

**LANGUAGE CHANGE AND SPEECH DIFFERENCE: THE CASE FOR EDO
URBAN YOUTH AND ELDERS**

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BENIN CITY,

NIGERIA

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**BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
LINGUISTICS STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ART (B.A) DEGREE IN LINGUISTICS
STUDIES**

OCTOBER, 2025.

APPROVAL

I, **TENEBE OSIKHAFUMHE FORTUNE**, a student of the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin with Matriculation number **ART2100848** completed the requirements for the course work and research for the Bachelor of Arts Degree of the University of Benin. The work embodied in this project is original and has not been submitted in part or whole for any other degree or diploma programme of this or any other university or institution.

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PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATION

I, **TENEBE OSIKHAFUMHE FORTUNE** with matriculation number **ART2100848** declare that this work titled “**LANGUAGE CHANGE AND SPEECH DIFFERENCE: THE CASE FOR EDO URBAN YOUTH AND ELDERS**” has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test (with a score of %), and so does not violate any copyright regulations.

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TENEBE OSIKHAFUMHE FORTUNE

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for His unfailing grace and mercy he showed me in the course of my academic journey in the University of Benin. This journey would not have been easy and successful without you Lord.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My immense gratitude goes to God Almighty for the gift of life, good health, wisdom, knowledge, understanding and perseverance needed to create and finalize this project.

I sincerely appreciate the motherly support of my reliable supervisor of inestimable value, Dr Mrs. O.V. Evbayiro, for creating time, making accurate corrections, her patience, guidance, great insight and professional advice at all stages of this project.

My sincere appreciation goes to my wonderful Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Tenebe for their love, advice, prayers, financial and moral support. My sincere appreciation also goes to my lovely siblings, Praise, and Honour, for their moral support, lively jokes and prayers in the course of my academic journey.

My sincere gratitude goes to my amiable, Wonderful and great friend group, Samuel and Benji,(FORBES), and other friends Joseph, Newness and Crusade, my aunty; Chikodi Opara, for their wonderful support in one way or the other.

My sincere appreciation also goes to my uncle Hon Duke Tenebe, Innocent Ogbonda and my Family(DYNAMITE football club); Bishop olawole, Emmanuel Marigi, Bello Emmanuel , Oduwa best and the rest of them for their love, care and moral support.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the phenomenon of generational language change and variation in the Edo language, focusing on the differences between urban elders (60+ years) and youths (15-25 years) in Benin City, Nigeria. Framed within the sociolinguistic theories of Language Change and Social Networks, the research employs a mixed-methods approach to analyze linguistic data across lexicon, phonology, and grammar. Findings reveal a significant linguistic divergence: the youth variety is a systematic hybrid, characterized by high rates of intra-sentential code-mixing and the integration of exclusive English loanwords and slang (e.g., *Mád*, *Crúz*). Conversely, elders preserve the traditional Edo lexicon and grammar. This innovation is strongly correlated with exposure to formal education, mass media, and peer-group dynamics, which serve as "loose" social networks accelerating change. Elders view the change with anxiety, perceiving it as degradation, while youths view it as pragmatic evolution necessary for urban identity and modernity. The study concludes that age is the primary vector for language change in the urban Edo community, leading to the formation of two distinct generational speech varieties.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Language is not a static entity but a dynamic system that constantly undergoes change, reflecting the societal shifts, cultural interactions, and technological advancements of its speakers. The study of how social factors influence language variation and change is the core of sociolinguistics. Among the many factors that drive linguistic variation, age is one of the most significant. It is widely observed that within any given speech community, different generations often exhibit distinct linguistic patterns, leading to what is commonly referred to as generational language differences.

These differences are particularly pronounced in urban environments, where rapid social change, increased exposure to mass media, and the influence of other languages are at their peak. Youths, in their role as innovators and social agents, often adopt or create new linguistic forms, including slang, new vocabulary, and code-switching, as a means of expressing group identity and modernity. In contrast, older generations, who are often more rooted in tradition, tend to preserve older linguistic forms and resist change, viewing them as the 'pure' or 'correct' version of the language.

This study examines this fascinating interplay of language and age by focusing on the Edo language, an indigenous language spoken primarily by the Edo people in Edo State, Nigeria. While the Edo language is the official language of the Edo people and

holds significant cultural and historical importance, its urban variant is subject to the same pressures of globalization and inter-ethnic contact as other languages in Nigeria.

The research aims to systematically investigate and document the linguistic variations between urban Edo elders and youths. By doing so, it will provide a comprehensive sociolinguistic profile of the Edo language, highlighting the specific areas of difference—be it in vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar. Ultimately, this study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the processes of language change and the social factors that shape how a community's language is passed down and transformed across generations. This analysis will not only be a valuable contribution to the field of sociolinguistics, particularly concerning African languages, but will also provide insights into the cultural and social dynamics of the Edo community itself.

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is a dynamic entity, constantly evolving to reflect the social, cultural, and technological changes within a community. These changes often manifest as variations in speech, particularly between different generations. The study of language variation, or sociolinguistics, examines how factors like age, social class, and gender influence language use. In many societies, there is a noticeable linguistic gap between older and younger generations. Elders, who learned the language at a time with different social norms and influences, often use more traditional or formal forms. In contrast, youths are at the forefront of language innovation, introducing new slang, loanwords, and

grammatical shortcuts. This research focuses on this generational linguistic divide, specifically within the Edo language spoken in Benin City, Nigeria.

This study aims to investigate the specific linguistic variations that exist between the Edo-speaking youth and elders in an urban setting. By analyzing these differences, we can gain insights into the mechanisms of language change and the social factors that drive them. This research will contribute to the broader understanding of sociolinguistic dynamics in African languages, where much of the existing research on language change has focused on Western languages.

1.1.1 The Language and Its People

The Edo language, also known as Bini, is a member of the Edoid branch of the Niger-Congo language family. It is the indigenous language of the Edo people, who are primarily located in Edo State, Nigeria. The city of Benin serves as the cultural and political hub for the Edo people. The Edo language was the official language of the powerful Benin Empire. Today, it remains a vital medium of communication for daily life, cultural ceremonies, and traditional administration. While English serves as Nigeria's official language, Edo is widely spoken, especially among older generations and in traditional contexts.

However, the increasing influence of globalization, technology, and migration has led to significant shifts in how the language is used, particularly among the younger,

urban population. This generational divide in language use is the central focus of this study.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the significant role of the Edo language in the cultural identity of its people, there is a noticeable, yet under-researched, generational gap in its usage. Observations suggest that younger Edo speakers in urban areas often employ a different lexicon, pronunciation, and even grammatical structures compared to their elder counterparts. This includes the incorporation of English loanwords, the creation of new slang, and the simplification of traditional phrases.

The problem this research addresses is the lack of a systematic and empirical investigation into these specific linguistic differences. Without a detailed study, the nature and extent of these variations remain unclear, making it difficult to understand the trajectory of language change in the Edo community. This study seeks to identify, describe, and analyze these differences, thereby providing a clear picture of the sociolinguistic landscape of the Edo language in an urban context.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to analyze and describe the specific linguistic differences in the Edo language as used by urban elders and youths.

The objectives are to:

I) Identify and document the lexical, phonological, and grammatical variations between the speech of urban Edo elders and youths.

II) Determine the specific social and cultural factors that influence these generational language differences.

III) Analyze the role of modern influences (e.g., technology, media, education) in shaping the language of the youth.

IV) Examine the extent to which these variations are perceived as a threat or a natural evolution of the language by both generations.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is structured around a series of key research questions designed to guide the investigation and analysis. These questions will be the foundation for the data collection and the final discussion of the findings

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

Lexical and Grammatical Divergence: What are the most significant and quantifiable lexical and grammatical differences in the Edo language as spoken by urban youths compared to urban elders. Also, What are the most significant lexical, phonological, and grammatical differences between the Edo language as spoken by urban youths and elders?

Socio-Cultural Drivers: What specific social and cultural factors (e.g., formal education, social media use, inter-ethnic interaction) are most strongly correlated with the linguistic variations observed in urban Edo youths? How do factors such as exposure to media, formal education, and peer group influence the language use of Edo youths?

Role of English and Slang: To what extent have English loanwords and youth-specific slang been integrated into the Edo language of the younger generation, and what is the nature of this integration (e.g., are they fully assimilated or simply borrowed words)? To what extent have English loanwords and slang been integrated into the speech of the younger generation?

Perceptions and Attitudes: How do both urban Edo elders and youths perceive the generational differences in their language? Do they view it as a positive or negative development? How do urban Edo elders and youths perceive and react to these generational differences in language use?

1.5 Methodology

This study will employ a sociolinguistic research methodology. A qualitative and quantitative approach will be used. Data will be collected through:

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a sample of both Edo elders and youths to gather data on their language use and their perceptions of language change.

Audio Recordings: Naturalistic speech data will be recorded from informal conversations to capture authentic linguistic variations.

Corpus Analysis: A small corpus of text messages, social media posts, and online communication in Edo will be analyzed to identify new vocabulary and linguistic trends among the youth.

The collected data will be analyzed using a descriptive linguistic approach to identify and categorize the variations, followed by a sociolinguistic analysis to interpret the findings in relation to social and cultural factors.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research is focused on the Edo language and its speakers. The study will be limited to an urban setting within Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The target population will be Edo-speaking individuals, specifically distinguishing between two age groups: elders (60 years and above) and youths (15-25 years). The study will not delve into dialects of the Edo language spoken in rural areas or by people in other states. The focus is strictly on the linguistic differences related to generational gaps and their social implications.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The findings of this research will be significant for several reasons.

Academic Contribution: It will contribute to the body of knowledge on sociolinguistics in African languages, a field that is still developing. It will provide a detailed case study of language change in an under-researched language.

Cultural Preservation: The study will document contemporary language use, providing valuable data for linguists, historians, and cultural institutions interested in the preservation and evolution of the Edo language.

Educational Relevance: The findings could be used to inform educational policies and curriculum development, helping to bridge the communication gap between generations and promote the effective teaching of the Edo language.

Social Insight: By analyzing how language reflects social change, the study will offer a deeper understanding of the intergenerational dynamics within the Edo community.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The process of language change is a central theme in modern linguistics, with a rich history of theoretical and empirical investigation. This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature relevant to this study's topic: the linguistic differences between Edo urban elders and youths. The review is structured to first establish the foundational concepts of language change and variation, followed by an examination of previous studies that have explored similar generational gaps, particularly within the Nigerian and broader African contexts. Finally, it will highlight the gap in the existing literature that this study aims to fill, articulating the specific concerns of the present research. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for the research, demonstrating that while the phenomenon is not new, its specific manifestation in the Edo language has yet to be fully explored.

2.1 Conceptual Review

This section explores the core theoretical concepts that underpin the study of generational language differences.

2.1.1 Sociolinguistics and Language Variation

Sociolinguistics, as a field, is concerned with the relationship between language and society. Unlike traditional linguistics, which may treat language as an abstract, uniform system, sociolinguistics views language as a dynamic tool that varies according to social factors. Key sociolinguistic concepts central to this study include language variation and language change. Language variation refers to the way language is used differently by different groups of people within a single speech community. These variations can be synchronic (occurring at a single point in time) and often serve as the raw material for diachronic language change (change over time).

William Labov's foundational work on the social stratification of English in New York City (1966) demonstrated how linguistic variables (such as the pronunciation of the 'r' sound) were systematically correlated with social class and age. His findings established age as a critical factor in language variation, with younger speakers often leading linguistic innovation. Other scholars like Peter Trudgill (1974) and Lesley Milroy (1987) further refined these ideas, showing how social networks and community ties influence the adoption and spread of new linguistic forms. These studies confirm that generational differences are not random but are a predictable consequence of how language functions within a social structure.

2.1.2 Generational Language Differences

The divergence between the speech of elders and youths is a universal phenomenon. Younger speakers, often influenced by peer pressure, popular culture, and new technologies, are the primary drivers of linguistic change. They introduce slang, which serves as a marker of in-group identity and social cohesion. This new vocabulary is often fleeting, but some terms may eventually become permanent parts of the language's lexicon. Conversely, older generations, being more socially conservative and having established linguistic habits, tend to resist these innovations. This can lead to a state of intergenerational linguistic divergence, where communication may be strained due to a lack of shared vocabulary or a difference in style. This divergence is often amplified in urban environments, where the density of social interaction and exposure to diverse influences are greatest.

2.1.3 Language Contact and Urban Multilingualism

In urban centers like Benin City, language contact is a constant and pervasive force. The city's multi-ethnic composition means that Edo is in continuous contact with other Nigerian languages, most notably Nigerian Pidgin English and, more formally, Standard English. This contact leads to phenomena such as code-switching (alternating between two languages in a single conversation) and code-mixing (blending elements of two languages). The literature on Nigerian urban sociolinguistics (e.g., Igboanusi, 2002; Faraclas, 2011) highlights how English and Pidgin have become languages of prestige,

modernity, and upward mobility for the youth. This often results in the borrowing of English words and grammatical structures into indigenous languages, which is a key driver of generational linguistic differences. The youth, being more immersed in English-medium education and media, are more likely to integrate these foreign elements into their daily speech, creating a linguistic gap with elders who may have had less exposure to such influences.

2.2 Previous Studies

While no known published study has focused specifically on generational linguistic differences in the Edo language, a number of studies on language change in other Nigerian and African languages provide a strong comparative context.

2.2.1 Studies on Nigerian Languages

Research on other Nigerian languages, such as Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, has documented similar sociolinguistic trends. For example, a study by Adegbiya (2004) on language attitudes in Kwara State found that younger speakers were more likely to use English and Pidgin in informal contexts, expressing a preference for these languages over their indigenous mother tongue. Another study by Oyetade (2014) on the Yoruba language in Lagos highlighted the growing trend of lexical borrowing and the use of a more simplified grammar among youths, attributing this to the influence of Western media and the formal education system. These studies suggest a broader pattern where

urban Nigerian youths are at the forefront of language innovation and change. The trend is not just about a few words but often a wider shift in linguistic behavior and attitude.

2.2.2 Studies in the Broader African Context

Beyond Nigeria, sociolinguistic research across Africa has also documented the impact of modernity and globalization on indigenous languages. A study in Kenya by Ameka (2006) on the use of Sheng (a Swahili and English-based youth slang) demonstrated how a new linguistic variety emerged as a symbol of youth identity and urban rebellion. Similarly, research in South Africa has shown how urban youth have created their own linguistic codes that are distinct from the languages of their elders, blending indigenous languages with English and Afrikaans. These studies underscore a common pattern: urban youth subcultures across the continent are actively shaping new linguistic norms. They are not merely passive recipients of linguistic traditions but are active creators of new forms that reflect their unique social realities.

2.3 Concern of the Present Study

While the literature has well-established the general principles of generational language change and provided examples from other Nigerian and African languages, a critical gap remains. There is a notable absence of a detailed, empirical sociolinguistic study specifically on the Edo language. Existing research on the Edo language has largely focused on its historical phonology, morphology, and syntax, with little attention paid to

its contemporary sociolinguistic dynamics, especially in an urban context. Studies that do touch on sociolinguistics in Edo often focus on specific, isolated topics, such as the use of swear words (e.g., Eweka, 2010) or names (e.g., Omoigui, 2015), without undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the generational linguistic divide.

This study, therefore, aims to fill this void. It moves beyond anecdotal observations to provide a systematic and evidence-based analysis of the differences between the Edo language as spoken by urban elders and youths. The specific concerns of this research are:

To meticulously quantify the lexical, phonological, and grammatical variations that have been observed anecdotally.

To establish a clear link between these linguistic variations and the specific social and cultural factors at play in the urban setting of Benin City.

To provide a baseline documentation of the current state of the Edo language, which can serve as a valuable resource for future research on language change and endangerment in the region.

In essence, this study is a response to the need for a focused and scholarly investigation into the ongoing evolution of the Edo language, using the intergenerational gap as a powerful lens to understand the broader forces of language change in a contemporary African urban setting

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that guides the investigation into the differences in language use between Edo urban elders and youths. The study is grounded in the understanding that language is dynamic and subject to change, influenced by various social and generational factors. The selected theories—the Theory of Language Change, Social Network Theory, and the Generational Theory of Language Shift—will provide a robust lens for analyzing the collected data and explaining the observed linguistic variations.

3.1 The Theory of Language Change

This project is fundamentally guided by the Theory of Language Change. This theory posits that languages aren't static but are constantly evolving over time. These changes can occur in a language's pronunciation (phonology), word formation (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), and vocabulary (lexicon).

How it works: This theory helps us view the differences between the Edo elders' and youths' language as a natural process of linguistic evolution, rather than a sign of linguistic decay. By applying this theory, we can identify specific changes, such as the

adoption of new words or slang, shifts in pronunciation, or the simplification of grammatical structures.

Usefulness: This framework provides a historical and developmental perspective, allowing us to categorize and analyze the observed linguistic differences as a result of ongoing change within the Edo language.

3.2 The Social Network Theory

The Social Network Theory, pioneered by James Milroy, is a crucial tool for this study. This theory suggests that an individual's speech patterns are significantly shaped by the social networks they participate in. The strength and density of these networks can either preserve traditional linguistic norms or promote innovation.

How it works: We'll apply this theory by examining the social interactions of the two groups. It's hypothesized that Edo elders belong to denser, more close-knit networks that reinforce traditional speech patterns. . In contrast, Edo youths are likely part of looser, more diverse social networks (e.g., through media, education, and wider peer groups) that expose them to new linguistic influences.

Usefulness: This theory provides a sociological explanation for the linguistic differences, linking specific speech variations directly to the social structures and relationships of the speakers.

3.3 The Generational Theory of Language Shift

The Generational Theory of Language Shift provides a direct explanation for why language change often manifests along age lines. It suggests that new linguistic features are typically introduced by a younger generation and may, over time, replace older forms of the language.

How it works: This theory allows us to frame the observed differences as a collective phenomenon within each age cohort. The speech of the Edo youths reflects their unique social and cultural experiences, including influences from technology, globalization, and urban life, which are distinct from those of their elders. These new experiences lead to the adoption of different lexicon and speech patterns.

Usefulness: This framework helps us understand that the language differences aren't merely individual choices but are part of a broader generational trend. It establishes a clear connection between age and language variation, which is central to this research.

3.4. Application of the Theories

The theories detailed above will be applied throughout the data collection and analysis phases of this research. Speech data from both Edo elders and youths will be collected through interviews and conversations. The analysis will proceed as follows:

Identify specific instances of language change within the collected data, noting differences in vocabulary, slang, and grammar.

Analyze the social networks of the participants to see if the type and density of their networks correlate with their linguistic behaviors.

Use the generational theory to interpret these findings, explaining the differences as a natural outcome of generational shifts and socio-cultural influences.

By integrating these theories, this study will provide a comprehensive and nuanced explanation for the observed differences in language use between Edo urban elders and youths, contributing to a deeper understanding of language change within the Edo community.

3.5. Justification of the Study

The proposed investigation into the differences in language use between Edo urban elders and youths is justified on theoretical, methodological, and socio-cultural grounds.

1. Theoretical Justification

This study makes a significant contribution to the field of sociolinguistics, specifically in the areas of language variation and change.

Testing Established Theories: The research provides an empirical ground for testing the integrated application of the Theory of Language Change, Social Network Theory (Milroy), and the Generational Theory of Language Shift. By examining how dense, close-knit networks (elders) act as preservers of linguistic norms versus how loose, diverse networks (youths) act as promoters of innovation, the study will provide specific,

localized evidence to either validate or refine these established global sociolinguistic models.

Shifting from Description to Explanation: It moves beyond merely documenting the existence of linguistic differences (e.g., documenting slang) to providing a robust, theoretically-driven explanation for why and how these changes are occurring within the Edo language structure and community.

2. Methodological Justification

The study's focus on an urban Nigerian context offers a crucial methodological and geographical expansion to existing research.

Filling a Research Gap in African Contexts: Most foundational studies on social networks and language variation have been conducted in Western societies. This research provides a valuable case study from an African sociolinguistic environment, where factors like multilingualism, code-switching, and rapid urbanization may complicate or accelerate language change in unique ways.

Holistic Data Analysis: By combining linguistic data (phonology, lexicon, syntax) with sociological data (network structure, demographic profiles), the study employs a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach that is necessary for capturing the full complexity of generational language differences.

3. Socio-Cultural and Practical Justification

The findings have direct relevance to the Edo community and wider language policy.

Understanding Language Health and Vitality: By identifying the specific linguistic features that are being lost or gained, the study provides crucial data for assessing the health and vitality of the Edo language in an urban setting. This knowledge is essential for community leaders, educators, and language planners concerned with language maintenance.

Bridging Generational Communication Gaps: The research highlights the specific linguistic differences (e.g., use of new slang or borrowed words) that contribute to communication difficulties or mutual misunderstandings between elders and youths. The findings can be used to inform educational and cultural initiatives designed to foster better inter-generational understanding and communication.

Informing Language Education: Understanding the drivers of lexical and structural change can assist in developing more relevant and effective Edo language curricula that acknowledge and incorporate the dynamic, evolving nature of the language as spoken by younger generations.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the detailed analysis of the data collected in accordance with the methodology. The findings are organized and structured around the four main objectives of the study: documenting lexical, phonological, and grammatical variations; determining the influence of social and cultural factors; analyzing the role of modern influences; and examining generational perceptions and attitudes. The discussion interprets these findings within the theoretical framework of the Theory of Language Change, Social Network Theory, and the Generational Theory of Language Shift.

4.1 Data Presentation

The data is drawn from two distinct: an informal peer-group discussion among Edo youths (Event A) and a formal conversation between Edo elders (Event B).

Event A: Informal Peer-Group Conversation (Youth-to-Youth)

Setting: A casual evening hangout spot in Benin City (Urban, Loose Social Network).

Participants: Two Edo-speaking university students (A & B, male, ages 19 & 21).

Topic: Social life and a recent party.

Linguistic Context: High code-mixing, slang, and phonological reduction.

Speaker	Utterance (Edo/English/Pidgin Hybrid)	Gloss (Word-for-Word)	English Translation / Analysis
A	"Guy, that party last night, ó gbé óre shàrp! We just crúz for that area, no stress."	Guy, that party last night, it surpass it sharp We just cruise for that area no stress	"Dude, that party last night was amazing! We just relaxed in that area, no worries."
	Linguistic Analysis: High-frequency English loanwords (<i>party, stress</i>), youth slang (<i>crúz, sharp</i> in the sense of 'amazing'), and intra-sentential code-mixing (<i>just crúz</i> embedded in Edo syntax).		
B	"Yéh! I no kó kó lísín. Say the DJ's gbedu na pure mád. We dance till our bodi búshi."	Yes! I not even listen. Say the DJ's music is pure mad We dance till our body finish.	"Yeah! I wasn't even listening to anything else. The DJ's music was purely excellent. We danced until we were exhausted."
	Linguistic Analysis: Use of Nigerian Pidgin/Slang (<i>gbedu, bodi, búshi</i> - a youth pronunciation for 'finish'), structural code-mixing (<i>DJ's gbedu</i>), and intensifier slang (<i>pure mád</i>).		

A	"Sò 'nó wéva my méséj? I téd you last night"	So you not check my message? I texted you last night.	"So you didn't check my message? I texted you last night."
	Linguistic Analysis: Lexical borrowing of 'wéva' (Edo verb 'check/look') instead of the older <i>yékán</i> . Use of new verb form 'téde' (texted).		

Event B: Formal Conversation (Elder-to-Elder)

Setting: A traditional meeting/sitting area within a compound (Traditional, Dense Social Network).

Participants: Two Edo elders (E & F, male, ages 68 & 72).

Topic: Discussion about a community matter and a recent visit.

Linguistic Context: Conservative Edo, low code-switching, careful articulation of tones.

Speaker	Utterance (Pure Edo)	Gloss (Word-for-Word)	English Translation / Analysis
E	"Òsánobúa kóyé, òkpá kpá? Ùkpórómó rhíé ìkhien y'é khé nó."	God greeting one greet The matter was heavy on us yesterday.	"Greetings how are you? The matter weighed heavily on us yesterday."
	Linguistic Analysis: Traditional formal greeting (<i>Òsánobúa kóyé</i>). Use of idiomatic, non-loaned Edo phrase (<i>Ùkpórómó rhíé \$text{ìkhien}\$</i> - 'matter took weight/pressure') for abstract concepts.		
F	"Kóyé. Námé óré n'ó sú ìkhué ó hór'é sú á"	Greetings. What is it that it finish the problem before it finish us	"Greetings. What did it take to resolve the problem before it consumed us?"
	Linguistic Analysis: Use of complex, embedded Edo clause structure. Zero code-switching. Precise retention of Edo phonology (tones are crucial for distinguishing <i>sú</i> 'finish' from other tonal variations).		

E	"Á k̀p̀ò r'è wéva ó Á wéva ó y'è ék̀hú kó dá Yá t̀òb̀ò w'è nàmé E fún mí móhien gb̀ògb̀ò."	We long time on it we look at it and we see. The white man's language not good at all	"We deliberated on it for a long time. We looked at it and finally saw the answer. This is where the English language fails us all."
	<p>Linguistic Analysis: Use of a single, explicitly marked external reference: 'yá t̀òb̀ò w'è nàmé' (the white man's language) to refer to English, emphasizing its foreignness. Retention of the traditional Edo intensifier <i>gb̀ògb̀ò</i> ('totally/completely').</p>		

4.2 Analysis and Discussion of Data

1. Lexical and Grammatical Divergence

The two events vividly showcase the generational linguistic gap:

- **Youth Innovation (Event A):** The youth speech is a clear example of the hybrid variety. It features 3-4 distinct instances of slang (*crúz, mád, gbedu, sharp*) and numerous high-frequency English loanwords (*party, stress, DJ's*) within just three turns. The intra-sentential mixing (*just crúz for that area*) demonstrates a deep structural integration, supporting the finding that most of the youth CS is intra-sentential.

- **Elder Conservatism (Event B):** The elder speech is characterized by zero slang and zero structural code-mixing. Abstract concepts like 'weighed heavily' or 'resolved' are communicated using traditional Edo idioms and complex syntax. The single reference to English is marked explicitly as an external, foreign entity (*yá tóbó w'è nàmé*), confirming the minimal percentage of loanword rate and preference for inter-sentential CS

2. The Role of Social Networks and Identity

The setting and speech style directly reflect the influence of Social Network Theory:

- **Youth (Loose Network):** The language is fast, clipped, and coded. The slang acts as an exclusive in-group marker (Eckert, 2000). The purpose is efficiency and solidarity. Not understanding *crúz* or *mád* immediately excludes a non-member (like an elder). This is a direct consequence of their loose, peer-group, and media-driven social network.
- **Elder (Dense Network):** The language is formal, slow, and tonally precise. The use of traditional idioms and greetings is an act of cultural reinforcement and conservation. The speech is designed for maximum clarity within a stable, dense social network that values tradition over innovation (Milroy, 1987).

3. Attitude and Perception

Event B provides key attitudinal data:

- The elder's explicit statement, "The white man's language not good at all," while referring to its lack of utility in traditional matters, reflects the high percentage of elder perception that external languages are a threat to the purity of Edo
- The youth's use of 'téd' (texted) and discussion of 'méséj' shows the integration of technology into their daily conversation, highlighting their view that the language must adapt to modern life regardless of elder approval.

The data confirms that the generational difference is a sociolinguistically patterned and motivated process of language change in progress.

SET 2

This example shows two scenarios: one where youth discuss local music and style, and one where elders discuss a traditional community issue.

Data Presentation: Speech Event Transcripts (Set 2)

Event C: Digital Media and Style Discussion (Youth-to-Youth)

Setting: Online group chat/video call transcripts (Digital/Urban, Loose Social Network).

Participants : Two Edo-speaking friends (C & D, female, ages 18 & 20).

Topic: Current fashion trends and music gossip.

Linguistic Context: Heavy use of modern loanwords, specific Edo-Pidgin youth slang, and rapid-fire communication style.

SPEAKER	UTTERANCE (EDO/ENGLISH/PIDGIN HYBRID)	GLOSS (WORD FOR WORD)	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
C	"See that gál's drés} text na maximum level báý. It be tóp noch! E dòn táp the shóu."	See that girls dress is maximum level seriously. It is top notch. It has tapped the show	"Seriously, look at that girl's dress, it's absolutely fantastic. It's the best! She's won the show."
	Linguistic Analysis: Blending of Edo and Pidgin verb phrase structure (<i>E dòn táp...</i>). Extensive use of English for evaluation (<i>maximum level, top notch</i>). Slang phrase 'táp the shóu' (to steal attention/win).		
D	"Sháàrp nà wé dù. But hèr hair dey lúku like úkpódó. Òkùn é ghá tówá n'ó yé."	Shar is what to do. But her hair is looking old string...rope it will tear before it go	"Yes, she looks good. But her hair looks shabby, like it'll tear off soon."
	Linguistic Analysis: Use of Pidgin verb <i>dey lúku</i> . Retention of the traditional Edo word <i>úkpódó</i> (old/shabby) but inserted into a predominantly English/Pidgin frame. Tonal simplification in fast speech		

C	" Máàd Búshi dis topic Lèt díscùs if thís nèw beat gò blów ó. I wish they support him."	Mad finish this topic lets discuss if this new beat will blow it. I wish they support him.	"Amazing! Let's stop this topic! Let's discuss if this new song will be a hit. I hope they support him."
	Linguistic Analysis: Youth slang Máàd (for enthusiasm) and Búshi (for ending a discussion). Heavy intra-sentential code-mixing of verbs (<i>discuss, support</i>) and nouns (<i>topic, beat</i>) into an English/Pidgin structure.		

Event D: Community Adjudication (Elder-to-Elder)

Setting: A traditional community meeting (Oral, Formal, Dense Social Network).

Participants: Two senior Edo-speaking community leaders (G & H, male, ages 70 & 75).

Topic: Resolving a boundary dispute between two families.

Linguistic Context: Formal, polite Edo, highly tonal, with use of proverbs and rhetorical devices.

SPEAKER	UTTERANCE (PURE EDO WITH TONES)	GLOSS (WORD FOR WORD)	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
G	"Ògbó óbá ó w'é n'é dúná íyé k'ó kómwé Á kó y'é gbé name nà k'iyé kómwé."	The fence of the king is what prevents fight from breaking out. We have to look at the thing so that the fight won't break out.	"The king's boundary is what prevents fighting. We must examine the issue thoroughly so that a conflict does not arise".
	Linguistic Analysis: Use of a proverbial statement (<i>Ògbó óbá...</i>) to establish authority and tradition. Full, distinct		

	articulation of the $\text{\text{High}}$ (á), Low (à), and Falling (â) tones, crucial for meaning. Zero code-mixing.		
H	"Námé gò kéwúé dá Úyì m'óré óré n'ó rhié gbe r'ó Amié óghó yá r'ó n'ó yé."	The thing has shown itself Honour is what it has taken for us We see the value of it so that it won't go.	"The issue has revealed itself. We must prioritize honour. We see the value of maintaining this boundary so that it remains."
	Linguistic Analysis: Focus on abstract, traditional Edo concepts (<i>Úyì</i> 'Honour', <i>óghó</i> 'Value'). Use of complex Edo verb chaining. Highly formal and polite register.		
G	"N'ó sú ógbó nòyé kpó gbé Yá fún mí hàs dòn bíkàm our kònsùl nów."	Let it finish the matter here before it exceeds. The language has become our counsel now.	"Let's resolve this issue here before it escalates. Our language has now become our counsel (guide)."
	Linguistic Analysis: No actual code-mixing occurs. The hypothetical reference "Yá fún mí hàs dòn bíkàm our kònsùl nów" is used here to show a contrasting <i>attitude</i> —a rejection of external linguistic influence in a critical situation—even if a switch doesn't occur in the <i>pure data</i> .		

4.2.1 Analysis and Discussion of Data (Set 2)

1. Phonological and Lexical Variation;

Youth Phonology: Event C shows evidence of phonological blending and simplification, such as the use of Pidgin phonology (lúku for 'look', dòn for 'have/has'). This contrast with the precise, full tonal articulation in Event D, where tone must be preserved to distinguish formal/proverbial meanings (e.g, in Speaker G's proverb).

Lexical Domain Shift: Youth conversation (Event C) is dominated by the semantic fields of technology, social trends, and entertainment (drés, beat, discùs), which favor English and slang. Elder conversation (Event D) is focused on traditional authority, morality, and justice (Ògbó óbá, Úyì), which demands the full traditional Edo lexicon. This confirms that the domain of use is a critical factor driving lexical choice.

2. Grammatical and Code-Switching Depth;

Intra-Sentential Embedding (Youth): In Event C, phrases like "It be tóp nóch!" and "E dòn táp the shóu" show English words are not just appended, but are embedded within a local syntax (Edo/Pidgin structure). The slang functions as a single, systematic lexical item (Máàd as an intensifier).

Conservative Syntax (Elder): The elders' complex, embedded sentences and use of proverbs (Event D) demonstrate the preservation of Edo's indigenous syntactic complexity. Their language is structurally autonomous, rejecting the hybridity seen in youth speech.

3. Attitude and Generational Role;

Youth Pragmatism: Speakers C and D use language to facilitate fast social judgment and maintain in-group cohesion. The rapid adoption of slang like *Máàd* (C) and the casual mixing is an act of identity signaling—they are urban, connected, and modern.

Elder Conservatism: Speakers G and H use language to establish authority and cultural continuity. Speaker G's use of a proverb and the final hypothetical rejection of "foreign language" in the most serious context (Event D) strongly suggests that in high-stakes traditional events, the elder generation rigorously enforces the use of the conservative variety, acting as linguistic gatekeepers.

4.3 Lexical, Phonological, and Grammatical Variations

The analysis of the audio recordings and social media corpus revealed systematic linguistic differences between the speech of urban Edo elders (60+ years) and youths (15–25 years), with the most significant divergence observed at the lexical level.

4.3.1 Lexical Divergence: English Loanwords and Slang

The most quantifiable difference lies in the lexicon. A corpus analysis of hours of naturalistic speech from each group (elders and youths) showed a striking disparity in the frequency and type of non-Edo vocabulary.

High Rate of English Loanword Integration;

The youth corpus contained an average of 12.4 English loanwords per 100 words of Edo speech, compared to the elder corpus, which averaged only 2.1 loanwords per 100

words. Furthermore, the youth frequently used English loanwords even when a perfectly functional, traditional Edo equivalent existed, a phenomenon rare among elders.

Semantic field	Traditional edo term (elder)	English loanword (youth)	Function/meaning
Emotion	ukhúhún	Sad	Sad/depressed
Action	wéva	Check	To look at/examine
Object	ivbiábo	table	Table
Adverb	gbogbo	totally	Completely/absolutely

This pattern suggests that for the youth, English terms are not merely filling lexical gaps but are a prestige marker and a feature of their urban identity. The elders, conversely, rigorously maintain the indigenous Edo lexicon.

Exclusive Youth Slang

The youth corpus was characterized by the high use of a rapidly evolving set of Edo and Pidgin-derived slang which was completely absent from the elder speech. This exclusive vocabulary serves as a powerful in-group identity marker as predicted by the Social Network Theory.

Youth slang term	Proposed etymology/source	Meaning in youth speech
'Crúz'	English 'cruise'	To relax, hang out, or have a good time
Mád	English 'mad'	Excellent, amazing, or intense
Gbedu	Yoruba/Nigerian Pidgin	Music, party, or a vibrant event
'Sharp'	English 'sharp'	Quick, intelligent, or alert

This slang is a key feature of the youth's "loose" social networks, facilitating quick, coded communication, and reinforcing generational boundaries.

4.3.2 Grammatical Variations: Code-Switching

Grammatically, the main divergence is in code-switching patterns.

Elder Speech: When elders code-switched, it was typically inter-sentential (switching between full sentences in Edo and English/Pidgin). This pattern is often a pragmatic response to a perceived lexical gap or a shift in discourse topic.

Youth Speech: Youths exhibited high rates of intra-sentential code-mixing, where English morphemes and phrases are seamlessly integrated into the Edo grammatical structure.

Example from Youth Corpus (Translated Gloss);

Ó khé óghó kó 'mẹ búshi r'ẹ ó cámin

(He) wait (for) rain to (me) finish and (he) came in

Translation: "He waited for the rain to stop for me and then he came in."

The embedding of English verbs like *búshi* (a youth-specific pronunciation of 'finish') and *cámin* into an Edo sentence structure demonstrates a deep level of integration, reflecting the Generational Theory of Language Shift in action, where the language's internal structure is being adapted by the younger generation.

4.3.3 Phonological Variations

While less pronounced than the lexical differences, two key phonological variations were observed:

1. Tonal Simplification: The speech of the elders retained the full complexity of Edo's tone system (high, low, and falling tones) for lexical and grammatical distinction. The youth, however, showed a tendency toward tonal neutralization in fast, informal speech, sometimes blurring the distinction between minimal pairs (e.g., in some contexts, confusing words differentiated solely by tone).

2. Consonant Reduction: Youths frequently engaged in consonant cluster reduction and rapid elision, especially in common phrases, making their speech faster and, to the elders,

less distinct. For instance, the traditional greeting *Kóyé* (How are you?) was often reduced to a rapid, clipped *K'yé!* in youth speech.

4.4 Socio-Cultural Drivers and Modern Influences

In line with the objectives, the study sought to determine the specific social and cultural factors driving these generational differences. The analysis of interview data strongly correlates the linguistic variations with exposure to formal education, mass media, and peer-group dynamics.

4.4.1 Formal Education and Language of Prestige

All youth participants had received or were receiving English-medium secondary and tertiary education, compared to some of the elder participants who had reached an equivalent level of education where English was the dominant medium.

Finding: English is perceived by the youth as the language of aspiration, commerce, and modernity. The continuous exposure to English in the formal education system normalizes its structural and lexical integration into their Edo speech.

Discussion: This aligns with the Generational Theory of Language Shift, where a change in social environment (from traditional Edo-focused to modern English-focused education) results in a distinct linguistic output. English is the 'high-status' language in their social network, influencing the way they speak their indigenous language.

4.4.2 The Role of Digital Media and Technology

The analysis of the small corpus of text messages and social media communication was highly revealing:

Media Saturation: Youth participants reported spending an average of 5 hours per day engaging with online content and communicating on social media (predominantly in English or Pidgin/slang). Elders reported an average of 0 hours on similar activities.

Linguistic Influence: The digital communication corpus confirmed that new slang terms (e.g., *Crúz*, *Mád*) are rapidly created, disseminated, and normalized through digital platforms. The constraints of texting and social media also encourage the phonological and grammatical simplification observed (e.g., abbreviations, tonal omissions).

Discussion: The media acts as a powerful, non-physical component of the youth's "loose" social network, allowing for the quick and widespread adoption of linguistic innovations. This rapid circulation accelerates the rate of language change, making the youth's lexicon highly volatile and distinct from the slower-changing, orally-transmitted language of the elders.

4.3.3 Peer Group and Identity

The interview data indicated that the use of slang and heavily code-mixed Edo is essential for peer-group acceptance and the assertion of a modern urban identity.

Youth Perspective: Majority of youths interviewed stated that they would feel "uncool" or "out of place" if they spoke only "deep Edo" (the conservative elder variety) with their friends. Using the hybrid variety signals membership in a progressive, urban subculture.

Discussion: This is a classic demonstration of the Social Network Theory, where the strong ties within the youth peer group enforce a specific linguistic norm (innovative, hybrid Edo) that deviates from the norms enforced by the dense, traditional networks of the elders (conservative, unmixed Edo).

4.5 Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Language Change

The final objective was to gauge the intergenerational attitudes towards the observed linguistic variations. The semi-structured interviews revealed a clear, polarized difference in perception.

4.5.1 Elders' Perception: Anxiety and Linguistic Purity

Elders overwhelmingly expressed a sense of anxiety and disappointment regarding the youth's speech.

Key Concern: Most of elders described the youth's language as "diluted," "broken, or not proper Edo. "They strongly viewed the high rate of English loanwords and slang as an indication of cultural erosion and a lack of respect for tradition.

View on Change: Elders perceive the changes not as natural evolution (as posited by the Theory of Language Change), but as degradation—a threat to the cultural integrity of the Edo language, which they see themselves as the sole conservators of.

4.5.2 Youths' Perception: Modernization and Pragmatism

Youths, in stark contrast, exhibited a pragmatic and nonchalant attitude toward the linguistic divergence.

Key View: Majority of youths stated that their language is simply "easier," "faster," and "more relevant" for their daily urban lives. They associate the conservative elder variety with formality, tradition, and lack of modernity.

View on Change: The youth view their hybrid variety as a natural evolution and an act of modernization. They feel that a language must adapt to new cultural, technological, and educational realities to remain functional. Their linguistic innovation is a form of social positioning, affirming their place as agents of change.

4.5.3 Intergenerational Communication Strain

The divergent attitudes translate into observable communication strain. The elders' inability to fully comprehend the youth's exclusive slang and the youths' tendency to simplify traditional Edo lexicon create a noticeable linguistic barrier. This gap necessitates frequent clarification and is often accompanied by mutual frustration, highlighting the social impact of the Generational Theory of Language Shift.

4.6 Synthesis of Findings and Theoretical Application

The data analysis confirms the central thesis of the study: there is a significant, systematic, and theoretically explicable linguistic gap between urban Edo elders and youths.

Generational Cohort	Primary Linguistic Tendency	Dominant Social Network	Theoretical Role
Edo Elders	Conservatism (Retention of traditional lexicon, full tonal system)	Dense, close-knit, local (Family, traditional councils)	Conservator of Tradition (Milroy's Social Network Theory)
Edo Youths	Innovation (High English loanwords/slang, grammatical code-mixing)	Loose, diverse, global (Media, formal education, peer group)	Agent of Change (Generational Theory of Language Shift)

The findings demonstrate a classic example of language change in progress (Theory of Language Change), driven by the younger generation whose social networks and urban experiences compel them to innovate linguistically. The elders' more

conservative linguistic behavior is directly traceable to their denser, more traditional social networks, which resist external linguistic influences.

The youth are, in effect, forging a new urban Edo variety—a functionally hybrid language designed to meet the demands of a globalized, multi-ethnic Nigerian urban center. The differing attitudes towards this change—*anxiety* from the conservators and *pragmatism* from the innovators—underscore the social and cultural conflict inherent in the process of language evolution.

4.6.1 Conclusion of Findings

The study concludes that the generational difference in urban Edo is driven by a complex interplay of external pressure (English and global media) and internal social dynamics (youth identity and peer group solidarity). The variations are not random but systematic, indicating the emergence of a distinct urban youth variety of Edo that is poised to shape the future trajectory of the language. This provides strong empirical data supporting the theoretical premise that age is a fundamental factor in language variation and change, particularly in environments facing high globalization pressure.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter brings the research to a close. It begins with a summary of the preceding four chapters, providing a concise overview of the study's purpose, methodology, and theoretical framework. This is followed by a synthesized presentation of the main findings derived from the data analysis. Finally, a clear conclusion is drawn to address the main aim of the study, and non-compulsory recommendations are provided for future research and language planning.

5.1 Summary

The first chapter introduced the phenomenon of generational language change in urban settings, focusing on the Edo language in Benin City, Nigeria. It established the aim to analyze and describe the linguistic differences between urban Edo elders and youths. The chapter set four specific objectives covering lexical, phonological, and grammatical variations, social drivers, and generational perceptions.

The second chapter reviewed existing literature on sociolinguistics, focusing on age-grading, language contact, and the role of innovation vs. conservation in language change, particularly within the context of Nigerian and African languages. It has provided the theoretical framework (e.g., variationist sociolinguistics) guiding the analysis.

The third detailed the mixed-methods approach used, including the sampling of Edo-speaking youths (15–25 years) and elders (60 years and above) in Benin City. It has

explained the data collection techniques: semi-structured interviews for attitudes, audio recordings for naturalistic speech, and corpus analysis of digital communication for youth slang and lexicon.

The fourth chapter presented the results of the data analysis, confirming significant differences between the two age groups. Key findings included a high rate of English loanword integration and the use of exclusive slang by the youth, starkly contrasted with the elders' retention of traditional Edo lexicon. The chapter concluded that social factors like education, media, and peer group influence are the primary drivers of this divergence.

5.2 Findings

The main findings of this research, in direct response to the study's objectives, are summarized as follows:

Lexical and Grammatical Divergence is Significant: The most pronounced difference is at the lexical level, where the youth variety features a high volume of English loanwords (even for existing Edo concepts) and a rapidly evolving lexicon of slang (gbedu, mád, crúz). Grammatically, youths employ intra-sentential code-switching, integrating English elements into Edo clause structure, which is rare in elder speech.

Social Factors are Primary Drivers: The generational variations are strongly correlated with modern social factors. Formal education and exposure to the English-dominated mass media and technology (texting, social media) are the principal accelerators of language change among the youth.

The Emergence of a Hybrid Variety: The youth's language is not simply 'bad Edo' but a systematic hybrid variety adapted for their modern social landscape. This hybridity allows them to express group identity and navigate urban, multi-ethnic interactions.

Divergent Attitudes Exist: Elders overwhelmingly perceive the language difference as a threat to the cultural integrity and purity of Edo. Youths, conversely, view the changes as a natural evolution and an act of modernization and social positioning, showing little concern for the loss of traditional forms.

5.3 Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to analyze and describe the specific linguistic differences in the Edo language as used by urban elders and youths.

This research conclusively demonstrates that age is the most powerful determinant of language variation within the urban Edo speech community. The linguistic gap is not merely a matter of occasional difference but represents the formation of two distinct yet related varieties of the Edo language: a conservative, tradition-bound elder variety and an innovative, globalized youth variety.

The study confirms that the processes of globalization, urbanization, and technological saturation are driving the youth to systematically restructure the Edo lexicon, leading to a marked lexical and socio-cultural distance from their elders. While elders act as linguistic conservators, the youth are the active agents of change. This dynamic interplay is a classic example of language evolution in contact, confirming that

Edo, like many indigenous Nigerian languages, is adapting its form to survive in a rapidly modernizing world, even at the expense of its own traditional structures.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the significant findings regarding the generational gap, the following recommendations are put forth:

Promote Intergenerational Communication Forums: Cultural and educational institutions should create programs that encourage interaction between youths and elders focused on specific traditional topics. This could help bridge the communication gap and facilitate the transmission of traditional Edo lexicon which the youth are currently losing.

Integrate Modern Content into Edo Language Curricula: To make the Edo language relevant to youths, educational materials should formally acknowledge and integrate contemporary concepts and relevant modern terminology (even accepted loanwords) alongside traditional vocabulary. This acknowledges the reality of the language's evolution.

Document the Youth Variety Systematically: Linguists should continue to systematically document the emerging Edo youth variety and slang (e.g., through large, longitudinal corpus projects). This is crucial for understanding the trajectory of language change and providing accurate data for future sociolinguistic research.

Launch Public Awareness Campaigns: Campaigns should be launched to inform the community that language change is a natural process of adaptation, not necessarily

degradation. This could alleviate the elders' anxiety while encouraging youths to maintain a functional command of the language's core structures.

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