

**LANGUAGE USE AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN Ọ̀LỌ̀WÀ, DÈKÍNÀ
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KÒGÍ STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated language use and language maintenance in Ọ̀lọ̀wà, Dèkínà Local Government Area, Kògí State, Nigeria with a view to identifying the factors responsible for the use or non-use of the languages in contact, namely Ígálà, Bàsà-Ngé, and Bàsà-Kómǒ, and how the factors manifest across different socio-cultural groups in the community. Fishman's theory on the relationship between micro- and macro-sociolinguistics, which centres around who speaks what language to whom and when, was used. One hundred respondents from each of the three language groups totaling three hundred respondents representing the different age groups, sexes, and socio-cultural classes were selected through random sampling. The data were analyzed using simple percentage to determine the extent of language use and language maintenance. The findings show that each respondent is proficient in his or her native language and in the dominant language, Ígálà. Factors responsible for this include ethnic identity consciousness, inter-ethnic relations such as marriage, economic, communal and other socio-cultural activities. Another factor is religion. This work adds to our existing knowledge of how the three languages used in the community have co-existed without any of them being endangered.*

KEYWORDS: language, language use, language maintenance, multilingualism, proficiency,

INTRODUCTION

Ọ̀lọ̀wà is a village in Dèkínà Local Government Area of Kògí State. Geographically, Kogi State is located in the middle belt, and it is one of the northern states in Nigeria. Dèkínà Local Government Area is in the eastern part of Kogi State. It has a population of about 260312 according to the 2006 census (The National Population Commission 2006). It is one of the oldest Local Government Areas in Nigeria. It is jointly inhabited by many ethnic groups, each speaking its own language. Ọ̀lọ̀wà has a population of about 17,285 people (The National Population Commission 2006). There is historical (oral tradition) as well as traditional evidence that the ethnic groups, namely, Ígálà, Bàsà-Ngé and Bàsà-Kómǒ originated from Ábẹ̀júkólò-Ìfẹ̀, Ógbólókó and Ógùmá respectively in Kogi State. Though there is no written history available, one of the oral traditions, and the most popular, has it that the first settlers in this community were the Ígálà people who were allotted the place by the then *Àtá Ígálà*. Later, other ethnic groups joined the Ígálà people. The village derived her name Ọ̀lọ̀wà from this river- meaning, "surrounding Ọ̀wà". Sequel to the above oral tradition, the Ígálà people claim ownership of the village and regard the other ethnic groups as later settlers.

Numerically, the Ígálà ethnic group is the largest ethnic group in Kogi State, Nigeria (Census 2006). The name Ígálà designates the people as well as their language. The Ígálà language belongs to the group of the New Benue Congo language family (Bendor, et al 1989: 169-177). Politically, the Ígálà people occupy key positions as heads of the different sections of the community. They are representatives of the community at the Local Government

Legislative Assembly and other government levels. Bássà-Kómö is another ethnic group in this community. Bássà-Kómö had intermingled with the Gwárí to the north of the Niger-Benue confluence before migrating to their present location. There is cultural evidence based on their cultural similarity that Bássà-Kómö and Gwárí might have originated from the same stock. Bássà-Kómö are mostly adherents of indigenous faith. The Bássà-Kómö language belongs to the Benue-Congo group (Bendor, et al 1989). Another group of people in this community also is Bássà-Nge. Historically, they are of Núpé stock. Linguistically, Bássà-Nge is a dialect of the Núpé language. The Núpé language belongs to the Benue-Congo group (Bendor et al 1989). Bássà-Nge people are also predominantly agriculturists. The majority of the Christians in Bássà-Nge land are of the Anglican Communion (Miachi, 1984).

Politically, Ólòwà comprises seven wards, and each ward is headed by an *Ómádákí*, a ward head, while the whole town is governed by *Ígágò*. *Ígágò* is the chief of a small town or village. He is a third class chief. The wards are *Ájáékéyì*, *Étíájá*, *Ófėjìjì*, *Àgbájó*, *Òpádá*, *Òchákpélè* and *Élíká*. This was the situation until 1996 when the town was divided into three parts. Two parts belong to Dèkínà Local Government Area and one part belongs to Bássà Local Government Area. Each part is headed by *Ígágò*. For example, *Ájáékéyì*, *Étíájá*, and *Ófėjìjì* are controlled by one *Ígágò*, *Òpádá* and *Òchákpélè* are headed by one *Ígágò* while another *Ígágò* controls *Élíká*. All these groups still make up one village, Ólòwà. For political reasons, although each ward now clamours for its own independence, the different groups still co-exist amicably till date. The available social amenities such as primary health centres, a customary court, schools, churches, and market are at the reach of every group in the town. There is no demarcation in the village and there is no discrimination among the different ethnic groups.

Economically, the people are basically farmers and traders. They are blessed with fertile land. Each group knows its boundary when it comes to issues of farmland. There has been no record of communal clash over farmland. The town is one of the major producers of yams and oranges in the Local Government Area. There is a big market which holds every fifth day. People from different parts of the state and beyond come to buy foodstuff. The people are also noted for brewing local wine known as *Bùrùkútù*.

In the area of religion, the three main religions practised in the community are Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion. There is a central mosque and other smaller mosques for family or compound use. The dominant Christian group here is the Christian Evangelical Fellowship of Nigeria (CEFN). There are other denominations, for example, the Catholic, Anglican and some new Pentecostal sects which are just springing up. There are some individuals from all the linguistic groups in the community who practise the traditional religion.

Statement of the Problem

Ólòwà is a small town and there are three indigenous languages existing side-by-side, namely, *Ígálà*, *Bássà-Nge* and *Bássà-Kómö*. This work on language use and language maintenance in Ólòwà seeks to investigate which domains influence language use and the factors responsible for language maintenance in Ólòwà.

Specific Objectives of the Research

Objectives of this study are to:

- i. identify the domains of language use in Ólòwà community,
- ii. examine the level and pattern of the proficiency of our respondents (members of the community) in the three languages spoken in Ólòwà, which are Ígálà, Bàssà-Ngé, and Bàssà-Kómǒ.

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

Language maintenance is a complex area of sociolinguistic studies, which was first advanced by Fishman in the 1960s (Fishman, 1989: 177). Language maintenance is one of the ultimate issues in language contact in the sense that when two languages or more come into contact, it is believed that, the minority language struggles, more often than not, to maintain itself in the face of the more dominant language. Fishman defines language maintenance as “the process and pursuit of intergenerational linguistic continuity”. He (Fishman) also suggests that, when two or more languages are in contact, three alternatives can occur. First, the languages may be maintained without any change. Second, there may be shift of some form in the languages. Third, one of the languages may be leading to a form of non-use, called language loss or language death. Fishman (2001:152) later avers that language contact may lead to what he describes as language maintenance. According to Adams et al (2012:99), language maintenance refers to language-contact situations where a minority group continues to use its language even under conditions that might support a language shift. Hornberger & Coronel-Molina (2004: 9-67), claim that language maintenance “refers to relative stability in domains of use, number, distribution, and proficiency of speakers in a speech community”. On the other hand, Fase et al (1992:4) define language maintenance as “the retention, use and proficiency in the language”. Sequel to or following above definitions/opinions, language maintenance can be said to reflect collective decision or volition. However, in this paper it is assumed that language maintenance is a reflection of the degree of language stability. That is, language maintenance is a situation where members of a community try to keep the languages they have always used, in other words, to retain the same patterns of language choice. In a multilingual community (like Ólòwà) it may find expression in each group’s conscious effort to protect its language and ensure its continued use.

Furthermore, in language maintenance, the languages in contact may have a co-existence of stable relationship (Hamde 2005:5). It is believed that, usually, the speakers of the less-prestigious language enhance a way of retaining it, transmitting it to the next generation, and use it appropriately in all domains. Hamde claims that most often speakers of a non-dominant language wish to keep their ethnic identity through language, religion or cultural heritage. He also avers that there are several factors that lead speakers to maintain their language and other factors that lead other speakers to shift from their language. These factors vary considerably from one speaker to another and from one situation to another. In addition, that language maintenance has to reflect a sense of maintaining one’s linguistic and, to some extent, cultural identity within the context of diversity while rejecting every notion of isolationism on one hand and assimilation on the other hand. And that the use and maintenance of a language is usually determined by factors such as status, degree of institutional support and demographic strength of an ethno-linguistic minority group. The will of the group to hold on to their language, in addition to appropriate socio-economic and political factors, according to Hamde, determines the position of the language.

However, central to maintenance factors is the role of language in defining people's ethno-cultural identities, in an era where belief in ethnic identity is a central anchoring point for many groups. As such, a psychological attachment to language for self-identity as well as group identity cannot be overlooked. Thim-Mabrey's (2003) distinction (cited in Schmidt 2006:15) between linguistic identity on the one hand and identity through language on the other is of relevance here. Linguistic identity does not only mean the features of a given language which distinguish it from other languages, but also the identity of a person with regards to his/her or in fact any language. Identity through language, on the other hand, describes "the identity of persons insofar as it is constituted or co-constituted through language and language use" (Schmidt 2006:15).

Nevertheless, researchers have investigated the factors that enhance language maintenance. These investigations show that there are many social, linguistic, economic, historical and psychological factors which significantly enhance a minority group's opportunity for language maintenance. Myers-Scotton (2006) cited in Charlyn Deyers (2008: 49-72) lists factors such as societal, in-group and individual factors as being among those factors central to language maintenance. Onugwa is a good example. Onugwa is a town in Anambra West Local Government Area of Anambra State in Nigeria. According to Okeke (2014) at a point in history, the Ígálà kingdom invaded the Northern tips of Igboland and changed the demographics of those parts of Igboland; the Igbo in those parts of Igboland had to start sharing their communities with the new Ígálà invaders. Okeke not only claims that, in Onugwa many people speak Igbo fluently but maintained that their main language is Ígálà. And he also claims that they are Ígálà and speak Ígálà and also that within the community, Ígálà is the language of communication, while some speak Igbo to people outside the community.

The social media form one of the institutions that can strongly influence language maintenance. Mass media in all its forms, radio and television programmes as well as publishing newspapers, periodicals, and books, can help minority individuals to promote and refine their languages and increase their competence (Cylne 1991:17-36).

Religious institutions have a positive effect on language maintenance, especially if the language is also the language of religion and it is used in the religious services held in religious institutions. This view is held by many scholars. According to Paulston (1997:73-85) a strong motive of Amish people in Pennsylvania and Hassidic group in New York for maintaining their languages (German and Yiddish respectively) is religion. Jamai (2008:313), for example, observed that Classical Arabic enjoys a very high status within the whole of the Arab world due to the fact that it is considered the language of the Quran and therefore that of God. However, within many Western European countries which have a large North African community, Classical Arabic, does not enjoy the same privilege. And that, North African communities in Western Europe have a nostalgic feeling towards Arabic due to the fact that it is the language of their religion and ancestral culture. This homogeneity can be a source of inspiration which leads individuals in the minority group to struggle to maintain their language and ethnic identity.

As regards demographic features, (Hamde 2005:5) maintains that, "language maintenance is possible and it is enhanced when the speech community has a large number of speakers, or if the community has close-knit social networks, if there are economic incentives (such as social mobility), and if the members of the minority language know their language well". By implication, she asserts that the demographic strength of an ethno-linguistic group and its

geo-linguistic distribution largely determine the degree of language maintenance and shift. For example, Clyne (1982:23) states the case of two Maltese immigrant groups in Australia of unequal size. The larger group was able to maintain its language, while the smaller group witnessed a higher degree of shift towards English.

In addition, there is a popular assertion that the maintenance of a language can also be influenced by inter-ethnic marriages. In such marriages the language that has a higher prestige and a socio-economic value stands more chance to survive as home language. As earlier observed, geo-linguistic distribution of an ethno-linguistic group usually has an impact on language use and maintenance. The degree of concentration of an ethno-linguistic group in a geographical location determines the degree of language use and maintenance within that particular community. For example in Canada, cited in Jamai (2008:120) French survived only because of the high concentration of its speakers in Quebec. In sharp contrast to this, speakers of French outside Quebec, where their concentration is markedly lower, tend to shift towards English. Wei (1982:109-124) also noticed that Chinese is maintained more by third generation Chinese living within Chinatowns than by those living outside. These examples suggest that the maintenance of any language gets its strength from the degree of the concentration of its speakers within a geographical area which is promoted by geographical proximity.

Other factors which facilitate language maintenance include educational opportunities for the language or new domains. The role of education in maintaining a language can be considerable. Another factor is the attitude towards a language (Fishman 1972:15-35, 1989), which includes the views and belief of an individual or a group about a language or its variety and beliefs about the members of the particular speech community. However, he concludes that, the attitude towards a language may be related to the extent to which the language has institutional support. Also use of the language in the mass media, especially the television, radio, electronic media, homepages, written media, political discourse, religious services and other community practices are believed to enhance language maintenance. Gustafson (2004) studied the situation of Bosnian refugees in Sweden, concluding that paradoxical processes forced the refugees to struggle for meaningful life, including maintaining their language, participating in local activities, and points to the importance of the majority opening its doors for participation in all spheres of life.

Language Use

According to Duan (2004:12), “language use is a term that describes a phenomenon in which members of a community use different languages or speech varieties in different social situations referred to as domains.” By implication, there are norms that are developed for intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic communication.

Wang’s (2000) study of language use in the multi-ethnic areas of southern and northern China, and Zhao’s (2001) study of language use in multi-ethnic areas of west China are significant to the present study. Wang examines language use in the multi-ethnic areas of southern and northern China, and concludes that bilingualism is very common, and the uses of the languages are not balanced, and different languages are always used in different domains and their functions are mutually supplementary. Based on his analysis of language use and language shift, Wang proposes a bilingual education model among the minority groups. Similarly, Zhao (2001) conducts a research on language use in multi-ethnic areas in West China and finds some common phenomena similar to Wang’s (2000) discovery. Both

studies are unanimous in their findings that bilingualism is very common as different languages are used at different levels; more language shift types occur and weak languages are dying out at an observable speed. Zhao (2001:114) claims that “among the over thirty languages spoken by minority groups in West China, more than ten of them are endangered with less than 1000 speakers.” Among those who have more than 1000 speakers, the language situation varies. He also claims that there is no positive correlation between the population of the speakers of a language and its vitality. One important issue that is common in the studies carried out by Wang (2000) and Zhao (2001) is the realization of the functional domains of the various languages and situational varieties which are responsible for either the survival/maintenance or endangerment of the different languages. However, we have our reservation as regards Zhao’s (ibid) assertion that there is no positive correlation between the population of the speakers of a language and its vitality.

Begona et al (2010) is another study of interest to our study of language use and language maintenance in Ólòwà. Begona et al (2010) investigate language use and maintenance in the multi-lingual area of Cheetham Hill, Manchester, to discover how a society with such a large variety of languages operates and how the individual residents and community as a whole manage to maintain the languages and cultures within it. Within the realm of how the society operates, they were interested in finding out whether inhabitants take active or passive role in maintaining their languages, and looked into domains/sectors such as the police, religious centres, community centres, the media, events and festivals. They used questionnaires to elicit information from residents, shopkeepers and workers in schools. They received 51 responses, though with a variety of answers. Their focus was the Fort shopping park as well as the Cheetham Hill road leading up to the area (Fort shopping park). Findings from this research show the use of native language in their homes with their families. They remark that there is strong evidence that Ukrainian language group members are maintaining their national language and identity and also mixing well with the rest of the community in Cheetham Hill. They conclude that Cheetham Hill’s community, centres and language support groups operate in a way which focuses strongly on the identity and maintenance of heritage languages and promoting their continued usage. We can draw conclusions from Begona et al’s (2010) work that multilingualism is sustained in Cheetham Hill as a result of each of the ethnic groups maintaining its national language and identity. Nevertheless, we are of the opinion that ethnic consciousness and language loyalty may not be the main or only factors responsible for the sustenance or maintenance of the different languages. Other factors like educational policy, political policy, economic and social benefits contribute significantly.

Data Collection

The instrument used to collect information from our respondents was a questionnaire. We opted for a multiple-choice type of questionnaire where the respondents chose from among the many given possibilities the option that reflected best their answer. The questionnaire sought demographic information and information on the degree of a respondent’s proficiency in the three languages, namely, Ígálà, Bássà-Ngé and Bássà-Kómö. It also focused on information on language use in specific domains, such as school, home, public gathering, market place, and work. Most of the questions in the questionnaire were designed to find out from the respondents the kind of languages spoken or used at different periods, occasions and the various functions the languages were meant to perform vis-à-vis the factors that

motivated the chosen codes at a particular period. Descriptive statistics were used as the main method in analyzing the data

In order to eliminate bias and get an authentic representation and a good result, the random sampling technique was used. The different domains in the community like the school, the market, places of worship, marriage ceremony and community forum (town meeting) were surveyed for respondents. We also considered factors like age, gender, social status and ethnic background to ensure the heterogeneity of the sample. In order to ensure effective monitoring of respondents and administration of the tests, 300 respondents were selected and tested. Each ethnic group consisted of one hundred (100) respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The demographic information that is important to this investigation includes sex, age, marital status, level of education, occupation, parents' and spouses' ethnic groups and the degree of inter-ethnic marriages. It is assumed that these socio-demographic variables may influence the language use and maintenance of our respondents.

Sex

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents' Sex by Ethnic Group

Sex of Respondents	Ígálà		Bàsà-Ngé		Bàsà-Kómǒ	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male	34	34	34	32	48	48
Female	66	66	68	68	52	52
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

As shown in Table 1 above, among the Ígálà respondents, 66 were female while the remaining 34 were male. The high percentage of female among the Ígálà respondents compared with the male respondents could suggest that there is a relationship between the factor of sex and multilingual proficiency. Similarly, among the Bàsà-Ngé respondents, 68 were female while the male respondents were 34. The result recorded among the Bàsà-Ngé respondents further confirms the assumption that there is a correlation between sex and proficiency and usually in favour of the female. However, among the Bàsà-Kómǒ respondents only 52 were female as shown in Table 1 above. The remaining 48 were male.

Age**Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents' Age Groups by Language Group**

Age Group of Respondents	Ígálà		Bàssà-Ngé		Bàssà-Kómǒ	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
10 – 20 years	8	8	–	–	32	32
21 – 30 years	20	20	30	30	20	20
31 – 40 years	14	14	22	22	22	22
41 – 50 years	14	14	12	12	14	14
51 – 60 years	2	2	22	22	10	10
61 – 70 years	42	42	14	14	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

As shown in Table 2 above, among the Ígálà respondents, those between ages 61 – 70 years were 42, ages 21-30 years were 20, ages 31-40 years were 14, ages 41-50 years were 14, ages 10-20 years were 8 and age 51-60 years were 2. Also among the Bàssà-Ngé respondents, a significant majority of the respondents, 30 of them were between ages 21-30 years, 22 were between ages 31- 40 years, 12 were between ages 41-50 years, 22 were between ages 51-60 years and 14 were ages 61-70 years. While among the Bàssà-Kómǒ respondents, those between ages 10-20 years constituted 32, 20 were between ages 21-30 years, 22 were between ages 31- 40 years, 14 were between ages 41-50 years, 10 were between ages 51-60 years and only 2 claimed to be between ages 61-70 years. The age distribution among the Bàssà-Kómǒ ethnic group seems to suggest that multilingualism is more wide-spread among the younger generation than among their older counterparts. This is obvious when we compare those who were forty years and below on the one hand and those who were above forty years on the other hand. See Table 2 above. It is assumed that there is likely going to be a correlation between the pattern of age distribution and their degree of proficiency in Ígálà and Bàssà-Ngé.

Marital Status**TABLE 3: Distribution of the Respondents by Marital Status**

Marital Status of Respondents	Ígálà		Bàssà-Ngé		Bàssà-Kómǒ	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Single	20	20	24	24	64	64
Married	80	80	76	76	36	36
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

As shown in Table 3 above, only 20 of the Ígálà respondents were unmarried, while the remaining 80 were married. Among the Bàssà-Ngé respondents only 24 were unmarried while 76 were married. Unlike the Ígálà and the Bàssà-Ngé respondents, among the Bàssà-Kómǒ respondents a sizeable majority, 64 of them were unmarried while 36 were married as

revealed in Table 3 above. A look at the marital status suggests a contrast between Ígálà and Bàssà-Ngé on one hand and Bàssà-Kómö on the other.

Respondents' Spouses' Ethnic Group

TABLE 4: Distribution of the Respondents' Spouses' Ethnic Group

Respondents' Spouses' Ethnic Group	Ígálà		Bàssà-Ngé		Bàssà-Kómö		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Ígálà	50	62.5	30	37.5	–	–	80	100
Bàssà-Ngé	–	–	76	100	–	–	76	100
Bàssà-Kómö	–	–	–	–	36	100	36	100

The distribution of the respondents' spouses' ethnic group as shown in Table 4 reveals that 50 of the Ígálà respondents claimed they were married to Ígálà while 30 of them (women) stated they were married to Bàssà-Ngé men. In other words, inter-ethnic marriages were only found among the Ígálà group with 30 Ígálà women who claimed to be married to Bàssà-Ngé men. All the married Bàssà-Ngé respondents claimed they married within their own ethnic group. None of them mentioned they married from any of the other ethnic groups. A similar situation was found among the Bàssà-Kómö respondents. All 36 of them claimed they married within their ethnic group. It implies then, that among the Bàssà-Ngé and Bàssà-Kómö respondents only intra-ethnic marriages were observed. The instances of inter-ethnic marriage observed among Ígálà respondents could enhance their proficiency in Ígálà and Bàssà-Ngé. That is to say, inter-ethnic marriage might be one of the factors that have influenced the respondents' multilingual proficiency.

Respondents' Parents' Ethnic Group

TABLE 5: Distribution of Respondents' Parents' Ethnic Group

Respondents Father's Ethnic Group	Ígálà		Bàssà-Ngé		Bàssà-Kómö	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Ígálà	100	100	–	–	–	–
Bàssà-Ngé	–	–	100	100	–	–
Bàssà-Kómö	–	–	–	–	100	100
Respondents Mother's Ethnic Group						
Ígálà	100	100	–	–	–	–
Bàssà-Ngé	–	–	100	100	–	–
Bàssà-Kómö	–	–	–	–	100	100

Respondents from the three ethnic groups claimed that their parents (both) were from their own ethnic groups Respondents. That is, intra-ethnic marriages were observed among the parents of the respondents as indicated in Table 5 above. This can be seen as an indication of

ethnic consciousness, upholding of their ethnic identity and ethnic loyalty which could be responsible for language maintenance and consequently survival of the three languages under study.

Respondents' Occupation

Table 6: Occupational Distributions of Respondents by Language Group

Occupation	Ígálà		Bàssà-Ngé		Bàssà-Kómǒ	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Student	20	20	22	22	26	26
Farmer	40	40	32	32	24	24
Trader	28	28	38	38	34	34
Civil servant	12	12	8	8	16	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 6 above reveals that among the Bàssà-Kómǒ, 26 of the respondents were students while, 24 of them were farmers, 34 were traders and 16 were civil servants. Among the Bàssà-Ngé respondents, 22 were students, 32 were farmers, 38 were traders and 8 were civil servants. Among the Ígálà respondents were 20 students, 40 of respondents claimed to be farmers, 28 of them stated they were traders and 12 claimed to be civil servants. The number of farmers was higher (40) among the Ígálà respondents compared with the Bàssà-Ngé (32) and Bàssà-Kómǒ (24). As observed in Table 6, the highest occupational group found among the Bàssà-Ngé and Bàssà-Kómǒ respondents was traders. The knowledge of the three languages under study is important to their trade because they need to communicate, to some degree, with their customers.

As earlier stated, there is a large market in the town that holds every five days. The three ethnic groups are free to do their commercial transactions without any restriction; hence this motivates multilingual proficiency. This may have contributed to the higher degree of multilingual proficiency found among the Bàssà-Ngé and Bàssà-Kómǒ respondents compared with Ígálà respondents, who recorded the highest percentage of farmers. Farmers may not need to be proficient in the three languages, since it is not necessary for their trade.

As earlier mentioned, these findings suggest that the knowledge of the languages is not uniformly needed in all occupations. The demands of their different occupations may be responsible for the difference in proficiency of the various occupational groups. As indicated in Table 6, the highest occupational group found among the Bàssà-Kómǒ respondents was traders. The knowledge of the three languages under study is relevant to their trade because they need to communicate in some degree with their customers. The observation noted above may have contributed to the results got from the Bàssà-Kómǒ group.

The Popularity of the Three Languages within the Groups

Some of the questions sought to determine the frequency with which each of the three languages is used among the respondents. To achieve this, the following four options; never,

rarely, sometimes and always were provided for the respondents to indicate the option that represents their practice. 60% of the Ígálà respondents claimed to speak Bássà-Ngé sometimes, when their audience understood it. 4% of them claimed that they rarely spoke Bássà-Ngé when their audience understood it while the other 36% claimed that they never spoke Bássà-Ngé even when their audience understood it. But only a small proportion (6%) of the Ígálà respondents claimed that, they sometimes spoke Bássà-Kómö when their audience understood it while the majority (72%) claimed they never spoke Bássà-Kómö even when their audience understood it. A few of them (22%) claimed that they rarely spoke it.

Among the Bássà-Ngé, 70% of the respondents claimed that they always spoke Ígálà when their audience understood it and 30% of the respondents claimed that they sometimes spoke Ígálà when their audience understood it. Only 28% of them claimed that they sometimes spoke Bássà-Kómö when their audience understood it. A high proportion of the Bássà-Ngé (66%) claimed that they never spoke Bássà-Kómö even when their audience understood it but 6% of them claimed that they rarely spoke Bássà-Kómö. Among the Bássà-Kómö respondents 80% of them asserted they always spoke Ígálà and 20% of them stated they sometimes spoke Ígálà when their audience understood it as against only 40% who claimed they sometimes spoke Bássà-Ngé when their audience understood it. 26% of the Bássà-Kómö respondents claimed that they never spoke Bássà-Ngé even when their audience understood it while the remaining 4% claimed they rarely spoke Bássà-Ngé.

However, the respondents from the three ethnic groups claimed they use their respective languages always. Furthermore, our findings indicate that Ígálà occupies a prominent position since all the respondents claimed to use it always or sometimes. As a result of its political and economic importance the Bássà-Ngé and Bássà-Kómö, though they speak their respective languages, learn to speak Ígálà for the purpose of political, social and economic transactions. There is a tendency of language shift towards Ígálà but we cannot uphold this supposition since the respondents claimed that they use their respective languages and until the various domains of language use among our respondents are examined and the extent of the use of their other two languages compared.

The Languages Employed by the Respondents for Communicative Purposes in Different Domains

Domains, according to Fishman (1972:15-35), are institutional contexts in which a language is used and these are organized into specific role- relationships. Domains of language use differ from one community to the other; so also the functions allocated to each of the domains vary. In this investigation, the domains stated below were explored in order to determine the degree and pattern of proficiency of the respondents.

At Home with Members of the Family

The Bássà-Kómö respondents (100%) reported that they communicate in their own language when discussing at home with members of their families. Similarly, all (100%) of the Bássà-Ngé respondents reported they communicate in their own language when discussing at home. A significant shift from this pattern was observed among the Ígálà respondents with 30% of the respondents who claimed they communicate in Ígálà and Bássà-Ngé at home with members of their families. This situation may not be unconnected with the fact that there were significant instances of inter-ethnic marriage between the Ígálà women and the Bássà-

Ngé men. The remaining 70% reported they communicate in Ígálà at home with members of their families.

Language Use in the Market with Customers and Traders

It is assumed that the language chosen in this domain would be the dominant language for the respondent, since the respondent could use any of the three languages because the interlocutor shares the same language with the respondent. The majority (72%) of the Ígálà respondents claimed that they communicate in Ígálà only in the market; 20% of them claimed that they communicate in Ígálà and Bàssà-Ngé when discussing with customers and traders in the market and the remaining 8% reported they communicate in Ígálà, Bàssà-Kómǒ and Bàssà-Ngé when discussing with customers and traders in the market. Whereas, a very high proportion (88%) of the Bàssà-Ngé claimed that they communicate in both Ígálà and Bàssà-Ngé in the market place, 6% claimed that they communicate in Bàssà-Ngé only. The remaining 6% reported that they communicate in Bàssà-Ngé, Bàssà-Kómǒ and Ígálà. Similarly, the majority (82%) of the Bàssà-Kómǒ claimed that they communicate in Ígálà and Bàssà-Kómǒ in the market while the remaining (18%) claimed that they communicate in Bàssà-Kómǒ, Bàssà-Ngé and Ígálà.

We can infer from the report of our respondents that the pattern of language use in the market among the three groups is similar. They claimed that they do their transactions mostly in Ígálà and their respective mother tongues. Low percentages of 8 Ígálà respondents, 6 Bàssà-Ngé respondents and 18 Bàssà-Kómǒ claimed that they use the three languages under investigation to do their transactions. This is in consonance with our earlier observation that Ígálà is the dominant language in Ólòwà and as such it is more essential for economic transactions.

Languages Employed by the Respondents for Communicative Purposes in the Office when

Discussing Official and Private Matters

The 12% of Ígálà, 8% of Bàssà-Ngé and 16% of Bàssà-Kómǒ respondents who claimed to be civil servants all reported that they do not communicate in any of the three languages when discussing official matters in the office. But they do communicate in Ígálà and their respective languages when discussing private matters in the office. The pattern of communication in this domain among the respondents from the three ethnic groups under investigation is similar and also comparable to the claim made in the school sector. The pattern of communication in official matters is slanted in favour of English while in private matters Ígálà and their respective mother tongues were used. The report further reflects the supremacy of Ígálà because of its popularity among the ethnic groups as well as the bid to promote and preserve ethnic identity which is a strong social factor among the Bàssà-Ngé and Bàssà-Kómǒ especially the Bàssà-Kómǒ respondents as can be deduced from their report on their use of their respective mother tongues.

At Places of Worship and at Home When Praying

The respondents were asked to say the language or languages they use at their places of worship and at home when praying. A sizeable percentage (82%) of the Ígálà respondents claimed that they communicate in Ígálà only in their places of worship and at home when praying while the remaining (18%) claimed that they communicate in Ígálà and Bàssà-Ngé.

Also, a high percentage (86%) of the Bàsà-Kómö respondents claimed they communicate in Ígálà and Bàsà-Kómö at their places of worship and while praying at home. The remaining 14% of the Bàsà-Kómö respondents claimed that they communicate in Bàsà-Kómö only in their places of worship. All the Bàsà-Ngé (100%) respondents claimed that they communicate in Ígálà and Bàsà-Ngé at their places of worship and when praying at home. However, it is obvious that the patterns of language use among the three ethnic groups under study in these personal and sacred functions are mostly in favour of Ígálà and their respective mother tongues. The linguistic situation in Ólòwà further indicates the dominance of Ígálà over Bàsà-Ngé and Bàsà-Kómö, which has an implication for language shift and language maintenance.

Language Considered Most Prestigious by the Different Ethnic Groups

All the Ígálà and the Bàsà-Ngé respondents considered their respective mother tongues to be the most prestigious and important language, while only 80% of the Bàsà-Kómö respondents considered Bàsà-Kómö to be the most prestigious language. The remaining 20% considered Ígálà to be the most prestigious and important. The fact that all the Ígálà, Bàsà-Ngé and 80% of the Bàsà-Kómö respondents considered their different native languages to be the most prestigious and important language could be seen as an expression of ethnic loyalty, promotion and preservation of ethnic identity. All these are capable of enhancing the continued survival or maintenance of the three languages under study. Similarly, the fact that 20% of the Bàsà-Kómö respondents considered Ígálà to be the most prestigious language reflects the high social status and predominant position of the Ígálà language in Ólòwà.

CONCLUSION

The respondents in each group were more proficient in their mother tongue than in the other two respective languages. Bàsà-Kómö and Bàsà-Ngé claim to speak Ígálà because the Ígálà language has a higher prestige and wider usage. However, as earlier stated in our study, Ígálà enjoys a higher status than the other two languages which are Bàsà-Ngé and Bàsà-Kómö based on their large population and also being a host to Bàsà-Ngé and Bàsà-Kómö groups according to the available oral tradition. It is expected that the use of Ígálà will permeate and dominate in all domains, including the home. But contrary to our expectation, the majority of the respondents from each of the three ethnic groups claimed to use their mother tongue when talking to their various interlocutors at home. It is a clear indication of ethnic identity consciousness and language loyalty and may be responsible for the maintenance or continuity of the three languages under study in a community like Ólòwà. As earlier stated, the mother tongues are associated with solidarity and social equality. They express one's relationship with members of one's family and members of the ethnic group. The mother tongue has remained a symbol of family tie, ethnic identity, intimacy and solidarity. Each of the ethnic groups under study in Ólòwà signals ethnic consciousness and traditional values; encode intimacy and solidarity. We could also assume that this (ethnic solidarity) may be one of the factors responsible for the survival of the three languages in Ólòwà speech community.

Using the Ólòwà survey data, this investigation sets out to answer Fishman's (1965:67-88) question 'who speaks what language to whom and when?' In terms of who speaks what language, to whom, where and when, the Ólòwà data show the importance of a respondent's verbal repertoire and competence in the languages.

Implication of Findings

Looking at language use and language maintenance in the light of nation-building makes obvious the reasons why this research is needed. This work is indeed an important perspective to complement other efforts in evaluating language use and language maintenance as well as encourage people to evolve and create awareness on the need to build solidarity among the different ethnic groups, by developing into truly intercultural societies, where people of different backgrounds take part in a dialogue with one another.

Also the peaceful co-existence, mutual tolerance among the three ethnic groups in Ólòwà under study is a sign of hope for national unity, social harmony and brighter future for our nation in this era of political, ethnic and religious intolerance. Furthermore, the work has the potential to be an important and extensive source of data on language or linguistic situation in Ólòwà. The knowledge this brings is a pre-requisite for any strategic language planning education policies in multi-ethnic Kogi State in particular and Nigeria at large, where minority languages abound.

Lastly, the living side by side and thriving of the three languages among the Ólòwà community with the dominance of Ígálà suggests that language competition in multilingual communities may not always lead to language shift or endangerment of minority language.

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