

Influence of choice of language of communication in inter-ethnic marriage families on the survival of minority languages in Nigeria

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Abstract

The survival of any language lies in its acquisition and usage by the younger generation. However, inter-ethnic marriages among the many ethnic groups in Nigeria have adversely affected the use of the indigenous languages, especially the minority languages. The consequence is that in most inter-ethnic marriage homes, couples adopt the English Language or the Nigerian Pidgin language for their communication purposes. The offspring of such relationship acquire the language used in their homes as their first language, thus becoming their mother tongue, thereby, relegating the languages of both parents. This study was undertaken to examine the effect of inter-ethnic marriages on the survival of minority languages in Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research method, using a set of questionnaire and focused group discussion to generate data from 384 respondents purposefully chosen from inter-marriage homes drawn from the six South-South States in Nigeria. The result of the study showed that many inter-ethnic marriage homes cared less about the survival of their native languages as they preferred and encouraged their children to master the English Language which is the language of taught (teaching) in schools. The study recommended that parents should encourage their children to learn one of the languages of the parents and that government should encourage the publication of books in minority languages to ensure their survival.

Key words: Communication, Inter-Ethnic Marriage, Language Acquisition, Language Survival Minority Languages

Background to the study

Nigeria is a multi- ethnic and religious country made up of many linguistic groups. It is estimated that Nigeria has over 371 ethnic groups with Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa as the dominant groups. The Hausa in the North are predominantly Muslims while the Yoruba and Igbo in the south are mostly Christians with pockets of traditional **Religious** worshipers. The different ethnic groups speak distinct languages, even though some have dialectical differences which are mutually intelligible. These different ethnic groups were merged together in 1914 by the British colonial administration under Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard to form the entity called Nigeria. This configuration is perceived to have promoted the idea of unity in diversity among the ethnic groups. Viewed from the perspective of the Federal Government of Nigeria, over the years, these languages and the cultures are

vital for transmitting knowledge, world views and verbal arts and not barriers but bridges of understanding and mutual cooperation across their respective frontiers which differentiates them as entities sometimes referred to as "ethnic nationalities" (www.nigeria.gov.ng).

In spite of this assertion by the government, the feeling of mutual suspicion among the different groups is palpable as groups have openly protested the seeming dominance by the majority groups and by extension, the endangerment of the minority languages. The issue of neglect or dominance of minority languages is exacerbated by the popular use of the Nigerian variant of the Pidgin language which developed as a result of the early contact with European missionaries and merchants and the need for people of diverse tongues in Nigeria to communicate. Nigerian Pidgin is a mix of the indigenous languages and English, and

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evolved from the need for European sailors to find a way to communicate with local merchants. According to Yul-Ifode (2001) the Nigerian Pidgin has been classified as a language of special status because it is used by a substantial number of people as a lingua franca. Today it is used in ethnically mixed urban and rural areas as a common form of communication among both educated and those who have not had any formal education in English.

Language has been described as semiotic system that depends on certain symbols and signals agreed upon to convey meaning between individuals. This concept as defined by Emenanjo and Ojukwu (2013) as “Any system that employed in giving and receiving, sharing, exchanging or hiding information, which is made up of sounds, symbols, postures and even silence”(p.2). Unarguably, language is essential for communication to take place because as Amberg and Vause observed, effective communication requires the understanding and recognising the nexus between a language and the people who use it. It is this intrinsic value of language that binds human societies together and distinguishes between man and other animals (Nath, 2010).

Communication is central to human relationships; it enhances family cohesion as a vehicle for maintaining family values and the transfer of cultural heritage from one generation to another. “Communication is the process through which needs, emotions, desires, goals, sentiments are expressed among human beings, using codes, symbols and language understood by parties involved in the process” (Omego and Nwakchuwu2013, p.3).The survival and development of a language is dependent on the use of the language, especially in communication experiences as a means of instruction and socialisation in homes and educational institutions. Language is not just a means of communication it also serves as markers of identity (Onadipe-Shalom, 2015).

The South-South region of Nigeria comprises six states (Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States), and is strategically located at the point where the Y tail of the River Niger joins the Atlantic Ocean through the Gulf of Guinea. Though a relatively small stretch of land, the south of the country provides the economic mainstay of the economy: oil. In addition to oil and gas, the region equally contributes other key resources, with potential huge investment opportunities in tourism and agriculture. The region is home to some 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups including the Bini, Efik, Esan, Ibibio, Igbo, Annang Oron, Ijaw, Ikwere, Itsekiri, Isoko, Urhobo, Ukwuani, Kalabari, Okirika, Ogoni and Ibani, who are among the inhabitants of the political Niger Delta, speaking about 250 different dialects. Due to the investment and job opportunities in the oil-rich region, there is a high concentration of people from different ethnic groups in the cities, especially the state capitals and other major urban centres.

The interactions between these people led to many inter-ethnic marriages where couples do not understand each other’s languages. Such homes adopt either the English language or the Nigerian Pidgin for communication within the home. What appears to be a challenge here, is that whenever, a family member of one of the spouse visits, the other spouse experience an alienated flow of communication unless, the parties inter switch between the native language and the English language or Pidgin to carry the other spouse along. Such situations lead to suspicion and create mistrust among couples.

Statement of the problem

The English language is the official language (lingua franca) in Nigeria while the three major languages are Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo popularly referred to as

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Wa-zo-bia an acronym for ‘come’ in the three languages. The federal system of government adopted by the country since the second republic, concentrated political powers at the centre and brought people from the different linguistic backgrounds together as civil servants, contractors and artisans to the centre. The assertion above is akin to the observation by Bandyopadhyay and Green, (2018) that “the literature on inter-cultural marriages in other contexts, show that modernization variables such as urbanization, literacy/education, wealth and declines in polygamy and agricultural employment, are significantly correlated with rising levels of inter-ethnic marriage” (para, 2). Indeed, the interactions among people of different ethnic origins, cultural and linguistic background in the work place and commerce, have resulted in inter-ethnic marriages. Another factor that has encouraged inter-ethnic marriages in Nigeria is the national Youth Service Scheme. After the 30-month civil war in Nigeria (1967-1970), the Nigerian government in an attempt to ensure national unity and integration, established the one year compulsory National Youth Service Scheme for all graduates of tertiary institutions in the country, with the graduates having to serve in regions other than their own. This scheme encourages inter-ethnic mixing and has resulted in many marriages among the youths.

In many of the inter marriage homes, the major language of communication between the couples become either the English language or the Nigerian pidgin language. In some rare cases, however, couples decide to adopt one of their languages as the language of communication within the household. This, invariably, translates to the abandonment of one of the languages. In homes where neither of the couples’ language is used, the children only use the English language. This trend has thrown up a new crop of individuals who do not

have a mother tongue or a first language. There is also another category of individuals who though not indigenous to their environment of upbringing, speak the language of the immediate environment as their First or second language. The scenarios painted above, if not checked could lead to the extinction of the languages indigenous to the people. Language has been described as the core of the culture of a people as it is used to receive and interpret signals (Daura, 2013).

By and large, a language can develop with use or go into extinction for lack of usage. Yul-Ifode, (2001) argues that the development of a language is a by-product of the transformation of members of a speech community (native speakers) and that this occurs due to encounters and new experiences among the speakers of the language. According to her “As long as a language remains in use and new experiences are encountered from time to time, the language will continue in the direction of the development of the users” (p.11). The family is central to the transmitting of language from one generation to another. Language is very essential for the socialisation of the child. Socialisation is the outcome of social relationships and interactions which sensitise the child to various orderings of the society. The survival or non-survival of minority languages depends on the extent to which the languages are passed on from one generation to another in their daily use in households. It is in the light of the above that this study seeks to investigate how minority languages spoken in the South-South Region of Nigeria can survive in the face of inter-ethnic marriages.

Aim and objectives

The study aimed at finding out how minority languages in the South-South region of Nigeria can survive due to the inter-ethnic marriages.

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The specific Objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the languages used in inter-marriage homes in the South-South region of Nigeria;
2. ascertain factors that determine the choice of language used in inter-ethnic marriage homes in the South-South region of Nigeria;
3. examine the attitude of the members of the family to the language adopted for communication in inter-ethnic homes in the South-South region of Nigeria; and
4. establish factors that threaten the survival of minority languages in inter-ethnic marriage homes in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Theoretical foundation

This study was anchored on the Poverty of Stimulus and the Social Interactional theories. The Poverty of Stimulus theory evolved from Chomsky's syntactic theory in the mid twentieth century (1950s-1960s) and describes children's direct response to linguistic stimuli within their linguistic environment at the critical language acquisition stage (Ndimele, 1992). It holds that all normal children are born with a linguistic endowment to acquire the language of their immediate environment. This innate linguistic endowment otherwise referred to as Language Acquisition Programme (LAP), provides children with the universal principle for developing a mental grammar of the language spoken in their immediate linguistic environment through, impulsive speech imputes which they receive from older members of their immediate linguistic environment (Radford, Atkinson, Britain, Clahsen and Spencer, 1999).

The description above clearly, points out two crucial components of language acquisition process: The presence of a linguistic community which provides an immediate speech community for all

normal children to acquire their mother tongue. The other component is that there must be a speech input upon which children develop the grammar of their mother tongue. Implicitly, the absence of these conditions could result in the failure to acquire a natural language by a normal child. Although, the large volume of vocabulary that becomes the output of the finite speech which a child gathers from older members of his speech community, may not be representative of the input. Linguists contend that without this finite input (triggering experience) it could be impossible for a child to acquire the mother tongue at this critical age. The implication of this scenario is that children born in inter-ethnic marriage homes are not able to speak the language of their parents because such languages are not spoken in their immediate environment.

The Social Interactionist theory, a strand of the socio-cultural theories of language enunciated by a Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, holds that interaction with adults plays an important part in children's language acquisition. The theory emphasizes the role of social interaction between the developing child and linguistically knowledgeable adults (Moerk.1994).This approach to language acquisition focuses on three areas, namely; the cognitive approach to language acquisition, the information processing approach or the information processing model and the social interactionist approach or social interaction model. The theory emphasises that learners understand the new language through socially mediated interactions. This approach to language acquisition emphasizes, that children are conditioned to learn language by a stimulus-response pattern with which is sometimes confusing. The social interactionist approaches rests on the premise of a social-cognitive model, emphasizing the child's construction of a social world, which then serves as the context of language development.

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Linguists believe that language learning has its basis in interacting with other people. They stress that the child's cultural development appears first, on the social level (Shaffer, 2009). Ayuwo (2013) seems to agree with this submission when he said that language is one of the avenues through that a child acquires cultural identity.

The relevance of these theories to this study lie in their explicit emphasis that the survival of any language depends on the acquisition and use by children. The stress that communication in homes between children and parents is accomplished through a language, help the children acquire their mother tongue, and that consistent usage make them competent speakers of the language. Children will not become purveyors of their native language if the language is not consistently used with parents.

Literature review

Scholars are agreed that communication is vital to the survival of any society, and that for family cohesion to be enhanced there has to be communication, hence Okah (2002) asserted that communication is the foundation of any successful relationship. He adds that communication helps society to organise itself as it is the ability of one make one's information understood, that makes communication worth the effort. According to Gudykunst and Nishida, (2001) communication is effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message that is relatively similar to what was intended by the person transmitting it. Scholars believe that culture depends strongly on communication because it provides processes of exchanging information with the objective of transmitting ideas, feelings and specific situations present in the individual's mind. Corbin and white, (2008) observe that the more different an individual's cultural

background is, the more different their style of communication.

The debate on majority/minority language and the struggle for the survival of minority languages has gained primacy in academic discourse and attracted extensive literature across the globe. The United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Special Rapporteur (2010) defines minorities as:

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members- being nationals of the state- possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, tradition, religion or language. (Np)

By this definition, minority ethnic groups and by extension languages, are those non-dominant languages in a given society. The dominant groups according to Marshall (1998) are dominant, most powerful, widespread or influential within a social or political entity in which many cultures are present.

In Nigeria, the raging argument is that the three dominant languages of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are being promoted by the government at the centre in Nigeria to the detriment of the over 370 other languages spoken by the several ethnic groups in the country. Scholars believe that the National Language Policy has conferred undue advantage on the three languages. For instance, they mentioned that even though the National Policy on Education in Nigeria stipulates that the initial language in elementary school should be the mother tongue of the child or the language of the immediate

community, however, only the three major languages of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa are taught beyond junior secondary school. It is only these languages that are offered as subjects by the West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council of Nigeria (NECO) and the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations, (Essien, 1991). Many also believe that the National cultural Policy is skewed against the minority languages. Adeniyi, (2007) contends that although the policy was geared towards strengthening the indigenous languages, it places more emphasis on the three major languages of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo.

Scholars like Jibrin, (1999) justifies the special privilege accorded the three languages as common-sensical and rational since all languages cannot be used. Opponents of this view, however, point out that it amounts to state-sponsored discrimination which might result in the gradual lingo-cultural genocide for ethnic minorities. The argument above, has the support of many state governments in the South-South Region of Nigeria that have expressed regrets over the federal government's education and language policies that have become death snare to the less popular languages. Odiegwu (2015) quotes the Bayelsa State Commissioner for Culture and Ijaw Language, Dr. Felix Tuodolor as saying that the Federal Government of Nigeria has been unfair to minority languages with the promotion of the dominant languages in the country.

Although there is no consensus among linguists about the taxonomy of languages, many argue that there is no superior or inferior language. Supporters of this school of thought believe that as long as a language serves the communication needs of the speech community, it shares the same status with other languages irrespective of the part of the globe where it is spoken (Yul-Ifode,

2001). However, in his classification of language, Ferguson in 1972 insists that there is a distinction between a majority and minority language. He claims that if a language is spoken by 25% of the native speakers or more than one million persons in a country, then such language can be classified as a majority language. He added that if a language is spoken by less than 25% of the native speakers or less than one million persons in a country, then such language qualifies as a minority language. On the other hand, linguists maintain that if a language maintains a downward slide in terms of number of its native speakers, such a language is endangered and can be said to belong to the minority divide (Ndimele, 2010).

Scholars have undertaken empirical inquiries into the issue of minority languages and inter-ethnic marriages. A study by McDoom, (2016) to examine the establishment of cross-ethnic marital ties in a deeply divided society and what drives individuals to defy powerful social norms and sanctions to choose life-partners from across the divide, found that, increase in individual's educational status and decline in inequality make individuals enjoy greater freedom in the choice of their social ties.

For instance, in their study on Language choice and family language policy in inter-ethnic marriages in South Eastern Nigeria, Ofiong and Mensah (2012) using three inter-ethnic marriage families, found that English Language was the major language of communication in the homes and that some of the indigenous languages of the people were at the verge of extinction. Also Offiong and Ugot, (2012) in their investigation of the maintenance of the minority language (Efik) in South Eastern Nigeria in the face of the domineering influence of the English Language, found that all members of the twenty families used for the study were positively disposed to the English Language than their native Efik Language.

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In the same vein, a study carried out by Onadipe-Shalon (2015) to ascertain the effect of globalisation on the survival of minority languages, with a focus on the Ogu Language found that globalisation, indeed, had negative influence on the survival of the language as only the aged showed enthusiasm to the use of the language, while the younger ones were more likely to speak the English Language.

Methods

The study adopted the survey research design to study 384 respondents purposefully chosen from inter-marriage homes drawn from the six states that make up the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria, with a population of 26,237,239. Data for the study were collected using a set of Questionnaire and Focus group Discussion. The data presentation was done using both the qualitative and quantitative approaches using tables of frequency distribution and percentages and descriptive analysis. This was to take care of the data obtained from the questionnaire and the focus group discussion. Out of the 384 copies of the questionnaire

administered, 377 were correctly filled and found useful for the analysis.

Data presentation and analysis

The data obtained showed that the majority of the respondents (217 or 58%) were aged between 18 and 37 years while those within the aged bracket of 38 and 60 years were 160 (42%). All the respondents had acquired education, although at different levels. While 199 (53%) had tertiary education, 121(32%) were secondary leavers and 57 (15%)who had elementary education. The data also indicate that most of the respondents live in urban and semi-urban areas as represented by 253 (67%) and 123 (33%) respectively.

On the languages used in inter-ethnic marriage homes, the data obtained revealed that only an insignificant number (34 respondents) of the families adopted the native tongues of one of the spouses for communication. More than half of the respondents use the Nigerian Pidgin while the remaining communicate with the English Language at home as shown in table below.

Table 1: Languages spoken in inter-ethnic marriage home

Languages	No of respondents	Percentage
English Language	128	34
Nigerian Pidgin	215	57
Native language of a spouse	34	9
Total	377	100

As shown in the table above, it is obvious that the Nigerian pidgin is the language mostly used in inter-ethnic marriage homes in south-South Nigeria. This is followed by the English language. The least spoken language in inter-ethnic marriage homes in the region is their local languages.

In order to ascertain the factors that determine the choice of language spoken in inter-ethnic marriage homes, the respondents were requested to give their agreement or otherwise to certain statements as presented in table two. The analysis of the data was done using the weighted mean score.

Table 2: The factors that determine language choice in inter-ethnic marriage homes

S/ N	Item Statement	Frequency of responses					N	Σ^{wf}	Wms	Decision
		SA	A	N	D	SD				
1	The immediate environment determines the language	115	121	71	50	20	377	1513	4.01	Accepted
2	The need to be understood at home determines the language I speak at home	48	162	40	66	61	377	1201	3.13	Accepted
3	Neither partner could speak their native tongue	68	133	67	42	67	372	1224	3.24	Accepted
4	The popularity of the language and its simplicity	66	146	53	70	42	372	1255	3.32	Accepted
Total/Aggregate								1298	3.42	Accepted

The data presented in the table show that the respondents accepted that their immediate environment determined the language spoken in inter-ethnic marriage homes. The item generated a cumulative score of 1513 and a weighted mean of 4.01 to be accepted. Similarly, the response to the statement that the need to be understood at home determines the choice of language used in inter-ethnic marriage homes in south-south Nigeria. This item generated a cumulative score of 1202 and 3.13 weighted mean and was accepted. A total of 1224 cumulative score and a weighted mean of 3.24 were generated from the responses of the respondents to the statement that the choice of language spoken in inter-ethnic marriage homes is because neither partner could speak their

native tongue. Finally, the responses of the respondents to the statements that the popularity of the language and its simplicity determines the language choice in inter-ethnic marriage homes in South-South Nigeria generated a cumulative of 1255 and a weighted mean of 3.42 to be accepted.

For this research objective an aggregate cumulative score of 1298 was generated and a weighted mean score of 3.42 obtained to be accepted. Thus we can infer from the data that the choice of language used in inter-ethnic marriage home could be determined by the immediate environment, the need to be understood and the inability of either of the partner to speak their native tongues.

Table 3: Attitude of the members of the family to the language adopted for communication in inter-ethnic homes

S/ N	Item Statement	Frequency of responses					N	Σ^{wf}	Wms	Decision
		SA	A	N	D	SD				
1	I have no choice as my parents/partner could not speak the language	115	121	71	50	20	377	1491	3.95	Accepted
2	I feel bad that I cannot speak my father/Mother's Language	48	162	40	66	61	377	1201	3.18	Accepted
3	A feel cheated or alienated whenever my parents or spouse speak to other people in their native tongues.	68	133	67	42	67	377	1043	2.76	Rejected
4	I do not care even if I cannot speak any of my parents/spouse's languages	76	107	50	81	63	377	1183	3.13	Accepted
5	I am happy the way things are	66	146	53	70	42	377	1255	3.32	Accepted
Total/Aggregate								1235	3.26	Accepted

The data presented in table 3 were to ascertain the attitude of members of the family to the language adopted for communication in inter-ethnic homes. In response to the statement that they had no choice and so resigned to fate as their parents or partner could not speak the language got a cumulative of 1491 and a weighted mean of 3.95 to be accepted. In the same vein, the statement that respondents felt bad that they could not speak any of their parents' languages generated a cumulative score of 1201 and a weighted mean score of 3.18 and thus, accepted. However, the data showed that the statement that they felt cheated or alienated whenever their parents or spouse spoke to other people in their native tongues, generated a weighted mean of

2.76 and was rejected. To the statement that they do not care even if they cannot speak any of their parents or spouse's languages garnered a cumulative score of 1183 and a weighted mean of 3.13 to become accepted. To the last item that sought respondents idea if they were happy the way things are, generated a cumulative score of 1255 and a weighted mean average of 3.26 and was accepted that they are okay with the way things are.

From the data presented and analysed above, it can be deduced that many family members in inter-ethnic marriage homes are not happy that they could not speak their mother's tongue they appeared not bothered about the situation of things, which is an indication of negative attitude to their native languages.

Table 4: Factors that threaten the survival of minority languages in inter-ethnic marriage homes in South-South region of Nigeria.

S/ N	Item Statement	Frequency of responses					N	Σ^{wf}	Wms	Decision
		SA	A	N	D	SD				
1	Couples in inter-ethnic marriages do not communicate in their local languages because they feel their languages are inferior	115	121	71	50	20	377	1392	3.69	Accepted
2	Inter-ethnic marriages couples prefer the English Language languages because they want their offspring to master the English language	52	154	48	67	56	377	1210	3.20	Accepted
3	Many minority languages in South-South have not been properly documented	65	128	61	60	63	377	1203	3.19	Accepted
4	Governments over emphasis the English language and the three major languages endanger the minority languages.	71	136	51	77	42	377	1248	3.31	Accepted
Total/Aggregate								1263	3.34	Accepted

The responses of the respondents to the factors that threaten the survival of minority languages in inter-ethnic homes in South-South Nigeria as presented in table 4 above show that many couples in inter-ethnic marriages do not communicate in their local languages because they feel that their languages are inferior to the language of their immediate environment and the major languages. This got a cumulative of 1392 and a weighted mean of 3.69 to be accepted. Also, the statement that inter-ethnic marriages couples prefer the English Language languages because they want their offspring to master the English language used as language of education and socialisation generated a weighted mean score of 3.20 and was accepted. The statement that many minority languages in South-South have not been properly documented and that has threatened the survival of the languages garnered a cumulative score of 1203 and a weighted mean score of 3.19 to be

accepted. In addition, the statement that governments over emphasis on the English language and the three major languages endanger the minority languages received a cumulative score of 1248 points and a weighted mean score of 3.31 and was accepted. Overall, this objective generated an aggregate cumulative score of 1263 and a weighted mean score of 3.34 to be accepted.

Discussion of findings

The discussion of the findings of this study was based on the objectives of the study and followed the order in which the objectives were presented in the earlier part of this presentation.

Objective one: To find out the languages used in inter marriage homes in the South-South region of Nigeria.

The data obtained and used to ascertain the language choice in inter-ethnic marriage home pointed to the fact

that the Nigeria variant of the Pidgin language is preferred by most inter-ethnic marriage households. This finding is akin to those of similar studies by Ofiong and Mensah(2012) who studied three inter-ethnic marriage families in South-Eastern Nigeria and Offiong and Ugot (2012) who investigated the maintenance of the minority language (Efik) in South Eastern Nigeria in the face of the domineering influence of the English Language. Both studies Found that the English Language was the major language of communication in the homes as all members of the families were positively disposed to the English Language than their native language and that some of the indigenous languages of the people were at the verge of extinction.

This sufficiently corresponds with the poverty of stimulus theory that guided the study. Since children acquire the language spoken in their immediate environment through Language Acquisition Programme (LAP), which provides children with the universal principle for developing a mental grammar of the language spoken in their immediate linguistic environment, through impulsive speech imputes which they receive from older members of their immediate linguistic environment. Invariably, the non-use of the mother tongue of the couples in inter-ethnic marriages negates the LAP process and endangers the indigenous languages of the people of South-South Nigeria, since all the languages are among the minority languages in Nigeria.

However, the current study found that the Nigerian pidgin is the preferred language in the South-South region of Nigeria, closely followed by the English language. Thus, we can infer that the indigenous languages are not used in most inter-ethnic marriage homes in the study area. The implication of this is that there is a bleak future for the minority languages spoken in the south-south part of the

country as all the languages can be classified as minority languages. This may be due to the fact that the region is home to many indigenous languages that are not mutually intelligible. This is also accentuated by the fact that most of these people are riverine dwellers that had early contact with the European sailors who had difficulties understanding the natives, so the pidgin languages developed from the need for the different ethnics groups to understand themselves.

Objective two: ascertain factors that determine the choice of language used in inter-ethnic marriage homes in the South-South region of Nigeria.

The study found that several factors determined the language choice in inter-ethnic marriage homes in South-South Region of Nigeria. These factors were the immediate environment where the families reside, the need to be understood by their spouses and other family members, the fact that neither of the partners could speak their native tongue and the perceived popularity of the chosen language. What can be deduced from this finding, and which corroborates the finding from the focused group discussion is that many of the inter-ethnic marriage homes have resigned to fate and are not making any effort to learn or speak their native languages. The respondents felt comfortable adopting the language used in their immediate environment, especially the English or the Nigerian Pidgin as their language of communication in their homes, thereby relegating the native languages.

This finding of course, lends credence to the Social Interactionist theory adopted for the study which emphasises that learners understand the new language through socially mediated interactions, which rests on the premises of a social-cognitive model, emphasizing the child's construction of a social world which then serves as the context of language

development. Interestingly, it is the language that a child is born into that the child acquires as the first language since language is not innate but a product of nurture.

The Interactionist theory emphasizes the role of social interaction between the developing child and linguistically knowledgeable adults. Given that children are the adults of tomorrow whose use of a language will perpetuate that language and ensures its survival, it then follows that if they do not acquire their native languages through interactions with adults, especially parents because the native language is not used in interactions in the home, it points to only one thing, the extinction of minority languages in the South-South region of Nigeria as the children who will become adults tomorrow will not be able to pass on the languages to the offspring. This approach to language acquisition focuses on three areas, namely the cognitive approach to language acquisition, the information processing approach or the information processing model and the social interactionist approach or social interaction model. The theory emphasises that learners understand the new language through socially mediated interactions.

Objective three: Examine the attitude of the members of the family to the language adopted for communication in inter-ethnic homes in the South-South region of Nigeria.

The findings from this objective indicated a lackadaisical attitude of the members of the families of inter-ethnic marriages in south-South Nigeria towards the survival of their native languages as many of them appeared complacent with the status-quo. There seemed to be no concern for the survival of their native or mother tongues as the respondents, especially the offspring of the inter-ethnic marriages saw nothing wrong with their

inability to speak neither of their parents' languages. Implicitly, this finding points to the fact that the future of the cultures of minority language speaker is bleak. This supports the observation Corbin and White (2008) who stress that the more different an individual's cultural background is, the more different their style of communication. It is through language that the culture of the indigenous people are preserved and passed on from one generation to another. So if the minority languages are not spoken within the family units in inter-ethnic marriage homes, then there is the likelihood of a break in the transmission of the cultural traits of the people which is made possible only through the sustenance of the languages. If the interactions within inter-ethnic marriage homes are done with the language of the immediate environment, the official English Language or the Pidgin language, the place of the indigenous languages of the South-South people of Nigeria will be lost because children from such families cannot acquire their native language. This is within the framework of the poverty of stimulus theory adopted for the study in which Chomsky described children's direct response to linguistic stimuli within their linguistic environment at the critical language acquisition stage.

Objective four: Establish factors that threaten the survival of minority languages in inter-ethnic marriages homes in South-South region of Nigeria.

A major threat to minority languages is that couples in inter-ethnic marriages do not communicate in their local languages because they feel their languages are inferior, even as they want their children to master the English Language which is the language of taught (teaching) in schools. Added to this is that fact that many minority languages in South-South have not been properly documented. Governments over emphasis the English language as the official

language and the inclusion of only the three major languages of Hausa Igbo and Yoruba as examination subjects for secondary schools, confers undue advantage on the major languages and endangers the minority languages. The respondents in the focused group discussion also saw the neglect of the smaller languages as a threat to the survival of the languages. They were of the view that the three tiers of government in Nigeria can jointly or severally implement strategies that can stimulate the publication of text books to document and preserve the minority languages. This finding corresponds with the views of Adeniyi, (2007) who believes that the National cultural Policy is skewed against the minority languages. He stressed that although the policy was geared towards strengthening the indigenous languages, it placed more emphasis on the three major languages of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study we conclude that:

The indigenous minority languages are relegated to the background in inter-ethnic marriage homes in the south-South region of Nigeria preferring the Nigerian Pidgin Language as the language of communication, followed by the English language; the factors that determine the language choice in inter-ethnic marriage homes in South-South Nigeria are immediate environment where the families reside, the need to be understood by their spouses and other family members; there exists a lackadaisical attitude of the members of the families of inter-ethnic marriages in South-South Nigeria towards the survival of their native languages as many of them appear complacent with the status quo; and that the major threats to the survival of minority languages are the feeling by members of inter-ethnic marriage homes that their languages are inferior to other languages, and

governments' education and cultural policies, which lays more emphasis on the English language

The following are recommended in the light of the findings:

1. Couples in inter-ethnic marriages should take special interest in one language of the partner's interest and use it as the language of communication in their homes.
2. Community-based associations should take deliberate steps towards the documentation of their local languages for posterity.
3. Governments should encourage the survival of the minority languages through sponsorship the documentation of the languages that have not been documented.
4. They should also formulate an education policy that emphasises that the child should be taught in the language of their immediate environments in the early part of their elementary school and that minority languages should be taught and offered as examination subject for the West African School Certificate (WASC) and the National Examination Council (NECO) Examinations rather than the three major languages.
5. People should be proud of their language and heritage and promote the use of their languages in their homes because one's language is one's identity.
6. Community-based unions should partner with video film producers to make films with cultural settings using the indigenous languages as this will go a long way in reawakening interest of the people in the use of the minority languages.

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