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AN ASSESSMENT OF INDIGENOUS NIGERIAN LANGUAGES AND FACTORS OF LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT: CAN THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES SURVIVE?

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Abstract

There have been serious concerns over the endangerment of small and indigenous languages all over the world. These languages are fast losing their domain and functions, which signals their impending death. This study examines the degree of the endangerment of a group of some related speech forms tagged Arigidi Cluster spoken in small communities in South-West Nigeria. The study was conducted in line with the UNESCO expert model designed specifically for measuring the endangerment level of any language. Findings from data collected through interviews with native speakers of the speech forms revealed that they are critically endangered because their speakers now prefer Yorùbá and English to the speech forms due to social factors. This study further confirmed the fears being expressed over the possible death of several worlds' languages in the next century. The study concluded that saving languages like those under Arigidi Cluster will definitely be a herculean task.

Keywords

language endangerment, *Arigidi Cluster*, UNESCO expert model, social factors

UNA VALORACIÓN DE LAS LENGUAS INDÍGENAS DE NIGERIA Y DE LOS FACTORES DE LAS LENGUAS AMENAZADAS: ¿PUEDEN LAS LENGUAS INDÍGENAS SOBREVIVIR?

Resumen

Existen serias preocupaciones sobre la amenaza que experimentan las lenguas minoritarias y las indígenas en todo el mundo. Estas lenguas están perdiendo rápidamente su dominio y funciones, lo que

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señalan su muerte inminente. Este estudio examina el grado de amenaza de un grupo de formas relacionadas con la oralidad, etiquetadas como *Arigidi Cluster* y habladas en pequeñas comunidades del sur-oeste de Nigeria. El estudio se realizó de acuerdo con el modelo experto de la UNESCO, diseñado específicamente para medir el nivel de amenaza de cualquier idioma. Los resultados obtenidos de los datos recogidos a través de entrevistas con hablantes nativos de las formas de habla revelaron que están en peligro crítico debido a que sus hablantes prefieren ahora yorùbá e inglés debido a factores sociales. Este estudio confirmó los temores que se han expresado sobre la posible muerte de diversas lenguas del mundo en el siglo próximo. El estudio concluye que salvar lenguas como las llamadas *Arigidi Cluster* será sin duda una tarea hercúlea.

Keywords

lenguas amenazadas, *Arigidi Cluster*, Model experto de la UNESCO, factores sociales

1. Introduction

The concept of language endangerment (which eventually leads to language death) a process which is usually gradual has been viewed and defined in various ways by linguists. The general consensus and view is that it is the decreasing competence in the use of language particularly the mother tongue of individual speakers. Brezinger (1992) observed that a language is considered extinct when there is no longer a speech community using the language. The issue of language death is not a recent phenomenon; it has been with us for decades. Swadesh (1994, quoted in Tsunoda 2005: 4) noted that in the Roman Empire, Latin replaced a lot of languages including Etruscan. Adegbija (2000: 78) observed that the European colonization exerted the most damaging impact on language diversity in the world. Language death however comes with a price. According to McMahon (1993: 285), gradual language death is defined as "a transfer of allegiance of part of a population from a language which has been native in the area to a more recently introduced language in which the indigenous people have become bilingual". The implication of this is that as the people gradually give up their language so they do give up their culture since language and culture are coterminous. A lot of questions have been asked and different hypotheses have been proposed as means of stopping the menace of language endangerment. In spite of all these efforts, Moseley (2010) observed that the number of languages estimated to be facing endangerment keeps increasing every

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second. However, the pertinent question which requires a factual answer is: can anything really be done to save these indigenous endangered languages? This present study examined the case of a group of minority languages often referred to as 'speech forms' in Nigeria with focus on factors of endangerment in an attempt to answer this vital question.

2. Ethnolinguistic background of Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and a multilingual country with over one hundred and sixty million people spreading across over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. The actual number of languages in Nigeria has not been ascertained as different scholars from different sources quote different figures. Ethnologue (2009) puts the estimated number of languages in the country at over five hundred (500). Nigeria is dominated by three major ethnic groups, Hausa-Fulani in the North which accounts for 29%, Yorùbá in the West which accounts for 21% and Igbo in the East which account for 18%. There are other minority tribes like Ijaw with 6,5%, Yakur 4%, Ibibio 4.5%, Kanuri 4%, Annang 3.5%, Etsakor 2.5%, Tiv 2.5% and Efik 2%. Presently, Nigeria does not have a single functional national language; however, the three major languages (Hausa, Yorùbá and Ìgbò) function as regional languages in their respective regions. Each of these languages is used as a medium of instruction at the elementary and secondary schools levels in their respective regions and is also studied as a degree in the universities. In Nigeria, English is the official language which is used for all official purposes; it is the medium of instruction from secondary school to the university level. It must be emphasized without mincing words that English is the only unifying language in Nigeria through which the multi-ethnic Nigerians with diverse languages interact and communicate. The implication of this is that in Nigeria, it is English a foreign language that actually plays the role of a national language.

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3. A brief classification history of the *Arigidi Cluster* ethnolinguistic group

The group of speech forms tagged *Arigidi Cluster* (Ethnologue 2009) belong to the Niger-Congo family. They are spoken in small towns in Àkókó region of the present Oǹdó state in Southwest Nigeria where Yorùbá is the dominant language. This group has a controversial and complex history in terms of sub-language classification.[1] Following the work of Williamson (1973), Akinkugbe (1976) carried out a comparison of lexical items among the speech forms and submitted that 80% vocabulary exists among them, scholars have been trying unsuccessfully to group them under a language subfamily and till this moment a consensus name is yet to be agreed upon for the subgroup. This is not such a big surprise because indigenous languages in Nigeria have received very little or no attention in terms of recognition and documentation on the part of the government.

Apart from the three main languages Hausa, Ìgbò and Yorùbá which are recognized as national languages, a recognition which exists only on paper, there is no serious language policy in Nigeria and the little efforts in terms of documentation of indigenous languages in Nigeria have come from studies carried out by Linguistics departments of some notable institutions like University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Ilorin and the University of Port Harcourt, Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko and the National Institute for Nigerian languages Aba among others as well as Non-governmental organization outside Nigeria like the Hans Rausing Endangered Language programme of the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London). It is because of such lackadaisical attitude towards indigenous languages that a group of speech forms is on the verge of extinction without proper documentation.

Till this moment, a consensus name is yet to be found for the group based on the fact that enough research is yet to be carried out on them. Oyetade (2007: 178) examined the level of endangerment of 'some' of the speech forms in focus here using four

[1] The first attempt to group the speech forms which include; Arigidi, Oyín, Erúṣú, and Ìgáṣí; Urò and Ọ̀jọ̀ spoken in Àjowá: and the following speech forms spoken in Òkèàgbè; Àfá, Ògè, Ìdò and Àjè was carried out by (Greenberg 1965) who grouped them under *Niger-Congo*, (Bennet & Stark 1977) referred to them as *Yoruboid*. (Capo 1989) suggested the name *Amgbɛ́*, (Hoffman 1994) called them *Northern Akoko Cluster*; (Ohiri-Anichie 2006) refers to them as *Akokoid* while (Ethnologue 2009) proposed the name *Arigidi Cluster*. Awobuluyi (personal communication) said they are dialects of a language yet to be determined. However, (Oshodi 2011) observed that they should be considered dialects of Yorùbá and suggested a new name North-Central Yorùbá for the group.

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demographic characteristics: sex, age, level of education and occupation with data collected from 1,187 respondents and concluded that the speech forms are seriously endangered and also reported that some respondents claim to be ashamed of speaking the native speech forms in public. Oke (1972: 53) complemented by Oyetade (2007: 170) observed that speakers of these speech forms also have Yorùbá as a second native language since the two are acquired almost simultaneously. Oshodi (2012) using Arigidi as a baseline observed that a lot of similarities do exist between the speech forms and Yorùbá but that the speakers are fast remodelling the structures towards Yorùbá particularly the young speakers. Also noteworthy is the fact that the speakers regard themselves as Yorùbá even though it is believed that the speech forms are *mutually unintelligible*[2] *with* standard Yorùbá.[3]

4. The present study

This study examines all the speech forms tagged Arigidi Cluster with focus on their level of endangerment by assessing those factors responsible for their endangerment through a particular model (the UNESCO expert model). It tries to see if the speech forms have any chance of survival based on the factors proposed for the assessment by this model.

4.1 Aim

The main aim of this study is to examine those factors that are responsible for language endangerment of small indigenous languages with focus on a group of related

[2]The mutual intelligibility referred to in this context applies only to the spoken form as the similarities in structure become obvious when the written forms are analyzed. As observed by Awóbùlúyì (2008), a structural study of the speech forms actually revealed a lot of similarities between standard Yorùbá and the speech forms, similarities which are difficult to notice in speech.

[3]According to Awobuluyi (1992), standard Yorùbá has a number of dialects which are structurally diverse which confirms that a speech form can be a dialect of Yorùbá and still exhibit some structural differences either from standard Yorùbá or some of its already established dialects. This is one of the reasons why Oshodi (2011) affirmed that the speech forms should be considered dialects of Yorùbá in spite of the little structural differences since they share almost 80% structural similarities with standard Yorùbá.

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indigenous speech forms in Nigeria. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What types of factors are responsible for language death?
2. Are these factors the same for indigenous endangered languages all over the world?
3. Can anything really be done to save these endangered languages?

4.2 Methodology

The study adopted the UNESCO expert model. The data were collected through structured interviews conducted with selected participants from each of the ten communities that make up the Arigidi Cluster group with focus on the factors proposed by the Model. This section will highlight and discuss these factors as well as the method of data collection, analysis and results.

4.2.1 The UNESCO Experts Model

To provide answers to the above questions, the UNESCO expert model was adopted for this study. According to Lewis (2005), the model was found reasonable and feasible after being experimented on the endangerment of over one hundred languages from different parts of the world. The UNESCO Expert model uses nine factors to assess language endangerment. They are:

1. Intergenerational language transmission;
2. Absolute numbers of speakers;
3. Proportions of speakers within the total population;
4. Loss of existing language domains;
5. Response to new domains and media;
6. Materials for language education and literacy;
7. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies;
8. Community members' attitude towards their own language; and
9. Amount and quality of documentation.

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As regards the proposal, a score will be assigned to each of the nine factors and the combined factors would then provide a measure of the level of endangerment that the speech forms are facing. As observed by Brezinger *et al.* (2003), it is important to note that all the factors should be considered in unison since a language that seems relatively secured in terms of one factor may be in serious jeopardy when other factors are considered. For each of the factors above with the exception of factor 2 (Absolute Population Number), a scale is proposed which allows the evaluator to assign a score from (0-5) for each factor. Below is a detailed description of the scoring mechanism (Tables 1-8).

Degree of endangerment	*Grade*	*Speaker population*
Safe	5	The language is used by all ages from children up.
Unsafe	4	The language is used by children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
Definitely endangered	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation up.
Severely endangered	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation up.
Critically endangered	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparent generation.
Extinct	0	There exists no speaker.

Table 1. Factor 1: Intergenerational language transmission scale

Degree of endangerment	*Grade*	*Proportion of speakers within the total reference population*
Safe	5	All speak the language.
Unsafe	4	Nearly all speak the language.
Definitely endangered	3	A majority speak the language.
Severely Endangered	3	A minority speak the language.
Critically Endangered	2	Very few speak the language.
Extinct	1	None speak the language.

Table 2. Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total reference group

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Degree of Endangerment	*Grade*	*Domains and functions*
Universal Use	5	The language is used in all domains and for all functions.
Multilingual Parity	4	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.
Dwindling Domains	3	The language is in home domains and for many functions but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.
Limited or Formal Domains	2	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions.
Highly Limited Domains	1	The language is used only in very restricted domains and for very few functions.
Extinct	0	The language is not used in any domain and for any function.

Table 3. Factor 4: Loss of existing language domains

Degree of Endangerment	*Grade*	*New domains and media accepted by the endangered language*
Dynamic	5	The language is used in all new domains.
Robust/Active	4	The language is used in most new domains.
Receptive	3	The language is used in many domains.
Coping	2	The language is used in some new domains.
Minimal	1	The language is used only in a few new domains.
Inactive	0	The language is not used in any new domains.

Table 4. Factor 5: Response to new domains and media

Grade	*Accessibility of written materials*
5	There is an established orthography, literacy tradition with grammar, dictionaries, texts, literature, and everyday media. The language is used in administration and education.
4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language. Writing in the language is not used in administration.
3	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.

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2	Written materials exist but they may only be useful for some members of the community; and for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.
1	A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written.
0	No orthography available to the community.

Table 5. Factor 6: Materials for Language Education and Literacy

Degree of support	*Grade*	*Official attitudes towards language*
Equal support	5	All languages are protected.
Differentiated support	4	Minority languages are protected primarily as the language of the private domains. The use of the language is prestigious.
Passive assimilation	3	No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.
Active assimilation	2	Government encourages assimilation to the dominant language. There is no protection for minority languages.
Forced assimilation	1	The dominant language is the sole official language, while non-dominant languages are neither recognized nor protected.
Prohibition	0	Minority languages are prohibited.

Table 6. Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language attitude and policies

Grade	*Community members' attitude towards language*
5	*All* members value their language and wish to see it promoted.
4	*Most* members support language maintenance.
3	*Many* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
2	*Some* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
1	Only *a few* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
0	*No one* cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language.

Table 7. Factor 8 Community members' attitude towards their own language

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Nature of Documentation	*Grade*	*Language documentation*
Superlative	5	There are comprehensive grammars and dictionaries, extensive texts; constant flow of language materials. Abundant annotated high quality audio and video recordings exist.
Good	4	There is one good grammar and a number of adequate grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and occasionally updated everyday media; adequate annotated high quality audio and video recordings.
Fair	3	There may be an adequate grammar or sufficient amount of grammars, dictionaries and texts, but no everyday media; audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality or degree of annotation.
Fragmentary	2	There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality with or without any annotation.
Inadequate	1	Only few grammatical sketches, short word-lists, and fragmentary texts. Audio and video do not exist or are of unstable quality, or are completely un-annotated.
Undocumented	0	No materials exists.

Table 8. Factor 9. Amount and quality of documentation

The above framework is totally quantitative in nature; however, relevant qualitative data are provided which would help present an all-encompassing fact on the main objective of this study.

4.2.2 Instrument

For data collection, structured interviews were conducted with selected participants. The structured interviews contained 27 questions written in English and Yorùbá and were divided into four sections. The first section focused on demographic information including language proficiency of the respondents, spouses and other family members. The second section focused on the respondents' language use in a variety of domains such as home, school, work place, market etc. The third sectioned examined the

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respondents attitude to their language and its use. The final section focused on the respondents' level of awareness of the endangerment of their language.

One hundred respondents were selected from the ten communities which make up the Arigidi Cluster group with ten participants chosen from each community. The respondents were selected cross sectionally based on sex, educational levels, and marital status. Preference was given to younger respondents in terms of age. The questionnaire was administered between December 2010 and February 2011. This did not present any problems because the researcher is an indigene of Arigidi and was able to administer the questionnaire in Arigidi easily. For the nine other communities, the researcher sought the help and services of speakers of the nine other speech forms who helped to administer the questionnaire in the nine communities.

(9a)

Age	*15-30*	*31-45*	*46-69*
n=100	48	42	10
%	48	42	10

(9b)

Occupation	*Public/Private Service*	*Self Employed*	*Unemployed*
n=100	26	26	48
%	26	26	48

(9c)

Gender	*Male*	*Female*
n=100	59	41
%	59	41

(9d)

Marital Status	*Married*	*Endogamous*	*Exogamous*	*Single*
n=100	50	5	45	50
%	50	5	45	50

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(9e)

Education	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Post-Secondary*
n=100	20	56	24
%	20	56	24

Tables 9a-9e. Social profile of respondents

4.2.3 Data Analysis

This section presents findings of this study with their significance from the angle of language endangerment, which would be discussed based on evaluation of the aforementioned framework, i.e. the UNESCO expert model.

4.2.3.1 Absolute number of speakers

It may be claimed that population alone may not be a clear indication of language endangerment; however, a language with a smaller number of speakers is likely to be prone to endangerment than one with a large number of speakers. In terms of numerical strength, it is certain that the actual numbers of speakers of the speech forms have been drastically reduced based on the fact that their neighbours are Yorùbá speakers coupled with the fact that interethnic marriage is common among them which often leads to the sole use of Yorùbá in the family. Also considering the fact that most native speakers of the speech forms migrate to big cities for economic reason is another factor that has reduced the number of their speakers. Another important factor has to do with urbanization and civilization which has brought schools and business centers to their domain, these have also attracted speakers of other languages predominantly Yorùbá to their communities which has forced the native speakers to communicate with them in Yorùbá. Thus, when numerical strength is considered, the speech forms are seriously vulnerable to Yorùbá because of its status as the main language of the region.

4.2.3.2 Intergenerational language transmission and the proportion of speakers

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The speakers of the above speech forms all live in a Yorùbá dominated region and have been acclaimed to have Yorùbá as a second mother tongue, they also live in a setting where English is considered a language of the educated and elites, it is therefore not surprising that the speech forms are not being transmitted to the younger generation. The table below shows the list of languages the respondents claim they can speak.

Languages	*ACSF*	*YOR*	*ENG*
All age group (n=100)	100	100	15
%	100	100	15
Age: 15-30	72	100	20
% (out of the above age group)	72	100	20
Age: 31-69	100	100	12
% (out of the above age group)	100	100	12

Table 10. The Languages spoken by speakers of the Arigidi Cluster speech forms

Languages	*ACSF*	*YOR*	*ENG*
n= 58	41	57	2
%	70.6	98.2	3.4

ACSF=Arigidi Cluster Speech Forms, YOR=Yorùbá, ENG-English

Table 11. Languages used mostly by children speakers of the speech forms

As shown in Table 10 above, while all the respondents within the 31-69 age group are able to speak the native speech forms, the opposite is the case for their younger counterparts of the 15-30 age group. Also, Table 11 revealed that all the young speakers of the speech forms use Yorùbá mostly. This confirms that there is a discontinuity in the intergenerational transmission of the speech forms. As a result of this, a score of (4) which corresponds to unsafe can be assigned to the speech forms based on Factor-1 in terms of their intergenerational transmission.

Also, from these results presented in Tables 10 and 11, a score of (4) “unsafe” can equally be assigned to the speech forms for Factor-3, which examines the *Proportion of Speakers within the Total Reference Group*. All the speakers identifies with Yorùbá, this is

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not surprising as speakers of the speech forms who live in the same community but use different speech forms which are not completely mutually intelligible have to resort to Yorùbá to communicate with one another.

4.2.3.3 Loss of existing language domains

It has been observed that home is the core and the last domain where a language manages to exist, when a language encounters adversarial situation in a country, home becomes the last place where speakers can create a meaningful resistance. Thus the use of language in the home domain provides a true picture of the level of endangerment of a language.

Languages	*ACSF* *%*	*YOR* *%*	*ENG* *%*
Spouse	55	54	48
Children	49	52	41
Siblings	68	50	10
Parents	91	18	5
Grandparents	98	2	0

Table 12. Language use in the home domain

In the home front, Table 12 shows that (51%) of the respondents do not speak the speech forms to their children while (45%) of the respondents do not use the speech forms to communicate with their spouses. The use of language however increases with siblings and attains the highest level with grandparents. From the above table it is obvious that the speech forms do not have a total dominance of the home domain, it also becomes evident that Yorùbá plays a vital role among speakers of these speech forms within the home domain.

Languages	*ACSF* *%*	*YOR* *%*	*ENG* *%*
Friends	68	67	18
Workplace	15	90	79

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School	38	97	70
Market	8	69	5

Table 13. Language use in the non-home domain

As regards language use in the non-home domain, based on factors like communication, religion, and new economic needs which are primarily social reasons, the speech forms have come into contact with Yorùbá and English and this has forced the speakers to make new language choices. As shown in Table 13, interactions with friends have the highest percentage of use of the speech forms, while in places like workplace and school, Yorùbá (the regional language) and English (the official language in Nigeria) are totally in control. Yorùbá is predominantly used in the market place. Based on these facts, the score (2) which corresponds to "dwindling" domains is assigned to Factor-4 since the speech forms are drastically losing their domain (home).

4.2.3.4 Response to new domain and media

The speech forms under Arigidi Cluster have no chance of responding to new domains and media; they are not used at any domain that links them to the outside world and are not used for education or in media. According to (Oshodi 2011), a lot of their words are being replaced with Yorùbá words. The score Zero (0) which corresponds to 'inactive' is thus assigned to them here. This shows that the speech forms are not used in any new domains.

4.2.3.5 Materials for language education and literacy

None of the speech forms under the Arigidi Cluster group has a written form. The little work carried out on them is patterned towards the Yorùbá alphabets. Based on the fact there is no orthography for the speech forms, the score Zero (0) is assigned to them since no 'materials for language education and literacy' exist on them.

4.2.3.6 Governmental and institutional attitudes and policies

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In Nigeria, there is really no policy for indigenous languages like the ones under the Arigidi Cluster group. The national language policy which is enshrined in the 1979 Constitution (revised in 1999 and 2004) of the Republic of Nigeria stated in section 51 says:

> *the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in **English**, and in **Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba** when adequate arrangements have been made thereof.*

The implication of this is that English should assume this role till the so-called National languages are developed, because right now, English is the only language used to conduct all the businesses of the National Assembly

As regards language of education, the 1989 constitution sub-section 19(4) simply states that:

> "*government shall encourage the learning of indigenous languages.*"

This type of general statement clearly indicates the nonchalant attitude of government towards documenting or encouraging the learning of indigenous languages in Nigeria. The case of the speech forms under the Arigidi Cluster is pathetic; they are dying without some linguistic facts such as their real language family being ascertained. A score of (2) which corresponds to "active assimilation" is assigned to them here. It indicates that minority languages are not protected and are being forced to be assimilated by dominant ones.

4.2.3.7 *Community members' attitudes towards their own language*

To examine this factor focus was on the two important areas of the speakers of these speech form's lives. The areas are livelihood and school. It is a fact that a language

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used for livelihood has far reaching effects for value development while the language use in school sends the message of a language's potential for survival in terms of continuity. This is the main reason which informed the decision to focus on these two areas.

Languages	*ACSF*	*YOR*	*ENG*
n=100	11	40	48
%	11	40	48

Table 14. Languages which children wanted to be taught in School

	Do you think your native language is endangered?	
	Yes	*No*
All Age n=100	70	30
%	70	30
15-30	79	21
%	79	21
31-69	88	12
%	88	12

Table 15. Do you think your native language is endangered?

The respondents affirmed that Yorùbá is the most important language on which their survival depends. This is closely followed by English. They all feel English and Yorùbá should be taught in schools with those in favour of English having a higher percentage. As regards whether the speech forms are endangered, Table 15 shows that a large percentage of the respondents both young and old agree that the language is seriously endangered. However, all the respondents were in support of their native language and are willing to protect them. Based on this, a score (5) which corresponds to "equal support according to Factor-8 was assigned to them here.

4.2.3.8 Amount and quality of documentation

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The speech forms have not yet been really documented; in fact, none among them is alphabetized. Akinkugbe (1976) carried out a comparative word list among the speech forms, apart from this, the few other studies have been carried out as Undergraduate Long Essays and Post Graduate theses dissertations in some universities. Considering the fact that the speech forms fare poorly in terms of documentation, it would be correct to say that they have little chances of survival. Oshodi (2011) observed that the speech forms share phonological and structural similarities with Yorùbá; in fact he specifically referred to them as dialects of Yorùbá. Based on level of documentation, a score of (1) which correspond to "inadequate documentation" is assigned to them.

5. Determining the level of endangerment of the Arigidi Cluster speech forms

After considering the eight factors proposed by the UNESCO expert model (excluding Factor-2), Table 16 below shows the overall level of endangerment of the speech forms based on the score 0-5 (see Table 17 below) which corresponds to different levels of endangerment.

Factors	*Grade*	*Mean Grade*
Factor-1	4	**2.25**
Factor-3	4	
Factor-4	2	
Factor-5	0	
Factor-6	0	
Factor-7	2	
Factor-8	5	
Factor-9	1	

Table 16. Overall level of endangerment of the Arigidi Cluster speech forms

Degree of endangerment	*Grade*
Safe	5
Unsafe	4
Definitely endangered	3
Severely endangered	2

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Critically endangered	1
Extinct	0

Table 17. Overall measure of language endangerment UNESCO expert model

If Table 16 which shows the mean grade for the overall level of endangerment of the Arigidi Cluster speech forms is placed beside Table 17 which shows the overall measure of language endangerment following the UNESCO Expert Model, the result placed the Arigidi Cluster speech forms between *Definitely* and *Severely* endangered.

6. Factors responsible for language death

Language (in terms of its versatility) is an exclusive peculiarity of man which distinguishes man from all other creatures. It is one important feature of man through which he communicates and survives. The question then is; why do speakers abandon this unique feature and also allow it to die? An attempt would be made to answer this question.

According to Sasse (1992: 13), three sets of factors are responsible for language death and they occur in sequential order. Among the three factors listed by Sasse, only the last one can be said to be truly linguistic. Below are the three factors:

i. External setting: This involves such extralinguistic factors which are present in language in situations of language death: cultural, sociological, ethnohistorical, economic, etc., processes, which create in a certain speech community, a situation of pressure which forces the community to give up its language.

ii. Speech behaviour: Such external settings induce change in people's speech behaviour. This is characterized as the regular use of variables, which in a given speech community, are bound with social parameters, e g. the use of different languages in multilingual settings, the use of different styles of one language, domains of language and styles, attitudes towards variants of language and so on.

iii. Structural change: This kind of speech behaviour in turn results in certain structural consequences, i.e. the purely structural substantial linguistic set of phenomena,

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e.g. changes in the phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon of the language threatened by extinction.

The three factors are seen as processes which occur in a fixed temporal sequence, which starts from External setting to Speech Behaviour and finally to Structural Change.

The process of language endangerment and subsequently death as depicted by Sasse clearly shows that the concept is predominantly caused by non-linguistics factors. Non-linguistics factors are those factors that cannot be directly linked to grammatical issues i.e. they are factors that exist outside the genre of language which has nothing to do with the internal properties and aspects of language. If the nine factors proposed by the UNESCO Expert Model to measure the level of language endangerment are considered, it becomes obvious that they never emanated directly from the languages, apart from factor 4- Loss of Existing Language Domains, where the younger generation of speakers has the tendency to change the structure of a language which is usually towards the pattern of a dominant language necessitated by social factors again, every other factor is completely social (non-linguistic). It is not surprising then that situation is not different for the Arigidi Cluster speech forms as well.

7. Can the Arigidi Cluster speech forms survive?

The above question is very crucial considering the level of optimism usually expressed by language documentation experts who believe that every endangered language has a high chance of survival. In the section we shall try to provide a satisfactory answer to this question based on facts shown above from the results obtained from the data collected from speakers of the Arigidi Cluster speech forms.

The cure for language endangerment at least for languages like the Arigidi Cluster speech forms which still have a relative number of speakers is revitalization. However, the procedure for revitalizing any endangered language must be considered vis-à-vis a number of factors particularly those immediate factors that are responsible for the endangerment. For the Arigidi Cluster speech forms, this very important concept

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(revitalization) alongside the factors of endangerment (highlighted and discussed above) shall be critically examined in order to see if these speech forms can truly be revitalized.

The Nigerian language context in terms of planning and use is a pathetic one as far as indigenous languages are concerned. It is an established fact that the three dominant languages in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá) are restricted to their respective region: Hausa to the North, Igbo to the East and Yorùbá to the West, this has given room for English to assume the role of a national language. In fact, there are children between the ages of 4 and 8 in Nigeria who cannot speak any indigenous Nigerian language; the only language they speak and understand is English. English is considered the unifying language in Nigeria since there is no single indigenous language that serves that purpose. As a result of this, the issue of recognizing and developing indigenous languages in Nigeria has always been left to non-governmental organizations and individuals who have flair for it. With the Nigerian governments at different levels battling with economic and social problems, the issue of developing indigenous languages is least on their agenda.

If the language context of every society in the present day of civilization is assessed, there is no society that is monolingual. The fact is that in any area of Human Endeavour where there exist many options where people are either given the option or forced to make one, it is certain that the issue of neglect and abandonment would definitely come in; i.e. the option not chosen would be abandoned and neglected. The same thing applies in a multilingual setting where the choice of which language becomes prominent and the one neglected is determined by factors already highlighted and discussed above. Considering these factors, it would be correct to say that the factors responsible for the endangerment of these indigenous languages are just too strong. A language that is not taught in school, that has very few speakers, that is not being passed down to the next generation, that is not documented, that is not used in media, that does not serve any beneficial economic purpose in the society and above all that has no definite policy on its functional status, without any prejudice or pessimism, is surely a candidate for extinction. There may be the argument that if the government of each country supports these languages in terms of documentation and materials for language education, these indigenous languages may survive. We need to face reality, documenting a language does not guarantee its survival or continuous use, for example, there are lots of materials on

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Latin but today, it is a dead language since no particular identifiable community speaks it anymore. Also, among such large number of indigenous languages (Nigeria has over five hundred), how many can the government support in terms of development to the level of teaching and learning? Besides, why would government want to expend resources on a language which does not perform any economic function? In fact, Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá the three languages with the largest numbers of speaker are still struggling to remain functional as English is gradually restricting their functional status even within their regions, why would the government pay serious attention to small languages like the Arigidi Cluster speech forms whose status either as distinct languages or dialects of a particular language is yet to be determined? The bitter truth which we have to accept is that, considering the factors responsible for their endangerment, the Arigidi Cluster speech forms just like other endangered indigenous languages in similar situation all over the world will find it extremely difficult if not impossible to survive.

8. Conclusion

Much has been said about language endangerment and factors responsible for it. However, linguists and scholars in this field of language documentation and revitalization have always been very optimistic that endangered indigenous languages have the chance of surviving. One fact which is unarguable is that a language can only survive as long as it remains actively in use (i.e. when it continues to be spoken by a group of people). The results of this study have clearly provided straightforward answers to the three questions asked in (4.1) above. One, the factors responsible for language endangerment cum death are non-linguistic. Studies such as Haruchi (2002), De Graaf (2004) based on researches conducted on (Nivkh) an indigenous Russian language and (Ainu) an indigenous language in Japan revealed that similar factors like those identified in this study were responsible for the endangerment of these two languages. This confirms that similar factors are responsible for the endangerment of indigenous languages all over the world. To the final question, considering the fact that the factors responsible for the endangerment of indigenous languages all over the world are non-linguistic which are usually necessitated

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by social and economic needs, the task of trying to save such languages is a herculean one which looks more and more unattainable with each passing day as the quest for survival, economic policies as well as civilization which requires focusing more on international languages like English, French, Spanish, Mandarin etc. (to the detriment of these lesser known languages which are not even actively functional in their respective domains) keep forcing speakers of such languages to abandon them. The only solution to saving such small and indigenous languages is for their speakers to keep passing them down to the younger generation, but is this really feasible considering the social (non-linguistic) factors militating against them? The definite answer is *NO*! This unpleasant conclusion has been justified with facts from this study which revealed that the survival chances of these small indigenous languages are almost a mirage. I wish to conclude with these words of Micheal Krauss which clearly capture the issue of language endangerment and death:

> *'' I consider it a plausible calculation that – at the rate things are going – the coming century will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind's language'* (Krauss 1992: 7).

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