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The Sociology of Language Maintenance in Nigeria

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Abstract: The dominance of English language in Nigeria has led to the depletion in the use of indigenous languages in the country. This has generated the necessity of conducting a more sophisticated and in fact an exhaustive study of the number of existent and non-existent/extinct languages. The basic finding of this study is that the mother tongue is still the dominant language in use in the home domain in Nigeria. This scenario reveals a case of language maintenance in Nigeria for now. Indeed, this position may not be sustainable for long in view of the preference of Nigerian youths for English over the mother tongue. The reasons behind current maintenance may not be unconnected with the fact that Nigerians are thoroughly bilingual in the semi-exoglossic type. This type of bilingualism entails knowledge of English and the mother tongue of the individual involved. While this development signifies that Nigerians are simply not learning any other indigenous language in addition to theirs as stipulated in the constitution, the study is a pointer to the fact that the stage is now fully set for the establishment of a mother-tongue based bilingual education in English and the mother tongue to avert any eventuality owing to the fact that English in Nigeria today is used in practically all domains. The study is a clarion call on all stakeholders to wake-up to the reality of the scourge of language shift and language endangerment currently plaguing Africa including Nigeria and some other developing countries of the world.

Keywords: Language contact; Language maintenance; Bilingualism; Language shift; Language endangerment.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is linguistically the most heterogeneous nation in Africa and it happens to be one of the 22 most linguistically diverse countries (Dada, 2007) in the world. In spite of being one of the most linguistically diverse nations of the world with possibly the greatest occurrences of language shift and loss, studies whose central concern deals with language shift and language maintenance as opposed to language shift and language endangerment in Nigeria are almost absent in sociolinguistic literature. This research work is in response to the need to fill this gap.

1.1. The Linguistic Situation in Nigeria

Many studies of multilingualism in Nigeria exist and many more will exist (see (Adekunle, 1976; Agheisi, 1985; Blench and Crozier, 1992; Hansford *et al.*, 1976), among others). Evident in these studies is the fact that Nigeria is extremely linguistically diverse. To Bamgbose (1971) there are about 450 indigenous languages in Nigeria. However, the recent 2014 Ethnologic Data (Lewis, et al, 2014) listed 529 languages for Nigeria. Of these, 522 are living languages, 7 are extinct. Of the living languages, 21 are institutional, 76 are developing, 357 are vigorous, 26 are in trouble, and 42 are dying. Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are the three major languages in Nigeria. The 1979 and 1999 constitutions recognize them as national languages. They are used as regional languages or lingua francas in Nigeria with Hausa language in use in the North, the Yoruba language is in use in the West and the Igbo language is in use in the South-eastern Nigeria.

It is interesting to note that apart from the many indigenous languages, which are the mother tongues of Nigerians, non-indigenous languages such as English, French, Arabic, Italian, Russian, and German also exist. Italian, Russian and German have limited roles compared with English, French and Arabic. The first set is commonly found among the elite and university students while the last set occurs as a medium of communication within learned and unlearned circles. Indeed, Arabic is highly associated with the Islamic religion, although, it exists as a school subject especially in the Northern part of the country. Today, English has become a second language in Nigeria, while Nigerian Pidgin English, with probably the largest number of speakers, has also emerged as a result of contact of English with the indigenous languages.

Indeed, English in Nigeria today is used in practically all domains. English enjoys an overwhelming position as the language of education, administration, government, judiciary, mass communication and wider communication. It is seen as a language that can facilitate social advancement as well as being a requirement for upward social mobility (Ugorji, 2005). The co-existence of numerous indigenous languages and the non-indigenous languages in Nigeria has made it mandatory for communities and individuals to become bilinguals/multilinguals. In most cases of bilingualism, individuals tend to be bilingual in their indigenous languages and the English language. The linguistic scenario presented above proves that Nigeria is a multilingual country par excellence.

The complex linguistic situation of Nigeria is further complicated by the inclusion of both indigenous and non-indigenous languages in the language provision of the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981;2001) and the National Language Policy contained in sections 51, 55, 91 and 97 of the 1979 constitution. Some scholars are of the opinion that there is no explicit linguistic policy for Nigeria. Some others believe that the existing language policies in Nigeria in whatever form marginalize the indigenous languages and do not adequately cater for their survival. A critique of Political and Educational Language Policy Provision in Nigeria exists in various forms and shapes (see (Adegbija, 1994; Afolayan, 1977; Brann, 1977;1982; Chumbow, 1990; Dada, 2012; Egbokhare, 2004;2006; Emenanjo, 1985; Essien, 2006; Fafunwa *et al.*, 1989; Fakuade, 2004; Jibril, 1990; Owolabi and Dada, 2012; Owolabi and Bankole, 2013; Oyetade, 2002) among others). A comprehensive list of flaws in the policy is available in Fafunwa *et al.* (1989).

Many scholars have written on the dominance of English as the official language in Nigeria. According to Oyetade (1992): consequent upon our colonial experience under the British, English has become Nigeria's official and dominant educational language. It is used in its written form as the language of administration from the federal to the local government level. It is the language of commerce and industry, its knowledge therefore is an essential prerequisite for effective participation in the day-to-day running of Nigerian government.

The dominance of English in Nigeria is overwhelming in virtually every domain including inter-ethnic communication (Igboanusi and Lothar, 2005). The 522 living indigenous Nigerian languages, as expected, cannot all function as the official language of Nigeria. The constitution of Nigeria lists four major languages namely, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, as official languages. At the state Government level, the major languages of each state are similarly recognized. However, the fact remains that English is the principal official language, while the Nigerian languages only play a complementary role either at the federal or state level. Thus, the recognition of English, an international language, as an official language in Nigeria holds dire implications for the vitality and development of indigenous languages (major or minor) in Nigeria. The vitality of a language depends on how often the language is used in communication by its speakers. Hence, a study of the level of use and level of prestige of these indigenous languages in the nation is necessary in view of the fact that the multilingual status of Nigeria has not influenced positively the development of any of her indigenous languages.

1.2. Language Maintenance and Language Shift

When languages come in contact a number of things which are however impossible to generalise actually happen. Hence, the need to examine the phenomenon of language maintenance and shift into details in Nigeria. Languages, like people, may and may not succumb to onslaught from one another. When two languages come in contact and somehow, the two manage to survive the contact, we talk of language maintenance, in that, the minor language has survived the influence of the major one. However, when a language yields to the consuming influence of another language thereby making its speakers to assimilate to this dominant language, we have a case of language shift. Language shift and maintenance, two sociolinguistic concepts, have been described by Fasold (1990) as two sides of the same coin. These two concepts are like siblings of a family, where shift was born before maintenance. Thus, Weinreich (1953) defines shift as 'the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another'.

Hoffmann (1991) describes language maintenance as a situation where members of a community try to keep the languages they have always used. Language maintenance is therefore attempts or steps taken by speakers of a particular language to ensure the continuity of their language in the face of the onslaught it receives from another language. This attempt may be deliberate or unintentional, formal or informal. This is actually realized through the preservation of the language in certain domains, although the language has lost its grip in several other domains (Onadipe-Shalom, 2013). According to Williamson (1990) factors that promote language maintenance are 'cultural commitment to one's language as opposed to the majority and intimacy, ease of communication and ability to appeal to the emotions that are characteristics of one's language'.

The importance of monolinguals to the survival or maintenance of minority languages all over the world has also been noted. This is because anyone wanting to speak to a monolingual is compelled to speak his language making it possible for such people to pass on successfully to their children their heritage language (Hill, 1998). According to Onadipe-Shalom (2013) what is most important and relevant to language maintenance is having 'few dedicated individuals'. The need to examine the issue of language maintenance and shift in multilingual Nigeria is of utmost importance to us today because Nigerian indigenous languages are not only competing with European languages, even among themselves, competition exists.

According to Appel and Muysken (1990) factors influencing language maintenance are: status, demographic and institutional support factors. Under status, we have economic, social, socio-historical and language status. To them, the economic strength of a language group automatically determines the survival of the language, in that, an economically disadvantaged group will 'have a strong tendency to shift towards the majority language'. Again, the

economic status of a people will dictate the group's social pride and self-esteem. Demographic factor has to do with the numerical strength of a group which can also determine the maintenance or shift away from a language. Institutional factor means government support for minority languages such as use in education, mass media, religion, etc. which will automatically translate into language maintenance. Holmes (1992) says that positive attitudes support efforts to use the minority language in a variety of domains. Thus, where and when speakers of a language are favourably disposed to the use of their language and are emotionally attached to their language, language maintenance is usually the norm and inter-generational continuity is the expected result.

As evident from the foregoing, language shift is the reverse of language maintenance. Language shift, according to Fishman (1991), is a 'process whereby intergenerational continuity of the heritage languages is proceeding negatively, with fewer speakers, readers, writers and even understanders' in every generation. Hoffmann (1991) says that language shift refers to a 'process whereby a community does not maintain its language, but gradually adopts another one'. Language shift usually takes place in communities where the recessive language has the status of the non-dominant and where non-dominant language speakers have an ambiguous attitude towards their language (Onadipe-Shalom, 2013).

Lewis and Simons (2009) say 'when language shift is in progress, the extent of language loss is measured by identifying the youngest generation (in an unbroken chain of generational transmission) that retains proficiency in language. Thus, inter-generational continuity remains one major indices of measuring language shift. That is, as long as the youngest generation speaking a language proficiently is children, then there is a future for such a language, what is more, extinction is impossible. According to Holmes, factors that encourage language shift include, social, economic, political, demographic, attitude and value. Social factors have to do with the environment where the people reside vis-à-vis the other people who use a dominant language in the environment. The economic factor borders on the necessity to get jobs in cities or trade with other tribes in view of having more gains. On demographic factor, it is believed that language shift is effectively curtailed in the rural areas than in urban centres. The reason adduced for this is that rural people can easily meet up with their needs without recourse to political affiliations.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Existing literature on the sociolinguistic situation of languages in Nigeria has focused mostly on bilingualism or language shift (Adegbija, 1994;1997; Ajisafe, 2014; Dada, 2005;2006;2007;2008;2009; Elugbe, 2009; Emenanjo, 1990; Emenanjo and Bleambo, 1999; Emenanjo, 2008; Fakuade, 1996;1997; Fakuade *et al.*, 2003; Fakuade, 2004; Onadipe-Shalom, 2013; Oyetade, 2007) to the exclusion of other aspects of the language contact situation such as language maintenance. According to Komondourous and McEntee-Atalians (2007) 'it is difficult to generalize about the exact constellation of causes of language shift'. They state further that 'every language contact situation is unique and must be evaluated on the basis of its own characteristics and dynamics' (p.367).

The complex multilingual nature of Nigeria therefore presents innumerable opportunity to attempt an exploration into the patterns of language contact, maintenance and shift situations in Nigeria. Empirical research covering the entire nation on the important internal and external factors in language maintenance in Nigeria is practically non-existent. Onadipe-Shalom (2013) says '...until now, the country is yet to get a comprehensive data on language use.' Adegbija (1994) says that only three out of the over 500 languages spoken in Nigeria are given official recognition. In view of this, it is imperative to investigate the language use patterns and language attitude of Nigerians as a means of determining the factors that helped to maintain the indigenous languages and those that are indicators of language shift.

1.4. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine critically the issue of language maintenance and shift in Nigeria. A study of the language use patterns of Nigerians will reveal whether the community is moving towards the maintenance of the mother tongue or shifting from mother tongue to English, the only official language in the country. Thus, the study hopes to evaluate the sociolinguistic vitality of indigenous languages in Nigeria. The research aims to examine the various factors responsible for current trends in language use and language maintenance in Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are to examine:

1. The role of the home or family in language shift and maintenance in Nigeria.
2. The role of the schools in language shift and maintenance in Nigeria.
3. The place of socio-political factor in language shift and maintenance in Nigeria.
4. The role of religion in language shift and maintenance in Nigeria.

The findings emanating from the objectives above will be instructive as to what step to take to reverse language shift and prevent language death in Nigeria. It will serve as an addition to the existing literature on language shift and maintenance in Nigeria. It will also provide empirical justification for proffering solution to the dichotomy between the major languages and the minority languages in Nigeria. The work will serve as a stepping stone to other sociolinguistic challenges besetting multilingualism in Nigeria. It will create awareness on the need for effective intergenerational transmission of mother tongue in Nigeria. The work in its entirety will provide a Nigerian paradigm to the world-wide phenomenon of language shift and maintenance.

It is our hope that this research will contribute to both linguistic theory and a better understanding of linguistic minority problems world-wide. It is essential to gather as much information as possible on all languages of

the world to have a global and precise perspective of what linguistic diversity is, the way human language works, how it changes in time and space. It is in this regard that our research could be considered a contribution to knowledge.

1.5. Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between sex and language spoken to parents and siblings at home during childhood.
2. There is no significant relationship between age and language spoken to parents and siblings during childhood.
3. There is no significant relationship between level of education and language spoken at home during childhood.
4. There is no significant relationship between religion and language spoken at home during childhood.

1.6. Research Design

The study continues the investigation of language shift and maintenance research through a questionnaire survey following Yamamoto (2002), Brown (2008) and Igboanusi and Wolf (2009). The current survey was designed especially to determine the effects of social, marital, educational, psychological, economic, religious and political factors on language shift and maintenance in Nigeria.

Data were collected through a questionnaire from respondents of varied background (students, teachers, traders, civil servants, technicians, engineers, fashion designers, nurses, accountants and even the unemployed persons) all over the nation. In order to circumvent the methodological difficulty of gathering data from the entire nation owing to the size and number of languages involved, only six states of the federation were used in line with six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The six states: Ondo in the south west, Anambra in the south east, Bayelsa in the south south, Adamawa in the north east, Zamfara in the north west and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, in the north central were all selected based on easy accessibility on the part of the researchers and their research assistants. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed in each state for the study with the exception of Abuja which had five hundred owing to its neutral, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature. In all, 192 questionnaires were recovered from respondents in Ondo State, 182 copies recovered from Adamawa, 194 copies from Anambra, 73 copies from Zamfara, 179 copies from Bayelsa and 475 copies from Abuja and the sum total is 1,295 copies.

This study is situated within the domain theory of Fishman (1964). Domain theory stipulates that there are certain institutional contexts in which one language is considered more appropriate than another. According to Ajiboye and Rafiu (2013) 'domains serve as the anchor points for distinct value system as embodied in the use of languages.' A domain, according to Holmes (2007), involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings. Fishman (1966) says that the issue of language maintenance and shift 'is concerned with the relationship between change and stability in habitual language use, on the one hand, and on-going psychological, social or cultural processes, on the other hand, when populations differing in language are in contact with each other.' Hence, the relevance of domain theory to the present analysis.

Domain is a concept that draws on three social factors in code choice which are the participants, setting or occasion and topic. This concept implies that no bilingual speaks all the languages he understands in each social setting. He uses whichever is appropriate to the domain, topic and the expected pattern of behaviour (Oyetade, 1992). Holmes (2007) opines that 'the order of domains in which language shift occurs may differ for different individuals and different groups, but gradually over time, the language of the wider society displaces the minority language mother tongue'. Fishman (1972) stipulates that domain analysis model is applicable in 'those speech communities that are characterized by widespread and relatively stable multilingualism'.

As evident in the foregoing, the domain of language behaviour is very relevant to this study as it relates speakers' choice of language to wide spread socio-cultural norms and expectations. For the languages under investigation, domains such as home, school/ work and religion were recognised. In addition, the study also provided for the three major considerations in domain analysis: participants, location and topic, in that respondents were also grouped into role-relations since language choice depends on the interlocutors. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Simple frequency distributions and percentages were applied for the descriptive statistics. Chi-square were used for the inferential statistics.

2. Findings

2.1. Demographic Information

The sample is made up of 1295 respondents from all over Nigeria. 192 (14.8%) of the respondents are from the south west, 182 (14.1%) of the respondents are from the North- East, South-East has 194 (15.0%) of the respondents, North-west is with 73 (5.6%) number of respondents, 179 (13.8%) respondents are from South-South and the North-central has 475 (36.7%) respondents.

The demographic characteristics of our respondents are presented below as Table 1, which includes Sex, Age, Education and Occupation.

Table-1. Description of the sample's Demographic Characteristics

Item		Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex	Male	714	55.1
	Female	581	44.9
Age	Under 30 years	890	68.7
	Above 30 years	405	31.3
Education	Primary	75	5.8
	Secondary	256	19.8
	Tertiary	964	74.4
Religion	Christianity	1075	83.0
	Islam	189	14.6
	Others	31	2.4

The profile of the respondents as presented above is important in two respects. One, it provided an insight into the background of the respondents. Two, enabled us to ascertain the reason for any variation(s), if any, in the respondents' choice of code and matters of bilingual proficiency.

Table-2. Relationship between Sex and Language spoken to parents at home during childhood

Sex	Language spoken to children				df	X ² cal	P-value	Inference
	Mother Tongue	English	Both	Total				
Male	389	101	224	714	2	1.629	0.443	Not Significant
Female	298	94	189	581				
Total	687	195	413	1295				

P>0.05

The table above shows that chi-square calculated value is (1.629), P-value is 0.443 which is greater than 0.05 significant level. The Null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between Sex and Language spoken to children at home is accepted. This implies that both male and female accept that they spoke mother tongue at home either as children or during childhood with their parents and siblings.

Statistically speaking, 687 (53.1%) respondents use mother tongue at home, 195 (15.1%) respondents use English and 413 (31.9%) respondents use both. If the percentage for both is added to that of MT we have 85.8% which means that there is mother tongue maintenance at home based on this result.

In the questionnaire, we sought to know which code(s) the respondents are capable of using. 266 (20.5%) respondents picked mother tongue, 187 (14.4%) picked English while 842 (65.0%) picked both. If the number of the respondents that picked both is something to reckon with, it means that Nigerians are highly bilingual in English and mother tongue.

Invariably, since there is a high level of bilingual proficiency in the Nigerian community, we probed to see if there is any relationship between age and bilingual proficiency of our subjects. This forms the basis of our second hypothesis.

Table-3. Relationship between Age and Language spoken at home in childhood

Age	Language spoken at Home				df	X ² cal	P-value	Inference
	Mother Tongue	English	Both	Total				
Under 30 yrs	401	168	321	890	4	80.937	0.00	Significant
30 – 50 yrs	240	23	85	348				
Above 50 yrs	46	4	7	57				
Total	687	195	413	1295				

P<0.05

The chi-square calculated is 80.937, P-value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 significant level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant relationship between age and the languages spoken at home. Those above 50 years unlike the younger generation, rarely use English at home. Thus, our subjects differ in bilingual language use at home with regard to age. This implies that bilingual ability in English and mother tongue is age-related in Nigeria.

Table-4. Level of Education and Language spoken at home during Childhood

Level of Education	Language spoken to children				df	X ² cal	P-value	Inference
	Mother Tongue	English	Both	Total				
Tertiary	496	153	315	964	4	7.397	0.116	Not Significant
Secondary	141	34	81	256				
Primary	50	8	17	75				
Total	687	195	413	1295				

P>0.05

The chi-square calculated is 7.397 at P-value (0.116) which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the level of Education and the language spoken at home as a child. Invariably, mother tongue is the home language in Nigeria irrespective of one's level of education.

Table-5. Relationship between Religion and language spoken at home during childhood

Religion	Language spoken to children				df	X ² cal	P-value	Inference
	Mother Tongue	English	Both	Total				
Christianity	546	178	351	1075	4	17.407	0.002	Significant
Islam	119	15	55	189				
Others	22	2	7	31				
Total	687	195	413	1295				

P<0.05

The chi-square calculated is 17.407, P-value is 0.02 which is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between Religion and the language spoken at home during childhood. This implies that there is relation between Religion and the language spoken at home during childhood. Language use in religion is fairly predictable in Nigeria (see (Dada and Owolabi, 2013)) such that English is used by the Christians and Arabic by the Muslims in practising their religions.

The two areas where there are significant differences between the variables measured here are age and religion. The implications of this for semi-exoglossic bilingualism in Nigeria are that (1) the language of the youths is slightly different from that of the adults; (2) the language of one religion (Christianity) is different from that of the other religion (Islam). Statistics has only been used to confirm reality in the two cases. The tendency is for the youths to master or pay more interest to an international language than to a 'national' or at best, a regional language, simply because of the attendant benefits associated with the international language. With this development there is an incipient language shift already towards the English language at the expense of the mother tongue. Only the future can tell what the dominant language at home between English and the mother tongue in Nigeria will be in the next 50 years. At present, the mother tongue, though not in the written form, is still widely spoken or used at home in Nigeria. However, who knows whether the use of mother tongue will still be as rampant as it is today by the time the younger generation who are under 30 years are now grand parents with another 30 years behind them.

As a projection on the foregoing, the questionnaire featured the following questions: (a) what languages do your children speak? (b) what language(s) would you prefer your children to speak? (c) in what language do your children talk to each other at home? (d) what language(s) do you speak at home? (e) how many moonlight stories did you learn at home? (f) how many moonlight stories have you taught your children? (g) do you believe that moonlight stories are gradually becoming a thing of the past? In response to question (a) 15.8% picked mother tongue, 31.1% picked English while 53.1% picked both. The result clearly shows that children these days in Nigeria use English more than mother tongue. To make matters worse they speak code-switched English and/or mother tongue. Hence, the tendency for them to say both. 'Both' here in reality does not translate into 'true' bilingualism. To question (b) 20.5% of respondents picked mother tongue, 33.5% picked English and 46.0% picked both. It is unfortunate that a higher percent picked English to the detriment of mother tongue. Although a fair percentage picked both, yet this is suspect. To question (c) 21.2% of the respondents picked mother tongue, 36.3% picked English while 42.5% picked both. A consistent pattern of the preference for English to the mother tongue is gradually emerging. Meanwhile, 'both' as stated already does not connote bilingualism in the Nigerian context since the younger generation perform poorly in both written English and written mother tongue. Indeed, many of the younger generation can no longer read their mother tongue, let alone write it with the correct tone. After all, ability to write in one's language is an indication of one's language proficiency as it helps to preserve and transmit one's culture from generation to generation for posterity. The response to question (d) has 36.4% for mother tongue, 16.1% for English and 47.5% for both. This is an encouraging response in that it shows that parents still communicate at home in the mother tongue with their children. This is a good indicator of mother tongue maintenance in Nigeria.

In order to further establish the issue of language maintenance in Nigeria, cultural questions as evident in questions (e) and (f) were featured. Any culture is inherently captured by its language. A rating scale of sufficient

and insufficient was established. Five (5) stories and above attracted sufficient as its score and below five (5) stories attracted insufficient. Thus, in response to question (e) 59.5% responded as insufficient while 40.5% responded as sufficient. To question (f) 23.2% responded as insufficient (i.e. below 5) while 76.6% responded as sufficient. The truth is that the respondents either misunderstood question (f) or they manipulated the answer to their favour to avoid the implication of picking a negative response. To be sure, the parents of these respondents gave them insufficient moonlight stories, how come they were however able to give their own children sufficient number of moonlight stories. Nevertheless, the correct answer came with question (g), 74.8% respondents picked Yes and 25.2% picked No. There is no gainsaying the fact that things of cultural values including moonlight stories are going down the drain in Nigeria. In fact, they are fast disappearing as the younger generation prefers something foreign to theirs. Also, story telling in mother tongue is an unusual task that requires interest and mastery of the language for it to happen without external incentive.

To further examine critically the issue of language maintenance or shift in Nigeria, two other questions were asked: (hi) what was the first language you learned to speak? (hii) at what stage in life did you learn English? (i) do you want English encouraged or discouraged as Nigeria's official language? The response to question (hi) shows that 72.7% respondents picked mother tongue. 25.4% picked English while 1.4% picked both. The response elicited from our subjects obviously reveals that a good number of Nigerians have one Nigerian language or the other as his/her mother tongue. A few respondents gave English as their first language which may or may not be true. The next question (hii) is a corollary to (hi). 31.1% of the respondents claimed to have learned English at home, 68.8% learned at school while 0.4% gave no response. This result has simply confirmed the earlier one which is that over 70% Nigerians have Nigerian languages as their mother tongue. Finally, in response to question (i) 79.9% of the respondents wanted English encouraged as Nigeria's official language, 12.4% wanted it discouraged, while 7.7% did not respond. This result has great implication for the national language policy.

3. Discussion

The analysis done above on the sociology of language maintenance in Nigeria has gone a long way to portray the extent of bilingualism in Nigeria and it has also demonstrated the degree of Nigerians' loyalty to their mother tongues. The result reveals that thus far, mother tongue maintenance is still a reality in Nigeria as far as speaking ability is concerned. Speaking ability is a reflection of effective use of language and by extension the vitality of the language within the speech community.

We hasten to add, however that the kind of bilingualism found in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. Bilingualism is still widespread in Nigeria because of factors such as the lingering effect of colonisation, globalization, high mobility of labour, the educational and national language policies and so on. Indeed, for now, Nigerians consider bilingualism a linguistic asset. They have therefore held to their mother at home (informal situation) while keeping English for all other situations, especially official purposes. Meanwhile, all the regional languages in Nigeria, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, have institutional support just like the English language. Thus, the need to learn them in addition to English is not far-fetched. Besides, Nigerians have had school reinforcement of these regional lingua francas in addition to English since the post-colonial era. Really, some of these regional languages are studied up to the tertiary level.

Bilingualism, itself, has been variously defined in the literature leaving us with a polarity of typologies. It is noteworthy that whatever measure of bilingual proficiency is employed for our data, the respondents here who are representing the Nigerian community are well qualified to be called bilinguals. They are bilingual in their mother tongue and the English language. This scenario reveals a case of mother tongue language maintenance because the use of it at home is still rampant. The study goes to confirm that the type of bilingualism in existence in Nigeria is semi-exoglossic bilingualism (Oyetade, 1992).

One major defect of semi-exoglossic or mixed bilingualism (Cobarrubias, 1983) is language interference in that the foreign language has not been learned in a natural setting just as the natural setting meant for acquiring the mother tongue is now facing serious onslaught from the English language which has attained globally the status of a killer language. Indeed, ambilingualism or true bilingualism seems naturally impossible under exoglossic bilingualism because of the phenomenon of language interference. Bilingual researches today in Nigeria (Ajani, 2013; Dada, 2007; Owolabi and Bankole, 2013) found out that youths are no longer proficient in the use of their mother tongue while the English language they tend to shift to suffers the same lot which unfortunately leaves them with a mix of two or more languages they are not competent in.

Observe that an insistence on ambilingual standard would have disallowed us to reckon with very many of our respondents as bilinguals. No wonder, Fishman (1971) asserts that sociolinguistically speaking "any society that produces functionally balanced bilinguals (that is, bilinguals who use both languages equally and equally well in all contexts) must soon cease to be bilingual because no society needs two languages for one and the same set of functions"(p.560). Our present findings prove this assertion to be very correct. For instance, the mother tongue is still dominant in the home, hence its survival thus far, but not outside the home. English has become the general language in Nigeria. This means it is the language most widely used at all times and in most situations including the home. Thus, the two languages are only kept functionally distinct partially, a situation which has been described in the literature as bilingualism without diglossia (Fishman, 1971). Bilingualism without diglossia is often considered to be less stable than bilingualism with diglossia.

A polarity already exists in the pattern of bilingual proficiency in Nigeria between the young (those under 30 years) and the older group (30 years and above). Indeed, (Nigerian) English seems to be spoken more by the youths than the adults. Most children, who are students in the nursery/primary schools, use (Nigerian) English actively but mother tongue passively. This position was openly tested while working on this paper. By this we mean that recently, one of us travelled out of our place of work with public transport and while coming back he boarded a taxi cab with a car radio that was on. Somehow, it was time for the Yoruba 6.30p.m news. The newscaster started to read as if she was not too sure of the pronunciation of what she was reading. At a stage, the cab driver got fed up and switched off the radio. He said, and rightly of course, 'this thing is becoming a generational problem, our youths can no longer read our language'. What an irony! Our youths can no longer read our mother tongues!

Our findings show that Nigerians are moving towards a mixed discourse of English and the mother tongue. The mother tongue tends to take a minority role in this mixed discourse. Nigerian youths tend to gravitate toward English, and English has become the dominant language in this mixed discourse of code mixing, code switching and code shifting. Thus, English has, at times depending on the occasion, become a stand-alone language while this is not so with mother tongue for many young Nigerians. Our investigation reveals that language use in Nigeria, which in turn affects proficiency in each of these languages, is dependent on the respondents' age and religion. On proficiency in the mother tongue, the older the better, whereas, English proficiency is slightly influenced by age and religion- Christian religion.

The present polarity in bilingual proficiency in the Nigerian community can however be accounted for in terms of disparity in the status of the languages in contact in Nigeria. English is an international language par excellence whereas apart from the home, Nigerian youths perceive no significant contexts in which their mother tongues are necessary and appropriate. The present result is consistent with the popular view (Columas, 2004) that the degree of bilingual proficiency is proportional to bilingual usage. Directly related to the loss of domains for the Nigerian languages is that children have insufficient exposure to the languages to achieve good proficiency in it. The 'restricted usage' of the mother tongue is an indicator of the present plight of the Nigerian heritage languages, a fate common to all African languages and to all small-population languages the world over. Thus, many Nigerian languages are languages without orthography, and are now confined once again to oral use in a particular social domain, the home.

4. Conclusion

Although, the present study on the sociology of language maintenance in Nigeria is not exhaustive bearing in mind time and financial constraints, in any event, the study has provided detailed data that should inspire subsequent studies of mother tongue maintenance in Nigeria. The adequate role played by the home in mother tongue maintenance in Nigeria has come to the fore. On the other hand, the roles played by the school, language planning agencies, socio-political factor, economic factor, and religion in encouraging language shift in Nigeria have also been publicised.

As inevitable as language shift is, Nigerians should explore the antidotes for keeping their languages alive. An important remedy for language shift and its consequences is language maintenance. Language maintenance involves sustaining strategies like regular usage at home and at school; protecting everything the language has in its components and devising ways of enhancing the value of such languages. Parents should strive to teach the younger ones their mother tongues without code-switching. Another solution to this menace is 'mother-tongue based bilingual education' which Igboanusi (2008), defines as 'a form of schooling that uses the L1 for teaching beginning literacy (reading and writing) and content area instruction (such as mathematics), while teaching the L2 as a second /foreign language'.

It is pertinent to note that only Nigerians can develop Nigerian languages. To think otherwise is to live in a fool's paradise. Hence, developing Nigerian languages is a collective responsibility of all of us. The most common cause of language death in the world today is not population death but language shift. And this happens when parents no longer pass on their language to their children. Once there is no inter-generational continuity in the learning of a language, the language is already endangered. To say the obvious is to say that whatever happens to these languages, that is, in terms of conflict or competition, shift or maintenance, healthy or diseased, speakers of these languages themselves serve as the social agents. Hence, the need to focus on the speakers in redressing a negative trend. The present study underscores the need for a concerted effort on the part of stakeholders (parents, language policy makers, government institutions, the children themselves and the Nigerian community at large) to slow down this negative trend of language shift in view of the fact that use is the bedrock of language growth.

Up till today, Nigeria has neither a 'true' national language nor an accurate figure of the number of languages in Nigeria let alone the accurate figure of those Nigerians who are monolingual, bilingual or multilingual. This is a clear indication of lack of an accurate statistics on the sociology of language maintenance in Nigeria. An inventory of the number of languages in Nigeria with vital information such as those ones used as mother tongues, second languages, third languages, etc. will reveal whether the indigenous languages are actually being maintained or not. According to Hoffmann (1991), 'when a community does not maintain its language, but gradually adopts another one, we talk about language shift while language maintenance refers to a situation where members of a community try to keep the language(s) they have always used.'

Language can be relied upon as a major factor in cultural maintenance. It is like this: a people's language is the greatest legacy nature has endowed them with. Language is a precious resource encapsulating the intellectual wealth,

world view, identity, verbal art, etc. of its owners. Thus, the loss of any language and by implication, the attendant cultural system it expresses means an irretrievable loss of diverse and interesting intellectual wealth, and the object of study of linguists.

Language endangerment is one inevitable consequence of languages coming into contact especially in Africa where multilingualism happens to be the norm rather than the exception. In situations where languages of dissimilar status come in contact, social, psychological and even economic variables may make bilingualism imperative for speakers of minority languages. What is more, this development may eventually lead to language shift and ultimately language death. Thus, the present study examines the sociology of language maintenance in Nigeria with reference to both Nigeria's major and minority languages with a view to determining whether these indigenous languages are being maintained or not.

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