

Investigation of Factors Contributing to Indigenous Language Decline in Nigeria

N. A. Ikoba and E. T. Jolayemi

Department of Statistics, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

The declining fortunes of some of Nigeria's indigenous languages are examined in this paper. A multi-dimensional indigenous language-use questionnaire was constructed to elicit data through a survey carried out in some Nigerian cities. The aim was to acquire relevant data on indigenous language ability and possible causes of language-use decline. The results from the survey showed that there is a low level of indigenous language literacy among most of the languages surveyed. The proportion of language use at home was also seen to be generally low for most of the surveyed languages, below the 70% threshold for virile languages. Several reasons were adduced for the non-transfer of indigenous language ability from parent to children and tests of statistical independence carried out showed that the respondents' perception that their language is inferior to English, belief that the child will be limited in school, negligence and inability of parents to speak their heritage language were the major reasons adduced for the decline. A logistic regression analysis of the data also showed that acquisition of language literacy depended on a person's place of childhood, age, level of education, frequency of use at home and the indigenous language spoken by the person's mother.

Keywords: indigenous languages, language literacy, test of independence, intergenerational transmission, logistic regression

1. Introduction

The world today is littered with thousands of languages and several hundreds have been documented to have become extinct (Crystal, 2000). Of the known 7,102 living languages, 22% of them have been categorized as 'in trouble', 13% dying, while there is a loss rate of about 6 languages per year (Lewis *et al.*, 2015).

While the origin of languages has not been fully established (Fernando, *et al.*, 2010), it is known that new languages generally arise through geographical isolation when former dialects become mutually unintelligible to the speakers and when languages get combined, that is, when *creolization* occurs (Fernando, *et al.*, 2010).