



A SURVEY OF AWARENESS OF LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

As Nigerians increasingly abandon the use of their indigenous languages in all domains of life, including the home, this study sought to find out if they were aware of the language endangerment and ultimate language extinction they were courting. The study used a descriptive survey methodology to find out about awareness of language endangerment, and other issues of language use and preferences from eight hundred adults spread over four States of the Federation-Akwa Ibom, Imo, Lagos and Sokoto States. Findings included the following: 71% of respondents have not heard of language endangerment; 83% do not believe their own language could die, while 89% would regret if their language became extinct. This regret, however, seems misplaced since only 40% spoke to their children in their indigenous language; among children aged 6 years to 11 years, 15% cannot speak parents' indigenous language, while the figure rises to 25% among children aged 5 years and below. The paper then recommends massive awareness and sensitization campaigns on language endangerment in the country; ensuring the active use of the indigenous languages in all spheres of life, especially in the home and enforcing the teaching of Nigerian languages in all nursery, primary and secondary schools as recommended in the National Policy on Education. Finally, the paper suggests the Federal Government declare every Wednesday a diversity day when indigenous languages and cultures would be freely used and manifested by everyone, and in every place.

1. **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The issue of language endangerment has occupied the front burner in world socio-linguistic and education circles for the past three decades. In general, the misgiving is that many languages are dying and that up to 90% of the world's 6000-6500 existing languages are not likely to survive into the next century. (Hill, 1978; Hale, 1992; Krauss, 1992, Geary, 1997). The African continent unfortunately has a large number of endangered languages as documented in Brenzinger (ed.), 1998. What, one might ask, is an endangered language? Brenzinger et al (1991) define it as one with less than 5000 speakers. Grimes (2001), for her part, reports that at a colloquium held in Germany in 2000, linguists distinguished different stages of language endangerment, thus:

Critically endangered: Very few speakers, all 70 years old and older, great-grandparent age.

Severely endangered: Speakers are only 40 years old and older, grandparent age.

Endangered: Speakers are only 20 years old and older, parent age.

Eroding: Speakers are some children and older people. Other children do not speak it.

Stable but threatened: All children and older people are speakers, but few in number.

Safe: Not endangered. Language is expected to be learned by all children and all others in the ethnic group.

In the specific case of Nigeria, the alarm has long been raised in many quarters that up to half of the country's 400 languages are endangered, with some, already extinct or near extinct. Ugwuoke (1992) relies on the definition of an endangered language as one with less than 5000 speakers given in Brenzinger et al. (1991) to arrive at a list of about 152 endangered Nigerian languages. With regard to the extinct or near extinct ones, Crozier and Blench (1992) list some eight Nigerian languages, including Bassa-Kontagora with only 10 surviving speakers in 1987. Shaeffer (1997) notes that Emai, spoken by a small community in Edo state and the 30 different languages spoken in the area would probably be dead by the year 2050 as none could serve as a lingua franca and were, therefore, being supplanted by English.

Haruna (2007) also lists some 20 northern Nigerian languages which are extinct or almost extinct, examples being Bubbure, a West Chadic language of Bauchi state spoken by 1 person presently and Holma spoken in Adamawa state by 4 aged speakers in 1987.

Although language endangerment is often associated with languages which have few speakers, Emenanjo (2007) reexamines all Nigerian languages in the light of the following evaluative factors on the UNESCO (2003) Language Vitality Index:

- Intergenerational transmission
- Absolute number of fluent and committed speakers
- Proportion of speakers within the total population

- Shifts in domains of actual use
- Materials for language use and literacy
- Governmental and institutional and language attitudes and policies including official status and use
- Interaction and social effects between language attitudes and policies
- Nature, type and quality of language documentation.

He concludes that, when viewed against the above indices, no Nigerian language is safe-not even the three major languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba that now have at least 18 million to 20 million speakers each. But, do Nigerians know that their languages are endangered?

2. **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Nigeria is a multilingual country, with about 394 languages (Crozier and Blench, 1992). In pre-colonial times the numerous languages of the different areas coexisted without problem, since every speech community lived and functioned in its own language. From the late 19th century, however, Britain assumed colonial powers over the territories which in 1914 became amalgamated into one country called Nigeria. English became the official language and has remained so, even after independence in 1960. English is not only the language of bureaucracy and governance, but is also the medium of instruction in schools from primary four classes upwards, the language of textbooks and of the media (print and electronic). In an increasing number

of homes parents now also prefer to bring up their children as monolingual speakers of English which they feel their children need to function in school and in the wider Nigerian context. With increasing urbanization and the influx of people of different backgrounds into the big cities, the common language of the neighbourhood is now also shifting to English or Pidgin English. The result of all these is that Nigerian languages are used less and less in different domains and by fewer and fewer people, especially children. The question then arises as to whether Nigerians are aware that their not using their indigenous languages is endangering these languages and is steadily leading them to extinction.

3. **THE STUDY**

3.1 **Purpose**

The main purpose of the study was to find out if Nigerians are aware of the phenomenon of language endangerment and, especially, of the fact that their own languages could become extinct before the end of the century.

3.2 **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- (a) Do the respondents understand and speak their indigenous language?
- (b) Do they use it at home in communication with spouse and children?

- (c) What percentage of children understands and speaks their parents' indigenous language?
- (d) Are indigenous languages used in the media-print and electronic?
- (e) Are indigenous languages used in legislative houses?
- (f) Are respondents aware of the phenomenon of language endangerment?
- (g) Would respondents regret if their own language had ceased to exist before the end of the century?

3.3 Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of adults from different walks of life in Nigeria-civil servants, politicians, college lecturers and students, school and media personnel, businessmen, artisans, traders, housewives and unemployed youths. The sample, however, was limited to eight hundred adults randomly selected from four states – Akwa Ibom, Imo, Lagos and Sokoto states. Akwa Ibom is a southern state with many small lects or speech forms, the two biggest being Ibibio spoken by about 1.5 to 2.0 million people and Anaang by about 1 million speakers (Grimes, 2000). Udoh (2003) says that Akwa Ibom would have been considered a homogenous state from a purely linguistic evidence since the different speech varieties in the state have differing degrees of mutual intelligibility. However, following greater ethnic consciousness in recent times, the speakers of some of the varieties claim independent language status. For the

purposes of this study, however, Akwa Ibom is considered a homogenous linguistic state; this is because all the respondents we encountered in Uyo, the state capital and environs understood one another.

Imo state in the south-east also is a linguistic homogenous state of Igbo speakers. Igbo is one of the three major languages of Nigeria with, at least 18 million speakers (Grimes, 2000). Lagos state is pre-dominantly Yoruba speaking. Yoruba is also one of the three major languages of Nigeria with about 22million speakers (Grimes, 2000). It has a tiny minority of Egun speakers in the Badagry area, but these are also fluent Yoruba speakers. However, as the former Nigerian capital and still its commercial capital, Lagos state has a large population of non-indigenes from different parts of the country who speak different languages. Thus, in our data analysis, we distinguished between Yoruba indigenes and non-Yoruba indigenes in the state. Sokoto state is a north western state with predominant Hausa-Fulani speakers. Hausa is the third of the major Nigerian languages with 24,200,000 native speakers (Grimes, 2000). Sokoto State also has a tiny minority of Zarma speakers who are also fluent Hausa speakers. Similar to Lagos State, Sokoto State has a large population of non-indigenes from different parts of the country including its neighbouring Kebbi and Niger States that have numerous small languages. Thus, in our data analysis, we have

distinguished between Hausa and non-Hausa indigenes in the State.

3.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

Data have been collected only in 4 out of the 36 states of the Federation. However, these states spatially represent both the north and the south and linguistically cover the big languages as well as the small ones. The vast geographical expanse of the country and its great number of languages would have required time, finance and logistics far beyond the capability of the present study. It is hoped, however, that the results obtained would have shed some useful light on the awareness of language endangerment phenomenon in the country.

3.5 Significance of the Study

By raising awareness on the problem of language endangerment, the study would have contributed a first significant step towards its solution. Indeed, the reactions of respondents during the study showed that many people were already being sensitized to the fact that their languages could become extinct sooner than later unless they took steps to protect them.

3.6 Methodology and Instruments

The study which was carried out between October and December, 2007 used a descriptive survey design involving questionnaires and oral interviews. In each of the four states, a general questionnaire was administered to three hundred

members of the public while specialized ones were given out to personnel of media and legislative houses. The researcher personally conducted the survey in Lagos and Akwa Ibom states with the help of colleagues and other able research assistants. In Imo and Sokoto states, two able and experienced colleagues led teams of researchers to conduct the survey.

In most cases, the questionnaires were completed and retrieved at once; hence there was a high rate of recovery. However, time and logistic constraints prevented the retrieval of the specialized questionnaires for media and legislative houses in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state; hence the state did not feature in Tables 3 and 4 which contain responses from media personnel. Further, during data analysis, it was discovered that some respondents left too many cells unfilled, leading to such copies being discarded. After weeding out defectively completed questionnaires and in order to obtain even numbers, two hundred completed copies of the questionnaire for the general public were used for each state in the data analysis.

4. THE RESULTS

4.1 Questionnaires

TABLE 1 MOTHER TONGUE COMPETENCE AND USE IN FOUR STATES OF NIGERIA

		AKWA IBOM STATE		IMO STATE		LAGOS STATE						SOKOTO STATE						TOTAL	
						Yoruba Indigenes		Non- yoruba Indigenes		Sub-total		Hausa Indigenes		Non- hausa Indigenes		Sub-total			
		200	(%)	200	(%)	100	(%)	100	(%)	200	(%)	100	(%)	100	(%)	200	(%)	800	(%)
Respondent speaks his/her indigenous language	Yes	196	98.0	199	99.5	97	97.0	95	95.0	192	96.0	100	100.0	94	94.0	194	97.0	781	97.62
	No	4	2.0	1	0.5	3	3.0	5	5.0	8	4.0	-	-	6	6.0	6	3.0	19	2.38
Language mostly spoken with spouse	L ₁	103	51.5	130	65.0	40	40.0	51	51.0	91	45.5	78	78.0	47	47.0	125	62.5	449	56.13
	English	4	2.0	6	3.0	13	13.0	25	25.0	38	19.0	4	4.0	10	10.0	14	7.0	62	7.75
	L ₁ + English	92	46.0	64	32.0	47	47.0	23	23.0	70	35.0	18	18.0	30	30.0	48	24.0	274	34.25
	Others	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	1	1.0	1	0.5	-	-	13	13.0	13	6.5	15	1.87
Language mostly spoken with children	L ₁	62	31.0	100	50.0	20	20.0	25	25.0	45	22.5	71	71.0	39	39.0	110	55.0	317	39.62
	English	24	12.0	17	8.5	20	20.0	32	32.0	52	26.0	3	3.0	10	10.0	13	6.5	106	13.25
	L ₁ + English	114	57.0	83	41.5	60	60.0	43	43.0	103	51.5	26	26.0	35	35.0	61	30.5	361	45.13
	Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	16.0	16	8.0	16	2.00
Children aged 5	Yes	178	89.0	189	94.5	77	77.0	75	75.0	152	76.0	98	98.0	75	75.0	173	86.5	692	86.50

[illegible]

Figure 1: Indigenous Language Competence in Nigeria

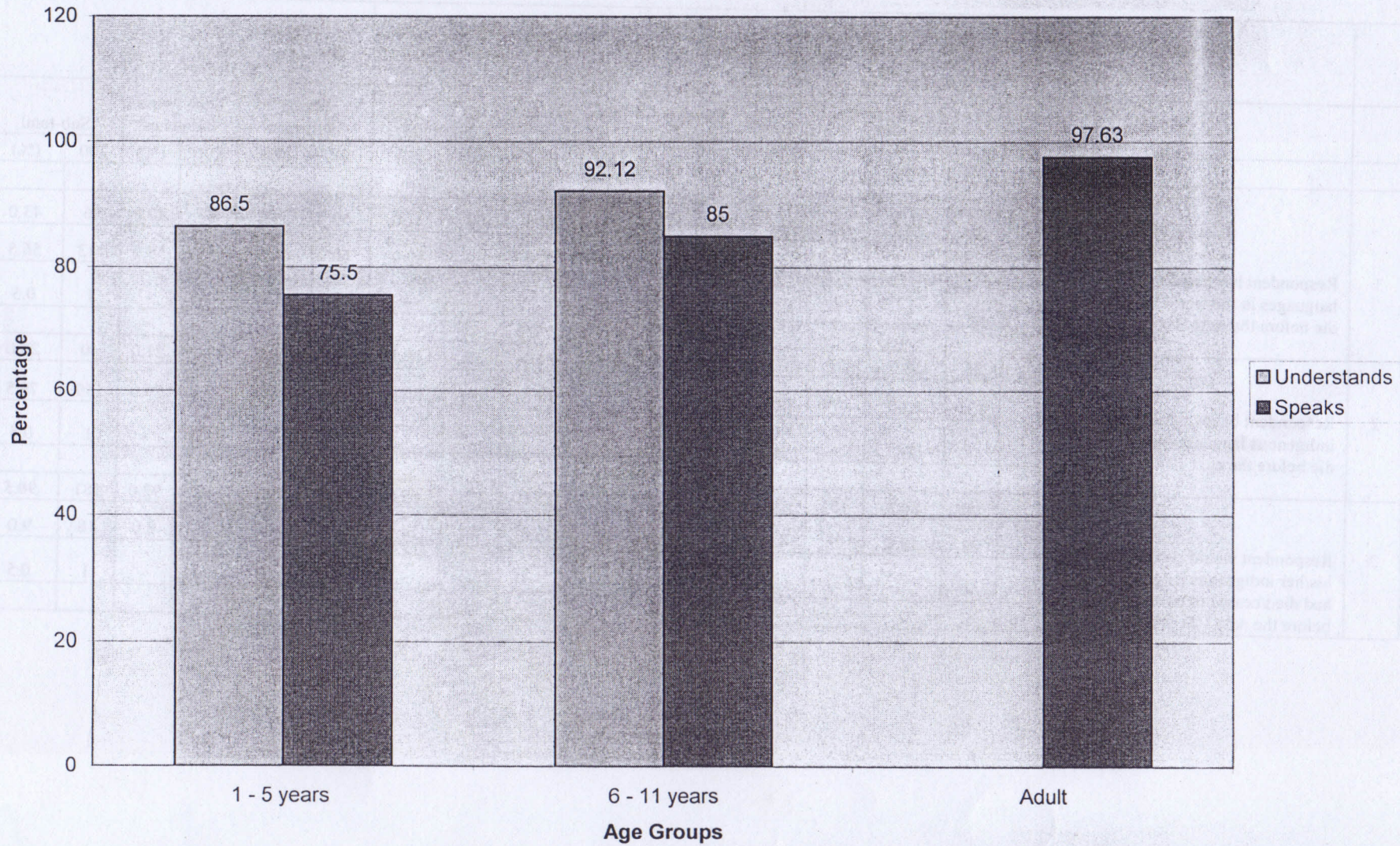


TABLE 2 AWARENESS OF LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT IN FOUR STATES OF NIGERIA

			AKWA IBOM STATE		IMO STATE		LAGOS STATE						SOKOTO STATE						TOTAL	
							Yoruba Indigenes		Non- yoruba Indigenes		Sub-total		Hausa Indigenes		Non- hausa Indigenes		Sub-total			
			200	(%)	200	(%)	100	(%)	100	(%)	200	(%)	100	(%)	100	(%)	200	(%)	800	(%)
1	Respondent has heard most languages in the world would die before the next 100 years																			
		Yes	59	29.5	22	11.0	28	28.0	34	34.0	62	31.0	39	39.0	47	47.0	86	43.0	229	28.62
		No	141	70.5	178	89.0	72	72.0	66	66.0	138	69.0	60	60.0	53	53.0	113	56.5	570	71.25
		Not Sure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.0	-	-	1	0.5	1	0.13
2	Respondent believes his/her indigenous language might die before the next 100 years																			
		Yes	36	18.0	22	11.0	16	16.0	23	23.0	39	19.5	19	19.0	21	21.0	40	20.0	137	17.12
		No	164	82.0	178	89.0	84	84.0	77	77.0	161	80.5	80	80.0	79	79.0	159	79.5	662	82.75
		Not Sure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.0	-	-	1	0.5	1	0.13
3	Respondent would regret if his/her indigenous language had died/ceased to exist before the next 100 years																			
		Yes	169	84.5	191	95.5	83	83.0	88	88.0	171	85.5	89	89.0	92	92.0	181	90.5	712	89.00
		No	31	15.5	9	4.5	17	17.0	12	12.0	29	14.5	10	10.0	8	8.0	18	9.0	87	10.87
		Not Sure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.0	-	-	1	0.5	1	0.13

TABLE 3 LANGUAGE USE IN THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

S/N		IMO STATE	LAGOS STATE	SOKOTO STATE
1	Language used in radio broadcasts	IBC Radio - English, Igbo	Radio Lagos FM - 90% Yoruba, Egun	Sokoto State Media Corporation - Hausa, English, Fulfulde
		Radio Nigeria FM - English, Igbo	Eko FM - mainly in English	
			FRCN - English	
			Bond FM - Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Pidgin English	
			WAZOBIA FM - Different Nigerian Languages	
2	Language used in television broadcasts	NTA Owerri - English, Igbo	LTV - English, Yoruba and Egun (+ Hausa/Igbo programmes on Fridays)	NTA Sokoto - English / Hausa
		IBC TV, Owerri - English, Igbo	MITV - English, Yoruba (and WAZOBIA plus programmes in Yoruba/Hausa/Igbo)	Sokoto State Media Corporation TV-Hausa, English, Arabic, Fulfulde
3	Local content in radio broadcasts	IBC Radio, Owerri - 30%	Bond FM - 100%	
		Radio Nigeria FM - 40%	WAZOBIA FM - 100%	
			Radio Lagos - 90%	
			Eko FM - 90%	
4	Local content in television broadcasts	IBC TV Owerri - 20%	MITV - 60%	NTA Sokoto - less than 40%
		NTA Owerri - 30%		
5	Programmes in Nigerian Languages on Radio / TV	News, current affairs, cultural and entertainment programmes,		
		children's programmes	SAME	SAME
6	Benefits of using Nigerian Languages in radio / TV broadcasts	Rural and grassroots people understand and appreciate them;	Semiliterate, elderly and grassroots people appreciate them;	Grassroots people understand the programmes better
		Provide entertainment and enlightenment	People identify with the programmes and can participate;	Promotes culture and preserves local languages
		Enables those not fluent in English to participate in programmes.	Promotes culture and preserves indigenous languages.	Less literate people can participate in programmes.

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7	Constraints of using Nigerian languages in radio/TV broadcast	Limited number of broadcast personnel competent in Igbo language	Preference of Nigerians for foreign things.	Language and cultural diversity in the state.
		Little interest of government and management in indigenous language programmes	Poor patronage from advertisers.	
		Lack of computer software to facilitate production	Lack of sponsors of indigenous language programmes	
		Dialectal differences compromise programme intelligibility/audience reach	Lack of competent professionals in the languages.	
			Inadequate airtime	
			Media policies (e.g. on local content) are not backed by the political will to implement them.	
			Inadequate government support (in cash and kind) for indigenous language programmes.	
			Lack of incentives for Nigerian languages broadcasters	
8	Advice on effective use of radio/television to promote and preserve Nigerian languages		Nigerian leaders should periodically grant interviews and participate in indigenous language programmes	Government should create a more profound media policy which better caters for local content and indigenous languages; government should also ensure and monitor its implementation
		Increase local content of media		
		Give greater airtime for indigenous language broadcasts	Ministers/commissioners incharge of information and cultures should be graduates of Nigerian languages	Create educational programmes focused on Nigerian languages
		Introduce more entertainment programmes in indigenous languages - drama, songs, dances, debates, etc; involve both young and old in the programmes;	Give increased airtime and create belts for indigenous language programmes	Introduce more entertainment programmes in indigenous languages (drama, songs, dances, discussions, phone - in programmes, etc)
		Produce adverts and jingles to create awareness on importance of indigenous languages and the need to hand them over to children	Give scholarships and other incentives to students of Nigerian languages	Make special efforts to involve children in indigenous language broadcasts.

TABLE 4 LANGUAGE USE IN THE PRINT MEDIA

S/N		IMO STATE	LAGOS STATE	SOKOTO STATE
1	Publications in Nigerian languages	A Newsletter in Igbo published by the Imo State Ministry of Information	Several Yoruba-medium newspapers and magazines, such as: iwé iròhin, iṣòkan, Akéde, Gboùngboùn, Alàròyé, Atóka, Akéde Àgbáyé	Hausa-medium newspaper
2	Benefits of publishing in Nigerian languages	Some people might understand the news better than in English	Promotion of cultural values and image; create more awareness and focus more on local issues; bridge the gap of language barrier;	Easier understanding of the message by people not too literate in English
			it has emotional appeal for some readers; helps promote and preserve local languages	Promotion of indigenous languages and culture
				Local publications also serve as documentary records
3	Constraints of publishing in Nigerian languages	Many people have difficulty in reading Igbo; death of competent writers in Igbo; lack of suitable computer software for publishing in Igbo; limited coverage and circulation	Limited readership;	Some people find it difficult to understand things written in indigenous languages;
			greater cost of production of indigenous language publications; lack of personnel competent in indigenous languages (editors, reporters, etc)	multilingualism in the state; publication might be limited to an ethnic group, thus having fewer readership; it could also promote ethnic sentiments; challenges of technology, finance and qualified personnel
4	Advice on how to use the print media to promote and preserve Nigerian languages	State-owned media should circulate publications in their local languages;	Schools of Journalism should also train indigenous language personnel; newspapers can run special columns or pages in Nigerian languages; media organisations should be funded to carryout intensive advocacy campaigns on Nigerian languages.	The government should acknowledge the importance of indigenous language publications which serve for information and for documentary records.
		Government should sponsor/subvent indigenous language publications;		
		Encourage civil servants and other graduates to undertake post graduate courses in Nigerian languages and cultures		

The findings from the questionnaires administered to the general public are displayed in Tables 1 and 2 while those of media houses are contained in Tables 3 and 4.

4.2 Oral Interview

Most of the adults interviewed understand and speak their indigenous languages and generally use them in their interactions with their kinsmen. They were, thus, incredulous when told that these languages are endangered and might not survive into the next century. Further explanations as to the indices of endangerment, especially lack of generational transmission caused sorrow among many of the respondents who called on God to forbid such a fate on their languages and vowed to prevent their languages from going into extinction.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Indigenous Language Competence

Virtually all the adults (97.62%) understand and speak their indigenous language. Competence in the indigenous language dwindles among children, with 85% of children aged 6-11 years able to speak their parents' indigenous language and only 75.75% of children aged five years and below able to do so. There is also a marked disparity between states. In Akwa Ibom and Imo states, 93% of children aged 6-11years speak their parents' indigenous language while for children aged 5 years and below, the figures are 80.5% for Akwa Ibom and 91% for Imo state.

The highest figures of children with indigenous language competence are recorded for Hausa children in Sokoto state where 96% of children aged 6-11 years and 97% of those aged 5 years and below speak parents' indigenous language. With regard to Lagos state, 79% of Yoruba children aged 6-11 years and 61% aged 5 years and below speak parents' indigenous language. These lower figures for Yoruba in Lagos state are surprising since the Yoruba are known to be very loyal to their language and use it freely. It is most likely that the great urbanization of the state with its large influx of Nigerians of other language backgrounds has resulted in the Yoruba of Lagos state using the language less with their children.

The groups with the least indigenous language competence are children of non-Yoruba indigenes in Lagos state and non-Hausa indigenes in Sokoto state. In Lagos, only 64% and 46% of non-Yoruba indigene children aged 6-11 years and 5 years and under respectively speak their parents' indigenous language. In Sokoto, the corresponding figures for non-Hausa indigene children are 69% and 59% respectively.

5.2 Language Use in the Home

The dwindling indigenous language competence among children is not surprising considering that the language of the home is shifting to English. Thus, on a national average, only 56.13% of

respondents mostly communicate with their spouses in their indigenous language. Communication with children witnesses an even greater shift to English with only about 39.62% of respondents speaking with their children in the indigenous language.

5.3 Language Use in Schools

The poor foundation laid in homes with regard to the acquisition of the indigenous language by children is compounded in schools where indigenous languages are treated with the greatest disdain and neglect. Although the National Policy on Education (1977, revised 1981, 1998 and 2004) provides for the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction in lower primary classes and for them to be taught as subjects in primary and secondary schools, most schools in the country do not teach any indigenous languages. This is especially so in multilingual states with numerous small languages where the excuse is usually that the state government lacks the resources to cater for the languages in schools. In the States of this study, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa which are majority languages are taught respectively in Imo, Lagos and Sokoto States. It was a pleasant surprise also to find Ibibio, a relatively small language being taught in some schools in Akwa Ibom State.

5.4 Language Use in the Media

In the 1980s, the Cultural Policy for Nigeria (1988) made adequate provisions for preserving and promoting indigenous Nigerian cultures, including language. For instance, section 6.2.1 of the policy says:

“The state shall preserve and present oral tradition, folklore, poetry, drama, essays, novels and short stories and popularize them by producing them in Nigerian languages and promoting them through the school system, language centre, writers’ workshops, book development councils, the media, etc.”

In reality, very little of media output is produced in Nigerian languages. Most of the media-radio, television, films, newspapers, magazines, etc are produced in English. Television houses have a few news, current affairs and entertainment programmes using the indigenous languages of the different areas. Thus, Igbo is used in Imo state, Yoruba and Egun in Lagos state and Hausa and Fulfulde in Sokoto state. Altogether, the indigenous language programmes constitute a very tiny proportion of media broadcasts in the country. Radio stations also broadcast mostly in English, but indigenous languages are used more on radio than on television. For instance, up to 90% of Radio Lagos programmes are produced in Yoruba, while Bond FM station in Lagos which is a substation of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria also broadcasts mainly in Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Pidgin English. An interesting new development is a

private station, the WAZOBIA FM, an offshoot of the English-medium Cool FM station which also broadcasts mainly in Nigerian languages.

Most video and movie films are produced in English, including the popular Nollywood (Nigerian Hollywood) films. However, there is a vibrant Yoruba home movie industry while there are also Hausa films. With regard to Igbo, although a few films were produced in the language in the early 1990s, this has now ceased, due to lack of sponsors, according to the producers.

There is great concern in many quarters that the electronic media hardly portrays Nigerian culture, including language. Conscious of the need for the electronic media to portray and promote Nigeria and Nigerian-ness, the Nigeria Broadcasting Code published by the National Broadcasting Commission (1993, revised 1996, 2003 and 2006) prescribes a local programme content minimum of 70% in every free-to-air station; for music programmes, the code prescribes that Nigerian music shall constitute 80% of all music broadcasts. Sadly, the spirit of the broadcasting code is not upheld as Nigerian media is now dominated by foreign programmes or their imitations. This is because the local content of the Code refers to the personnel - the authors, producers and other personnel which the Code says should be Nigerians working exclusively or in partnership with foreign persons. This focus on the personnel rather than on the programme content results in media output that is far from

Nigerian. For instance, virtually all the music and dance now seen and heard in the Nigerian media consist of Hip Hop, Reggae, Rhythm and Blues. Since, however, they are performed by Nigerian youth, they qualify as local content.

The Nigerian Broadcasting Code hardly makes provision for the use of indigenous languages except in section 9 on Community Broadcasting where it says:

“A community broadcasting service shall give prominence to the languages spoken in its community” (page 73).

Community broadcasting constitutes a very small percentage of broadcasts in the country. In the absence of provisions on the use of indigenous languages in the majority of broadcasting services, producers and programme sponsors completely ignore indigenous language programmes, preferring the English medium for wider audience reach and appeal.

The print media also publishes overwhelmingly in English. Generally, the indigenous language press does not fare well due to low patronage from readers, sponsors and advertisers alike. The most vibrant indigenous language press is in Yoruba. Indeed, the oldest newspaper in Nigeria, the *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, a Yoruba-medium newspaper has been published since 1859. Other Yoruba newspapers and magazines include *Ìṣòkan*, *Gboùngboùn*, *Akéde*, *Alàròye*, *Atòka*, *Akéde Àgbayé*, etc. There are also a few Hausa language news publications, the best known being *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo* which has been published since 1939.

Attempts to publish newspapers in Igbo in the past have often failed as the publications were usually discontinued after a few issues due to low patronage by readers and advertisers.

5.5 Language use in the Legislature

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979, revised 1989, 1999) provides for the use of Nigerian languages, alongside English in the National and State Houses of Assembly. Till today, English remains the sole language of the National Assembly and of most State Houses of Assembly. The few exceptions include Ogun State which introduced the use of Yoruba on Wednesdays in 2003, Anambra State which introduced Igbo in 2004, and Sokoto State which uses Hausa alongside English. In Lagos State, the House of Assembly passed a motion in December, 2007 to introduce the use of Yoruba alongside English. This is a welcome development since the use of indigenous languages in state and local council deliberations and activities will surely bring democracy nearer to the grassroots.

5.6 Awareness of Language Endangerment Phenomenon

On a national average, most people (71.25%), have not heard that many languages in the world would not survive into the next century. Here again, there are state disparities with the least awareness recorded in Imo State where only 11% of respondents

have heard of it, while the greatest awareness (43 %) is recorded in Sokoto.

5.7 Feelings Regarding Possible Extinction of One's Own Language

Most respondents (82.75 %) do not believe their own language would be among the 90 % of the world languages which linguists predict might not survive into the next century. This is because they see their languages used robustly all around them, outside official circles in their daily interactions with their kinsmen. However, when the indices of endangerment are pointed out to them, especially the important one of lack of generational transmission, many are hit with the realization that indeed, a time would come when their future generations would be unable to speak their indigenous language. The respondents then become sorrowful with 89 % saying they would regret if their indigenous language had ceased to exist before the end of the 21st century.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that most Nigerians are unaware of the phenomenon of language endangerment and especially about the possibility of their own languages becoming extinct within a few generations, if care is not taken. The good news is that most of them would not want their languages to cease to exist; hence there is room for optimism that right actions could be pursued to

halt the present match of the country's indigenous languages towards decay and ultimate extinction.

7. SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS HALTING LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT IN NIGERIA.

7.1 Suggestions from Respondents

Some of the following suggestions were made by respondents of the study.

Promote Active Use of Indigenous Languages in Homes

Parents should be made to understand that they hold the key to the prevention of language endangerment through bringing up their children to speak their indigenous language and using it at home.

Compulsory Teaching of Indigenous Languages at all Tiers of Education

The government should ensure that indigenous languages are taught at all tiers of education – from nursery to primary and secondary schools and in tertiary institutions – both private and public. The government should monitor compliance and mete out punishment to defaulters.

Award Scholarships and Bursaries to Students of Nigerian Languages in Tertiary Institutions

A great number of students would be attracted to study Nigerian languages if scholarships and bursaries were available.

Promote Nigerian Languages and Cultures in Schools

All nursery, primary and secondary schools should have weekly activities of Nigerian cultures, using Nigerian languages – in songs, dances, games, drama, etc. They should also wear Nigerian dresses, at least, once a week.

Make Knowledge of Indigenous Languages a Pre-Requisite in Certain Vital Domains

Knowledge of, at least, one indigenous language should be a pre-requisite for advancement in certain areas, example:

- Promotion from Junior Secondary School to Senior Secondary School; and admission into tertiary institutions.
- Employment in the public sector.
- Obtaining Certificate of State of Origin, Citizenship or Nigerian passport.

Use Indigenous Languages More in Governance and Religious Worships

State and Local Governments and traditional rulers should promote the use of indigenous languages alongside English in governance. Government officials, politicians, successful elder citizens and traditional rulers should often be seen by citizens, especially the youth, to use indigenous languages. Similarly, Christian and Islamic organizations should involve indigenous languages more in their religious worships and practices.

Treat both Big and Small Languages Equally

Government policies and funding should not be restricted to the promotion of the three big languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Equal attention should be paid to all Nigerian languages, big or small.

Encourage Indigenous Language Publications

The government and private sector should actively promote publications of various categories in Nigerian languages – school textbooks, leisure materials, magazines, newspapers, etc.

Create Belts for Indigenous Language Programmes in the Electronic Media

Greater air time and space should be given on radio and television for indigenous language programmes - drama, songs, dances, phone-ins, quizzes, discussions, etc.

Encourage Nigerians in the Diaspora to Use their Indigenous Languages

Nigerians in the diasporas should also bring up their children to be bilingual in the parents' indigenous language and the language of the host community.

Create a Cultural Diversity Day

At least one day in a week should be set aside for all Nigerians to celebrate Nigerian-ness. On the designated day, everyone will dress Nigerian and speak his/her indigenous language. Schools

will encourage wearing of school uniform in the Nigerian fashion and hold cultural activities.

7.2 Suggestions from the Researcher

Research and Documentation of Language Endangerment in States and Communities

There is need to research on, and produce concrete statistics on the state of endangerment of the languages of different speech communities and states of the Federation. This will better drive home the realities of language endangerment and make the affected people think of solutions to prevent the demise of their languages.

Implementing and Ensuring Compliance with Existing Constitutional and Other Provisions on the Use of Indigenous Languages in Various Domains

The Federal and State Governments should take steps to implement the existing provisions regarding the use of Nigerian languages in various spheres of life, as contained in various documents such as:

- the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979, revised 1989, 1999)
- the Cultural Policy of Nigeria (1988)
- the National Policy on Education (1979, revised 1981, 1998, 2004).

- the Nigeria Broadcasting Code (1993, revised 1996, 2003, 2006.).

Redefining the “Local Content” of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code”

Local content of television and radio programmes should be redefined to mean the content of programmes, rather than the involvement of Nigerians in the production and broadcast of the programmes. Use of Nigerian languages in programmes should also form part of the consideration of local content.

Celebrating Nigerian Languages and Cultures: Declaring a Nigerian Diversity Day

There is need to combat the over 150 years of denigration and relegation of Nigerian languages and cultures. To this end, the Federal Government should put in place measures for actively promoting Nigerian languages and cultures. One such measure is to declare a Nigerian Diversity Day, possibly on Wednesdays, when individual languages and cultures would be freely used and manifested by everyone and in every place.

Make Loss of Indigenous Mother-Tongues One of the Indices of Human Deprivation in Reports of UN Agencies

There is no doubt that the successful combating of language endangerment in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa will require

assistance from world agencies. One such assistance is for the loss of indigenous languages to be made one of the Indices of Human Deprivation in reports compiled by UN Agencies, such as the Human Development Report, thus focusing constant attention on the problem.

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