

HOW ENDANGERED ARE IGBO VOCABULARY ITEMS COMPARED WITH IBIBIO?

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Abstract

Although language endangerment is often associated with languages which have few speakers, it has now become an emerging fact (e.g. Brenzinger and De Graf (2006)) that languages with huge populations can also be vulnerable to endangerment. In Nigeria for instance, both the major and non-major languages, as noted by Emenanjo (2007), are not safe when examined in the light of the evaluative factors on the UNESCO (2003) language vitality index. Thus, as Nigerians increasingly abandon the use of their indigenous languages in all domains of life, including the home, the present paper examines the phenomenon of vocabulary endangerment in two 'unequal' Nigerian languages, Igbo and Ibibio in order to assess how faithful speakers of both languages are, in using some indigenous vocabularies of their languages in their daily interactions. Respondents who were grouped into clusters were chosen from Aba and Uyo metropolises where Igbo and Ibibio are indigenously spoken respectively, and were presented with a list of 260 Igbo/ Ibibio nouns categorized into 24 groups and their equivalents in English. They were further asked to indicate 'yes' or 'no' to whether they would use each indigenous Igbo/Ibibio noun or its English equivalent any time such a word comes up in their day-to-day interactions done in Igbo/Ibibio language. The findings of the paper among others reveal that there is evidence of vocabulary endangerment in the speech of both the Igbo and Ibibio respondents. However, compared with Igbo respondents with a total average of 48.6% usage of the vocabulary items studied, Ibibio respondents had a total average usage of 68.1%. This shows that the Igbo respondents in Aba unlike the Ibibio ones in Uyo manifested a much higher apathy in the use of their vocabulary items, a fact which obviously shows that vocabulary items are more endangered in the speech of Igbo respondents. However, given the fact that Igbo has a much higher population of speakers with also a much bigger geographical area covered by its speakers, there is the need for this kind of study to be extended to other metropolises in the other states (Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo) of the South-East of Nigeria where Igbo is homogeneously spoken. Such a survey when compared with the result of Ibibio as presented here would give a much clearer picture of the level of endangerment between Igbo and Ibibio.

Résumé

Bien que la mise en danger de la langue soit souvent associée à des langues qui ont peu de locuteurs, il est maintenant devenu un fait émergent (par exemple Brenzinger et De Graf (2006)) que les langues avec d'énormes populations peuvent également être vulnérables à l'égard de la mise en danger. Au Nigeria, par exemple, les langues majeures et mineures comme l'a noté Emenanjo (2007) ne sont pas sans danger lorsqu'elles sont examinées à la lumière des facteurs d'évaluation de « language vitality index » de l'UNESCO (2003). Ainsi, comme les Nigériens abandonnent de plus en plus l'utilisation de leurs langues indigènes dans tous les domaines de la vie, y compris la maison, cet article étudie le phénomène de mise en danger du vocabulaire dans les deux langues nigérianes « inégales », igbo et ibibio afin d'évaluer dans quelle mesure les locuteurs restent fidèles dans l'utilisation du vocabulaire indigène de leurs langues dans leurs interactions quotidiennes. Nous avons soumis une liste de mots contenant 260 noms/igbo/ibibio catégorisés en 24 groupes et leurs équivalents en anglais à des sous-groupes des participants issus d'Aba et d'Uyo où les langues igbo et Ibibio sont localement parlées. Nous les avons en outre invité à cocher « oui » ou « non » à la question de savoir si ils utilisent chaque nom indigène Igbo / Ibibio ou son équivalent anglais toutes les fois qu'un tel mot vient dans leurs interactions quotidiennes en langue igbo/ibibio. Les conclusions de l'étude révèlent entre autres qu'il existe des preuves de la mise en danger du vocabulaire dans le discours des locuteurs Igbo et Ibibio. Cependant, comparé avec les locuteurs Igbo qui ont en usage un pourcentage de 48,6 des mots étudiés du vocabulaire, les locuteurs Ibibio ont en usage un total de 68,1 pourcent. Ce qui montre que les locuteurs Igbo à Aba contrairement à ceux d'Ibibio à Uyo manifestent une apathie beaucoup plus élevée dans l'utilisation de leur vocabulaire, un fait qui montre de toute évidence que les éléments de vocabulaire sont plus en danger dans le

discours des participants Igbo. Toutefois, étant donné le fait que la langue igbo a une population beaucoup plus élevée de locuteurs avec également une zone géographique beaucoup plus couverte par ses locuteurs, il serait nécessaire que ce type d'étude soit étendue à d'autres métropoles dans les autres états (Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi et Imo) du Sud-est où la langue igbo est homogène et parlée ; les résultats d'une telle enquête comparée avec celui présenté dans le présent article sur la langue ibibio donneraient une image beaucoup plus claire du niveau de danger entre les deux langues, igbo et ibibio.

1. Introduction

Language endangerment is real and a phenomenon which is continuing through space and time as many languages continue to fall out of use and are being replaced by other languages that may be more widely used for economic or socio-political reasons. Language endangerment is not just affecting the languages of a particular geographical location, culture or race; it is a very pervasive phenomenon, spreading and affecting world languages, and Nigerian languages are not spared. As observed by Brenzinger and De Graf (2006), the size of a linguistic group does not always matter as far as endangerment is concerned; therefore, endangered languages are not necessarily languages with few speakers even though small communities are more vulnerable to external linguistic threats. The viability and vitality of a language therefore, is primarily a function of the positive attitude of its speakers towards their linguistic heritage which they manifest by vigorously using their language, thus ensuring that the language is transferred from one generation to another.

Brenzinger & De Graf (2006) further state that statistical data related to language use illustrates the extent of the phenomenon of language endangerment. According to them, about 97% of the world's people speak about 4% of the world's languages while on the other hand, about 96% of the world's languages are spoken by about 3% of the world's population. Also, 85% of about 7,000 languages of the world are spoken in only 22 countries and some of the countries are home to large numbers of different languages. These countries include Papua New Guinea (900 languages), Indonesia (about 700 languages), Nigeria (more than 500 languages), India (about 400 languages), Cameroon (almost 300 languages), Mexico (almost 250 languages), Democratic Republic of the Congo (more than 200 languages) and Brazil (more than 200 languages). They note that these countries are highly heterogeneous linguistically with only a few of their languages having significant numbers of speakers; meanwhile very few languages are assigned official status, yet large numbers are being threatened by extinction.

The consequences of language endangerment and language extinction are unimaginable. The loss of a language is the same as the loss of the culture the language carries, together, with social and cultural disruptions. The unquantifiable intangible heritage embedded in the language disappears and a substantial contributor to linguistic diversity is forever lost. Similarly, when a community loses its language, it also loses a great deal of its cultural identity at the same time including the spiritual and intellectual life which are experienced and expressed through language. The spiritual and intellectual life experiences include prayer patterns, belief systems, myths, ceremonies, technical vocabulary, etc. The loss of these knowledge systems in an extinct language does not implicate the extinction of the speaking community. However, the entire knowledge system, if it is to survive, is repackaged in the new language which has absorbed the speakers of the dead

language. As has been highlighted on the huge literature (e.g. Brenzinger & De Graf, 2006, Austin & Sallabank, 2011, and Grenoble & Whaley, 1998) on endangerment, the reasons for language endangerment may include:

- (i) external forces, such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation
- (ii) internal forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language or by a general decline of group identity
- iii) when communities with different linguistic backgrounds live side by side, the communities that do not enjoy the same prestige in contact situation may acquire proficiency in the language of the dominant group, relinquishing their language, including their culture, and may decide to adopt the language and culture of the dominant group.

UNESCO (2003) categorizes language endangerment into five levels, which are safe languages, vulnerable languages (not spoken by children outside the home), definitely endangered languages (children not speaking them), severely endangered languages (only spoken by the oldest generations), and critically endangered languages (spoken by few members of the oldest generation, often semi-speakers). Krauss (2007), using an alternative scheme of classification, classifies languages as 'safe' if they are considered that children will probably be speaking them in 100 years; 'endangered' if children will probably not be speaking them in 100 years and 'moribund' if children are not speaking them now. Brenzinger & De Graf (2006) summarizes that the following factors (cf. Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2013), which UNESCO (2003) identified, can be used to assess language endangerment thus:

a) Degree of endangerment

- i) Intergenerational language transmission
- ii) Absolute numbers of speakers
- iii) Proportion of speakers within the total population
- iv) Loss of existing language domains
- v) Response to new domains and media
- vi) Material for language education and literacy

b) Language attitudes and policies

- (i) Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official language status and use
- (ii) Community members' attitudes towards their own language

c) Urgency of documentation

- (i) Amount of documentation
- (ii) Quality of documentation

Language endangerment has become a focal discussion in socio-linguistic and education circles given its threat to the linguistic diversity of the world. There has been a general consensus that many languages are dying and many more are threatened with extinction to the extent that up to 90% of the world's 6,000-7,000 existing languages are not likely to survive into the next century (Hill, 1978; Hale, 1992; Krauss, 1992; Geary, 1997). As documented by Brenzinger et al (1991), the

African continent unfortunately has a large number of endangered languages; languages as noted by Brenzinger et al (1991) have less than 5000 speakers and may be in different stages of language endangerment as listed below.

Critically endangered: Very few speakers, all 70 years old and older, great-grandparent age

Severely endangered: Speakers are only 40 years old and older, grandparent age

Endangered: Speakers are only 20 years old and older, parent age

Eroding: Speakers are some children and older people. Other children do not speak it

Stable but threatened: All children and older people are speakers, but few

Safe: Not endangered. Language is expected to be learned by all children and all others in the ethnic group.

2. Nigerian Languages and the Phenomenon of Endangerment

Nigerian languages, going by UNESCO's (2012) predictions, are already under the dangling axe of language endangerment and the alarm is being raised in many quarters that up to half of the country's over 400 languages are endangered (Ohiri-Aniche, 2008). Some of the languages are already extinct or nearly extinct being, overwhelmed by the influence of foreign languages especially English and French. Crozier & Blench (1992), and more recently Blench (2012) record over 489 languages for Nigeria, with about 200 of these being severely endangered and about 20 being moribund languages. Ugwuoke (1992), relying on Brenzinger et al's (1991) criteria of endangered languages, lists about 152 endangered Nigerian languages. Shaeffer (1997) also notes that Emai, a language of a small community in Edo state (including about 30 different languages spoken in the area) would probably be dead by the year 2050 since none of them could serve as a lingua franca within the area and they were being displaced by English. Haruna (2007) also lists about 20 languages in northern Nigeria which were extinct or almost extinct, specifically mentioning Bubbure, a West Chadic language of Bauchi state spoken by just one person as at then and Holma spoken in Adamawa state by 4 aged speakers in 1987.

Emenanjo (2007) for instance notes that going by the UNESCO's (2003) language vitality indices, not even the major Nigerian languages; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are safe. Also, any aspect of language usage, no matter how numerous its speakers are, can also be vulnerable to endangerment (cf. Ohiri-Aniche, 2008). The present study is therefore, carried out to examine the phenomenon of vocabulary endangerment between two 'unequal' Nigerian languages, Igbo (with a much larger number of indigenous speakers) and Ibibio. The study was conducted among Igbo and Ibibio speakers in Aba and Uyo metropolises, where Igbo and Ibibio are largely and homogeneously spoken respectively. The study seeks to assess how faithful speakers of both languages are in using the indigenous vocabulary items of their respective languages in the daily interactions which they do in Igbo or Ibibio.

A study such as this will obviously create/raise awareness on the potential dangers of language endangerment among the speakers of the languages and also contribute to the existing literature on language endangerment. By creating and raising the awareness, this study would have been part of contribution towards the solution as some of the respondents in this study acknowledged their neglect of their

indigenous vocabulary items and promised to improve on their usage. Thus, a study such as this would provide an opportunity for sensitization that languages could become extinct if the speakers do not continuously and vibrantly use the vocabulary items.

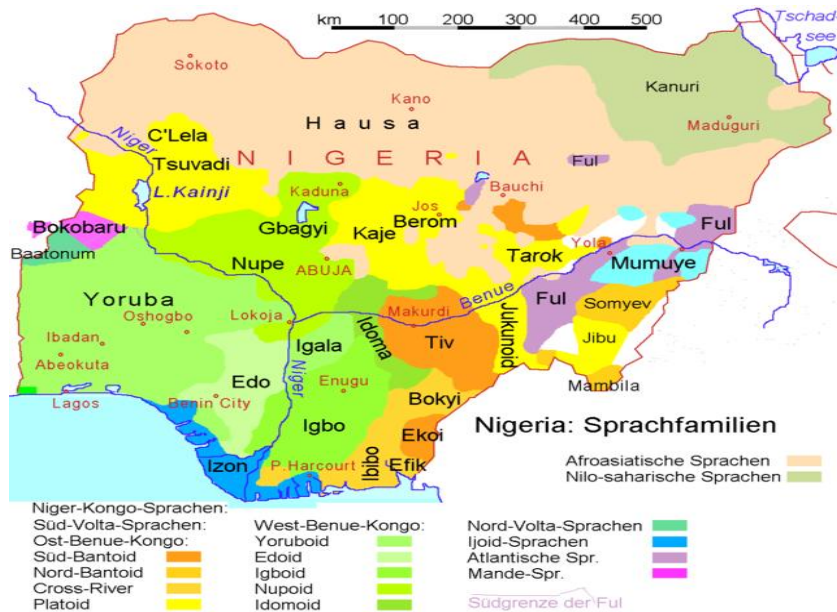
Igbo and Ibibio are two Nigerian languages spoken in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. According to the 2006 Nigerian national census, Igbo is indigenously spoken by about seventeen million people in the south-eastern states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states) while Ibibio is indigenously spoken by about two million people in Akwa Ibom State. One of the Igbo-speaking states (Abia) shares boundaries with Akwa Ibom state where Ibibio is indigenously spoken. This study was conducted in Aba and Uyo metropolises of Abia and Akwa Ibom States respectively.

The remaining part of this paper is organized as follows. Section 3 provides an overview on the use of Igbo and Ibibio, while in section 4, I present the Igbo and Ibibio vocabulary vitality/endangerment test results. Section 5 discusses the results/findings of the vocabulary test results while section 6 is the recommendation. Section 7 is the conclusion.

3. Igbo and Ibibio Usage: An Overview

Igbo refers to both the language whose indigenous speakers live in the southeastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and parts of Delta and Rivers States. As already mentioned, according to the 2006 national census, Igbo is indigenously spoken by an estimated population of seventeen million people. Within the Igbo speech communities, there are scores of regional dialects though the exact number of these dialects is not yet known. Emenanjo (1977) lists about forty-one of these dialects. The dialects of Igbo share a considerable degree of lexical items, a variety of phonological, morphological and syntactic features and as well, a great deal of mutual intelligibility. The dialects also form part of the richness and fascination of Igbo as a language. It must be stated, however, that the differences among the dialects are sometimes a matter of the frequencies with which certain features occur rather than completely different ways of saying things. The Igbo dialect variations are in the areas of phonology, lexicon and syntax as outlined in Anyanwu (2010).

The Ibibio people constitute the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, after the three major ones-Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. They speak the Ibibio language and they total about two million according to the 2006 Nigerian national census. Ibibio is spoken in about 14 Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State. Ibibio also has variations, most of which are attitudinally regarded as different lects. The differences in the Ibibio lects are also in the areas of phonology, morphology and lexicon. The map below shows the language groups of Nigeria indicating the geographical positions where Igbo, Ibibio and some other indigenous Nigerian languages are spoken.



Map of the Language Groups of Nigeria showing the geographical positions where Igbo, Ibibio and other indigenous Nigerian languages are spoken

The Igbo and Ibibio speaking communities in pre-colonial times, before English became the official language of Nigeria, were strictly indigenous language speaking communities. At Present, English is not only the dominant language in these Igbo and Ibibio speaking communities, but also the medium of instruction in schools (from primary four classes), the language of textbooks and language of the media (print and electronic). In most of the homes, parents prefer to bring up their children as monolingual speakers of English which they believe their children will require to function in school and even beyond the school. Also, with the ever increasing urbanization and the influx of people of diverse social backgrounds into cities where Igbo or Ibibio was once only spoken, the common language of interaction within the neighborhood is also shifting to English or Nigerian Pidgin English. The implication of this is that while English (and in some cases, Nigerian Pidgin English) is gaining more grounds and speakers, Igbo and Ibibio, and by extension other Nigerian languages, are being used in fewer domains and by fewer people, especially children.

Apart from the pressure imposed by Nigerian Pidgin English, a popular medium of communication among the teeming masses, the use of English has made many native speakers of both Igbo and Ibibio to water down the essence of their languages through code-switching. Most speakers of these languages, despite their level of education, get involved in code-mixing especially in predominantly indigenous language-based discourses. That is, there is hardly any speech rendered in these languages by most speakers which is not laced with chunks of English words. For Igbo especially, the code-mixing phenomenon is a reflection of the attitude of apathy of Igbo speakers towards their language even when the English words used in the code-mixed expressions have equivalents in Igbo. Again, this practice, which for most times, is an unconscious activity (driven by socio-economic reasons), has had the negative implication of continuously shrinking the

functional domains of these two languages in usage while expanding that of English. Also, the bilingual environment in which English has established itself as the language of opportunity and upward social mobility has created an increasingly large body of new homes in which parents unwittingly speak more English than their mother tongue to their children and, as a matter of fact, indigenous languages are not spoken at all in such homes. So, with speaker's competence impaired right from the home, its consequences include child incompetence in the language and failure in intergenerational transfer of the language.

Though both languages are spoken in some families as first languages, they are restricted to homes where the children interact with their parents and close relatives. The importance attached to English has made English to be regarded as a language of prestige since it carries a certain potential for economic benefit. A shift from these languages has also been noted in many urban families, where many parents are now introducing their children to English language as the first language rather than the indigenous languages. This is mainly due to the belief that English language is the language of the educated and enlightened persons. There is a feeling among many Igbo/Ibibio people, though faulty in many respects, that the ability to speak English language rather than the indigenous language is in itself the acquisition of knowledge. Also, there has been an increase in the number of middle income earners who take their children to schools that primarily use English, the language of instruction right from early childhood education.

4. Igbo and Ibibio Vocabulary Vitality Tests

In order to check the vitality/vibrancy of Igbo and Ibibio vocabulary usage, and also to have a glimpse of the degree to which some of the vocabulary items have diminished in the speech of the speakers of these languages, some speakers in Aba and Uyo metropolises were given a vocabulary test.

4.1 Sample Population

The respondents used for the study consisted of adults from different walks of life in Aba metropolis (the commercial city of Aba State) and Uyo metropolis (the capital city of Akwa Ibom state). In terms of socio-economic status, the respondents consisted of traders, businessmen, businesswomen, politicians, civil servants, college lecturers and students, school and media personnel, artisans, housewives and unemployed youths who are indigenous Igbo or Ibibio speakers residing in Aba or in Uyo between the ages of 16 to 65 years. The sample size taken was 768 adults; 384 adults (192 males and 192 females) for Igbo in Aba metropolis and 384 adults (192 males and 192 females) for Ibibio in Uyo metropolis.

Aba is the commercial city of Abia. Apart from the speakers of the other non-speaking Igbos working in Aba, Aba is also largely and homogeneously Igbo speaking. As at 2006 Nigerian national census, Aba had an estimated population of 500,183 and more than 90% of the population is indigenously Igbo-speaking, which to a large extent makes the city linguistically homogenous. The Aba metropolis basically consists of two Local Government Areas, Aba South and Aba North. The two Local Government Areas were divided into ten clusters for ease of administration of the research instrument. The ten clusters are Opobo Junction

cluster, 7UP Bottling Company junction cluster, Aba Main Park cluster, Ngwa Road cluster, Azikiwe Road cluster, Faulks Road cluster, Umungansi cluster, Abayi cluster, Ariaria Market cluster and Port Harcourt Road cluster. The number of respondents per cluster was 38 (19 males and 19 females) except for the Ariaria cluster which consisted of 42 (21 males and 21 females) respondents.

Uyo is the capital city of Akwa Ibom, a state with many small lects or speech forms, the two biggest being Ibibio spoken by about two million people and Anaang by about one million speakers (Grimes, 2000). Apart from the speakers of the other Ibibio lects who reside in Uyo and others who are non-speakers, Uyo is also largely and homogenously Ibibio speaking. The population of Uyo metropolis (which comprises Uyo and Itu Local Government Areas), according to the 2006 Nigerian Census was 500,000. Also, ten clusters within the Uyo metropolis were identified and used. They are: Itam cluster, Idoro Road cluster, Ikpa Road cluster, Ibom Plaza cluster, Nwaniba cluster, Oron Road cluster, Abak Road cluster, Aka Road cluster, Nsikak Eduok cluster and Udo Umana cluster. The number of respondents per cluster was 38 (19 males and 19 females) except for the Itam cluster which consisted of 42 (21 males and 21 females) respondents.

4.2 Methodology and Instrument of Data Collection

This study was carried out between June and December, 2015, using a descriptive survey design involving the use of questionnaires. In both cities (Aba and Uyo), a general questionnaire was administered containing 260 English words categorized into 24 word groups to 768 respondents; 384 for Igbo and 384 for Ibibio. The respondents were asked to indicate ‘yes’ or ‘no’ if they would use the indigenous language equivalent of the English words in their day- to-day interactions done in indigenous language. The survey was personally conducted by the author in both cities. The completed questionnaires were retrieved with a high rate of recovery. The random sampling method was used to select the respondents within each cluster. The result of this vocabulary test is shown in the table that follows.

S/ N	Word Group	No of Items in the Group	Total No of Respondents	Average % of Igbo Vocabulary Usage	Average % of Ibibio Vocabulary Usage
1	Words for Body Parts	34	384	78.1	75.7
2	Words for Foods and Vegetables	23	384	54.3	71.7
3	Birds' names	9	384	71.4	70
4	Words for Greetings	3	384	10	80
5	Family/Kinship words	18	384	39.2	71.2
6	Words for Telling Time	6	384	25.8	37.8
7	Words for	7	384	45.7	77.4

	Insects/Pests				
8	Names for some Animals	13	384	52.2	70.9
9	Names for some Reptiles	9	384	83.4	80
10	Names for some House Objects	34	384	20.1	79.9
11	Words for Colours	7	384	22.9	32.6
12	Words for some Fruits	10	384	29.7	55.4
13	Words for Instruments	5	384	42	58
14	Words for some Furniture	5	384	25	60.2
15	Words for Kitchen Utensils	7	384	83	85
16	Words for General Place Names	10	384	59	75
17	Names for Persons/Occupations	18	384	44.6	80
18	Words For Sicknesses	4	384	44	79
19	Names of Deities	2	384	100	100
20	Words for Jewelries	3	384	51	72
21	Words for Water Bodies, Mountains	12	384	81.8	75
22	Words for Naira Denominations	9	384	0	23
23	Words For Vocatives	3	384	61	67.7
24	Building/Carpentry Materials	9	384	42.6	57.4
	Total	260	-	48.6	68.1

5. Results/Findings

The results from the vocabulary test as presented in the table show evidence of varying degrees of vocabulary endangerment in both Igbo and Ibibio. It also vividly captures the vitality ratings of different aspects of the vocabulary items compared in both languages. Six word groups in Igbo out of the twenty-four word groups had usages of 70% and above. These were body part words, names for birds, names of reptiles, words for cooking utensils, words for deities and words for water bodies with a usage of 78.1%, 71.4%, 83.4%, 83%, 100% and 81.8% respectively. Apart from the words for cooking utensils, the other three groups in the category of 70% above were generally basic vocabulary words. Following the six groups with 70% and above but not closer in terms of the percentage scores, were four other groups with 50% and above but not up to 60%. These were words for food and vegetables, names for animals, words for general place names and words for jewelries. The only group within the range of 60% was the group for vocatives. However, thirteen out of the twenty-four word groups surveyed, had less than 50% usage in Igbo. These were words for greeting, kinship words, words for telling time, insects/pests names, object names, words for colours, words for fruits, words for certain instruments, words for furniture, words for persons/occupations, words for sicknesses, words for naira denominations and words for building and carpentry materials. Even within the thirteen word groups with less than 50%, seven groups had a usage of less than 30%. These were words for greetings, words for telling time, names of certain objects, words for colours, fruit names, words for furniture and words for naira denominations. It was surprising to note that the total percentage average usage of the entire twenty-four group of words for Igbo was 48.6%. This simply shows that of the twenty-four groups of words, about less than half of the population sampled used the indigenous Igbo words. This shows evidence of indigenous Igbo vocabulary neglect by the Igbo speakers.

Compared with Igbo, the vocabulary vitality test result for Ibibio shows that sixteen out of the twenty-four word groups had a usage of up to 70% and above. These were words for body parts, words for food and vegetables, birds' names, greeting words, family/kinship words, names for insects/pests, animal names, names of reptiles, names of some house objects, names of cooking utensils, general place names, names of persons/occupations, words for sicknesses, names of deities, words for jewelries, and words for water bodies/mountains.

Unlike in Igbo, out of the entire twenty-four word groups, Ibibio had eight groups with less than 70% and out of the eight groups with less than 70%, only three groups scored less than 40%. Thus, out of the entire twenty-four word groups, Ibibio scored 50% and above in twenty-two word groups while Igbo scored 50% and above in only eleven word groups. Compared with Igbo with a total average of 48.6%, Ibibio had a total average usage of 68.1%. These figures show obviously that vocabulary endangerment is more in the speech of Igbo respondents than in the speech of Ibibio respondents in the two cities compared.

5.1 Vocabulary Areas Resistant and Vulnerable to Endangerment in both Languages

If it is assumed that a score of 70% and above is evidence of vocabulary resistance to endangerment, both Igbo and Ibibio have six groups of vocabulary items that are resistant to endangerment based on this survey. These groups are words for deities, body parts, birds' names, water bodies/mountains, reptiles, and kitchen utensils. Unlike Igbo, Ibibio still had more vocabulary groups with 70% and above, and thus far, resistant to endangerment. These include words for food and vegetables, greetings, family/kinship, insects/pests, animals, certain home objects, general place names, persons/occupations, sicknesses and jewelries. In both Igbo and Ibibio, words for vocatives had 61% and 67.7% respectively, which means these words may likely become vulnerable over time. However, already in a vulnerable situation with respect to endangerment in both languages and even more in Igbo are words for telling time, colours and words for naira denominations. These had less than 40% in both languages. Other words in Igbo but not in Ibibio that are also in this vulnerable condition include words for greetings, family/kinship, insects/pests, certain home objects, fruits, instruments, furniture items, persons/occupations, sicknesses and building/carpentry materials. These had less than 50% ratings in usage among the Igbo respondents, pointing to the fact that these vocabulary items in Igbo are more endangered than they are in Ibibio.

5.2 Implications of the Vocabulary Vitality Tests for Igbo and Ibibio

The results of the vocabulary test also have implications for both Igbo and Ibibio especially when viewed in line with the UNESCO's indices for language endangerment. The most commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to the next. Given the figures of the vocabulary usage by the respondents in both Igbo and Ibibio, it is obvious that those vocabulary items that are not used in the speech of the respondents are not likely to be transmitted to the next generations of Igbo or Ibibio speakers. Therefore, the transmission of these languages from one generation to another may be threatened gradually for Ibibio but obviously is being seriously threatened in Igbo.

Another implication of the result of the vocabulary vitality test is the possibility that the number of active population of speakers of both languages, especially Igbo is gradually reducing. The total average percentage usage of the entire twenty-four group of words in Igbo is 48.6%. This means that there is clearly a gradual neglect of indigenous Igbo vocabulary items by the speakers of Igbo surveyed. This is also evidently a sign that the active speakers of Igbo is reducing. For Ibibio, the total average usage is 68.1% among the respondents in Uyo. This is less than 70% and also an indication that the number of active speakers is also not intact.

Igbo/Ibibio is the language of the ethno-linguistic group of the Igbo/Ibibio people and therefore should be used for interaction, identity, inclusiveness, thinking, creativity, entertainment and in fact in all active discourse domains, and for all purposes. However, as shown by the result of the vocabulary vitality test, the domains of usage for both languages are gradually shrinking and this is more

apparent in Igbo where words for greeting, kinship words, words for telling time, insects/pests names, object names, words for colours, words for fruits, word for certain instruments, words for furniture, words for persons/occupations, words for sicknesses, words for naira denominations and words for building/carpentry materials had a total average of less than 50% each. For the Igbo respondents, the domains of usage of the vocabulary items are shrinking; that is why they are not able to use them but prefer the English equivalents. Compared with Igbo, Ibibio had eight groups out of the twenty-four groups surveyed with less than 70% and yet three groups within the eight groups scored less than 40% and are therefore shrinking in their domains of usage.

Both Igbo and Ibibio vocabularies, based on the results of the vocabulary test, are not breaking new grounds or domains of usage. Rather, a large percentage of Igbo/Ibibio speakers as shown in the table above accord chunks of English language words more prestige and respect in their day to day interactions done in Igbo or Ibibio. This is an indication that Igbo and Ibibio are not gaining more domains of usage but rather losing domains of usage to English.

The poor attitude of both speakers of the two languages, especially the Igbo speakers is also very obvious from the percentage scores. The Igbos by their nature are traders and travelers who take businesses outside their indigenous speech communities. In their new host communities where they do their trading, their initial communication begins with English or Nigerian Pidgin English, and they later try to become linguistically inclusive with their host communities by learning the language of their host, which will provide them with better trading prospects. The long term effect of the situation is that the traders get involved in apparent neglect of their indigenous language (Igbo) to the extent that by the time they visit their indigenous speech communities, their speech will be characterized by overwhelming evidence of code-mixing of Igbo and English. This automatically influences the speech of even those who permanently reside in the indigenous speech communities and the evidence of this kind of linguistic behaviour is as reflected in the vocabulary test result.

6. Recommendations

The Federal Government of Nigeria has a positive statement about the Nigerian Indigenous languages but, has not taken significant steps to ensuring the practical realization of the language policy statement as enunciated in the National Policy on Education. It is very important that the government ensures the practical realization of the language policy. Though a lot of books have been written on Igbo and Ibibio languages, many more materials for language education and literacy are still required in the languages. There is also the need for more materials in literacy tradition and in everyday media. In this regard, the following recommendations are made in line with Ohiri-Aniche (2008) towards halting vocabulary endangerment in Igbo, Ibibio and other indigenous Nigerian languages. They are:

(i) *Promoting Vibrant Use of Indigenous Languages at Homes:* Parents hold the key to the prevention of language endangerment by bringing up their children to speak the indigenous languages and to also use them at home.

(ii) *Mandatory Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Languages at all Levels of Education:* Governments at both the national and state levels should ensure that

indigenous languages are taught and learnt at all tiers of education, from nursery to primary schools and secondary schools to the tertiary institutions (both private and public schools). The government should also monitor compliance.

(iii) Award of Scholarships and Bursaries to Students of Indigenous Languages in Tertiary Institutions: This will be a great source of encouragement when students studying Indigenous languages at the tertiary level are motivated with scholarships and bursaries. This will attract more students to enroll for such programmes.

(iv) Promote Indigenous Languages' Cultures in Schools: All nursery, primary and secondary schools should have weekly activities of indigenous languages' culture.

(v) Use of the Indigenous Languages in Songs, Dances, Games, Drama: This will enhance vocabulary learning and retention in the indigenous languages.

(vi) Make Knowledge of One's Indigenous Language a Pre-Requisite in Certain Vital Domains: Knowledge of one's indigenous language can be made a pre-requisite for advancement in certain areas, for example, promotion from Junior Secondary School to Senior Secondary School, and admission into tertiary institutions, employment in the civil service, obtaining Certificate of State of Origin/ Citizenship or Nigerian passport.

(vii) Encouraging Publications in Indigenous Languages: Both the government and private sectors should actively promote publications (school textbooks, leisure materials, magazines, newspapers, etc) of various categories in the local languages

(viii) Creating Enough Time for Indigenous Language Programmes in the Electronic Media: Greater air-time and space should be given on radio and television for Indigenous Language programmes (such as drama, songs, dances, phone-ins, quizzes, discussions, etc).

(ix) The Nigerians in the Diaspora should Use their Indigenous Languages: Nigerians in the Diaspora should use their respective indigenous languages and also bring up their children to be able to speak such languages as well as the language of their host communities.

(x) Celebrating Indigenous Languages and Cultures' Day: There is need to combat the over 150 years of denigration and relegation of indigenous languages and cultures. To this end, the Federal Government of Nigeria should put in place measures for actively promoting the indigenous languages and cultures. One such measure is to declare a Nigerian diversity day, possible on Wednesdays, when individual languages and cultures will be freely used and manifested by everyone and in every place.

7. Conclusion

The vocabulary endangerment test results as presented in 4.2 have shown that the vocabulary items compared in the two languages are more endangered in Igbo than in Ibibio. While the total average usage of the vocabulary items by the Igbo respondents was 48.6% that of the Ibibio respondents was 68.1%.

This simple vocabulary test result from Igbo and Ibibio has shown that the phenomenon of language endangerment is real and has the potential/possibility of forcing the languages into becoming critically endangered and ultimately extinct as generations of speakers continuously show apathy to their indigenous languages coupled with incessant loss of indigenous vocabulary. The results from the vocabulary tests, show that the basic parameters applied in designating the present state of several languages as endangered or seriously endangered for example in the

UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages may, over a period of time, apply very much to these two languages but especially Igbo. Thus, the vocabulary tests results for Igbo are clear indications that Igbo may be manifesting signs of reduced speaker competence, rapidly decreasing child competence, repressive language policies in schools, intense code-switching and code-mixing, assimilation from languages such as English and Nigerian Pidgin and the depletion of the population of monolingual elderly (cf. Azuonye 2002).

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