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Linguistic Diversity, Code-switching and language Shift in Nigeria

Nkechi M. Christopher*

*Department of Communication and Language Arts
University of Ibadan
Ibadan, Nigeria*

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Socio-politico-economic developments in Nigeria favour language shift from local languages to English, a situation making local language maintenance and sustenance difficult while portending language extinction. Codeswitching between English and Nigerian languages is posited as a stage in the process of language shift to English and eventual extinction of local languages. Contributing to the evolving linguistic situation are: extreme linguistic diversity, tenacious resistance to language imposition, nascency of democratization, people mobility in the quest for survival in a poor economic environment, the absence of a viable language policy, neglect of local languages in the education of the child at home and school, and the dominance and viability of the English language for the individual in socio-economic life of the nation. Nigeria is experiencing linguistic transition that may eventually see the extinction of many Nigerian languages if unchecked. Under the situation, language owners may be the best group to save their languages (over 500) from extinction.

Keywords: code-switching, language contacts, language death/extinction, language maintenance, language shift, linguistic diversity.

Introduction

Living languages grow, those languages that fail to grow die. Language is a living entity, changes, grows and expands spheres and modes of usage from generation to generation. The extent to which language grows or expands may be proportional to the expansion of areas of human endeavours where it is used – once there is need for communications in the moon, across the sea, down in the bowels of the earth, etc. there would be means for meeting the challenges. In addition, languages grow as knowledge and experience expand – words/expressions may be devised within a

language for new experience or borrowed from another language. However, the significance of a language may diminish, and in extreme cases it could die out of non-use. Language extinction has become more alarming in a globalizing world; since globalization, even in its elemental stage without ICT, creates a need for a universal language of communication to enable people operate beyond their immediate society. Mühlhäusler (1996:273) observes of language contacts in the Pacific that, “An interesting observation is that the sickness of languages is greatest in areas where English is the official language.”

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* Corresponding author E-mail address: nmxtopher@gmail.com

The choice of a national language in Nigeria was influenced by two factors: language diversity and the presence of an acceptable language. The acceptance of English, a colonial heritage, by all partners in the geo-political arrangement has given English the lead over Nigerian languages (and Arabic in the north). Though a foreign language, English has become an amalgamating element while Nigerian languages are codes of dichotomy, creating or escalating enmity along linguistic/ethnic lines on matters that have nothing to do with language itself. Nonetheless, the sheer number of languages and a people on the move leave no room for monolingualism. Rather, the norm is bilingualism (multilingualism) in urban and semi-urban areas as well as among the educated in rural areas. Nigeria is therefore a case of bilinguals in multilingual environments.

Code-switching may become an integral element of bilingual speech when there is no functional differentiation between two languages in contact or restrictions on their use. Where languages in contact have significant place in the socio-economic context, code-switching may lead to the evolving of a “new” language, such as Singlish, Franglais (Frenghish), Hinglish, etc. But if one of the languages has a superior position in the socio-politico-economic arrangement, there is a tendency for people to shift from the less “significant” language to a dominant socio-economically viable language. Education and mobility of people from their places of origin to other parts of the country favour shift from local languages to English in Nigeria. (Hopefully, a decision taken by the government executive council on August 23, 2006 to use major Nigerian languages in radio broadcasting may increase the status of some Nigerian languages). Already some children as well as adults in some Nigerian cities do not know what their parents’ mother tongue sounds like. For such children, there is already

language extinction, the chain of transfer having been broken.

Linguistic Diversity and Evolving Language Situation in Nigeria

It is well known that Africa’s most populous nation is blessed with, among other wonderful resources of nature, diverse people and languages. According to a summary by Gordon (2005), of 521 languages listed for Nigeria, 510 are living languages, two are second languages without mother-tongue speakers, and nine are extinct. There might be truth in the saying that our diversity is our strength, as it, among other controls and advantages, checks permanent domination of others by ethnic entities or individuals. This, however, has inhibited the evolution of a national language, much as its desirability is not in question.

It is expected that a Nigerian should at least be bilingual in the mother tongue and English: the constitution and national policy on education indicate that English and Nigerian languages can/are to be used for official business and teaching. According to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria:

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefor.

Similarly for state house of assembly:
The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve.

Despite this constitutional provision, English remains the norm; there are no, or

indeed need for, facilities in place for such a cumbersome venture. Besides, it would be another Tower of Babel if 22 languages are permitted in the River State house of assembly. Kari's (2002) account of the linguistic landscape in River State is indicative of the problem of managing language diversity in Nigeria's 36 states and federal capital territory. Of 23 local government areas, 17 are monolingual, speaking one of 12 (of the state's 22) indigenous languages, while other local government areas have two to four language groups. Similarly, with 18 local government areas, Edo State boasts of 17 languages, with one local government area (Akoko-Edo) home to 10! (Siebert, 2000). Over and above these, Blench (1998) estimates that with 394 languages, the Middle Belt area has the greatest diversity of languages. The diversity in language has become more apparent to Nigerians with the creation of new states and local government areas. In all, people not only see the need for bilingualism but are also desirous of becoming bilinguals.

In addition to diversity of languages are dialectal differences that sometimes lead to mutual unintelligibility among speakers of the same language, even within 25 to 50 km radius (for example the word "echeta" is "arisa" in another place less than 25 km away). When interlocutors with different dialects share another common dialect, say, the central Igbo or standard Yoruba, the use of the English language may not be necessary; but when the contrary is the case, some elements of bilingualism will obtain, including code-switching to English.

Although Gordon (2005) refers to Edo, Efik, Adamawa Fulfulde, Hausa, Idoma, Igbo, Central Kanuri, and Yoruba as well as English as official or national languages, it should be noted that theoretically, all Nigerian languages can be used officially and no language other than English is used nationally. In fact, the diversity

and inadvertent empowerment of languages through state and local government creation has encouraged language owners to resist other's language being foisted on them. However, with the benefit of hindsight, there are indications that overtime three national languages could have emerged from the country's earlier regional arrangement. Prior to the balkanization of the three regions inherited at independence, Yoruba was the dominant language in the south west, Hausa was evolving as the lingua franca in the northern region, Igbo was being learnt by non-Igbo speakers in the south east, and later, Edo in the (youngest) Mid-west region.

Later development saw Pidgin English evolve as a lingua franca in various major towns of the former Mid-west region. Also of note was the springing up of special dialect of Yoruba in Lagos. Incidentally, the special Lagos variant of Yoruba that Lagosians (native and non-natives in Nigeria's former capital [in the south west]) learnt is fast giving way today to Pidgin English. Meanwhile, the Pidgin English spoken in each area of the country has its own uniqueness and appeal (with that spoken in the old city of Warri in Delta State found most fascinating). Interestingly the army barracks had Hausa language as its major lingua franca and Pidgin as a minor. However, with more education and the raising of standards for joining the Nigerian army, the linguistic tradition may witness a change that will see Hausa losing its status as a major language in the barracks.

The diversity of language and people's resistance to the imposition of another language on them have made it difficult to work towards upgrading/ developing any of the numerous languages to a national status. This is compounded by the difficulty experienced in implementing mother tongue education in primary schools and teaching major Nigerian languages in secondary schools across the

country. The implicit recognition of all Nigerian languages in the national policy of education, which states that a child should be taught first in his mother tongue, is becoming impracticable as there are no orthographies and therefore no books and other resources on many languages. It also seems that: “the well known fallacy that if you can speak a language you can teach it, or teach in it, continues to rear its head” (Gaudart, 1996: 187) and conceal the need to invest more effort in language development and training.

Furthermore, urban migration encouraged the establishment of private primary schools instructing solely in English to cater for children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This has eventually led to a situation whereby children in private schools speak better English with more ease than, and to the envy of, children (and their parents) taught in the mother tongue. Unfortunately, mother tongue education is also associated with public schools where resource provision for teaching by government and parents are poor, leading to inferior education which many inadvertently attribute to mother tongue education. Consequently, to ensure that their children learn the English language, many parents patronise private primary and secondary schools, and some in addition speak “English,” exclusively, to their children at home, even where their proficiency in the language could be in question. Some scenarios as this are inexplicable: a Yoruba university driver, his wife, a nephew in senior primary class, and the mother of the child choose to speak only in English to a grand daughter of about four years, while everyone else converses solely in Yoruba. The situation could be worse among the Igbo, with such an example of an Igbo young man who had to learn Igbo from his cousins when he travelled to the United States after having spent all his life in Nigeria (Solarin, 2003). Yet proficiency in English in Nigeria today is inferior to what obtained in the

1950s–70s when both languages in an individual’s environment were allowed to develop alongside each other (This is evident in the observable difference between the performance abilities of earlier and today’s graduates of the educational system: a Primary 6 pupil in the earlier periods could comfortably write letters for relations, but some university graduates shy away from writing letters today).

Parents are unmindfully and gradually creating situations that will see to the death of Nigerian languages. The onus is on Nigerian linguists to educate people that a child will learn more than a language if he is exposed to them. Denying children access to the local language which arranges the world they belong to in preference for a foreign language with limited models may not be in the overall interest of the development of children. It will be preferred that adequate facilities are made available for teaching Nigerian and English languages to children in school and at home.

Code-switching in Nigeria

Bilingual speakers often ‘switch codes’, that is, move from one language to another and back again in the course of conversations. Sometimes, it is unclear which one they are speaking at any particular point. The process may result in language mixing But in most cases, one of the languages wins out, and the other is demoted to subsidiary status (Silva-Corvalaán, 1996: 246)

Silva-Corvalaán (1996:6) suggests that while using the subordinate language speakers code-switch (one of five strategies employed) to lighten the “cognitive load of having to remember and use two different linguistic systems.” Code-switching is a reality of bilingual situations, especially in informal situations where speakers tend to use

all shared languages when no restrictions is imposed.

An Igbo teenager raised in a Yoruba city may start a conversation with the sibling in Igbo, switch back and forth to Yoruba and use some in-group phrases and sentences in English picked up at school or the neighbourhood. The same child may allow some utterances in Yoruba while speaking with the mother, but will not use a word of Yoruba when speaking with the father, since most Igbo fathers are usually not eager to learn the Yoruba language and wish their children to be fluent in Igbo. While the type of speaker described here may not have any problem conversing with a monolingual Yoruba, he/she would likely have problem holding monolingual Igbo conversation with peers in an Igbo community, and will therefore tend towards the common and more convenient English language. In a situation as this, code-switching to the superior language is engendered mainly by poor proficiency in the matrix language. While this will constitute the main reason for shifts from Nigerian languages to English, there are other reasons why people code-switch.

A study of code-switching among peoples of Nigeria will reveal that ease of switch from L2 (English) to L1 (a Nigerian language) and vice versa may vary from one ethnic group to the other. While switch from English to Yoruba is more common than vice versa, many Igbo speakers find it far easier to code-switch to English. Other than taking pride in speaking the English language, dialectal differences could create so much discomfort (and repetitions or explanations to make up for differences) that using the English language becomes economical, especially for the educated who do not have to learn the central or standard dialects to survive.

Why are people willing to let go of their mother tongue in preference of English? The ascendancy of the English language to the pride

of place in Nigeria can most easily be attributed to the socio-economic viability of English, and its subsequent/consequent incursion into domains previously “reserved” for local languages, such as homes and churches. Englishization of Nigeria is a trend that can be linked with the observation that over the years those who occupy important and enviable socio-economic positions in the society speak a lot of English, and those who did/do not are losing grounds. High income bespectacled doctors and lawyers with raised shoulders display their dexterity in English, while low income mechanics, drivers and other artisans speak the local languages. Proficiency in the English language, it is believed, must be the key to changing one’s social status. In fact, the children of those that live in choice neighbourhoods and affluence speak a lot English, and rarely make a show of their knowledge of the local language.

Showing off proficiency in the English language is one of the reasons some people code-switch. In some Igbo communities, a man could say something in English or Igbo and then translate same into the other as a manner of speaking. Switching is done for social identity negotiation, so as to impress it on the listener that the speaker, having been adequately educated in or exposed to it, has acquired the English language and therefore belongs to *the* prestigious class. According to Eze (<http://uwandiigbo.com/wb/pages/about-igbo.php>), a scholar observes that “Igbo-English mixture is a conscious display of the knowledge of a prestigious language, English...” This reason for code-switching is obvious in recent Yoruba movies and TV shows, and one can hear the somewhat educated speaker quickly switch back to Yoruba in mid sentence when problem is encountered in a linguistic voyage.

Another reason people show off their proficiency in English is to impress on a co-interlocutor and standby listener(s) one’s

educational qualification/exposure and to use same as a means of attaining a superior status in the environment of communication, consequently enforcing one's wish or opinion on others. Such an individual would balk in the presence of a more proficient speaker. When speaking with a person of higher status and proficiency in English, a speaker with an inferior knowledge of the L2 could code-switch to a shared Nigerian language to conceal inadequacy. However, much as the pretentiousness of those who can speak English increases the desire of the less proficient to have his/her children become fluent in English, the society still admires and appreciates bilinguals who are capable of keeping both languages apart, especially when they are learned.

Among the educated, a topic or a change in topic may determine language choice and the extent of switching (or not) that takes place in an informal situation. Since Nigerian languages are generally limited in use to home and community, subjects outside these domains are usually first encountered and assimilated in the classroom or books, and therefore the tendency to discuss them in English, the language of first experience. In making this observation, code-switching in this paper is not restricted as Poplack (2001:1) did in a paper to "the mixing, by bilinguals (or multilinguals), of two or more languages in discourse, often with no change of interlocutor or topic," but includes Kari's (2002:5) definition of code-switching and code-mixing, with preference for the latter.

Code-switching (the complete change from one language or code to another within the same conversational context by the same speaker) and code-mixing (the use of two or more languages or codes interchangeably in a given conversational context by the same speaker)

Many will consider code-mixing as defined by Kari as an aspect of code-switching, such as this definition by Kuntze (2000: 289): "Codeswitching is conventionally thought of as the mixing of two languages in an utterance," since the interchanging of languages in a given conversation could involve the use of not only words of the languages involved but also their different grammars and morphological features. According to Kuntze, "if the morphology and syntax are consistent with only one of the languages, any nonnative lexical item must be borrowed. If not, then it is a case of codeswitching" (p. 289). Similarly, Fasold (1984) considers the interchange of grammatical structures in an utterance as code-switching, when the grammatical structure of a clause is different from that of a preceding one. This may imply that lexical items may belong to one language and the grammatical structure to another. Such covert cases of code-switching are encountered in students' writings – deviant constructions, otherwise meaningless, that are direct translations of mother tongue. Many proficient speakers of English are unaware of deviant sentences and pronunciations in the Nigerian English repertoire (A lecturer could pronounce the word "vulcanizer" as "fokaniza," just as most people in the city say it). Therefore, first and second language learners are acquiring models of English riddled with deviants.

Code-switching in Nigeria is a characteristic of transitional bilingualism and may indicate a process of shift from traditional languages to English. This is unlike Hinglish, Franglais or the situation of Irish in Ireland where code-switching is encouraging the "maintenance" of an endangered language (O'Malley-Madec, 2004).

Non-Linguistic Factors Influencing Language Situation in Nigeria

Language is central to human interaction and is a product of human interaction. Language

reflects most relevant issues, or to what extent an element of culture is important to a people. Indeed, it may reflect a person's or people's process of development – as when a people shifting into a new culture adapt or lose their language to a new one. An example is the Basawa people (formerly, Bassa people) of the Middle Belt area who now speak Hausa having lost their own language through assimilation (Blench, 1998). The significance of a language to an individual or a people is depicted by how much of a person's life or cultural elements it portrays.

Nigeria is yet to pay attention to the need to kick-start a national culture that embodies the peoples' beliefs and other various cultural heritages, which are rapidly slipping away through urbanization and urban migration. Struggles for economic and political control in a nascent democracy by different interest/ethnic groups without any national creeds have been inimical to the development and maintenance of a national identity. There is no collective identity for the people to defend, and the languages are slipping away as well. Linguistic pride and strategic preservation of native languages as elements of cultural consciousness are yet trivial in the national development question. If cultural identity is essential in personal and national development, language that houses and preserves culture should not be ignored. Many factors in the present dispensation are influencing the language situation(s) in Nigeria, of which some issues in political developments, socio-economic self-preservation and education are highlighted here.

Political factors

The significance of numeric and political powers of linguistically diverse peoples who cling tenaciously to ethnicity has prevented Nigeria from evolving a national language, desirable as most people do realize it is. The three dominant peoples in the three distinct power

blocks that were amalgamated into Nigeria are geographically and linguistically separated by numerous ethnic groups and languages – Hausa-Fulani controlled the northern part of the country which is separated from the south by the Niger river at the left and Benue river at the right of the map (and both flow down together into the ocean after meeting at Lokoja, dividing the south into two) and then hundreds of languages; the south west is predominantly Yoruba, with the Edo language separating it from the third “power,” the Igbo who spill across the Niger from the south east. This natural arrangement has ensured that none of these power blocks can engulf any other politically or linguistically, especially since each block played significant roles in the struggle for independence. Furthermore, the Nigerian civil war (1967–70) which saw the Igbo, the least in numeric strength of the three power blocks, fighting for nearly three years to secede from the Nigeria arrangement has made it obvious that submergence of any group into the other(s) will be most difficult. This determination of each group to hold its own politically is most conspicuous in the resistance to the imposition of any of the key languages on the other groups as a national language.

Prior to the civil war, the east was dominated by the Igbo and the north by the Hausa-Fulani peoples and languages. The dominance of the Igbo in the south east was immediately curtailed after the war through state creation that separated the other ethnic groups from the Igbo society, reducing the latter's influence/dominance as well as the need for the former to learn Igbo for economic or political reasons. This process is also being enacted in the northern part of the country. The deteriorating political and ethno-linguistic (and religious) affiliations that obtained historically across the country for purposes of economic, religious, social and political interactions is hastened by

incessant state and local government creation. The linguistic manifestation of this trend is that more people in the older generation of minority groups than the present speak Igbo (Hausa or other dominant language). Obviously, geo-political and socio-economic changes affect people's perception and need for hitherto a dominant group's language.

The manifestation of linguistic differences of the recent (1980s–90s) balkanization of politico-geographic entities in Nigeria is most prominent in the north and Niger Delta areas, the core east and west being relatively homogenous linguistically. During the colonial administration, being literate in Hausa, the lingua franca of the northern area, could guarantee one employment (Blench, 1998). However, the carving out of more states overtime has increasingly diminished the political and religious powers of the Sokoto caliphate over the Nigerian Islamic "empire" among the northern peoples. Therefore, the place of the Hausa language as a lingua franca is fast diminishing, especially with non-Hausa-Fulani people resisting continued domination by the group. The Hausa language is no longer the language of education in northern states. Therefore, there will likely be a reduction in, if not a total halt of, an earlier trend of language assimilation in the Middle Belt observed by Blench (1998).

From another dimension, education in English is now a sine qua non for pursuing political ambition. A person that is not able to speak English will most likely be rejected by the literates and non-literates alike because of the realization that those without adequate education (in English) are unlikely to represent the people's interest adequately. Thus, to be relevant in the political scene, people who had hitherto made their marks in the political development of their areas get further education, and some others are taught to speak the English language. This however has not reduced the importance of

language as an element of political engineering and intrigues.

Socio-economic factors

As already mentioned, English is economically viable since most jobs require the prospective worker to be knowledgeable in the English language. The effect has been the abandoning of mother tongue to give the learning of the English language the attention it is deemed to deserve. Beyond this expectation, the mobility of people to other areas is another important factor that is inimical to language sustenance. People may leave their places of origin for another due to transfers. But most importantly, people mobility is most pronounced on language in cases where people relocate to other towns for long sojourns. On the other hand people may be forced by natural disasters such as desertification to seek other places of abode. Other causes are the dislocation of people in the Niger Delta areas due to oil explorations that destroy sources of livelihood. Also, wars between neighbours are contributing to the forcing out of people from their homelands.

The search for greener pastures takes natives away from where their presence could help maintain a language. Whereas in Kano, outsiders share *Sabo*, in other parts of the country, the Hausa-Fulani usually live together in *Sabos*. It is most likely that the latter arrangement helps to preserve the Hausa language outside its place of origin while the former will increase the use of the English language, Hausa or Pidgin among people from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds living, doing business and schooling together, as their own languages are compromised. Code-switching will be a common feature of the speech of visitors, especially where the visitors' traditional language is spoken at home.

When a new language is not a necessity for survival, there is little incentive for learning it.

Although the Igbo, probably the most mobile of Nigerian people, are found in every town and village, the immigrant often knows enough English that enables him sell his goods – he may learn enough local language to get by. Generally, the women seem more interested in and adept at learning the language of a new place than the men.

A major practice that helps to sustain Hausa-Fulani and Igbo languages outside their ecology is travels to the homeland for festivities during the year. Because link is maintained with homeland, the Igbo and Hausa pass on their languages to their offspring, unlike some parents from other groups who do not take part in such rituals or have plans of taking their children back to their traditional homes eventually. If there is no interaction and renewal of bonds between emigrants and homeland, increasing population of potential speakers of a language (Blench, 1998) will not work in favour of perpetuating the language to next generations.

Education

Despite falling education standards, the education industry has been witnessing tremendous growth. Ironically, income inequalities and snail-speed industrialization make tertiary education about the only option open to a Nigerian youth for self-advancement and meaningful preoccupation of idle time. Under this dispensation, parents realize that the key to a better tomorrow in Nigeria is English – even at the forfeiture of mother tongue. In fact, mother tongue is seen as a hindrance to learning English and thus, a child can grow up in Lagos without learning the parents' language or the Eko Yoruba. Without intervention, this trend is likely to continue in Nigerian cities and towns, enthroning English (and Pidgin English) as the Nigerian language. In less metropolitan areas in Ondo State, Ayeomoni (2006) assessed the

process of language use among students and found that:

. . . in a continuum . . . Yoruba starts to be the dominant language at the pre-primary period of the child's language acquisition; a balance is struck between Yoruba and English . . . at the primary school level, with English being used mainly in the classroom and Yoruba often used outside the classroom; while the English language is pre-dominant at the secondary school stage. . . English replaces Yoruba as a dominant language eventually (Ayeomoni, 2006: 93).

Ayeomoni (2006) further observes that code-switching manifests early in primary school and correlates positively with an individual's educational attainment. We are witnessing in Nigeria similar characteristics of language shift observed by Taumoeofolau et al. (2002) of languages in Manukau (New Zealand). They observed loss of formal register over time (in Nigerian, sayings and proverbs are disappearing from people's speech); children are learning English as first language, schooling is having negative impact on local languages, English is taking over the public domain, and children have problem with quick recall of vocabulary, leading to this typical observation:

She also indicated how the shift is taking place in many of the homes. Although her parents usually spoke to her in Samoan, she tended to respond in English . . . This nonreciprocal use of the community language between the generations is a pattern that is showing up . . . (Taumoeofolau et al., 2002)

The use of Nigerian languages in homes in cities among literate (and semiliterate) parents now depends on their views about language need

and acquisition – many do not realize that the possession of many languages gives the speaker more linguistic facilities and encourage more complex thinking, especially in an environment in which the model of English available to the learner is too limited. There is no evidence that those with English as first language perform better than those with two languages – the Wole Soyinkas, Chinua Achebes, J.P Clarks, Cyprain Ekwensis, Chukwuemeka Ikes, Ngugi wa Thiongos and a host of African writers are yet to be matched by this generation of students who are denied the rich cultural heritage these tapped into to produce their celebrated works.

Unfortunately, facilities provided for teaching any language are grossly inadequate. Lack of language teachers ensures that Nigerian languages are not taught at all in some schools; while the absence of books and other necessary materials, in addition to poor management of the teaching/learning process, especially in public schools, make it difficult to teach English and Nigerian languages in meaningful ways. Thus, bilingual learners have skewed knowledge of the languages they control: oral skills with no literacy skills in mother tongue, and literacy skills with poorly developed oral skills in English. With these problems many students are placed in conditions that discourage sufficient and timely development of the cognition, since this also depends on language processing.

**Code-switching
and Language Maintenance,
Shift and Death in Nigeria**

A hypothetical situation in which three viable national languages were allowed to evolve may have had its draw-backs (for example language assimilation), but it could have stabilized the language question. Right now there is hardly a language policy being implemented with any vigour; and this has negative implications for

national identity and culture in the long-run, and poor execution of education for all in the immediate. The second aspect of language planning, corpus planning, is also not receiving adequate attention from either government or the language owners; further denigrating Nigerian languages in education. This is unlike in other developing countries, such as Malaysia where some subjects are taught in Malay and others in English, making it necessary for a prospective teacher to be literate in both languages (Gaudart, 1996). Christopher (2004: 7) suggests that the language owners in Nigeria should promote, preserve and redeem their languages from extinction, rather than wait on government. It becomes more imperative because all the factors recognized by Blench (1998: 9) as being responsible for language maintenance will soon cease to hold or remain important as education increases. The factors include: “a) absence of adjacent culturally dominant groups, b) endogamous marriage practices, c) maintenance of traditional religion/cultural pride, d) existence of an orthography, e) government oppression and neglect, f) remoteness, g) access to media, h) demography”. So far illiteracy and the remoteness of languages from the metropolis have proved the most effective elements in the sustenance/preservation of Nigerian languages. Mühlhäusler’s (1996: 274) observation is therefore true of Nigeria:

. . . one of the main processes by which traditional languages lose their power is through the loss of functions and domains. Most noticeable among these is the function of education where a few metropolitan languages have displaced the majority of the world’s languages as sources of knowledge.

If Nigeria’s language process would mirror that described of the Pacific by Mühlhäusler

(1996), it will hopefully attain the fifth phase (the second phase is not applicable) through a conscious effort to retain local languages (Please see below). At the moment, many parts of the country are at phase three, tending towards four, “monolingualism in a powerful language,” with some individuals already operating at this level. Equitable bilingualism requires effort which at the moment is missing in the Nigerian system.

1. use of vernaculars
2. attempts to impose monolingualism in a metropolitan language
3. transitional bilingualism
4. monolingualism in a powerful language
5. equitable bilingualism (Mühlhäusler, 1996:142).

Nigerian languages are being allowed to lose out in the public domain and are becoming less prestigious than English, and there is little incentive for learning them. English is fast becoming the dominant language in the public domain and in some cases at home as well, because of its perceived political and socio-economic values. Silva-Corvalaán (1996:7) observes that:

The result is more or less massive changes in the secondary language. The extent of these changes correlates with the speakers’ level of bilingual proficiency and with extralinguistic factors. The occurrence of the changes

is further favoured and accelerated by (a) absence of normative pressures on the subordinate language; (b) restriction in the range of communicative uses of the subordinate language; and (c) speakers’ positive attitudes towards the superordinate language combined with either neutral or negative attitudes toward the subordinate one.

The alert on the looming language extinction may sound premature in today’s Nigeria where all the languages seem to be holding their own. However, the findings of a study by Taumoeofolau et al (2002) about the change in demography are instructive:

. . . it is necessary to remember the age structure of the Pasifika communities. They have comparatively few older members and many younger people . . . So although a high proportion of older speakers may be fluent . . . they make up a rather small proportion of the total community population.

Globalization and ICT are efficient in extinguishing languages but can be advantageously exploited, not only to preserve languages but also to strengthen them through worldwide teaching and interaction among people across space.

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Лингвистическое разнообразие, переключение языковых кодов и языковая ассимиляция в Нигерии

Н.М. Кристофер

*Отделение языковой коммуникации и лингвистики,
Ибаданский университет,
Нигерия, Ибадан*

Социально-политическое и экономическое развитие Нигерии способствует тому, что английский язык начинает преобладать над местными наречиями, что приводит к ситуации, когда поддерживать местные языки сложно, и они постепенно вымирают. Смена языковых кодов между английским и нигерийским языками находится на этапе языковой ассимиляции с английским языком и постепенным исчезновением местных наречий. Развитию данной лингвистической ситуации также способствуют: значительное лингвистическое разнообразие, устойчивое сопротивление насильственному сохранению языка, зарождение демократизации, мобильность людей в стремлении выжить в плохих экономических условиях, отсутствие эффективной языковой политики, пренебрежение обучением детей местным языкам дома и в школе, доминирование и целесообразность обучения английскому языку для социально-экономической жизни населения. В Нигерии происходит лингвистический переход, который может привести к исчезновению многих местных наречий, если не обратить внимание на данную ситуацию. Спасти местный язык (в Нигерии около 500 диалектов) могут только сами его носители.

Ключевые слова: переключение языковых кодов, языковые контакты, смерть/исчезновение языка, поддержание языка, языковая ассимиляция, лингвистическое разнообразие.
