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Patterns of Language Use: An Assessment of Etulo Linguistic Vitality in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

Minority languages in Nigeria are amongst the most understudied in the world, this has made most of the languages that are almost all endangered to suffer from low vitality; this study looks at the patterns of Etulo language use with a view of identifying the domains of use for the singular purpose of assessing the linguistic vitality of the Etulo language of Benue State. It employed the sociolinguistic questionnaire, focus groups interviews, face-to-face personal interviews and observations for data collection. UNESCO's nine factors of linguistic vitality were used in the measurement of the linguistic vitality of the Etulo language. The findings show that the Etulo language is used across all informal domains such as the home, the river banks, festivals, ceremonies, village meetings and discussion. The English and Tiv languages are used in the all official domains such as schools, offices and clinics. The Etulo language therefore, has a very low vitality.

Keywords: Language use, language vitality, language endangerment, Etulo language, language revitalization

1. Introduction

Language vitality is the ability of a language to survive. It is an indicator of a language's sustainability, and of the extent to which intervention is needed for its maintenance (Stanford & Whaley, 2010). Boltokova (2004) in agreement with the above statement summarily posits that language or linguistic vitality is used to indicate the ability of a minority language to endure as an individual language in a multilingual environment.

Linguistic vitality is demonstrated by the extent to which the language is used as a means of communication in various social contexts for specific purposes. The most significant indicator of a language's vitality according to SIL International is the daily use at home. A language with high vitality would be one that is used extensively both inside and outside the home, by all generations and for most if not all topics. For language development, the study of language vitality is important for determining the likelihood that a language will continue to be used into the foreseeable future and that all efforts to develop the language are likely to be sustainable.

According to SIL-International (2019) state that, language assessment experts study language vitality by exploring the functions (Domains of use), acquisition (transmission across generations), motivation for use and governmental policy regarding language use, particular contexts where the language is used as these factors foster the ongoing use of a language. By identifying people's motivations, for using a given language we learn of their interest and desire to continue to use one language or to acquire a new language. The vitality of a language within a speech community is also further assessed by asking for the specific purposes, social contexts, opportunities and frequency that a certain language is been used.

Minority language vitality studies has recently become a recurring decimal in most language conferences and symposia around the world such as the 19th Interim Conference of the African Languages Association of Southern Africa & 7th International Conference on Bantu Languages Cape Town, South Africa, July, 2018; 12th International Conference on Minority Languages Linthicum, Maryland, USA, December, 2009; 16th International Conference on Minority in Jyväskylä & Närpes, Finland, August, 2017; 3rd International Conference on Documentary Linguistics – Asian Perspectives Nakhon-Pathom, Thailand July, 2018; 49th Annual Conference on African Linguistics, Michigan, USA March, 2018 and a host of other conferences have all been conscientiously centred on a way forward for the revitalization of minority languages in Africa as the language institutes of the First Language Speakers of the world's Majority languages are through international diplomacy speedily killing the use of minority languages globally.

The status of minority languages in Benue state appears to dwindling gradually with time. These languages such as Etulo yearn for survival tactics so as to prevent it from consequent death and extinction. Studies on the survival of minority languages have being conducted almost all over the world giving an assessment to the linguistic vitality of

endangered languages for the sake of knowing their status. Programmes have been put up in places where such studies were conducted such as in Cambodia and Venezuela and a host of other places.

The languages of the Benue valley are not properly studied, even though there are relatively few of such studies such as Sulaiman (2016) Eggon Studies of Nasarawa state, Muniru, Magnusson, Hansley, & Ayenajeh (2016) the Kulere studies of Nasarawa and Plateau states and Magnusson, Muniru, Rueck, Hon and Byington (2011), The Koro Wache studies of Nasarawa and Kaduna States. This study shall therefore give an account of the patterns of use of the Etulo language of Benue state, Nigeria with a view of stating the domains of use of the Etulo language within the study area for the purpose of assessing the linguistic vitality of the Etulo language of Benue state.

1.1. Etulo Language Location

According to Blench (2019), Etulo is an idomoid language of the Old Kwararafa kingdom of the Benue Valley. Oral history has it that, the Etulo and Idoma of Benue State, Jukun and Geomai of Taraba State and Alago of Nasarawa State had occupied the Benue Valley before the Tiv migrated from the Cameroun hills into the Benue valley and took over the previous settlements of the Etulo, Jukun, Alago, Idoma and Geomai in the Benue Valley by conquest. The above named four languages had their headquarters near Jalingo. The Etulo upon conquest were surrounded while the Idoma moved down west while the Alago move up north to Nasarawa. The Jukun and Geomai moved North-Eastwards back to Taraba. The Etulo who were already surrounded by the conquerors' Tiv and remained in the mist of the Tiv in the present-day Benue State.

The Etulo upon the creation of Local Governments by the military administration of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida in 1991, found themselves in Buruku Local Government Area, in Etulo Council Ward. This council ward is one of the smallest but with a mixture of three languages, the Tiv, Etulo and Abakwa. Tabe (2007) state that at present, the Etulo occupy both banks of the River Katsina-Ala about 135 kilometres east from Makurdi the capital city of Benue State of Nigeria. The Etulo land stretches on latitudes 7°N and 9°N and lies within longitude 1°E to 13°E. They are one of the Jukunoid groups that formed the erstwhile Kwararafa kingdom in the middle Benue Valley (Adams, 2004).

A federal government road runs beside the Etulo land at Gboko Local Government Area from Yandev to Tyowanye to Adi-Etulo Market. Etulo also falls within the Catholic Diocese of Gboko and is managed from the Bishop's House in Gboko. The Etulo is also surrounded by the Tiv by all around the Etulo Borders, the Abakwa co-habit with the Etulo within their speech community. The present Benue State Amended Chieftaincy Act as Amended 2016, has scrapped the paramount rulership of the Etulo and made the Etulo a member of the larger Tiv Traditional Council also administered from the Tortiv's Palace in Gboko, Benue State Nigeria.

1.2. Goal of the Study

The basic goal for the survey of the patterns of language use of the Etulo language is to identify the domains of use of the language within the speech community and in which contexts is the language is used by which groups of people as well as. The kind of people that use it such as parents, grandparents, siblings, spouses and friends as well as great grandparents.

1.3. Previous Research

Mogara, Kari, Kadenge & Molefhi (2017) investigated a linguistic vitality of some parts of north eastern Botswana with the main objective of investigating the level of language vitality in Botswana on the basis of patterns of language use, transgenerational language transmission, language attitudes and ethno-cultural identity. Their findings confirm previous impressionistic observations that Setswana dominates public, official and social domains while the ethno-linguistic vitality of community languages is very low because they have no official status, have limited intergenerational transmission and remain restricted to private domains like the home and cultural activities.

Noriah & Hashim (2012) investigated the language vitality of the Sihans using a field survey, observation and interviews. The output of the field survey was analysed using the nine criteria of language vitality, outlined in the UNESCO Expert Meeting in March, 2003 (Lewis 2006, Brenzinger et al. 2003). The data from the survey were supported by the data obtained from observation and interviews. The findings of the study reveal that the Sihan language is under threat as it does not fulfil UNESCO's nine criteria of language vitality.

Again, Gao (2015) measured the linguistic vitality of Miqie, an endangered Central Ngwi/Yi language of Yunnan, China, and identifies the social factors contributing to language shift. Findings from participant interviews in 11 village survey points show there are varying degrees of language endangerment, with intermarriage and access to a major road as primary indicators of shift. This paper evaluates different tools for assessing linguistic vitality and uses the Language Endangerment Index (Lee & Van Way in press) to assess Miqie language endangerment at the village level. Language shift information is essential in the description and documentation of a language, especially because the contexts in which the language is spoken may disappear faster than the language itself.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

Obiero (2010) state that at the UNESCO Experts Meeting on Safeguarding Endangered Languages, a framework was proposed that uses nine factors of vitality and endangerment in measuring the level of endangerment of the world's languages called the Factors of Language Vitality and Endangerment (LVE) and adopted by an international meeting on 'Safeguarding Endangered Languages' held at UNESCO Headquarters in 2003. The nine factors identified by this ad-hoc linguistic expert group and published by the UNESCO are found in the table below:

Factor Number	Factor
1	Intergenerational Transfer
2	Absolute number of speakers
3	Proportion of speakers within the total population
4	Trends in existing language domains
5	Response to new domains and media
6	Materials for language education and literacy
7	Government and institutional language attitudes & policies, including official status and use
8	Community members' attitudes towards their own language
9	Quality and amount of documentation

Table 1: UNESCO's Factors of LVE

Source: Brenzinger Et Al (2003)

So as to operationalize these factors, they suggest that for each language, a 5-point score should be assigned to each of the factors (except factor 2). From a summation matrix of the scores from the scale, a measure of the level of endangerment together with a sense of the level of urgency for revitalization efforts can then be determined, and that analysis should not be based on one factor alone but all the factors should go together, because a language that is ranked highly according to one criterion may deserve immediate and urgent attention due to other factors (Brenzinger et al 2003).

2. Methodology

This work is a quantitative survey, it shall employ the use of the sociolinguistic questionnaires, focus groups, personal interviews and observations will also be made. Data will be presented in tables and analysed using simple percentages so that generalization can be confidently made about the patterns of language use of the Etulo people within their speech community.

2.1. Area of Study

The area of study is the Etulo speech community of Buruku Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The speech community has nine clans, namely Ugye, Okpashila, Agbou, Angwauje, Ogulube, Agia, Agbatala and Otsafu. It is one of the sixteen political council wards in the local government area, with two markets, churches, schools, clinics, a mosque, a river and playgrounds. It is an agrarian community and the residents basically survive on subsistence farming coupled with fishing and hunting.

2.2. Method of Data collection/Instrumentation

Four basic methods of data collection were used for this study, these include, the sociolinguistic questionnaire administration, focus groups discussions, face-to-face interviews and observation. The questionnaire is divided into two sections, the first is the biodata of the respondents while the second section is the questionnaire itself, which shall be made of five (5) questions for eliciting data on the patterns of language used of the Etulo people within their speech community. Focus groups of 10 members will be used as well as personal interviews with few respondents and observations will be made as well.

2.3. Sample/Sampling Techniques for the Study

The study has adopted Krejcie & Morgan (2006) in determining the sample size from a given population. If a study area has a population of 2,800, it shall have a sample of 338 respondents, 3,000 shall have a sample of 341 respondents and to infinity. Agbedo and Kwambeh (2013), put the Etulo population at less than 5000; Blench (2011) puts the Etulo population at 2,900. The study shall use a total of 340 sociolinguistic questionnaires covering nine (9) clans of the Etulo speech community, quota sampling shall be employed where 50% of the questionnaires shall be administered to females and another 50% administered to males.

3. Presentation of Data and Analysis

There are three languages in use, they are Tiv, English and Etulo. Under this object, we shall account for their patterns of use within the speech community. In addressing this objective, questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the sociolinguistic questionnaires (Language Use Section) was used. The results are presented in the table below:

Domains Language	Etulo	%	Tiv	%	English	%
a. Family/Home						
Respondent with Spouse	322	94.71	18	5.29	0	0
Respondent with children	318	93.53	22	6.47	0	0
Respondent with parents	340	100	0	0	0	0
b. Official Domains						
Schools	0	0	0	0	340	100
Clinics	68	20	202	59.41	70	20.59
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Schools	0	0	0	0	340	100
Clinics	68	20	202	59.41	70	20.59
c. Cultural Domains						
Festivals	340	100	0	0	0	0
Traditional Ceremonies	332	97.64	8	2.36	0	0
Village Meeting	340	100	0	0	0	0
d. Social Domains						
Church	0	0	309	90.88	31	9.12
Markets	66	19.42	162	47.64	112	32.94
Mosques	0	0	0	0	0	0
With Friends	260	76.47	72	21.18	8	2.35
River Banks	194	57.05	146	42.95	0	0

Table 2: Domains of Use of the Etulo Language

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

The respondents identified the domains of use of the Etulo language in tables 3a-e above, to be the Family/Home, river banks, festivals, ceremonies, markets, village meetings and gatherings and with friends. The domains stated above as elicited with the use of the sociolinguistic questionnaire are those identified as the social avenues for the use of the Etulo language and particularly the unofficial domains of language use. It is a good indicator towards the positive and high linguistic vitality of the Etulo language. To answer the question on the patterns of use of the Etulo language in all domains of use within the Etulo speech community in a germane and instructive manner, the data presented in Table 2 above is infallible and we shall critically analyse the data below.

Table 2a-e above identifies the domains of use of the Etulo language within the speech community. The first domain is the home/family, it categorically state that the Etulo language is used across all generations at home, 94.71% of the respondents reported that they use Etulo at home with their spouses why 5.29% use the Tiv language at home with their spouses. 93.53% use the Etulo with their children at home, and then 6.47% use Tiv language with their children at home. 100% of the respondents use the Etulo language at home with their parents while 88.24% use Etulo at home with their siblings and 8.24% use Tiv and a paltry 3.52% use the English at home with their siblings.

In official domains identified as schools and offices, 100% of the respondents use English at schools, 59.41% use Tiv language at clinics, another 20.59% use English language and 20% of the respondents use Etulo at clinics. This was so, because, English is the official language of business in Nigeria and must be used in schools and offices. More Tiv language is used at the clinics because of the number of Tiv speakers that come to the hospital and coupled with the fact that the head of the only government clinic is a Tiv man.

Again, 100% of the respondent's report that Etulo is the only language used at festivals, village meetings and gatherings while, 97.64% of the respondents reported that Etulo language is used at all ceremonies while 2.36% reported that Tiv language is the language used at ceremonies. In their report 90.88% of the respondents stated that Tiv language used at all churches, while 9.12% state that English language that is used in all churches. 76.47% for Etulo, 21.18% for Tiv

and 2.35% for English respectively is used with friends within the speech community just as 57.05% report that Etulo is used at the river banks, while another 42.95% of the respondent's report that Tiv is used at the river banks. Unfortunately, 100% of the respondents reported that literacy is done in English language. Finally, respondents identified the Home/Family, clinics, festivals, village meeting and gatherings, traditional marriage ceremonies, the markets, with friend and River banks as the domains of use for Etulo.

We shall apply the nine factors of Linguistic Vitality and Endangerment (LVE) proposed by UNESCO for the assessment of the linguistic vitality of languages across the world.

Factors	Language: Etulo
Factor One: Intergenerational transfer	5- points: Safe yet threatened: spoken across all generations.
Factor Two: Absolute number of speakers	2,900 people (Blench, 2019)
Factor Three: Proportion of speakers within the total Population	5 points- Safe: All s speaks Etulo.
Factor Four: Trends in Existing Language domains	4 points- multilingual parity: English and Tiv are used in official domains, while Etulo is used in unofficial domains
Factor Five: Response to New Domains and not used media	0 points- inactive: Etulo language is in any new domains.
Factor Six: Availability of Materials for language no education and literacy	0 points: no orthography: Etulo has orthography
Factor Seven: Governmental and Institutional Language attitudes and policies including official	4 points: Differentiated Support: Tiv and English are protected by government laws and policies, but Etulo is not.
Factor Eight: Community member's attitudes towards their own language	5 points: All members value the Etulo and wish to see it promoted.
Factor Nine: Type and Quality of documentation	1 point: inadequate: there is no grammar, no word-lists, no texts, no audio-visuals for Etulo in existence.

Table 3: Application of LVE to Etulo

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

From the table above, UNESCO's Nine factors of Language Vitality and Endangerment (LVE) were applied to Etulo and the results show that most of the factors including intergenerational transmission of the language have indicated that the Etulo language has a positive vitality meanwhile some of the factors on the other hand do not support the positive vitality of the Etulo language. Factors 1, 3, 4, 7 and 8 are indicative of a positive vitality of the Etulo language while Factors 2, 5, 6 and 9 are indicative of a negative vitality of the Etulo language. Therefore, the researcher can comfortably state here that the Etulo language is dynamic, because it has perfect intergeneration transmission across all generations and is used by all speakers, who also have a very positive attitude about the language. The Etulo language therefore has a positive vitality even though the linguistic vitality is low.

4. Conclusions

This pioneer work on the patterns of use of the Etulo language has revealed the linguistic vitality status of the Etulo language by assessing the patterns of use of the language vividly. The study employed the use of the sociolinguistic questionnaire, focus group discussions, face-to-face personal discussions and observations and adopted the UNESCO's LVE for assessing the Etulo linguistic vitality.

From the data presented in table 2a-e above, it was clear that there are two types of domains of language use within the Etulo speech community. The official domains make use of Tiv and English languages while the unofficial domains make use of the Etulo language. From the findings of this study, the following patterns of use of the Etulo language were identified.

- *The Home/Family:* a visit to the Etulo homes revealed that an Etulo home is made up of grandparents, parents, spouses, siblings and children. All generations use the Etulo language at home and as a conscious move by the people to preserve their language, because all home and family activities are conducted in Etulo. Fishman (1991), aver that the use of a language at home is the most important indicator of the linguistic vitality of a language.
- *Festivals:* there are three festivals within the Etulo speech community, these are the Okpashila, Esho and the Mgbasho festivals. Etulo language, is an exclusive language for all the festivals, any other language spoken at the festivals is an abominable act and has unbearable consequences.
- *Markets:* *Adi* and *Mandela* market are the only markets within the speech community, Etulo is most used at the markets together with Tiv and English respectively. Majority of the commercial activities at these markets is in Etulo and a minimal use of Tiv and English.

- *River Bank*: the fishermen and the local sailors as well as divers at the river banks are mostly the Etulo people. Etulo is spoken on both sides of the river banks. The people ferrying across the river are mostly the Etulo, who mostly use Etulo though, other tribes ferry across the river too.
- *Village Meetings and Gatherings*: Village meetings and community gatherings strictly make use of the Etulo language for deliberations. The use of only Etulo at all village and community meetings is a very good indicator for the linguistic vitality of the Etulo language.
- *Ceremonies*: the Etulo is used at all ceremonies within the speech community such as marriage ceremonies between two Etulo speakers, birthday celebrations, naming ceremonies and all other ceremonies within the speech community. These ceremonies are those that involve only Etulo speakers such as a marriage and naming ceremony of an Etulo baby etc.

From the data presented above, we can confidently conclude that; The Etulo language is used in unofficial/private domains such as the home, markets, village meetings and gatherings, river banks, traditional festivals, traditional ceremonies and for friendship, while English and Tiv languages are used in all official domains such as schools, offices and clinics within the speech community.

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