

Language shift and attrition: Typical sociolinguistic phenomena in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines language shift and attrition in Nigeria, and the effect of insurgency in the northern Nigeria on minority languages. It notes that language shift induced by some factors including insurgency may lead to the death of some languages that put Nigeria on the world's linguistic map by having three out of four language phyla in Africa. While some factors lead to gradual shift, it is discovered from our observation from different Internally Displaced Persons camps that the displaced survivors of insurgency rapidly shift to the (major or minor) languages of their host communities. Questionnaires were administered on 100 respondents chosen from four selected cities (Lagos, Benin, Warri and Port-Harcourt) to ascertain the extent of language usage and shift while oral interview was conducted on 60 Internally Displaced Persons in three Internally Displaced Persons camps, namely Kano, Makurdi and Abuja, to ascertain the effect of insurgency on indigenous languages especially in the north-east and north central. Findings reveal that, some seriously endangered languages have become terminally-endangered. The language use of the immigrants in cities has been largely replaced by pidgin and the established language of the host communities.

Keywords: Boko Haram and herders' insurgency, Internally-displaced persons IDP's, language attrition, language shift, northern Nigeria

Introduction

Language is not an isolated phenomenon; it exists alongside its speakers in the society. As such, language has a direct link with the society and culture. Whether from linguistic or sociolinguistic perspective, language is always dynamic. One of the current references for Nigerian languages in has 515 living indigenous languages. Out of these number, 505 are living indigenous language, 8 are extinct while 2 are second languages, (see Grimes, 2000:166). Haruna (2007) notes that many more Nigerian languages still die each day especially in the north. A survey of language usages in the cosmopolitan cities like Lagos and Port Harcourt reveals that many of these minority are constantly threatened by language shift and attrition due to some sociolinguistic variables that are beyond the control of the native speakers in the new environment. Many linguists have gone ahead to explain rather than define the concept of language change and language shift. Thomason (2001) sees language attrition as a gradual process by which a

language recedes as it loses speakers, domains of use, and structure. For Schmid (2011:3-4), language attrition is "the (total or partial) forgetting of a language by a healthy speaker...[which] takes place in a setting where that language is used only rarely". The foregoing is corroborated by Abdulkadir and Abbas (2017) that language attrition refers to the declining use of mother-tongue skills by those caught in bilingual situation.

Attrition which usually results from language shift is a by-product of language contact where speakers unconsciously neglect or helplessly become incapacitated to maintain maximum use of their language. Fishman (1991:59) explains that language shift occurs 'because interacting language in-cultures are of unequal power, and, therefore, the weaker ones become physically and demographically dislocated.' Lieberman (1981) on the other hand believes that, 'changes in pattern of language usage can ultimately be traced to societal shifts'. This assertion is not disputable here considering



the fact that the dynamism of language and society is interwoven. In most multilingual speech communities in Nigeria, individuals or groups of speakers use a dominant language of the community other than their own for every day communication. A dominant language here refers to what Essien (2001:1) would prefer to describe as that language in a bilingual or multilingual situation, 'which usually invests its speakers with not only what Wardhaugh (1986:344) refers to as a "full panoply of uses that signify a standard language", but also with prestige, self-confidence and power.' The implication of this is that a dominant language may not necessarily be a major language.

The type we have in mind here is the language of government, business, education, the legal system and social mobility of all kinds. Therefore, when individuals or the entire community of speakers shift from one language to another in every day conversation and make this other (new) language their dominant language, their former language becomes passive and eventually forgotten. As Yule (1996:222) will note 'small speech communities, are usually more susceptible to existential changes which can result in a rapid decline of their mother-tongue.'

Sand (2018) observes that what is peculiar to the situation in Africa is the pressure on susceptible languages by some other minority languages. In other words, language shift appears to be from a small/minority language to a locally dominant language rather than to a global language (Batibo 2005, 2013a). The foregoing is however refuted by Obikudo et al. (2016) who note that language shift still manifest among minority languages. They cited an example of Nkọrọ, an Ijaw language spoken in Rivers State Nigeria by about 2,000 people is "severely endangered, yet Defaka (another language spoken in Bonny, Rivers State) speakers are shifting to Nkọrọ.

In a multilingual community like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja, the degree of multilingualism is always relevant in determining language shift. Our investigation is focused on sociological multilingualism and not individual

multilingualism. An individual may have many languages in his/her linguistic repertoire without his speech community adopting any or all of these languages as language(s) of communication. Based on this assumption, many domains and settings of language use were investigated and it was discovered that children of bilingual/multilingual parents are at risk in relation to intergenerational language shift.

Multilingual urban centres are typical pluralistic. The different ethno-social groups have different habit of meaning and sociolinguistic coding orientation. Most speakers who have internalized patterns are extraordinarily heterogeneous and naturally react to this by choosing some coding and assigning normative values to them. When this is habitually done over a period of time, some unsuccessful languages are marginalized and others gain prominence thereby causing a shift in the pattern of language usage. It can be said that a chain of sociolinguistic phenomena associated with language endangerment like attrition, emanate from language shift.

Haruna (2007) notes that 'we have an idea of extinct languages within the north eastern part of Nigeria...some of these languages, e.g. Aukoyawa/Shira are no longer living languages used by speakers and speech communities in their day-to-day conduct, they have disappeared without even rudimentary information about their known features being available to us ... and sadly, many more are still being lost'. The foregoing lends credence to the present study given the displacement, and destruction of lives arising from terrorist attack in the north-eastern Nigeria and Fulani herders attack in the Middle Belt (north-central Nigeria). These crises have led to the decimation of the negligible population of speakers of these minority languages who have scattered in different directions for safety. Many of them are presently seeking refuge in various Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDPs) in the southern Nigeria. Kuju (1999) notes that northern Nigeria is a better-known linguistic 'killing-field'.

This region attracts attention because, by the African standard, northern Nigeria represents



a region of linguistic complexity. It is unique because it is a meeting point of three African language phyla found in Nigeria; the Afro-asiatic phylum, the Nilo-saharan phylum, and the Niger-Congo phylum. This area is therefore one of the geographical areas of Nigeria richest in languages. Table 1 below presents a broad scope of the language phyla and sub-families present with a few languages.

Table I: Language phyla and sub-families of Northern Nigerian languages

Phylum	Sub-phylum	Language
Afro-asiatic	Chadic	Hausa, Angus, Bura
Nilo-saharan	Saharan	Kanuri, Teda-Daza, etc
	West Atlantic	Fulfude
	Adamawa	Waja, Chamba, Mummuye
Niger-Congo	Benue-Congo	Jukun, Jàar, Laour, Birom

So, the manifestation of language shift in urban centres and IDPs camps would continue to constitute a context within which language attrition flourishes in Nigeria. Though many scholars have researched on languages in the north-east and north-central (Middle Belt), (Omale-Peters, 2001, Yusuf, 2006), not much work, to the best of our knowledge, has been carried out on the adverse effect of insurgency and herders' crises that are continually threatening the survival of and decimating the remaining minority languages, hence the need for this study. In other words, this paper examines:

- i. the sociolinguistic motivating factors for language shift and attrition in the urban centres in Nigeria, being an instance of gradual declining, and
- ii. the effect of Boko Haram insurgency attack and Fulani herders' crises on the minority languages in the north-eastern and north-central (Middle Belt) Nigeria respectively, which represent the quicker process of attrition and language death.

Yusuf (2006) notes that majority of minority indigenous languages in Nigeria are in the north. And almost all of them are endangered in one way or the other.

1. Significance of the study

Though many scholarly works abound in language shift and attrition, as well as their motivating factors, however, none has indeed examined from linguistic or sociolinguistic perspectives the influence of insurgency and crises in the northern Nigeria on the already endangered minority languages in the north-east and north-central (Middle-Belt). Besides, while other language shift and attrition induced factors, as we shall in the paper, usually lead to a gradual decline in the language usages, observation from insurgency and crises lead to sudden or faster disappearance of these languages due to the death or displacement of small community of speakers who have been sustaining the survival of the languages.

More significantly, if this ugly trend is not quickly curtailed, northern Nigeria that is known for its linguistic richness as a result of the presence of three major language phyla known in Africa on account of these minority languages may lose its linguistic value and visibility on the world's linguistic map because of languages shift, attrition and language death.

Multilingual urban centers in Nigeria

Nigeria is densely multilingual and operates a complex linguistic system as noted above. Based on the existing structure, the country adopts the three major languages (Hausa for the north, Yoruba for the south west and Igbo for the south east) as national and somewhat official languages. Though cities/urban centres in Nigeria are synonymous with state capitals like Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Abuja etc, there are some major cities in Nigeria that are not state capitals, e.g. Onitsha, Warri, Gboko, Suleja etc. These urban centres have a common index: they are multilingual, though the degree of multilingualism varies from one place to another. Some like Warri, Lagos, Benin, Abuja and Port Harcourt are more linguistically heterogeneous than others. The pattern of language use and



subsequent shifts in these urban centers vary. In some of the cities, the natives had established and developed a language system which immigrants inherit. A typical example is Lagos and the use of Yoruba, Hausa in Kano. In some other areas like Port Harcourt, the natives did not get established long enough to develop a language system for immigrants to inherit.

Generally, cities worldwide including Nigerian have some magnetic force to attract diverse people, notwithstanding pattern of settlement. As Dawling (1999:34) would note, ‘...among forces that have encouraged movements of people out of their homes of origin into new communities, particularly since the end of the second world war, are colonial activities and development of formal education as well as employment opportunities, industrial development and urbanization.’ For a normal Nigerian who is either pushed out of his speech community by the socioeconomic forces or pulled by city attractions, the city becomes a permanent settlement. He only visits his country-home on vacations. Beyond his will, therefore, he makes efforts to adapt to the norms of his new settlement. In an attempt to become effectively integrated into his new society, he uses language as a tool for socialization and adaptation. He could lose his language in the process or acquire more in addition to his mother-tongue. This indeed is typical of multilingual urban centres in Nigeria and possibly African cities.

These language shift and language attrition motivating factors, and more significantly, the effect of Boko Haram insurgency and Fulani Herders’ crises on minority languages in the northern (north-east and north-central ‘Middle Belt’) Nigeria are the major thrusts of this study.

Empirical studies

Adegbija (2008) examined language maintenance and language shift with respect to indigenous languages and English. The paper recommends that though English is still dominant in Nigeria in terms of geographical spread, efforts should be made to secure future for Nigeria indigenous languages. Yuka and Bayodele (2017) looked at lexical attrition and language shift in Uneme language. They discovered that lexical

attrition has pattern in relation to the location and generation of the native speakers. Okeke and Okeke (2017:1) investigated attrition in Nkpor dialect of Igbo. They noted that the dialectal attrition which resulted from dialect shift may lead to dialect loss if unchecked. According to them, ‘attrition involves the gradual...decline, weakening or loss of native speakers’ proficiency in their mother tongue as a result of their negative attitudes...or lack of loyalty towards the language/dialect.

However, one can assert that even when the speakers have loyalty and some measure of good attitude, there are still some prevailing factors that constrained these speakers to renege on their positive attitude and loyalty to their mother-tongues. Categories were provided to try and capture languages that are apparently in decline due to gradual shift to dominant languages in contact situations despite having a viable number of speakers. These languages have variously been christened ‘endangered’ ‘deprived’ ‘disappearing’ ‘dying’ ‘vanishing’ ‘declining’ or ‘moribund’ languages.

Wurm (1998 and 2003) provides some sort of classifications of language endangerment. He distinguishes five types of language communities focusing on the weaker languages.

- i. Potentially endangered, if the children start preferring the dominant language and learn the obsolescing language imperfectly (the language begins to lose child speakers).
- ii. Endangered, if the youngest speakers are young adults and there are no or very few child speakers.
- iii. Seriously endangered if the youngest speakers are middle-aged or past middle age.
- iv. Terminally endangered or moribund if there are only a few elderly speakers left.
- v. Dead or extinct when there are no speakers left at all.

Sociolinguistic phenomenon in the urban centres depict the potentially endangered situation of some minority languages especially in Lagos, Benin, Warri and Port Harcourt while the



linguistic situation in the IDPs camps illustrates the seriously endangered languages since some speech communities have been completely displaced and inhabitants are either killed or relocated to IDPs in a different region for safety or seek refuge elsewhere.

Method of data collection and analysis

For the purpose of this study, seven major multilingual cities are considered. They are Lagos, Benin, Warri, Port Harcourt, Kano, Makurdi, and Abuja. These cities have been selected randomly based on their linguistic heterogeneity and locations of internally displaced persons' (IDP's). While the sets of data collected from Lagos, Warri, Port-Harcourt and Benin are used for the sociolinguistic changes in expanding cities, data elicited through oral interview from internally displaced persons' camps in Kano, Makurdi and Abuja are analysed to determine the extent of language shift and attrition in the northern Nigeria due to the insurgency. For the residents in Lagos, Benin, Warri and Port Harcourt, the questionnaire is designed primarily to investigate the language available in the linguistic repertoire of residents of these cities. These include the language they use in the different domains. We further probed the languages used before movement into these cities whether they are still used by their speakers or have been marginalized or lost. We also probed into their marital status to determine the influence of inter-tribal marriage on language shift and eventual attrition.

We decided to investigate the language use in their place of occupation (for the civil servants only) to ascertain the formal and informal domains of the language use in these urban centers. The stability of the linguistic status quo of these cities was investigated to determine the effect of the sociolinguistic factors of the pattern of language usage. Twenty research assistants were engaged to help interpret the oral interview that were recorded through observer's paradox to our informants at the IDP's camps. Both the oral interview and questionnaire sought to know why, when and how the new languages were acquired. Other bio-data information including age, sex, and marital status are

excluded from the table presented below. Information drawn from the interview and questionnaire was administered on total number of 160 respondents (20 from each IDP camps and 25 from each of the four cities). The summary of the questionnaire is given in the table 2 below.

Language shift and attrition: the sociolinguistic induced factors

Multilingualism

Though languages are spoken by individuals, the effect of shift in the pattern of language use is noticeable in the speech community. In a multilingual society, choices made by individuals or groups may become institutionalized at the societal level. In most multilingual cities in Nigeria, the languages serve specialized functions and are used for particular purposes. Some are elevated as national and regional languages, e.g. Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, and others like Fulfude, Kanuri, Efik/Ibibio, Tiv, Igala, Ijò and Edo are only regional according to Akinnaso (2015). Pidgin and other minority group languages are however used in the home domain.

These major/national languages Hausa (in the North), Igbo (in the east) and Yoruba (in the west) are used as lingua franca for regional communication (see Igboanusi, 2002 and 2008), the minority languages are used for 'local (often) rural communication' (Schmid, 2013: 26) and are functionally marginalised to the 'primary domains of life' (Webb, 1994:181), such as family and friends, local markets and domestic services, traditional social institutions and religion. As such, people shift to such 'prestigious' language that enjoys wider acceptability. This present study however discovers (as we shall see much later in this paper) that the use of Pidgin, especially in urban centres like Warri, Port Harcourt and Benin transcends beyond home/informal domain.

Multilingualism affects the pattern of language usage in a speech community especially in the area of language acquisition among children. The use of more than one language especially in addressing children by their parents suggests a major mechanism by which long term



shift or change may occur in the language system. This is because the children grow up to acquire more languages than their parents. This is in addition to the simple changes from parents' mother-tongue (MT) to the use of a different language from their offspring. The situation becomes complex since there is equally the possibility that these offspring may themselves use both languages and sometimes others to address their children in a process which could go on indefinitely. As more and different languages are acquired by these children and later their offspring, the pattern of language use in their immediate community keeps shifting with the stronger or more viable languages surviving the weaker ones.

Government policies

Government policies on education as outlined in language provisions of the National Policy on Education (NPE) affect the sociolinguistic status quo of a speech community. The NPE of 1981, section 8, stipulates that in the interest of national unity, 'each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue...government considers the major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.'

What this implies for the speakers of other languages is that in addition to their mother-tongue, they will still acquire the language of wider communication (if it is different from their mother-tongue) and also two other languages in a formal classroom environment (English and any of the three major languages), (see Igboanusi, 2002, 2008; Adegbite, 2010). The situation is more complicated in some multilingual cities. In Port Harcourt for instance, which is known for its complexity, the children are exposed to many languages at school because the government, on the approval of the Rivers Readers' Project encouraged the use of many indigenous languages at school to foster literacy development for these languages. Due to some sociopolitical and economic factors, the programme could not be sustained. The consequence of this is that when the zeal wore

out, teachers and students resorted to the use of Pidgin to fill the gap created.

Since formal education tends to add competence in another language, children acquire the languages in stages. As their level of acquisition graduates in stages and they eventually begin to use the language(s) at home and with friends, the pattern of language usage shifts.

Migration

Language shift may also be motivated by migration. Migration to multilingual cities in Nigeria as a result of marriage, business, education etc. has resulted in a leveling of the language differences among the different groups in the speech communities. With time, new generations are born leading to new population spread which settles at an early age in the host speech community. They grow up to acquire a language and culture different from those of their parents. Children in this group use pidgin as their L1 through the process of creolisation. In cities with established language patterns, like Lagos, as earlier mentioned, Yoruba is used as the established language of the natives and therefore inherited by immigrant alongside Pidgin.

In many of the multilingual cities in Nigeria, the migratory or cultural affiliation leads to voluntary clustering of ethnolinguistic groups in separate neighbourhood of the host city. When this happens, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, even though from a different ethnolinguistic group, use their native languages instead of the dominant languages of the immediate community. The Hausa quarters in many Nigerian non-Hausa towns and cities portray good examples of this sociolinguistic situation. The shift in the pattern of language use in these cities with high immigrant population is observed when one considers the retention rate of mother-tongue languages used by these immigrants (language vitality). Some ethnolinguistic groups have higher retention rate than others.

As observed, the Hausa, for example, are known to cling to their language irrespective of the environment. They are in this trend followed by the Yoruba. A visit to a Hausa community outside Hausaland (either in the southern, eastern,



or western Nigeria) reveals that a non-Hausa speaker, even though a speaker of the language of wider communication in the community, resort to the Hausa language to facilitate communication with the Hausa immigrant. We cannot offer any objective reason for the differences in the high retention rate of (Hausa or Yoruba) language of immigrant groups, since that is not exactly the focus of the paper. However, a widely held view by some scholars shows that the ethnolinguistic vitality of a language and the attitude of speakers of that language go a long way in facilitating the retention of the language. At least, high vitality will lead to maintenance while low vitality usually results in shift towards the dominant language, or in some cases, as it were in the urban centers and IDP camps, shift towards another more prestigious vernacular. Language maintenance is characterised by the continued survival of a language in contexts where it is expected to be endangered, due to sustained use of the language and its transmission to neophytes (Ostler 2011).

Language contact

Language contact necessitates multilingualism in Nigerian urban cities. Languages used in these cities influence, considerably, one another in various ways to the extent that the longer the contact, the deeper the influence. As Emenanjo (2003:12) points out, 'when many languages live cheek by jowl in a very compact area... through attrition and survival of the fittest, the stronger or more viable language survives.' The sociolinguistic implications of language contact situation vary. Extreme contact situations lead to language diffusion or displacement. Ugwuoke (1999) listed a number of Nigerian languages in danger of disappearing. Unfortunately, during our investigation, some of these endangered languages were mentioned by our respondents as mother-tongue languages used before movement to the cities.

In the four cities observed, there seem to be a limitation of the native languages' use to more restricted social contexts (like the home domain), to the point of what Bright (1997) calls 'obsolescence' of the native languages in some

environments and ultimate language shift in the direction of the more socially acceptable language(s); in most cases one of the languages of wider communication, languages, pidgin and / or English. The birth and growth of pidgin is traced to language contact situation. However, the use of Pidgin in formal domains especially in Warri, Benin and Port Harcourt features more prominently than it is in Lagos. Because of constant increase in contact and interaction in Nigerian multilingual cities, it is predictable that the pattern of language use will keep changing to reflect the ever-increasing intensity of interaction from language contact.

Terrorists' insurgency and Fulani herders' crises: Threat to endangered languages

Boko Haram started as a non-violent breakaway group, persecution and aggressive crack-downs from the security services brought about their violent response. Boko Haram was at first a small and controllable problem, but the issue escalated in 2009 after heavy crackdowns were ordered by President Yar'Adua. The crackdown was brutal and disproportionate; around 700 innocent people were killed, some of them publicly executed on suspicions that they were member of Boko Haram (Sani, 2012). The killing of their leader, Mohammed Yusuf actually made the group increase its rate of violent activities (Ajah, 2011). Following the killing of their leader the movement went underground but emerged a year later with renewed attacks. The group that comprised essentially Muslims puts forward the idea that it has religious connotation. The principle governing its emergence and activities relates to its rejection of Western education as evil, Islamising Nigeria and promoting Islamic ideologies in the country.

Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east and Fulani herders' crises in the Middle Belt (north-central) have beyond any other factor decimated the pocket of native speakers who are sustaining some minority/small indigenous languages in the north generally. Small languages are defined here as those with 0-10,000 native speakers. A number of these speech communities have been destroyed while the native speakers are maimed and killed. The survivors of the attack



usually either orphans, or widows/widowers are presently seeking refuge in IDPs camps in other regions as far as south. Several attempts by the Federal Government to relocate them to their homes have failed due to some unknown reason(s). Their languages have been weakened; the speakers in a bid to survive in their new environment abandoned their mother-tongue in total embrace of the languages of the host community. Presently, there are over 380,000 children in different internally-displaced persons' camps across Nigeria. Many scholars have written on the imminent death of many Nigerian languages especially when the present elderly ones who are sustaining the languages die (Emenanjo and Bleambo, 1999, Ostler, 2011, Sand, 2018). A change in environment would mean that the cultural and social settings in which a given language had been functioning, usually for a very long time, have been replaced by new and quite different ones as a result of irresistible culture contact with the traditional dominant language instead of it readily functioning as a vehicle of expression of the new culture.

Out of 60 respondents (who have different minor languages as their L1 or mother-tongues) interviewed through our research assistant, 48 agreed that their respective languages are severely affected by displacement arising either from Boko-Haram scourge or Fulani herders' crises. 18 of the respondents noted that their different micro-speech communities were completely destroyed while the inhabitants dispersed in different directions for safety. We observed that there are some languages that do not have up to 10 speakers in some displaced camps. To worsen the situation, these surviving speakers are already learning how to communicate some basic communicative needs in some other languages that have majority speakers within the IDP camps. In some instance like in Kano and Makurdi, some internally

displaced persons, in spite of the negligible percentage of speakers of some minority languages, prefer to speak some dominating languages like Tiv, Idoma, Yoruba, Igbo, Igede in Benue and Abuja while Hausa, or Fulfude dominates other minor languages in Kano.

According to Schiffman (1998) in Okeke and Okeke (2017), language death arises when a speech community fails to use their mother-tongue due to negligence. Schiffman notes that the first step in language death is language shift followed by the assimilation of the speakers by another (host) language, or when the last speaker of a language dies due to genocide, natural disaster. The final stage is when the speakers are scattered in such a way as to break up the language/speech community. This final stage of language death explains the present situation in the north-east and north-central Nigeria. It has been suggested that a language must have at least 100,000 speakers to be considered 'safe' (Lee and Van Way 2016:281). If this claim of Lee and Van Way is true, a vast majority of small/minority languages of the northern Nigerian are indeed unsafe.

Even before the terrorist and herdsmen attack, most of the minority languages in the north-eastern and north-central Nigeria are under serious threat of Hausa, Fulfude. Judging from the result of historical and comparative linguistics, the culture contact with Hausa/Fulani definitely is one of the most important factors which has led and is still leading to changes in the ecology of the languages of the north-east Nigeria (Aliyu, 1986; Adamu, 1984; James, 1987; and Harnishfeger, 2002). While these scholars agree that contact does not lead to the extinct or even marked decimation of the population speaking a given language, it severely affects the attitude of that community towards its language.

Table 2: Sociolinguistic variables and shift in the pattern of language usage over time

Sociolinguistic variable	MT %	LWC %	PI %	ENG. %	Maj. Lang.
% of languages used in the home domain	65	45	50.0	45	4.0
% of languages used in the market	4.00	95	95	20	30
% of languages used in the office	2	50	55	75	45



% of languages used in the place of work	5.00	40.0	65	80.0	45.5
% of languages used before inter tribal marriage	90	10	50	30	20.5
% of languages used in the after marriage	40	30	67	45	41.0
% of languages used in the club/play	20.5	78.5	98.5	20	5.0
% of the languages used in school by students outside classroom	1.0	80.0	95.0	25.0	5.0
% of languages used in school by teachers	2.0	4.0	1.5	98.0	35.0
% of languages used before movement into the city	98	2.0	10	40	48.0
% of the languages used after movement into the city	1.0	90	95	60	48.0
% of the languages used in all environment	10	50	95	40	35.4
% of the languages used but lost after movement into the city	80	1.6	2	60	30
% of the languages used as L1 and MT	40	14.4	25	1.5	4.0
% of the languages used out of necessity	25	90	95	70	6.0
% of the languages used by choice	60.8	80	88.5	50	20
% of the languages used out of convenience	15.5	70	90	45.5	25.3

Discussion of findings

From the table presented above, we discover that 65% of MT usage in the home domain was recorded. The 4% recorded by majority languages indicated that even when these majority languages are acquired at school because of the government policy on education, the use at the home domain is minimal and negligible.

Apart from the formal classroom environment and place of work, the pidgin scores the highest percentage in different domains of language use. This finding lends credence to the wide acceptability of the use of the pidgin language even in the informal/official domains among Nigerians as enunciated by Babarinde, (2017). Before movement into these cities, however, our respondents rarely use pidgin for communication. This accounts for the 2% recorded as loss suffered after movement into the cities. On the other hand, 25% is recorded in the use of pidgin by children born or settled early in these multilingual cities. They have grown up not using the parents' native languages of wider communication in the immediate environment (especially in Warri, Benin and Port Harcourt). This may be because most of Niger Delta population speaks it Pidgin as their first language. This is not unexpected given the fact that the Portuguese settled in this geopolitical region when they explored Nigeria. Since these people had no common language, it was easy for the

Niger Deltan to learn the Portuguese-based pidgin.

Before movement into these cities, the use of the MT recorded as high as 98%. These MTs are later to record a loss of 80%, leaving only 18% as the retained. On the use of majority languages by non-speakers, 8% was recorded for use before movement into cities, 35% usage by teachers in classroom environment as they are taught as school subjects, and 45% usage after settlement to the tune of 35.4% as these languages are acquired and relinquished, the pattern in the usage keeps shifting.

On the effect of insurgency, it is discovered that due to the displacement that led to eventual dispersal of surviving native speakers of some minority languages in the north east and north central, the so-called few surviving native speakers of already endangered languages have further been decimated to the point of terminal endangerment. As observed, some of the internally displaced camps have less than 10 speakers of some minority languages. This further poses threat to these languages more so that these surviving speakers are gradually abandoning their languages to the embrace of some other minority languages with fairly high number of speakers or some other major languages spoken outside the IDP camps. It is noteworthy that the category of speakers who are inclining towards the acquisition of another language at the expense of their own are children



and youths. While adult internally displaced persons still maintain loyalty to their language despite the threat, the youngsters have started shifting gradually towards another language with some stronger influence over theirs.

Summary of findings and conclusion

Language is organic and it keeps pace with the social development of its users. Many multilingual cities in Nigeria have witnessed some shift in the pattern of language usage, some stages with longer life span than others. The effect of multilingualism (which leaves cities with as many as five languages or more at any given stage) on the pattern of language is noted. Some of the languages gained prominence while others are marginalized towards attrition. Most importantly, the acquisition of these languages is not simultaneous, so the pattern of use is not always stable. Extreme contact situation has led to the disappearance of some languages in the linguistic repertoire of inhabitant of these cities. Because of the need for a language of convenience and social accommodation, the pidgin has grown to be a language of necessity except in Lagos where there exist an established (Yoruba) language of the natives and therefore inherited by the majority of the immigrant.

Interestingly, it has been discovered that when there is an intergenerational weakening of the mother-tongue, a complete shift is generated. The foregoing which finds credence in Wurm (2003) classification of endangered languages is corroborated by *Times Magazine* of July 1997, Vol.(150)1:50 that the most serious indication of a language's imminent demise is when it is no longer spoken by children. It cuts the cords of linguistic transmission between generations and when the elders die, their language dies with

them.'

Sociolinguistically speaking, when an existing pattern of language use is established, there is tendency for this pattern to perpetuate itself for a long time. This is because when a particular language has gained widespread acceptance and usage, becoming the language of wider communication in a multilingual speech community, non-native speakers of this language help in preserving the language pattern. In the case of multilingual cities in Nigeria, the sociolinguistic status quo will remain stable for some time; but shift they will, because there are bound to be social changes in these cities which will in turn change the pattern of language use.

On the effect of insurgency and crises, unfortunately, majority of the speakers of these minority languages that only existing at the spoken form have been decimated by the combined efforts of Boko Haram and Fulani herders. The survivors, who can no longer cluster together as a group or community of speakers have scattered around in different directions including IDPs camps far from their region and even across the Nigerian borders. That these endangered languages are seriously or terminally endangered is to say the least on account of language shift, its attendant attrition and eventual death.

The overall effect of this is that, Nigeria that has been occupying a prominent place in the world's linguistic map on account of these minority languages that are housed in the northern Nigeria may soon lose the prestige due to the alarming declining, attrition, and death of these languages arising from destruction and displacement of the small number of speakers sustaining the languages.

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