

Dearth of Native Languages and Cultural Sustenance in Rivers State

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Abstract

The paper examined dearth of native languages and cultural sustenance in Rivers State. It adopted the desk study approach in which academic inputs within study scope were sourced from the internet, journals, textbooks. The paper suspects very strongly that if no proper machinery is put in place by both linguistic scholars and government, the dearth of native languages in Rivers State becomes potent. It outlined the causes of language dearth or extinction, the nexus between language and culture transmission, and proffered solutions in order to averting the imminent speculation of outright dearth of native languages in Rivers State. It based its theory on Academic Associated Role Theory by Bogucki. The paper concluded that language preservation through academic innovations is crucial to avert looming native language dearth in Rivers State. Local or native languages have been under attack by international language intrusions and educational quests in the city centres. In other terms, the wanton metropolitan pursuit of the Rivers State society has a major potential of deadening indigenous languages. It recommended among others that Linguists academics in Rivers State should embrace technology by making the learning and retention of native languages 'virile' in the social spectrum and that Government of Rivers State should develop workable policies of teaching some or all of Rivers State native languages in schools.

Keywords: Native Languages, Dearth, Culture, Sustenance.

Introduction

Language has been identified as a major component of culture and agent of cultural transmission. Every culture is transmitted to the younger generation via language. Language is required to teach both the contemporary and next generation the culture of a people. It is a worrisome trend that native languages are hastily going into extinction. It has been observed that most children can hardly speak their mother-tongue. There have been cases where both parents speak foreign languages to the children to the exclusion of the local language in most homes in Rivers State. The language of a people contains proverbs, puns, euphemisms and respect (Adein, 2021). When these are not transmitted to the generation, language dearth or extinction becomes imminent and the cultural future of the people, bleak. This paper considers local language extinction as a show of loss of culture and a linguistic challenge to linguistic scholars. There is a very close nexus between language and culture as every culture is transmitted via language. It therefore follows that when a language is lost, culture follows suit.

The world today is littered with thousands of languages and several hundreds have been documented to have become extinct (Crystal, 2000). Of the known 7,102 living languages, 22% of them have been categorized as 'in trouble', 13% dying, while there is a loss rate of about 6 languages per year (Lewis et al., 2015). While the origin of languages has not been fully established (Fernando, et al., 2010), it is known that new languages generally arise through geographical isolation when former dialects become mutually unintelligible to the speakers and when languages get combined, that is, when creolization occurs (Fernando, et al., 2010). This paper fears that if no effort is put in place as a matter of policy in Rivers State, indigenous languages in Rivers State might fall into the negatives statistics of extinct languages.

Language is the code of communication. It is a medium in which culture is communicated to the people. The anglicization of language in many homes in Rivers State seem to have led to the palpable extinction of local or native language. This according to Oyet (2016) is cultural super-imposition in a most subtle form. A situation where people leave their cultural language for another, could be viewed as exhibition of inferiority. It is a situation in which one's language is considered difficult to use for a more metropolitan language approach.

Culture contains the morals of a people. Most of the contents of a people's culture embodies in moral preservatives, such as greetings, manners to elders, pubic conduct and other social befitting conducts. It however appears that this component of moral culture is disappearing amongst various linguistic units in Rivers State. A culture that does not have a mode or code of transmission, is destined to vanish (Oyet, 2016). This in other terms implies that the fulcrum of any cultural development is contained or communicated through the language of such a people

In scholarly pursuit to curb the trend on native language extinction, Ibezim (2014) carried out a desk study on the dangers attacking Igbo Language in which he bemoaned the hasty extinction of the Igbo language even in its own soil. Adeboye (2019) delivered a public lecture on Yoruba Language, an endangered specie and explained the manner in which foreign languages are eaten up the language root of the Yorubas. However, it appears that there has not been works on local language in Rivers State, which gap the present paper seeks to close.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation: Academic Associated Role Theory in the Preservation of Culture

This paper considers that academics have a role to play in preserving culture through native language vitality. The Academic Associated Role Theory was propounded by Bogucki (1958) and cited by Anyanwu (2012) with its principles demonstrated how regional academic and research organizations can help field projects prioritize site investigations and to flag when and where contract projects are likely to turn up long-sought key data for regional synthesis. Eastern European Neolithic academic specialists

proved very capable of generating clear and specific want lists for field workers that should ensure that cutting edge analysis and synthesis is effectively applied to rescue situations. Other regional research groups (formal or informal) can be similarly helpful and influential in setting research agendas for large rescue projects.

Concept of Natives Language Extinction

The notion of ethnolinguistic vitality and the factors that cause language dearth as mentioned above are also essentially contained in Crystal (2019) theory which is based on the assumption that the language power is different. Languages that are less strong tend to lose out in competition and that strength is measured based on geo-linguistic density. BI is stronger than BD, as seen from the results of Hayward (2018) study. In linguistics, language death occurs when a language loses its last native content through the interference of foreign language. By extension, language extinction is when the language is no longer known, including by second-language speakers, when it becomes known as an extinct language. Language performs its function to describe, exchange, and compose experiences according to context.

While it could be taken that ethnic based languages in Rivers State may not have totally got into extinction, but there have been tendencies of showing lack of speaking ability by the younger generation, which this paper fears might lead to extinction. According to Ogunmodimu (2015), context is the internal aspects of the text and everything that externally surrounds the text. Saragih states as well that language is a social phenomenon that exists as a social semiotic and a constructive text (determine and refer to mutually) with a social context. Language is like a breath for humans, it has a primary function that is as a tool for social interaction in society because language cannot be separated from all activities. If we do not have a language, we can lose our humanity as human beings. Therefore, language is a means for its users to manage in communicating each other. If there is a language, there must be a community of users. Humans in using language are motivated by certain goals and objectives.

Causes of Natives Language Extinction

Whaley (2013) asserted that while they differ in setting, culture, and phonetics, one aspect that most dead Indigenous languages share is that they deaden as a result of colonization and the subsequent rise of foreign languages. As native languages go extinct, so too do the culture and history that they carry with them. Metropolitanism appears to be a major causative agent of dearth of native languages. A situation where people prefer to analyze even when it is not necessary constitute a major threat to native languages in Rivers State. Today, Indigenous communities rely heavily on the federal government for basic services, such as education, which places English in an important position for the younger generation. Secondary education is less accessible to Indigenous students, who often have to travel hours to attend school. Some students in Nunavik choose to leave in order to attend secondary schools in Thunder Bay, where there is an institutionalized homestay

program. In exchange for higher quality education, however, they give up their local community and home environment as well as the opportunity to speak their native language (Hassan, 2018). Those who are able to pass through secondary education then face additional challenges in seeking higher education, where the pursuit of a degree forces them to relocate further to cities that operate almost entirely in English, creating pressure to either assimilate or risk discrimination. Life outside Indigenous communities is thus dominated by English, with Indigenous languages being relegated to the less essential status of traditional cultural markers (Ajumogobia, 2017).

Panacea for Extinction of natives Lanaguages in Rivers State

If governmental policies in Rivers State have made the preservation of indigenous languages especially difficult, and the globalized nature of modern society makes English a more useful and necessary language, how can Indigenous languages be preserved?

Bluman, (2019) insists that one solution lies in the potential of education technology and distance learning. If members of Indigenous communities in Rivers State are able to complete their education within their own communities, it would reduce pressure to move to English-dominated areas or cities such as Port Harcourt, Bori and cut ties with home environments. The potential of distance learning has already been demonstrated through a graduate degree program for Inuit students that allowed them to study partly remotely. This Masters of Education program continues to operate successfully, and the foundation of its distance learning model could be applied to various levels of education. The COVID-19 pandemic has engendered a newfound proliferation in resources for online education at all levels. If programs are designed specifically around decolonizing learning methodologies and prioritizing Indigenous perspectives, traditional Indigenous beliefs can be integrated into curriculums to preserve valuable cultural and historical views (Hummy, 2021).

If technology were to be harnessed properly for targeted use in schools, it could also help reinforce Indigenous language and improve educational experiences for Indigenous children with culturally tailored curriculums. Indigenous children have a right to receive education in their native language, and those who are taught in their first language perform better academically and are less likely to drop out. In a 2017 survey, knowledge of their native language was also found to be one of the top priorities of Indigenous youth. However, as most teachers in Nunavik schools do not speak Inuktitut, for example, students are instructed exclusively in English and French. Applications for iPads, iPhones, and laptops have already been developed to help young children learn Inuktitut syllabics interactively. These applications also allow keyboards to be downloaded for typing in Indigenous languages. If applications such as these were to be implemented in Indigenous education, they could help decolonize curriculums to include Indigenous perspectives, improve Indigenous children's relationship to the education system, and preserve languages for future generations (Nweke, 2023).

As the government has been largely responsible for threatening the existence of Indigenous languages, its involvement will also be key in preserving them. Currently, the mechanisms

of the Rivers Indigenous Languages Preservation Act are to "language cluster in primary schools in Rivers State'. A policy that is yet to receive implementation effort. Federal efforts to preserve Indigenous languages, such as those listed above, are especially important in preventing the subordination of such languages to colonial ones. These practices create legal mechanisms that prevent the gradual erosion of Indigenous cultures. For example, the legal requirement that hospitals have a translator on-call can protect Indigenous patients from receiving poor care due to miscommunications in a hospital geared towards treatment only in English or French. The extent to which new mechanisms will be enforced, and whether funding will be efficiently allocated, remains to be seen.

On comparative note, Indigenous peoples in Canada have faced centuries of colonial assimilation imposed by a government that creates barriers to their autonomy and to the preservation of their languages. Strategies to break down these barriers, involving a variety of technological and policy measures, must be carefully designed with the ultimate goal of creating long-lasting social change. This social change requires that Indigenous peoples be able to actively participate in education and society, while remaining connected to their communities to the greatest extent possible (Dalgard, 2018).

Nexus between Language and Transmission of Culture

Language is a product of culture. Therefore, it can be said that language is influenced by the culture in which it exists. Because of this relationship between language and culture, we can see how language impacts our ideas about ourselves and others. Language and culture are closely connected. A society's language is influenced by its culture, and vice versa. For example, in English we use "to" as an auxiliary verb to form compound tenses such as "I have to go." This is a completely different use of the word "have" than it is in another language like Spanish or German. In Spanish, they would say "Tengo que ir". In German they would say "Ich muss gehen (Agresti, 2022).

Language is related to the culture of a society. Because language has a social, cultural, and political impact, it can be used as a tool to change or maintain the culture. In order for language to have an effect on culture, it must be studied in relation to the people and their environment. Akubuiro (2015) affirms that the language spoken in one country may differ from that of another country because of different influences such as geography, climate (such as desert vs jungle), religion, and historical events that have affected both countries over time. For example, English is considered an international language because there are many speakers who are able to communicate easily with others around the world through this language; however, its meaning may be different depending on where you are located geographically or socially speaking (i.e., low-ranking vs high-ranking individuals). Language is the key to understanding a culture. It's what people use to communicate with each other, and it can provide insight into how they conceptualize the world. For example, if you are from a rural area and you speak a dialect that is not widely spoken by others in your area, then this could mean that your community has unique values or practices. It could also mean that you are isolated from other communities in your area. Language can also be used

to determine whether or not someone belongs to a particular group. For example, a person who uses slang terms and phrases that are not commonly used by others might be considered more "ghetto" than someone who uses very formal language.

Nweke (2023), on a NTA Talk Show avers that native languages in Rivers State, is an endangered species considering that the younger generation hardly receive the culture of growth. The language of the people communicates its culture which is on the low ebbs amongst native languages spoken in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Conclusion

The paper traversed through scholarly opinions and have posited that language preservation through academic innovations is crucial to avert looming native languages dearth in Rivers State. Local or native languages have been under attack by international language intrusions and educational quests in the city centres. In other terms, the wanton metropolitan pursuit of the Rivers State society has a major potential of deadening indigenous languages.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions and reviews above, the following recommendations have been made:

- i. Linguists' academics in Rivers State should embrace technology by making the learning and retention of native languages 'virile' in the social spectrum.
- ii. Government should develop workable policies of teaching some or all of Rivers State native languages in schools.
- iii. Parents should be encouraged to speak their local or native languages to their children and wards.

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