

INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ON IKWERRE LANGUAGE IN PORT HARCOURT METROOLIS OF RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study was concerned with the assessment of the influence of English Language on Ikwerre Language within Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State, Nigeria. Its objectives were to investigate the role of parents, schools and government in protecting the Ikwerre Language from being killed (destroyed) by the English Language and to ascertain the level of proficiency in the use of the native language amongst the Ikwerre parents and children. Data were elicited with the use of the questionnaire and interview schedule. The sample size of the study was made up of 400 respondents which were selected through the random sampling technique. Frequently, percentage and mean were used for the analyses of data which were obtained from the field survey. Results indicated that the level of proficiency in the use of the native language amongst Ikwerre parents was 20%, while that of children was 5%, bringing the pooled proficiency value to 12.50%. The following results were obtained: Parents, schools and government have not done much to protect the Ikwerre Language spoken in Port Harcourt metropolis from being endangered by the English Language. In order to prevent the Ikwerre Language from going into extinction in the area, the study recommends that the language should be frequently spoken at home by parents to their children to increase proficiency in its use. The school and government should also enforce the use of the language of the environment as a medium of instruction for the first three years as is stated in the National Policy on Education provisions.

Keywords: Language, English Language, Ikwerre Language and Language endangerment

Introduction

As an official language of the country, the English Language is the language for education, law, judiciary, sports, commerce and industries, politics, science and technology. It is also the language for plenaries. The status of the English Language in Nigeria has made it almost impossible for other languages, especially those with fewer speakers to maintain their status. Thus, in a multicultural and multilingual nation like Nigeria, the English language has dominated so many indigenous languages, including Ikwerre. This is because of its influence and negative effect on those languages.

The National Policy on Education has also strengthened the killing powers of the English Language by declaring English the language of instruction, especially, from Basic Four (4) and

above. It also makes the English Language a compulsory subject and requirement for admission into higher institutions in Nigeria.

The English Language in Nigeria has become so successful in relegating other languages and enthroning itself as the only language actively used through the country especially in the Rivers State. It has become crystal clear that nothing can be done to change the status and the intimidating power of English because of the multilingual nature of Nigeria. This, therefore, contributes to the death of the Nigerian indigenous languages. This research work, therefore, looks at the influence of the English language on the Ikwerre people and the extent to which the language has subsumed Ikwerre within the Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor dialect cluster. It is given that many Nigerian indigenous languages are under threat of

extinction today as a result of undue priority placed on English. Consequently, parents of Ikwere origin rarely speak their native language to their children without mixing it with English. This has resulted in raising children who cannot fully express themselves in their native language.

Definition of Language

Language is a systematic tool for conveying ideas or feelings by using agreed signs, sounds, gestures or signs that contain understandable meanings (Tseng, 2018) and (Oviogun and Veerdee, 2020). Similarly, Crystal (1974) and Hakim (2018) hold that “language is human vocal noise (or the graphic representation of this noise) used systematically and conventionally by a community for the purpose of communication”. Obi-Okoye (2008) also defines language based on its function as “the most important means of human communications. It is used to convey and exchange information (information functions); prompt action (appellative function); commits oneself to do something (obligatory function); opens hold, and or guide in discovery, investigate and promote discovery (heuristic function); convey and exchange artistic/aesthetic creations (poetic function)”.

Nwala (2015) opines that “language among other things is a channel through which people interact, exchange all sorts of phatic communication and transmit their culture from one generation to another”. However, an indigenous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken mainly by those in that region (Orji and Udeze, 2021). The importance of language in any human society cannot be over emphasized as it is important to our day-to-day interaction which ensures orderliness in the society (Ozoemena *et al*, 2021). From the above definitions, one central idea about language is that it involves the use of signs and symbols or even oral words to communicate.

Language Planning and Policy

Here we shall look at the efforts made by the government on language and the policies relating to language. In any nation where there is multiplicity of language, that is, pluralistic nation where many languages are used, there is bound to be conflict, ethnic loyalty, fear of intimidation, social and political inequality, development of

some sections and the underdevelopment of some other sections. There will also be the problem of communication, linguistic and ethnic loyalty, and even use of non-native language, such as the case in Nigeria. Mesthrie *et al*. (2009) differentiate between language planning and language policy when they opined that:

Language policy is sometimes used as a synonym for language planning. Language policy refers to the more general linguistic, political and social goals underlying the actual language planning process. Based on that, the implementation of a language policy is known as unnatural change, often referred to as a deliberate attempt at changing the use of a language or various languages within a community or a nation (Mesthrie *et al.*, 2009).

It is also important to look at it in terms of whose responsibility it is for this deliberate language change. It becomes obvious from this definition that the said responsibility lies with the government to implement a new language policy.

Language Provisions of the National Policy on Education of Nigeria

In every country, the government always make policies revealing its ideology concerning the language situation in the country. The government formulated the National Policy on Education to promote education among individuals within the country. To develop the education system of the country is one of its aims (Odimayo, 2019). Some of the objectives of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria to include among others: to centre educational activities on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment; relate education to overall community need; rate education high in national development plans.

Education policies make provisions for the use of languages. The language provisions of the National Policy on Education were presented in 1977. It is worthy of note to state this working document has undergone several reviews, the last been the 2004 version. It indicates as follows:

- Each child should be encouraged to learn two out of the three major languages other than his

mother tongue. The major languages are Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo.

- The medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment. In this case, the orthography for more indigenous languages will be made available.
- The junior secondary school will be prevocational and curriculum should make room for students to study two Nigerian languages, languages of their own area and any of the three major languages.

Three groups of languages exist in Nigerian schools: they are indigenous, official and foreign languages. People learn through these languages either formally or informally. Sometimes, these languages serve as media of instruction though some are taught as subjects. Whichever way, the important thing is that provisions are made for languages in the National Policy on Education at the nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary education levels.

English Language

The English Language is the language spoken by the British. It is a West Germanic language brought about by the arrival of the Germanic tribes who invaded Britain between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. Nwala (2015) asserts that English Language is 'a left-over colonial product' He adds that 'it was the language of contact used by Nigerian colonial masters – the British'. The truth is that the use of a common language – English, made colonialisation of Nigeria easy as it was possible to communicate in a common language. English has become a global language and recognised as an official language by about sixty-seven (67) countries. This was made possible as it was imposed on the countries the British colonialists conquered. It is a language of business across the world. With it in a multilingual society, communication becomes easy.

The widespread usage of English Language in many countries has given it a global status. English Language is the indigenous language of Great Britain, United States of America, Canada and Australia. However, many countries now use it as their first language; others use it as their second language while some others use it as a foreign language. English has become

the language of international media: radio, newspapers, magazines, televisions, etc. It is exerting its dominance on the space of every country in the world (Verghese, 2007). No wonder, Nigeria adopted it as its official language. English remains a second language learned and used in every sector.

Language Attitudes

Language attitude can cause language endangerment. It is indubitable that attitudes are keys to whether languages are maintained or abandoned. The nonchalant attitudes of some Ikwerre speakers have made the transmission of the language almost impossible. This linguistic attitude could be a powerful force both for promotion and loss of their languages. Conflicting linguistic attitudes arise when several larger linguistic communities compete amongst themselves for the same social or political space; and this brings to the fore the general perception that multiple languages bring divisiveness and are a threat to national unity.

Omego (2014) was of the opinion that the adoption of English Language by Federal government as the official language of the nation is one of the factors militating against the development of indigenous languages. This impression should be corrected by studying and developing Nigerian indigenous languages alongside English language. The faith of small languages is in the hands of the speakers. If they wish their language to grow, they should take steps not only to use it themselves but to ensure that their children are adequately exposed to it and retain it as their home language to pass on to the next generation. Where this is neglected, then the language may be extinct in a few generations.

Language Revitalisation

Revitalisation of language is a language planning practice intended to increase the use and transmission of languages that are socially, political and economically marginalised, and that have discussed as likely to disappear entirely within, at best, a few generations (Hinton, 2003; Grenoble and Whaley, 2006).

Accordingly, the role of schools is fundamental in restoring minority and endangered languages (Fishman 1989; Crystal, 1974). Education systems reflect the values and aspirations of nation status

dominant society (Schaffer, 2003). If minority languages are incorporated into the education system of the state or nation, it will promote its (the endangered language) use as the status of the language will be elevated and offered equal opportunity of social, political and economic participation, even to those who speak such languages.

Crystal (1974) opines that an endangered (dying) language will progress if its speakers have a strong presence in the educational system. No language can survive in an abstraction; restoring indigenous languages requires special planning that includes formal recognition in education systems and incorporation into school curricula. On that note, schools are focal points with the potential to promote the development of a child's mother tongue by teaching it to them at the early stages of their lives.

Language Maintenance

Language maintenance is a situation in which an individual or a community intransigently clings to using their traditional first language, despite compelling situations to renounce the same (Veettil et al, 2020). For a language to be maintained, speakers of such language must continue to use it despite competition with the dominant language. In this case, elevating the prestige of such language will be required. One of the ways to achieve this is through the media. Television and radio are useful in enhancing the prestige of a language. Speakers of an indigenous language will have more opportunities to listen to their language if programmes can be broadcast in their language. Language prestige can also be achieved through government recognition which can be done by placing the indigenous language in the same level as the dominant language.

Methodology

Area of the Study

The area of study of the research was the Port Harcourt metropolis. Many Ikwerre Language speaking communities make up the metropolis known as Port Harcourt and the communities are found in two Local Government Areas (LGA) of

Rivers State, Nigeria, namely: Obio/Akpor Local Government Area and Port Harcourt City Local Government Area. Few of these communities were randomly selected for this investigation. The communities from Obio/Akpor Local Government Area are Rumuomasi, Rumueme, Rumuola and Ozuoba. From Port Harcourt City Local Government Area, Rumuwoji, Orogbum, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo and Elikahia were selected.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was made up of all Ikwerre indigenes in Port Harcourt metropolis (Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt LGAs). As at 2006 census, the population status of Obio/Akpor was 464,789 while Port Harcourt Local Government Area as at 2011 census, held a population of 638,360 (Harrison, 2018).

Research Problem

The research problem of this study was to determine the extent to which the English Language has influenced the Ikwerre language spoken in the study area in order to prevent the threat of extinction of the language.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the research.

- i What is the level of proficiency in the use of Ikwerre language by Ikwerre parents and children in the area?
- ii To what extent have the parents, schools and government performed their roles in protecting the use of Ikwerre language from being killed by English language?

Objectives of the Study

This study's aim was to assess the influence of the English language on the Ikwerre language. The specific broad objectives were to:

- i. ascertain the level of proficiency in the use of Ikwerre Language amongst Ikwerre parents and children in the study area and
- ii. establish the role of parents, schools and government in protecting the Ikwerre language from being destroyed by the English Language.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sampling technique employed for this research was the random sampling technique. This type of technique gives every member in the defined population equal opportunity to be selected. The researchers

selected the respondents randomly to serve as the sample for the study. The sample size of this research was determined by using Taro Yamane formula which is presented as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size required

N = Number of people in the population (1,103,149 as in this case)

1 = Constant

e = Allowable error (± 5) = 0.05%

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

N = 1,103,149

e = 0.05 (0.0025)

$$\begin{aligned} \therefore n &= \frac{1,103,149}{1+1,103,149 (0.0025)} \\ &= \frac{1,103,149}{1+2757.8725} \\ &= \frac{1,103,149}{2758.9} \\ &= 399.85 \\ &= 399.9 \\ \underline{\Omega} &= 400 \end{aligned}$$

The answer obtained was 400. In view of this situation, the sample size of this study was 400 respondents. Twenty-five parents and twenty-five children from each of the eight communities were randomly sampled. The total samples obtained from parents was 200 and that from children was 200 as well.

Method of Data Collection

For this study, the researchers used questionnaire and interview schedule for the data collection. The use of questionnaire was a necessity in that it is the most appropriate means of getting a reliable information, and easy and

quick feedback from literate respondents. Interview schedule was also used to receive detailed information from illiterate respondents.

Method of Data Analysis

The method of data analysis for the objectives was a simple descriptive statistical method, whereby the data from the distributed questionnaire were sorted, coded, tabulated and analysed with frequency, percentage and mean. The response for each variable of interest was obtained by dividing the frequency for the variable by the total frequency for the study and multiplying by 100, all in percentage.

Mathematically, this is presented as:

$$Y = \frac{X}{Z} \times 100\%$$

Where: Y = Variable of interest

X = Frequency of variable of interest

Z = Total frequency of the study (in this case = 400) for the parents and children respondents.

Research Question 1: What is the level of proficiency in the use of Ikwerre language amongst the Ikwerre parents and children?

Table 1: Level of Proficiency in the use of Ikwerre Language by Parents and Children in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State, Nigeria.

S/N	Variable	Frequency		Percentage (%)		Pooled Value	
		Parents (n=200)	Children (n=200)	Parents	Children	Frequency (n=400)	%
1	Interest to speak	64	30	32	15	94	23.50
2	Effective in conversation	120	20	60	10	140	35
3	Making and understanding parables	9	-	4.50	-	9	2.25
4	Ability to read	4	-	2	-	4	1
5	Ability to write	3	-	1.50	-	3	0.75
	Proficiency level			20.00	5		12.50

Source: Field Survey, (2021).

From the foregoing in item one (1) on Table 1, sixty-four (64) respondents from the parents which represented 32% of the respondents acknowledged that they had interest to speak Ikwerre language, while thirty (30) from the children representing 15% also affirmed that they were actually interested in speaking the language. The pooled value frequency of parents and children respondents interested in speaking Ikwerre language came up to ninety-four (94) with 23.50%.

Item two (2) result indicated that one hundred and twenty (120) parents with 60% and only twenty (20) children representing 10% of the entire research sample could effectively communicate in Ikwerre language. The pooled value frequency of parents and children that could communicate effectively in the said language was one hundred

and forty (140) with 35%. In item 3, only nine (9) parents representing 4.50% admitted that they understood and could make parables in the Ikwerre language. Not even one respondent amongst the children could make or understood any parable in their Ikwerre language. Item four (4) brought us to the knowledge that only four (4) parents representing 2% could read in Ikwerre language while none amongst the children had the ability to read in the language.

In item 5, while just three (3) respondents from the parents, representing 1.50% had the ability to write in Ikwerre language, none could amongst respondents from the children. The proficiency levels in speaking Ikwerre language by parents therefore was 20%, while children were 5% and pooled value Port Harcourt metropolis was 12.50%.

Research Question 2: To what extent have the Parents, Schools and Government performed the role of Protecting Ikwerre language from being killed by English Language?

Table 2: Role of Parents in Protecting Ikwerre Language from being killed in Port Harcourt Metropolis

S/N	Variable	Frequency		Percentage (%)		Pooled Value	
		Parents (n=200)	Children (n=200)	Parents	Children	Frequency (n=400)	%
1	Strongly agreed	30	5	15	2.50	35	8.75
2	Agreed	20	3	10	1.50	23	5.75
3	Undecided	10	2	5	1	12	3
4	Disagreed	40	70	20	35	110	27.50
5	Strongly disagreed	100	120	50	60	220	55

Source: Field Survey, (2021).

Table 2 showed that thirty (30) parents representing 15% of the respondents strongly agreed that parents performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre language from being killed by English Language, while five (5) children representing 2.50% also strongly agreed to that. The pooled value, therefore, which is a combination of the result of both the parents and children showed a ‘strongly agreed’ result of only thirty-five (35) respondents representing 8.75% of the total respondents.

In ‘Agreed’ column, however, the result showed that twenty (20) parents representing 10% of the total respondents agreed that parents performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre language from being killed by English Language while three (3) children representing 1.50% also agreed to that. This, therefore, gives us the pooled value frequency of only twenty-three (23) respondents out of four hundred (400) representing 5.75% only who agreed that parents performed their role.

However, ten (10) parents representing 5% of the respondents were undecided while two (2) children representing 1% of the respondents were also undecided, bringing the pooled value frequency to twelve (12) with the percentage of 3. Forty (40) parents representing 20% of the entire research sample disagreed that parents performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre language from being killed by the English Language while seventy (70) children representing 35% of the total respondents also disagreed to that assertion also bringing the pooled value frequency to one hundred and ten (110) and 27.5% respectively.

Similarly, one hundred (100) parents representing 50% of the respondents and one hundred and twenty (120) children representing 60% with the pooled value frequency at two hundred and twenty (220) and 55% respectively strongly disagreed that parents performed their role in protecting Ikwerre language from being killed by English Language.

Table 3: Role of Schools in Protecting the Ikwerre Language from being killed by English Language in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

S/N	Variable	Frequency		Percentage (%)		Pooled Value	
		Parents (n=200)	Children (n=200)	Parents	Children	Frequency (n=400)	%
1	Strongly agreed	6	2	3	1	8	2
2	Agreed	10	6	5	3	16	4
3	Undecided	3	2	1.50	1	5	1.25
4	Disagreed	41	30	20.50	15	71	17.75
5	Strongly disagreed	140	160	70	80	300	75

Source: Field Survey, (2021).

Table 3 showed that six (6) parents representing 3% of the total respondents and two (2) children representing 1% with a pooled value frequency of eight (8) giving the percentage value of 2% strongly agreed that schools performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre language from being killed by English Language.

In item two in the table, it was shown that ten (10) parents representing 5% of the entire respondents and six (6) children representing 3% with a pooled value frequency of sixteen (16) giving 4%, agreed that schools performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre language from being killed by the English Language.

In item three (3), however, three (3) parents out of the respondents with 1.5% and two (2) children with 1% were undecided. The pooled value frequency therefore, came to five (5) and 1.25% respectively. In the same vein, item four (4) indicates that forty-one (41) parents with 20.5% and thirty (30) children with 15% giving rise to the pooled value frequency of seventy-one (71) and 17.75% disagreed with the assertion.

Finally, the fifth item in this table indicates that one hundred and forty (140) parents with 70% and one hundred and sixty (160) children representing 80% with the total of three hundred (300) pooled value frequency giving rise to 75%, strongly

disagreed that schools performed their role to protect the Ikwerre language in the study area

Table 4: Role of Government in Protecting the Ikwerre Language Spoken in Port Harcourt Metropolis from being killed by English Language

S/N	Variable	Frequency		Percentage (%)		Pooled Value	
		Parents (n=200)	Children (n=200)	Parents	Children	Frequency (n=400)	%
1	Strongly agreed	7	2	3.50	1	9	2.25
2	Agreed	8	3	4	1.50	11	2.75
3	Undecided	15	10	7.50	5	25	6.25
4	Disagreed	40	35	20	17.50	75	18.75
5	Strongly disagreed	130	150	65	75	280	70

Source: Field Survey, (2021)

Table 4, from the parents' point of view and response, only seven (7) respondents representing 3.50% of the entire sample of the research strongly agreed that Government performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre Language from being killed by English Language. Similarly, from the children's point of view and response, only two (2) respondents representing 1% strongly agreed that government performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre language from being killed by English language. The pooled value frequency, therefore, was nine (9) with 2.25% that strongly agreed to that assertion.

Again, in item two, only an insignificant number of eight (8) respondents representing 4% from the parent's point of view and three (3) respondents representing 1.50% from the children point of view giving rise to the pooled value frequency of eleven (11) respondents and 2.75% respectively, agreed to that.

Fifteen (15) respondents from the parents which represents 7.50% of the sample and ten (10) from the children representing 5% with the pooled value frequency of twenty-five (25) and 6.25% respectively, were undecided in item three.

However, forty (40) respondents from the parents with 20% and thirty-five (35) respondents from the children representing 17.50% of the sample with the pooled value frequency of seventy-five (75) and 18.75% respectively disagreed in item four that government performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre language from being killed by English Language.

Item five (5) showed that one hundred and thirty

(130) respondents with 65% from parents and one hundred and fifty (150) respondents from children representing 75% with a pooled value frequency of two hundred and eighty (280) respondents representing 70% of the entire sample strongly disagreed that government performed their role in protecting the Ikwerre languages from being killed by English Language.

Conclusion

The results of this study have shown that it was strongly agreed that English Language has negative influence on the Ikwerre language which is spoken in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers State, Nigeria. Furthermore, it was clear that the level of proficiency in the use of Ikwerre language by Ikwerre parents and children was very poor in the study area. The roles played by parents, schools and the government in protecting the influence of English Language on the use of Ikwerre language were generally poor and below the average.

Recommendations

In order to prevent the influence of English Language from completely destroying the Ikwerre language in Port Harcourt metropolis, the study recommends that Ikwerre language should be frequently spoken at home by parents to their children to increase proficiency in the use of it. The school and government should improve their role of protecting the language by enforcing the implementation of the language of the environment as a medium of instruction for the first three years as is stated in the National Policy on Education provisions.

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