

Investigating Youths' Attitude to the Appropriation of Bafut Tangible Material Culture in the Teaching and Learning of the Bafut Language

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Abstract

This study investigates the attitude of Bafut youths to the appropriation of Bafut material culture motivated by observation that it seems Bafut youths are not quite familiar with Bafut material culture. The number of youths targeted was 50. The data collected for the study was through the administration of a questionnaire to the 50 youths. The study was conducted adopting the following theories: signification by Saussure (1966), the GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) by Fishman (1991), and the cultural-historical theory championed by Virchow (1869). Results obtained from the study revealed that Bafut youths have a positive attitude to the appropriation of Bafut material culture. In the process of language teaching/learning didactic material to teach the Bafut language should carry Bafut material culture. This will expose learners to it and encourage them to use it, thus, maintaining the language.

Keywords: attitude, appropriation, tangible material culture, teaching, learning, language

Introduction and Problem

It has been observed that Bafut has so much in store for the Bafut language in its material culture. Seemingly, its indigenous youths are not acquainted to this material culture which is a representation of the Bafut culture and language. Some five decades ago, the school curriculum had a subject called "Handwork" which was actually meant to train learners how to produce works of art using their own skills. Some of the artistic works were crafts from their areas and they used local materials to produce these artifacts. This exercise did not only train learners how to produce artistic works using their hands but it also enabled the youths to learn the names of the material used in making the artifacts in their various mother tongues thus, maintaining their material culture and their language. Today, the situation has changed. Instead of drilling learners how to produce "Handwork" (material culture) with their hands and use it, learners are sometimes asked to pay money for "Handwork" or the items are bought from the market. The item commonly bought and presented for "Handwork" is brooms. This has made youths less interested in their material culture and given that culture and language is handed down from generation to generation, the disappearance of material culture from a particular area will mean the disappearance of its language and consequently the loss of the identify of indigenes. This problem is a call for concern hence, motivated these researchers to carry out an investigation on the attitude of Bafut youths towards their material culture with the aim of creating awareness in the young generation to love their material culture and learn to produce it which will also help in maintaining their language.

Objectives of Study

The general objective of this study is to find out the attitude of Bafut youths towards the appropriation of their material culture.

The general objective will be obtained from the following specific objectives:

1. To find out if Bafut youths can identify and describe their tangible material culture.
2. To investigate if Bafut youths are willing that Bafut material culture be used in teaching their language.
3. To find out if Bafut youths are familiar with their tangible material culture and suggest ways of making learners appropriate their material culture.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: Can Bafut youths identify and describe tangible material culture?

RQ2: Are they willing that material culture be used in the teaching/learning of the Bafut language?

RQ3: Are the youths familiar with Bafut tangible material culture? How can learners be encouraged to appropriate their culture?

Literature Review

Review of literature consists of conceptual, theoretical and empirical frameworks. Concepts related to the study are explained. The theoretical frame focused on signification, GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) and the cultural-historical theory. The empirical frame reviewed studies related to this work.

Conceptual Framework

Key concepts used in the study such as attitude and tangible material culture will be examined.

Attitude

Ajzen (1988) defines attitude as “a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution or event.” According to Gilbert, Fiske and Lindzey (1998:62) attitude is “...an expression of hates and passions, likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions”. Some linguists have also identified various ways through which attitudes can be measured. Gardner (1985) posits that attitude refers to an individual’s behaviour or reaction towards any situation associated with any immediate context, be it learning language or others. He further asserts that “attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual’s beliefs or opinions about referent”. Attitude therefore is built on an individual’s feelings and observable behaviour towards situations and people. Since this study is based on attitude towards appropriation of material culture, it is therefore relevant to examine attitudes towards material culture.

Tangible Material Culture

The word ‘tangible’ is from Latin *tangere*, “to touch”, and it simply means something that can be touched, felt, thought. It can be used in the metaphorical sense¹. Tangible cultural heritage refers to physical artifacts produced, maintained, and transmitted intergenerationally in a society. Examples include Taj Mahal, Machu Pichu, and the Great Wall of China. All these heritage sites and monuments are here thanks to human creativity and have a global cultural significance². A good example from Cameroon is the Reunification Monument that is situated in Yaounde around the former National House of Assembly. Material is that which can be

¹ www.vocabulary.com

² www.gbnews.ch>your-career-journey

touched or felt by touch, having actual form and substance³. Furthermore, material is a substance or substances of which a thing is made or composed, anything that serves as crude or raw matter to be used or developed for example, wood pulp is the raw material from which paper is made⁴. Tylor (1971) asserts that “culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customs, laws and other capabilities which are learned, shared by men as members of society, and transmitted from one generation to another”. Any laxity, lassitude and levity exhibited by its custodians would result in rapid erosion and disappearance of the uniqueness of the people and their culture. Since the genesis of culture is as old as man himself, without it, man is reduced to an animal. Culture therefore has two essential qualities: first, it is learned and secondly, it is shared.

Material culture can be viewed at two angles: Tangible material culture and non- tangible material culture. Chapbel (2020) states that material culture refers to the physical pieces that make up a culture. Tangible material culture consists of things that are created by humans. Examples include cars, buildings, clothing and tools while non-tangible material culture refers to abstract ideas and ways of thinking that make up a culture. Examples of non-tangible material culture include: traffic laws, words, and dress codes. Unlike tangible material culture, non-tangible material culture is invisible. However, this study focuses on tangible material culture.

Viduka in UNESCO Bangkok (2012) sees material culture as encompassing the study of creation, uses, meaning, and interpretation of the tangible products of human endeavour. As any object can have many different culture needs to be interdisciplinary in nature to take into account historical, iconographical, aesthetics, cultural, scientific and behavioral perspectives.

Another issue is that the significance of an object is always actively constructed within a context and, consequently, its representation is subjective and consequence of a knowledge exchange dynamic, Carbini and de Luca (2016).

Objects are strictly connected to the diverse aspects of social organization, culture, systems of thought, or actions Lemonnier (2013), shaping the normative behaviour of a group, reflecting in them the identity of a social landscape Miller (2010) and acting as communication devices. The meaning can be encoded in an artifact using a basic cognitive process Fauconnier and Turner (2003) which constructs a reality throughout the projection of a conceptual model into a new mental space that blends the properties of the two into a new representation anchored in a material object. The result of the conceptual blending is usually used in a social arena to define symbolic meaning of its own reality Hutchins (2005). For such reasons context and object always exist in a circular relationship Bal and Bryson (1991).

UK Essay (2018) declares that the artifact is the one that is made by human beings and typically it is an item of historical interest. The cultural artifact is made by observing something in a scientific way of investigation and that is naturally presented. The artifact is the element in which historical events, situations, entertainment heritage can be identified by the human being. The artifact includes the function, architecture, designs and so on for the identification of the cultural influences. It is the historical tool that can deliver the environment of the earlier people. The cultural artifacts have the deep roots in the case of representing the philosophy, religion and economics of the earlier culture.

Examples of cultural artifacts include almost anything from pots and books, to religious items, clothing, and tools or gadgets. A cultural artifact is any artifact or item that sheds light on the way a particular society lived, thought or otherwise expressed itself. For example, a statue of the stone age fertility goddess may reveal what people of that time thought about women. Some specialists have endeavoured to offer classification systems for cultural artifacts.

³ www.yourdictionary.com

⁴ [www.dictionary.com>browse>m](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/m)

The Wartofsky system establishes three: Primary artifacts, secondary artifacts and tertiary artifacts. Primary artifacts are those used in production (i.e. a utensil or camera). While secondary artifacts are representations of primary artifacts and tertiary are representations of secondary artifacts. Despite their comparable newness, even modern innovations can be esteemed as cultural artifacts given context and interpretation. Cell phones for example, illustrate how people within modern society have eased and streamlined opportunities for communication. The internet similarly displays and enhances capacity for global outreach and, consequently and paradoxically, the creation of a world where perhaps social and cultural differences are less significant⁵.

Given that diversity is necessary in language teaching and learning, the study uses literal translation to enable those who do not understand Bafut to be able to derive the meaning of artifacts' names. Wanchia (2016) quotes Vinay and Darbelnet (1958:48) who aver that literal translation designates the movement from a SL-TL resulting in a text that is both correct and idiomatic, without any undue attention to issues other than linguistic exigencies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is an interdisciplinary research which touches on several theories. The theories used include: semiocide, linguicide and cultural imperialism matched with signification, GIDS and cultural-historical respectively. The GIDS is a theory which focuses on language maintenance. The GIDS stages 4-8 point to the fact that a language can be maintained if it is transmitted from generation to generation orally (speaking) and through teaching (literacy). Thus, Bafut material culture can only be maintained if the artifacts are transmitted from generation to generation through use at home and in the teaching/learning of the Bafut language. When this is done both the physical artifact and language are preserved.

Semiotics theory (signification) by Saussure and Pierce (see Norquist 2020) states that a sign is anything that stands for something else-that is a sign stands for an object or concept Hoopes (1991). Semiocide coined by Puura (2013) refers to a situation where signs and stories significant to someone are destroyed by someone else's carelessness and malevolence. Linguistic theory (the Graded Intergenerational Disruption scale (GIDS) levels 4-8) by Fishman (1991) focuses on language transmission through education and oral communication matches with linguicide by which is the killing or death of a language from natural or political causes Pinede⁶, and archaeology theory (cultural-historical) by Virchow purports that there are distinct and different cultural groups which can be identified through their material culture. The cultural-historical theory is matched with cultural imperialism which is the dominance of a powerful culture over a nonpowerful culture⁷. The cultural-historical theory is related to this study in that it portrays certain cultural items which are peculiar to the Bafut man in particular. For example, the thatched house 'finda' is not built by everybody in Bafut. Only a crème of people related to the palace can build such a house.

The theory of signification: there are artifacts in Bafut which stand for other things or concepts. For example, the cowries seen in one of the grids signify royalty. In Bafut, only queens wear cowries on their wrists. Any man who sees a woman wearing cowries knows that she is a queen and no man can go closer to her for any marital relationship again.

Other works have been carried out on tangible material culture elsewhere. However, none has been carried out in Cameroon on the use of tangible material culture of a particular area in the teaching of its language. This study focuses on investigating the attitude of Bafut youths on the use of Bafut material culture in the teaching and learning of the Bafut language.

⁵ www.reference.com

⁶ www.wordnik.com

⁷ www.britannica.com

Empirical Review

A study conducted by Csikszentmihaldyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) in urban America on 82 families about the special objects they have in their houses and the reason for their importance to them reveal that the most frequently mentioned objects of the inquiry by the respondents were furniture, visual art, photographs, books, stereos, musical instruments, television, sculpture, plants and plates. The meaning association showed difference mainly under the influence of change in gender and age. Children favourite objects were stereos, parents furniture and grandparents photos. Terry and Koberstien (1989) carried out an experiment on six 3-5 years olds in a small preschool in Southern Illinois to obtain a frequency count of the number of times sharing occurred in a 10 minutes period using books with puppets. Results revealed that combined bibliotherapy and puppetry helped increase sharing behaviour in preschoolers. Money (2007) conducts a research on domestic material culture and everyday life in the UK. He refers to goods and objects that have been acquired and brought into the home in a variety of ways and the main discussion rests on how these goods have been appropriated in order to maintain and nurture important social relationships and connections. The aim of the research was to understand how individuals consume these items rather than as an exercise in merely cataloguing what items were on display. From the statistics gathered from the research, it was observed that a fairly large proportion of the goods and objects encountered in the 50 households were transacted via active system of gift giving among family, friends and to a lesser, wide social networks. This present research is out to encourage the use of Bafut material culture in the teaching of the Bafut language.

Methodology

This section presents the research design, participants, sample size, sampling techniques, research instrument, validity and reliability of research instrument, administration of the instrument, methods of data processing and analysis (data coding procedures, data processing and analysis), and presentation of findings. This research adopted the quantitative research paradigm to collect data from indigenous youths of the language. A total of 50 youths of ages between 10-20 years were targeted. The random sampling technique was used to select respondents with gender equality respected. The instrument used for this study was a questionnaire. 50 questionnaires were administered to indigenous youths of Bafut who live in Bafut between the ages of 10 to 20 years and can speak the Bafut language. The data for this study was collected in the form of numbers, words, phrases and sentences. Presentations, descriptions, interpretation of raw data and connections of the raw data with literature were the procedures that the researcher followed during data analysis. The study used tables to present the data collected. Numbers were used to come out with the frequencies through counting. The mean for each research question was calculated using percentages as seen below.

Data Analysis

This section presents the analysis of data. It starts with the presentation of the number of questionnaires administered and the number returned.


Table 1: Number of questionnaires administered

| Number of questionnaires administered | Number of questionnaires returned | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| 50 | 50 | 100% |

Source: Fieldwork 2022


Table 1 indicates that 50 questionnaires were administered and all the 50 were returned, giving a 100% return of questionnaire.

Each grid summarizes findings based on the research questions stated earlier. The three artifacts analysed represent royalty. These three were selected because in the Bafut culture, royalty sets the pace for everything.

| Artifact No. 1 | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| A: IDENTIFICATION | | | | |
|  | 1 | Name in Bafut | ighə'ə | |
| | 2 | Literal translation | / | |
| | 3 | English equivalent | cowries | |
| | 4 | Artifact category | Symbol of royalty | |
| | 5 | Location of use | In the Bafut palace. | |
| | B: LINGUISTIC/PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF ARTIFACT | | | |
| | 6 | Linguistic description | ighə'ə (noun) | cowries (noun) |
| | 7 | Physical description | It is made of cowries put in a string. | |
| 8 | Function | Worn by Queens to distinguish them from other women. | | |
| B: ARTIFACT IN SOCIO and APPLIED LINGUISTICS | | | | |
| 9 | Number of respondents | | 50 | |
| 10 | Percentage ability to identify and describe object | | Of 50 sampled, 40 identified and described it in the Bafut language representing 80% | |
| 11 | Percentage degree of familiarity with object | | 5% could use it representing 10% | |
| 12 | Percentage willing it be used as language pedagogic tool. | | 100 % were willing it be used. | |
| 13 | Respondents' aggregate degree of appropriation | | Aggregate degree of appropriation | Value judgment |
| | | | Only 45% could use | Judged to be low . |
| 14 | Respondents' method | | Semiotics theory | Semiocide |
| | | | Linguistic theory | Linguicide |
| | | | Archaeology theory | Cultural imperialism |
| 15 | Pedagogic input | Proposal on deficiency | Respondents should learn to identify, describe, pronounce correctly, and state other meanings associated to it. | |
| | | Sample use | Text | 1. Ma Bi wε'ε ighə'ə. |
| | | | Gloss | 1. ma (Queen) Bi(Bi) wε'ε (wears) ighə'ə. |
| C: SCIENTIFIC JUSTIFICATION | | | | |
| 16 | Researcher's method | | Semiotics theory | Signification |
| | | | Linguistic theory | Fishman's 1991 GIDS |
| | | | Anth/arch theory | Cultural-historical |
| 17 | Justification of researcher's method | | <p>Signification: some artifacts carry signs which are very meaningful in the Bafut culture.</p> <p>Fishman's GIDS: focusing on literacy and intergenerational transmission (levels 4-8)</p> <p>Cultural-historical: Based on the idea of different yet distinct cultural groups which can be identified through their material culture.</p> | |


| | | |
|----|---------------------|---|
| 18 | Transitional phrase | The next artifact to analyse will be finda. |
|----|---------------------|---|

Source: Fieldwork 2022

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| Artifact No. 2 | | | | |
| A: IDENTIFICATION | | | | |
|  | 1 | Name in Bafut | finda | |
| | 2 | Literal translation | / | |
| | 3 | English equivalent | Grass house | |
| | 4 | Artifact category | Traditional house | |
| | 5 | Location of use | Located Mbebali Bafut. | |
| | B: LINGUISTIC/PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF ARTIFACT | | | |
| | | Linguistic description | finda (noun) | Traditional house (noun) |
| | 7 | Physical description | A traditional house constructed with sticks, mud, bamboos and grass. | |
| 8 | Function | A special house for notables. | | |
| B: ARTIFACT IN SOCIO and APPLIED LINGUISTICS | | | | |
| 9 | Number of respondents | 50 | | |
| 10 | Percentage ability to identify and describe object | Of 50 sampled, 20 identified and described it in the Bafut language representing 40% | | |
| 11 | Percentage degree of familiarity | 1 was familiar with it representing 2% | | |
| 12 | Percentage willing it be used as language pedagogic tool. | 100 % were willing it be used. | | |
| 13 | Respondents' aggregate degree of appropriation | Aggregate degree of appropriation | Value judgment | |
| | | 21% could use | Judged to be very low . | |
| 14 | Respondents' method | Semiotics theory | Semiocide | |
| | | Linguistic theory | Linguicide | |
| | | Archaeology theory | Cultural-historical | |
| 15 | Pedagogic input | Proposal on deficiency | Respondents should learn to identify, describe, pronounce correctly, and state other meanings associated to it. | |
| | | Sample use | Text 1. Ta Mbonjem tswe ni finda | |
| | | Gloss | 1. Ta (father) Mbonjem (name) tswe (has) ni (a) finda (traditional grass house). | |
| C: SCIENTIFIC JUSTIFICATION | | | | |
| 16 | Researcher's method | Semiotics theory | Signification | |
| | | Linguistic theory | Fishman's 1991 GIDS | |
| | | Archaeology theory | Cultural-historical | |
| 17 | Justification of researcher's method | <p>Signification: some artifacts carry signs which are very meaningful in the Bafut culture.</p> <p>Fishman's GIDS: focusing on literacy and intergenerational transmission (levels 4-8)</p> <p>Cultural-historical: Based on the idea of different yet distinct cultural groups which can be identified through their material culture.</p> | | |

| | | |
|----|---------------------|--|
| 18 | Transitional phrase | The next artifact to analyse will be tɔgə. |
|----|---------------------|--|

Source: Fieldwork 2022

| Artifact No. 3 | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|------------------|
| A: IDENTIFICATION | | | | |
|  | 1 | Name in Bafut | tɔgə | |
| | 2 | Literal translation | / | |
| | 3 | English equivalent | Traditional regalia | |
| | 4 | Artifact category | Traditional dress | |
| | 5 | Location of use | All Bafut. | |
| | B: LINGUISTIC/PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF ARTIFACT | | | |
| | 6 | Linguistic description | tɔgə (noun) | dress (noun) |
| | 7 | Physical description | A traditional dress embroidered with wool thread. | |
| 8 | Function | It is worn by the men. | | |
| B: ARTIFACT IN SOCIO and APPLIED LINGUISTICS | | | | |
| 9 | Number of respondents | 50 | | |
| 10 | Percentage ability to identify and describe object | Of 50 sampled, 45 identified and described it in the Bafut language representing 95% | | |
| 11 | Percentage degree of familiarity with object | 40 could use it representing 80% | | |
| 12 | Percentage willing it be used as language pedagogic tool. | 100 % were willing it be used. | | |
| 13 | Respondents' aggregate degree of appropriation | Aggregate degree of appropriation | Value judgment | |
| | | 87.5% could use | Judged to be high . | |
| 14 | Respondents' method | Semiotics theory | Semiocide | |
| | | Linguistic theory | Linguicide | |
| | | Archaeology theory | Cultural imperialism | |
| 15 | Pedagogic input | Proposal on deficiency | Respondents should learn to identify, pronounce correctly, and state other meanings associated to it. | |
| | | Sample use | Text | 1. Ta wɛ'ɛ tɔgə. |
| | Gloss | | 1. Ta (father) wɛ'ɛ (wears) tɔgə. | |
| C: SCIENTIFIC JUSTIFICATION | | | | |
| 16 | Researcher's method | Semiotics theory | Signification | |
| | | Linguistic theory | Fishman's 1991 GIDS | |
| | | Anthropology theory | Cultural-historical | |
| 17 | Justification of researcher's method | <p>Signification: some artifacts carry signs which are very meaningful in the Bafut culture.</p> <p>Fishman's GIDS: focusing on literacy and intergenerational transmission (levels 4-8)</p> <p>Cultural-historical: Based on the idea of different yet distinct cultural groups which can be identified through their material culture</p> | | |

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Presentation of Findings

The findings for this study are presented based on the research questions.

RQ 1: Can Bafut youths identify and describe Bafut tangible material culture?

The first research question was to find out if Bafut youths can identify and describe their tangible material culture. Of the 50 youths sampled, 40 of them could identify and describe the 50 artifacts that were presented to them representing 80% while 10 respondents could not identify nor describe the artifacts. For the analysis, only 3 artifacts were chosen representing royalty in the Bafut fendom (see methodology).

RQ 2: Are Bafut youths willing that their material culture be used in teaching their language?

Of the 50 who were sampled, all 50 participants showed a positive attitude towards using their tangible material culture in the teaching of the Bafut language making 100%.

RQ 3: Are Bafut youths familiar with their tangible material culture? How can learners be encouraged to appropriate their material culture?

Out of the 50 respondents sampled, 20 were familiar with the objects making 40% while 30 were not familiar with them making 60%.

Recommendations

1. Bafut youths should be exposed to Bafut tangible material culture so that they can identify and describe the artifacts in their language.

2. Bafut tangible material culture should be included in textbooks written for the teaching/learning of the language. Also, the youths should be trained how to produce material culture using local material.

3. Parents should transmit material culture to their children and inculcate in them the spirit of using material culture. Tangible material culture should be stored in museums for posterity.

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the attitude of Bafut youths to the appropriation of their material culture. Results from findings showed that these youths have a positive attitude to the appropriation of Bafut material culture. This corroborates the claim made by Bayri 2010 that using cultural artifacts motivates a learner to learn the target language. The theories used are appropriate to the research as they aided the researcher to come out with appropriate findings. After the findings, recommendations have been made on how to encourage youths appropriate their material culture which will help maintain their language.

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