

## **THE STATUS OF MINORITY LANGUAGES IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF TIV, EDO, MBUBE, BASSA-NGE AND BASSA-KWOMU LANGUAGES**

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### **Abstract**

*Language is a tool of social definition and development. This owes to the fact that no society understands its views and hopes without language and no society with different languages can develop without solving her linguistic problems. However, some countries have not been able to understand this fact and tackle linguistic challenges properly. Nigeria is an example, as much of Nigeria's languages which help majority of Nigerians understand Nigeria's ideologies and goals better when spoken in their varying tongues remain underused and underdeveloped. This paper thus, adopts the sociolinguistic principles by William Labov to enquire into the status of Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-Nge and Bassa-Kwomu languages among the numerous Nigerian minority languages. The paper observes that Tiv language has high level of acceptance among its speakers, but has no standard orthography yet, it gains some institutional support to aid its development and enjoys wide extent of usage though limited to the environment of its native speakers. Edo language which is better referred to as Benin language following arguments by other language speakers equally share similar status as Tiv in its speech community. Mbube language has good acceptability with no orthography nor institutional support and is confined to extremely informal usage while Bassa-Nge and Bassa-Kwomu which do not enjoy much acceptance among their speakers, have no standard orthography nor institutional support and their usage are equally limited to informal situations. Finally, the paper recommends that people express strong commitment to their respective indigenous languages.*

*(A Publication of Tansian University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies)*

**Key words:** language, speech community, orthography, acceptance, institutional support

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## **1.0. Introduction**

Nigeria today is a country that is inhabited by several groups of people historically organized by nature and events into a collection of kingdoms, tribes, clans and villages that were once politically independent of one another, possessed, and still possess their independent cultures and traditions, as well as their languages. The independence of these kingdoms, tribes, clans and villages was witnessed prior to the coming of the colonialists who came with their ideologies as well as their language (English), imposed them on the people and subsequently, forcefully merged them into one political entity that is today called Nigeria.

Consequently, the linguistic state of the country Nigeria is surely, one that can largely be regarded as a multilingual one. This owes to the fact that Nigeria as a country has many ethnic groups and languages. These ethnic groups and languages, to a great extent, collectively determine the nature of the country; her political strength, power and continental status as the dubbed 'Giant of Africa'. This situation of course has its attendant challenges as these variable ethnic and linguistic units battle for recognition and supremacy over one another; especially the three dominant tribes in Nigeria- Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba.

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognized the need to resolve this and also to inculcate some level of her linguistic identity within her status as an independent country and thus, granted the status of 'official language' to the languages of these three dominant ethnic groups. However, this move though commendable, has not solved the country's linguistic issues as most Nigerians cannot speak all three official languages nor can majority of Nigerians from other minor ethnic groups speak these recognized official languages. Consequently, English language has come to become the language that is used in almost all official activities, both at the federal, regional, state and sometimes, even down to the family level. This excessive use of the English language has resulted in the relegation of virtually all Nigeria's indigenous languages to the background; as they now occupy inferior or minor position when compared to the English language.

From the fore-going therefore, the scope of this work is limited to sociolinguistics as studying the status of the minority languages in Nigeria will be limited to sociolinguistic perspective which investigates language in relation to its environment. The aim of this work is to look into the status of Nigeria's minority languages by studying the level of acceptance, the state of orthography, extent of usage and institutional support given to them. The languages under study are : Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-kwomu and Bassa-Nge languages, which are selected minority languages in Nigeria. The following research questions will be adopted to help achieve the aims of this work:

- i. What is the level of acceptance of Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-kwomu and Bassa-Nge languages, respectively?
- ii. What is the state of the orthography of Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-kwomu and Bassa-Nge languages, respectively?
- iii. Have Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-kwomu and Bassa-Nge languages and their speakers received any institutional support in promotion of the languages?
- iv. What is the extent of usage of Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-kwomu and Bassa-Nge languages, respectively?

The limitations encountered in this work include time constraint, possible subjective responses of some of the respondents and the hoarding of valuable information by the respondents. However, qualitative efforts will be made to address these shortcomings as much as possible so as to achieve a reliable result. Significantly, the work is valuable as it creates an insight into how some Nigerian languages which are symbols of the country's identity are being treated and how underdeveloped many of them remain. It equally evokes a mind-provoking resolve from the reader to treat one's language better.

## **2.0. Review of literature**

This section of the study takes a look at the works of some writers and researchers who have done similar works or works which prove relevant to the one being done here. The works of these writers and researchers will be discussed under theoretical studies, empirical studies and theoretical framework.

### **2.1. Theoretical studies**

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First, Let us look at the words of Ferguson (1962) in his explanation of what language situation is all about. In his opinion, language situation is a total configuration of language use at a given time and place including such data as how many and what kinds of language are spoken in the area, by how many people, under what circumstances and what the attitudes and beliefs about languages held by the members of the communities are. It is based on these facts that the growth of a language or even its death can be determined or estimated. Equally, languages are on these facts categorized according to their socio-cultural, educational and political levels of importance, as well as determining the status of a language as a minority or majority language.

The fact that people have great attachment to language can be understood through Sapir (1970)'s expression that language is a tool of significant experience. Capo (1990) justifies this as he wrote thus, "When it is considered that language is closely related to culture in that it is an expression of the common cultural experiences of the members of a linguistic community who speak it, this point underscores the socio-cultural value of language to man." This is an undeniable fact and it is equally fact that all languages are indeed, socio-culturally valuable to man irrespective of its status as a minority or a majority language; as long as it is still spoken and used by a give population of people for communicative purpose. A given language situation does not in any way render a language less important to any other.

According to Williamson (1990:118), "A language is only described as 'minority' language if it co-exists with one or more 'majority' languages". This is of course a point we agree with and in the words of Capo (1990:2), the minority-majority reference about languages in Nigeria are expressed thus:

*...it has become conventional, in this country to refer to three languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) as the 'major' languages on the basis of number of speakers (each of the three languages has by far a larger supportingspeaker population than any of the other languages, and together, the three languages account for over 60% of the Nigerian population) and official status, i.e. in terms of government recognition and use at various levels, particularly national and state, and for various purposes. The remaining languages are by*

*implication deemed to be 'minor' in a vague indeterminate sense.*

However, this is not a generally held view because there are various angles from which various writers, authors and researchers view the issue regarding the minority-majority status of Nigerian languages. Consequently, this same author postulates thus: "...while the three main languages are argued by some to be 'major', they are hardly perceived to be 'dominant' in a pervasive sense, a status that is reserved for English." It is based on this angle that some other people view all Nigerian languages as minority languages when viewed alongside the English language.

Various theories of sociolinguistics have been proposed by several theorists to explain this phenomenon of language status as well as the relationship between language and the society. A sociolinguist, William Labov proposed sociolinguistic principles to show the relevance of social variables in relation to language. Dell Hymes proposed to help study the factors that determine how people use language through his Ethnography of communication paradigm. Another is John Gumperz; a scholar who proposed sociolinguistics to study the interaction between individuals through his idea of interactional sociolinguistics. These theories are very handy to researchers and indeed sociolinguistics theory lends huge support to this work.

## **2.2. Empirical studies**

Some researchers have conducted similar researches on the status of Nigerian languages in general. In the research conducted by Ezenwafor and Ezenwafor (2010) on the place of Nigerian languages in the era of globalization, with particular reference to the Igbo language, they observed and put forward their findings by stating that the Igbo language is fast losing grounds in the face of numerous challenges posed by globalization and suggested production of modern films using Igbo language, the revitalization of the translation field and a language attitude change of the indigenous Igbo speakers to help revitalize the language. Globalization here means the creation of a world society in which the image of a nation-state and national identity had given way to a worldwide social interaction- confer Okeke and Ohaeto (2010).

Ifechelobi (2010) on her own part conducted a research on the relevance of minority Nigerian ethnic groups and languages to National unity. In her study, she observed that many of Nigeria's minority languages still remain underdeveloped and maintained that every language is capable of being developed sufficiently and rapidly too by the expansion of the vocabulary to cope with any aspect of knowledge, including science and technology. She then suggested that a cost minimizing strategy of implementation that will allow segmentation of the implementation can be adopted over a period of time until the overall task is completed.

### **2.3. Theoretical framework**

Among the sociolinguistic theories already identified in this work, the sociolinguistic theory by William Labov will be adopted to study the status of some minority languages in Nigeria such as Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-Nge and Bassa-Kwomu languages. William Labov proposed this theory in 1968. The theory analyzes data by studying the demographic, social and linguistic characteristics of the speaker and his language within a given speech community and describes their relationship adequately.

The strength of the theory therefore rests on the fact that unlike many other sociolinguistic theories, it favourably links structures of linguistic theory with time and other social and extra-linguistic variables, including the use of statistical data. More relevant to this work is that this theory broke the rule of what is referred to as elitist language attitude where only popular languages are studied; thus, advocating and advancing the study of minority languages as well.

### **3.0. Research methodology**

The various methods and considerations employed for this research work will be discussed in this section. These include the area of the study, the methods of data collection, the method of data presentation, as well as the method of analysis used.

#### **3.1. Area of study**

The work concentrates on the field of sociolinguistic. Thus, it bases on the various social factors or events which provide various degrees of evidence to the status of Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-Nge and Bassa-Kwomu languages.

#### **3.2. Method of data collection**

Information of data for this work was obtained through various reliable sources. These sources include textbooks, online journals and research-papers, as well as unstructured interview. Making use of interviews is to ensure that first-hand information are obtained from some credible respondents as this will equally ensure that biased information are controlled to ensure credible result at the end of the work.

### **3.3. Method of data presentation and analysis**

Being a study of the status of Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-Nge and Bassa-Kwomu languages based on sociolinguistic principles by William Labov, the information obtained were thoroughly evaluated and adequately described. The various information obtained through evidence from texts and interviews were thoroughly studied to ensure that confusion and ambiguities are dispersed. The status of the languages under study were then discussed or described based on four factors which include the level of acceptance or interest shown in the language, the state of orthography of the various languages, institutional supports which have been given to each of the languages as well as the ones still being given to them, and also, the extent to which the languages are used.

### **4.0. The status of Tiv, Edo, Mbube, Bassa-Kwomu and Bassa-Ngelanguages**

The discussion on the status of these minority languages identified and spoken in various places in Nigeria and by an identified Nigerian population will be based on certain angles or aspects ranging from:

- i. Level of Acceptance
- ii. The state of their orthography
- iii. Institutional support to the languages and their speakers, to
- iv. Extent of Usage

These points will in no small measure, help us to adequately discuss each of these five languages with equal attention.

### **4.1. The status of Tiv as a minority language in Nigeria**

The Tiv language is a part of the Southern BantoidTivoid family, a branch of Benue-Congo and ultimately of the Niger-Congolanguage-family.

#### **4.1.1. Level of acceptance of Tivlanguage by its speakers**

The Tiv language is spoken by over three million people in Nigeria, with a few speakers in Cameroon. Most Nigerian Tiv speakers are found in Benue State of Nigeria. The language is also widely spoken in the Nigerian States of Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Cross River, as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja.

According to Gundu (1990), an average Tiv child grows up not only speaking the Tiv language; he also learns the oral literature which comes in the forms of “Kwagh-Ahir” (story telling); oral poetry of “Atsam” or “Imo”, riddles called “Kikya” or proverbs known as “Anzaakaa”. It is later, while at school that he comes in contact with the written literature; starting with its rudimentary form of primes like Hen TivDedoo or UHiihii.

According to Udu (2009), as quoted by Sar (2012), researches on Tiv as a language began with the advent of the early European missionaries who saw the need to develop this language that is today spoken by over 3 million people. People like R. C. Abraham, Rev. W. A. Malherbe, Gerald Terpstra, Eugene Rubingh and Carl Hoffman among others took interest in the language and made several efforts towards the development of Tiv language. Their efforts for researching into and developing the Tiv orthography are worth commending. In fact, these Europeans knew nothing about the structure of the Tiv Language but out of interest, they applied their linguistic knowledge of the English in their study of Tiv. Again, the natives who must have been their resource persons were not educated or literate so to say, as to competently assist in these researchers’ efforts. This thus means that Tiv speakers have pride and favourable disposition towards the language. Thus, it can be said that the level of acceptance of the Tiv language held by its speakers is high.

#### **4.1.2. Institutional support to Tivlanguage and the role of government**

According to Ikpa (1965:8), prior to 1979, the state government had not much interest in Tiv languages as well as other state languages. However, 1979 witnessed renewed interest in not only Tiv but other such languages as Igala (now in Kogi State), Idoma and Igede, all of which were approved and recommended for use in all primary and post primary schools in the state. At the



national level, the Federal Government took statutory steps to accord priority attention to the recognition and development of indigenous languages. To this end, provisions were made for their use and development in the National Policy on Education (2004). The document states that:

“Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures....” (NPE 2004:5). The document continues:

Government shall therefore ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; to this end will:

- a. develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and
- b. produce textbooks in Nigerian languages (NPE 2004:7)

The efforts of the government in this regard were complemented by the activities of good-spirited individuals and Associations such as the Tiv language Studies Development. The Association made spirited efforts to develop orthography for the Tiv language.

#### **4.1.3. State of orthography of Tivlanguage**

Sar (2012) has it that over the years, several efforts have been made by a lot of scholars towards the development and standardization of the Tiv language. Of particular relevance is with regards to the orthography. Before the report on Tiv orthography was made public, Prof. R.G. Armstrong said there were seventy (70) phonemes in Tiv (Armstrong 1983:62-65). A one-time Executive Governor of BenueState, late Mr. AperAku took interest in the development of the Tiv language. He set up an ad-hoc committee on the Tiv language development. The committee presented sixty-five (65) phonemes as existing in Tiv. This committee’s report was the most accepted as representing authentic document on the Tiv language. In recent times, the Tiv language Studies and Development Association (TILSDA) has worked extensively on Tiv Orthography. At a seminar held at KatsinaAla in March 2010, the Association came up with a white paper showing that 87 phonemes are found in Tiv.

Tiv Orthography:

a, aa, b, bw, by, mb, c, cw, d, dy, dw, nd, dy, ndy, e, zw, ee, j, f, fy,jw, g, gb, gby, gh, gw, gy, h, hw, hy, i, ia, ii, iô, j, jw, k, kp, kpy, kw, ky, l, lw, ly, m, mb, mbw,

mby, n, n, nd, ngb, ngby, njy, nj, nng, ngw, nw, nyng, ngb, ngw, nz, o, oo, p, pw, py, r, rw, ry s, sh, shw, sw, t, ts, tswtw, ty, u, ua, ue, uu, v, w, y, z.

However, from the interview with Mr. David Waya, a Tiv native speaker, he asserts as at the day of the interview in May 2013, that the Tiv language does not have any standard orthography yet but a committee has been set-up recently to device a standard orthography and this may be largely drawn from the Gboko dialect which is regarded as the main dialect of Tiv.

#### **4.1.4. Extent of usage of Tiv language**

According to our respondent, the major tribes in Benue state are Tiv, Igede and Idoma, consequently, using the Tiv language for state affairs, official gatherings and the likes. However, in all Tiv territorial areas, the Tiv language is taught in primary schools. Also, there are radio stations that cast news and broadcast some of their programmes in the Tiv language. Since 1941, the bible had equally been translated into the Tiv language called Tiv biblio. The standard Tiv dialect is called Gboko dialect although there is no much difference among the dialects. This is why some people refer to it as a mono-language owing to the fact that there are almost no dialectal variations.

#### **4.2. The status of Edo as a minority language in Nigeria**

The Edo language, according to Imasuen (1998), is a language spoken in the lower reaches of Niger River, Uredo, Ego-Uselu, Ikpoba-Okha, Ovia North East, Ovia South West, Uhunmwuode and Orhionmwon local government Areas of Edo State, and other Parts of Nigeria, especially in Delta and Ondo States. The Edo language belongs to the Edoid group of languages of the New Benue-Congo family as classified by Williamson (1989). He equally maintains that although the entire language is called Edoid group, this is not intended to imply that the various languages and dialects derived historically from Edo.

However, we wish to note that a vital discovery was made by the researchers during the course of this work. The Edo respondents interviewed, said that there has been a great shift from what was identified by previous researchers as Edo language. They maintained that for political reasons, the use of Edo language to

refer to the Benin language has become obsolete. This was due to the strong political experience and break-through which other tribes that speak other languages aside Edo have gained. However, this does not change much as the fact still remains that native Benin people still refer to their language as Edo language as well. Thus, Edo and Benin language is used interchangeably in this work to refer to the same language.

#### **4.2.1. Level of acceptance of Benin language by its speakers**

In an interview with one of our respondents, Mr. G. O. Eigbiremole, he maintains that the speakers of Benin language are very proud of their language, being the language with the highest number of speakers in Edo state. It is often spoken and used among the people who can speak and understand the language.

#### **4.2.2. The state of orthography of Benin Language**

The Benin language is the medium of interaction within the cultural frame of the Benin people. The unit constituents of language are the alphabets and Edo/Benin language has its alphabets. There are 24 alphabets in the Edo language with 7 vowels and 17 consonants. Interestingly, there are also 7 pairs of consonants (that is the pair or double consonants) which though are not part of the 24 consonant letters. They occupy a special category in the Edo alphabetical system and are pronounced differently from the single consonants.

The Benin letters include the following:

a/aa/; b/bi/; d/di/; e/a; e/e/; f/fi/; g/gi/; i/i/;; h/hi/; k/k/ a I; l/l/, m/mi/; n/nil; o;/Q/or/ p/pi/; r/ril; s/si/; ttil; u/uu/; v/vi/; w/wi/; y/yi/; z/zi/. The vowels include a, e, i o and u, while the consonants are b · d · f · g · h · k · I · m · n · p · r · s · t · v · w · y · and z.

#### **4.2.3. Institutional support to the language and speakers of Benin language**

There has been institutional support to the growth and development of the language. However, these efforts were undertaken by individuals in attached to a scholarly unit who pick interest in studying the language. Examples are Imasuen (1998) who conducted a study on the influence of Edo language with

the Portuguese language. He noted how both languages have borrowed from each other to enhance their languages following the coming of the white men to Edoland between 1483 and 1897 AD. Melzian, H. (1937) published a concise dictionary of the Bini language of southern Nigeria in London. Munro, D.A. (1967) compiled an English-Edo word list, as well as Agheyisi, R. N. (1986) who produced an Edo-English dictionary.

#### **4.2.4. Extent of usage of Benin language**

The extent of use of Benin language is not too wide in terms of places and events of use. Though it is used in local radio programmes as confirmed by our respondent, it is not used in many political gatherings nor in the state house of assembly because there are an array of people from other ethnic groups who are always involved in deliberations. Thus, use of only Benin language cannot be understood by majority of the people. However, he affirmed that the speakers do speak the language very well within their families and in some informal events.

### **4.3. The status of Mbube language as a minority language in Nigeria**

The Mbube is a language spoken by the Mbube people of the Ogoja in Cross River State, of Nigeria. The number of its speakers number about 14,300 people in 1973. As the closest relative of the Ekoid family of the Southern Bantoid languages, Mbube, also known as Mbe language is fairly close to the Bantu languages. It is tonal and has a typical Niger-Congo noun-class system. According to Maduagwu (2012), Mbube is a language spoken in Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

#### **4.3.1. Level of acceptance of Mbube language by its speakers**

According to Mr. Nche, the speakers of Mbube language are very proud of their language and they speak it adequately among themselves. The language is mainly spoken in Ogoja and in this place the parents or older ones have and exercise great commitment with teaching or passing-on the language to their younger ones to ensure the continuous strive and usage of Mbube language.

### **4.3.2. The state of orthography of Mbube language**

According to Maduagwu (2012), Mbube is one of the phonologically and tonologically unresearched languages. However, some scholars have tried to follow the writing pattern of developed/already written languages to create some parameters of study for the language.

For example, the author above presents some of his study thus:

Mbube orthographic consonants and vowels as well as their phonemic counterparts: All Mbube consonants apart from the labial-velars (kp,gb, w) and nasal(n) have labialized counterparts. (/j<sup>w</sup>/ is presumably [ɥ].) In addition, the non-labialized peripheral stops (m p b k g; palatalized ɲ would be ɲ) and the liquids (l, r) have palatalized counterparts. There are a few consonants that only occur in idiophones, such as /f<sub>i</sub>,h<sub>i</sub>/. Summarily, Mbube language does not have a standard orthography yet.

### **4.3.3. Institutional support to Mbubelanguage and their speakers**

As earlier stated, much has not been done in Mbube language with regards to supporting its development. This has been as a result of lack of support to its development by government and other institutions capable of lending support to the development of Nigerian languages. The only support has been on individual bases which has been through the conduction of individual or private studies on the language as Maduagwu, Georgina in her 2012 study, Lewis, M. Paul in his 2009 study on the language among other few scholars.

### **4.3.4. Extent of usage of Mbube language**

At this point, we would like to state that from our findings, Mbube is not just a minority language but also an endangered language. There are however some dialects of Mbube language. However, none of these dialects have a status higher than the language itself. These dialects include Idum, Ekuntark, Odejie, Igbe, Keruen and Mbeafal. Communities where Mbube language is spoken include: Idum, Ekuntark, Odejie, Igbe, Keruen and Mbeafal. They are all equally limited to being spoken in Ogoja, Cross River State and Eastern Nigeria. So, aside usage in informal situations, especially in the immediate family setting, Mbube language is neither spoken nor taught in schools. It is equally not used in official

gatherings or in political sessions, anywhere in Cross-River state nor in any other state in Nigeria.

#### **4.4. The status of Bassa-Nge as a minority language in Nigeria**

Bassa-Nge is a language notably spoken in Ugboloko which is located in Kogi State. This place (Ugboloko) is equally regarded as the ancestral home of Bassa-Nge people. Bassa-Nge language belongs to the Kwa group of languages.

##### **4.4.1. Level of acceptance of Bassa-Nge language by its speakers**

From an interview with Mr. Suleiman, Bassa-Nge is a language which its speakers, especially the Bassa-Nge people of the modern era do not hold in high esteem. He maintains that some of its speakers are often shy of speaking the language in the mist of people from other tribes. This piece of information in a high sense simply means that the level of acceptance of the language is poor. This respondent equally states that families who migrate out of Bassa-Nge hardly return home and hardly use their language away from home nor teach the language to their children or younger ones. Notwithstanding that Bassa-Nge people have prominent people such as the former chief judge of Kogi State in the person of Former Chief Justice Musa Eri, now the Director of Nigerian Judicial Council; Alhaji Abdulrazak Issa Kutepa who is a very wealthy businessman and philanthropist among others, the Bassa-Nge language hardly earns much acceptance from the people of the state nor the state government. Its acceptance is very poor.

##### **4.4.2. The state of orthography of Bassa-Nge language**

Currently, there is no known orthography for the Bassa-Nge language. All works which have been done on the language, if any, are hardly available to researchers like us and even attempts made in writing about the language are done by individuals who adopt the writing system of another language, notably the English language; like the work entitled *A Descriptive Grammar of the Bassa-Nge Language* by an author named Mohammed Aminu Mu'azu, Jidda Hassan Juma'a & Suleiman Tebu in 1968.

##### **4.4.3. Institutional support to Bassa-Nge languages and their speakers**

*(A Publication of Tansian University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies)*

As earlier stated, there has been no standardized attempt to promote the orthography of Bassa-Nge language. In like manner, there has equally been no institutional support to the growth or development of the language. All effort has been in private studies of few scholars. Let us take a look at an extract from the Daily Trust Online Newspaper of 22nd January, 2010 in an article entitled Nigeria: 'You Can't Fill a Pick-Up' - Story of Bassa-Nge.

*Does the development of communities revolve around size of the population, with larger populations being first recipients of the much needed facilities? TadaferuaUjorha went to Shintaku, Gboloko and Abocho in Kogi State. The Bassa-Nge needs a bridge. It would rise at Lokoja, extend across the Niger and neatly terminate at Shintaku. They repeat that the bridge would turn around their lives and enhance travel and trade. It would be a boon to agriculture and quicken the pace of tourism and development.*

*They love the concept of the bridge and they have different words for what they need. In their language 'Akpada' is the word for bridge, and 'AkpadaZi' is the plural form. They have been waiting for the bridge all their lives. But they suspect that this bridge won't be built just yet, because of the nature of power equations in Kogi State. So they say, rather prophetically, that it will certainly be built whenever a Bassa-Nge son becomes Governor. A prominent ruler in the area says 'If we produce a Governor for Kogi State, his first priority will be the bridge.' The thought consoles them but how long will they have to wait? One government comes. It does a little. It is quickly replaced by another. The award winning cycle of neglect and forgetting continues. Still the people wait and hope and pray. The people pray and hope and wait. The situation is akin to that of Sisyphus, the legendary character in Greek folklore, who rolls a stone to the top of the hill. When he is about to be exalted that he has succeeded in his task, the stone rolls downhill, and he has to roll the stone uphill afresh. . Speaking on the Bassa-Nge communities, a former civilian Governor of Kogi State is reported to have said in public "I can afford to ignore you (Bassa-Nge), because your population is not significant. Your entire people cannot fill a pick-up van."*

This extract above summarises not just the political state of the Bassa-Nge people in Nigeria today, but also, that of the language.

#### **4.4.4. Extent of usage of Bassa-Nge language**

The Bassa-Nge language is definitely, a language which has been confined to usage only in informal situations and gatherings within the Bassa-Nge Region in

Ugboloko, Bassa local government of Kogi state. Wikipedia records that its population is very small with about 139,992 speakers. Bassa-Nge is an endangered language and not just a minority language. The extent of its usage continues to diminish as time goes on.

#### **4.5. The status of Bassa-Kwomu as a minority language in Nigeria**

The Bassa-Kwomu language is a language that have been and is known or referred to in different ways by different people. Thus, other names used to refer to the language include Rubasa, Basa-Benue, Abacha and Abatsa. Just as Bassa-nge, it is viewed by some people as a dialect of Nupe language because both have some degree of mutual intelligibility. According to Wikipedia, the people of Bassa also often speak Igala and Nupe languages. However, they are separate languages recognised independently especially for political reason. Their speakers are viewed as different tribes instead of one tribe. Therefore, their mutual intelligibility does not make them one language.

##### **4.5.1. Level of acceptance of Bassa-Kwomu language by its speakers**

From our interview with our respondent, Mr. Suleiman, Bassa-Kwomu language does not enjoy much popularity nor acceptance in terms of the choice of people to speak and use it for various communication purposes. Consequently, as stated earlier, the speakers of the language often speak Igala or Nupe languages in preference to it. No wonder our respondent Mr. Suleiman put it this way, "The people are not proud of the language and rather, prefer to speak it in hiding."

##### **4.5.2. The state of orthography of Bassa-Kwomu language**

According to Blench (1991), Bassa-Kwomu has gone through a number of orthographic changes during the history of publication and the writing system is still being debated. An excerpt of his contribution is that in the Bassa-Kwomu language, the 'ŋ' was introduced to show a nasalized vowel at the end of words. Nasalized vowels in the middle of words are marked with 'n'. To spell in a more consistent way, it has been decided to use 'n' in all cases. This in summary means that the Bassa-Kwomu language does not have a standard or conventional orthography yet.



### **4.5.3. Institutional support to Bassa-Kwomulanguages and their speakers**

From our study so far, it is glaring that most efforts so far on the development of Bassa-Kwomu language has been based on private individual efforts. There has not been conspicuous institutional support aimed at enhancing the status of the language nor developing it. The language has strived to convince all about its status as a language rather than a dialect of Nupe language and seems to have succeeded to an extent, judging from the views of some researchers and writers. However, institutional support to its development is still lacking.

### **4.5.4. Extent of usage of Bassa-Kwomulanguage**

According to Blench (1991), "Since 1991, the Bassa people have had their own Local Government Area, called Bassa, centered on Oguma, near the Benue River in northeast Kogi State." The use of this language is mainly concentrated around this area. One of our respondents, Mr. Suleiman equally has it that Bassa-Kwomu speakers equally exist in small numbers in Abuja and Nassarawa States of Nigeria. However, the use of Bassa-Kwomu language is not far-reaching. It is rather used only in informal gatherings like in the families and in other very informal situations. It is hardly taught in schools, nor used in the state political affairs. This owes especially to the small population of its speakers. Besides, it is always difficult and practically impossible for a language without a standard orthography to have a wide and diversified extent of usage.

## **5.0. Conclusion**

From this study, we can understand to a great extent that the status of most minority languages in Nigeria is not enviable. This owes largely to their limited extent of usage and lack of attention. Added to that, non linguists have failed to understand the strong impact of language to the growth and development of the country. To this, Okon (1990) advises that the speakers of the minority languages have a very important part to play; that they should form language associations which aim to develop and promote their own languages and thereby compel government attention. He cited an example with an Ibibio Cultural Organization which in 1982 commissioned the writing of Ibibio orthography and presented it to the State Ministry of Education in 1983 as part of its community's contribution to education. This he said made the former Cross-River State government to have

no alternative than to order the teaching of Ibibio language in the schools within the state which in turn attracted the attention of the University Press Limited that commissioned primers in the language.

Thus, all hands are advised to be on deck with regards to the promotion and development of Nigeria's minority languages. This will enhance and promote proper teaching and learning in the schools. It will equally ensure that no Nigerian is left behind in matters or affairs concerning one's locality or speech community, state or country. The development of minority languages will equally help to establish a true Nigerian linguistic identity. This will deemphasize the current situation where a good number of Nigerians get lost in the massive ocean of the English language. Especially when the use of English language does not fully express all aspects of Nigerian culture and so, leaves a lot of Nigerians lost in issues concerning them.

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Name	Sex	Age	occupation	Date of Interview
David Waya	Male	32	Linguist	28th April, 2014
GodsgiftEigbiremolem	Male	26	Economist	10th May, 2014
George Nche	Male	27	Lecturer	5th April, 2014
Ivy Abuh	Female	25	Civil Servant	25th May, 2014
Suleiman ChimozoShuaibu	Male	39	School Teacher	3rd March, 2014

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## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW 1

#### Interview with Mr. Godsgift M. Eigbiremolem

**Researcher:** Good morning.

**Respondent:** Good morning.

**Researcher:** please, I am a student conducting a research on the status of Edo language and

Would like to ask you some questions; haven't identified that you are from Edo.

**Respondent:** okay. But I don't think there is a language called Edo. There are many languages in

Edo state.

**Researcher:** Okay. What language do you speak?

**Respondent:** I speak Esan.

**Researcher:** Okay, but several other researchers have identified some speakers of Edo

language.

**Respondent:** May be it is Benin language that they are calling Edo because there are many

languages in Edo. So, it sounds somehow for someone to mention that there is a language called Edo.

**Researcher:** Okay, but do people who speak these languages in Edo state understand

themselves?

**Respondent:** They do to an extent o, but only if you have stayed in their places for some time,

then you will be able to be picking one or two things you can understand in the language.

**Respondent:** So don't you think they are all dialects of the same Edo language?

**Respondent:** No, it is not so. They can't understand themselves. As I said, you can only

UnderstandEsako or Benin if me for example that is from Esan have stayed there for some time. It is a personal thing. If someone from Benin speaks, I can understand a little because I have stayed there for some time.

**Researcher:** Okay. Thank you

**Respondent:** You are welcome.

## **INTERVIEW 2**

### **Phone Interview with Miss Ivy Abu**

**Researcher:** Hello, Ivy.

**Respondent:**Kels... Good afternoon.

**Researcher:** Afternoon. Ivy, I have a question to ask you. Is there a language called Edo language in your state?

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Researcher:** apart from Edo language, are there any other languages in the state?

**Respondent:** Of course, there are other languages like Esako, Owan, Oran, Benin and others.

Researcher: Okay. These languages you mentioned, are they easy to understand among the speakers? That is, for example, can someone from Esan understand what a Benin person is speaking?

Respondent: No.

Researchers: Okay. I asked because I was thinking that all these languages you mentioned are perhaps dialects of one Edo language.

Respondent: No ooo. They are not oo. All these languages have different people and places where they are spoken. Wait ooo, infact there is no language that is called Edo language sef. Rather, there are several languages spoken in Edo as a state.

Researcher: You see, I was going through the works of some other researchers and several of them identified Edo language. As a matter of fact, some of these researchers see some of these languages you are mentioning as dialects of one Edo language.

Respondent: No ooo. It is not true. In fact, there are different languages in Edo state. Edo is a state not a language and it is not easy to understand what other speakers of a different language is speaking. For example, me I am Esako and if I'm speaking now, someone from Esan or Benin cannot understand what I am saying.

Researcher: So, how come the concept of 'Edo language' in the first place? How come.

Respondent: Okay, see, it is like this. In Edo state, the capital which is Benin is where Benin language is spoken. There are many other areas where different languages are spoken; like Esako, which is my language, Esan, Owan, there is also Akoko-Edo. It is a language of its own that is different from Benin language but what happens is that people take it that Benin language is Edo language but it is not so.

Researcher: Okay, well, I just shared my observations from the study I am doing currently. May be other language speakers over there are not doing well enough to project there language which is a trend that they need to correct.

Respondent: What is the work about?

**Researcher:** It is a research on the status of indigenous languages in Nigeria. To find out how much attention people pay to speaking and using their languages and help them know the consequences of not doing so and also encourage them to speak, write and generally, use their languages adequately and proudly.

**Respondent.** Okay. It's good.

**Researcher:** Yes o. Thank you; and eem, how is work going?

**Respondent:** Fine fine.

**Researcher:** Okay, well done, we will still talk later my dear. Take care.

**Respondent:** Aite. Later. Bye.

### **INTERVIEW 3**

#### **This is an Interview with Mr. George Nche**

**Researcher:** I am here to interview you on the status of Mbube language in Nigeria.

**Respondent:** Go on. You can.

**Researcher:** How often do Mbube people use the language to communicate among themselves

or when meeting someone in their locality for the first time? Do they start with their language or with another?

**Respondent:** if it is a stranger, we start with English or Pidgin. If it is someone from Mbube who

can speak it, we speak with Mbube, but if the person is from our town but can't speak it, we use English or Pidgin still.

**Researcher:** Okay. Does Mbube have an orthography already standardized for writing Mbube

language?

**Respondent:** No. None that I know of.

**Researcher:** Why nah? Does that mean people don't try to write in Mbube?



**Respondent:** I don't know but we hardly write in Mbube language. I for example, I don't.

**Researcher:** Does it mean Mbube is not taught in schools in your locality or used in formal

gatherings and events like that?

**Respondent:** Hmmmm... No. I wasn't taught Mbube in school and I have not seen any school that

teaches it. We use it in the gatherings in our village but we also combine it with English for many other people who don't understand it.

**Researcher:** and it is not used in the government gatherings in the state like in the House of

Assembly I guess.

**Respondent:** No nah. You cannot nah. There are many people from many places that speak

different languages there nah. You can't speak your language there because many people

will not understand it. So, English is mainly used.

**Researcher.** Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

**Respondent.** You are welcome.

#### **INTERVIEW 4**

##### **Intervi with Mr. Suleiman ChimozoShuaibu**

**Researcher:** Good afternoon Mr. Sulei.

**Respondent:** Good afternoon sir.

**Researcher:** I am here to ask you some questions about the Bassa languages of Bassa-Nge and

Bassa-Komu.

**Respondent:** No problem.

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**Researcher:** I will like to start with the Bassa-Nge language. Where and where is the language

Spoken?

**Respondent:** Ugboloko is the ancestral headquarters of Bassa-Nge people. Ugboloko is in Kogi

state. Their language is like Nupe but they are not Nupe. Except that people who speak Nupe can understand Bassa-Nge and if Nupe person speak, Bassa-Nge person can understand what he is saying.

**Researcher:** Okay. And what is the population of the speakers.

**Respondent:** They are not many. They are just few. They don't even occupy a local government.

They are just in a part of a local government.

**Researcher:** Do they have a writing system for writing the language?

**Respondent:** No. They don't have a writing system.

**Researcher:** But don't they have prominent people from Bassa-Nge?

**Respondent:** Ha! They have oo. The former chief judge of Kogi state is from Bassa-Nge tribe.

What is that his name....? Wait let me remember it..... He is now the director of Nigerian Judicial Council..... eee. His name is Chief Justice Musa Eri. That is name. Chief Justice Musa Eri. There is this other man. A very rich business man and a philanthropist- AlhajiAbdulrazakIssaKutepa. He was a former gubernatorial aspirant in Kogi state.

**Researcher:** Okay. What is the attitude of the people of Bassa-Nge? Do they like to speak their

language and do they have people who help to develop their place and things like that.

**Respondent:** Aside these people I mentioned, the Bassa-Nge people hardly come home

whenever they leave their place. They also seem to be shy of speaking their language in public. They hardly speak or teach their children their language.

**Researcher:** Does that mean the language is not used in formal or official gatherings like in

politics or house of assembly?

**Respondent:** No. They just have small speakers. So, many people don't even know the language

is existing sef.

**Researcher:** Okay, for Bassa-Kwomu people. Where can they be found?

**Respondent:** Bassa-Kwomu people, they are the original people of Gwagwalada in Abuja and

they are also found in Nassarawa and Kogi state also. In Kogi state, they are neighbours of Bassa-Nge people in Bassa local government. In Abuja, they are headed by a man called Alhaji Mohammed. Headquarters of Bassa-Kwomu people is Ogwuma. Ogwuma is also in Kogi state, in Bassa local government.

**Researcher:** how do they handle or take their language. What is the style of life style of Bassa-

Kwomu people?

**Respondent:** The people... Just like Bassa-Nge people who are well influenced by the

Missionaries and so, they are enlightened and go to school, Bassa-Kwomu people don't like going to school. They don't seem to like education.

**Researcher:** Okay. What of their language, do they like speaking it often.

**Respondent:** They don't seem to be proud of their language. Many of them hardly speak it,

especially the ones that go outside their place and the ones that manage to go to school. They don't write the language. Many people don't know about it and don't speak it.

**Researcher:** Okay. Thank you sir.

**Respondent:** Yes sir. Thank you sir ooo.

## **INTERVIEW 5**

### **Interview with Mr. David Waya**

**Researcher:** Eh eh, Mr. Dave, I want to ask you something. It is about the status of your

language with regard to its level of acceptance by the speakers, state of its orthography, extent of usage and institutional support to the language.

**Respondent.** Oookaay.... Tiv is one of the 3 major languages in Benue state, along with Idoma

and Igede. It is widely spoken among Tiv people. It is use in Education also. Primary schools in Tivland teach Tiv language very well. Also, radio stations, especially, I know of two who cast their news and present some programmes in Tiv language. As for in house of assembly and political gatherings, 'No' because there are people from other tribes like Igede, Idoma and others. So, using only Tiv will not be possible.

**Researcher.** Ok. What about the orthography?

**Respondent:** Actually, Tiv does not have any standard orthography yet but a committee have

been set-up recently to device a standard orthography and this may be largely drawn from the Gboko dialect which is regarded as the main dialect of Tiv. However, there is not much difference among these dialects unlike in Igbo where someone from Anambra may not be able to understand what someone from Nsukka is saying. In Tiv, every Tiv person can understand whatever another Tiv person says very well, no matter the tribe. So, I can say that Tiv is a mom-language because it almost has no dialectal variations so to say. **Researcher:** Okay. Thaaannk you very much.