

Language Attitudes in Ìdóàní: A Sub-Urban Community in Ondo State of Nigeria

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Abstract

The attitudes of the Ìdóàní community members to Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú and standard Yorùbá are examined in this paper. The research findings show that standard Yorùbá, Amùsìgbó, and Ìyàyú are codes that are used in Ìdóàní community and that standard Yorùbá is the Lingua Franca in the community. The findings also show, among others, that the attitudes of the Amùsìgbó respondents towards the Amùsìgbó code are not positive enough to ensure the future survival of the code and that the attitudes of the Ìyàyú respondents towards the Ìyàyú code show that the Ìyàyú people embrace the Yorùbá language because of the inevitable interaction with the non-Ìyàyú members of the community. It is further shown that when the High and Low varieties of a language exist in a community it is possible for the Low variety to be threatened with extinction because of the factors of education and age and that when two different codes are used in a community it is possible for the speakers of a code with Low status to do everything possible to ensure the survival of the code. The finding has also contributed to our knowledge of the fact that dialects of a language can be endangered for social and political reasons.

Keywords: language, dialect, attitudes, mutual intelligibility, multilingualism.

INTRODUCTION

The multilingual nature of the Àkókó-Edó border areas of Oṅdó and Edó States of Nigeria can also be referred to as a Tower of Babel just as Wardhaugh (1987) (cited in Babájídí 2001:9) has described the multilingual situation of African States as a Tower of Babel. A visit to these areas will confirm that nearly every town or village or hamlet has at least two or three dialects or languages in its linguistic repertoire. One of such towns or villages is Ìdóàní a town in Ọsẹ Local Government Area in Oṅdó State. The Ìdóàní Community has six quarters namely Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú, Ìsùrẹ, Àkò, Ìsẹ̀wà and Ọwáání. While Ọkẹ (1972:63 & 66) reports that standard Yorùbá and Ìyàyú Languages are used in Ìdóàní community, Ìkòtún (2003:10) and Ìkòtún and Sọyọyẹ (2001 – 2002:85 – 87) report that the codes that are used in the community include standard Yorùbá, Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú and that Amùsìgbó is a dialect of Yorùbá because there is mutual intelligibility between Yorùbá and Amùsìgbó.

The studies further show that there is no mutual intelligibility between Yorùbá and Ìyàyú because Ìyàyú is a different speech form. For example, the word 'ounje' (food) in Yorùbá is 'nñje' in Amùsìgbó and 'edè' in Ìyàyú. Ìkòtún and Sọyọyẹ (2001 – 2002:93–103) also show how Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú and Yorùbá have been existing side-by-side in the community through language use at home, in church, for political, cultural and educational matters, friends and strangers. Ethnically and linguistically, there are no similarities between Ìyàyú on one hand and

Amùsìgbó, Ìsùrẹ, Àkò, Ìsẹ̀wà and Ọwáání on the other. Historically, each of Amùsìgbó, Àkò, Ìsùrẹ, Ìsẹ̀wà and Ọwáání has its dialect. At present, Àkò, Ìsùrẹ, Ìsẹ̀wà and Ọwáání dialects are dead or no longer prominent. However, the two quarters under study are Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú and there is no known research work that has examined the attitudes of the Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú speakers to Ìyàyú, Amùsìgbó and standard Yorùbá which is the Lingua Franca of the Ìdóàní Community. There is no doubt that there are speech forms that are endangered in Àkókó-Edó area of Nigeria (see Ọkẹ 1972:63-66). There is therefore the need to document attitudes to regional dialects and standard dialect of a language. In this paper, I want to examine the attitudes of the Ìdóàní Community members to Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú and standard Yorùbá.

Language Attitudes

Research studies on language attitudes to foreign languages and Nigerian languages show that educated Nigerians have a disposition to English. Gòkè-Paríqlá (1987:88 & 89) employs the sociology of language approach in his study of a description of the sociolinguistic bases of language choice in Nigerian urban centres. The essence of the study, which is carried out on the University of Ifẹ Campus among the University workers and students, is to determine the use and functions of Nigerian languages and English and also the attitudes of Nigerians to the question of a National language. Having identified his respondents' reactions to the question of a National language, Gòkè-Paríqlá (1987:97) concludes

that the English language is still preferred to any of the Nigerian languages as the National language by the respondents.

The factors of prestige and success that have been identified by Nwafor (1971) (cited in Ahukanna, 1990:178 & 179), Babájídé (2001:4) and Oyètádé (2001:16 & 17) can be cited in support of Gòkè-Pariólá's (1987:97) findings. We are of the opinion that the factor of success is especially responsible for most Nigerians' interest in English. One needs sufficient knowledge of English for securing white collar jobs, for good performance in schools and also to secure admission into any of the schools in Nigeria. This is the reason why those who do not have good mastery of English would still want to speak English to their children at home or encourage them to master the language.

Discussing the Federal Government of Nigeria Policy on Education (NPE henceforth), Egbokhare (2001:112) frowns at the exclusion of Nigerian Pidgin (NP henceforth) in the NPE. According to him, the population that speaks NP is more than the population that speaks both Hausa and Yorùbá. He argues that, "it is clear violation of the linguistic rights of the speakers of the language; their right to literacy, information, freedom of expression, as well as their right to participate in the process of governance" (p. 112). Egbokhare's (2001:112 & 113) position that information through NP now gets to nearly every home in Nigeria has earlier been observed by Jubril (1995:233). Jubril (1995:233) says:

The functions of NP have become more extensive. Apart from expanding its territorial spread as a Lingua Franca in ethnically homogeneous areas such as Warri, Sapele, Port-Harcourt, Lagos, Abuja and other large cities and among the lower ranks of security forces, it is now used in radio and television broadcasts and in poetry and drama.

We agree with Egbokhare (ibid) that the Federal Government of Nigeria only favours the use and teaching of Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá out of almost four hundred languages that are existing in Nigeria. For example, only Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá are taught in Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria. We want to add also that it is not only the lower ranks of security forces that use NP. It is also a means of communication between the higher ranks of security in informal situations. However, the attitudes of the Federal Government of Nigeria towards the Nigeria Pidgin may not change. This is because the impression in very many circles is that NP is broken English or a truth stepped down. We can therefore say that in a multilingual society, the study of attitudes in relation to language choice or use may

help to show the direction towards which the languages or codes in the society are moving. In this study, we will examine the attitudes of the speakers of Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú to their mother-tongues as well as to Standard Yorùbá.

Data Collection

The questionnaire that was used to collect information about the attitudes of the Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú speakers to Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú and Yorùbá had two parts. Part one of the questionnaire was designed to obtain information on personal data such as age, education and occupation of the subjects. Part two of the questionnaire was the multiple choice type and it contained the following questions:

1. How will you feel if your dialect is given more prominence than Yorùbá?
2. Are there circumstances where you would speak Yorùbá even when you are talking to another speaker of your own language or dialect?
3. Will you like to see your language or dialect used in public spheres more than it is now or as much as Yorùbá?

These questions touch on language loyalty.

The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of people in the community to Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú and Yorùbá. This is because since the three codes are used interchangeably by Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú speakers, there should be no reason why the speakers should create any negative attitude towards any of the codes. Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were given to two hundred people from the two quarters and each of the quarters had one hundred. We decided to make use of the opinions of two hundred people because we felt the number was sufficiently representative of the people in both quarters. The respondents were randomly selected from both quarters. All of the two hundred copies were returned. The questionnaire sought to know the respondents' feelings or attitudes towards the Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú and the Yorùbá languages both at home and in public places. The researcher's intimate knowledge of the town since 1987 was a contributing factor to the one hundred percent return of the questionnaire forms.

Those whose opinions were sought included men, women and children who were either farmers, artisans, traders, civil servants, applicants or students. In Amùsìgbó quarters, the number that belonged to the 10–30 age-group was 40. 32 respondents belonged to the age-group of 31–50 and 28 respondents belonged to the age-group of 51 and above respectively. In Ìyàyú quarters, there were 37 respondents in 10–30 age-group, 42 respondents in 31–50 age-group and 21 respondents in 51 and above age-group.

According to the level of education, in Amùsìgbó quarters, 18 of the respondents did not have formal education. 44 respondents had below post primary education, 36 had post primary education and 2 respondents had post secondary education. Among the Ìyàyú respondents, 14 did not have formal education, 40 had below post primary education, 43 had post primary education and 3 had post secondary education. The occupation of the respondents also shows different categories of people. Among the Amùsìgbó respondents, 43 were farmers, 21 were traders, 11 were civil servants, 6 were artisans and 19 were students / applicants. The Ìyàyú respondents included 39 farmers, 18 traders, 13 artisans, 9 civil servants and 21 students / applicants. Participant observation of the language use and Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú speakers' attitudes to Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú and Yorùbá from 1987 to 2006 was also considered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to be able to determine the attitudes of the respondents to Amùsìgbó, Ìyàyú and Yorùbá, responses to the research questions were correlated with social factors of age, level of education and occupation. The results of the study are presented and discussed below:

As shown in Figure 1 below, majority of the respondents in Amùsìgbó quarters show negative attitudes towards the Amùsìgbó dialect. The factor of age seems to be in support of the negative attitudes of the Amùsìgbó speakers towards the Amùsìgbó dialect.

Between the ages of 10 – 20, 2 respondents were happy if the Amùsìgbó dialect is given more prominence than the Yorùbá language while responses from 11 respondents showed indifference to the Amùsìgbó dialect. Between 21 – 30 age-group, all the 27 respondents were indifferent if the Amùsìgbó dialect is not given prominence over the Yorùbá language. Out of the 23 respondents in the 31 – 40 age-group, 4 respondents were happy if Amùsìgbó enjoys more currency than the Yorùbá language while the remaining 19 respondents claimed indifference to Amùsìgbó.

Furthermore, for the 41 – 50 age-group, 7 out of the 9 respondents were happy if Amùsìgbó enjoys currency than the Standard Yorùbá while the remaining 2 respondents claimed indifference to the local dialect. Out of the 28 respondents who belonged to the 51 and above age-group, 17 were happy if Amùsìgbó is more favoured than the standard Yorùbá while 11 claimed indifference to the local dialect.

From the foregoing, the first observation is that majority of the speakers of the Amùsìgbó dialect do not show appreciable interest in the Amùsìgbó dialect. Therefore, it might be worth speculating that

the majority of the respondents seem not to be bothered if the Amùsìgbó dialect is replaced by Yorùbá. Secondly, if the respondents' attitudes are a true reflection of the attitudes of the Amùsìgbó speakers towards the Amùsìgbó dialect, then the future survival of the dialect may be doubted. Majority of those who have shown appreciable interest in the Amùsìgbó dialect are above the age of 40.

In addition, the non-indigenes or people from other Yorùbá ethnic groups such as Òwò, Àkúrẹ̀, Èkìtì, to mention a few, who reside in Amùsìgbó quarters may not see any need for them to learn and use the Amùsìgbó dialect as a result of the negative attitudes exhibited by most speakers to the dialect. The 21 – 30 age-group seems to be an alienated group as all the respondents reported indifference. The overall result of the speakers' attitudes shows that the Yorùbá language may be valued higher than the Amùsìgbó dialect.

Figure 2 in the appendix contains the responses of our interviewees to the question of attitudes in relation to their level of education.

Figure 2 shows that education is another powerful factor that is responsible for the indifference to the Amùsìgbó dialect among Amùsìgbó respondents. For example, out of the 18 respondents who claimed to have formal education, 12 were happy if Amùsìgbó enjoys more currency than the Standard Yorùbá while 6 were indifferent to Amùsìgbó. 15 out of the 44 respondents who had below Post Primary were happy if Amùsìgbó enjoys currency at the expense of the standard Yorùbá while the remaining 29 were indifferent to the dialect. 3 out of the 36 respondents who had Post Primary or its equivalent were happy if Amùsìgbó is more favoured than the Standard Yorùbá while the remaining 33 showed indifference to Amùsìgbó. The only 2 respondents who had Post-Secondary School Education showed indifference to the prominence of Amùsìgbó over the standard Yorùbá. It is evident that those that were indifferent cut across both the literate and non-literate groups. The majority of those who showed appreciable interest in the Amùsìgbó dialect, however, had no formal education. There were some respondents who, despite their educational attainment, still showed some loyalty to the dialect. In most cases the higher the educational attainment the greater the rate of indifference to the Amùsìgbó dialect. One interpretation of this is that the Amùsìgbó dialect may cease to exist if everybody in those quarters acquires formal education.

The information in Figure 3 below indicates the responses of the interviewees in relation to their occupation. The result too seems to show that

occupation is also a factor that may influence the people's indifference to the Amùsìgbó dialect.

From Figure 3, one can note that 28 out of the 43 farmers were happy if Amùsìgbó enjoys more prominence than the Standard Yorùbá while 15 showed indifference to Amùsìgbó. 11 traders were happy if Amùsìgbó is used more frequently than the Standard Yorùbá while the remaining 10 reported indifference to Amùsìgbó. While all the civil servants and students/applicants were indifferent to the preference of Amùsìgbó to the standard Yorùbá, 4 out of the 6 artisans were happy if Amùsìgbó is preferred to the standard Yorùbá and the remaining 2 showed indifference to Amùsìgbó.

The first observation we can make from the figure is that those who showed indifference to the preference of Amùsìgbó to the standard Yorùbá cut across all the occupational groups. The second observation is that civil servants and students/applicants do not seem to show any appreciable interest in the dialect. The third observation is that if everybody were to be either a civil servant or student, then the Amùsìgbó dialect could have been non-existent by now. The fourth observation is that farmers, traders and artisans still favour the use of the dialect.

The information in Figure 4 below answers the question about the feelings of the Ìyàyú respondents. Our observation from the table indicates that age is a factor that should be considered in the determination of the positive attitudes of the Ìyàyú respondents towards the Ìyàyú dialect.

The 8 respondents who were in the 10 – 20 age-group were happy if Ìyàyú enjoys more currency than the standard Yorùbá. Out of the 29 respondents in the 21 – 30 age-group, 21 were happy if Ìyàyú is preferred to the standard Yorùbá while 8 showed indifference to the Ìyàyú dialect. 25 out of the 26 respondents in the 31 – 40 age-group were happy if the Ìyàyú dialect enjoys more currency than the standard Yorùbá while the remaining 1 were indifferent to Ìyàyú. All the 16 respondents in the 41 – 50 age-group, likewise all the 21 respondents in the 51 and above age-group expressed happiness if Ìyàyú is more used than the standard Yorùbá. It is observed from the figure that speakers of the Ìyàyú dialect cherish their dialect more than Yorùbá. Majority of the respondents prefer the Ìyàyú dialect to the Yorùbá language. Both the old and young ones embrace and try to protect the continuity of the dialect from the overwhelming influence of the Yorùbá language. The subjects' responses are a confirmation of the fact that the Ìyàyú dialect enjoys more currency among the Ìyàyú people.

The Ìyàyú people probably embrace the Yorùbá language because of the inevitable interaction with

people outside their ethnic group. The number of those who were indifferent to the issue of preference for Ìyàyú is not as significant as to threaten the existence of the Ìyàyú dialect. Majority of the respondents expressed satisfaction when non-indigenes speak the Ìyàyú dialect either in public places or at home in their quarters.

The data in Figure 5 below show the responses of the interviewees according to the level of formal education they received. What we observed is that formal education does not affect the loyalty which the Ìyàyú respondents have towards their dialect.

For example, all the 14 respondents who said they had no formal education were happy if Ìyàyú gains prominence over the standard Yorùbá. Out of the 40 respondents with less than Post Primary qualification, 38 expressed happiness if Ìyàyú enjoys currency over Yorùbá while 2 were indifferent to Ìyàyú. 37 out of the 43 respondents who had Post Primary or its equivalent were happy if Ìyàyú is more valued than Yorùbá while the remaining 6 showed indifference to the Ìyàyú dialect. There were 3 respondents who had Post-Secondary School education. 2 out of this number expressed happiness if Ìyàyú is given more prominence than Yorùbá while the remaining 1 showed indifference to Ìyàyú.

One observation from this figure is that formal education may not be a potent factor that could militate against the continued existence of the Ìyàyú dialect. This assertion may be plausible if the appreciable interest of the vast majority of the Ìyàyú people in their dialect, particularly the literate ones, is considered critically.

The information in Figure 6 below contains the responses of the interviewees according to different occupational groups. We observed that occupation would not be a factor that would change the negative attitude of Ìyàyú speakers towards the Yorùbá language.

As it is shown in Figure 6, farmers, traders and artisans would be happy if Ìyàyú is used more than Yorùbá. 8 out of the 9 civil servants expressed happiness if Ìyàyú is given more prominence than Yorùbá while only 1 showed indifference to Ìyàyú. 13 students/applicants would be happy if Ìyàyú enjoys more currency than Yorùbá while the remaining 8 were indifferent to Ìyàyú. We can conclude that nearly all the occupational groups show sufficient loyalty to the Ìyàyú dialect. Therefore, it is not likely that occupation of respondents will be an obstacle to the continued existence of the Ìyàyú dialect. However, one question that has not been addressed is: are the Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú speakers competent in the Yorùbá language that is used as a

Lingua Franca in the community? The answer to this question can be considered in another paper.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown in the study that the attitudes of the Amùsìgbó respondents towards the Amùsìgbó dialect/code are not positive enough to ensure the survival of the dialect. These non-encouraging attitudes seem to place Standard Yorùbá over the Amùsìgbó dialect. Our conclusions are that in future, two things may happen; one is that the Amùsìgbó dialect may become grossly unpopular with the majority of the indigenes of Amùsìgbó and secondly, even when the dialect continues to exist despite the odds, Standard Yorùbá may likely have an edge over it. On the other hand, it has also been affirmed that attitudes of the Ìyàyú respondents towards the Ìyàyú dialect show that the Ìyàyú people embrace the Yorùbá language because of the inevitable interaction with the non-Ìyàyú members of the community. The attitudes of the Ìyàyú people towards the Ìyàyú dialect are sufficiently powerful to ensure continuity of the dialect in the future.

Furthermore, if the High and Low varieties of a language are in use in a small community, it is possible for the Low variety to be threatened with extinction in the future, especially when the old people are finally replaced by the young ones. The factor of education may also make the Low variety to be replaced by the High variety when the number of speakers of the Low variety is negligible. But, if there is no mutual intelligibility between two languages that exist in a small community, it is not unlikely that the will to protect one's cultural heritage may make speakers of the local language to try at all costs to ensure the survival of the local language.

Similarly, it is significant and important to observe that in linguistics, scholars and readers are interested in the endangerment of languages and dialects of a language in order to understand factors that are responsible for endangerment. This paper is a contribution to research efforts in this area of language study. The paper has also contributed to our knowledge of the fact that dialects of a language can be endangered for social and political reasons.

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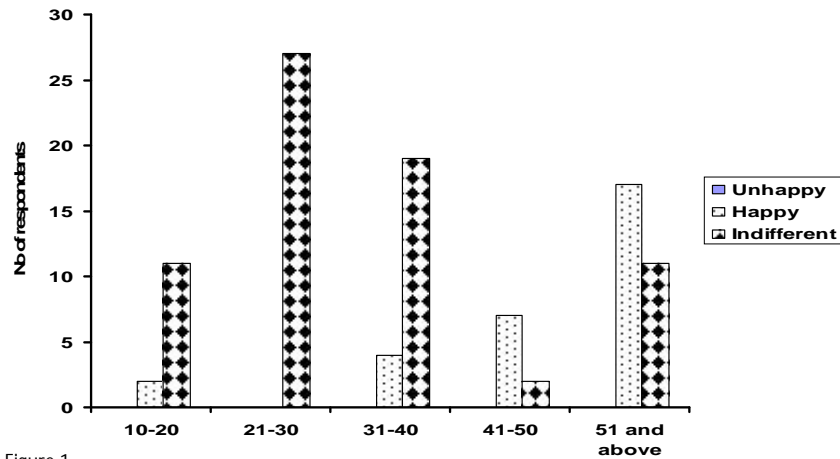


Figure 1 Language Attitudes According to Age in Amùsigbó Quarters

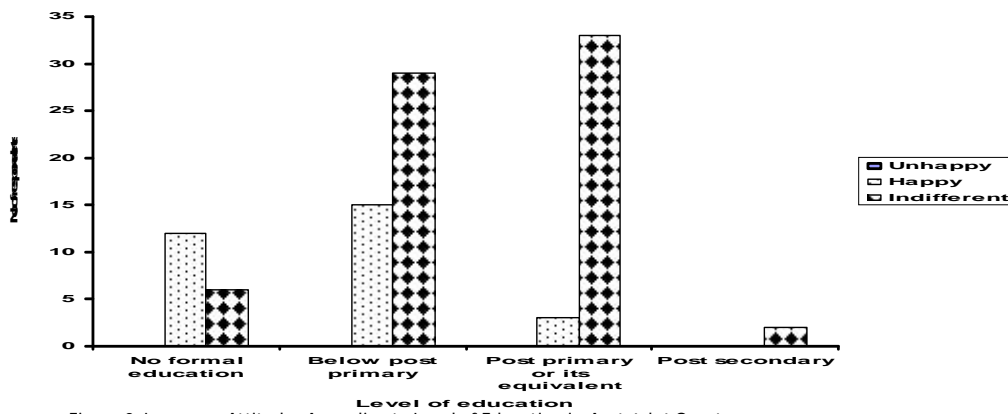


Figure 2: Language Attitudes According to Level of Education in Amùsigbó Quarters

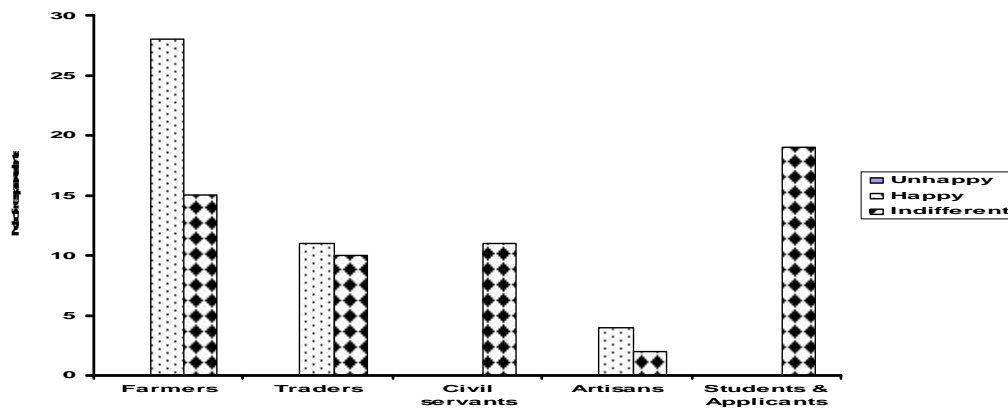


Figure 3: Language Attitudes According to Occupation in Amùsigbó Quarters

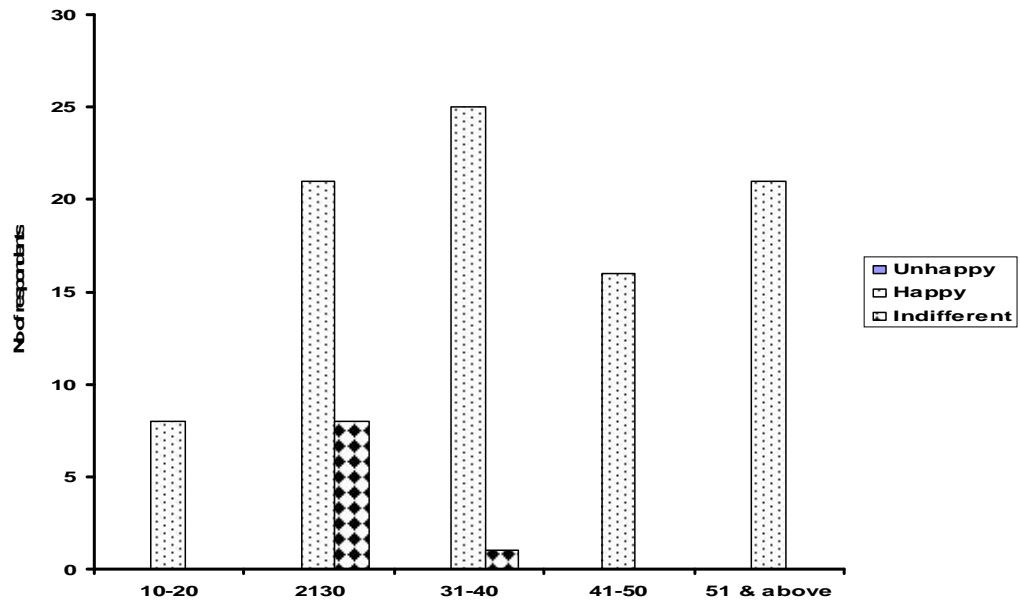


Figure 4 Language Attitudes According to Age in Iyayú Quarters

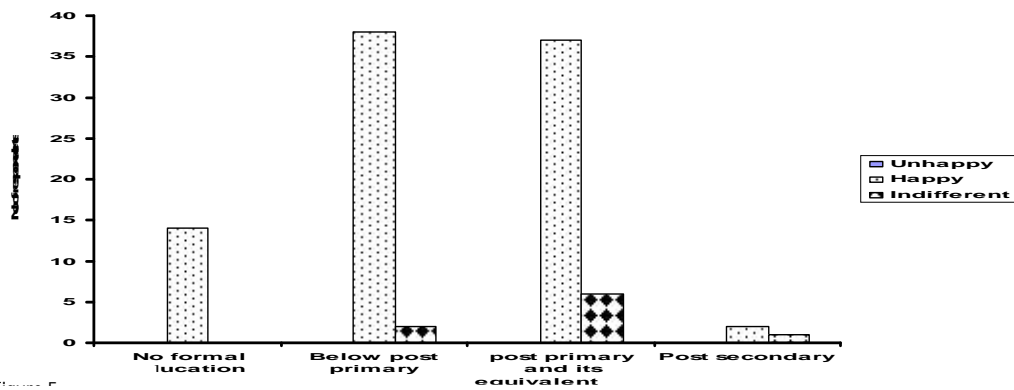


Figure 5 Language Attitudes According to Level of Education in Iyayú

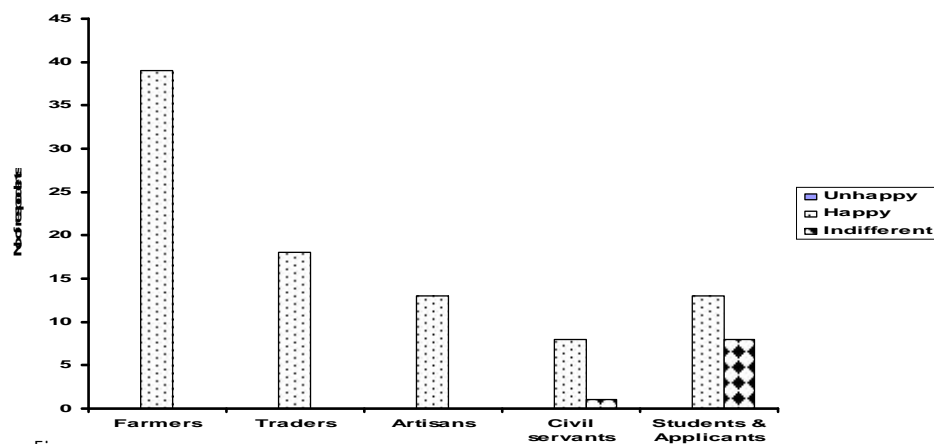


Figure 6 Language Attitudes According to Occupation in Iyayú Quarters