Marginalization and Deprivation of Languages in Nigeria: The Case of Ikwerre Language

By

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Abstract

This paper is a descriptive study of the marginalization and deprivation of language in Nigeria, with particular focus on Ikwerre language, one of the languages spoken in Rivers State. The aim of this study is to determine the extent to which Ikwerre language is marginalized and deprived of its use as a medium of instruction for lower primary education, its 'right' to be taught as a subject and also to ascertain the factors responsible for its marginalization and deprivation. Twenty-four basic 1-3 teachers and 574 pupils of four primary schools in two Ikwerre speaking local government areas are purposely selected for this study. Data elicitation instruments were a questionnaire and an interview session. Simple statistical tools of frequency and percentage are used for data analysis. The findings reveal that Ikwerre is neither the medium of instruction at the lower primary education level nor is it taught as a subject. Hence the paper concludes that it is a marginalized and deprived language and proffers some suggestions on how to salvage Ikwerre from marginalization and deprivation.

Keywords: marginalization, deprivation, medium of instruction, Ikwerre, lower primary education

Introduction

The heterogeneity of Nigeria is evidenced in the not less than 250 ethnic groups and 400 indigenous languages that exist in the country. Into this indigenous diverse structure, English, Pidgin English and Arabic also exist. All these languages are used by Nigerians of different ethnolinguistic and cultural affiliation, and geo-social background as they carry out varying forms of communicative interactions in different contexts and for different purposes. Each of the languages therefore is a viable medium of expression, interaction and maintenance of phatic communion and relationships. However, based on the number of speakers and the degree of development, indigenous Nigerian languages are categorized into major and minor languages. The major languages are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and the minority languages include all other indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria. In Nigeria, English is the official language and is generally perceived as a language of prestige and upward social mobility. Thus, in the order of importance, Igboanusi and Ohia (2011) note that English is closely followed by Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, Nigerian Pidgin and then the minority languages. Following this perceived order of importance, English plays a dominant function in almost all aspect of the Nigeria's polity. Thus, the presence and significant role of English and Nigerian Pidgin in Nigeria's polity have denied indigenous Nigerian languages full access and participation in Nigeria's polity. This trend results in the marginalization and deprivation of all indigenous languages. Among the indigenous languages, minority languages are said to be more marginalized and deprived (Essien 1990, Uwajeh 2003, Nwagbara, 2017).

The terms marginalization and deprivation are sometimes used interchangeably. This is because both phenomena are counter- productive to the life of a language. However, they are not synonymous. In relation to language, marginalization occurs when (a) language(s) is/are not

recognized for (a) certain function(s) in which space is accorded to other languages within the same linguistic ecology (Ndhlovu, 2007; Bamgbose, 2003). A language is deprived when its utilitarian and creative values that warrant its acquisition, learning and eventual use within and beyond its customary domains are untapped due to some socio-political, economic, religions and psychological factors (Onose, 1993, Essien, 1993, Aziza, 1993, Nwagbara, 2017).

Since Nigeria's independence, several attempts have been made by both government and enthusiastic individuals to create equitable opportunities for indigenous languages to exercise their functionality as viable instrument of discourse in the modern world, particularly in education. For instance, the National Policy on Education (NPE, (1977, revised 1981, 1998, 2004, 2014) provides for the use of the MT or the LIC as the medium of instruction at pre-primary level and the first three years of primary education. The MT or LIC should thereafter be taught as a subject at the upper primary education levels in junior secondary school (JSS) and the senior secondary school (SSS), if it is one of the languages examined by WAEC and NECO.

The NPE provision reinforced language development co-ordination by the government, individual, religious and ethnic groups. For instance, the Federal Government of Nigeria instituted a lot of bodies such as Nigerian Educational Research Development Council (NERDC), National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) Through NERDC the orthographies and metalanguages of indigenous languages are developed and published. Thus, in Nigeria from 1975-1991, the curricula for the teaching of the major languages and some minor languages such as Efik, Izon, Fufulde etc were designed and produced (Emenanjo 1993a, 1993b). Textbooks and supporting materials like readers, novels were also written for primary, JSS and SSS levels. The availability of these materials means that the languages are viable medium of instruction, and can as well be taught as subjects at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

However, the fact that access to higher education, political powers and upward social mobility depends on one's competence in English, the fortunes of all indigenous languages as vibrant and dynamic instruments of education have been linked indexically to their native speakers. This means that the extent of marginalization and deprivation an indigenous language suffers depends on the symbolic and communicative status attached to it by its native speakers. Its viability and functionality as a significant instrument of discourse, language of education, politics and socio-economic activities cannot be achieved without its immediate speech community. Thus, how 'alive' an indigenous Nigerian language is or how marginalized and deprived it is, is not pushed by overt government actions or by the socio-political status of major ethnolinguistic group. Rather, it is sustained and pushed by the existential and ideological realities within its immediate locality and among its native speakers that compel native speakers of the language to accept or not to accept the prestige and utilitarian values of 'other' languages to the detriment of their own language.

This paper therefore attempts to ascertain the extent to which Ikwerre language is marginalized and/or deprived of its function as the medium of instruction and verbal interaction at the lower primary education level, whether or not Ikwerre is taught as a subject, and the factors are responsible for its marginalization and deprivation.

Language use in Primary Education in Rivers State

Rivers state is one of the 36 federating States of Nigeria. It is a multilingual state created from the East Central State in 1967. Until 1996 the state comprised the area which is now Bayelsa State It has many indigenous languages and dialects, none of which is understood in all the twenty three local government areas (LGAs) of the state. As in other states in Nigeria, English is the official language of the state. Five other languages are recognized and used for news broadcast in the state. They are Ikwerre, Izon, Kalabari, Kana and Pidgin English. Although there is no dominant

language in the state, Ikwerre and Izon are the most spoken languages while Pidgin English is widely used in radio and television broadcast and also in socio-political and religious interactions.

The linguistic balkanization (Emenanjo, 1995) of indigenous languages in Nigeria between 1967 and 1976 impacted on the developing and promoting of indigenous languages in Rivers State. It prompted more inputs to sustain the development of language such as kalabari, Izon, Nembe, Okirika which were before 1967 used as media of instruction (Afiesimama, 1995). Similarly, there were committed efforts and genuine supports to develop as many other indigenous languages as possible so that "children can begin to read in their own language before going on to English (Williamson, 1976, p.39). The committed efforts received expression and support of the Rivers State government in 1970 with the setting up of the Rivers Readers Project (RRP). The aim of this project was to develop as many indigenous languages as possible, publish books in them for primary school use together with readers and supporting materials for teachers so that the languages can be used as medium of instruction and as well as taught as subjects at the primary level of education.

The NPE provision on the use of MT or LIC as the medium of instruction for initial literacy at the primary education level and to be taught as a subject at the primary and junior secondary school level gave more impetus and reinforced the RRP. The RRP yielded some good dividend as readers, textbooks supporting materials were written in twenty-one languages. These facilitated the teaching of the languages as subjects and using them as media of instruction and for radio broadcast. And Ikwerre language is among these languages.

Ikwerre language is spoken in four local government areas (LGAs) namely, Port Harcourt City, Obio-Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua. According to Afiesimama (1995), Ikwerre is among the four Rivers State languages whose teaching as a subject and use as the medium of instruction at the primary school levels in the 1970s, 1980s and early part of the 1990s gained

great momentum. Also its use for radio broadcast was started in earnest in the 1970s.

The RRP suffered a setback in the 1990s due to lack of fund, encouragement from successive governments, language planning at the state level as well as indifference to the use of the indigenous language in education. (Afiesimama, 1995). Despite this lull, the use of data from Ikwerre and other developed indigenous languages for academic researches and teaching at University of Port Harcourt and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni has continued. Ikwerre is still used as one of the state languages for radio and television broadcast. For literacy purposes, books such as Enyia's (2008) *Speaking Ikwerre: A beginner's first year course for languages students* are published. Also for religious purposes, translations of prayer books such as *Okwukwo Eri Chiokike* and the New Testament part of the Bible *Tesitamenti Ikne* are published in 2010 by the Ikwerre language committee.

Nevertheless, it seems that the fortunes and life of Ikwerre as a medium of instruction and subject at the Primary education level has dwindled. Hence this study investigates the extent to which it is marginalized and/or deprived of its use in primary education. That is, to ascertain whether Ikwerre as MT or LIC is used as the medium of instruction and also taught as a subject as stipulated in the NPE and the factors that are responsible for the marginalization and deprivation of the language.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research method, using questionnaire and interview to collect data. For the purpose of this investigation, two Ikwerre speaking LGAs namely Obio/Akpor and Ikwerre, are chosen. The choice of these Local Governments areas is informed by the fact that they have state primary schools that attract and admit children from Ikwerre and non-Ikwerre speaking homes, both from

the high and low income groups. Ikwerre therefore is both an MT and an LIC in the two LGAs.

The subjects for the study comprised 24 Basic (primary) 1-3 teachers and the 574 pupils in their class drawn from the four randomly selected government primary schools. From each LGA, two schools were randomly selected out of 318 primary schools in Obio-Akpor and166 primary schools in Ikwerre LGA. There were 36 Basic 1-3 teachers in the four schools and 24 were randomly selected with all the pupils in their classes as participants. The schools are categorized as A,B,C and D. Schools A and B are in Obio-Akpor LGA while C and D are in Ikwerre LGA. The questionnaire comprises four sections with section A intended to elicit data on the teacher and pupils' linguistic backgrounds and languages taught as subjects. Section B, C and D are made up of twenty-four items, eight for each section. Section B is intended to elicit data on the frequency with which Ikwerre language is used for classroom teaching and interactions during classroom teaching while section C and D are used to collect data on the use of Ikwerre for out-of-class teacher-pupil formal interactions and out-of-class pupil formal interactions respectively. For each questionnaire item the respondents had to indicate how frequently each activity is carried out in Ikwerre, English, Pidgin English or any other indigenous language. The options are Always (A), Quite often (QO), Sometimes (ST), and Never (N).

The interview questions are meant to elicit data on the teachers level of awareness of the NPE provision on the use of MT or LIC as the medium of instruction, and the factors that limit and /or prevent the use of Ikwerre as the medium of instruction for primary education and also from being taught as a subject. Response to the interview questions are tape recorded in the researcher's phone and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The linguistic background of the teachers and pupil from each school are calculated using counts and percentages. The interviews were analyzed

for form and theme with a focus on identifying the factors responsible for the marginalization and deprivation of Ikweree as a medium of instruction.

Results

SCHOOL A: A State Primary School in Obio/Akpor LGA

Table 1a: Frequency and percentage of Ikwerre and other languages as MT and/or L1 of teachers (T) and pupils (P)

Language	Class			
	Basic 1-3			
	T		P	
	F	%	F	%
Ikwerre	2	33.33	32	24.62
Other languages	4	66.67	98	75.38
Total	6		130	

Table 1b: Frequency and percentage of Ikwerre and other languages as MT and/or L1 of teachers and pupils by class

Language	Class											
	Basic 1				Basic 2				Basic 3			
	T		P		T		P		T		P	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Ikwerre	1	100	3	12.5	1	50	9	25.71	-	-	20	28.17
Other languages	-		21	87.5	1	50	26	74.29	3	100	51	71.83
Total	1		24		2		35		3		71	

Table 1c: Languages taught as subjects

Language	Class		
	Basic 1	**Basic 2**	**Basic 3**
Ikwerre	NO	NO	NO
English	YES	YES	YES
Other languages	NO	NO	NO

Results in Table 1a shows that the total number of Basic 1-3 pupils in this school is 130. Out of this number, 32 speak Ikwerre as the MT/L1 while the remaining 98(75.38%) speak other indigenous languages as MT/L1, English or Pidgin as L1. The table also shows that 2 teachers speak Ikwerre as the MT/L1 while 4 teachers speak other indigenous languages as their MT/L1. The result therefore is that in Basic 1-3 of school A, there are more non-Ikwerre speaking pupils and teachers.

Table 1b also reveals that the distribution of non Ikwerre speaking pupils and teacher by class is also high. Basic 1 has only 3 Ikwerre speaking pupils and 21(86.5%) non-Ikwerre speaking pupils. The class teacher speaks Ikwerre as MT. For Basic 2, while the language distribution for the teachers is even, 1 Ikwerre and 1 other language, the distribution for the pupils is 9 (25.71%) Ikwerre and 26 (74.29%) are for other languages. All the 3 teachers of Basic 3 and 51(71.83%) of the pupils speak other languages as MT/L1 while 20 are Ikwerre-speaking pupils.

Table 1c shows that Ikwerre is not taught as a subject at this level. The only language taught as a subject is English.

The teachers' responses to questionnaire items in sections B, C and D reveal that all the 6 teachers use English always as the medium of instruction for in-class teaching and quite often for formal interactions with pupils in out-of-class contexts. Pidgin English is used occasionally for spoken remarks on pupils' behaviour and also during out-of-class school organized activities such as games. All the teachers also revealed that

Ikwerre is used sometimes especially by pupils for illustration or exemplification purposes and the English glosses of such Ikwerre examples and illustrations are usually given. The finding therefore is that Ikwerre language is neither used as the medium of instruction and interaction nor is it taught as a subject. Hence, it is not just a marginalized language, it is a deprived languages.

The responses of all the teachers and some pupils interviewed in School A revealed that the urban nature of the school is a big and weighty hindrance to Ikwerre being used as the medium of instruction. This is because there is no possibility that all the teachers and pupils will be of Ikwerre linguistic background and the teachers also be literate in it.

It is also interesting to note that 92.31% of the pupils interviewed revealed that they speak English and/or Pidgin English at home. All the pupils also attended nursery school and spoke English before their entry into the school. So, using Ikwerre as the medium of instruction in any class is not feasible. English remains the most appropriate medium of instruction.

Though all the teachers claimed awareness of the NPE provision on the use of MT/LIC as the medium of instruction and the teaching of an indigenous language, either MT or LIC, at the lower primary level as subject, they said that the possibility of using and teaching Ikwerre is very remote. This is because though

> there is a curriculum for its teaching, there are no teachers; if there are, they may not be willing to teach it. Again Ikwerre is not examined at the end of primary education in Rivers State and it is also not a subject for the common entrance examination into secondary schools in Rivers State too (Basic 3A teacher).

SCHOOL B: A State Primary School in Obio-Akpor

Table 2a: **Frequency and percentage of Ikwerre and other languages as MT and/or L1 of teachers and pupils**

Language	**Class**			
	Basic 1-3			
	T		**P**	
	F	%	F	%
Ikwerre	2	33.33	25	16.23
Other languages	4	66.67	129	83.77
Total	6		154	

Table 2b: Frequency and percentage of Ikwerre and other languages as MT and/or L1 of teachers and pupils by class

Language	**Class**											
	Basic 1				**Basic 2**				**Basic 3**			
	T		**P**		**T**		**P**		**T**		**P**	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Ikwerre	1	100	4	10.26	1	50	8	14.55	-	-	13	21.67
Other languages	-		35	89.74	1	50	47	84.45	3	100	47	78.33
Total	1		39		2		55		3		60	

Table 2c: Languages Taught as Subjects

Language	**Class**		
	Basic 1	**Basic 2**	**Basic 3**
Ikwerre	NO	NO	NO
English	YES	YES	YES

Other languages	NO	NO	NO

Table 2a shows that 2 of the teachers and 25(16.23%) of the pupils speak Ikwerre as their MT/L1. While 4 teachers and 129(83.77%) pupils speak other indigenous languages as MT/L1, or English, or Pidgin as L1.

The distribution in Table 2b shows that non-Ikwerre speaking teachers and pupils by class is far higher than the Ikwerre speaking teachers and pupils. Basic 1 teacher speaks Ikwerre as MT/L1 but 39 (89.74%) pupils in this class are non-Ikwerre speaking. Similarly, while Basic 2 has even distribution of teachers, the non-Ikwerre speaking pupils are 47(85.45%) against Ikwerre speaking pupils, 8(14.55%). All the Basic 3 teachers are non-Ikwerre speaking and 47 (78.33%) of the pupils as well do not speak Ikwerre as MT/L1.

Table 2c indicates that Ikwerre is not taught as a subject; English is the only language taught as a subject. In this school, the Basic 1-3 teachers' responses to section B, C and D of the questionnaire revealed that Ikwerre is never used as a medium of instruction. Rather English fulfils this function always. However, one Basic 2 teacher observed that pupils do use Ikwerre sometimes to answer teachers' questions, and that such answers are easily understood by other pupils.

All the Basic 1-3 pupils interviewed in this school attended nursery school, spoke English before their primary education, and also speak either English or Pidgin at home. So, using any other language other than English as the medium of instruction is not possible.

Although all the teachers claim awareness of the NPE provision on the use of MT/LIC as the medium of instruction, and its teaching as a subject, majority of them see the provision as a mere wish. This is because the multilingual nature of urban schools makes the use of any indigenous language as the medium of instruction difficult. Though its teaching can be done, the teachers observed that the prestige and official status of English in Nigeria, its role as the language of Nigeria's education and literacy, in

addition to its global power as global lingua franca is a great clog in the use of Ikwerre as a medium of instruction.

SCHOOL C: A State Primary School in Ikwerre LGA

Table 3a: Frequency and percentage of Ikwerre and other languages as MT and/or L1 of Teachers and Pupils

Language	Class			
	Basic 1-3			
	T		P	
	F	%	F	%
Ikwerre	5	83.33	78	60
Other languages	1	16.67	52	40
Total	6		130	

Table 3b: Frequency and percentage of Ikwerre and other languages as MT and/or L1 of teachers and pupils by class

Language	Class											
	Basic 1				Basic 2				Basic 3			
	T		P		T		P		T		P	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Ikwerre	2	100	30	61.22	2	100	23	56.1	1	50	24	60
Other languages	-		19	38.78	-		18	43.9	1	50	16	40
Total	1		49		2		41				40	

Table 3c: Language Taught as subjects

Language	Class		
	Basic 1	Basic 2	Basic 3
Ikwerre	NO	NO	NO

English	YES	YES	YES
Other languages	NO	NO	NO

Table 3a shows that 5(83.33%) of the teachers and 78(60%) of the pupils speak Ikwerre as their MT/L1. Only 1 and 52 (40%) of the pupils speak other indigenous languages as their MT/L1, or English, or Pidgin as L1. Even the only teacher whose MT is not Ikwerre can also speak Ikwerre. The result therefore is that in Basic 1-3 of School C there are relatively more Ikwerre (MT/LIC) speaking teachers and pupils.

The distribution of languages spoken by teachers and pupils by class as shown in table 3b indicates that the two teachers in Basic 1 and in Basic 2 as well as 30 (61.22%) and 23 (56.1%) of their pupils respectively are Ikwerre MT/L1 speakers. 24(60%) of the pupils and one of the Basic 3 teachers are also Ikwerre MT/L1 speakers.

Table 3c shows that English is the only language taught as a subject; Ikwerre is not taught. It could be possible to use Ikwerre as the medium of instruction for lower basic education in this school because according to the teachers some of the non-Ikwerre MT/L1 pupils are polyglots and do speak Ikwerre. But all the teachers' responses to sections B, C, and D of the questionnaire indicate that they use English quite often as the medium of instruction, and sometimes code-switch or code-mix English and Ikwerre or English and Pidgin.

Only three of the six teachers are aware of the NPE provision on the use of MT/LIC as the medium of instruction and the teaching of an indigenous language. Their responses to what limits and prevents Ikwerre from being used as the medium of instruction and taught as a subject are summarized with one Basic 2 teacher's view that

> the government and even the Ikwerres themselves are not serious about this language. Even those who study it in the university, who

> can read and write it, who support its teaching, abandon it for English that has prestige, and give them job. They tell us to speak the language, encourage our children to speak the language, but they themselves and their children speak English. They send their children to schools where everyone speaks English. Those who really speak and like the language and would want it to be used in teaching their children and also to teach it are the poor people in the villages.

SCHOOL D: A State Primary School in Ikwerre LGA

Table 4a: Frequency and Percentage of Ikwerre and other languages as MT and/or L1 of Teachers and Pupils

Language	**Class**			
	Basic 1-3			
	T		**P**	
	F	%	F	%
Ikwerre	6	100	132	82.5
Other languages	-	-	28	17.5
Total	6		160	

Table 4b: Frequency and percentage of Ikwerre and other languages as MT and/or L1 of teachers and pupils by class

Language	Class											
	Basic 1				Basic 2				Basic 3			
	T		P		T		P		T		P	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Ikwerre	2	100	50	83.33	2	100	38	79.17	2	100	44	84.12
Other languages	-		10	16.67	-		10	20.83	-		8	15.38
Total	1		60		2		48		2			

Table 4c: Language taught as subjects

Language	Class		
	Basic 1	Basic 2	Basic 3
Ikwerre	NO	NO	NO
English	YES	YES	YES
Other languages	NO	NO	NO

Table 4a shows that in School D more that 80% of Basic 1-3 pupils speak Ikwerre as MT/L1 and all their teachers (6) are also Ikwerre speaking. It could therefore have been possible to use Ikwerre as a medium of Instruction, but as the teachers' responses to section B, C and D of the questionnaire revealed they use English always.

According to them, using English will enable the pupils to speak English well. Moreover, as all the teachers pointed out, all the textbooks, notes given to the pupils and internal and external examinations are done in English. So, using English as the medium of instruction and also teaching it will, according to them, help the pupils improve their spelling and

vocabulary skills and invariably reading and writing skills. In this school, Table 4c shows that Ikwerre is not taught as a subject. All the Basic 1-3 teachers are also aware of the NPE provision on the use of MT/LIC as medium of instruction and the teaching of an indigenous language, but they expressed that even if government provides books for the teaching of Ikwerre, and translates all textbooks into Ikwerre, most Ikwerre speaking teachers are not literate in the language. So, using Ikwerre as a medium of instruction and also teaching it as a subject is unrealistic.

Emphasizing the role of English in Nigeria in depriving Ikwerre its "right" as a medium of instruction Basic 3 teacher submits that

> So far English is Nigeria's official language, language of education, language that make people "big man" and the language Ikwerre people use to communicate with others in many areas and things … it will be difficult to leave English. Using Ikwerre will keep the Ikwerre children local and behind. Even, many Ikwerre now don't have interest in it. They see it as local; they prefer using pidgin. Ikwerre is not a big man's language.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are:

1. Ikwerre language is not a medium of instruction at the lower primary education level
2. It is not taught as a subject.
3. Forces external and internal to it limit and deprive its functionality as a medium of instruction

A realistic and objective interpretation of these findings is that Ikwerre is a marginalized and mostly a deprived language. What deprive it of its growth, development and use as a medium of instruction and it being taught as a subject are external and internal forces. It is for instance,

obvious from the above statement of Basic 3 teacher in School D that when the Ikwerre language speakers abandon their MT/L1 in preference for English, they are not doing so out of choice. Rather, the hegemonic role of English in Nigeria's body polity and its perceived importance as the language of success and survival in life are salient determining variables.

Similarly, internalized subordination in terms of native speakers regarding Ikwerre as "local" and not a "big man's" language constitute a strong and important variable to understanding why and how marginalized and deprived the language is. The statement of a Basic 2 teacher in school C quoted above leaves an objective reason why Ikwerre language is marginalized and deprived. Its marginalized and deprived status is linked to the existential and ideological realities within its immediate locality and among its native speakers. The Ikwerre-English bilinguals, particularly the "enthusiastic revivalist and restorers" are not projecting the utilitarian and creative values of the language. Rather their educational background, jobs, social network, and dexterity in the use of English show that with English educated Ikwerre people can progress effectively in life without Ikwerre language or any other indigenous Nigerian language for that matter.

The findings of this study affirm Bamgbose (2003) and Uwajeh's (2003) views that the oppressive role of English as Nigeria's official language, language of education a requirement in jobs, lack of self-determination by the native speakers and savage linguistic assaults are the effective measures through which language marginalization and deprivation in Nigeria are affected. In addition to these forces, the urban nature of two Ikwerre speaking LGAs impacts negatively on the Ikwerre language. It deprives it expansion beyond its customary domains, thereby denying it the right to being a medium of literacy and wider social interaction. Thus, the current marginalized and deprived status of Ikwerre language will progressively lead to its decay if nothing is done to tackle its marginalization and deprivation, particularly for educational purposes.

Suggestions for Changing the Tide

The Ikwerre linguists and all lovers of the language should be realistic and objective in their advocacy, study and "fight" for the growth, development and use of the language. This is because if nothing more than the intellectualizing and academic diversion (Uwajeh, 2003) is done to revitalize and restore the teaching and use of Ikwerre, at least, at the primary school level, the tidal waves of marginalization and deprivation, always stirred and sustained by the progressively attractive, though oppressive, role of English would in no distant future wash it away. Even the current heat and flood from Pidgin English is so imaginatively creative in Ikwerre speaking communities that Ikwerre language is exposed to endangerment and gradual death.

Therefore, to tame the raging waves, the following proposals can be pursued. First is self-determination. Ikwerre native speakers should have self-determination to revive, restore and promote the use of Ikwerre language. Just as Uwajeh (2003) contends speakers of Ikwerre language have their alienable right to promote the welfare of their language by legitimate means, including through government. This means that Ikwerre language speakers who are in position of power and authority to elevate its status should not hesitate to do so.

Ikwerre linguists who should nurture its growth and showcase its creative and utilitarian values should go beyond translations of the Bible, prayer books and hymns into Ikwerre language. These translations are for the educated Ikwerre-English bilinguals and not necessarily for realistic involvement of Ikwerre in domains where its use matters. Thus, there should be aggressive drive towards translating all primary education textbooks and other supplementary materials into Ikwerre language. Yes, this is a cost intensive project, but where there is a will there is a way.

The Ikwerre language committee should put up some mechanisms and strategies towards the teaching of Ikwerre as the language of the immediate community in all the tertiary instructions in Ikwerre speaking communities.

Finally, the fruits which the RRP yielded for Ikwerre should be looked for, revised and replanted into the Rivers state polity, particularly in primary education, because using a language as a medium of instruction at this level is a powerful strategy of empowering the language.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted through a descriptive survey to discuss the marginalization and deprivation of languages in Nigeria with particular focus on the Ikwerre language. While language marginalization is more of a limiting act, deprivation is a denying and preventing act. The functional range of a language can be marginalized by forces external to it, yet the language is alive to its speakers. But deprivation ceases the growth, development and functionality of a language, and reduces it to merely existing but not living. Thus, any marginalized and deprived language needs more of conscious, concerted, consistent and determined native speakers' efforts for it to regain its life, expand its horizon and be a viable medium of communication. The paper therefore concludes that how marginalized or deprived a language is, is indexically linked to the existential and ideological realities within its immediate domains and among its native speakers. As it is what people do with their language that determines whether or not it is marginalized and/or deprived, the utilitarian and creative values of Ikwerre as a marginalized and deprived language can be reactivated.

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