his new 'foreign' image to create social distance in order to actualize his new status. This instance demonstrates the view of Tajfel (1979) that groups provide individuals with a sense of social identity, therefore group affiliation is an important source of pride and self-esteem. The film characters' language choices in different situations therefore indicate the recognition of social categorization as an effective means of establishing in-group and out-group differentiation (Turner & Tajfel, 1986, Turner, 1982). Suraju thus discriminates against his old friends as 'out-group' while locating himself within the in-group of the 'nouveau-riche' to which he pretends a new belonging.

The use of Yoruba-English bilingualism as a tool of symbolic representation of certain cultural practices is a pervasive component of language alternation, otherwise called code-switching (Poplack 1988, Romaine 1989) in *Eti Keta*. The linguistic repertoire of most of the characters consists mainly of English and Yoruba, thus the two languages are frequently alternated in the dialogue. In the portrayal of certain cultural practices like greetings, prayers, incantations, rituals, however, we see the symbolic capital of Yoruba-English being vividly deployed for the purpose of repetition or emphasis to drive home the cultural message. For instance, as Adigun commences his trip to America, an uncle offers bilingual farewell prayers:

My son, go well. Waa lqo're, waa bqo're. Waa ba wa l'alaafia.
Go well.
(May you go well and return well).

The herbalist who performs money ritual for Aduke, Adetutu's sister, emphasizes the danger in possible non-compliance with his directions by alternating between the two languages:

Herbalist: Èni ti a fi okun ẹmi rẹ kọ l'ọrun.. ko gbọdọ ku. If the person should die,
you, Aduke, will not live another day! Ẹbọ ti a wi yii, ọdun
marun-marun l'oo maa ẹe. It must be renewed every five years.
(the person with whom your life is tied, must not die.
... the propitiation I am talking about, must be done every five years)

Sheri is troubled by the stigma of single motherhood and terrified that Adigun will leave her for a single woman. Despite his constant reassurance about his love for her, Sheri's misgivings always find emotive expression in her characteristic response to Adigun's queries about her well-being: "*Two naa ni.*" (you are the reason). Sheri prefers English in the expression of her deepest fears. In the flashback recounting of the unfortunate death of her first husband, her language choice establishes a symbolic connection between her, Adigun and her son. Adigun's mother deploys English for similar emotive purpose when she recounts the circumstances that led to her husband's death, as she laments: "That was how your father died, and I became lame." Similarly, many characters resort to English in the expression of emotive features like anger or frustration. For instance, Adigun expresses his exasperation with Ajadi's constant bickering with his wife, Shaki, as he chides his brother:

Adigun: Oo tiẹ ro ti Mama! Do you want to kill her? Se o fẹ pa Mama ni?
(Did you even think of Mama in all these? Do you want to kill her?)

Ajadi also expresses his disappointment and frustration over Adigun's failure to return the money which he loaned to the latter by frequently adopting code-switching:

Ajadi: Of what good will this discussion of ours be? Se ki n baa le pada s'ẹwọn ni?
After all I've been through. It's a shame pe brother temi lo n bother mi!
(What good will this discuss achieve? So, I can return to prison? It's a shame
that I am being bothered by my own brother!)

Conclusion

This paper has explored the dimensions of Yoruba-English bilingualism in two Nollywood films, *Eti Keta* (2011) and *Ade Ferrari* (2015). Its analysis of bilingual speech norms presented various strands of socio-cultural identification within the portrayed Yoruba communities. By characterizing how socio-economic challenges interrogated self-perception, the study provided evidence of the interconnection between language and identity negotiation. The deliberate framing of screen dialogues in both English and Yoruba deepened the recognition of dual linguistic identity as a central component of contemporary Nollywood. This sociolinguistic approach enhanced the understanding of how linguistic repertoires effectively projected the human condition in modern society.

The investigation explored the impact of Nollywood in portraying social negotiations and illuminated the significance of language ideologies. Beyond entertainment, the linguistic components of these productions shed light on how individuals perceived themselves in relation to their cultural environments. Consequently, Nollywood served as a resource for cultural re-orientation and the promotion of social consciousness for Africans both at home and in the diaspora.

Finally, the paper examined how characters represented the shifting and contesting of identities within Nigeria's multilingual environment. The filmic projections of urban existence and socio-economic challenges provided avenues for individual and collective expression. Ultimately, these manifestations revealed the desire of individuals to locate themselves favorably within their own cultural constructs and across cross-cultural boundaries.

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Filmography

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