



Language Endangerment in English As A Second Language (ESL) Nigerian Context

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Abstract

The issue of language endangerment and possible linguistic, where exoglossic languages such as English and French hold sway, has characterized African multilingual societies. In spite of the awareness of the importance of language diversity, 'Peace linguistics' (Crystal 2008), the tendency towards the use of English as the only language in Nigeria tends to be increasing pathetically. Some linguists have cautioned that the way the English language is going, it may eventually kill most of the other languages in the world (Colls 2009). This development has prompted new initiatives whereby concerned citizens, policy makers, and administrators dread the loss of their heritage languages. Many of these languages are now endangered and are teetering on the brink of extinction. A mini language survey was carried out in South West Nigeria to assess the linguistic repertoire of the average Nigerian elite. Findings show much loss or erosion in their first language (L1) competence. In light of the above, this paper examines the causes and nature of language endangerment in Nigeria and suggests possible ways to save Nigerian dying tongues based on UNESCO's (2003) resolution that language diversity is essential to the survival of human heritage and that every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people.

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1. Introduction

Many linguists aver that an estimated 7000 languages are being spoken around the world today. It is however, a matter of grave concern that many of these languages are now endangered. In Nigeria, we are facing a critical situation whereby speakers of our indigenous languages who have been exposed to the use of the English language as a second language because of its dominance in the social, political, educational, and economic lives of the people, have lost much of their linguistic and communicative competence in their native languages such as Hausa Igbo and Yoruba. Nigeria is a multilingual society having over 500 languages and many of them teetering on the brink of extinction. The topic of language preservation and language maintenance has become increasingly relevant in our society. Researches on language endangerment in specific African countries are often impressionistic and dismissive without regard for the nature and causes behind such language behaviour. This study therefore seeks to reconfigure the merely descriptive perspective by adopting a data-driven analytical approach to the understanding of the studies in this realm of language and cultural experience.

We are now witnessing a situation where many educated Nigerians are taunted to behave like a confused child of two worlds but lacking competence in both. The gradual shift whereby educated Nigerians owe more allegiance to English at the expense of their heritage language is as a result of the prestige status of the English language. The situation becomes more worrisome when some languages such as Arabic which share more affinity with Yoruba are even jettisoned so that English attracts more speakers. This is due to the fact that many Yoruba people are Muslims who practice the Islamic religion and therefore better exposed to some words derivable from their religious worldview. According to Adeyemi (2016), no language in the world is without an origin. The origin may be from where it is being spoken or near to it. The language spoken may change from the origin but still, there must be traces or elements of this origin in it that will show emergence of this language from this source. We can observe this in the diffusion of Arabic to Yoruba language either by borrowing or historical connections. The following words are traceable to such description:

Table 1. Showing Similarities between Yoruba and Arabic words

| Yoruba | Arabic Transliteration | English |
|--------------|------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Abẹrẹ | Ibrah | Needle |
| 2. Ààrá | Ar-Ra’ad | Thunder |
| 3. Àduà | Ad-Du’a | Prayer |
| 4. Alááfìà | Al-Ā’fiyah | Good Health |
| 5. Alààyè | Al-Ĥayyu | The Living One |
| 6. Àléébu | Al’Ayb | Blemish |
| 7. Àlubarika | Al- Barakah | Blessing |
| 8. Fitina | Fitna | Distress |
| 9. Máléékà | Malaika | angel |
| 10. Wákàt | Waqt | Time/Hour |

Colls (2009) argues that an estimated half of the present languages being spoken in the world will go extinct in the next century. The alarming possibility of losing such a great number of languages in the world must be worrisome to sociolinguists who are concerned with language preservation and development. He argued that without practice even a native language would begin to deteriorate. Linguists should therefore begin to document, support, preserve and revitalize endangered languages and the communities where they are spoken.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Nigerian Languages and Endangerment

According to the President of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN), Prof. Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche, Nigerian languages are endangered due to past neglect and denigration, noting that some had already become extinct, while 152 others were on the verge of extinction. The Guardian of 16th February 2016 reported that the association is worried that Nigerian languages are not being handed over to children in homes and schools. She further revealed that researches show that on the average, 25 per cent of children below 11 years are unable to speak their parents’ indigenous languages. If this trend is not checked, then Nigerian languages will be in extinction in two to three generations, which is in 50 to 75 years’ time.

Specifically, the Igbo language was regarded as being seriously threatened by Progressive Leaders Association (PILA). In the words of Mr. Chima Umealo, the coordinator in South Africa while launching the establishment of Igbo language school in Johannesburg said the group’s aim was to secure the Igbo language and ensure that it would not go into extinction because UNESCO has predicted that the language is among those that will go out of fashion in no distant future. The association has therefore come out ‘to secure our language because a people without a language are no people’ (p2). The Guardian of July 4, 2017 reported that the association expressed concern that Igbo children born in

South Africa were losing touch with their language. It is therefore by establishing the school that their heritage and culture will not go into extinction.

Akinlabi and Connell's (2013) study of two Nigerian dying tongues, Defaka and Nkoroo portrays an unsettling picture of the nature of endangerment of some Nigerian languages. They report that every 14 days, a language dies and soon, the Nigerian language of Defaka, now spoken by only 50 people, could be one of them. Many endangered languages are spoken by fewer than 5,000 people and have fallen out of public circulation. They aren't used in the marketplace, in the schools, or in radio broadcasts. Some have no alphabet, and for most, the rules that govern grammar and syntax have never been written down. The greatest threat to a language is when parents are no longer speaking it with their children, often because it can't help them get jobs or an education.

In their study titled "Documenting Defaka and Nkroo", sponsored by the National Science Foundation under the Linguistic Collaborative Research grant, it was revealed that over 200 West African languages are currently identified as being severely endangered. Most of the Ijoid languages, a branch of the Niger-Congo family found in the Niger Delta in southern Nigeria, are in danger of disappearing. The aim of this project is to document in detail, following currently established best practice, two severely endangered languages of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Defaka and Nkoroo. Population estimates for one of these languages, Defaka, range from 1,000 or fewer.

Essien (2013) corroborates the Defaka dismal situation when he submits that when the speakers of a language evaluate their language negatively in response to the socio-economic value placed on their language by their supposed superior neighbors, the speakers of the language develop low self-esteem, inferiority complex and consequently, the language is stigmatized. Due to the negative value attached to their traditional language, many parents cease to transmit the language to their children and the language begins to die. This is not far from being one the major causes of the dying state of Defaka.

Professor Akinlabi's study is however designed to rescue Defaka from total extinction. First, by gathering large quantities of texts and lexical data, the language will be archived in a lasting medium, in order to preserve Defaka and Nkoroo for the benefit of their speakers, outside linguists, anthropologists, historians and other scholars, and for mankind in general. Second, native speakers of the languages will be trained in documentation techniques, enabling them to play a more active role in the preservation of their language. This will hopefully preserve information that will allow the languages to be revitalized, or at least have them remembered.

Brenzinger (1998) in his study of endangerment of African languages reveals that language death has always been taking place in Middle Belt Nigeria. He gave an example of the sociolinguistic situation regarding major expansions of languages that led to turmoil in the area because many languages have disappeared due to language displacement and assimilation. Hausa, Kanuri and Tiv enjoy a lot of patronage but often Hausa is always overriding other languages. The Basawa people who once had Bassa as their major language now speak only Hausa.

In the same vein, Ujorha (2013) carried out a study of the 'The Dying Languages of Illo' in Kebbi state. The study shows that many of the languages spoken in Ilo are dying. The older generations speak the languages, but the younger generation can hardly utter their mother tongues. However, they speak a lot of Hausa, and their fluency in the tongue improves with every passing day. Today, they are already rivaling native speakers of Hausa. Languages such as Zabarmanci, Dandanci, and Busanci are declining rapidly.

Alebiosu (2017) laments that educated Nigerians were fast losing grips of their language as a dying tongue when respondents in a language survey questionnaire cannot correctly interpret expressions in their own language. Findings reveal a worrisome dimension to the endangerment being faced by the Yoruba language. This position was corroborated by Akinkurolere and Akinfenwa (2018) who remarked that Yoruba culture (beliefs, ideologies, customs and norms) is deteriorating in recent times. Cultures such as greetings (kneeling down and prostrating for elders), chastity (virginity), dressing (traditional attires such as Aso Oke, Dansiki and others), moonlight folktales and traditional hairstyles for females are now considered outdated. The fear of endangerment was also echoed by Oke (2013:90) in a study with the following Yoruba names that has been deprived of their language heritage on the social media platform:

Table 2. Showing Yoruba Names and their Anglicized Version

| Names in Original Yoruba Versions | Anglicized Version of the Names |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ayomide | Haryurmideh |
| Oyindamola | Hoyindarmorlah |
| Adedoyin | Ardeydhoyin |
| Abisola | Harbeesorlah |
| Femi | Phemmy |

The Nigerian situation has witnessed some of these recognizable factors responsible for language death. According to Brenzinger (1998) a language moves from endangerment to death when:

1. It is assimilated to larger, more powerful groups nearby
2. It is assimilated to smaller but culturally dominant groups
3. It is assimilated to English as an official language
4. It is assimilated to demographic crises caused by labour migration and urbanization

Much of the social, political, social, spiritual and cultural life of any speech community is experienced through language. The people express their mores, myths, songs, poetry and ceremonies through their indigenous language. When a language dies, all these worldview and sensibilities are buried in it. It is therefore important that we protect our languages from extinction, if we are to retain our humanity.

According to Osoba and Alebiosu (2016) language displacement usually precipitates language extinction or death. When the population of the speakers of a language begins to decline rather than grow, it may lead to the extinction of that language. Language displacement which occurs in a community because of specific social environments as well as preference for a particular language or dialect in a multilingual speech community may also result in language extinction. This is perhaps why language displacement and preference usually underlie language endangerment which may later metamorphose into language extinction.

Crystal (2000) affirms that “a language dies when nobody speaks it anymore” A language thrives and survives as long as someone speaks it and has someone to speak it to. United Kingdom Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL) reported the Mambilla case in Adamawa province in Nigeria where Kasabe language died when Boyon the last speaker died just before the researcher could complete an attempt to rescue the language from going into extinction. We can imagine the horror of a situation whereby someone speaks a language named ‘Bangaloid’ (coined by the author) when the processing of this paper is on-going only for us to hear later before the publication in 3 months’ time, that such a language has ceased to exist. We should note that the disappearance of unwritten and undocumented languages is a bad signal that Nigeria may lose not only its cultural wealth but also important ancestral knowledge embedded in our indigenous languages.

2.2 Languages are Unique

UNESCO (2010) document in support of linguistic and cultural diversity reports the adoption on September 13, 2007, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This includes language rights. Article 13-1 of the declaration reads "Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons" It is therefore important to appreciate the uniqueness of our languages by making them cut through our particularity.

What can we make of an advertisement in the Hindustan Times in New Delhi which offers a match with ‘a beautiful homely girl’ from a good family? Prospective grooms are advised to set their own convenient time to meet the girls but ‘if you are especially eager you can always *prepone it’. Weismann (1987) reported that although they have been speaking English on the Indian subcontinent for 300 years, there are those who think the Indians haven’t got it right.

According to his source, Indian English could perhaps best be defined as a language written or spoken by Indians in the belief that it is English. The Spelling is English. The tone and spirit may not be. In the Nigerian setting, many of our elite now utter some expressions that are rooted in the socio-cultural

perspective of their environment but using English mode of expression. This variety occurs when they impose a grammatical usage of their native tongue upon the language of expression. This is also noticeable in the case of a Yoruba-English bilingual who says “let me land” when interrupted in the course of making a speech. Just like a French man might say “I am here since Friday.” This is lexically English, but grammatically French.

Crystal (2000) discloses that new varieties of English are beginning to appear around the world as a consequence of its emerging status as a world lingua franca. He cited the Singaporean, Ghanaian, Caribbean and other New Englishes which are now regarded as varieties of English. In Nigeria we have a form of domesticated variety now tagged Nigerian English which has taken a form of its own in terms of lexis, syntax and semantics. These varieties are as a result of interference from the corresponding mother tongues in what Adebija (2004) terms as the domestication of English in Nigeria... there is the day-to-day contact of English with many indigenous languages. This awareness has created the need for new ideas and modes of thought to be expressed in new ways that are not available in the native variety of English. He identifies several levels of domestication such as: “Coinage (Cash madam, go slow), Hybridization (bukateria, kiakia bus), Analogization (arrangee, decampee) Direct translation (bushmeat, long leg), Affixation (awoism, zikism)”.

The challenge facing many linguists is to protect, promote and propagate their heritage language from being swallowed as the English language continues its increasing incursion into the nooks and crannies of the languages of the world. According to McWhorter (2001) the spread of English is the product of naked linguistic superpower. If anyone, anywhere wants to get ahead nowadays, an ability to speak English is obligatory and taken for granted. Power comes, as it always did in the 20th century, from the barrel of a gun. But in the 21st century it also comes, more pacifically, from the Oxford English Dictionary. English is universally regarded as the global currency. However, we must strive to accord our own indigenous languages their well-deserved respect while the English language continues to play its complementary role in Nigeria. According to Banjo (1995), if Nigeria is to make a distinctive contribution to human civilization, it will have to be as a result of the symbiotic relationship between English and the indigenous languages, a pooling of the resources of all the languages without foreclosing the contributions that any of them can make.

2.3 The Example of Yoruba as an endangered language

The sociolinguistic narrative has accepted the notion that there is a close relationship between language, culture and thought. Our languages have a high level of interrelationship with our surroundings to the extent that our social, economic, political and educational worldview should not be severed from them. Despite the world’s movement along the globalization plane it still advocates multiculturalism. There is need for diversity of our languages, whereby tolerance and respect for other languages to thrive should be acceptable. Language revitalization should be encouraged in a world that claims to be democratic and self-determining. Crystal (2000) argues that we should be concerned that some languages may be endangered because languages express identity, because languages are repositories of history, because languages are interesting in the schools. The following Yoruba expressions and idioms were administered randomly to 50 educated Nigerians to interpret but the results were as shocking as they were illuminating.

3. Methodology

A mini language survey was carried out in south west Nigeria among the elite comprising 200 respondents. The study was to examine their language behaviour in terms of understanding simple indigenous expressions in their Mother Tongue (M.T.) Yoruba. The questionnaire was drawn to cut across professionals who are Yoruba-English bilinguals to ensure a good representation. These include: teachers, lawyers, doctors, students and bankers. The gender factor though very crucial in a survey like this was not taken into consideration here because our focus is to elicit correct interpretations of these expressions irrespective of the sex of the respondents. However, they were all above age 25 years to

enable us confirm that they have been sufficiently exposed to the usage and nuances of the Yoruba language. (See Table)

Table 3. Showing Yoruba Expressions and their Interpretations

| S/N | Yoruba Expression | Translation | Correct Interpretation | No. of respondents with correct answer | Percent of Respondents with correct answer |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| 1 | Eja Mbakan | Fish or Crab? | Was it a success or a failure? | 16 | 8% |
| 2 | A Kii Mojo so lokun | Time cannot be tied. | Make hay while the sun shines | 120 | 60% |
| 3 | Akuko nko inu bi ole | A lazy man grumbles when the cock crows. | Procrastination is unacceptable | 40 | 20% |
| 4 | Bi a daso fun ole a pa laro | Clothes given to a lazy man should be dyed. | Please, give full support to an upstart | 60 | 30% |
| 5 | Akara tu sepo | Frying the bean cake has gone bad | Confusion has set in | 40 | 20% |
| 6 | Afe fe ti fe, ati ri di adie | When the wind blows, the nudity of the chick is exposed | The secret is out | 20 | 10% |
| 7. | Atari Ajanaku ki seru omo kekere | The elephant's skull is not a child's play | Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown | 40 | 20% |
| 8. | Alejo lowo | Money is a visitor | Be prudent | 180 | 90% |
| 9. | Iji ki ja ko domi inu agbon nu | No storm can spill the coconut juice | Tough times don't beak tough people | 40 | 20% |
| 10. | Kosode, ko osagbe o nje yan igangan | You are neither a hunter nor a farmer, but you eat sumptuous pounded yam | You tend to reap what you have not sown | 0 | 0% |

4. Result and Discussion

The various interpretations given by the respondents reveal that many Yoruba-English bilinguals are fast losing track of their mother tongue. While it is understandable that some of these expressions are opaque because they have disappeared from the linguistic repertoire of the respondents, it is lamentable that other expressions that are transparent could not be correctly interpreted by them.

The following categories of interpretation were identified: *Very difficult*, *Difficult*, and *Easy*.

Table 4. Showing Item Difficulty Index

| Rating | Very difficult | Difficult | Easy |
|--------|----------------|----------------|-------|
| Items | 1 & 10 | 3,4,5,6,7, & 9 | 2 & 8 |

The findings above reveal a worrisome dimension to the endangerment being faced by the Yoruba language. We could observe that only two of the items 2 and 8 are found intelligible by the respondents. While items 3,4,5,6,7 and 9 are found to be difficult and many could not interpret them, items 1 and 10 are totally unintelligible to most of the respondents such that only 8% can interpret item I while none of them can interpret item 10.

4.1 Towards A Sustainable Language Development Initiative

Nigeria should evolve an aggressive and a more embracing system towards a sustainable language development and revalorisation in tune with what operates in other parts of the world where language endangerment is seen as a threat and linguistic genocide. Two Row Times of April 5, 2017 reported the case of how students celebrate their language at Six Nations University in Canada. Over 400 indigenous and non-indigenous students celebrated Indigenous language Day on Friday March 31st 2017. Some of them were excited asking “How would you feel if one day you weren’t allowed to speak your language and communicate to your peers?” “That’s what happened to us. That’s what happened to our people and we’re here today to help re-learn our language and teach others what was lost,” Students from schools and surrounding areas were gathered to spend the day participating in language workshops, presentations, lectures, information sessions, art demonstrations, story-telling, sports, singing demonstrations, and more. The CEO of the university in support of the effort said: “It’s important for all sides to become engaged and involved in language reconciliation. Seeing young people interested in learning our language and having fun while participating is encouraging and makes all the effort worth it,” Nigeria needs such a rejig for our languages to regain their diminishing status.

Turin (2017) argues that many speakers of endangered, poorly documented language have embraced new digital media with enthusiasm. With the coming of the internet facilities on smart phones and computers, Yoruba speaking people are turning to the Web as a virtual space for the language to thrive, thus saving the language from extinction. Some activities that could not reach the world are now being given the oxygen of publicity through You Tube, We Chat Whatsapp, Twitter, Skypee and Facebook. An online forum, Indigenous Language and Technology (ILAT) now offers an open discussion list for community language specialists, linguists, scholars and students to discuss issues relating to the use of technology in language revitalization efforts.

Web Scholars now talk of language technology where indigenous languages like Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo are being given their pride of place in terms of digital dignity, digital identity and digital longevity. Although still on a limited scale and with low patronage from the Nigerian audience, Google has a Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa entry where its search engine could be displayed to access the social, economic, political and educational research of those indigenous languages.

The Guardian of July 19, 2017 reported the breakthrough of Omolabake Adenle of Aja.la studio that built a natural language and speech processing application for African languages. A National Science Foundation (NSF) graduate research fellow, she developed a software for African languages that can understand and digitize spoken African languages. ‘Her software not only helps newer generation learn languages that are slowly dying but would also afford those who speak their local languages enjoy the benefit of digital revolution such as a voice assistant that can take instruction in and speak Yoruba’. (p2). Other Yoruba examples of such illuminating and educative references on the web comprise the works of D.O. Fagunwa and J.F Odunjo which have remained classic citations on Yoruba values and ideals. While D.O Fagunwa is celebrated for masterpieces such as *Igbo Olodumare*, *Ireke Onibudo* and *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale (The Forest of a Thousand Daemons)* as translated by Wole Soyinka, Odunjo is revered for *Ise Logun Ise (Work Ethics)*, *Toju Iwa re (Character is beauty)* and *Omo Beere, Osi Beere (Family planning)*. It is therefore apposite here to exemplify the need to promote our languages by reproducing excerpts from *Ise logun Ise* to bring out the poetry and nuances of the Yoruba language.

4.2 Work Ethics

Ìsẹ̀ Ní Ọ̀dún Ìsẹ̀

Múra Sí Ìsẹ̀ Re, Ọ̀rẹ̀ M

Work Is The Antidote For Poverty.

Work Hard, My Friend.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Isé Ni A Fi Í Di Eni Giga | Hard Work Will Elevate Us |
| Bí A Kò Bá Réni Fèyìn Tì | If No One Supports Us |
| Bí Òle Là Á Rí | It's As If One Is Lazy. |
| Bí A Ko Réni Gbékèlé | If None Could Be Trusted |
| À A Tera Mó Isé Eni | We Simply Work Harder. |
| Ìyá Re Lè Lówó Lówó | Mother May Be Wealthy. |
| Bàbá Sì Lè Lésin Lèèkàn | Father May Have A Ranch Full Of Horses. |
| Bí O Bá Gbójú Lé Won | If You Depend on Them |
| O Té Tán Ni Mo So Fún O | You May End Up In Disgrace |
| Ohun Tí A Kò Ba Jiyà Fún | Whatever Is Not Justly Earn |
| Kì Í Lè Tójó | Usually Does Not Last. |
| Ohun Tí A Bá Fara Sisé Fún | Whatever One Works Hard to Earn |
| Ní Í Pé Lówó Eni | Lasts Longer In One's Hand. |

Credit: <http://www.goodbooksafrica.com/2014/08/ise-ni-ogun-se-alawiye-by-j-f-odunjo.html>

Our observation also reveals that many Yoruba elites cannot recite the Yoruba alphabeth from A to GB (A to Z), talk less of engaging in any discourse involving the use of its calendar. The Lagos state House of assembly had to throw a challenge to its members in one of its deliberations, promising a reward of N100, 000 to anybody who could recite the alphabet. Only three of the 40 members won the bet! The Yoruba alphabeth and calendar are:

- *The Yoruba alphabet (Alufabẹ̀ti/ABD Yorùbá)*

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| A a | B b | D d | E e | È è | F f | G g | Gb gb | H h |
| ah | bi | di | hay | hen | fi | gi | gbi! | in |
| [a] | [b] | [d] | [e] | [ɛ] | [f] | [g] | [gb̄] | [h] |
| I i | J j | K k | L l | M m | N n | O o | Ọ ọ | P p |
| he! | ji | ki | li | mi | ni | oh | or! | pi |
| [i] | [j] | [k] | [l] | [m] | [n] | [o] | [ɔ] | [kp̄] |
| R r | S s | Ş ş | T t | U u | W w | Y y | | |
| ri | si | shi | ti | uh! | wi | yi | | |
| [r] | [s] | [ʃ] | [t] | [u] | [w] | [j] | | |

Nasal vowels (Awọ̀n Fawẹ̀li Aranmupe)

| | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| an | ẹn | in | on | un |
| [ã] | [ɛ̃] | [ĩ] | [ɔ̃] | [ũ] |

Credit: Omniglot- An Online Encyclopedia of Writing Systems and Languages
<http://www.omniglot.com/index.htm>

- *Yoruba Calendar*
AWON OSU (MONTHS)

OKUDU (JUNE) **AGEMO** (JULY) **OGUN** (AUGUST) **OWEWE** (SEPTEMBER) **OWAWA** (OCTOBER) **BELU** (NOVEMBER) **OPE** (DECEMBER) **SERE** (JANUARY) **ERELU** (FEBRUARY) **ERENA** (MARCH) **IGBE** (APRIL) **EBIBI** (MAY)

It is interesting to note that Yoruba calendar begins in June though many of our elites have celebrated the New Year on 1st of January. The seven days of the week are: Ojo-Aiku ([Sunday](#)), Ojo-Aje ([Monday](#)), Ojo-Ishegun ([Tuesday](#)), Ojo-Riru ([Wednesday](#)), Ojo-Bo/Alamisi ([Thursday](#)), Ojo-Eti ([Friday](#)) and Ojo-Abameta ([Saturday](#)).

UNESCO (2010) has also created a forum to raise awareness about language endangerment and the need to safeguard the world’s linguistic diversity among policy-makers, speaker communities, and the general public, and to be a tool to monitor the status of endangered languages and the trends in linguistic diversity at the global level. Languages are vehicles of our cultures, collective memory, and values. They are an essential component of our identities and a building block of our diversity and living heritage. Alebiosu (2016) posits that where the speakers demonstrate the zeal to develop their languages in both spoken and written forms, they will record appreciable success if such languages could be codified, elaborated, and institutionalized by using them in educational, social, religious, and cultural domains. Where this is not done, the languages will remain at the level they left them, endangered or even die out in favour of another dominant language. When the criteria listed for assessing language vitality and endangerment were considered in respect of the Yoruba language, the following rating was conceivable.

4.3 Adaptation of UNESCO’s criteria for language vitality and endangerment in respect of Yoruba language

Table 5. Showing UNESCO’s Criteria for Language Vitality

| S/N | Criteria for Yoruba | Degree |
|-----|---|------------|
| 1 | Proportion of speakers within the total population | Safe |
| 2 | Absolute number of speakers | Safe |
| 3 | Intergenerational language transmission | Vulnerable |
| 4 | Type and quality of documentation | Vulnerable |
| 5 | Availability of materials for language education and literacy | Vulnerable |
| 6 | Response to new domains and media | Vulnerable |
| 7 | Shifts in domains of language use | Vulnerable |
| 8 | Community members’ attitude to Yoruba | Vulnerable |
| 9 | Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use | Vulnerable |

It is however instructive to note that no single factor could account for the state of a community’s languages. What then should be the criteria to assess the level of vitality or endangerment of a language? When the above factors were considered in respect of the Yoruba language it is observable from the present situation of usage that Yoruba could be assessed as being more vulnerable than safe. The illustration above tends to affirm what Crystal (2000) mentioned of the two judgements from the Foundation for Endangered Languages which state that:

1. The majority of the world languages are vulnerable not just to decline but to extinction.
2. Over half the world’s languages are moribund, that is, not effectively being passed on to the next generation.

He suggested that some crucial steps should be taken to prevent languages from going into extinction. These include

1. Increasing their prestige within the dominant community. Nigerian indigenous languages for example should not be restricted to only the informal domain of cultural settings, homes families and socials.

2. Increase their wealth. Language should be used for economic activities for wealth creation.
3. Increase their legitimate power in the eye of the dominant community.
4. Have a strong presence in the educational system.
5. People can write down their language
6. Language should be adaptable for electronic technology.

When we consider the foregoing, there is need for concerted efforts on the part of Nigerian scholars, governments and professional bodies to save our threatened and endangered languages from extinction. Alebiosu (2016) has given an insight into some ameliorative steps to be taken. These include:

1. More researches are needed to sensitize individuals and corporate entities to optimize the use of our national languages as enshrined in the constitution. A more positive attitude should be cultivated by our elite towards the functional expansion of our indigenous languages.
2. The federal government and organized bodies should revive the moribund language centres and encourage language development activities. There should be some enforcement of the language policy that each state assembly should conduct debates and deliberations in the constitutionally recognized national languages apart from English.
3. Orthographies of many local languages should be developed and more terminologies evolved to carry the weight of modern experience. With the advent of information technology, the indigenous languages should be given their right of place. Apart from the fact that Google has listed Yoruba in its search machine, a pioneering initiative known as the Kamusi project has been launched by Yale University in America proving that technology is not the preserve of just the English Language.
4. The mass media are also a means of propagating and consolidating the enhancement of our indigenous languages. Broadcast, debates and dramas should be carried out in these languages so that we can further preserve our identity. It is disheartening to note that 70% of the programmes aired on our radios and televisions are laden with English. Despite the National Broadcasting Corporation guidelines stipulating high percentage local content, many media outfits find it convenient to flout such directives. With the deregulation of the broadcasting industry, many private owners prefer most of their programmes aired in English. This must change if we want our indigenous languages to develop beyond the present state.
5. Governments at federal, state and local levels including organized bodies should revive the moribund language centres and encourage language development activities. There should be some enforcement of the language policy that each state assembly should conduct debates and deliberations in the constitutionally recognized national languages apart from English. A worthy example is the Nigeria's Minister of Education, Mr Adamu Adamu's inauguration of the National Technical Committee for the development of Language Policy to preserve Nigerian indigenous languages.

The Guardian of April 11, 2018 reported that:

The National Language Policy was to enable government create conducive atmosphere for the preservation of indigenous languages, determine how language skills are developed and deployed to achieve national goals. He stressed that National Language Policy cannot be taken for granted, adding that it will produce a workable document that will promote, and enable the Nigerian child become multi lingual.p14

Mr Adamu also said that a well-articulated language policy will enhance the international status of Nigeria, as Hausa is spoken in all Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) even in Central Africa and Cameroon, while Yoruba is spoken in Benin Republic and the Diaspora. The Lagos state government has also enacted the Yoruba Promotion Bill which according to The Vanguard of 25th February 2018 that the teaching of Yoruba language is now compulsory in both private and public schools in the state. The law also mandates all state-owned tertiary institutions in the state to integrate the use of the language as a course unit into their general studies GNS courses. The governor stated while signing the bill that:

It will become normal for you to be admitted into any of our tertiary institutions with a credit in Yoruba language and Yoruba will now become a major requirement for you to engage in normal business communication in Lagos State. This is a clear and conscious commitment to the position which Lagos State prides Yoruba language as the cultural vehicle for us to be able to articulate our position and it also shows that Lagos has furthered recognised the importance of language as a vehicle for development. (6)

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to sensitize concerned scholars, linguists, educators, and language planners to the scourge of language endangerment with particular reference to Nigerian dying tongues. Global awareness has become increasingly positive on the advantages of language diversity and language promotion. There is nothing preventing the Nigerian elite from exhibiting equal proficiency in both their native language and English. This is in tune with Adebite (2008), who believes that in the Yorùbá community, for example, personal, social, and official transactions ought to take place in Yorùbá while English is used mainly for inter-ethnic or international communication. Stable Yoruba-English bilinguals ought to be more fluent in Yorùbá than English, and they ought to use the former for all kinds of communication more than the latter in their mother tongue environment. Surely, a person cannot be considered functionally literate if they are not proficient in their mother tongue. No self-respecting person will take more pride in using a foreign tongue or possessing sole mastery of another language to the detriment of their own. Charity must not begin abroad, and as our people would say: 'TIWA NTIWA' (OURS IS OURS).

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