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MINORITY LANGUAGES AND IDENTITY PATTERN OF LANGUAGE USE IN
ÀKÓKÓ, OŃDÓ STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study specifically explored the interconnectedness of heritage language use and speakers' identity in Yorùbá-speaking region of South-Western Nigeria with a view to answer questions as to what factors are responsible for the shift or death of the speech forms in Àkókó? The researcher used the 'reversing language shift theory' by Fishman (1991) as a framework to propose a checkmate to the extinction and the gradual shift the Àkókó language is experiencing. Qualitative research design was adopted while personal interviews was used for data collection. The findings indicate that learning Àkókó language through courses, books, and tapes helps. There are also affective aspects, which influence how successful one is in acquiring a second language, such as personality, motivation, and whether it is a priority for the learner to be able to move to another level in German culture. This research has also discovered that globalization, education, and modernizations are the major threat to minority languages despite the fact that local populations have somewhat gained from language shift and that language endangerment or extinction takes place under 'peaceful conditions, through insidious process of assimilation'. The study therefore proposes the maintenance of the Àkókó language being a minority language in Nigeria, looking at the fact that the languages are endangered which will lead these languages into extinction in the process of time.

Key Words: Minority, Minority Languages, Identity Pattern, Àkókó Language, indigenous languages, multilingual, heritage language

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1. Background to the Study

Language is the vehicle for expression or exchanging of thoughts, concepts, knowledge and information as well as the fixing and transmission of experience and knowledge Bussmann, (1998). Language is foremost means of communication, and communication always takes place within some sort of social context. This is why effective communication requires an understanding and recognition of the connections between language and the people who use it. When one use language, such an individual communicate his thought, cultural beliefs, families, social groups, other association and practices of the communities of which he represents. Languages are not only means of communication; they also serve as markers of ethnic identity. Yet, pursuits of economic advancement and commerce have rendered many speakers of minority languages dependent on global languages such as English in Nigeria (Ònàdípè, 2015).

Language can be classified as majority or minority. Minority language is a language spoken by a smaller group of the population of a territory, such are termed linguistic minorities or language minorities. Regional or minority languages are languages that are; traditionally used within a given a territory of a State by nationals or of that State which form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; and different from official languages of that State. (Wikipedia). According to Markey (1987), no language willingly chooses a minority status for itself "or willingly places itself on the endangered species list, or knowingly commits linguistics hara-kiri".

The concepts of the term 'Minority' is enumerated by Nelde (1997) from different perspectives, on his part, he rejects the use of the term 'minority.' because; Minority implies a group discriminated against, stigmatized or perhaps suppressed, and because of its low prestige, it could be a handicap for social and economic advancement in professional life. The language is not employed as a useful means of communication in public life, and there is functional restriction to daily use of the language which consequently limits its use to family domain. Therefore, such languages are usually neglected (Nelde 1997). Pattanayak (1981) distinguishes between a 'minority' and 'minority' language in relation to power. According to him, minority languages are "small group languages plus power whereas minor languages are small group languages minus power (Adégbijà 1997). To Adégbijà (1997), minority languages can be referred to as 'smaller – population language' which lacks among others genuine national or economic presence (Adégbijà 1997). This same minority language is referred to as "Heritage Language" (Yearwood,

2008) asserts that heritage language is often defined as a "nonmajority language spoken by an individual or group considered to be a linguistic minority" Valdes (2005) extends this definition and includes indigenous languages multilingual that are in danger of disappearing. Consequently, the term heritage language may comprise all first languages of immigrant minorities in different host countries as well as indigenous languages of the native population.

Nigeria is a multilingual nation that is full of diverse ethnic groups with several languages, dialect and sub-dialect. Based on the size of the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country, it may be convenient to recognize three distinct groups. These are the three major languages, such as Hausa, Yorùbá and Igbo, each spoken by more than ten million speakers. These are followed by languages of local importance, which are equally useful in their respective States. Languages in this category include Èdó, Efik, Kànrírí, Tiv, Úrhòbò, Fulfulde, Ìgalà, Nùpé, Ìjò, Ìsékírí, Èbirà, Annang, Gwari, Ìjèbú etcetra. The last category is those languages that are very small and are only useful in their respective communities. These are what some scholars regard as minority languages (Agheyisi 1984). However, for these three groups of languages, Bámbgósé (1992) has suggested such terms as major for Hausa, Yorùbá, and Igbo; minor for languages that are prominent in each State, and small group languages for others so as to steer clear of the pejorative connotation associated with the term "minority" languages. Oyètádé (2013).

Studies have shown that the minority language is largely discriminated against and neglected in the national, regional or even local scheme of things. Therefore, postulates certain characteristics of minority languages. To him they are comparatively or absolutely small in relation to the size of the population, they tend to be on the endangered-languages list; they tend to suffer national as well as regional and local neglect; small-population language group "generally tend to be a handicap for social and economic advancement in professional life and are generally not very useful vehicles of communication in the public life of the nation concerned". Adégbijà (1997) hence he prefers the term 'underdevelopment'. That show that minority languages are underdeveloped languages within a nation or State.

Language identity is a central feature of human identity and it is inextricably bound with identity and every language as an integral part of a culture, is a rich heritage of that culture which mirrors its speakers' identity believes that language "not only creates identity for its speakers but also identifies their social group membership". Like majority languages,

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minority languages are one of the influential ways to keep a nation in touch with its heritage. Such languages are valuable sources of human accomplishments and on-going manifestations of human civilization, development and originality. They are also core values of ethnic cultures and identity. Minority languages, Lesser Used languages or Small languages as defined by European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages refer to languages traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population (European Union, 2013).

The present language ethnography identifies over five hundred and twenty-one languages and ethnic groups in Nigeria. These indigenous languages have been stratified as majority and minority languages based on the population of speakers. This population-based system of classification has inherent political problems as it technically describes the minority group as occupying a marginal position in the scheme of things in the nation's politics. A classification of this sort smacks of ethnic consciousness and polarity with language as the symbol. Nigeria is now define along a linguistic line of major languages and minority languages. Given that Nigeria as a polity is an amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups; the larger part of these ethnic groups has the pejorative status of "the minority". However, from a linguistic standpoint, the government has conveniently recognized three major languages - Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá - because they all have over twenty million speakers (Oyètádé 2003). Other languages such as Tiv, Ístékìrì, Ùrhòbò, Èsan, Fulfude, Èbìrà, Núpé, Kànúrì, Ìbìbò, Efik and Gwari to mention a few with over one million speakers are considered the minority languages (Bámgbósé 1991) One must speak of some other languages smaller than the minority languages with speakers ranging between a hundred to five hundred thousand speakers. These smaller minority languages have the linguistic importance in their respective local communities. Ògúnmodímú (2015) Àkókó Language is seen as one of the minority languages in Nigeria located in Oñdó State.

Language shift refers to gradual displacement of one language by another. Hornberger (2010) proposes that language shift is manifested as loss in number of speakers, level of proficiency, or functional use of the language. According to Hoffman (1991) when a community does not maintain its language, but gradually adopts another one, we talk about language shift. Àkókó language as a minority language is experiencing language shift because the native speakers of Àkókó speech communities threatened with reduction in intergenerational continuity as a consequence of

fewer and fewer users of Àkókó language from one generation to another.

Àkókó Dialect is a dialect spoken in some part of Oñdó State, Nigeria. There have been different views about the classification of Àkókó dialect among the Yorùbá dialectologist (Akínkùgbé, 1978; Adétugbò 1967; Awóbùlúyì 1998, inter alia) to the extent that most of them do not classify Àkókó as one of the dialects of Yorùbá because many of them were not conversant with Àkókó land; therefore, they assume that Àkókó land is linguistically homogeneous.

According to United Nations Environment Programme, there are 5,000 to 7,000 spoken languages in the world with 4,000 to 5,000 of these classified as indigenous, used by native tribes. More than 2,500 are in danger of immediate extinction and many more are losing their link with the natural world becoming museum pieces rather than living languages. Garland (2006) also reports, "Languages have been disappearing steadily, with 3,000 of the world's language predicted to disappear in the next 100 years" in confirmation of this research, it has been discovered that thousands of minority language heritage will suffer loss in the nearest decades. It is saddening to note that while English and the other major languages expand their territories, dominating other languages, minority languages have continued to suffer. Several questions have been asked by scholars in order to know what the factors that lead to the loss of minority language heritage all over the world. Moreover, Àkókó as a minority language spoken in some part of Oñdó State, South-Western Nigeria has been losing its identity in the twenty-first century, thereby, making minority languages identity and patterns of language use in Àkókó going into extinction.

2. Statement of Problem

The trend of multilingualism in the twenty-first century is making minority languages to suffer loss or even death. Mega use of "official languages" based on social development through the pursuits of economic advancement and commerce have rendered many speakers of minority languages dependent on official or global languages such as Standard Yorùbá and English in Nigeria. Many studies have proposed the maintenance of the minority languages in Nigeria, looking at the fact that the minority languages are endangered and also posited on how to revive, improve, standardize, rejuvenate and promote minority language use, heritage and identity. However, there is a dearth of literature on the nature of language communication and identity of Àkókó language in the northwest and northeast of Oñdó State. Hence, the research attempt to answer questions as to

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what factors are responsible for the shift or death of the speech forms in Àkókó?

3. Objectives of the Study

Determine the attitude of Àkókó indigene towards speaking of Àkókó dialect;
Assess the attitude of Àkókó indigene towards speaking of English Language;
Determine the Surviving chance of Àkókó Language as majority or minority language;
Identify the factors responsible for the language shift and death of Àkókó language;
Determine the efforts taken to preserve the language heritage and pass it to the next generation in the face of globalization challenges by the indigenes; and
Identify the steps that should be taking to revitalize maintain and preserve Àkókó language heritage.

4. Research Questions

What is the attitude of Àkókó indigene towards speaking of Àkókó dialects (Ìkàrè, Sùpàrè, Ìsùà)?
What is the Surviving chance of Àkókó Language as majority or minority language?
What are the factors responsible for the language shift and death of Àkókó language?
What are the efforts to preserve the language heritage and pass it to the next generation in the face of globalization challenges by the indigene?
What are the steps that should be taking to revitalize maintain and preserve Àkókó language heritage?

5. Methodology

The research study adopted a qualitative research design. The methodology includes a secondary analysis of existing research studies into changing educational system and change management in the libraries. The advantage of secondary analysis is that it enables the researcher to spend more time on the analysis and interpretation of data than would be the case using a primary research method (Bryman, 2015). References were made to various journal databases, including SCOPUS, Spinger Link e-resources, JSTORE (All Discipline), Agora, and Ebscohost using search terms such as language heritage, indigene, Yorùbá folk, dialects and language

The research method also includes participant observation and in-depth interview of Àkókó heritage languages selected purposively from designated towns and villages based on structured interview guide and questionnaire for gathering of quantitative data. The population of this study consisted of the entire indigene of Àkókó that are living within the geographical entity of Àkókó land. Fifty (50)

families were chosen purposively to serve as the sample for this study. Twenty-five each shall also be chosen purposively from Àkókó Northwest Area and twenty-five from Àkókó Northeast. Purposive sampling technique is essential so as to have the required information from the real custodians or indigene of Àkókó land. From each of the family purposively chosen, an average of six (6) family members (elders, youth and children), The children respondents were aged 10 and above because they could use the language with ease. The youth respondents were aged between 18 and 30 as well as parents who are mostly mothers because they were more available more than the fathers. The study sample was randomly selected through random sampling around Àkókó Municipality within villages, secondary school and the university environment of Àkókó land. Two local government area were considered in both rural and urban area. The instruments used to gather data for this study are observations and structural interviews from all the respondents in order to discover and compare their changing attitudes towards minority languages and identity pattern of language use in Àkókó.

6. Result and Interpretation of Result Research Questions

Four research questions guided this research and the answers to them are elucidated as the findings of this study

6.1. Research Question One: What is the attitude of Àkókó indigene towards speaking of Àkókó dialect?

The result of research question two showed that 80 percent of respondents show positive attitude towards the use of standard Yorùbá in Àkókó Northeast while we have an average attitude of a 50 percent to Standard Yorùbá language in Àkókó Northwest. This shows that the attitude to Standard Yorùbá is higher in Àkókó Northeast than Àkókó Northwest, hence, Àkókó language in Àkókó Northeast is prone to language shift and lose than that of Àkókó Northwest, since most elite in the land prefer Standard Yorùbá to the mother tongue L1. It was discovered that all mothers except 10 in Àkókó Area spoke Àkókó language fluently and were committed to the usage of the language in among their age bracket. However, speaking Àkókó language to their children was minimal because they were conscious of them learning to speak and write English, especially for children in Nursery and Primary school. Meanwhile, all children interviewed understood Àkókó language well. Fifty-two (52) percent of them could speak the language fluently but none of them could write their mother tongue. The children of Àkókó Municipality generally held positive attitude towards the English language in these two local government areas under study. It was

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noticed that the children admired the contexts and functions with which English is associated. “Generally, attitude to languages were strongly influenced by social and political factors”,

As western education invades Yorùbá land, literacy increases and native languages become moribund. Àkókó parents are committing 'linguicide' by not encouraging their children to speak their mother tongue. The researcher also observed that code-mixing and code-switching was very high amongst the children, especially in Àkókó Northeast. The children that manage to speak Àkókó at all, code-mixed between Yorùbá, English and Àkókó language very strongly. The result of our studies shows that Children's attitude towards Àkókó language was not positive. The evidences are clear because the children did not see reasons why they should speak Àkókó language, since in schools, it is not part of their requirements. They see the Àkókó language as not having enough legacy of overt prestige. It does not show any symbol of nationhood. This attitude of the children which is not good enough for the development of the language stands as a hindrance for the maintenance of the identity and language heritage of Àkókó land.

Burnaby (1980) indicates that “when many speakers of two or more languages are in regular and significant contact, it is likely at times that the speakers and the language will change in some way... one might give way entirely or partially to the other...”. As it stands in the Àkókó Municipality, it looks as if Àkókó language are gradually giving way to Standard Yorùbá and English language even though the process of shift is slow. Our results shows that Àkókó language as Minority languages needs urgent attention to be rescued from endangerment.

6.2. Research Question Two: What is the Surviving chance of Àkókó Language as minority language?

The outcome of the interviews conducted clearly showed that Àkókó language is gradually shifting to standard Yorùbá and maybe practically to English language in terms of identity and usage. This is noticeable in the challenges of language choice facing Àkókó children. One can therefore predict that the future of the language is bleak since there is an eminent death. This is what Ofiong and Ugot (2012) refers to as 'Bottom to top death'. According them; “Bottom to top” death is what the language is gradually experiencing, that is, at the home level, the language is not spoken by most of the children at home, particularly in the urban areas. This means that as literacy increases and western education becomes better the native use and identity heritage of Àkókó language become moribund. The study shows that most mothers in Àkókó land still love their languages, songs,

rhyme and folktales, including the culture of the land. Although they are used to speaking English and standard Yorùbá with their children as an unconscious attitude which was done for the sake of the children doing well in their academic prowess. However, Àkókó children themselves were not interested in the use of their mother languages, just a few of the children are interested in the use of Àkókó language. All these findings established the fact that Àkókó language is at the detriment of going into extinction in the face of globalization, political and socio-economic challenges. In few decades to come Àkókó language as a minority language will totally lose its identity in Yorùbá land, starting from Àkókó Northeast Local Government to other part of Àkókó land.

6.3 Research Question Three: What are the Factors that may be responsible for the language shift and death of Àkókó language?

Lack of interest in the speaking of the language emanated from some peripheral factors such as Education, globalization, the role of mass-media and inadequate Government policies. There was no motivation to speak the Àkókó language effectively and efficiently as parents do not encourage and enhance the inter-generational transfer of the mother tongue to avoid Language death. Parents do not have time and habit of telling folktales or reading stories to the children in the language. This indeed is in support of Fishman, (2004) who asserted that the importance of the family language maintenance; other domains and efforts are ineffective until the language finds functionality within the family. Dyers (2008) established that ‘the family interventions can help to ensure the continued vitality of vernacular languages or increase the pace at which those languages are edged out by others.’ Ònàdípè-Shalom (2015). The suggestion raised by these scholars are evidently lacking among the parents in Àkókó land and these expressly explained why the language is dying and gradually moving towards extinction.

Public education services are provided in a majority language to the appropriate degree, broadly following a proportional approach. This includes all levels of public education from kindergarten to university. Fishman (1980) opines that ‘unless they are entirely withdrawn from the modern world, minority ethno linguistic group needed to be literate in their mother tongue’. This means that education is also important in language survival.

The role of mass-media in promoting Àkókó language is also very germane in this period of technology advancement and globalisation. Air-time allocated to the language on the Radio and Television, as well as publications in the

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Newspapers has been too small. Radio such as Sunshine FM, Positive FM, Àdàbà FM and OŃdó State Television Broadcasting Cooperation, among others give less than ten percent of their air time Àkókó language-based programmes, its people and culture. The researchers also discovered in this study that there is no Radio or Television Station Throughout Àkókó land that can promote the language through which the minorities can freely express themselves and communicate with their own members and others in their own language.

6.4. **Research Question Four:** What are the steps that could be taking to revitalize maintain and preserve Àkókó language heritage?

Majority of the respondents agreed that Àkókó language speakers themselves must be ready to reawaken their indigenous languages as the major step that could be taking to revitalize maintain and preserve Àkókó language heritage. According to Emenanjo (2008) in *Ọ̀nàdípẹ̀-Shalom* (2015) "small or minority languages do not stand any chance of survival or empowerment except the native speakers of such languages have robust plans or programmes for revitalizing their languages". Moreover, policy makers can identify the various domains where the use of the language is diminishing and then reinforce language use in such areas. This is in tandem with Fishman (2001). On reversing language shift, he states that it becomes easier to recommend solutions to language shift only when we can identify the problems associated with it. One of the strategies for saving endangered languages is the creation of more agencies for language maintenance and development. Oyètádé (2003).

One of the ways to maintain the use and identity of Àkókó language is through politics. UNSRMI (2017) asserts that; steps to encourage and facilitate the effective participation of minorities in public life include, where practicable, the use of their languages in electoral, consultative and other public participation processes. The use of minority languages must be allowed on posters, in documents of meetings, other activities of political parties, non-governmental organizations and lobbying groups or private individuals. Finally, deliberate efforts should be reinforced in terms of Minority language awareness campaign, standardized orthography of Àkókó language and introduction of some of these languages in schools should be made both by the community leaders, linguists and government.

7. Summary

The major purpose of this study is to assess the impact of social transformation in the South-western part of Nigeria on language and identity in rural communities of Àkókó as it is

known as minorities' language. The trend of globalization, language-communication and identity are increasing with alarming rate at the expense of minority languages in the country. This is a critical situation and there is thus urgency to explore the complex situation in Àkókó, OŃdó State, where individual is confronted with the need to speak Yorùbá and English language in addition to their heritage mother-tongue/languages, as well as maintain their group identity in the country so that the language will not experience death.

8. Recommendation:

The researcher recommended that the multilingual education especially in schools within the Àkókó Northeast and Northwest Local Government Area.

Moreover, since the OŃdó State House of Assembly adopted the use of Yorùbá for their proceedings on Thursday, it is expected that such should be extended and recommend the use of the Àkókó language in the Local Council at least once in a week.

Policy makers and leaders in the community should take crucial steps in the media to ginger ethnic consciousness of the people. This is in line with the UNESCO declaration that every 21st day of February should be marked as the International Mother Language Day.

The Àkókó language speakers themselves must be ready to reawaken their indigenous languages. According to Emenanjo (2008) in *Ọ̀nàdípẹ̀-Shalom* (2015) "small or minority languages do not stand any chance of survival or empowerment except the native speakers of such languages have robust plans or programmes for revitalizing their languages". Moreover, policy makers can identify the various domains where the use of the language is diminishing and then reinforce language use in such areas. Finally, deliberate efforts should be reinforced in terms of Minority language awareness campaign, standardized orthography of Àkókó language and introduction of some of these languages in schools should be made both by the community leaders, linguists and government.

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VOL. 6(1), Pp.22-29, © APRIL, 2022 MINORITY LANGUAGES AND IDENTITY PATTERN OF
LANGUAGE USE IN ÀKÓKÓ, OŃDÓ STATE, NIGERIA.**

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