

English Language as a Killer of Ikwerre Language Spoken In Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This research analyzed English Language as a killer language of the Ikwerre language spoken within the Port Harcourt metropolis as a case study. The objectives of the research investigated the extent to which the English Language has endangered the Ikwerre Language in the study area and evaluated the effect of the predominant use of English Language on the Ikwerre Language spoken in Port Harcourt metropolis. Data for the study were elicited with the copies of the questionnaire and interview schedule as the instruments for data collection. The sample size of the study was made up of 400 respondents who were randomly selected. Taro Yamen formula was used to determine the sample size. Instruments for data analyses were frequency, percentage and mean. The results of the analysis showed that English Language has actually endangered Ikwerre Language which is spoken within the Port Harcourt metropolis to a very reasonable extent, with ‘strongly agreed’ value of 55.25%. The major effect of the predominant use of English Language on the Ikwerre Language was the inability of natives to communicate in their indigenous language. The study recommends that the Ikwerre Language be frequently spoken at home by parents to their children and that the language should be documented to enhance its reading and writing.

Keywords: *English Language, Ikwerre Language, Killer Language, Language dominance and Language endangerment.*

I. Introduction

To a layman, death and growth are natural phenomena peculiar to only living things, especially, those that are tangible and not non-living things. On the contrary, the linguists hold strongly and have shown that death can occur to a language. In fact, some languages are already endangered to the extent that there is no guarantee that such languages will still be there by the year 2050.

Language death is a process of decrease in the level of a speech community’s linguistic competence. The result is that no native or fluent speakers of the language still exists. For a language to die, there must be another language superintending over it and eventually killing it.

Being introduced to a multicultural and multilingual nation like Nigeria, the English Language has become the ‘killer’ of so many indigenous languages, including Ikwerre. It was an imposition of the colonial masters for administrative convenience and unfortunately, the language has become a dominant force in Nigeria [1]. Many languages today have gone extinct for want of speakers. ‘A language without a group of speakers is dead’ [2].

1.1 The Concept of Language

There has been a replacement of many languages by others which tends to add more values to the lives of the speakers and have wider reach or audience. No wonder it has been stated that some languages are abandoned for lack of prestige – Ikwerre language is one of such. Languages are acquired through the process of socialization and in this acquisition, the cultural reality of a society is being transmitted. Generally, it is the base of social relationship, in that, it is a vehicle through which thoughts are conveyed. Meeting people and interacting, quarrelling, playing, etc. with them involve the use of language. This is why language is seen to be a tool of assistance for the insurance of a great deal of cultural uniformity[3]. As stated earlier, the only way to grow, develop and transmit a language is to speak it. Where minority languages are not being spoken by the speakers of the language, then such languages are in for extinction. This means that the fate of minority languages is in the hands of the speakers.

1.2 Language Acquisition

Language acquisition occurs in an informal setting where the child is completely immersed in its mother tongue[4]. It is an unconscious process of acquiring the language of one's immediate environment. It is a natural process of imbibing language especially in children in the critical stage of language development. A child absorbs a target language's sound system and structure without thinking about it. Language acquisition is a process whereby a child naturally masters a language without necessarily learning it in the sense of receiving instruction[5]. A child does not need any form of pedagogical process to manifest the language of his parents[6]. Acquisition is directed by the linguistic environment, the child's family and caregivers as teachers. He feels that a normal child who grows up in a normal household, surrounded by conversation will acquire the language used around him. This can be achieved through interaction with parents, adults and other children.

Language acquisition is restricted to communication purpose so the child basically acquires speaking skill. The Nativist theory which is the most popular of language acquisition, suggests that there is a natural gene in man that enables him learn language. It believes that man possesses Language Acquisition Devise (LAD) in his brain which enables him learn language.

1.3 Language and Identity

The importance of language cannot be overemphasized. In fact, it appears to be God's best gift to man. It is often times used to determine both individual and group identity. This is so, as it is used to distinguish one ethnic group from another and highlight their cultural differences. It is the language one speaks that is used to, many times, identify the person's tribe. This is why we can emphatically state that those whose languages are destroyed fall into identity crisis, as language is often seen as symbols of ethnic and national identity. Campaigners of language endangerment holds that when a language dies, a unique way of looking at the world disappears[7].

1.4 English Language

The English Language is the language spoken by the British. English Language is the indigenous language of Great Britain, United States of America, Canada and Australia. English Language is 'a left over colonial product'[6]. It was the language of contact used by Nigerian colonial masters – the British. The truth is that the use of a common language – English, made colonialization of Nigeria easy as it was possible to communicate in a common language. English has become a global language and recognized as an official language by about sixty seven (67) countries. This was made possible as it was imposed on the countries they conquered. It is a language of business across the world. With it in a multilingual society, communication becomes easy.

1.5 English Language Dominance

The widespread usage of English Language in many countries has given it a global status. English Language is the indigenous language of Great Britain, United States of America, Canada and Australia. However, many

countries now use it as their first language; others use it as their second language while some others use it as a foreign language.

English has become the language of international media: radio, newspapers, magazines, televisions, etc. It is exerting its dominance on the space of every country in the world (Verghese, 2007). No wonder, Nigeria adopted it as its official language. Notwithstanding, English Language still remains a second language learned and used in every sector. The relegation of the indigenous languages of Nigeria is as a result of the dominance of English Language in Nigeria which its untold effect cannot be over emphasized. The negative effect of the dominance of English Language cuts across cultural, linguistic, politics, economic etc. identity of the nation. Similarly, it has forestalled the transmission of the indigenous language to the younger generation and its implication is endangerment and subsequently death.

1.6 The Concept of Language Endangerment

When a language is on the path of extinction, it is endangered[9]. When the speakers of a language cease to use it and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next, that language is bound to go into extinction. This is a situation where there are no new speakers, either adult or children. In this case, language is at the risk of falling out of use and is said to be endangered or it loses all its native speakers and becomes a dead language. A language is endangered if there is no transmission of it to young generation[10].

The causes of language endangerment may be of external forces such as: military, economic, religious, cultural or educational subjugation or the cause may be internal, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language[9]. Many indigenous people associating their disadvantaged position with their culture come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining[9][11], so they abandon their languages and culture with the hope of overcoming discrimination.

1.7 Language Death

Language death occurs when speakers stop using it altogether[12]. Language death occurs as a gradual process triggered by social needs in which a language is replaced by a new language that has higher political and social status[13] and [12].

Language can also become endangered and even die when speakers of the language find that its use no longer fulfills their social needs or when it alienates speakers from participating or contributing to society. It has nearly always been due to a local history of political suppressions, social discrimination, or economic deprivation that make speakers change to another language. People would not want to acquire a language that will not be useful to them afterwards[14]. People prefer to learn and teach their children languages that will be useful for them to perform social functions. Furthermore, economics also plays a major role in choice of languages to acquire. This is because, a language that offers prospects of employment attracts more learners than others that present no such advantages to their users.

For death of a language to occur, it passes through many stages. A language may be safe, endangered, moribund or extinct[12]. There are three levels to indicate the degree of endangerment; endangered, potentially endangered and seriously endangered[15]. A language is potentially endangered when it is socially and economically disadvantaged and beginning to lose child speakers; endangered when there are few or no children learning it, and the youngest speakers are young adults and a language becomes seriously endangered when the youngest good speakers are ages 50 or above[15]. Any language that surpasses the seriously endangered category is said to be moribund, and this is when the language is no longer being learned as a mother tongue by children[16], and extinct when it has no speakers left[15]; [12]. A language shifts to language death when speakers of a threatened language ceases to use their language for the sake of profiting from the use of the imposed dominant language which will lead to a language death because of the lack of competence in a language and its users' incapacity to transmit it to their children.

1.8 Language Revitalization

Revitalization of language is a language planning practice intended to increase the use and transmission of languages that are socially, political and economically marginalized, and that have discussed as likely to

disappear entirely within, at best, a few generations[17]. Language revitalization in linguistic is strongly associated with efforts to document and record languages prior to their disappearance in order to ensure the availability of a permanent scientific record, as well as with the rise of a more “ethically engaged” practice of working with indigenous and minority communities. Accordingly, the role of schools is fundamental in restoring minority and endangered languages [12]. Education systems reflect the values and aspirations of nation status dominant society[18]. If minority languages are incorporated into the education system of the state or nation, it will promote the endangered language use as the status of the language will be elevated and offered equal opportunity of social, political and economic participation, even to those who speak such languages. An endangered (dying) language will be revived if its speakers have a strong presence in the educational system. No language can survive in an abstraction. Restoring indigenous languages requires special planning that includes formal recognition in education systems and incorporation into school curricula. On that note, schools are focal points with the potential to promote the development of a child’s mother tongue by teaching it to them at the early stages of their lives. This early stage is what is called the “critical period hypothesized” which states that the crucial period of language acquisition is before the age of twelve (12). Lennenberg opines that languages learnt after this period could not be learnt in normal and fully functional senses and suggests incorporating language acquisition into the early stages of a child’s life.

In terms of language revitalization, education is a cultural supremacy, and a key instrument in the promotion of indigenous knowledge. This is because education is always an action either for the domestication of people or for their liberation[19]. What this means is that schools can be used to promote the development of bicultural societies by teaching principles that reflect upon the importance of having cultural diversity and of maintaining indigenous legacies alive.

1.9 Language Maintenance

For a language to be maintained, speakers of such language must continue to use it despite competition with the dominant language. In this case, elevating the prestige of such language will be required. One of the ways to achieve this is by the use of the language in media. Television and radio are useful in enhancing the prestige of a language[17] because speakers of an indigenous language will have more opportunities to listen to their language if programmes can be broadcast in such languages.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework on which this study was conducted were Halliday’s Environmentalist theory and B. F. Skinner’s Behaviourist Theory.

The Environmentalist theory of language acquisition holds that the child’s language acquisition is governed by habit forming and reinforcement by imitation and repetition. This is why it is difficult to know what a child needs if he only cries without making a gesture. However, if he needs biscuit and can just point at it even while still crying and manages to say ‘bi-bi’ as the case maybe, it becomes much more easy for the caretaker to understand and attend to him. There is therefore, the tendency for the child to repeat the word ‘bi-bi’ when next he needs it. In this case, the mention of the word ‘bi-bi’ reinforces the learning and the use of the word. The explanation is that the child’s action hinges on the language prevalent in his environment since his environment is an embodiment of his upbringing.

This theory holds that the environment a child finds himself affects him greatly. It is in the environment he learns to talk as he interacts with the people there. As he watches others communicate with one another, the desire to do the same thing begins to develop in him. No wonder he gradually begins to imitate and repeat the things he hears from those in his environment and before long, he learns to interact well. This means that he acquires the language of his environment whether it is his mother tongue or not.

This theory goes further to state that part of the child’s environment includes his parents, neighbours and siblings and all of these people contribute to his linguistic inputs and manipulation. This means that the exposure the child receives in his environment helps to shape his language.

The Behaviourist Theory, on the other, is the stimulus-response (S-R) learning theory with B. F. Skinner as the eminent proponent. Skinner later came up with the concept of operant conditioning which holds the idea that behaviour is determined by its consequences which may be reinforcements or punishments. This means that the consequences of one's actions will influence him to either repeat such actions some other time or not. The theory is based upon the idea that changes in behaviour are the result of an individual's response to events (stimuli) that occur in the environment. When a particular Stimulus-Response (S-R) pattern is reinforced (rewarded), the individual is conditioned to respond. Reinforcement is the key element in Skinner's S-R theory. A reinforcer is anything that strengthens the desired response. It could be praise (like a pat on the shoulder, an applause, a bonus mark) or a good grade. Behaviour that is positively reinforced will definitely reoccur. In this case, the child is conditioned by the consequences of his action. The above assertion indicates that the essential mechanisms for the acquisition and or learning of language according to the behaviourists are imitation and practice.

The two theories, Environmentalist and Behaviourism are closely related. In the two theories, the growth of a child linguistically and otherwise takes place in the environment and the environment serves as input and his conditioning system.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem of the study determined the extent to which the English Language has affected the Ikwerre Language and ascertain the linguistic future of its owners. The research questions of the study were: (1) To what extent has English Language endangered Ikwerre Language in Port Harcourt metropolis? (2) What are the effects of the predominant use of English Language on Ikwerre Language in the study area?

IV OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In order to tackle the research questions, the objectives of the study were to:

- i) investigate the extent to which English Language has endangered Ikwerre Language in Port Harcourt metropolis and
- ii) determine the effects of the predominant use of English Language on Ikwerre Language.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Study Area

The area of study of the research was the Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria. Many communities make up the metropolis known as Port Harcourt and the communities are found in two Local Government Areas (LGA) namely, Obio/Akpor Local Government Area and Port Harcourt City Local Government Area. Few of these communities were randomly chosen for this investigation. The communities from Obio/Akpor Local Government Area were: Rumuomasi, Rumueme, Rumuola and Ozuoba. From Port Harcourt City Local Government Area Rumuwoji, Orogbum, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo and Elikahia were selected.

VI POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study is made up of all Ikwerre indigenes in Port Harcourt metropolis (Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt LGAs). As at 2006 census, the population status of Obio/Akpor was 464,789, while Port Harcourt Local Government Area as at 2011 census, had a population of 638,360[20].

VII SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE SIZE

The sampling technique employed for this research was the random sampling technique. This type of technique gave every member in the defined population equal opportunity to be selected. The sample size of this research was determined by using Taro Yamane formula which is presented as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \dots 1$$

Where:

n = Sample size required

N = Number of people in the population (1,103,149 as in this case)

1 = Constant

e = Allowable error (± 5) = 0.05%

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \dots 2$$

Where:

N = 1,103,149

e = 0.05 (0.0025)

$$\therefore n = \frac{1,103,149}{1 + 1,103,149 (0.0025)^2}$$

$$\frac{1,103,149}{1 + 2757.8725}$$

$$= \frac{1,103,149}{2758.9}$$

$$= 399.85$$

$$= 399.9$$

$$\underline{\underline{Q}} = 400$$

The answer obtained was 400.

In view of this situation, the sample size of this study was 400 respondents.

Twenty-five (25) parents and twenty-five (25) children from each of the eight communities were randomly sampled. The total samples obtained from parents was 200 as well as children, giving the grand total of 400 respondents which were used for this study.

VIII METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION /INSTRUMENTATION

For this study, the researcher used questionnaire and interview schedule for the primary data collection. The use of questionnaire was a necessity in that it is the most appropriate means of getting a reliable information, and easy and quick feedback from literate respondents. Interview schedule was also used to receive detailed information from illiterate respondents. Textual sources - textbooks, journals, encyclopedia and the internet were part of the secondary data where information concerning language death, endangerment, sustenance and the environment were retrieved.

IX METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The method of data analysis for the objectives was a simple descriptive statistical method, whereby the data from the distributed questionnaire were sorted, coded, tabulated and analyzed with frequency, percentage and mean. The response for each variable of interest was obtained by dividing the frequency for the variable by the total frequency for the study and multiplying by 100, all in percentage.

Mathematically, this is presented as:

$$Y = \frac{X}{Z} \times 100\% \dots 2$$

Where: Y = Variable of interest

X = Frequency of variable of interest

Z = Total frequency of the study (in this case = 400) for the parents and children respondents.

X RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question 1: How has the English Language endangered the Ikwerre language in your area?

Table 1: Extent to which English Language has endangered the Ikwerre Language in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

S/N	Variable	Frequency		Percentage (%)		Pooled Value	
		Parents (n=200)	Children (n=200)	Parents	Children	Frequency (n=400)	%
1	Strongly agreed	120	101	60	50.50	221	55.25
2	Agreed	50	70	25	35	120	30
3	Undecided	10	10	5	5	16	4.00
4	Disagreed	17	12	8.50	6	29	7.25
5	Strongly disagreed	3	7	1.50	3.50	14	3.50

Source: Field Survey, (2021).

Table 1 shows that one hundred and twenty (120) parents representing 60%, strongly agreed that English Language has endangered Ikwerre language. From the view of the children respondents, 'strongly agreed' also was the highest result with one hundred and one (101) respondents representing 50.50%. The pooled value which represented result from a combination of both the parents and children in the study area also showed a strongly agreed result of frequency of two hundred and twenty-one (221) and 55.25%. Further result from the pooled value showed that the respondents agreed with the frequency of one hundred and twenty (120) and 30% that English Language has endangered the Ikwerre language spoken in Port Harcourt metropolis.

The pooled result in Table 1 implies that English Language has actually endangered Ikwerre language in Port Harcourt metropolis to a very reasonable extent with strongly agreed value of 55.25%. This means that Ikwerre language is endangered and will soon go into extinction in the study area. This finding agrees with the earlier study in Nigeria where it was said that English Language has become a linguicide – a language killing chemical, killing all our indigenous languages, making Nigeria linguistics slaves and cultural satellites to Europe.[12]

Research Question 2: What are the effects of the predominant use of English Language on the Ikwerre language?

Table 2: Effects of the Predominant use of English Language on the Ikwerre Language Spoken in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

S/N	Variable	Frequency		Percentage (%)		Pooled Value	
		Parents (n=200)	Children (n=200)	Parents	Children	Frequency (n=400)	%
1	Reduction of interest in Ikwerre language	25	40	12.50	20	65	16.25
2	Endangerment of Ikwerre language	100	30	50	15	130	32.50
3	Loss of identity	15	12	7.50	6	27	6.75
4	Loss of culture	20	18	10	9	38	9.50
5	Inability to communicate in Ikwerre language	40	100	20	50	140	35

Source: Field Survey, (2021).

From the responses got from parents in item one in Table 2, twenty-five (25) respondents representing 12.50% of the entire sample admitted that they lacked interest actually in speaking the Ikwerre language. The same thing

was applicable to the children as forty (40) respondents also confirmed the fact that children lack interest in speaking Ikwerre language. This gave us the pooled value frequency of sixty-five (65) with 16.25%.

In item two (2), the Table showed that Ikwerre language is endangered as one hundred (100) parents representing 50% of the research sample and thirty (30) children with 15% affirmed this. The pooled value frequency of parents and children that considered Ikwerre language as being endangered were one hundred and thirty (130) with 32.50%.

Item three (3) indicated that fifteen (15) parents representing 7.50% of the total respondents and twelve (12) children representing 6% admitted that one of the effects of the predominant use of English language on the Ikwerre language is loss of identity. The pooled value frequency and percentage of both parents and children that admitted that the Ikwerre indigenes are losing their identity were twenty-seven (27) and 6.75% of the entire research sampled population.

As indicated in item four (4), twenty (20) respondents from the point of view of parents representing 10% of the research sample were of the opinion that one of the effects of the predominant use of English Language on Ikwerre language is loss of culture. Similarly, eighteen (18) respondents from the children also representing 9% of the research sample were also of the same opinion. The pooled value frequency of both parents and children therefore, became thirty-eighty (38) again with 9.50%.

Finally, in item five (5), the table showed that forty (40) parents representing 20% of the entire research sample were of the opinion that the predominant use of English Language on Ikwerre language has actually made most of the Ikwerre indigenes unable to speak the language. In the same vein, one hundred (100) respondents representing 50% of the research sample from children were also of the same opinion. The pooled value frequency became one hundred and forty (140) with 35%.

Table 2 shows in the pooled section that Effects of the Predominant use of English Language on the Ikwerre language included: Reduction of interest in the language with the pooled value of 16.25%, endangerment of Ikwerre language (32.50%), loss of identity (6.75%), loss of culture (9.50%) and inability to communicate in Ikwerre language (35%). From the results, the major effects were inability to communicate in Ikwerre language (35%) and endangerment of Ikwerre language (32.50%).

From the figures, we can see that the Ikwerre language is highly endangered especially as only few respondents could speak it. Consequently, it has been established that the language prevalent in many environment plays a very important role to the language acquisition and language lives of the indigenes. Here, the predominant language is English Language and this is the reason why the Ikwerre language is on the verge of death. Note that the tenacious grip of the English Language is a loose grip on the indigenous languages thereby, relegating them to the background. This agreed with the study that the dominance of the English Language in Nigeria has naturally relegated the use of the indigenous languages[22]. The study is of the opinion that the use of indigenous languages among children is getting reduced as a result of the dominance of English Language in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study believes that the implication of this dominance is that many languages now face the threat of extinction, language shift or ultimately, language death.

XI. CONCLUSION

The results of this study have shown that it was strongly agreed that English Language has negative effects on the Ikwerre language spoken in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers State, Nigeria. Furthermore, the major effects of the predominant use of English Language on the Ikwerre people in Port Harcourt metropolis included endangerment of Ikwerre language and the inability of natives to communicate in their indigenous language. It can therefore, be stated emphatically that the Ikwerre language spoken in Port Harcourt metropolis is endangered and at the verge of total extinction if nothing is done to reawaken the interest of the indigenes of the study area concerning their language.

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to prevent the English Language from completely destroying the Ikwerre Language in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State, Nigeria, it is recommended that, Ikwerre language should be documented so as to

enhance its reading and writing by Ikwerreindigenous people in the study area. Also, Ikwerre language should be frequently spoken at home by parents to their children to increase proficiency in the use of the language..

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