

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE: A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDE OF EREI TEENAGE SPEAKERS

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Abstract

Many minority languages in the world die as a result of lack of interest in the mother tongue, or as a result of minority speakers shifting to dominant languages. The paper investigates the extent to which Erei language in Cross River State of Nigeria has undergone maintenance, especially by Erei teenagers. Three research objectives and questions were formulated to guide the study, while behaviourism theory was adopted as the framework for the study. Thirty-six Erei-speaking teenagers aged 14-19 years drawn from the three wards that make up Erei land - Abayong, Erei North and Erei South - were selected for the study. Also, 25-item questionnaire was developed to elicit information from the respondents. The findings from their self-assessment reports show that Erei language, although minor, receive adequate maintenance by majority of the respondents, even though it is in contact with two dominant languages: English and Igbo, which pose threat to its existence. The study concludes that, although majority of Erei users find it difficult to read, write or translate Erei, the language may survive the threat of those dominant languages, and might likely not shift to any of them.

Keywords: Language Maintenance; Language Shift; Language Contact; Mother Tongue; Erei Language; Erei-speaking Teenagers

1.1 Introduction

Erei language is spoken in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State in the South South geopolitical zone, Nigeria, with a population of about 25,000 speakers (Uwen, 2018). The language belongs to Benue-Congo of the Niger-Congo family located in the western subgroup of the Upper Cross River which in turn is a subgroup of Delta-Cross (Essien, 2003; Inya, 2011; Ukam, 2015; Uwen, 2018). Uwen (2018, p. 94) reports that "Erei is more of an endangered language than a vigorous one" because it is being threatened by other languages, particularly English and Igbo, for example; as a result, Erei language may stand the chance to shift to both or one of those dominant languages. Although Erei is a community language of Erei people, it is rarely used in a formal setting or business

transaction in Erei land. Rather, Igbo and English are used. In other words, over 70 per cent of Erei people speak English and basic Igbo (Uwen, 2018; Ukam, 2023). Like English, Igbo language is another subject taught in Erei schools in place of Erei language, neglecting aboriginal Erei language which is supposed to be taught to Erei teenagers.

Till today, Erei has not been taught in school even though its letters and sounds have been developed (Inya, 2011; Ukam, 2015, 2023), and books have been written on it including Erei bible (Inya, 2012). There is also a video entitle "Erei Jesus" which shows instances where Jesus speaks Erei fluently. And currently, Erei language learning centre is functioning accurately. In spite of all these, English, Igbo and even Pidgin English, being in contact with Erei,

have all exercised dominance over Erei language in its homeland, reducing Erei to a more minority language which may eventually result to its death in the nearest future (Uwen, 2018), aligning with Cavallaro (2005), and Okpanachi and Joseph (2017), who all argue that minority languages struggle more to maintain themselves in the faces of other dominant languages, especially when they are in contact with each other; they may eventually shift and give way in such condition to other dominant languages.

For Fishman (1989, p. 15) and Fang (2017, p. 2), three things exist whenever languages are in contact: first, languages may be maintained without any change; second, there may be a shift in some form of languages; and thirdly, one of the languages may no longer be used, leading to language loss or language death. The authors suggest that minority people need not to abandon their language if they are with their normal senses. They conclude that language royalty is a moral duty to everyone (Zhou & Bankston, 2000). But as important as language maintenance (LM) a lot has not been done. Instead, the negative side of maintenance, that is, language shift (LS), has been over-attended, whereas the positive side (i.e. LM) has been downplayed and overlooked, leading to the statement that the big fish always swallows the small fish (Fishman, 1991).

Erei language is one of those languages being neglected and out-maintained in its ancestral land, especially since English and Igbo are in much contact with it. Yet, not much has been done to investigate how Erei citizens continue to maintain their aboriginal Erei language. The current paper is an acknowledgment to this gap by investigating the attitude of Erei teenagers towards maintaining Erei language. The objectives of the paper are: first to assess the extent to which Erei teenagers protect Erei language as their linguistic and cultural identity; second, to identify the effects of

language contact on aboriginal Erei language; and thirdly, to examine the proficiency Erei teenagers have in maintaining their mother tongue.

1.2 Research Questions

- a. To what extent is Erei language maintained by Erei teenagers in protecting their linguistic and cultural identity?
- b. To what extent does language contact (like trade) or identity negotiation motivate or affect Erei language maintenance?
- c. How proficient are teenage native Erei speakers in using Erei language in discourse?

2.1 Review of Concepts

2.1.1 Language Maintenance

Language maintenance is a situation where a speaker or group of speakers or speech communities continue to use their language in everyday life despite competition with dominant or majority language(s). Benrabah (2004) avers that LM is the continuous use of the mother tongue, regardless of the cultural pressures from more prestigious or politically more dominant language. In a situation where a language is being threatened by other languages (as in the case of Erei) LM (language maintenance) is needed to face the threat of an LS (language shift). In fact, LM is an important component of identity and culture of any group: members can easily identify themselves more closely with those who share their language than with those who share other aspects of their cultural background (Fang, 2017).

The concept was first advanced by Fishman (1989, p. 77), who defines it as the process and pursuit of intergenerational linguistic continuity. Hamde (2005, p. 5) contends that LM is possible if the members of the minority language know their language well, and continue to use it even in the midst of bilingual or

multilingual setting, while Fang (2017, p. 5) maintains that these minority bilingual users stand a better advantage than those of monolingual users as long as they do not abandon their language in place of another. But Cavallaro (2005) has lamented that most languages in Nigeria have been allowed to speedily decline, losing to English, broken English or Pidgin English, and may eventually die (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977; Thieberger, 1990; Kedrebeogo, 1998).

2.1.2 Language Contact

In many cases, speakers of two or more languages interact and influence each other. The close interaction could lead one language (with more population) to influence the other (with less population). Overtime, most languages have been influenced by contact, resulting in different degrees of transfers from one language to another. It was because of contact that resulted English, for example, to borrow more from French, Latin, Greek and many other languages (Ike, 2000), and for Erei to borrow some lexical items from Igbo, English, Efik as well as other surrounding languages (Inya, 2011). Language contact is the way in which language communities not only interact with each other, but also impact such contact on others. The term, according to Gramley (2012), occurs at language borders, by borrowing, or as a result of migration, among others. Gramley further states that the concept is the major factor of language change and shift, leading to alternative pronunciation, grammatical structure as well as vocabulary. Erei language has contact with Igbo and English; as a result, native Erei speakers are bound to be influenced by these languages.

2.1.3 Language Shift

When languages are in contact, they influence each other; particularly, the dominant ones usually dominate the lesser ones. Speakers of the less dominant language begin to gradually shift to the languages which seem to be dominant,

resulting to LS, or if possible, language loss. Language shift is sometimes referred to as language replacement or language assimilation. It is the process whereby members of a speech community change or shift from their aboriginal language to a new different language. This happens when dominant languages dominate lesser ones.

Language shift may also occur when a speech community sees no reason of maintaining their ethnic or native language. In other words, it is a process in which a speech community gradually stops using its own language in favour of another. According to Anthony (2007), the best way to understand LS is to look at it as a social strategy in which individuals and groups compete for positions of prestige, power and security, arguing that “a relatively small immigrant elite population can encourage widespread language shift among numerically dominant indigenes” (p. 117). This implies that a dominant language can easily impose itself in an environment of a non-dominant language even when such a dominant language has lesser speakers.

Kartika-Ningsih and Rose (2018) are of the opinion that this concept is the use of multi-languages in all types of interactions such as teaching and learning. The authors go further to state that LS is when two or more languages are in contact in such a way that items from first language are brought to second language. In this case, the native of aboriginal language might code switch or mix during spoken discourse. Kandler et al. (2010) describe LS as the process whereby “members of a community in which more than one language is spoken abandon their original vernacular language in favour of another” (p. 3855). They term the concept as a competition process in which the languages in contact try to overcome each other. Most speech communities have abandoned their languages in favour of more dominant ones in order to meet

their needs or gain favour when using the new language. The users are confronted with different choices in terms of which language they are to use in place of another. One major decision is to abandon the less prestigious language in favour of the more prestigious one, because such shift, according to the authors, is seen as “more modern, useful or giving access to greater social mobility and economic opportunities” (p. 3855) (see also Krauss, 1992; Nettle & Romaine, 1999).

3.1 Behaviourism Theory

Watson (1913) propounded the theory of behaviourism to support the idea of Skinner, Parlov and Thorndike, who earlier developed the theory on learning as a reaction to traditional grammar. Behaviourism is of the opinion that human beings have the capacity to learn and use language in order to gain knowledge either in a conscious way or subconscious way. That to use language effectively does not necessarily mean one must learn it through formal way. Language can equally be learnt in the church, at home or in any other informal environment. And that using language effectively comes when there are changes in behaviour.

Since behaviourism justifies that learning and using of a language is an act of a new set of habit, Ellis (1990) argues that learning and producing language adequately can be effective by manipulating the environment to provide the required experience, leading to a habit formation recognised as Stimulus-Response, because every process of learning has to be followed by reinforcement (Demirezen, 1988). In other words, behaviourism believes that learning and using language can happen through manipulating the environment in order to experience the new behaviour. In this paper, this theory shall help to account for the behaviour of Erei teenage speakers in their handling of Erei language in different environments they find themselves.

4.1 Methodology

For the purpose of the current study, 36 Erei-

speaking teenagers (12 from Erei South ward; 12 from Erei North ward, and 12 from Abayong ward) were selected from the 17 communities that make up Erei land. The respondents were secondary school students aged between 14 and 19 years. The age brackets of the teenagers and the choice of secondary school students are considered here for the fact that the respondents are more advanced teenagers who could provide appropriate details towards the use of Erei language in discourse, as well as expressing themselves fluently in their native Erei language. In order to expose the participants to the knowledge of Erei language, they were subjected to eight-week pre-test examinations: each was asked to read a passage written in Erei language, to discuss it and then to translate it into English, before the distribution of the questionnaire.

A questionnaire containing 25 items were developed to elicit information from the participants. The questionnaire items, which were validated by an expert, focused on the respondents' self-perception or report of the following dimensions: proficiency in Erei (5 items), the use of Erei at home (5 items), the use of Erei in public (5 items), the use of Erei in school (5 items), and the use of Erei in church (5 items). The data were distributed to the respondents to fill, and the collection of the forms took about two weeks. The rating scale of the questionnaire used is a Linkert scale: SA - strongly agree, A - agree, D - disagree and SD - strongly disagree, in order to have a clear idea of their self-responses. The data were analysed in tables using a simple percentage: the first two tables (Tables 1&2) examined the respondents' sex and age brackets, while the remaining tables (Tables 3-7) showed the respondents' proficiency ability in Erei language.

5.1 Results

The data from the questionnaire, represented in tabular forms, is presented and discussed in this section. While Tables 1 and 2 analyse the

personal information of the respondents (sex and age, respectively), sections three to seven are a discussion of respondents' reports.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Sex

Sex	Frequency (Freq)	Percentages (%)
Male	16	44.5
Female	20	55.5
Total	36	100

The female respondents constituted 20 (or 55.5%), while the males are 45.3 per cent or 16 in number. The order of respondents is ranged from being first born child to the fourth.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

No.	Years	Freq	%
1	14	6	16.7
2	15	4	11.1
3	16	7	19.4
4	17	4	11.1
5	18	5	13.9
6	19	10	27.8
Total		36	100

Respondents in the 19-year category had the highest informants with 27.8 per cent as shown in Table 2, followed by those of 16 and 14 years (19.4% and 16.7%, respectively). The remaining constituted the lowest number with four respondents or 11.1 per cent (15 and 17 years), and five or 13.9 per cent (18 years) of the total population. These ages are considered for the purpose of this study, because it is expected that they should be able to express themselves fluently in their mother tongue.

Table 3: Proficiency in Erei

No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1	I understand Erei Fluently.	16	44.5	12	33.3	5	13.9	3	8.3	36	100
2	I speak Erei Fluently.	21	58.3	13	36.1	2	5.6	0	0	36	100
3	I write Erei Fluently.	4	11.1	7	19.4	8	22.3	17	47.2	36	100
4	I read Erei Fluently.	6	16.7	9	25	6	16.7	15	41.6	36	100
5	I can translate Erei to English easily and accurately.	2	5.6	5	13.8	8	22.3	21	58.3	36	100

Table 3 shows the extent to which the informants are proficient in Erei language. Item 1 indicates the level to which the participants understand Erei language. Those who strongly agreed that they understood Erei fluently and perfectly were 16(44.5%), which constituted the highest number; those who agreed were 33.3 per cent or 12 in number, whereas those who disagreed and strongly disagreed that they cannot understand

Erei effortlessly were 13.9 per cent and 8.3 per cent, respectively. What this means is that 77.8 per cent of the respondents considered that they can easily understand Erei. Only 22.2 per cent had a negative view.

Items 2, 3 and 4 show how proficient the respondents are in both their productive (speaking, writing) and receptive (reading) skills. Item 2 considers how respondents could speak

Erei language easily. Greater percentage strongly agreed (58.3%) and agreed (36.1%), respectively that they can speak the language correctly. The percentage (94.4%) when put together outnumber those with a negative view. They included 5.6 per cent for those who disagreed, and 0% for those who strongly disagreed. The zero per cent implies that no respondent was able to rate himself or herself as strongly disagreed. The positive response shows that majority of Erei speakers may likely be proficient, especially in speaking their native Erei language.

For Items 3 and 4, it is the negative response that constitutes the highest number. While greater number of the subjects can comfortably speak the language, the reverse is the case in these items. In Item 3, only 4(11.1%) strongly agreed that they can write Erei language very well. Seven respondents, representing 19.4 per cent agreed. While 8(22.3%) disagreed, the remaining 47.2 per cent, representing 17 of the total respondents strongly disagreed, a strong indication that Erei users are unable to maintain their language in terms of writing. The position indicates that 30.5 per cent of the respondents did really agree that they can write Erei language correctly, but 69.5 per cent of the respondents did not accept the position, claiming that they were yet to practice how to write Erei language perfectly. Item 4 in the same table indicates a

greater focus and competent on the reading of Erei language. Like Item 3, the respondents who strongly disagreed (15 or 41.6%) constituted the highest number. Despite the fact that maintaining language is very important, it was noted that even when the participants claimed to have sufficient knowledge in Erei, majority of them could not read Erei perfectly which might result to the death of the language in time to come. On the other hand, those who agreed formed 9(or 25%) of the total respondents. Six respondents (16.7%) disagreed. This result shows that 41.7 per cent had a positive view of the statement that they can read Erei language correctly, while 58.3 per cent of the respondents had a negative view all together.

Item 5, Table 3 shows whether respondents under study can translate Erei to English. Two respondents, representing 5.6 per cent of the total population strongly agreed, while 5(13.8%) of the respondents agreed. Whereas the remaining 8(22.3%) disagreed, those who strongly disagreed that they did not know how to translate Erei to English were 21(58.3%). This result indicates that 80.6 per cent of the respondents suggested that they cannot effortlessly translate Erei language possibly to English. Only 19.4 per cent expressed a positive view.

Table 4: The Use of Erei at Home

No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
6	My parents speak Erei to me at home.	9	25	12	33.3	4	11.1	11	30.6	36	100
7	I speak Erei to my parents at home.	15	41.7	11	30.5	4	11.1	6	16.7	36	100
8	I speak Erei to my siblings at home.	14	38.9	6	16.7	7	19.4	9	25	36	100
9	I speak Erei to my friends at home.	11	30.5	10	27.8	10	27.8	5	13.9	36	100

10	I think or talk to myself in Erei when I am at home.	16	44.4	15	41.7	3	8.3	2	5.6	36	100
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Items 6 and 7 in Table 4 examine the degree to which parents and their children speak Erei to each other at home. Item 6 shows that those who strongly agreed that their parents talk to them at home, using Erei language were nine in number or 25 per cent, and those who agreed were 12 or 33.3 per cent, which recorded the highest percentage. Four (11.1%) and 11(30.6%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. In Item 7, a large number of the respondents 15(41.7) strongly agreed that they speak Erei to their parents at home. While 11 or 30.5 per cent agreed, those who disagreed and strongly disagreed that they did not speak Erei to their parents at home were 11.1 per cent and 16.7 per cent, respectively. The total percentage of the positive response implies that parents maintain Erei when communicating with their children at home without interfering it with any other language. The same is applicable to Item 7 where 72.2 per cent of the total population, when combined together, also agreed that they spoke Erei with their parents at home. Those with opposite view in Items 6 and 7 stand at 41.7 per cent and 27.8 per cent, respectively.

Items 8 and 9 report the extent to which participants speak Erei to their siblings (brothers and sisters) as well as their friends. From their self-assessment reports, those who agreed that they communicate with their brothers, sisters and

friends at home were 14(38.9%) in Item 8 and 11(30.5%) in Item 9. Those who strongly agreed in both items were 6(16.7%) and 10(27.8%), respectively. While those who disagreed were 7(19.4%) in Item 8 and 10(27.8%) in Item 9, the rest others who strongly disagreed in Item 8 outnumber their counterparts in Item 9 who recorded only 13.9 per cent of the entire population. The position indicates that 55.6 per cent in Item 8 and 58.3 per cent in Items 9 of the participants did agreed that they speak Erei to both their siblings and friends at home, but 44.4 per cent (in Item 8) and 41.7 (in Item 9) did not accept the position.

Item 10 of the same table indicates a greater thinking or talking in Erei to oneself while at home. The respondents who strongly agreed (16 or 44.4%) constituted the highest number, while those who agreed formed 15 or 41.7 per cent of the total respondents, and were also aware that they think in Erei language whenever they are at home. Three respondents (8.3%) disagreed, and those that strongly disagreed were two respondents (5.6%). This result shows that 86.1 per cent had a positive view of the statement that “I think or talk to myself in Erei when I am at home”, while 13.9 per cent of the respondents had a negative view of the same statement.

Table 5: The Use of Erei in Public

No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
11	My parents speak Erei to me in public.	4	11.1	2	5.6	16	44.4	14	38.9	36	100
12	I speak Erei to my parents in public.	6	16.7	9	25	6	16.7	15	41.6	36	100

13	I speak Erei to my siblings in public.	7	19.4	5	13.9	15	41.7	9	25	36	100
14	I speak Erei to my friends in public.	2	5.6	6	16.7	9	25	19	52.7	36	100
15	I think or talk to myself in Erei when I am in public.	10	27.8	12	33.3	8	22.2	6	16.7	36	100

Item 11, Table 5, shows the level at which parents speak Erei language to their children in public. Four respondents, representing 11.1 per cent of the total population strongly agreed, while 2(5.6%) of the respondents agreed. Whereas the remaining 16(44.4%) disagreed, those who strongly disagreed that their parents did not speak Erei to them in the public were 14(38.9%). This result means that 83.3 per cent of the respondents suggested that their parents hardly speak Erei to them in the public, particularly outside Erei communities. They would have a retroactive effect on the teenagers who would not be confident when speaking their mother tongue in public. Only 16.7 per cent expressed a positive view.

Items 12, 13 and 14 of the same table outline respondents' consistency in speaking Erei in public to their parents, siblings and friends, respectively. In each item, 6(16.7%) in Item 12, 7(19.4%) in Item 13, and an insignificant number 2(5.6%) in Item 14, respectively strongly agreed that they speak Erei to their parents, siblings and friends in public. Those who disagreed in the three items are 9(25%), 5(13.9%) and 6(16.7%), respectively. On the other hand, the subjects who disagreed that they hardly speak Erei in public to

either their parents, siblings or their Erei friends constituted six or 16.7 per cent (in Item 12), 15 or 41.7 per cent (in Item 13) and nine or 25 per cent (in Item 14). The remaining number of respondents: 15(41.6%) in Item 12, 9(25%) in Item 13 and 19(52.7%) in Item 14 strongly disagreed the position that they speak Erei in public to any of them. Although 15(41.7%) in Item 12, 12(33.3%) in Item 13 and 8(22.3%) in Item 14 of the total respondents responded positively, the remaining respondents who were 58.3 per cent (in Item 12), 66.7 per cent (in Item 13) and 77.7 per cent (in Item 14) were in a negative view that they did not speak Erei to their Erei people in public domains. The percentages, therefore, emphasise the poor handling and speaking of Erei in public environments linguistically.

Item 15 on Table 5 demonstrates that 10(27.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed that they did think or talk to themselves in Erei whenever they are in public. Those who agreed were grouped into 12(33.3%), those who disagreed were 8(22.2%) and those who strongly disagreed were 6(16.7%). Therefore, those of the affirmative view were 61.1 per cent as against 38.9 per cent who disagreed.

Table 6: The Use of Erei in School

No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
16	My teachers speak Erei to me in school	0	0	1	2.8	9	25	26	72.2	36	100
17	I speak Erei to my	2	5.6	4	11.1	8	22.2	22	61.1	36	100

	teachers in school.										
18	I speak Erei to my classmates in school.	15	41.7	11	30.5	2	5.6	8	22.2	36	100
19	I speak Erei to my friends in school.	7	19.4	18	50	7	19.4	4	11.2	36	100
20	I think or talk to myself in Erei when I am in school.	20	55.5	10	27.8	6	16.7	0	0	36	100

Like other tables, there are five items labelled 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 on Table 6. The table explains the use of Erei in school, that is, if Erei is allowed to be spoken in schools whether as a vernacular or official language. Item 16 of the table shows that zero per cent of the total respondents strongly agreed and 2.8 per cent agreed, and while 9(25%) of the respondents disagreed, those who strongly disagreed were 35(61.1%). This implies that an insignificant 2.8 per cent of the respondents affirmed that their teachers used to speak Erei to them in the school they attended. The other 97.2 per cent of the respondents had a negative view, meaning that majority of Erei teachers do not speak their mother tongue to their Erei students even in casual or informal situation. In Item 17, 22(61.1%) of the total respondents strongly disagreed that they speak Erei to their teachers in schools. Two or (5.6%), 4(11.1%) and 8(22.2%) strongly agreed, agreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. The percentage of the respondents who had a positive view stands at 16.7 per cent, giving a poor impression. Only 73.3 per cent of the respondents were of the opposite view.

Items 18 and 19 demonstrate how respondents could frequently speak Erei in school with their classmates and friends, since it is

regarded as a vernacular language in that environment. It was noted that those who strongly agreed with the statements were 15(41.7%) on Item 18 and 7(19.4%) on Item 19. Those who agreed on both items were 11(30.5%) and 18(50%), respectively. Whereas 2(5.6%) and 8(22.2%) disagreed and strongly disagreed on the statement in Item 18, 7(19.4%) and 4(11.2%) also disagreed and strongly disagreed in Item 19, respectively. The percentages of the respondents who had a positive view on the statements stand at 72.2 per cent (in Item 18) and 69.4 per cent (in Item 19), indicating that the teenagers have good attitude on Erei language. Ten respondents or 27.8 per cent and 11(30.6%) had a negative response on the same statements, respectively.

In item 20, 55.5 per cent of the total respondents strongly agreed that they think or talk to themselves in Erei when they are in schools. Accordingly, 27.8 per cent agreed, 16.7 per cent disagreed and zero per cent strongly disagreed. The data further shows that 83.3 per cent of the respondents had the understanding of the important of mother tongue as they did think in it even in an environment where it is not spoken, the other 16.7 per cent were in the negative view about thinking in Erei to oneself in school.

Table 7: The Use of Erei in Church

No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
21	My pastors or reverend fathers preach in Erei to me in church.	3	8.3	7	19.4	6	16.7	20	55.6	36	100
22	I speak or discuss in Erei to my pastors or reverend fathers in church.	6	16.7	13	36.1	9	25	8	22.2	36	100
23	I speak Erei to my brethren in church.	15	41.7	12	33.3	6	16.7	3	8.3	36	100
24	I speak Erei to my friends in church.	20	55.6	13	36.1	2	5.5	1	2.8	36	100
25	I think or talk to myself in Erei when I am in church.	11	30.6	17	47.2	5	13.9	3	8.3	36	100

Table 7 explains the use of Erei in the church premises. Item 21 in the table suggests that 3(8.3%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that their clergymen used to speak, sing or preach in Erei to them during sermons. Although 19.4 per cent agreed and 16.7 per cent strongly agreed, a substantial 55.6 per cent strongly disagreed. This indicates that 27.7 per cent of the respondents agreed that their clergymen preached to them in Erei, while the maximum respondents of 72.3 per cent agreed that their clergymen did not use Erei in any form with them. The implication of this assertion is that Erei might lose its prestige in an environment where it is less used by majority of its speakers.

Items 22, 23 and 24 of the same table portray the manner in which Erei teenagers speak their Erei mother tongue to their clergymen, brethren and friends in churches. The positive response from each item is a clear indication that the attitude of Erei teenagers towards maintaining Erei in the church environments where many language users are found is good. Six or 16.7 per

cent (in Item 22), 55.6 per cent (in Item 23) and 55.6 per cent (in Item 24) strongly agreed that they speak Erei to their pastors or reverend fathers, brethren and friends in the church irrespective of those who may not understand Erei. Thirteen (36.1%) (in Item 22), 33.3 per cent (in Item 23) and the same percentage observed in Item 23 (i.e. 36.1% in Item 24) agreed. On the other hand, those who disagreed on the position were 25 per cent (in Item 22), 5.5 per cent (in Item 23) and the same percentage of 5.5 per cent on Item 24, while those who strongly disagreed in each item were 22.2 per cent, 2.8 per cent and another 2.8 per cent of Items 22, 23 and 24, respectively. From the respondents' self-reports, it shows that the maximum number of 52.8 per cent, 91.7 per cent and 77.8 per cent had a positive opinion on the statements in Items 22, 23 and 24, respectively. The other 47.2 per cent on Item 22, 2.3 per cent on Item 23, and 8.3 per cent on Item 24, who had negative view, were less significant.

Like Items 10, 15 and 20, Item 25 indicates that 30.5 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that they think or talk to oneself in Erei when in churches. A considerable number of 17 respondents or 47.2 agreed, while 13.9 per cent and 8.3 per cent disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively that they never can think in Erei when they are in churches. The percentage of the respondents who had a positive view, when put together, stands at 77.8 per cent, giving a good impression that Erei receives adequate maintenance. Only 22.2 per cent of the respondents were of the opposite view.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

From the report of the findings, it was observed that Erei language, which is the language of Erei people, does receive adequate attention in terms of maintenance by Erei citizens. Research has shown that various minority languages will soon lose or die due to a greater influence of other dominant languages (Zhao, 2001). For example, Cavallaro (2005) claims that when languages are in contact, there is tendency of dominant where some languages with less speakers will shift and give way to others. But in the case of Erei, which is one of the minority languages, such phenomenon does not hold well as the attitude of greater respondents is good, reporting positively that they maintain and speak Erei any place they come across their Erei people, irrespective of the environments.

For instance, in Table 4, the percentages of respondents who reported positively that their parents speak Erei to them as well as they do same to their parents are far better than those who

did not agree with about 58.3 per cent (for parents) and 72.2 per cent (for teenagers) as against only 41.7 per cent (for parents) and 27.8 per cent (for teenagers) of those with a negative view. The positive response is applicable also to Items 8, 9 and 10 (on Table 4), 15 (on Table 5), 18, 19 and 20 (on Table 6), 22, 23 and 24 (on Table 7) where a greater number of respondents responded positively that they use Erei in all situations. However, it was only in Table 5 where those with negative view outnumbered others with a positive view. The reason could be that some Erei speakers do not like to speak Erei outside Erei community; they are not proud of their Erei mother tongue in public domain.

6.1 Conclusion

In this paper, the attitude of Erei teenagers in their attempt to using their mother tongue in certain domains was investigated. A questionnaire of 25 items, grouped in five different sections, was delivered to seek information from the respondents. From their individual self-reports, it was observed that respondents know the importance of their Erei mother tongue; thereby, maintaining it not only at homes, but also in public domains such as market places, schools, churches and all over places they meet each other. Of importance is that even in environments where vernacular language like Erei may not have been permitted, the participants maintained their Erei mother tongue in order to keep their identity. Erei language, therefore, may not face much threat, or even shift to Igbo and English no matter their contact with it.

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