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Language Choice and Family Language Policy in Inter-Ethnic Marriages in South-Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

Ensuring continuity in the intergenerational transmission of language is a crucial element in the process of its maintenance (Fishman, 1991). The family has been identified as the bedrock of such social transmission thus raising questions about language choice which usually ignites emotional reactions especially in inter-ethnic marriages. This paper investigates the issue of language socialization and language choice in inter-ethnic marriages from a macro-sociolinguistic perspective involving the intersection of Efik-Ibibio, Igbo and Lokaa couples and children who are products of these unions, given that parents make decisions with regard to the family linguistic choices and children are the agents of socialization and change in language ecology and family dynamics. The study is rooted in Hyme's (1962) theory of ethnography of speaking which is concerned with the linguistic resources people use in context and the socially situated uses and meaning of language; what language to use in what place, to whom and upon what occasion etc and Giles' (1979) socio-psychological theory of accommodation which seeks to explain cognitive adjustments in the choice of language adopted by children. The study discovers that the motivation for indigenous language transmission is weaned as the family does not provide the bond to foster sufficient indigenous languages activities, therefore, children raised in inter-ethnic marriages are not balanced bilinguals. The study has implications for language shift and maintenance in Nigeria.

Key words: Code-mixing/switching; Family language policy; Inter-ethnic marriages; Language choice; Linguistic ecology; Multilingualism

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INTRODUCTION

Languages are systematically allocated to specific social situation as they are spoken by different groups of people in different social domains. Language choice in inter-tribal marriages is based on a number of social influences and subjective sensibilities. Inter-tribal marriages in Nigeria is a common social reality given the over 500 languages in existence in the country (Grimes, 2001, p27). There are 250 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria and this attracts very strong interaction and contact of people from different ethnic backgrounds. On this note, therefore, there are indications that people from different ethnic groups, speaking different languages have the potential of marrying one another. Over the years, these inter-tribal marriages have increasingly been explored and recognised as a key issue in sustaining unity in diversity in the Nigerian context. It has brought about cultural assimilation, enacted multiculturalism in diverse positive ways and also opened up borders for inter-ethnic cooperation, strengthened exchange of cultural ideas and oral traditions. In addition to these, inter-ethnic marriages also have far-reaching implications for language transmission, shift and maintenance. The home is one of the informal domains for the transmission of the mother tongue. In the wake of the conflict in the family where the parents have different linguistic backgrounds, what are the factors that determine the choice of the children's language at home. This is the research question which this paper seeks to answer. According to Spolsky (2004), the study of language policy includes analysis of language

belief and ideologies (what people think about language), language practice (what people do with language) and efforts to modify or influence those practices through any kind of intervention, planning, or management. The concept of family language policy is understood as the decisions that guide the use of language within the home from members of the family. King and Logan-Terry (2008) argue that the major shift in parental orientations towards child language learning and bilingualism is also apparent in the area of family language policy, hence the present study.

As we look at language choice and family language policy, it is important to examine the languages used in this study by the couples – Efik, Ibibio, Igbo and Lokaa. Efik belongs to the Niger-Congo family and is sub-classified as a lower Cross-language of the Delta-Cross sub-family (Faraclas, 1989) that is spoken predominantly in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria. Efik is one of the so-called minority languages in Nigeria. It is spoken by a population of over 2 million people as first languages and 3.5 million people as a second language in Nigeria, and it has had a widespread influence along the entire south-eastern coast of Nigeria. In Cross River State where it is mainly spoken, it is given some recognition in the mass media, education, public mobilization and orientation on government policies and programmes (Mensah, 2010).

Ibibio is a major language of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. It constitutes the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, after the three major ones-Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. They are about 4 million speakers who are located in South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Ibibio, just like Efik belongs to one of languages known as lower Cross. It is as well referred to as Ibibiod languages. Genetically, the Ibibio language belongs to the Benue-Congo sub-family which in turn belongs to the Niger-Congo family, one of the largest families of languages in Africa (Greenberg 1963; Essien, 1990). Grimes 2002 estimates the Igbo population to be 15 million. The Igbo are situated in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, Williamson and Blench (2000) classify the Igbo language under the West Benue-Congo family which corresponds to the former Eastern Kwa as seen by Greenberg. They fall under the Igboid. The language is spoken predominantly in the following five States in Nigeria; Anambra, Imo Enugu, Ebonyi and Abia. It has mutually intelligible dialect spoken within the five states. It is also widely spoken in Rivers and Delta States.

Udoh and Okon (2008) state that Lokaa is spoken by the Yakurr people in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. They have an estimated population of 1.13 million first language speakers. It also belongs to the Niger-Congo group of families. It is an Upper Cross language. The language not fully developed in terms of having published literary materials and entrenching scholarship.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on language planning or management and language choice involving couples with varied linguistic backgrounds. We have chosen three families with the intersection of Efik with Ibibio, Igbo and Lokaa as the reference point. Within each family, we sought to know the parents' linguistic ideologies or family policies on language towards a successful socialization of their children. The primary method of data collection was personal interviews and audio recordings of family conversations. We also adopted participant observations which yielded ethnographic information in respect of linguistic ecology or repertoire of family members. In each family, we interacted with the parents separately and study a particular child given that every child in each family tends to display the same pattern of multilingualism. Three children were, therefore, observed and studied in the three families randomly.

The oral interviews were arranged mostly on weekends with family members at their best convenient time. Permission was obtained to observe each family in their natural occurring interactive sessions where most of the recordings took place. The different families studied are based in the city of Calabar. The first family is a permanent resident in the town and has its root there. The other families are immigrants who have relocated to the city at different points in their career and business lives. Couples in the first two families are civil servants while the third are business magnets dealing on liquor. All their children are schooled in Calabar and the Efik language naturally becomes their language of immediate environment. The mothers' language behaviour with the children was observed separately from the fathers'. The nannies' language choice with the children was observed in two of the families. The parents' mode of interaction with children was noted and the children's language socialization process within the neighbourhood was also recorded. The socio-biographical data on the couples and the selected child studied in each family such as age, occupation, educational background, religion etc were taken. We asked questions about the main language in each family and policies designed to promote early child bilingualism.

BACKGROUND AND THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEMS

The focus on the need to foster on the choice of language used by two people who come together in marriage with different languages to live together as one is a consequence of the conflict situations that inter-tribal marriages all over the world are facing. Several couples based in Calabar provide the data to actually verify what transpires in their marriages in terms of language use. On the surface, it appeared that language choice was never a

problem, but on close inquiry, certain discoveries were noted which will aid give data to this study.

A question now arises, does language choice in such marriages portray positive or negative consequences and are they insensible? It is in recognition that the causes and consequences of language choice transcend ethnic, regional and national boundaries, that it has been made an issue of global concern thus the present interest in this paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study applies sociolinguistics rules to a non-linguistic context. The question that comes to mind is why sociolinguistics? The answer is simple. Sociolinguistics has become an increasing, important field of study as certain cultures around the world expand their communication base and interpersonal relations to reflect the dynamic nature of language. According to Wolfram (1998), the basic notion underlying sociolinguistics is quite simple: language use symbolically represents fundamental dimensions of social behaviour and human interaction. He further explains that the ways in which language reflects behaviour can often be complex and subtle. Furthermore, the relationship between language and society affects a wide range of encounters - from broadly based international relations to narrowly defined interpersonal relations. Sociolinguistics, therefore, has applications for the study of language choice and its resolutions, since it deals with issues within the purview of interpersonal relations.

We are using two models: - the grammar of context and the rules socio-psychological theory of accommodation. The first one developed by Hymes (1974) analyses a situation to determine what kind of rules for interaction are assumed by members of a certain culture. This will aid us determine the rules about who says 'what', to 'whom', 'when', 'where' and 'how'. These rules are usually tacit (unspoken) and differ from culture to culture (Wolf, 2009, p.298). The second theory has found its correlates in both the sociolinguistic notion of appropriateness and Le Page's theory of linguistic behaviour. This paper chooses the later model as the framework for the discussion of the issues under consideration. The choice is due to its wider application to interpersonal relations as compared to Hymes' model, which is more adaptable to intercultural situations.

The above-named models aid the explanation of possible language choice resolution strategies. The socio-psychological theory of accommodation by Giles (1979), was successfully adopted in Trudgill (1992) to explain the necessary adjustment that are sometimes made in speech and other aspects of linguistic behaviour. Giles' theory briefly put, attempts to explain temporary or long term adjustment in speech (with special reference to

pronunciation) and other aspects of linguistic behaviour in terms of a drive to approximate one's language to that of one's interlocutors. Apart from resources of social desirability, this adjustment is necessary if the speaker wishes to identify with his audience and/or demonstrate good will towards them. Accommodation may often take the form of reducing frequency of socially stigmatized linguistic forms in the presence of speakers of higher prestige varieties. Giles further explains that theory allows for the opposite effect: the distancing of one's language from that of the speakers one wishes to disassociate from, or in order to assert one's own identity.

Accommodation theory is desirable for the analysis of our data in the sense that it explains certain principles emanating from linguistic ecology which can help direct and guide linguistic behaviours, whether negative or positive and this is aimed at resolving the language chosen by couples who have different L1 backgrounds. From the sociolinguistic standpoint, the correlate of accommodation theory is the notion of appropriateness, which states, that different situations, different topics and different genre require different linguistic styles and registers. For example, a man would prefer his wife to learn to speak his language so that his children will learn to speak his L1. At other times, the woman will prefer to speak English language or Nigeria pidgin instead of learning to speak her husband's L1. Viewed from this perspective, conflict situations are special situation involving language choice. Thus appropriateness becomes a relevant factor in negotiation to resolve which language to use in communication in an inter-tribal marriage contexts.

In dealing with appropriateness especially as it pertains to choice, we prefer to use the notion of L2 instead of L1, in our case, English or Nigerian Pidgin language instead of Efik/Ibibio, Efik/Igbo or Efik/Lokaa amongst others. Language is used to negotiate, create, and establish ethnic and social identities within a framework of social interaction (Offiong, 2004, p.217). She opines that in the Nigerian context, there is the need for the use of any of the language codes such as English, Efik, Igbo, Ibibio, Nigerian pidgin and Lokaa as vehicle of discourse within the goal of achieving cooperation amongst the couples in question and their children.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILES OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS

The three couples and their families selected for this study are Ekenyong and Uduak (Efik-Ibibio), Larry and Nkechi (Efik-Igbo) and Obeten and Bassey (Lokaa and Efik). The three families reside in Calabar, where Efik is the language of the immediate environment. In the ensuing discussion, we examine the sociolinguistic profile of each family.

Ekenyong is a fifty year old Efik man married to

Uduak, a forty year old Ibibio woman. They have been married for 20 years. Ekpenyong speaks only Efik and English while Uduak speaks Ibibio and Efik in addition to English. They have two children – Daniel and Amanda. The children are multilingual because they speak Efik, Ibibio and English relatively. At home they speak Efik when their dad is around. When only mum is at home, they speak Ibibio with her and at school they speak English. They use three different varieties or code depending on the circumstances. Uduak speaks the three codes like her children very well.

Larry is a forty-five year old man and a multilingual. He speaks Efik as his L1, Igbo and English as second and third languages respectively. Nkechi, his wife is a bilingual and speaks Igbo and English as her L1 and L2 respectively. They have four children who are all boys. They live in Calabar where Efik is the dominant language. Certain social factors and contexts turn out to be important

and useful and this accounts for the language choice in the family. In general family activities, English and Nigerian pidgins are used for communication. When Larry and Nkechi are together, they communicate with Igbo. The four boys since they are under age 15 and interact with their friends within the environment in Efik, Igbo, English and Nigeria pidgin.

Obeten is a 35 year old Ugep man and speaks Lokaa and English Language fluently. His wife, Bassey is 30 years old from Akpabuyo and speaks Efik and English. They are both bilingual and have two children, a boy and a girl aged ten and eight respectively. Obeten and Bassey communicate in English always. It is only when their relations visit that they speak either Lokaa or Efik depending on who has visited. Their children communicate only in English without speaking either Efik or Lokaa. Table 1 summarises the language practice of the children of these couples:

Table 1
Language Practice of Family Members

Family member	Daniel	Victor	Stella
Sex	Male	Male	Female
Age	10yrs	8yrs	8yrs
Place of birth	Calabar	Aba	Ugep
Duration of stay in Calabar	From birth	6yrs	5yrs
Assumed L1	Efik	Efik	Lokaa
Father's L1	Efik	Efik	Lokaa
Mother's L1	Ibibio	Igbo	Efik
Language spoken with parents	English	English	English/Pidgin
Language spoken with siblings	English	English	English
Language spoken in neighbourhood	English/Efik/Ibibio	English/Efik/Igbo/NP	English/Lokaa/Efik/NP
Language spoken at school	English	English	English

ANALYSIS

Ekpenyong speaks Efik and English fluently Uduak speaks Ibibio, Efik and English fluently; Daniel speaks English fluently but still has a degree of problem speaking Efik or Ibibio. Efik is the language of their father; Ibibio is the language of their mother. The children are indirectly forced to align with the theory of appropriateness, where they use the notion of L2 instead of the L1 of either their father or their mother. Certainly a problem of ethnic and social identity arises in this marriage of an Efik man and an Ibibio woman. The good thing about this marriage of an Efik man and an Ibibio woman is that the two languages are mutually intelligible. One understands the other very well. Naturally one could have referred to the two languages as one being a dialect of the other, but for

political and social convenience, the two ethnic groups never agree or accept the fact that one language could be a dialect of the other. It makes it even more volatile for the children to choose any of the L1 as their mother tongue. However, it is an advantage to the children of this family because their repertoire includes three varieties of English, Efik and Ibibio, but they more or less choose the English variety which is analyzed as an inter-tribal marriage social factor.

The style the family adopts in communication is based on the English code when they are all together. There is typically nothing, wrong with this except that it breeds the social consequence of native language neglect. In this family, there is no explicit language planning but simple choice based on practice and ideology (Spolsky, 2005). No deliberate intervention is initiated by the parents

to allow for quality input in any two languages. The children's productive competence in only strengthened in English because the parents believe that there are economic, educational and employment benefits that go with a majority language like English.

A study of the second family presents much wider sociolinguistic domains with more codes appropriate to each domain. It selects different codes in different situations and their use of English, Igbo, Nigerian pidgin, and Efik fall into a pattern of different domains. For this family they have considerable areas of language use which is unspecified. There is just no prediction about their linguistics repertoire. We are able to observe from this family the different domains that barred prediction. We noticed three important social factors in code choice – participants, setting and topic. We capture broad generalization about the family. This observation draws us to a very simple model summarizing the norms of language use for the family. This model is particularly useful for bilingual and multilingual families, especially in inter-tribal marriages.

This information over-simplifies the complexity of multilingual interaction in a family. This model ensures our understanding of which domains and varieties are relevant to language choice. Holmes (2008, p.23) says this model summarizes what we know about the patterns of languages in a 'family' (emphasis mine). It is not an account of the choices a person must make or of the process they go through in selecting a code. It is simply a description of the family's norms which can be altered or added to if we discover more information. This entire model is captured in the accommodation theory which is the notion of appropriateness. This theory explicitly provides a clear basis for comparing patterns of code choice in different families. Models make it easy to compare the varieties appropriate in similar domains in different inter-tribal marriage families. This model describes which code or codes are usually selected for use in different situations.

In the third family, there are restrictions in the codes or varieties used in communication at home. The code choice in this family is specific because of the social factors involved. The regularity of the English choice is dependent on their social class. Their class distinction makes them select the variety or code they use. Compared to the previous families the third family is restricted because of the social dimension in this family. It has a status relationship which makes them select the code they use, and this has to do with high status. This status situation gives a dimension of formality. The family is strongly English affective, because the parents have not made any effort to either learn any of their spouses' languages or encourage the children to learn to speak either Efik or Lokaa. It is the collective effort of the parents that is suppose to aid the children communicate

in either Lokaa or Efik. In this family, particularly with the children, code switching or code mixing is totally absent. Here also, the accommodation theory aids express the knowledge and behaviour of the children in the family. The choice of English reflects the behaviour of the family at home and within the society. The last two families just like the first also uphold the indispensability of English in sustaining their children's linguistic and personal development. They argue that English has a high prestige in the neighbourhood, a privilege denied the indigenous languages, which they couples believe have scars. One of the parents also upholds that it is risky to encourage bilingualism at the current stage of the child's development as the mother tongue would interfere in her performance in English.

Our generalization here is that the interactional outcome of language choice in these families is that English is imposed overtly or covertly on the children as their first language. There is low level of proficiency with the ability to actively use other languages thus, the respectively families do not promote early children's bilingualism in spite of the fact that these children have different exposure levels to the respective languages which they encounter.

SPEECH SITUATION

We have been able to observe in the three examples that language choice can be triggered by several factors, including the setting and purpose of communication, the person being addressed, the social relations amongst others. Using Finnegan's (2004, p.331) definition of speech situation which is "the coming together of significant situational factors such as purpose, topic and social relations, then each speech situation by bilinguals will generally allow for only one or the two languages to be used, we can determine reasons for language choice in an inter-tribal marriage like the three examples we have used.

Communication and language choice takes consequence of purpose while choosing code in a bilingual or a multilingual family setting. Also the activities and goals of communication is another factor that allows for demonstrational vacuity. That is, the social relationship depends on the axiom and at some other time by the vacuity of free variation. Particularly for the children, apart from the third family, the language choice postulates that one may or may not wish to use a particular code or variety. Again apart from family influence, different activities may have influence on language choice.

Setting also influences switch from one language to another, depending on the topic, interest and location. Generally, family location influences language choice as could be seen in the second and third families. Location goes hand in hand with mode. Participants, that is, the

identity of the speaker at a particular time influences language choice. In the first family, the identity of the father and mother and that of the children is relevant and their roles make them more multilingual than the other families. Generally put, various aspects of speech situation come together in a particular choice of language variety. In each situation in the three families - whether a general one such as home or a specific one such as discussing with strangers - only one variety is usually appropriate. The issue of getting accustomed to using a particular variety makes language choice peculiar. Also the setting is another speech situation that influences language choice in a family. This speech situation strongly shows why there are code switching in examples 1 and 2 which is very common throughout the world, but absent in the third family.

The recognition that there are settings and speech situations in language choice in inter-tribal marriages in which one language or another is appropriate has a direct parallel in intra-tribal marriages, in which varieties of a single language constitute the entire linguistic repertoire. Linguistic repertoire allocates different language varieties to different speech situations. There are marked variation in the forms of language used for different activities, addresses, topics and settings. By choosing among the varieties, situational variation is both created and mirrored (Finegan, 2004, p.333).

THE IMPLICATIONS OF INTER-TRIBAL MARRIAGES ON LANGUAGE CHOICE

At the sociolinguistic level code-switching and code-mixing offers useful insights in understanding the mechanism which underlines the processing of which codes or register one has to choose from. Mensah (2010) who quotes Ahukanne (1990) maintains that code-mixing serves as a springboard for the foundation of theories and hypothesis about the representation of two or more languages in the brain. Our interest in this paper hovers around which language, code or register any family member will use at a particular time when communicating, especially at home. The viewpoint strictly is contained in the accommodation theory. Here, the "switch" or "mix" depends on the cognitive competence of the family members that are bilingual or multilingual. We have also examined the acquisition of the languages the children possess as their L1. This depends on which languages they were exposed to in their different families. In the course of language development, one of the two opposing views associated with language development aided us determine language choice. The opposing views are Skinner's behavioural or mechanical theory and Chomsky's mentalist or cognitive theory. Our observation with the three families used, showed that the cognitive theory was more potential in identifying which of the

codes the children acquired more and why they used the languages they communicated with more frequently.

In the families studied, our interest were not just on the language the children acquire and which one they used most while communicating, but we also examined the language development of the fathers and the mothers. It was only in the first family that the mother made a deliberate attempt to learn the language of the father. She went further in ensuring that the children could speak the three languages they were exposed to though at different levels of competence. We observed based on Hoffman (1991, p.104-105) which submits that "the older bilingual child and adult bilingual are credited with possessing two different language systems which they can keep apart; they can switch from one to the other, and they can show code-mixes". The cognitive competence within the family members varies in the different languages both for the adults and the children.

At most point all the family members studied were subconscious or unconscious of the language they used at any point of their discourse. They hardly knew when the mixed- this was on close observation over a period of time. Most times, the first and second families were the ones that code mixed more often subconsciously. When they used English as their form of discourse at home, they were mostly conscious of their innate capacity. However, the first family were the ones that were subconscious in their use of English as a form of discourse without taking cognizance of the fact that they could code-mix. The children of this family are more innately developed in English language than Efik or Lokaa.

As we carried out this study, code-mixing and code-switching provided the veritable raw materials we required to investigate and study the three families. This is because we really observed their use of the different languages each time they communicated amongst themselves as adults, as children, as the whole family and with the people outside the family setting. This aided us know and determine which codes they used at different times and why. We came to understand also how and why the children acquired the different codes and we determined their code- use with the goal of achieving appropriate language use within the social milieu.

In the course of this study, several questions crossed our minds in respect of the children's linguistic repertoire amongst which were these two;

- (a) In each of these families, which was the host language? and
- (b) Which language stood out as the most indigenous to these families?

The major concern that popped up these questions where to determine if the children of these families shared a mark of imperfect linguistic knowledge in any of the codes ? or was there some level of linguistic impurity as it concerned any other languages used amongst members

of these different facilities? The fact of language mixing prompted Mensah (2010, p.253) to state that “some schools of thought and many custodians of indigenous languages and purists argue that language mixing is a negative influence on the host language. It is said to be a mark of imperfect linguistic knowledge”. Hoffmann (1991) argues that some bilinguals often view code-mixing as a form of linguistic impurity or a sign of laziness. Crystal (1987, p.363) also maintain that “monolinguals often dismiss or satirize language switching, using such pejorative labels as ‘Franglais’, ‘spainglish’ or ‘Tex-mex’...

Ahukanna (1990, p.175) confirm these views:

...against the background of campaigns and government policies to develop Nigerian languages within the long term objective of finding a nationally acceptable official language; the practice of code mixing is viewed in certain quarters as linguistic sabotage directed against indigenous languages.

He goes further to reaffirm that code-mixing could lead to pidginization of Nigeria indigenous languages. In the course of observing these families we realized that families in the second family used much of Nigerian pidgin because it was more convenient to express themselves with this at home and their immediate environment, than use any of the L1 of the parent. Language choice in inter-tribal marriages apart from encouraging code-switching and code mixing, fathom up and made us interested in the component of domain. In our observations, we noticed congruency within the domain. There were interactions in certain domain that were predictable while others were not. The implication of language choice within all three families were that, the social factors affecting all of them encouraged communication at home using the English language and the Nigerian pidgin. None of the observed families settled for any indigenous language as their major form of communication at home. This means that inter-ethnic marriages do not produced balanced bilinguals. One of the benefits of balanced bilingualism according to Lididem (2011) is the development of balanced identity. Acquiring the language of both parents will demonstrate allegiance with both ethnic divide and culture by having one's social network and acquaintances, and by partaking in the daily life, festivals and identities of the two ethnic nationalities.

Another implication of the present scenario is the direct relegation of the indigenous languages by these families to the background. There is no family language reproduction which is a principal cause of language shift. We argue that the mother tongue or the language of the environment should be the first language a child acquires and uses at home before attending school. It is a natural instrument of thought and communication and a fountain head of creativity. In the educational setting, the mother tongue has enormous advantages; it enables the child to develop higher cognitive skills and structured input. It enhances

continuity in the child's learning process and maximizes his intellectual development. The mother tongue also reflects the child's social and cultural orientation as well as traditional wisdom paradigms that depict the experience of life. Unless the family can produce indigenous languages speakers who can find everyday purposes for these neglected languages, they may be doomed for extinction. In this concern, family language policy should be tailored towards ensuring vibrant survival of the mother tongue and indigenous cultures in this era of globalization and westernization in response to the popular maxim; “If you do not speak your language, you lose it”.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the multilingual features in the ambience of macro-sociolinguistics as it concerns language choice in inter-tribal marriage in the south Eastern part of Nigeria. We notice the influence of English on the multilingual children who are products of such marriages. The Efik people, the Igbo people, the Ibibio people and the Lokaa people completely identified with the English language for education, administrative survival, and the use of any of the other indigenous languages had become a difficult tasks. (Offiong, 2005, p.135).

The three house-holds were either bilingual or multilingual, but “the criterion of mutual intelligibility’ and other purely linguistic criteria, were, therefore, of less importance in the use of different codes” (Trudgill, 1983, p.15). This led to use of English or Nigeria pidgin as a variety. English is the language used in administration and governance in Nigeria. The children of all the families had language socialization. They acquired all the languages spoken by their parents easily, but did not use them in everyday discourse. This was because, they did not have what Spolsky (1998) called ‘balance bilingualism’ or ‘multilingualism’. The children’s bilingual or multilingual competence were ‘co-ordinate’. Their selection of codes, especially when speaking to themselves within the family carried a wealth of social meaning. They all chose different codes as a way of negotiating social relations amongst themselves.

Olaoye (2007, p.120) confirms that language choice is broad and has code-switching, code-mixing, code-shifting, ethnography and domain as concepts. We used all of these concepts in the course of our analysis. Of all the sociolinguistic profiles noticed in this study, language contact is one of the most veritable aspects that were common amongst all the families studied. Offiong (2004, p.219) explains that “instances of deviations from the norms of a language occasioned by contact had permeated all strata of linguistic performance viz, phonology, syntax and lexis”. This, therefore, confirms the macro-sociolinguistics concerns. In all the families, several linguistic variables were discovered, especially

phonetically – in ways they pronounced certain words, their accent and intonation problems set-in in some cases. The variables also noticed were mostly social and sometimes stylistics.

A number of conclusions have been drawn from this study, some of them confirming the findings of other studies. Here, we can rightly affirm that some of the indigenous languages are at the verge of extinction. Apart from Igbo which is studied in universities in Nigeria, Efik, Ibibio and Lokaa, require conscious efforts to be kept alive. It is, therefore, necessary to state that families (especially of intertribal orientations) should encourage the use of their mother-tongue in education, administration and even in business. This paper also serves as a wake-up call to minority language speakers the world over, Africans and Nigerians in particular to encourage the use of their mother tongue.

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