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NIGERIAN BILINGUALS' LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AS POSSIBLE PRECURSORS OF ENDANGERMENT

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Abstract

This survey was carried out among Nigerian-language-English bilinguals to compare the extent of their use of the English Language with that of their indigenous languages and also find out if they are conscious of subjecting their indigenous languages as well as their cultural identities to avoidable extinction. Copies of a self-constructed eleven-item questionnaire validated at 91.4 Cronbach alpha were administered to two hundred bilingual undergraduates. It got through a multi-stage sampling procedure. One hundred and ninety-nine copies were useful and the data collected were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, and t-test statistical tools in answering three research questions and testing three null hypotheses. The findings shows that Nigerian undergraduates speak English Language more frequently than their indigenous languages for informal interactions, a slightly greater proportion of the female sample prefer to use English language in informal interactions, the use of English for informal interactions is more common among students of the private university than the public ones. There are no significant differences between the undergraduates from minority linguistic groups and those from majority language groups in their sense of foreboding on the likely death of their languages, there is no significant difference in readiness to

change language behaviour patterns between minority language among Nigerian students and their majority language counterparts, and there is no significant difference between males and females in their readiness to start using their indigenous languages for informal transactions in other to save such languages.

Keywords: Nigerian Billinguals, Cultural Identity, Endangerment.

Introduction

Nigeria is acknowledged to have up to 522 living indigenous languages, each with its various dialects (Cambier-Langeveld, 2016). Three of the languages (namely Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo) are designated as National Languages (NERDC, 2013; Buba, 2017). The National Language Policy stipulates that the language of immediate environment be used as medium of instruction until the end of the fourth year in every primary school. Where such a language is without orthography, the language that is predominant in the larger community serves the purpose until English, hitherto a school subject, takes over progressively as medium of instruction from the fourth year (NERDC, 2013).

A credit pass in English Language at the Senior Secondary School Certificate level is compulsory for admission to any programme in a Nigerian University, as well as the Arts and Social Sciences in other tertiary institutions. A pass in English Language may secure admission to some technical courses in Polytechnics, provided there are not many other applicants with various degrees of credit passes. English Language is Nigeria's first and, in fact, the only functional official language as French proclaimed as the second during Late Gen. Sanni Abacha's regime has not been visible in that realm.

English Language is well acknowledged as the instrument for mutual intelligibility among the many constituent linguistic entities, the medium of governance, administration, judiciary, entertainment, and international relations. It is the language that confers the greatest prestige on its speakers in Nigeria, the language with which the privileged fluent speakers intimidate and mesmerise non-speakers or incompetent speakers.

Theoretical Framework

The study is hinged on Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity Theory in which Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) recognise the significant roles of language in the formulation and sustenance of a people's collective memory, which is also a very important component of the people's cultural identity. Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) posit that the collective memory is crucial to every specie's survival. The nexus between language and ethnic/cultural identity has been so much established that many scholars deem it worthy of serious research (Herman, 2007). Hauser (2009) sees modes of thinking, mentality and acting as indicators of a people's cultural identity and goes on to acknowledge other scholars' argument that technology and the resultant globalisation can intrude into and alter people's identities at the micro (individual) as well as the macro (societal) level. Bucholtz and Hall (2008) observed that the issue of cultural identity assumes a critical dimension in situations of micro and macro-level bilingualism. Where the bilingual individual or society becomes confused when it comes to maintaining a co-ordinate balance between the two linguistic codes and their cultural undertones, what Hall (1996:596,597) refers to as "crises of identities", "loss of a stable "sense of self", which results from a continuous interaction between the "real" self and the identities that the "outside" worlds offer in the present modernist dispensation. Vigne (2015) links this phenomenon to the theories of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o that assert the destructive influence of the colonial masters' languages on those of the African colonies, repressing and oppressing the cultures to which the indigenes' languages were inseparable tied. According to Thiong'o, the repressive force of the colonialists' languages and cultures resulted in the Africans' doubting themselves and the wholesomeness of their inherited cultures and languages. He uses the terms "*culture bomb*", "forced exogenous language" and "imperialism"to describe the situation and recommends "Decolonisation of the Mind" as the solution to the mental neo-colonialism to which the average African has subjected himself or herself.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian cultures are fast being displaced by foreign ones. This is as a result of the negative attitude to indigenous languages and inordinate preference for the English language, even in the most informal contexts. The distinctive identity of the typical Nigerian community is therefore under the threat of extinction. Concerted efforts need to be made to ascertain the extent of Nigerian bilinguals' self-maginalisation in terms of their linguistic preferences and practices, their knowledge or ignorance of the impact of such on their cultural identities as well as their readiness or otherwise to make amends where necessary. This study, therefore, sought Nigerian bilinguals' responses to the awareness of the dangers of extinction that their preference for the English language portends for their linguistic and cultural identity. It is hoped that this would serve as a wake-up call to the bilinguals to consciously opt for linguistic practices that can facilitate the preservation of their languages and cultural peculiarities. In the long run, the unique contributions that the Nigerian languages and cultures could make to global sustainable development would be preserved.

Men, Materials and Method

The descriptive survey was conducted in the two universities in Ibadan in Oyo State of Nigeria: The University of Ibadan and Lead City University, Ibadan. The choice of the universities was predicated on the need to ensure that the participants have attained at least a modest degree of bilingualism. Secondly, the undergraduate population is the generation that will soon take over the reins of socio-political and economic life of the country. They thus represent the latter's nearest future. Third is the cosmopolitan composition of a university campus community. A university campus is one of the places that provide the opportunity to meet people from the various ethno-cultural constituents of Nigeria.

A self-constructed eleven-item questionnaire was validated at 91.04 cronbach alpha. Section A contains five items requiring demographic information while Section B has the remaining seven

items inquiring about linguistic preference and practice, knowledge of the consequences concern about cultural identity preservation.

A multi-stage sampling method was used. Purposive sampling was employed to choose university students because of the relevance of their general bilingual and varying degrees of bi-cultural status. The only two universities in Ibadan were used by total population sampling. One hundred participants were drawn from each university by accidental sampling technique, thus making a total of two hundred respondents.

Two research assistants were engaged in administering the instruments, along with the researcher, to the undergraduates that agreed to complete the questionnaire. The copies were taken to lecture halls in the various faculties and administered while students had either just finished a lecture or were waiting to commence another. Some copies were administered in halls of residence. The filled copies were retrieved immediately. One of the returned copies was, however, found inappropriately and inadequately filled and was thus not used.

Discussion of the Findings

Table 1a: Demographic Description of the Respondents according to School Type

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Public	99	49.7	49.7	49.7
	Private	100	50.3	50.3	100.0
	Total	199	100.0	100.0	

Table 1a shows that the copy found unusable for the study was from the public university. There were thus ninety-nine valid copies available for analysis from the school. All of the one hundred for the

private university were used. The total was one hundred and ninety-nine.

Table 1b: Demographic Description of the Respondents according to Sex

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	94	47.2	47.2	47.2
Female	105	52.8	52.8	100.0
Total	199	100.0	100.0	

Table 1b indicates that ninety-four of the respondents were males, while one hundred and five were females. It is noteworthy to point out that this does not necessarily mean that female undergraduates outnumber males in Nigeria since the sampling at the level of each university was accidental.

Table 1c: Demographic Description of the Respondents according to Age

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
15yrs-25yrs	165	82.9	82.9	82.9
26yrs-35yrs	34	17.1	17.1	100.0
Total	199	100.0	100.0	

Table 1c shows that one hundred and sixty-five of the respondents were from age fifteen to age twenty-five, thirty-four were from ages twenty-six to thirty-five. This means they are all youths, the future of the country. Whatever they choose to practice

en-mass is capable of either strengthening or weakening existing collective cultural identity of their entire community.

Table 1d: Cross-tabulation of the Respondents' Numbers of Languages with Sex

Sex	Number of Languages Spoken			
	One Language	Two Languages	Three Languages	**Total**
Male	16 (17.02%)	67 (71.28%)	11 (11.70%)	**94 (100%)**
Female	19 (18.10%)	70 (66.67%)	16 (15.24%)	**105 (100%)**
Total	**35**	**137**	**27**	**199 (100%)**

According to Table 1d, sixteen males and nineteen females (making a total of thirty-five respondents professed satisfactory competence in only one language. Sixty-seven males and seventy females (totalling one hundred and thirty-seven) professed significant competence in two languages. Eleven males and sixteen females totalling twenty-seven indicated proficiency in three languages. None claimed proficiency in more than three languages.

Answering the Research Questions

Research Question 1: Do bilingual Nigerian undergraduates speak English more frequently than their indigenous languages in informal interactions?

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Answering the Research Questions

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Table 2: Statistical Juxtaposition of the Undergraduates' Frequency use of English Language with their Use of Nigerian Indigenous Languages

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
English Language	103	51.8	51.8	51.8
Indigenous Language	96	48.2	48.2	100.0
Total	**199**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 2 shows that one hundred and three (51.8%) of the respondents confessed that they speak English oftener than their indigenous languages in informal interactions while ninety-six (48.2%) reported making more use of their indigenous languages than the English Language. Of course, all of the respondents agree that that they carried out many of their informal social relations through the medium of the English language. The answer to Research Question One is thus clear: Nigerian undergraduates speak English Language more frequently than their indigenous languages for informal interactions.

Research Question 2: Do female undergraduate bilinguals speak English more frequently in informal situations than the males?

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of Males' and Females' Comparative Uses of English Language and Indigenous Languages in Informal Contexts.

Sex	Language Most Often Used for Informal Interactions		Total
	English Language	Indigenous Languages	
Male	47 (50%)	47 (50%)	**94 (100%)**
Female	56 (53.33%)	49 (46.67%)	**105 (100%)**
Total	**103**	**96**	**199 (100%)**

Table 3 indicates forty-seven males (50%) of the male sample self-reported employing more of English Language than their indigenous languages for informal interactions and the same number reported doing otherwise. But a slightly greater proportion of the female sample (fifty-six or 53.33%) self-reported preference for English language use in informal interactions while a slightly smaller percentage (forty-nine or 46.67%) professed more frequent use of their indigenous languages for such unofficial transactions.

Research Question 3: Do more of undergraduates in private universities speak English more frequently in informal situations than their counterparts in public universities?

Table 4: Simple Comparison of Nigerian Bilingual Undergraduates' Linguistic Code Preferences for Informal Interactions.

School Type	Language Mostly Used for Informal Interactions		Total
	English	Indigenous Languages	
Public	41 (41.42%)	58 (58.58%)	99 (100%)
Private	62 (62%)	38 (38%	100 (100%)
Total	103	96	199 (100%)

Table 4 shows that a greater percentage of the undergraduate bilinguals from the private university (62 or 62%) than those from the public university (41 or 41.42%) use English oftener than their indigenous languages in informal interactions. The answer to Research Question 3 is that more of the undergraduates in private universities speak English more frequently in informal situations than their counterparts in public universities. This can be explained by the assertion that linguistic preferences of bilingual families are tied to socio-economic status. Besides, affordability of private university education is a socio-economic trait. People whose socio-economic status is too low for enrolling their children in private nursery and primary schools as well as private secondary schools are not very likely to send their children to private universities that charge very expensive school fees. Earlier studies (Olatunji, 2007) have proved that most private nursery and primary schools have the culture of excessive use of English language while most of their public counterparts excessively use indigenous languages. The foregoing shows that most private university students must have formed and sustained the habit of inordinate use of English Language right from childhood while their private university fellows could have been inducted into the circle of self-Anglicised Nigerians only much later, if at all.

Testing the Null Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant difference in Nigerian bilinguals' consciousness of the endangerment of their indigenous languages according to majority versus minority status in the Nigerian language policy.

Table 5: The t-test for Independent Measures of Assigned Status of Nigerian Languages and their Speakers' Foreboding about Likely Death of the Languages.

LANG. STATUS	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t	P
Majority	154	1.43	.496	.040	197	.851	>.05
Minority	45	1.44	.503	.075			

Since t (.851) > .05, it is clear that there is no significant difference between bilingual Nigerian undergraduates' consciousness of threat to their indigenous languages based on the assigned status of either majority or minority languages in the national language policy. The null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in Nigerian bilinguals' consciousness of the endangerment of their indigenous languages according to majority versus minority status in the Nigerian language policy is thus not rejected. Though the other languages have minority status compared with Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. The raw data collected shows that 20 of the 25 in the sample stated that they had never considered the fact that their languages and cultures will die in the future if the languages are neglected. As those with the majority status fail to give much thought to the maintenance of their languages and cultures, so also are those with minority status.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in Nigerian bilinguals' passion for the maintenance of their languages according to majority versus minority status in the Nigerian language policy.

Table 6: The t-test for Independent Measures of Assigned Status of Nigerian Languages and their Speakers' Readiness to Change their Linguistic Practices to Preserve Such Languages

LANG. STATUS	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t	P
Majority	154	1.22	.416	.034	197	-.157	>.05
Minority	45	1.38	.490	.073			

The t (-157) > .05. Therefore, there is no significant difference in Nigerian bilinguals' passion for the maintenance of their languages according to majority versus minority status in the Nigerian language policy. The null hypothesis is thus not rejected. The rate of readiness or otherwise of speakers of the languages designated as majority languages to change their language practices in order to save such from extinction is similar to the speakers of the so-called minority languages who may be logically expected to naturally guard their not-so-favoured languages jealously.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in Nigerian bilingual undergraduates' passion for the maintenance of their languages according to sex.

Table 7: The t-test for Independent Measures of Nigerian Undergraduate Bilinguals' Sexes and their Readiness to Change their Linguistic Practices to Preserve Such Languages.

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Df	t	P
Male	94	1.39	.491	.051	197	.071	> .05
Female	105	1.47	.501	.049			

The t (.071) > .05. This means there is no significant difference in the Nigerian bilingual undergraduates' passion for the maintenance of their languages according to sex. In other words, there is no significant difference between males and females in their readiness or otherwise to alter their linguistic practices in order to preserve and promote their indigenous languages. Null Hypothesis Three is, therefore, not rejected, while 70 of the 94 males expressed their readiness to change their linguistic behaviours to preserve their languages, if proved necessary, 24 of them confessed unwillingness to stop using English language in informal situations, even if such is the saving grace for the preservation of their cultural identities. Similarly, 78 of the 105 females indicated their readiness to begin conscious use of their indigenous languages in unofficial circumstances if that is the antidote to an impending death of their cultural distinctive while the remaining 27 of them indicated to the contrary.

This picture portrays a sort of ray of hope concerning the prospect of attaining linguistic and cultural identity rejuvenisation. The situation is not irredeemable yet. At the same time, percentages that have no regard for their cultural distinctives on both sides should not be seen to be insignificant considering the fact that there are nations of the world where such degree of self-inflicted colonial mentality is unheard of.

Conclusion

Findings from the study have shown that the excessive preference for the use of English Language Nigerian bilingual undergraduates pervades Socio-Economic cadres of society, sexes, and ethno-linguistic and geographical terrains. Thus, not even languages like Yorùbá (spoken as first language by about 25 million people in south-western Nigeria as well as about another 22 million as second language in other parts of the world, and with a standard orthography), Igbo (with about 20 million speakers) and Hausa (with between 40 and 50 million speakers) are absolutely immune against eventual extinction, and consequent death of their cultures (Dada, 2007 citing Igboanusi and Peter, 2005; and Gimes 2000; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed on 15th February, 2013) If the languages and their cultures die, the loss of an irredeemable repository of human knowledge results (McCarty, 2003). The lost human knowledge will include the field of local practice of botany (Fakoya, 2008) on which rests the invaluable identification and use of an array of local flora and fauna resources for both preventive and curative purposes. It will be appalling with the percentage of both young and old Nigerians that cannot identify in their indigenous languages many of the herbs and roots used by their fore-fathers to great medical advantage. Unfortunately, they cannot identify such with English Language, either.

In the case of Nigeria, the family intimacy and communal lifestyle that makes us to see ourselves as our brothers' keepers, but which are being fast eroded as a result of the craze for western culture, will be completely and finally destroyed (Fishman, 1991). There is, therefore, a need to be conscious that while we make the necessary efforts to increase our English language proficiency to attain global relevance, it is imperative that we preserve and develop our linguistic and cultural distinctive.

It is hoped that the findings from this study would alert policy makers and implementers in the educational sector and other related sectors like the Ministries of Information, Culture, Youth Development, and so on, to their responsibilities towards the

preservation of the very useful cultural and linguistic heritage. It should also serve as a clarion call to the Nigerian youths that are being carried away by the force of globalisation to consider the need to work towards placing their languages and cultures on vantage points rather than allow such invaluable inheritance to be pushed into extinction. The revelation by the study that a larger percentage of the Nigerian respondents do not care if their linguistic and cultural identities are lost and would not be moved to make any effort at reversing the pathetic trend should serve as a useful working tool for any future research as regards the need to re-orient such bilinguals to appreciate their identities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations flow from the findings from this study:

i. the Nigerian education should make a credit pass in one indigenous language mandatory for admission to any programme of study in any tertiary institution. Although the pride of place accorded English Language is quite understandable, it is unacceptable and unpatriotic if it goes on without elevating the indigenous languages to the same pedestal. To do otherwise is to send a wrong signal that the indigenous languages are not worth celebrating.

ii. there should be mass recruitment of the teeming unemployed Nigerians that have specialist training in the teaching and learning of our indigenous languages and cultures in order to reverse the negative trend of paucity of teachers in such fields in our elementary and secondary schools.

iii. language development centres should be established and adequately funded to develop orthographies for languages that are yet to have.

iv. impressive performance in quiz and essay competitions as well as cultural displays should be attractively rewarded to serve as

incentives for children to develop and sustain adequate passion for their indigenous languages and cultures.

v. More time should be accorded indigenous language and culture-related contents of our school curricula.

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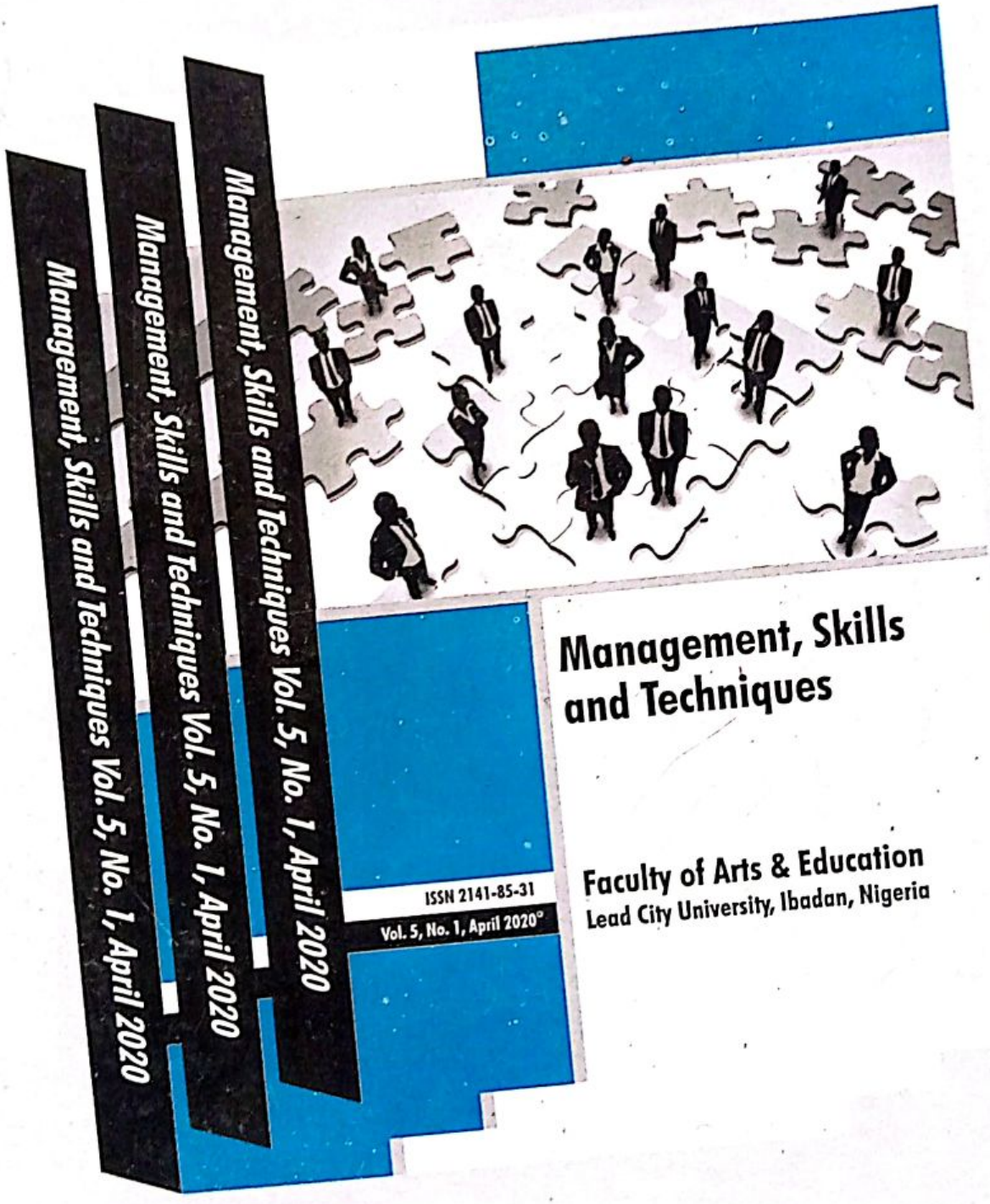
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