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The Effects of Language Endangerment on Ngamo Language

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Abstract:

This study attempts to investigate the effect of language endangerment on Ngamo language with the sole aim of finding out the extent or level of its endangerment. The researchers have employed the Ethnographic Research approach that involves observing variables in their natural environments or habitats in order to arrive at objective research outcome, which, at the same time uses observation, interview, distribution of questionnaire and participation. The study adopts the work of UNESCO expert committee on language endangerment (2003) as it models of approach. As parts of its the findings this research discovered that the factors that cause language endangerment are: Inter Community Marriage, Lack of Economic Activities, and Lack of Research on the Endangered Language, Globalization, and Lack of Institutional Support, Cultural Background and Migration. More so, the research also confirmed that Ngamo language is under serious threat of endangerment. Moreover, as part of its findings, this research has discovered a lot of things in line with language endangerment which include a case of language shift in Ngamo language. In this case, only 4.06% of their native speakers were found to have an in-build mastery of the language which is quite insignificant. As such, the native speakers of the language (Ngamo) appeared to be very much comfortable while speaking other languages like Hausa and Bole where 62.60% of such speakers were recorded there. Also, among the finding unveiled by this study was interruption on intergenerational transmission in Ngamo language. The scores recorded here shown that, out of the eleven (11) items designed on the questionnaire and administered on their native speakers of the language, it was expected that, Ngamo language scored 55 marks which is the highest point to be obtained on the eleven (11) items on the questionnaire in order to mark the language as safe. However, Ngamo have scored only 29 out of the 55 marks, this ultimately placed the language as critically endangered language.

Keywords: Language endangerment

1. Introduction

Languages are often seen a symbol of ethnic and national identity. Many endangered language complainers claim that when a language allies out, a vague way of looking at the world also disappear (Fishman, 1989). Language diversity is essential to human heritage each and every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people. The less of any language is thus a less for all human unity. Though according to UNESCO, approximately six thousand languages still exist, many out of them are under threat. Therefore, there is an imperative need for language documentation, new policy initiative and new materials to enhance the vitality of these languages. In almost every part of the world, minority languages are seriously under threat of extinction. At the same time, some dedicated efforts are being made to document, revive and maintain the endangered languages from the verge of extinction or totally disappearing from the globe for not having the desired attention. Language endangerment is a very common phenomenon in Africa and the world at large. Therefore, Nigeria or Yobe state will never be an exception.

Yobe state is located in northern part of Nigeria it was carved out of Borno state in 1991 by the then military government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. The dominant linguistic and cultural force, until the mid of 20th century, was Kanuri. But in recent years, Hausa has become the universal lingua franca for all parts of northern Nigeria including Yobe state. Nonetheless, numerous minority languages remain in active use. They all have a substantial community of first language speakers. Therefore, lack of interest plus documentation in the communities in seeing their languages developed through publication in and on them make Yobe state an ideal place for a broad linguistic project.

Ngamo language is also one of the members of Chadic language under the Afro-Asiatic phylum, spoken in north eastern Nigeria in Yobe state particularly in Fika Local government and Gombe state in Nafada-Bajoga local government and Darazo local government in Bauchi state. Their population is 118,000. It has two different dialects which comprises GudiNgamo and YayaNgamo (Joshua, 2021).

1.1. Chadic Overview

The Chadic Language family comprises about 150 languages that lie in a band south of the Sahara Desert, stretching across southern Niger, northern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, and south-central Chad Republic. A single Chadic language, Hausa, constitutes the entire western end of the Chadic area. Hausa is the overwhelmingly largest Chadic language with well over 20 million native speakers, whereas most other Chadic languages have fewer than 100,000 speakers. The Hausa native-speaking area covers most of the northwest quadrant of Nigeria and most of southern Niger. It is the lingua franca for all of northern Nigeria and most of Niger. Chadic languages at one time probably formed a block from near the Niger River in the west to their current eastern extent in Chad Republic. Hausa has absorbed many of its cousins in the west, Kanuri has replaced Chadic languages west and southwest of Lake Chad, and Kanembu and Chadian Arabic have cut through the original Chadic area of Chad Republic.

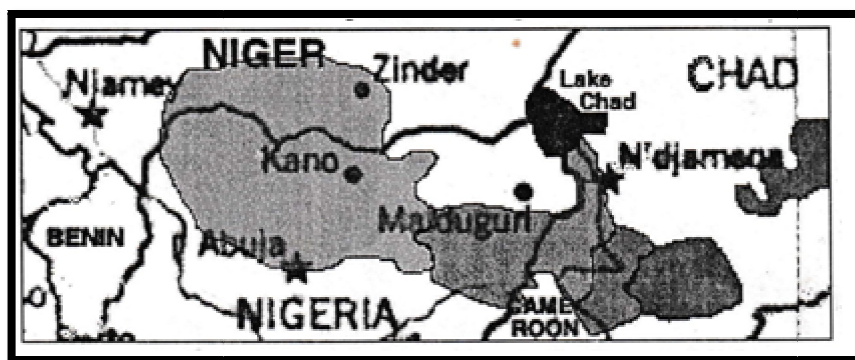


Figure 1

In the 1930's, Johannes Lukas presented the first comprehensive classification of languages of the Lake Chad basin, proposing a 'Chado-Hamitic' group and a 'Mandara' or 'Chadic' group (Lukas 1936). A principal criterion for this categorization was the presence or absence of grammatical gender. Greenberg (1950) set the stage for the modern classification of Chadic. On the basis of lexical resemblances and shared patterns in morphology, Greenberg proposed a unitary group of 'Chad' languages with nine subgroups, which included all Lukas's 'Chado-Hamitic' and 'Chadic' languages and was itself a branch of the larger Afrasian (= Afroasiatic) family.

In the first true comparative Chadic publication, Newman and Ma (1966) proposed a subgrouping that unified Greenberg's two largest groups of Chadic—group 1 at the western end and group 9 at the eastern end—into a 'Plateau-Sahel' branch, with the remainder of Greenberg's groups united in a 'Biu-Mandara' branch. They identified a number of sound changes that united or differentiated the various subgroups and reconstructed a list of 150 items for a proto-Chadic lexicon.

Newman and Ma's Plateau-Sahel group soon became untenable. Newman (1978) himself noted that counts of lexical similarities did not justify a special linkage between the western branch (Greenberg's group 1) and the eastern branch (Greenberg's group 9). Moreover, a major criterion for Newman and Ma's classification was a putative correspondence of Plateau-Sahel *s to Biu-Mandara Research in the late 1960's revealed that many of the Plateau-Sahel languages of Nigeria also have lateral fricatives, thus ruling this out as a criterion for subgrouping.

Drawing on a large amount of Chadic research and publication in the 1960's and 1970's, two reclassifications of the Chadic languages emerged about the same time in the late 1970's. Newman (1977) updated what was known about sound changes among the Chadic languages and presented a new list of 150 proto-Chadic reconstructions. Newman proposed a four-way division of the Chadic languages into West (= Greenberg's group 1, all spoken in northern Nigeria and including Hausa), Biu-Mandara (= Greenberg's groups 2-7, spoken in northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon), Masa (= Greenberg's group 8, spoken mainly in western Chad, extending into eastern Cameroon), and East (= Greenberg's group 9, all spoken in Chad Republic). The map above reflects this classification, lighter to darker shades of gray distinguishing the groups from west to east.

The second reclassification is that of Jungraithmayr and Shimizu (1981), repeated in Jungraithmayr and Ibrizimow (1994). This classification has West and East branches identical to those of Newman (1977). Both reclassifications also recognize 'Masa' as a unitary group. However, unlike Newman's distinct high-level groups of Biu-Mandara and Masa, the Jungraithmayr et al. classification has a single Central Chadic branch. This branch, in turn, has three sub-branches, with the languages of Newman's Masa branch included within one of those sub-branches. It may well be that Masa is linked to the other 'Biu-Mandara'/'Central Chadic' languages, but a low-level classification of Masa within Central Chadic is questionable. Shryock (1989), using a variety of criteria from sound change, lexical change, and morphological change, was unable to find evidence for a link between the Masa languages and the Biu-Mandara/Central Chadic languages as opposed to any other branch of Chadic. The conservative Newman (1977) classification, with four-high level branches, thus seems to be the most plausible among current proposals. Branch affiliations of languages cited below will be indicated by [W], [B-M], [M], and [E] following the language name.

1.2. Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the effect of language endangerment in Ngamo language and ascertain the level of endangerment and establish the reasons that lead to the endangerment.

1.3. Problem Statement/Justification

In July 2005, Yobe Language Research Project has shown that, in addition to being genetic sisters/cousins, the indigenous Chadic languages of Yobe state constituted an interesting linguistic area i.e., an area which is full of linguistic research opportunities. In spite of this, there is very little published documentation of any of these languages, yet they have substantial communities of first language speakers. This has made Yobe state an ideal place for broad linguistic projects. In addition, some linguistic experts, Crystal 2000, for example, established that only 600 of the 6000 or so languages in the world are 'safe' from the threat of extinction.

Based on the above linguistic expert's assertion, this study come across very little academic research that works on language endangerment phenomenon. Therefore, this has made it necessary for us to make a thorough investigation on the devastating effect of language endangerment in Ngamo language.

1.4. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study limits its scope within the areas where on Ngamo language is spoken only which includes, Fika, Gadaka, Garingoge, all in Fika local Government in Yobe state and some part of Bajoga in Gombe state etc.

2. Literature Review

Bamgbose, (1993, p. 3) claims that, even though the concept of language endangerment is taken as a given actual fact there is no uniform definition of endangered languages, the most obvious definition is by number of speakers. Obviously, a language with fewer speakers is more likely to be endangered if compared with larger languages. Speakers of such languages tend to learn another language (more widely spoken) for purpose of interaction outside their immediate community, where language loyalty is not strong; it is a short step to language shift and eventually language death. He further said that endangerment is a structure which comes as a result of incidence of domination by a more powerful language. In this sense many African languages will, in varying degree, qualify as endangered either by widely spoken national language such as Swahili or by official language of a wider communication such as English, French or Portuguese.

Machinyanse, (2018, p. 2) argues that, the most widely affected languages by language endangerment are minority languages as a result of certain factors like; globalized economies and media are most prominent social factors that successfully change the culture landscape of the entire globe affecting negatively the languages human speaks. It is clear facts that indigenous languages whose speakers are affected directly by these modern global trends are on the verge of extinction. Other factors are cultural/political/economic marginalization and hegemony, this happen when political and economic power is closely linked to a particular language and culture so much that there is strong incentive and benefit for individuals who use the privileged language, this compels speakers of minority languages to abandon their languages in favour of another more prestigious one.

Simon and Charles (2020) maintained that language endangerment is a serious concern to linguist and language planners. Language planners have turned their attention in the last several decades for a variety of reasons, speakers of many smaller less dominant language stop using their heritage language and begin to use another. Parents may begin to use only the second language for their children and gradually the intergenerational transmission of the heritage language is reduced and even cease. As a consequence, there may be no speakers who use the language as their first or primary language and eventually the language may no longer be used at all. A language may become dormant or extinct, existing only in recordings or written records and transcription. Languages which have not been adequately documented disappear altogether.

UNESCO, (2003) stress that, a language endangerment is simply refers to a situation when the language is on a path towards extinction without adequate documentation. A language that is extinct can never be revived. A language is said to be endangered when its speakers cease to use it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. That is, there are no new speakers, adults or children. About 97% of the world's people speak about 4% of the world's languages, and conversely, about 96% of the world's languages are spoken by about 3% of the world's people (Bernard, 1996, p, 142). Most of the world's language heterogeneity, then, is under the stewardship a very small number of people.

Even languages with many thousand speakers are no longer being acquired by children; at least 50% of the world's more than six thousand languages are losing speakers. We estimate that, in most world regions, about 90% of the languages may be replaced by dominant languages by the end of 21st century. Therefore, language end may be as a result of external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation, or it may be caused by internal forces such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language. Internal pressures often have their source in external ones, and both halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions. Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandoned their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood, and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global market place.

3. Methodology

The study, entitled 'A Linguistic Survey of Endangered Languages in Yobe and Neighboring States, employs Ethnographic Research approach that involves observing variables in their natural environments or habitats in order to arrive at objective research outcome, which, at the same time uses observation, interview and participation, (cf. Chamo, 2015, p. 272).

The target audiences for the research were native speakers of Ngamo language from the age of 10 years above irrespective of their gender variation. The data obtained through the interview were recorded for further transcription, translation and final analysis. The data were analyzed based on the outlined determining factors by UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. Under each factor there was adoptable grades from 0 to 5, where 0 represents complete shift to another language (termed as extinct), whereas 5 represents vitality of a language (which termed as safe). The remaining indices (1 to 4) represent the percentage on which a language is endangered.

4. Data Presentation

4.1. Item One in the Questionnaire

In what domain do you use your language?

- a. Home b. School c. Market d. Office e. Place of Worship
f. All of the above g. None of the above

S/NoLang	Home	Sch	Mark	Off	P/W	A/A	N/A	Total
Ngamo	67	69.79	3 3.13	0 0	0 0	0 0	26 2.08	0 0 96

4.2. Item two on the questionnaire

How frequent do you use your language?

- a. Always b. Sometimes c. Never

S/N	Language	Always	Sometimes	Never	Total
Ngamo	65	67.71	31	32.29	0 0 96(100%)

4.3. Item Three in the Questionnaire

To what extent do you currently speak your language?

- a. Always b. Sometimes c. Never

S/N	Language	Always	Sometimes	Never	Total
Ngamo	33	34.38	60	62.50	3 3.13 96(100%)

4.4. Item Four in the Questionnaire

How will you rate your attitude towards your language?

Very good/I speak it always b. Fair/I speak it sometimes

S/N	Language	V/Good	Fair	Poor	V Poor	total
Ngamo		57 59.38 38	39.58 1	1.40 0	0 96(100%)	

4.5. Item Five in the Questionnaire

What language(s) do you currently speak apart from your mother tongue?

Hausa, English, Fulfulde, Bole, and Kanuri.

Ngamo	5	(0.76)
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4.6. Item Six in the Questionnaire

How comfortable are you when speaking your second language more than your mother tongue?

- a. Very comfortable b. Comfortable. c. Not comfortable

S/N	Language	V/Good		Fair		Poor		V Poor		total
Ngamo	13	13.54	38		1	1.40	0	0	96(100%)	

4.7. Item Seven in the Questionnaire

What is your level of proficiency in your language?

a. No proficiency b. Basic/Elementary c. Limitedd. Bilingual e.Intuitive

No proficiency		B. Basic/Elementary		C. Limited Bilingual			C. Intuitive				
S/N	Language	N/P	B/E	LTD	B/G		I/T			Total	
Nga mo	9	9.38	60	62.50	10	10.42	13	15.54	4	4.16	96(100%

4.8. Item Eight in the Questionnaire

Have ever seen any written document in your language or not?

Yes [] No []

S/N	Language	Yes		No		Total	
Ngamo	13	13.54	38	86.46	96(100%)		

4.9. Item Nine in the Questionnaire

Can you read or write in their language or not?

Yes [] No []

S/N	Language	Yes		NO		Total	
Ngamo	77	80.21	19	19.97	95(100%)		

4.10. Item ten in the questionnaire

Is your language taught in schools?

Yes [] No []

S/N	Language	Yes		NO		Total
Ngamo	5	5.21	91	94.79	96(100%)	

4.11. Item eleven in the questionnaire

Is language use in places of worship within the speech community?

Yes [] No []

S/N	Language	Yes	NO	Total	
Ngamo	48	50.00	48	50.00	96(100%)

4.12. Data Analysis

4.12.1. NGAMO

Like the other languages so far analyzed on the basis of their level of endangerment using percentage analysis and indices research measures, Ngamo language is equally placed on such a standard. However, different items on the questionnaire were analyzed having different percentage figures from the native speakers of the language (Ngamo). Items 1 on the questionnaire set to find out the domain in which Ngamo language is mostly used by its native speakers. Here, 69.79% of the respondents claimed that they are using the language at home which enabled it to be placed on indices 4 of the research measure, i.e., the language is stable but yet threatened.

The level of frequency of usage of Ngamo language among its native speakers is checked on item 2 of the questionnaire series. The responses recorded showed that, 67.71% claimed to have been using the language always which makes it possible to be placed on indices 4 of the research measure. Therefore, by such a statistical figure, Ngamo language is said to have been stable but yet under the threat of endangerment.

The extent to which native speakers of Ngamo are currently speaking the language to either their children or parents was checked on item 3 of the questionnaire. The respondents here indicated that, only 34.38% found to be speaking the language to either children or parents always. By this proportion, the language (Ngamo) seemed not to be well passed to younger generation which makes it to be placed on indices 2 of the research measure. This shows that the language is severely endangered.

Items 4 on the questionnaire series required information from the native speakers of Ngamo on their attitude towards their language. The statistics recorded here showed that 59.38% of the respondents claimed to have a very good attitude towards their language indicating that they speak it always. However, with this proportion the language qualified to be placed on indices 3 of the research measure showing that the language under this item of the questionnaire is definitely endangered.

The Ngamo native speakers believed to have been speaking other languages like Kanuri, Fulfulxe, English and Hausa by 48.64% apart from their mother tongue. This revealed to be known through the item 5 on the questionnaire series. Also, it is this percentage recorded that make the language (Ngamo) to be placed on indices 3 of the research measure indicating that definitely there is element of language endangerment recorded in the Ngamo under this item.

Meanwhile, the issue of comfortability of native speakers of Ngamo, that while speaking second language more than their mother tongue is checked on item 6 of the questionnaire series. The data obtained to this regard revealed that only 46.88% are not comfortable while speaking second language more than the Ngamo language as mother tongue. So, by implication, the language is definitely endangered making it to be placed on indices 3 of the research measure. Item 7 on the questionnaire series was designed to investigate the level of proficiency of Ngamo native speakers in their mother tongue. Based on the responses recorded from the data obtained to this regard, only 4.16% were found to have good mastery of the language (Intuitive). By such a fraction, the research measure used places the language on indices 1 which termed the language as critically endangered.

But in a situation where the native speakers of Ngamo were asked on whether they have ever seen or heard about a written document in their language or not, the following is the statistical analysis recorded to that regard: only 13.54% of the respondents have seen or heard about written document in their language. This means that the language (Ngamo) has little or no written documentation, as such, the research indices used places the language on indices 1. Therefore, the interpretation here means that the language (Ngamo) is critically endangered based on the data obtained.

Item 9 on the questionnaire was design to find out if the native speakers of Ngamo language read or write in their language. The responses gathered indicated that 80.21% can read and write in the language (Ngamo) which places it on indices 4 of the research measure. Here, the interpretation maintained that the language seemed to be stable but yet endangered.

However, when Ngamo people enquired on whether the language is being taught in the schools of the speech community as set on items 10 on the questionnaire. The native speakers of the language (Ngamo) responded that only 05.21% of the responses believed to have the language used in teaching in their schools. By this proportion, the research indices showed that the language is placed on indices 1, meaning that it is critically endangered.

The last items on the questionnaire set to investigate the status of Ngamo language in places of worship in their speech community. To this extent, the native speakers responded that 50.00% of them believed that the language is being used in places of worship like mosques and churches. By this percentage, the research indices used shows that the language is placed on indices 3, indicating that the language is definitely endangered.

4.14. The Level of Languages Endangerment Based on Percentage Analysis

As mentioned earlier, this study analyzed the data obtained from the field based on the outline determining factors by UNESCO Ad hoc Expert Group (2003) on endangered languages. Under each factor there was adoptable grades ranging from 0–5, where 0 represent complete shift to another language (termed as extinct), whereas 5 represent the vitality of the language (termed as safe). The remaining indices 1- 4 represent the percentage on which a language is endangered.

Therefore, the following statistical analysis was use in determining the level on which a language under study is graded based on the scores recorded in respect of Ngamo language. To this end, the language is leveled or graded based on their respective level of endangerment.

4.13.1. NGAMO

Ngamo is the language under study. Here, based on the result obtained from its native speaks, Ngamo language scored only 29 marks which obviously placed it on the level of the most critically endangered language.

5. Conclusion

According to UNESCO (2003:4) language endangerment simply refers to a situation where its speakers cease to use it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains and cease to pass it on from one generation to another that leads to the total absence of new speakers, whether adults or children. A language is said to be endangered when it is on a path towards extinction without adequate documentation even if the language has many thousand speakers if at all they cannot pass it to the younger generation, that language in question is said to be seriously endangered or in the verge of extinction.

Therefore, this study has drawn its conclusion based on the designed objectives earlier mentioned. For instance, the study has clearly investigated and established the clear causes of language endangerment which include Intra and Inter Community Marriage, Lack of Economic Activities, Lack of Research on the Endangered Languages, Globalization, Lack of Institutional Support, Cultural Background and Migration. More so, the research also confirmed that the language under study is under serious threat of endangerment. Also, the study has ascertained the level of engagement of Ngamo language. Moreover, as part of its findings, this research work has discovered a lot of things in line with language endangerment which however include a case of language shift in the issue of Ngamo language, where only 4.16% of their native speakers were found to have an in-build mastery of their language which is quite insignificant. as such, the native speakers of the language (Ngamo) appeared to be very much comfortable while speaking other languages like Hausa and bole where 62.60% of such speakers were recorded. Among the finding unveiled by this study was an interruption on intergenerational transmission in Ngamo language, in this case, Ngamo language that scored a very less percentage of 34.38% of item 3 of the questionnaire which clearly shows that the ability to pass their language on to their children was quite insignificant. Likewise, it is among the findings of the research where it has been discovered that Ngamo language suffered the endangerment because of their poor or inadequate documentation. This can be categorically seen in case of Ngamo language that scored only 13.54% of item 8 of the questionnaire which shows the extent of codification of the Ngamo language. This percentage appeared to be quite meager to serve as the only percentage possessed on language

documentation. In line with the above finding discovered, it has also been realized that, there is lack of awareness on the side of the native speakers and their traditional rulers of the language on how to document and maintain their language. One the unfortunate thing here is that, some the native speakers of Ngamo language they don't want to be associated with their language, they prefer to associated themselves with dominant language of their area particularly when the dominant language is socially well placed or politically or economically viable.

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