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## “Endangered, Moribund and Preservation of Languages”

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**Abstract:** *Languages are just like human beings they become extinct every now and then. Some can be endangered and some died out completely, and it is all over the world. They are being threaten by killer languages such as English and French languages at international level, and Like Hausa language at National level in case of Nigeria. The research that has been conducted here is to show how we can prevent those endangered languages or if possible to revitalize those that are completely extinct; through creating recorded and printed resources. Recorded and printed documentation are essential for preserving languages' sound and context. Teaching and taking languages classes. Using digital and social media outlet. And insist on speaking the indigenous languages.*

**Key words:** *language, preservation, moribund and endangered*

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### Introduction:

Language is a system of communication used by a particular community. There are about six to seven thousand (6,000 – 7,000) languages but 6,500 languages according to Anna Klappenbach (2021) in the world today but the most hurting or terrible thing is at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century almost half of these languages would have perished. The numbers mentioned above may be in flux because the languages themselves keep changing every day (ethnologue.com). These languages are part of the world's diversity and beauties. According to Crystal (2000) as he estimated, one language will die in every two weeks or so somewhere in this world. Miroslav 2010 quoted Ethnologue (2005) that there are about 50 languages around the world that have only one speaker left: 7 languages in the USA, 3 in South America, 3 in Africa, 6 in Asia, 28 in Australia, and 3 in the Pacific Ocean islands. Nearly or almost 500 languages have less than 100 speakers; 1,500 languages are spoken by less than 1,000 speakers; 3,000 or so languages have up to 10,000 speakers; and 500 languages have no more than 100,000 speakers. It has been calculated that about ninety-six percent (96%) of the world's languages are spoken by about or only four percent (4%) of the globe's population.

“Most of us feel we could never become extinct. The Dodo felt that way too.” (William Cuppy)

More than 50% of the endangered languages are from eight countries, these include: Nigeria, Cameroon, Mexico, India, Brazil, Australia, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. Nigeria our area of study particularly Borno State is among the countries where languages are endangered and will becoming extinct so rapidly, later they will die out.

Endangered language is one that is probably to become vanished or extinct in the near future. Many if not most languages are dying out of use and being replaced by others.

A dead language is a language which is no longer spoken by anyone as their main language, such as Latin, that is no longer learned as a native language by a speech community.

There are some voices that believed to be the last speakers of their languages. Some years back in Hacı Osman in Turkey Linguists went into the village to record Tevfic Esenç who believed to be the last speaker of Ubykh Language. He couldn't even converse with his own children, because they have become Turkish. What he wanted to be written on his grave, he has already written it on the grave stone in 1984 "This is grave of Tevfic Esenç. He was the last person able to speak the language they called Ubykh." With the death of Esenç in 1992, Ubykh too joined the ever-increasing number of extinct languages.

In Southern Carolina, four years after, a Native American called Red Thundercloud also died as the last voice of dying tongue (Wappo).

**Problem statements:**

- What is the goal of the preservation of language?
- Why are endangered languages so important?
- How can we prevent language?
- How can I promote my language?

**Objectives:**

- Endangered languages stand a great chance of survival when they are frequently used
- Languages preservation is the effort to prevent them from becoming moribund or completely vanish
- Sometime words appear in one language where there simply isn't an alternative in another. Loosing languages can have a detrimental loss of community identity, collective purpose and self determination
- Language is a vital part of human connection. Although all species have their ways of communicating, human are the only ones that have mastered cognitive languages communication. Language allows us to share our ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others. It has the power to build societies, but also tear them down.

**Literature review:**

If people find it easier for them to use languages that are easy to conduct business and communicate in them such as English, Dutch, Spanish, Italia etc., then you will find out that the younger ones are no longer using the indigenous languages (languages of the immediate environment), or if the younger ones are not being educated in the languages spoken by a limited number of people (Elizabeth Malone) that means few people are using the languages, then they gradually die. The languages that are responsible are the ones that are mentioned above. Klappenbach classified and ranked them from 1 – 12: English with 1,132 million native

speakers, Mandarin with 1,117 million native speakers, Hindi with 615 million native speakers, Spanish with 534 million native speakers, French with 280 million native speakers, Arabic with 274 million native speakers, Bengali with 265 million native speakers, Russian with 258 million native speakers, Portuguese with 199 million native speakers, Indonesian with 170 million native speakers, Urdu with 170 million native speakers, and German with 132 million native speakers. English language apart from being the number one Lingua Franca of the world, it is the only language of the sky, because all pilots are subjected to use only English language to communicate with the control towers.

There are factors for the loss of language(s):

- Language shift – when a language shift towards a stronger language frequently
- Natural disasters such as volcanic eruption, hurricane, tsunami, earthquake, disease
- Human disasters such as invasion, genocide, warfare, insurgency, banditry etc.
- Political reasons such as colonization, education, migration

These factors often result in cultural assimilation or even genocide compare it with/to language, cultural, and educational policies that have taken place in the previous time. Today it is not easy or common to punish people for practicing or using their languages, still languages continue to die.

50% of the languages represent vast, largely unmapped terrain on which Philosophers, Linguists, and Cognitive Scientists can chart the full capabilities and limits of the human mind. These languages each of them has a unique local knowledge of natural system and cultures in the region or where it is spoken. To understand human history, you need these languages as a source of evidence. Davis (2003) said language is not only exist to express vocabularies and grammatical rules rather it is what made humans who they are.

“Language is not just a body of vocabulary or a set grammatical rule. A language is a flash of human spirit. It is a vehicle through which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world. Every language is an old-growth forest of the mind, a watershed, a thought, an ecosystem of spiritual possibilities.” (Wade 2003)

Apart from the uniqueness of the knowledge associated to those languages, the reason(s) for their death was not recorded or documented i.e. both the languages and the knowledge. Heather Lotherington said and I quote “All languages open doors to knowledge and it is the narrow-mindedness of monolinguals to think their language (our, in case of English) is somehow the unique key to knowledge.” Though linguist believed that all languages are equal. There is nothing like superior language.

Tsunoda 2012 came up with a suggestion that languages need to be documented because once a language is lost there would be no opportunity to record it. Therefore, it is important to make an adequate documentation of languages while there is an opportunity. Tsunoda said in the process of documenting endangered languages or any language for that matter, there are certain

procedures to be followed or should be aim at the following level of quality (Craig 1997; Lehman 1999)

- a. accuracy: the documentation must be as reliable as possible, and;
- b. Comprehensiveness: the documentation must be complete as possible.

Thus, it “should provide a true presentation of the language” (Mithun 2001). In view of these aims, particularly (b), it is vital to take a holistic approach, rather a narrow approach. A holistic approach aims to document a language as a whole, including its socio-cultural background (Tsunoda 1998b)” Tsunoda 2012.

But if the situation slightly change from documentation to preservation, then you the following:

- i. Creating recorded and printed resources, because recorded and printed documentation are essential for preserving languages’ sound and context.
- ii. Teaching and taking languages classes.
- iii. Using digital and social media platforms.
- iv. We should maintain on speaking the indigenous languages.

### **Methodology:**

Protecting and preserving of language(s) looks simple and easy to say in few words, but in reality is a huge task. The most commonly and accepted alternatives are:

- i. The most essential thing is to encourage the native speakers of affected languages and even non-affected languages not to be relented in speaking their languages. That is to say that insist in using and speaking of their native languages. They should never have passion toward dwelling in using someone’s language. You should know that using one’s language (the dominant languages) is bad but don’t let it overshadow your own language or consider it as special and better language (superior language) because all languages are equal.
- ii. Whether you’re interested in promoting the linguistic rights of your multinational contacts or are committed to preserving your language, the professional translators and simultaneously interpreters are to be engaged in such situation.
- iii. Using of social media platforms. This is another way of promoting and protecting of languages. Instead of composing messages using lingua franca of the immediate environment, then we should compose it in the native languages, but this method has a lot of challenges. Not all languages are having orthography, that is to say majority of the languages are not put into writing.
- iv. Let’s teach and take classes in our native languages. Now there are some plans and policies going on how to teach wards in schools through the use of indigenous languages, especially the first three years, but the minority of the languages were not included in the plans, instead they teach the pupils in the language of the environment. That is how each language got the chance to survive and be promoted.
- v. Recording and documenting of the local languages is another important method of preserving language. This idea involves money, it is not an easy task. We have to put

hands together i.e. government, organizations, philanthropies, individuals etc. to sponsor it. Thus, all hands must be on desk to ensure that a perfect and accurate records have been taken.

## **Findings**

Borno state is among the worse states where many of its languages are endangered. Linguistically, about twenty-eight languages being spoken in the state. Including Chadic group of languages, while Kanuri is an exceptional and it is a member of Saharan group of languages. According to Wikipedia the following are the languages found in Borno state but on the process of findings we discovered that the languages are beyond twenty-eight. The additional language was in Gwoza Local Government. That is where it was discovered: The languages are:

1. Kanuri
2. Fulfulde
3. Shuwa Arab
4. Babur/Bura
5. Glavda
6. Jehode
7. Mandara
8. Gamargu
9. Waha
10. Dghwede
11. Guduf
12. Laamang
13. Mafa
14. Afade
15. Zalidva
16. Wula
17. Ngosh
18. Ndagh
19. Chikide
20. Chinine
21. Gavva
22. Waja
23. Kyibaku
24. Kamwe
25. Kilba
26. Yedina
27. Marghi,
28. Tonati and
29. Dera

Among the mentioned languages, especially the Chadic group languages are the most endangered ones. This occurred due to the influence of lingua-franca languages like Hausa,

Kanuri and others, but insurgency also contributed a lot. The insurgency in the area (North-east region of Nigeria) quiet for some time specifically Borno State has a huge impact on language death. This crises has led many people to flee to the Capital City of the state (Maiduguri), while others flee to neighbouring states. Some have even fled to the neighbouring countries such as: Cameron, Chad and Niger. With this exodus many of the native speakers of the languages were left with no other choice than to assimilate other languages, especially the younger generation who will grow up and those will be born into a new environment and culture. The mentioned generation will hardly be spoken the languages of their ancestors rather they speak the languages of the new environment. With this attitudes the alien languages (the languages that have gone to the new environment) will either die out completely or will be endangered, and once it become endangered, it's about to die.

Now that most the inhabitants of the rural areas are returning back to their origin, there is a little hope that some will survive, but many are still don't want to go back, because of trauma.

### **Analysis**

When you document a language, you equally preserve it. This will prevent and help the language from dying. The main purpose of language is to communicate and also retains the cultural diversity and values attach to it. Language and culture are inseparable, they go hand in hand. If a man wants to know his history and where he comes from then must relate back to language. This what really differentiate man from other animals.

Documentation has a lot of work to do. Most of the time when a language is to be documented then the question of how to develop an orthography will also come in. orthography is the standard form of writing a particular language. So, it plays a vital role in preserving a language. But, sometimes, it turnout to be difficult. For instance, in a multilingual society like Nigeria, where there are 500 languages according to translators without borders. The irony of the whole thing is that, upon all these languages Nigeria is using English language as official language as well as medium of instruction in schools. In such situation, if one or government wants to preserve languages properly; first must develop orthographies for those languages that are endangered. After that the languages should be taught in schools formally then gradually the diverse languages and the cultures should be put into writing. This procedure is expensive so to say. There is a need to employ experts as well as dedicated people from the society who have their languages at heart. Language experts are not left behind that comprises of all branches of linguistics. Phonologists and interpreters are the first priority because without getting the exact pronunciations and interpretations of the vocabularies, idiomatic expressions and sentences the effort will be abortive. Then the other experts like syntactician, semanticist, morphologist etc. will follow. The reason for involving all these experts is perfect the situation and to get an accurate result. Financially, the monetary aspect is the bedrock of this project. The success of such project lies on gargets and they need to be procured especially the ones that are concern with phonology and phonetics. Employed people too need to be paid. As Africans, if you need information from the people, sometimes you have to give incentive before getting what you want. All what have been mentioned requires financial support.

“A proper documentation and preservation of language will not only help the language from death, but also help in the retention of its cultural diversity. The library plays a key role in human's ability to record his thoughts, experience, history, culture and heritage in his language and to make it available to others.”

“When a language dies out, future generations lose a vital part of the culture that is necessary to completely understand it. This makes language a vulnerable aspect of cultural heritage, and it becomes especially important to preserve it. More than 3,000 languages are reportedly spoken by fewer than 10,000 people each.”

### **Results:**

At the end of this research we would be able to identify different ways of preserving languages especially those that are endangered. You can preserve the languages through the methods that we mentioned previously: by creating recorded and printed sources, teaching and taking language classes, using digital and social media outlets, and insisting on speaking the native language. Not only identifying the ways but utilize them in field. Borno State is the Centre of our research, the state is in critical condition because most of its languages are endangered which needs serious attention. As we discussed it in our analysis, the following are steps to be taken which we recommended it to the government as a solutions to serve languages. Can also serve as solution to government in terms of language policy and planning. People who want a way-out to save their various languages would have an answer to their problems. This research will also serve as step to other researchers who want carry out researches on moribund or endangered languages. Finally, it is a step forward in language policy and planning.

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