Investigation of Factors Contributing to Indigenous Language Decline in Nigeria

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The declining fortunes of some of Nigeria's indigenous languages are examined in this paper. A multi-dimensional indigenous language-use questionnaire was constructed to elicit data through a survey carried out in some Nigerian cities. The aim was to acquire relevant data on indigenous language ability and possible causes of language-use decline. The results from the survey showed that there is a low level of indigenous language literacy among most of the languages surveyed. The proportion of language use at home was also seen to be generally low for most of the surveyed languages, below the 70% threshold for virile languages. Several reasons were adduced for the non-transfer of indigenous language ability from parent to children and tests of statistical independence carried out showed that the respondents' perception that their language is inferior to English, belief that the child will be limited in school, negligence and inability of parents to speak their heritage language were the major reasons adduced for the decline. A logistic regression analysis of the data also showed that acquisition of language literacy depended on a person's place of childhood, age, level of education, frequency of use at home and the indigenous language spoken by the person's mother.

Keywords: *indigenous languages, language literacy, test of independence,* intergenerational transmission, logistic regression

1. Introduction

The world today is littered with thousands of languages and several hundreds have been documented to have become extinct (Crystal, 2000). Of the known 7,102 living languages, 22% of them have been categorized as 'in trouble', 13% dying, while there is a loss rate of about 6 languages per year (Lewis *et al.*, 2015).

While the origin of languages has not been fully established (Fernando, *et al*., 2010), it is known that new languages generally arise through geographical isolation when former dialects become mutually unintelligible to the speakers and when languages get combined, that is, when *creolization* occurs (Fernando, *et al.*, 2010).

Krauss is credited with the four-way classification of languages: extinct, moribund, safe and endangered languages (Whaley, 2003). On the global scale, it is a very difficult task to obtain global estimates of the rate of indigenous language loss, and this task goes beyond the confines of linguistics (Whaley, 2003) as statistical considerations and principles must be reflected in any estimate obtained for it to be of greater utility.

For a variety of reasons, speakers of many smaller, less dominant languages stop using their heritage language and begin using another (Nuwer, 2014; Lewis, *et al.*, 2015). This shift manifests in declining levels of intergenerational transmission of language ability from parent to children. When this shift continues, a language may become dormant or extinct, existing perhaps only in recordings and written records and transcriptions (Nuwer, 2014). Languages which had not been adequately documented disappear completely, under such extreme circumstances.

The aim of this study was to examine the indigenous language-use patterns of Nigerians especially in urban centres of the country. The objectives were to: elicit language use data on some of Nigeria's indigenous languages to ascertain their status; determine the major reasons for lack of transfer of indigenous language ability from parent to children; and ascertain the indigenous language literacy level of urban dwellers in Nigeria.

It is claimed that more than 400 Nigerian languages are endangered (Ohiri-Aniche, 2014), mainly due to neglect and denigration. It is of great concern that Nigeria's indigenous languages are not being handed over to the children in home and schools. A recent language study showed that on the average, 25% of children below 11 years are unable to speak their parent's indigenous language (Ohiri-Aniche, 2014). If this trend is not checked, it is projected that many Nigerian languages will be in extinction within 50 to 70 years, that is, between 2064 and 2084 (Ohiri-Aniche, 2014).

Due to the indigenous language diversity that permeates the Nigerian space, coupled with years of mutual ethnic mistrust, no Nigerian indigenous language can stand as the national language of the country. English language is thus the only national language of Nigeria, although there are three major languages – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo and hundreds of minority languages. The national language policy on education stipulates that the indigenous language of an area should be the medium of instruction in primary schools along with English (Ogunmodimu, 2015). However, this mother tongue-based multilingual education policy has not been fully integrated into the education curricula of primary schools and there is widespread non-compliance across the country. Language planning to sustain dithering indigenous languages in Nigeria is also non-existent (Ogunmodimu, 2015), as the full scale of the problem has not been established due to data paucity.

The importance of using the indigenous language at home, as a critical component of its continued survival, was captured by Crystal (2000). A survey of indigenous languages in Canada showed that the viability of a language is directly reflected in its proportion of home use: in the more viable languages, 70% of the population used their indigenous language at home, while the corresponding proportion for the less viable language was about 30% or less (Crystal, 2000). Another critical factor established by Crystal (2000) was that the mean age of the language-speaking population shows the extent to which language transmission between generations has been successful. The lower the mean age, the more

successful the parents have been in getting young people to speak the language (Crystal, 2000). A rise in the mean speaker age was established as a strong predictor of a language's progress towards extinction (Crystal, 2000).

In situations where there is a visible competition between two languages, Batibo (2005) listed some likely causes of language endangerment as: the degree of pressure from the stronger language (political domination, socio-economic attraction or social gains); amount of resistance by the weaker language (strong traditional or religious attachment, strong sense of self-assertion and determination); and advantages inherent in joining the community of the stronger language speakers (language abandonment to enhance integration).

Mufwene (2005) adduced some of the reasons for indigenous language decline as lack of literacy, lack of pride and of prestige, numerical attrition of potential speakers, population movements and inter-ethnic marriages.

Michieka (2012) examined the pattern of language use among Kenyan university students to ascertain whether multilingualism was thriving or the local languages are threatened by a potential shift. The following factors were adduced by Michieka (2012) as factors that impact on the growth of indigenous languages: national language policies, context of the individual's upbringing (whether rural or urban), parents' educational levels, nature of parents' marriages (inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic), users' attitudes towards the language, etc.

Anyanwu (2012) examined the nexus between the main indigenous languages of Warri, Nigeria (Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri) and Pidgin English. A survey showed that the inhabitants were more proficient in Pidgin English than their individual indigenous languages, even though most of the inhabitants were of the three main tribes. Thus, Anyanwu (2012) established that Pidgin English had an overriding influence on the indigenous languages of Warri, and was fast eroding their continued existence in the city.

Hassan (2015) explored a gender perspective in language revitalization efforts in Canada, and established that European colonization, globalization, discriminatory government policies and religion were the major reasons for the loss of indigenous languages in Canada.

In a survey of teachers of the indigenous Yoruba language in South-Western Nigeria, Aladesote *et al.* (2016) postulated that English language was the main reason for the declining use of Yoruba as a language of communication of the region. The claim by Aladesote *et al.* (2016) that the Yoruba language is going to extinction was not however supported with sufficient empirical evidence.

2. Materials and Methods

Indigenous language use data were obtained via national survey with the aid of a multi-dimensional questionnaire structured in such a way that the respondent could provide language-use information for up to three generation of persons, namely the parents, siblings and the children, if applicable.

Ideally, data on language endangerment could be extracted from national census returns, as is the case with Canada and Wales (Wyburn and Hayward, 2009), but there is an absence of population census data relating to indigenous language dynamics in Nigeria. In fact, there has been a deliberate policy to exclude ethnicity considerations from national census questionnaires (Musa, 2005).

The questionnaire contained 19 brief questions with the goal of eliciting information on the basic demographic characteristics of the respondent, indigenous language use ability of the respondent's sibling as well as the respondent's children, if any. The questionnaire also contained questions relating to the possible reasons for lack of intergenerational transfer of language ability from parent to children.

The survey covered some parts of southern Nigeria, capturing the scenario in Yoruba and Igbo languages, two of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The other major Nigerian language, Hausa, has been shown to be very vibrant, and in fact, may be eroding other smaller languages in Northern Nigeria as it keeps shrinking the domains of use of such minority languages in the region (Akubuiro, 2015; Ogunmodimu, 2015).

The full survey was conducted in Abuja, Asaba, Ekpoma, Lagos and Warri, capturing indigenous language abilities of several languages in the stated locations. Data elicited from these locations contained the following languages of interest: Edo, Esan, Igbo, Isoko, Urhobo and Yoruba.

The target population for the survey was urban and semi-urban residents, as indigenous languages are virtually stable in the rural areas where it is often the basic language of communication.

A total of 606 respondents provided language use data on themselves, their parents, siblings and their children, if any. Hence, the data contained information on over 5,000 persons across three generations.

The chi-square test of independence was used to examine the perception of respondents on language decline on the basis of their language or tribe. Also, logistic regression analysis was carried out to establish the factors that contributed significantly to indigenous language ability, indexed by indigenous language literacy.

The chi-square test of independence is used to test whether the opinions of the respondents significantly differ along ethnic lines. This will enable us to isolate the factors that were tribe-dependent. According to Agresti (2002), this test is appropriate for categorical data of such nature.

The Pearson's X^2 statistic for the *r x c* contingency table (r rows and c columns) is

$$X^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{r}\sum_{j=1}^{c}\frac{\left(n_{ij} - m_{ij}\right)^2}{m_{ij}}$$

where represents the observed frequency of the i[th] row and j[th] column of the contingency table, and $m_{ij} = E(n_{ij})$ is the corresponding expected frequency for the $(ij)^{th}$ cell.

The expected cell frequency is estimated as

$$m_{ij} = \frac{n_{i.}n_{.j}}{n_{..}}$$

The null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis are given as:

H_0: The opinion about the factor is independent of the language.

H_1: The opinion about the factor is not independent of the language.

The decision rule is to reject the null hypothesis if the X^2 value is greater than the corresponding value from the chi-square distribution with (r-1)(c-1) degrees of freedom, at a pre-specified level of significance of the test (α =0.05, or α=0.01). Otherwise, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

If the null hypothesis is not rejected, then all the ethnic groups basically have the same opinion about the question and the differences in proportion are due to chance (Bluman, 2012). On the other hand, if the null hypothesis is rejected, then one or more groups have a different opinion about the question from the others. It should be noted however that rejection does not mean that one group agrees to the question and the other disagrees. Perhaps both groups agree to it or both disagree to it, but in significantly different proportions.

If the null hypothesis is rejected, then there could be a relationship between the variables, and the Pearson's contingency coefficient could be computed to determine the strength (weak, moderate or strong) of the associations (Agresti, 2002; Bluman, 2012).

The Pearson's contingency coefficient, C is given as

$$C = \sqrt{\frac{X^2}{X^2 + n}}$$

where X^2 is the value of the test statistic and n is the sum of frequencies of the cells. The contingency coefficient lies between 0 and 1, and is interpreted the same way the correlation coefficient is interpreted, with values close to zero implying weak association and values close to 1 meaning strong association.

The main interest of the chi-square tests of independence was to examine the factors for which there is unanimity of opinions irrespective of the ethnic group as contributing to the decline in indigenous language transfer from parents to children. In those instances where a significant result ensues, it is also of interest to measure the strength of the relationship, using the contingency coefficient.

Logistic regression is used to model binary or multinomial outcomes of a response variable on the basis of several independent variables. Binary logistic regression provides an elegant way of transforming categorical outcomes of the dependent variable into a bounded continuous probability called the odds ratio.

Logistic regression analysis is part of generalized linear models, which are characterized by their response distribution and a link function, which transfers the mean value to a scale in which the relationship to background variables is linear or additive (Agresti, 2007). In the case of binary logistic regression, the response distribution is binomial while the link function is the log odds (or logit) (Agresti, 2007).

Consider the general binary logistic regression model with k explanatory predictors ($x_1, x_2, \cdots, x_k$) on a binary response Y, with success probability p

$$logit(\Pr(Y = 1)) = \log_e\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \cdots + \beta_k x_k$$

The parameters β_i, $i = 1,2,\cdots,k$ represent the effect of x_i on the log odds that Y=1, holding the other explanatory variables fixed, while α, the intercept of the model, represents the log odds of the event Y=1 when all the predictor variables

are zero. The odds ratio exp (β_i) is the multiplicative effect on the odds of a unit increase in x_i, at fixed levels of the $x_j's, j \neq i$.

There is no error term in the logistic model, due to the fact that the probability of an event is being estimated directly and this in turn determines the variability of the binary outcomes (Dalgard, 2008). The distributional assumptions on the error term in linear regression analysis are thus absent when dealing with logistic regression.

The parameters of the logistic regression model can be estimated via maximum likelihood using the Newton-Raphson iterative procedure. The likelihood function $L(\beta)$ is the joint probability of the observed dataset for varying parameters (Dalgard, 2008).

The likelihood ratio test compares the log likelihood L_1 for the full model against the log-likelihood L_0 when the null hypothesis is true.

The appropriate hypothesis for testing parameter inclusivity in the model is given as

$$H_0 : \beta_i = 0 \; for \; all \; i = 1,2,\cdots,k$$

The test statistic is

$$LR = -2(L_0 - L_1)$$

When the null hypothesis is not rejected, the LR statistic has a chi-squared distribution with degrees of freedom equal to the difference between the parameters of the two models.

Some commonly used goodness-of-fit measures for logistic regression are the pseudo-R^2 statistics – Cox & Snell R^2 and Nagelkerke R^2 and they are interpreted the same way as the statistic in linear regression, as the proportion of the variation in the data that is explained by the model.

The model sensitivity (the percentage of true positives) and specificity (the percentage of true negatives) also provide a measure of the strength of the classification.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 reflects the frequency of use of the indigenous language both in private and public domains. Table 2 presents the proportion of respondents whose parents were of the same tribe. Table 3 contains the indigenous language literacy profile of the respondents. It reflects the pattern of language use across the surveyed tribes. Table 4 captures the reasons given by respondents for the lack of intergenerational language ability across the various ethnic groups and the corresponding proportion of respondents. Table 5 summarizes the result of fitting an appropriate binary logistic regression model of indigenous language literacy (represented by ability to write in the language) on several predictor variables.

Figure 1 shows the language ability curve constructed for each of the surveyed languages, and pinpoints the pattern of indigenous language ability from the lowest level (language understanding) to the highest level (ability to write in the indigenous language).

Table 1. Percentage (%) use of indigenous language at home (H) and in public (H)

Tribe	Never		Hardly		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently	
	H	P	H	P	H	P	H	P	H	P
Igbo	2.1	4.3	3.5	10.7	6.3	12.1	33.6	57.9	54.5	15.0
Yoruba	0	3.6	5.4	8.9	7.1	10.7	19.6	50.0	67.9	26.8
Urhobo	15.3	19.3	11.0	16.8	12.7	22.7	32.2	31.1	28.8	10.1
Esan	4.8	9.4	8.3	12.9	13.1	20.0	21.4	29.4	52.4	28.2
Edo	8.3	15.2	2.1	15.2	10.4	8.7	22.9	32.6	56.3	28.3
Isoko	0	3.4	6.9	13.8	10.3	20.7	44.8	55.2	38.0	6.9
Others	1.0	6.1	10.0	18.4	4.0	9.2	32	54.1	53.0	12.2

Table 2. Percentage of respondents whose parents were from the same tribe

Tribe	Igbo	Yoruba	Urhobo	Esan	Edo	Isoko	Others	Total
Percentage	92%	84%	70%	92%	77%	70%	85%	83%

Table 3. Percentage (%) of respondents with indigenous language inability

Language	Don't Understand	Don't Speak	Can't Read	Can't Write
Igbo	2.2	3.6	32.1	41.1
Yoruba	1.8	3.6	14.3	16.1
Urhobo	15.8	27.5	57.9	70.6
Esan	2.4	11.9	45.2	50.0
Edo	6.4	13.0	53.2	61.7
Isoko	3.4	13.8	62.1	58.6
Others	2.0	8.8	34.7	42.0

Table 4. Percentage (%) of respondents by tribe who affirmed the various reasons for lack of transmission of indigenous languages from parent to children, together with the Chi-squared test of independence and the contingency coefficients

Reason / Language	a	b	c	d	e	f	g
Igbo	49.3	60.4	22.2	29.2	38.2	45.8	31.3
Yoruba	58.9	71.4	41.1	41.1	35.7	51.8	33.9
Urhobo	38.8	42.1	24.8	22.3	14.9	45.5	33.9
Esan	34.1	63.5	24.7	25.9	18.8	44.7	27.1
Edo	41.7	66.7	20.8	20.8	35.4	43.8	39.6
Isoko	56.7	63.3	30.0	16.7	26.7	60.0	36.7
Others	51.0	45.1	32.4	28.4	27.5	57.8	32.4
X^2	14.49	25.73	10.37	10.04	24.47	7.14	2.74
p-value	0.025	0.001	0.110	0.120	0.001	0.310	0.840
Contingency coefficient	0.157	0.207	-	-	0.202	-	-

Note: Key: a – Inter-tribal marriages; b – Civilization and Western culture; c – Feeling of inferiority of the language to English; d – Belief that the child may be limited in school if he imbibed his indigenous language; e – Parents living far away from their homeland; f – Negligence of parents; g – Parents are unable to speak their indigenous language.

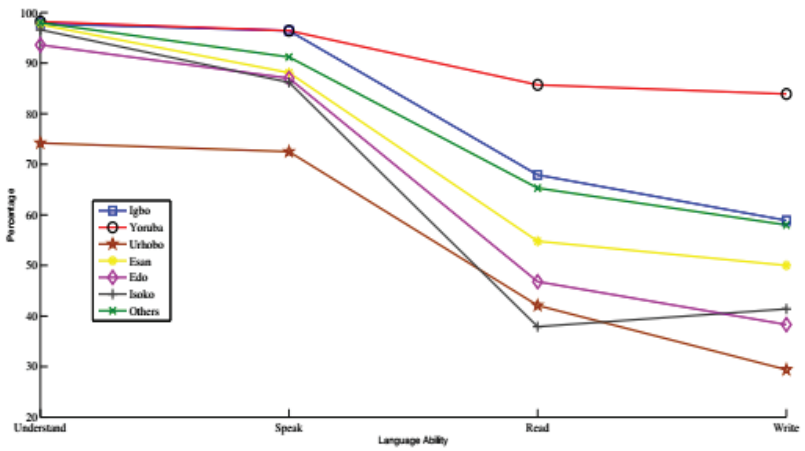

Figure 1. Plots of indigenous language ability curve of some Nigerian languages

Table 5. Estimates of model parameters of logistic regression of the respondent's language literacy on several demographic variables and other factors, together with the odds ratio and 95% confidence interval for the estimated parameters

Predictor	Reference Category	β	S.E.	p-value	exp (β)	95% C I for exp (β)	
						Lower	Upper
Intercept		-2.969	0.923	0.001	0.051		
Location of respondent (Abuja)	Warri	0.946	0.473	0.045	2.575	1.020	6.503
Location of respondent (Ekpoma)	Warri	1.931	0.721	0.007	6.893	1.678	28.323
Sex (Male)	Female	0.753	0.323	0.020	2.124	1.129	3.996
Age	-	0.052	0.015	0.001	1.053	1.022	1.085
Educational status (Primary)	Tertiary	-3.992	1.442	0.006	0.018	0.001	0.312
Educational status (Secondary)	Tertiary	-0.909	0.421	0.031	0.403	0.177	0.919
Place of childhood (Village)	City far away	1.662	0.409	0.001	5.268	2.365	11.731
Place of childhood (City close to village)	City far away	1.566	0.397	0.001	4.788	2.199	10.426
Mother's tribe of respondent (Yoruba)	Isoko	3.475	0.975	0.001	32.283	4.780	218.043
Language use at home (Hardly)	Frequently	-3.349	0.651	0.001	0.035	0.010	0.126
Language use at home (Rarely)	Frequently	-2.193	0.611	0.001	0.112	0.034	0.369
Language use at home (Sometimes)	Frequently	-1.957	0.354	0.001	0.141	0.071	0.283

A close scrutiny of table 1 revealed some important characteristics of the respondents in relation to the use of their indigenous language both at home and in public. All the languages surveyed fell short of the 70% threshold of usage at home, as established by Crystal (2000). Obviously, the tribes with higher percentages that never speak the language are at greater risk than those tribes with lower percentages. It could be seen that the Yoruba and Edo languages had the highest percentages of frequent use both in private and public domains, close to the 70% threshold. On the other end, the Urhobo language could be seen as having the lowest percentages of frequent use in both domains. There are some patterns visible from the data presented in table 1. It would seem that the languages that are stable (Yoruba, Igbo and Edo) show a marked increase in percentage of use from the lowest level (Never used) to the highest (Frequently used), while for languages that are not sufficiently transferred from parents to children (Urhobo and Isoko), there is a seemingly even distribution within the various levels of language use (never, hardly, rarely, sometimes, frequently).

From table 2, it is seen that at least 70% of the respondents had parents from the same tribe, with the Igbo and Esan languages exhibiting a high of 92%, while the overall proportion of respondents with parents from the same tribe was 83%. The implication of this finding is that, inter-tribal marriages (at least among the sampled languages) were not commonly contracted.

Table 3 shows that there is a marked rise in language inability across all the languages surveyed. The pattern of this rise showed the percentage of those who did not understand the language is smallest, followed by that of those who could not speak, then those who were unable to read in their indigenous language, and finally those who were unable to write in their language. This pattern was more pronounced in some of the languages than others. In fact, looking at the Urhobo language, it could be seen that it had the highest percentage of respondents who could not understand the language (15.8%), those who could not speak the language (27.5%), and those who were unable to write in the language (70.6%). This is indicative of the threat on the continued survival of Urhobo language, as a substantial part of the population is lacking what may be termed *indigenous language literacy* (ability to read and write in the language). On the other hand, a close look at the language inability profile for the Yoruba language revealed quite useful insights. For the Yorubas, it was seen that they had the lowest percentages of language inability across the various levels. Thus, the Yoruba respondents exhibited the highest levels of indigenous language literacy among all the tribes surveyed (up to 85%).

This finding, placing Yoruba far above other languages in terms of indigenous language literacy may be as a result of conscious policy efforts by policy makers in Yoruba land to entrench Yoruba language literacy among students in schools. With the availability of teachers and teaching aids, together with the fact that Yoruba is the lingua franca in many Yoruba urban centres, it has been possible for people to have basic literacy in the language in a formal setting, the school. It is also a fact that, for a long time, Yoruba subject has been made compulsory for students at the secondary school level.

The scenario of widespread indigenous language illiteracy becomes more disturbing when viewed together with the fact that the sampled population across the various languages were mainly persons with English language literacy, having obtained basic education. Based on information available in table 3, it would seem that apart from Igbo and Yoruba, all the other languages surveyed were seriously deficient in indigenous language literacy, pointing to the possible fact that the minority languages may be suffering from language illiteracy, which is a precursor to the gradual decline of such languages.

A graphical overview of the pattern of language ability across the surveyed languages, presented in figure 1 showed that indigenous language literacy was very low among most of the surveyed languages. This could be seen as an indicator of the wellbeing of the language. As in other components of the language survey, the Yoruba (high) and Urhobo (low) languages are seen to be on the extremes of this *language ability curve*.

From the data in table 4, the three leading reasons for the decline in language transfer given by respondents irrespective of their tribe were: (i) inter-tribal marriages, (ii) civilization and Western culture, and (iii) negligence of parents. Further analysis of the data using Chi-squared test of independence between the

tribes and the responses revealed that items (a), (b) and (e) were significant at the 5% level of significance. The implication is that there was a significant difference between the tribes on their response to the following factors contributing to the lack of transmission of indigenous language ability:

(i) inter-tribal marriages;

(ii) civilization and western culture; and

(iii) parents were living far away from the homeland of their indigenous languages.

For these results that were significant, the corresponding contingency coefficients were computed to determine the strength of the association between the tribe and the perception of the respondent. The overall sum of the frequencies was 572, hence n=572. The contingency coefficients established a weak relationship, implying that even though the null hypothesis was rejected, there was still a very low level of dependency between the variables.

A similar analysis was carried out on the basis of some demographic variables like gender, marital status and the respondent's place of childhood in relation to the factors listed in table 4. The results showed that there was no significant difference between respondents on the basis of gender, while the feeling of inferiority of the language to English was significant on the basis of the marital status of the respondents. Finally, on the basis of the place of childhood of the respondents, the perception that parents living far away from their homeland was the only significant result. All the tests were carried out at the 5% level of significance.

For the logistic regression analysis, the reference categories were chosen as the last group of each categorical independent variable. The Nagelkerke was obtained as 0.524 which implied that about 52.4% of the variation in the data was accounted for by the model. The sensitivity of classification was 83.2%, while the specificity was 73.6%, thereby yielding an overall 79% correct classification.

Table 5 lists all the predictor variables having significant contribution to the logistic regression model. The variables were: Location (Abuja and Ekpoma were significant), Sex, Age, Educational status (primary and secondary school were significant), the respondent's place of childhood (village and city near the village were significant), the respondent's Mother's tribe (Yoruba was significant), and Language use at home (hardly, rarely and sometimes were significant).

The standard errors (S.E.) of the estimates, as shown in table 5, were quite small for most of the estimated parameters, and these in turn, yielded smaller confidence bounds for the odds ratio, exp (β). The estimated odds ratio for the variables that had significant effect on the model was between 0.018 and 32.283.

The odds ratios illuminated some interesting perspectives on the scope of indigenous language decline across several Nigerian languages. It showed that as a person moved away from his homeland, the higher the likelihood that he would not be language literate. Therefore, persons who grew up in their villages were more than five times more likely to be language literate than their counterparts who grew up in cities far away from their villages (the reference category). The location of the respondent also had a significant effect on the model, and the odds ratio revealed that a respondent in Abuja and Ekpoma were between 2 and 7 times more likely to have indigenous language literacy than the respondents in Warri (the reference category). Males were also found to be twice more likely to have language literacy than the females. Persons with tertiary education were more

likely to be language literate than those with primary or secondary education. It was also seen that the frequency of usage of one's indigenous language at home affects language literacy – persons who used their languages frequently at home had greater odds of being language literate than those who used the language sometimes, or rarely.

Finally, the logistic regression analysis showed that the tribe of a person's mother is also critical in acquiring language literacy. There is an intuitive explanation of this result also. In most Nigerian homes, the mother has greater interaction with the children especially in their formative years. Hence, she is in the best position to impart basic language ability on the children as they progress through their formative years.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Most of the surveyed languages in the study were deficient in the frequent use of the indigenous language in both private and public domains. The Yoruba language was closest to the 70% threshold while the Urhobo language had the lowest percentage of use, with grave implications for the continued vitality of the language. The threats to the continued vitality of the Urhobo language also tallies with the conclusions of Ikoba and Jolayemi (2016 and 2019), who viewed the language decline scenario from a different modelling perspective.

Indigenous language literacy was very low among most of the surveyed languages, except Yoruba and Igbo. In order to reverse the trend of indigenous language illiteracy, there should be a robust policy framework to cater for the challenges of not having teachers and materials for teaching the indigenous language in the homeland, as well as making such indigenous languages to be compulsory subjects in their localities at secondary school level, at least.

Inter-tribal marriage was not a major factor contributing to the decline of indigenous languages. The perception of inferiority of the indigenous language to English, that the child may be limited in school if he imbibed his heritage language, negligence and inability of parents to impart their languages to their children were considered as factors contributing significantly to the decline of the languages.

Demographic variables like the age, gender, educational status and place of childhood, together with frequency of use of the language at home were significant factors that impacted on the language literacy of a person, as shown by the logistic regression analysis conducted on the survey data.

The need for a coherent and workable national language policy is imperative for the continued vitality of Nigeria's indigenous languages. It is recommended that brief questions on ethnicity and indigenous language ability be included in national census questionnaires. The utility of such data on is of great benefit to the sustenance of such languages and their embedded cultures. Census data on indigenous languages will also provide useful ancillary information for subsequent surveys on indigenous languages.

In the absence of relevant historical data on indigenous languages, a national survey should be conducted to ascertain the status of any indigenous language. The developed indigenous language questionnaire used in this study could also be usedas the survey instrument to undertake the national survey.

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

Dear Sir/ Madam

Survey on The Level of Decline of Some Indigenous Nigerian Languages

We are conducting a national survey that seeks to pinpoint the level of indigenous language decline across various ethnic groups of Nigeria.

We would very much appreciate your participation in this survey. The information you provide will assist in clarifying the status of your indigenous language, as well as help the government, and even the concerned tribes, to evolve ways of tackling the imminent death of our indigenous languages, if desired. The survey usually takes less than five minutes to complete. Whatever information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will not be divulged in any way.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary. If you should come to any question you don't want to answer, just go on to the next question. However, we hope you will participate in the survey since your views are very important.

(Researcher)

1. Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age last birthday:
3. Marital Status: ☐Single ☐Married ☐Divorced ☐Widowed ☐Separated
4. Educational Status: ☐Primary ☐Secondary ☐Tertiary ☐No Education
5. Where did you grow up?

   ☐My village ☐City near my village ☐City far from my village
6. At what age did you get married?_____ *(Leave blank if you are not married)*
7. What are the tribes of your parents?

   Father: _____

   Mother: _____
8. How many children did your parents have?

   Males:_____ Females:_____
9. How many of these children could speak your father's language?

   Males:_____ Females:_____

10. How many of these children could speak your mother's language?

    Males:_____ Females:_____
    (Leave blank if both parents are from the same tribe)

11. How many children do you have?

    Males:_____ Females:_____

12. How many of your children can speak their father's language?

    Males:_____ Females:_____
    (Leave blank if you do not have any children)

13. How many of your children can speak their mother's language?

    Males:_____ Females:_____
    (Leave blank if you do not have any children)

14. Do you understand your language? ☐Yes ☐No

15. Do you speak your language? ☐Yes ☐No

16. Can you read in your language? ☐Yes ☐No

17. Can you write in your language? ☐Yes ☐No

18. In a week, how often do you communicate with your language?

    i. At home:

    ☐Frequently ☐Sometimes ☐Rarely ☐Hardly ☐Never

    ii. In public:

    ☐Frequently ☐Sometimes ☐Rarely ☐Hardly ☐Never

19. Indicate the reason(s) for the lack of transmission of indigenous language from parents to children? (Tick as appropriate).

    ☐ Inter-tribal marriages
    ☐ Civilization and Western culture
    ☐ They feel their language is inferior to English language
    ☐ They believe the child might be limited in school if they learn the language
    ☐ The parents are far away from their state of origin
    ☐ Negligence of parents
    ☐ The parents are unable to speak their language