

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT: TOWARDS THE REVITALISATION OF BOLE LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *The paper highlighted the threat of extinction which the Bole language is facing today in the global world. It illustrates how gradually, the Bole language is unfortunately not being spoken even by many of its native speakers either at home, schools, mosques, official circles or at social functions. The researcher used interview techniques as a tool for generating the data from the two major communities where the language is natively spoken in Yobe state groups - Fika and Potiskum. Thus, 50 subjects were sampled for the interview from two universities, Al-Qalam University Katsina and Umaru Musa Yaradua University respectively. The results of the data showed the Bole language enjoys low patronage and patriotism amongst the users; many of whom found it very difficult to express themselves freely in the language. The significance of this work, therefore, is seen in the fact that Bole language stands at risk of gradual extinction if urgent measures are not taken by all the stakeholders concerned to tackle the dwindling fortunes of the language. To this effect, the paper made a clarion call on what needs to be done to maintain the language. Similarly, it recommended massive awareness and sensitisation campaigns on the language which is on the verge of being endangered in the country; thereby, ensuring the active use of it, especially at homes and other social functions.*

Key Words: *Language endangerment, Language revitalisation, Bole language, Linguistic diversity.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The only channel by which human beings present reality is language as it affects the way we think or perceive our reality. This makes language peculiar to human beings and can be both an individual property (when it exists as knowledge) and a social property, (when it manifests to perform its functions). The survival of the language of a people is very vital to the people's survival as a whole as it is rightly challenged by Haruna (2004:30) that "if you want your language to survive, speak it".

Also, language is a means of communication among a group of people. It is a form of expression which is generally conceived as an arbitrary set of codes used for communication and a means by which an ethnic group could be easily identified. As such, language is a tool with which thoughts are represented and communicated. It is a process through which thoughts are established as well as elaborated. To jettison ones indigenous language is to say the least a fundamental step towards losing ones identity. This is because, without language, the identity and culture of the ethnic group is dead. According to Hale in Orkar (2006:5), losing one's language entails losing one's "culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art etc. It is like dropping a bomb on a museum." Language captures the entire essence of man. It makes a man who he is and what he will become. Similarly, in the words of Lewis quoted in Algeo (1974):

The gift of language is the single human trait that marks us all, genetically setting us apart from the rest of life. Language is, like nest building or hive making, the universal and biologically specific activity of human beings. We engage in it communally, compulsively, and automatically. We cannot be human without it; if we were to be separated from it our minds would die assuredly as bees lost from the hive.

This shows that language is the most important heritage of any society, as people can always have their history traced through their language. According to Baldeh (1993:3), "language is the hand-maid of culture, the two are inseparable." It is against the backdrop of this that Bole language (one of the minority languages) is taken as a case for this study. What this implies therefore, is that for the Bole culture to stand the test of time, its language must remain strong and be spoken often.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOLEWA

Bole or Bolanci (as called by the Hausa), is a language spoken by Bolewa. They are called Bolewa by the Kanuri and Bolewa by the Hausas (Westerman and Bryan, 1970). Each unit according to Meek (1931), calls itself by its own local title. Historically, the Bolewa claim a distant origin from Yemen. Like the kings of Kanem and Songhai, it is probable that the Bolewa kings belonged to a group of "Semitic invaders who found their way into the Sudan from Abyssinia and established at various times, kingdoms in Kanem Bornu, Ghana, Gao..." (Meek, 1931:289 in Gimba, 2000).

The Bolewa are, later, said to have severed their relationship with the Kanuri on the shores of Lake Chad about the dawn of the tenth century, probably during the reign of Mai Idris of Bornu (Abraham, 1929). After sojourning for some years in Bornu and Biu emirates, they established themselves at various centres to the west and northwest of Bornu. Thus, “with their migration to Nigeria, they settled in Northern part of Gombe and also further south of Fikka” (Abraham 1929:115).

Linguistically, Bole (also called Bolanci) is a register tone language that is, a language in which 'steady pitch height' is maintained by different levels of tonal contrasts (Hyman 1975). It belongs to the Chadic group of Afro-Asiatic language family and is spoken in Gombe and Yobe states, in Northern Nigeria. It is a member of the West sub-branch of Chadic (Newman 1977), the same major sub-branch that includes Hausa. As such, it is closely related to Hausa, but its closest linguistic relatives include other languages of the Bole Angas group, such as Karekare, Tangale, Kanakuru, Angas, Sura, and others.

There are six distinct modern languages that are indigenous in the area that is now Yobe State Duwai, Ngizim, Bade, Karekare, Bole and Ngamo. With the exception of Bole, these languages are spoken almost entirely within the confines of Yobe State. Bole has a large number of speakers to the south in Gombe State, by estimated 250,000 – 300,000 speakers (Gimba, 2000). It, therefore, has a major dialect split, roughly defined by the Gongola River that forms part of the southwestern border between Yobe and Bauchi States (Newman, 1977).

3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK:

The theory applied in this study is Cultural Marginalisation Theory of Language proposed by Austin and Sallabank (2011). This theory posits that indigenous populations frequently go for the other peoples' languages in order to achieve higher social status. The adoption of such cultural and linguistic traits may come as a result of colonialism, conquest or invasion. Austin and Sallabank concluded that this is the most common cause of language endangerment (Austin and Sallabank, 2011).

Specifically, this theory maintains that when people gradually neglect and refuse to promote official and unofficial communication dynamics in their own language, consciously or unconsciously, as they are culturally marginalizing their language, such language is at the risk of being endangered. Come to face it, if indeed language is to be objectively used as a means of identification, most Bolewa might probably fail the screening exercise. As such, there is indeed an urgent need for the renewal/restoration of the Bole language without any further delay. The warnings, made by Amano (2015) that languages are now rapidly being lost at a rate of extinctions exceeding the well-known catastrophic loss of biodiversity, should be a clarion call for all Bole people of good will to try and promote the language at official and non-official interactions (Amano, 2015).

4. LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY:

Nigeria as a linguistically diversified country is currently said to have over five hundred languages, though the dominant ones officially recognised by the government, apart from English, remain: Yorùbá, Hausa, and Igbo. The exact number of languages spoken in Nigeria is not quite certain as there are some languages which are yet to be discovered. In fact, what constitutes a language or a dialect has been debated for too long a time by linguists. Hoffman (1974) classifies 396 in language families in Nigeria excluding dialects that are recognised, while Hansford (1976) recognises 395 languages in Nigeria. Blench and Dendo (2003), however, record 550 languages as spoken. However, according to the most recent survey, Nigeria has some 400-500 languages (Blench, 2011).

To this effect, recent scholarship on linguistic diversity and multilingualism has been focused on language endangerment and language maintenance. Languages that are functionally vibrant and full of vitality may become endangered by losing their vitality as a result of a conjuncture of social, economic, political and linguistic factors and go through varying phases of attrition or progressive weakening resulting ultimately in language loss or language death (Fishman 1968, Brezinger 1992, 2007, Mackey 1997, Grenoble and Whaley 1998, Nettle and Romaine 2000, Mkude 2001, Crystal 2000, Mufwene 2001, 2004, Batibo 2005 and Chumbow 2009 and 2011 among others).

The negative perception of linguistic diversity, therefore, serves to diminish the status of Nigerian languages, presenting them as a problem rather than an asset. A typology of the languages shows that there are three types of languages: majority, minority and endangered. The major languages such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, etc. are spoken by large number of speakers and are almost invariably associated with higher status and perhaps political and economic power. However, it is a mistake to ignore minority languages as doing so means exclusion and denial of the rights of speakers to use them in crucial domains such as education in general and literacy in particular.

In this regard, one of the consequences of the negative perception towards linguistic diversity is language endangerment, a phenomenon that has become a prominent issue in sociolinguistic studies. The recognition and general acceptance that language is the major vehicle of a people's culture and that a people deprived of its language is also deprived of its culture have led to renewed emphasis in the world at large on preservation of endangered languages.

Adekunle (1976) examines the functionality of Nigerian languages and classifies them into three categories as outlined below;

Class A: In this category are three Nigerian languages are classified by the government as the major indigenous languages and they are spoken by at least six million native speakers and used widely outside their states of origin by Nigerians with different mother tongues. These are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

Class B: These are officially recognised languages in Nigeria and used at the national and federal levels but do not enjoy much usage outside the state of their origin. Under this category are; Kanuri, Fulani, Edo, Efik, Tiv, and Ijo, etc.

Class C: These are minor languages with no official recognition at the state level. Bole language is an example of this class.

A decade later, Brann's more recent demographic approach to the classification of Nigerian languages has been appreciated by a good number of linguists including Emenanjo and Bleambo. In fact, most recently many scholars have adopted this method of classification. In his demographic classification, Brann (1986) identified four groups of Nigerian languages, these are:

(i) The decamillionaires referring to languages spoken by more than ten million people (or demolects); Examples of these include Hausa and Yoruba.

(ii) The millionaires, that is, languages spoken by more than one million people (or choralects); Examples of these include Fulfulde and Igbo

(iii) The centimils, that is, languages spoken by more than 100,000 peoples (or ethnolects); Examples of these include Nupe and Tiv and,

(iv) The minorities, that is, languages spoken by less than 100,000 people. A goodb example of these languages is Bole.

In summary, with respect to the indigenous languages in Nigeria, Brann identified 3 decamillionaires, millionaires, a little more than 50 centimils and all the others he considered as minorities.

5. LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT:

Nigeria is the most linguistically complex country in Africa, and one of the most complex in the world. Crozier & Blench (1992) have not only improved our knowledge of the geography of Nigerian languages but also revealed that much remains to be done on language endangerment. Confusion about status and nomenclature remains rife and the inaccessibility of many minority languages is an obstacle to many researches.

In this regard, Derhemi's (2002) work is devoted to problems of endangered languages, particularly endangered languages spoken by minorities, focusing on the sociolinguistic study of the causes, circumstances and results of endangerment, and other structural and social processes related to endangered languages and to their survival. Omo-Ojugo (2004) asserts that a language can only resist death/extinction if it is able to move from the status of oracy to a written status. In his definition of endangered language, Darhemi (2002:6) avers that an endangered language is a language that may soon vanish, ceasing to be used as a vehicle of communication, perhaps even disappearing completely from human history. On the devastating effect of language endangerment, Usman (2014) opines that:

When speakers of a language- usually original or ethnic minority speakers abandon their language in favour of a more populous, prestigious, or economically viable one, they give up their birth right, since their language embodies their distinctive, self-defining civilization and symbolizes their exclusive contributions to human knowledge and development. When a language dies, an irreplaceable intellectual and social wealth of the people also dies, and the larger society's pool of educational, social and cultural values is diminished. (p. 10)

To make this point clear, Fishman (1997) points out that it is not because languages are not being taught in schools or lack official status that make them to be endangered but that they become endangered because they lack informal intergenerational transmission and informal daily life support. In support of Fishman's argument, Wurm (1998) recognized a five level model of language status. These levels are: (i) Potentially endangered (ii) Endangered (iii) Seriously endangered (iv) Moribund and (v) Extinct.

Grimes (2001) reports that at a colloquium held in Germany in 2000, linguists distinguished different stages of language endangerment, thus:

Critically endangered: Very few speakers, all 70 years old and great-grandparent age.

Severely endangered: Speakers are only 40 years old and older, grandparent age.

Endangered: Speakers are only 20 years old and older, parent age.

Eroding: Speakers are some children and older people. Other children do not speak it.

Stable but threatened: All children and older people are speakers, but few in number.

Safe: Not endangered. Language is expected to be learned by all children and all others in the ethnic group.

NOW's (2000) report is of the view that language endangerment arises in situations of contact between groups. Contact involves not only an exchange of cultural elements and products, but also of cultural prestige, which is often correlated with different degrees of technological advancement. There are six major characteristics of an endangered language, according to Bomgbose (2011):

- Very few speakers remaining, most of them old.
- No longer used for any meaningful purpose in the community.
- Not being transmitted to the younger generation.
- No orthography or written materials in it.
- Language shift has taken place such that the language has been or is being replaced by another language.
- On the verge of extinction.

The above view shows that when a language is moving gradually towards extinction as a result of the users' attitude, it is an indication that a culture is going out of existence. It is a pointer that the story of a people is about to be lost. Bole language with its rich culture of aphorisms, proverbs, folklore, folktale, oral poetry, oral tradition, moonlight stories, songs, panegyric, praise, and others is gradually losing its relevance and emphasis. This brings forth the pressing need that all hands must be on deck in order to revive the endangered languages

6. METHODOLOGY:

The study adopted a qualitative approach and data were collected using interview. The data were collected from the native speakers of Bole language, with particular focus on the use of the language or otherwise outside the home domain. Fifty speakers of the language who hailed from both Fika and Potiskum of Yobe state and were undergoing their degree programmes from various faculties at Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University (UMYU) and Al-Qalam University, Katsina (AUK) both in Katsina state. Thirty of these were males while the remaining twenty are female students. A voice recorder was used to make the interview easier for the researcher in the cause of conducting his research.

Majority of the students interviewed did not understand and speak their indigenous language and generally do not use it in their interactions with friends. They were, however, shocked when told that their language might soon be endangered and might not survive in the next century. Further explanations as to the indices of endangerment, especially the lack of generational transmission caused confusion among many of the respondents who prayed "God forbid" such a fate on their language and pretend to prevent it from going into extinction.

7. DISCUSSIONS:

The result of the research conducted using interview as a source for data collection revealed that 25% of the respondents feel more comfortable chatting with their Bole friends in social media in Hausa and 12.5% in English. Moreover, 50% of them prefer both Hausa and English, while 12.5 opt for Hausa and Bole as their means of chatting. This shows that, none use Bole among them. Similarly, in response to the second question, 75% of the respondents converse with their friends in Hausa while 12.5%, English. More so, 12.5% combine the two (Hausa and English) in their conversation. In response to third question, the statistics reveals that 25% of the respondents prefer listening to Hausa music, 12.5% Bole, and 40.5% in English while 22.5% go for those sung in English and Bole languages respectively.

Also, when asked whether they can list at least three Bole performers, only 25% of them did so while the remaining 75% could not mention even a single performer. In the same vein, when the respondents were asked whether they partook in performing songs like Bayadajiji and Leloganjonni in their childhood, only 37.5% of them did partake while the whole 62.5% answered with a capital "NO". Furthermore, when asked to write their names and addresses in Bole language, only 12.5% did so. However, 75% could not do so while the other 12.5% tried to write their names only but failed to write their addresses. Moreover, when the respondents were given one minute to give a story on any topic of their choice in Bole language, only 12.5% of them did write. The rest, unfortunately, could not even make an attempt. Finally, in response to the question as to whether they make any attempt in maintaining the language in the campuses through such activities like cultural day, Yobe day etc, 50% of them responded negatively while the other 50% only pretended that they are in the process of doing so.

8. WAY FORWARD:

In order to revive the dwindling nature of Bole language many hands must be put on deck on ensuring the successful implementation of this effort. To begin with, government at the state and local levels has a lot to do in ensuring the implementation of the mother tongue instruction in early classes of the primary school by providing equipment and aids that will facilitate it. Readers, text books and teachers handbooks written in Bole for all subjects studied in classes 1-3 need to be brought to life and made available to teachers for use. Similarly, since "the fate of a language lies in the hands of the owners of the language themselves and their will to make it survive" as Bomgbose

(1993:29) has rightly expressed, parents should be made to understand that they hold the key to the prevention of language endangerment through bringing up their children to speak their indigenous language and using it at home. On the same vein, the use of Bole language to write in both offices and schools would help to preserve it. As such, works on Bole language written by scholars (Gimba and Ibrizimow 1994, 2000 on Bole Verb Morphology, *Bole Language and Documentation Unit BOLDU Report I*, Glossary: Bole – English and the host of other scholarly Bole writings) should be exposed and made available for the young ones at their disposal to pick up and use. This is essential because writing is one of the most important activities of a literate society and has incalculable influence on humanity as it is a common instrument for dissemination of knowledge (Otagburagu, 1997). Similarly, conscious efforts must be made to use the language at home and in neighborhoods. This way, the Bole language will be revitalized and its loyalty will be enhanced.

Other factors responsible for revitalising Bole language include;

- a) Endogamous marriage practices
- b) Maintenance of traditional religion/cultural pride
- c) Existence of orthography
- d) Access to media

Summarily, Adeiyongo in Orkar (2006:1) reveals that, "...when a language dies, the people who speak it also die." It is therefore important for Bolawa to guard their native language jealously by ensuring its survival at all cost because one way in which human have right to maintain and secure their culture and existence is through the use of their languages.

9. CONCLUSION:

The whole discussion in this paper, as broached above, has dealt greatly with the research conducted in the linguistic diversity as a tool for language endangerment; towards the revitalisation of Bole language in Nigeria. Through this paper, reviews have been made on the related literature which includes the concept of historical background of Bole language, linguistic diversity and language endangerment. This is followed by the research methodology, the discussion of the data and, finally, way forward. More research is therefore needed in this area in order to fill in the remaining gaps.

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APPENDIX:

THE SUBJECTS ARE INTERVIEWED ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. If you are chatting with your Bole friends in social media, do you feel more comfortable chatting in Hausa, English or Bolanci?
2. In which language do you converse more often with your Bole friends on campus?
3. If you were to listen to music, which one would you prefer; Hausa, English or Bole?
4. Can you give me three Bole performers you know?
5. During your childhood, did you partake in playing songs like Bayadajiji and Leloganjonni?
6. Can you write your name and address in Bolanci?
7. Can you give one minute story in Bole language on any topic of your choice?
8. What effort do you make in ensuring the maintenance of Bole language on campus?