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Revitalization of the Urhobo language across
Physical and Virtual Spaces

By

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Keywords

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Abstract

There is increasing interest in finding an effective revitalization system for safeguarding small and endangered languages. Therefore, this study explores the revitalization of Urhobo, an endangered minority language spoken by over two million people in Nigeria. The study also did a morphological and syntactic analysis of the language and the findings revealed some important aspects of the phonological and morpho-syntactic structure of the language. The syllables of the Urhobo language are open ended which ensures vowel endings. Its sound system consists of 28 consonant phonemes, and several of them can function as allophones as their interchangeable usage does not influence word meaning. Both bound and free morphemes exist in the Urhobo language, and affixation is the most common morphological process in the language. New words are also formed through compounding, reduplication, and clipping, with the latter occurring mainly in proper names. This research further highlights the revitalization efforts undertaken by members of the Urhobo community within geographical spaces, including South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Nigeria, as well as in virtual sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social platforms. The study used qualitative and quantitative analysis approaches to examine the revival of the language among speakers dispersed across continents and networking channels. The researcher intends to demonstrate efforts made by Urhobos to preserve, chronicle, and revive the language within geographical and virtual spaces. The study outlines strategies based on language use, transgenerational language transfer, linguistic attitudes, and identity. It also discusses the difficulties encountered and the vitality of the Urhobo language as used in diverse domains. Indigenous language perspectives were also elicited to document the viewpoint of speakers towards the revitalization of the language. The results showed, among other things, that the revitalization of the Urhobo language continues to be hampered by poor progress toward intergenerational transmission. As the survival of any language is anchored on how the younger generation uses it, the study shows that the Urhobo language continues to reflect less proficient speakers, especially among the younger generation. Sociolinguistic variables, including language shift, have remained a constant challenge in maintaining language vitality. This is more evident with the wide usage of Pidgin and English as the preferred languages in homes and other social settings. Other factors, including migration, inter-tribal unions, and the lack of mutual intelligibility of the Urhobo dialects, continue to mitigate the revitalization project across various communities. In terms of the virtual domain, it was found that only a sizable number of the Urhobo people are promoting the language within virtual spaces, which has further weakened the proper documentation and digitization of the language. The study's conclusion emphasizes the supporting role multimedia technologies play and how this can facilitate the Urhobo people's language revitalization effort in Nigeria and among those living abroad.

Recommendations and suggestions were made regarding how to effectively use the Urhobo language by parents and within other physical and virtual spaces.



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Declaration

I declare that *Revitalization of the Urhobo language across physical and virtual spaces* is my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Patience Adarighofua Onowode

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Signed: P.Onowode Date: 10/12/2022



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Christ is the one who gives me the strength I need to do whatever I must do.

– Philippians 4:13 ERV!!!

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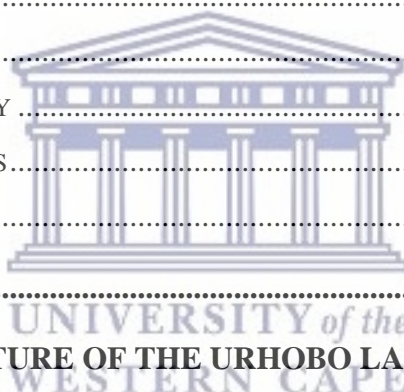
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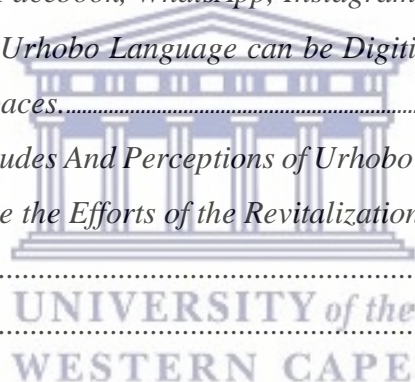


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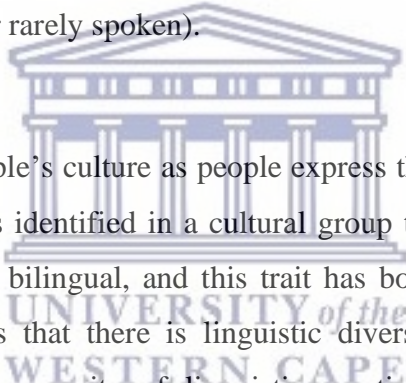
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Background

The colonial masters who set out to discover and dominate the rest of the world knew from the outset the importance of language as an instrument of state and therefore put the language in the hands of their satellite (the elite) to use as a weapon for linguistic (Philipson, 1994:8).

The existence of languages within and outside the African continent has been threatened for a long time, as evidenced by several factors studied by scholars. The linguistic that Philipson mentions refers to the gradual death that many minority languages face. According to Ioraim-Uba (2009), before languages die out entirely, they pass through an endangered state. The four degrees of language endangerment are: weakening/sick (when older people speaking a language are not fully using it with the younger generations); moribund/dying (when you have only a few speakers and it is no longer in use as a native language by children); dead (when a language is not used anymore as a first language); and extinct (when a language is never spoken or rarely spoken).

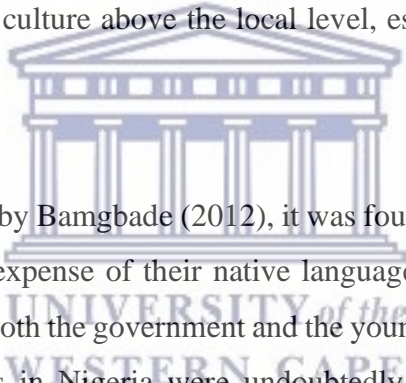


Language forms a large part of people's culture as people express themselves through their preserved culture and history; an individual is identified in a cultural group through a language. By their very nature, many African countries are bilingual, and this trait has both advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, this trait also implies that there is linguistic diversity. Nigeria is known for being linguistically diverse with its heterogeneity of linguistic practices; according to Blench (2012), approximately 550 languages are spoken in Nigeria. According to demographic data, there are just over 200 million people living in Nigeria, of whom 62 million are Hausa/Fulani speakers, 42 million are Yoruba speakers, and 28 million are Igbo speakers. These three languages make up the majority of the population of the country: Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo (Babajide, 2003). Over 400 other spoken languages, the Urhobo language included, are seen as minority languages, although each is widely spoken in their various regions (Abubakar & Bashiru, 2017).

Indigenous languages are not autonomous, separate from colonial languages in this world of code-switching and translanguaging. The young especially, integrate language practices from their interactions with different communities with different ideologies as they draw from different semiotic systems and modes of meaning (Garcia, 2009:4). According to Arokoyo (2019), all efforts to document, describe and revive endangered languages are motivated by a love of language, the common heritage

of humanity. For any revitalization effort to be successful, this love must be accompanied by action. It is a shared responsibility, with the speaker community at its heart.

The endangerment of languages has journeyed from the colonial period to the dawn of independence. Colonialism brought with it good and bad attributes. Concerning language, the language terrain in most African countries was augmented by the scramble and partition of Africa. Post-independence, the colonial languages became the official languages of use, and they pervade all aspects of the country, pushing up against communities that have still maintained their languages over time; they crack to the pressure of these languages because there is a need to fit in. In addition to Nigeria's indigenous languages, three other languages are widely used in the country for different communication purposes. These are the English language, the Nigerian Pidgin English, and Arabic. However, the English language is by far the most important as it is the official language. Its status as the country's official language emerged with the British colonial government, and its maintenance in this position has largely been due to the country's complex multilingual situation. International affairs, the judiciary, education, higher commerce, and the mass media have made it the single most important language in the world, along with its role as a language of culture above the local level, especially among the educated elite (Agheyisi, 2015).



According to an experimental study by Bamgbade (2012), it was found that the student's preference for English was unprecedented, at the expense of their native language, Yoruba, which is spoken in the area. It was argued in the study that both the government and the younger generation's negative attitudes to the use of indigenous languages in Nigeria were undoubtedly the bane of socio-economic and educational advances among native speakers, because it is assumed by colonial authorities that the use of several mother tongues will create inter-ethnic conflicts. To prevent such conflicts, therefore, they posit that a foreign language should be chosen. This substantiates the presentation by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), highlighting the factors responsible for language loss in indigenous communities around the world, some of which are colonization, poor national policies, and cultural or educational subjugation. The organization found that internal forces, like a community's negative attitude towards its own language, for instance, are one of the major causes of language endangerment.

In Nigeria, according to Ejele (2003), major language groups are gradually being eroded by the Nigerian Pidgin (NP) and the English language. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the Urhobo language, a minority language predominantly spoken in the southern region of Nigeria, and an example of a

language gradually being eroded. When the young people in a community stop speaking their mother tongue, this becomes the first step toward endangering that language. Similarly, most Urhobo people are a lot more enthusiastic about speaking English, NP, and even the major languages as opposed to their mother tongue, the Urhobo language (Ejomafuvwe, 2018). The Urhobo language belongs to the Niger-Congo family of West African languages. It also belongs to the Pan-Edo group of languages derived from what Kay Williamson describes as Edoid (as cited by Ojaide and Aziza, 2007). Furthermore, Ojaide and Aziza (2007) posit that the pan-Africanist scholars of African Cultures, as well as Cheikh Anta Diop, have observed similarities among black African languages very far from their loci. The large ‘family’ to which the Urhobo language belongs lends credence to the great Bantu migration idea of a common source of most sub-Saharan African languages (Ojaide & Aziza, 2007).

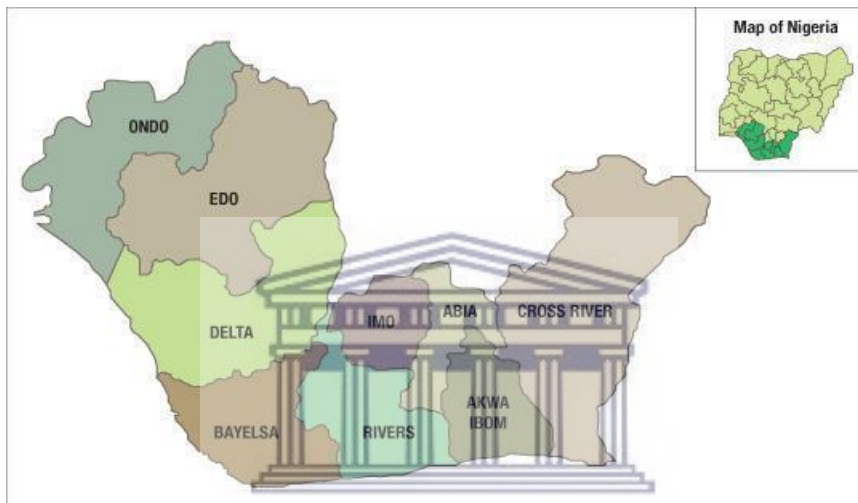


Figure 1.1: Map of the Niger Delta

Source: research gate

Ejedafiru & Ejobee (2012) posit that little has been achieved in the teaching and learning of the Urhobo language. This is traced to poor policy formulation and implementation, lack of adequate teachers, poor infrastructure, lack of organized orthography, inadequately written history and literature, and lack of interest on the part of the owners of the language. Despite all of these factors threatening the existence of the Urhobo language, the study is motivated by the fact that the exponential rate of loss of indigenous languages has often been countered by local grassroots efforts to bring sleeping and endangered languages back to life.

1.1 History of Nigerian Languages

Nigeria is one of the nations in Africa with the largest population and is situated on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. Its neighbours are Benin, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. Although Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with over 500 languages, there are three languages recognized as the major languages spoken in the nation, according to the geographic regions known as the Northern, Eastern, and Western parts of Nigeria, that is, Hausa, Igbo, and the Yoruba languages.

The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), through its Language Development Centre, has created the following orthographies of Nigerian languages in an effort to create as many languages as possible, according to Olude (1997) as cited by Obinyan (2010) in manuals numbered I through VII, as depicted in Table 1-1 below.

Table 1.1: Manual of the Orthographies of Nigerian Languages

S/No	Manuals	Languages Covered
1	Manual I	Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Efik
2	Manual II	Edo, Fulfulde, Ijo, Kanuri and Tiv
3	Manual III	Ibibio Nupe Idoma Birom and Kalabari
4	Manual IV	Ibira, bwatye, Isoko, Kaje Urhobo, Igala
5	Manual V	Esan, Bura, Mambila, Ikwerre and Jukun
6	Manual VI	Obolo, Lokaa, Igede Twak and Mbembe
7	Manual VII	Ngas, Maghi, Etsako, Ejagham, and Mumuye

With regards to the domains of language use in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the National Policy on Education, the government understands the importance of the clear allocation of roles to both the indigenous and foreign languages (Ayeomoni, 2012). The government also recognizes that in Nigeria, language is a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion, and cultures; therefore, it is required of every child to learn the language of their immediate surroundings. Additionally, it is beneficial to the country if each child learns one of the three major Nigerian languages, which are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. Although Nigeria is known for its diversity, it has been observed that language choice has become ingrained in Nigerians' language usage practices because every language use domain has distinct linguistic characteristics. This is due to the distinct usage domains of both the native (major and minor) and foreign languages. Nevertheless, despite the country's

many different languages, the English language is the dominant language of use in almost all domains, and specifically, it is used for all governmental functions. This is mainly due to the historical, multi-ethnic, and cultural nature of the country (Ayeomoni, 2012).

English serves as the official language in various functions as well as the second language for a lot of indigenous native speakers. It remains the language of the bureaucracy, education, commerce, science and technology, inter-ethnic cooperation, and contacts. English is, however, less frequently spoken in rural areas. Nigerian Pidgin (NP), a language that emerged because of the contact between English and the indigenous languages in Nigeria, is spoken more and understood amongst the less educated people. The Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Afro-Asiatic linguistic groups are used to categorize the languages spoken in Nigeria. The enormous Niger-Congo group is further split into nine major branches, including the Kwa subgroup, which is spoken in the country's most south-westerly region; the Ijoid branch, which is spoken in the Niger Delta region; and the Atlantic subgroup, which most notably includes Fulani/Hausa; the extensive Benue-Congo and Niger-Congo subgroup, which includes Tiv, Jukun, Edo, Urhobo, Itshekiri, Ijaw, Igbo, Igala, Idoma, Nupe, Gwari, Yoruba, and a number of Cross River basin languages, including Efik, Ibibio, Anang, and Ekoi. In addition, the Adamawa-Ubangi languages are spoken in the country's northern region and include Awak, Waja, Waka, and Tula (Blench, 2019).

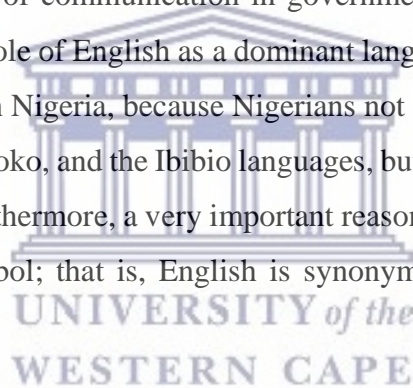


Figure 1.2: A map showing some ethnic groups and languages of Nigeria

1.2 Challenges Arising from Nigeria's Heterogeneous Nature

In Nigeria, people from a particular ethnic group are known by the languages spoken in their communities. The presence of about 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria makes the country a multilingual and multicultural nation with a multiplicity of customs and cultures. While the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country contributes to the rich heritage of the nation, it has, however, made it difficult for the country to introduce and enforce a national language policy that allows inclusivity of minority languages (Dare, 2015).

The largest ethnic groups are the Hausas, Yorubas, and Igbos. Their corresponding languages are primarily spoken and used as a means of communication in the regions where they are localized. Hausa is mainly used in the North, Yoruba in the West, and Igbo in the East, and there is the NP which is mostly used as a lingua franca in the South-South geopolitical zone in the Niger Delta Region (Frances, 2014). In contrast, the English language is studied and spoken as the official medium of education, trade, and used as a formal means of communication in government, foreign affairs, the courts, and mass media. To a large extent, the role of English as a dominant language could be said to be one of the causes of language endangerment in Nigeria, because Nigerians not only prefer English to their mother tongue, such as the Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko, and the Ibibio languages, but also feel that their local languages are restricted in certain aspects. Furthermore, a very important reason for the preference for the English language is that it is a status symbol; that is, English is synonymous with civilization born out of colonialism.



1.3 Language Shift

In Africa, the scenario is that there is pressure on vulnerable languages, forcing a language shift to a locally dominant, national or global language (Batibo, 2013a). Language shift is the action that leads to language endangerment. This is when people of a particular speech community encounter another language that they see as superior to their own. This new language becomes the popular one to speak, and by doing so, people shift their interest from their mother tongue to this new language. According to Ravindranath (2009), as cited in Ejomafuvwe (2018), language shift is the process by which languages are switched between by a speech community who then gradually abandons its native tongue in favour of the other. The language they shift to does not necessarily have to be English; it could be one of the larger indigenous languages, such as Yoruba or Igbo in Nigeria.

Language shift occurs when intergenerational transmission proceeds in a negative direction with fewer speakers in each direction; the shift is a collective or communal process, and loss refers to the reduction of linguistic abilities at the individual levels. Internal change occurs when speakers begin to shift their language loyalties, ‘abandoning’ their language in favour of a higher-status language, typically because they believe the higher-status language is more socially beneficial. Individuals eventually come to believe that their heritage language is less useful, important, and prestigious than the language of wider communication, resulting in a language shift (Eunice & McCarty, 2006).

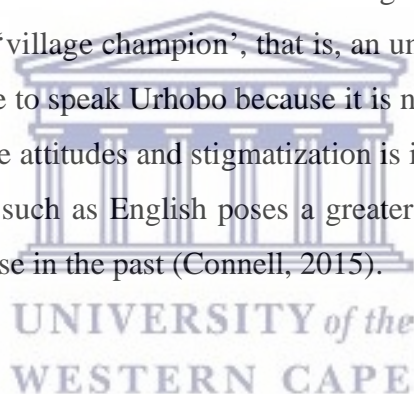
There is, however, no doubt that with the history of colonialism in Africa, African languages have lost their seat at the diplomatic table. Education is one of the reasons for language shift because one is more likely to be taught English, Portuguese, French, and increasingly, Mandarin, in the classroom to ensure a better socio-economic future (Mukama, 2007). Additionally, it is possible that the use of a regional or national lingua franca or urban vernacular is often more valued as being modern and sophisticated. This can be at the expense of marginal languages. In public domains such as schools, workplaces, politics, and the media, a fairly large number of languages may be marginalized compared to most state-sponsored regional languages (Nwagbara & Reid, 2013). In many cases, minority languages undergo a shift to regionally dominant languages spoken by much larger populations (Batibo, 2013b). For example, to the west of Lake Eyasi in Tanzania, many Hadza speakers have shifted to Sukuma, which is a Bantu language spoken by a large population of about seven million people. Sukuma itself is under pressure from the national language, Kiswahili, and younger speakers have lost a significant number of lexical items known to older speakers (Batibo, 2013b). Furthermore, according to the United Nations (n.d.), more than 370 million indigenous people live in 70 countries around the world. Out of the 7,000 or so languages that are thought to be in use today, some are widely spoken and used across a variety of technological platforms. In contrast, indigenous languages have much smaller language communities, and the majority of them are in danger of going extinct or going into dormancy (Galla, 2018).

The causes of language endangerment in Nigeria, especially in the south-southern region, are like those seen in other parts of the world (Alexandre, 2010). What is particular to the situation of Urhobo is the pressure from other dominant indigenous languages, i.e., language shift tends to be from a minority language to a locally dominant language rather than a national or global language (Batibo, 2013b).

1.4 Language Loss

Language loss is an occurrence that negatively affects us all. The trend of globalization, while promoting some languages and internationalization, has endangered many other local languages. According to UNESCO's Atlas of the world (2009), 230 languages have gone into extinction since 1950, with another 3,000 languages endangered worldwide. Furthermore, UNESCO posit that many indigenous communities around the world have experienced language loss because of genocide, colonization, assimilation, national policies, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation. The organization found that internal forces are one of the major causes of language endangerment. This can include a community's negative attitude towards its own language, and these situations are prevalent within African regions. In Nigeria, according to Ejele (2003), major language groups are gradually being eroded by the Nigerian Pidgin (NP) and English.

Most Urhobo people are enthusiastic about speaking English, Pidgin, and even the major languages to the detriment of their language. The Urhobo speech community seem embarrassed and ashamed to speak Urhobo (Ejomafuvwe, 2018). The few who have the courage to speak the Urhobo language are often called 'ogburhobo', meaning 'village champion', that is, an unexposed timid person. This is due to a lack of confidence in being able to speak Urhobo because it is not valued as highly as English and NP. The result of these unfavourable attitudes and stigmatization is increasing neglect of the language, especially when a global language such as English poses a greater threat to minority local language maintenance, which has been the case in the past (Connell, 2015).

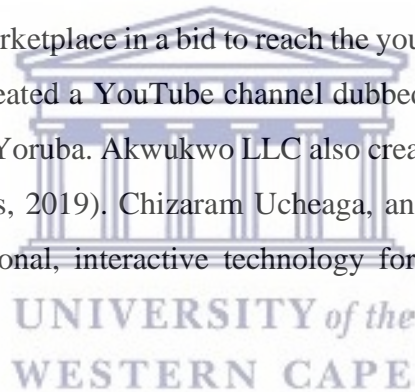


1.5 Language Documentation

According to Himmelman (2004), as cited in Penfield and Tucker (2011), language documentation is meant to provide a detailed account of linguistic usage unique to a specific speech community. Similarly, Evans (2010) proposes that successful language documentation draws on and cross-fertilizes the work of a diverse range of people and achieves the best results when it capitalizes on the diverse talents and motivations that each brings to the task. Jones (2014) postulates that the ever-increasing availability of new technologies, from visual to aural archiving to the digitization of textual resources and electronic mapping, has the potential to revolutionize the documentation, analysis, and revitalization of endangered languages for the linguist and indigenous community alike. As evidenced above, in comparison to the English language, which is a mainstream language, Urhobo is a minority language. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could play a decisive role in the teaching, learning, and preservation of a language, which in this study, is the Urhobo language. Modern homes are replete

with ICT gadgets, therefore, the first step to revitalizing the Urhobo language is to invent a keyboard with Urhobo characters as it is desperately needed, particularly in the virtual space (in terms of chatting). Experts, like Delgado (2003), have discovered that technology plays an important role in language revival. Digitization can reduce the time it takes to produce, distribute, and consume information in local languages while also being cost-effective. It is focused on new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which are tools that employ languages or instruments for language processing and representation (Osborn, 2010). The primary goals of digitization are to increase access and preservation while also allowing users to search collections quickly and extensively from any location at any time. However, digital tools used to chronicle, archive, and teach language are beginning to raise privacy problems, cultural appropriation, control misappropriation, and cultural manipulation (Delgado, 2003).

There are instances of people who have come up with language apps to preserve minority languages. Luis Van Ahn and Severin Hacker, founded Duolingo, an American language-learning website with a digital textbook, a mobile app, and a language proficiency assessment exam. Mali-born Mamadou Gouro Sidibé created a voice-based messaging platform, Lenali, a platform that has proved effective in enhancing communication in the marketplace in a bid to reach the younger generation. Gbemisola Isimi, a Nigerian based in the UK, has created a YouTube channel dubbed CultureTree TV, which, through music and videos, teaches children Yoruba. Akwukwo LLC also created an app for children to learn the Igbo language in Nigeria (Williams, 2019). Chizaram Ucheaga, another Nigerian, created the Mavis talking books and pen, an educational, interactive technology for improving performance in basic education and language learning.



The revitalization of endangered languages typically involves efforts to expand them into new domains such as virtual spaces, that is, digital media. According to Carew *et al.* (2015), as cited by Lhawa (2019), digital media has emerged as a critical domain into which endangered languages can expand with relative ease compared to the educational or governmental (physical) domain. Social media has provided an expanding range of opportunities for communities to create a digital presence for their languages through writing (texting), video, and audio messaging (voice notes, YouTube videos, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook) to create a digital presence for these languages (Galla, 2016).

1.6 Digitization

New technologies have become an ever more prominent domain for the promotion of endangered languages worldwide. ‘Digitization’ and ‘digitalization’ are two conceptual words that are often used

interchangeably throughout a wide spectrum of literature. Digitization, on the other hand, is most commonly defined as “the process of converting from analog to digital in order to make it easier to archive, access, and exchange information” (Gimpel & Röglinger, 2015:5), while digitalization is most often associated with “...the increased use of digital technologies and changes in how people connect with one another and behave in society” (Gimpel & Röglinger, 2015:5). By embracing digital technologies and a wider usage and context of digitized data transformed into actionable information with a specific benefit in mind, digitalization facilitates, improves, and transforms processes and activities (Kagermann, 2015). Following these characteristics, academics coined the phrase “digital transformation”. Digital transformation is defined as the overall phenomenon emerging from alterations in society and organizations due to an increased usage of new, computerized technologies (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2014; and Hanelt *et al.*, 2015).

1.7 Language Revitalization

The most crucial first steps in language revitalization involves establishing the degree to which a particular language has been disconnected. The situational peculiarities for revitalization often vary within and across speech communities depending on the degree of the language endangerment. Language is always evolving; that is, language changes across physical spaces and social groups; language changes over time as well. Pronunciations change over time, new words are coined or borrowed, the meaning of old words shifts, and morphology either develops or degrades. The rate of change varies, but regardless of how quickly or slowly they occur, the mother tongue eventually becomes unintentionally distant and different. As a matter of fact, historical linguists accurately identified that language shift and language death are not brand-new occurrences as we see languages of the world constantly changing, merging and, at times, vanishing completely in the process. The dead languages in the world include, but are not limited to, Latin, Coptic, Biblical Hebrew, Sumerian, Akkadian, and Sanskrit (Coggin, 2016).

Therefore, language revitalization is an attempt by language activists in combination with specific communities to implement or create language tools intended to sustain an endangered language and prevent it from dying. Lee and Van Way (2016:281) proposed that a language must have at least 100,000 speakers to be “safe”, implying that about one-third of African languages are considered “unsafe”. In this regard, Tsunoda (2016:171) states that language revitalization aims to “maintain or restore a language to a state that it is spoken by a reasonable number of people, reasonably fluent, and in a reasonably intact form”. Penfield and Tucker (2011) define language revitalization as a multifaceted process that includes language documentation, language rebuilding, language maintenance, language

conservation, and language sustainability. It is a multifaceted, ongoing, and dynamic process that includes linguistics analysis, language policy and planning, curriculum development, teaching tactics and methods, materials development (some or all of which are based on existing documentation), and activism. Consequently, a thorough comprehension of the mechanics of reviving a language, as well as the idiosyncrasies of variables within a specific speech group, is critical; at the same time, reviving a language also means reviving related conventions and shared values. In any event, language revitalization is an important process that allows us to keep our existing understanding of language. Whatever the case may be, language revitalization is an important process that allows us to keep our existing understanding of language in general and across cultures.

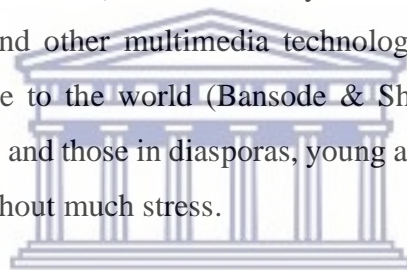
Language revitalization involves addressing situations surrounding endangered language or language death. A language can die out due to various reasons. According to Crystal (2000), a language is classified as “dead” or “extinct” when there are no living persons who speak it. Languages most at risk of extinction typically belong to disenfranchised minority groups, small communities of practice, or indigenous peoples. Indigenous languages are either affected by the prevalence of the dominant language spoken in a region or nation, or actively weeded out by a nation’s government. Hinton (2001:3) posits that even without apparent repression, minority languages may shift to the dominant language. This shift is sometimes made through voluntary or conscious decisions. It is important to note that saving indigenous languages ensures the preservation of indigenous peoples’ cultural identity and dignity, and to enable them to safeguard their traditional heritage and historical values. Therefore, if the government focuses on only the dominant language and emphasizes its importance in trade, economics, and politics, the dominant language becomes the only way to communicate in public spheres effectively; therefore, indigenous languages that are not used as often in these areas become secondary and are rarely spoken and eventually become extinct.

Language attitude is one of the aspects of sociolinguistics. Language attitudes, according to Crystal (1997), refers to how people feel about their own languages or other languages that they encounter in their daily lives. A language attitude can be positive or negative; in reality, some people may also hold a neutral attitude. A positive language attitude is accompanied by positive actions, whereas a bad language attitude is accompanied by negative actions. Additionally, Coronel-Molina (2009) posits that there has not been a consensus about the concept of attitude, a cornerstone of conventional social psychology.

The study of the relationship between the researcher's language attitudes and the respondents' linguistic habits, therefore, plays a key role in the various analyses presented in this thesis. Most researchers agree that a favourable (positive) attitude towards a language would affect more positive results in learning. In contrast, a negative view of a language being learned will more likely cause negative results. On the other hand, this study will focus more on people's behaviour toward certain languages used in society, particularly in real-life situations. In their article, *Language Attitudes Studies: A Brief Survey of Methodological Approaches*, Agheyisi and Fishman (1970) summarized some helpful strategies for the research of language attitudes. Examining attitudes is important to the study at hand since the researcher is particularly interested in how participants feel about Urhobo and its variants.

1.8 Language Revitalization in the Context of this Study

Individual, academic or public libraries, actual or virtual, would be established to champion documentation of the Urhobo language. Today, computers have become an integral feature of modern libraries, owing to their space efficiency, precision, and speed. This implies that the effectiveness of modern libraries (digital/virtual libraries) relies mainly on Information and Communication Technologies such as computers and other multimedia technologies, which would make print and electronic material easily accessible to the world (Bansode & Shinde, 2019). In this way, Urhobo language users and learners at home and those in diasporas, young and old, would have the opportunity to access the language materials without much stress.



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Different scholars have painted a dire picture of indigenous languages on the African continent and the world at large. This study pivots on the revitalization of the Urhobo language specifically. Language speakers in the diaspora are a highlighted speech community, as there is a move away from the oral to the written because of the virtual nature of some of the interactions among Speakers of the Urhobo language. Social media pages have become encyclopaedias and areas of reference for various speakers across the world looking for answers regarding their languages. According to the Urhobo public consensus, kola-nut presentations, for instance, at heterogeneous socio-cultural gatherings within the Urhobo homeland, sometimes show disrespect for the multilingual and ethnic nature of the events (Ifesieh, 2016). The question therefore remains, can documentation of Urhobo improve its vitality?

According to Ojaide and Aziza, in their work, the *Urhobo Language Today* (2007), approximately three million people speak Urhobo in the South-South region of Nigeria. The Urhobo language belongs to the Niger-Congo family of the western African language, although on a more specific and narrower level,

the Urhobo language belongs to the Pan-Edo group of languages, deriving from the eponymous “Aka”, according to what Kay Williamson describes as Edoid (as cited by Ojaide and Aziza, 2007). The Urhobo ethnic nation is culturally cohesive, yet it is divided into 24 political clans or kingdoms, each with its own dialect. The Urhobo language has different dialects, which are Okpe, Uvwie, and the Agbarho dialects. The Agbarho variant of Urhobo is the generally accepted standard Urhobo language in its entirety, which will be the focus of this study. However, literate Urhobos discourse in English, while those with little or no formal Western-style education communicate in Nigerian Pidgin. Intercultural marriages have also led to the reduction of speakers, as parents communicate with their children in English or Nigerian Pidgin; this is the scenario in all spheres of activities, except in annual or periodical traditional religious rites or elders’ and chiefs’ meetings, especially in rural areas. The Urhobo language is also spoken in very limited physical spaces in some rural homes, markets, and Orthodox Church services (Ojaide & Aziza, 2007).

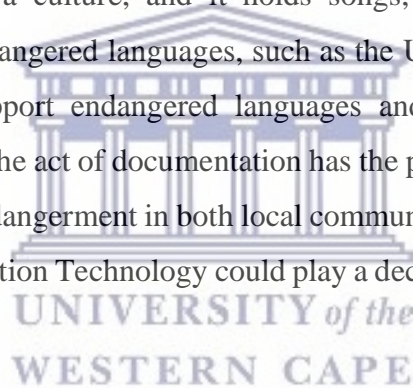
In recent years, the Urhobo language has been introduced into the Delta State University Curriculum. The study programme includes learning about the Urhobo civilization, culture, geography, and history. This development has elevated the language from a speech-language used for daily conversation, to an academic language (used for intellectual discourse). However, this has not changed the status of the language; rather, it has just become an object of study, just like people study ancient Greek or old English, which people do not speak anymore (Ojaide & Aziza, 2007). Outside these studies, Urhobo is not often used in speech; hence, it remains a language on the brink of endangerment following the explanation of the degrees of endangered languages, as highlighted by Ioratim-Uba (2009).

Language revitalization, according to Penfield and Tucker (2011), is the process of re-awakening languages. Language documentation, language rebuilding, language maintenance, language conservation, and sustainability are all part of language revitalization. Language revitalization, according to Tsunoda (2006:171), strives to “maintain or restore a language to a state where it is spoken by a reasonable number of people, is sufficiently fluent, and is reasonably intact”. Languages whose use and prominence are severely limited are among those in need of revival. According to Himmelman (2004), as cited in Penfield and Tucker (2011:48), language documentation is intended to “provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community”. Similarly, Evans (2010:128) claims that successful language documentation draws on and cross-fertilizes the work of a diverse group of people and that it achieves the best outcomes when it capitalizes on the many talents and motivations that each person brings to the task. Jones (2014) believes that the increasing availability of new technologies, such as visual and aural archiving, textual resource digitization, and

electronic mapping, has the potential to revolutionize the documentation, analysis, and revitalization of endangered languages for both linguists and indigenous peoples.

Language revitalization should be aided by technology, according to researchers such as Delgado (2003). Digitization has the potential to shorten the production, distribution, and consumption processes of information in local languages, and it is cost-effective. It is centred on new information and communication technologies (ICTs) which are conceived as tools that use languages or as language processing and representation tools (Osborn, 2010). The main reasons for digitization are to enhance access and improve preservation. Another reason is that digital products allow users to search collections rapidly and comprehensively from anywhere at any time. However, digital tools used to chronicle, preserve, and teach language can also contribute to privacy problems, cultural appropriation, misuse of control, and cultural knowledge manipulation (Delgado, 2003).

For the children to embrace the language at school, for example, their learning must begin from home. A language is the foundation of a culture, and it holds songs, folk tales, family histories, and connections. Documentation of endangered languages, such as the Urhobo language, can help provide critical linguistic resources to support endangered languages and relearning in communities and institutional contexts. Further still, the act of documentation has the potential to alter linguistic attitudes and raise awareness of language endangerment in both local communities and society at large (Rouvier, 2017). Information and Communication Technology could play a decisive role in the teaching, learning, and preservation of a language.



1.9 Problem Statement

Language loss refers to a societal or individual loss in the ability to use a language, which implies that another language is replacing it. Languages are seen as components of ethnic and national identities, and according to recent studies, by the end of this century, 46 percent of the world's 7,000 language communities face a complete loss of language transmission (Rouvier *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, Ejomafuvwe (2018) posits that in a world where one's language is perceived as associated with one's identity, there is a need to preserve and nurture one's language. With people losing the ability to speak the Urhobo language, it means that they can lose an aspect of their identity.

In a report by UC Berkeley PhonLab, titled *Phonetics and Phonology of Urhobo*, as cited in Ojaide (2007), many people who reside in Urhoboland, including Effurun, Sapele, Ughelli, and Warri, do not

use or speak Urhobo, particularly for those who are younger than 21, who communicate primarily in Nigerian Pidgin English and Nigerian Standard English. Therefore, the question is how the situation of Urhobo language endangerment can be reversed, particularly through revitalizing and digitizing the Urhobo language across physical and virtual spaces and through the use of modern technological tools/affordances. The main problem of this study, then, relates to the revitalization of endangered languages for future generations across physical and virtual spaces. Of particular interest is the kind of technology that is needed to amalgamate the physical and virtual spaces and to achieve the goal of digitizing, documenting, and revitalizing the Urhobo language at the same time.

1.10 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to hypothesize how different virtual spaces can be studied in relation to both new and exciting ways in which unanticipated and unconventional opposing accounts are taken into consideration to reflect the general view of a physical community versus a virtual community.

1.11 Significance of the Study

The study will add to the existing knowledge in the field of language documentation, revitalization, preservation and, more importantly, will contribute to the existing knowledge on Urhobo as a language. Furthermore, this study will try to identify the speech communities in not only the physical spaces but the virtual spaces as well, because the Internet can serve as a connective tissue that connects speakers over vast distances. The study could also serve as a template to revitalize other languages in a similar situation. The study hopes to fill in the gaps on how to strengthen oral and written Urhobo in the physical domain and virtual domain, especially considering that it is the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution.

Respondents have an awareness of the importance of revitalizing their language and a shift from the negative to the positive attitude scale. For teachers and mentors, the results of this study will help the language teachers train better in order to teach prospective speakers of the language as well as think of ideas that will give proper guidance to the students/mentees, this may also increase the competency of the students.

The study's results should be considered as reference material and a guide for future researchers who wish to conduct the same experimental study or any study related to phenomena in this study.

1.12 Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to explore the vitality of the Urhobo language with the multiple purposes of documenting and revitalizing the language through digitization. This entails finding ways to make the language more interactive and available to Urhobo speakers in Nigeria and diaspora across the physical and virtual spaces.

1.12.1 Specific Objectives

1. To do a morphological and syntactic analysis of the Urhobo language.
2. To determine the vitality of the Urhobo language in terms of place and domains of use in physical spaces such as markets, churches, etc.
3. To determine the vitality of the Urhobo language in terms of place and domains of use in virtual spaces such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.
4. To explore how the Urhobo language can be digitized, documented, and revitalized across virtual and physical spaces.
5. To establish the attitudes and perceptions of Urhobo people towards the revitalization of Urhobo; do they appreciate the efforts of the revitalization.

1.13 Research Questions

1. What is the morphological and syntactic structure of Urhobo?
2. Where is the Urhobo language spoken, by whom, and in what context?
3. In comparison to other languages in the area, how common is the Urhobo language used as a language for education and other interaction?
4. How do we ensure the preservation, documentation, and revitalization of the Urhobo language in both the physical and virtual spaces?
5. What kind of technology/ies is/are required to integrate the physical and virtual spaces, as well as to achieve the goal of digitizing, documenting, and revitalizing the Urhobo language?

1.14 Limitations

The research focus of this study was mainly on the revitalization of Urhobo in physical and virtual spaces. The findings from the research, therefore, are directly applicable only to Urhobo. The single case that was used suggests that there is a possibility that the results might not be generalizable beyond the researched language without conducting any further study. Following the study's scope, the case study in this research did not explore the entire Urhobo speech community for scalable reasons.

1.15 Chapter Outline

Seven chapters make up this research, and each chapter is further divided into different subheadings. This section serves as a guide to the reader in line with the contents of each chapter.

Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of the research and background to the study. Other aspects discussed are the problem statement, the objectives, and the significance of the study under investigation. The chapter further clarifies the research methodology and includes the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review and theoretical /analytical framework of the study. It also presents previous primary and secondary literature surrounding the study, such as literature to do with the descriptive analysis of the formal aspect of the Urhobo language, literature to do with the sociolinguistics analysis of the Urhobo language, and Fishman's work on language revitalization. In terms of the theoretical framework, the study will employ Galla's work on the technacy framework.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and methodology, motivating its implementation, data collection instruments, data presentations, and analyses.

Chapter 4 gives the demographic information of the Urhobo people.

Chapter 5 examines, interprets, and discusses the grammatical structure of the Urhobo language by analysing some linguistics levels, and presenting an outline of some sound systems in Urhobo, i.e., the Urhobo consonants and vowel sound segments and how they are patterned.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from the analysis of the sociolinguistics of the vitality of the Urhobo language across physical spaces.

Chapter 7 concludes the research study, by giving pertinent suggestions for potential future research directions and study limitations.

1.16 Chapter Summary

The introductory chapter has built a general direction for the entire research plan. It has also provided the context for the determination of the study. It presented the background of the study, a description of the research problem, the research objectives, and the research questions. A summary of the research design and methods has also been put forward, adding how bias can be avoided. The concepts in the study have been defined, limitations and scope have been dealt with, and the final part of the chapter concludes with a brief description of the other chapters in this thesis.

The next chapter presents the Literature review and theoretical/analytical framework of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical/Analytical Framework

2.0 Introduction

This study examines how the Urhobo language might be revitalized in physical and virtual contexts. According to Whaley (2001), when a language becomes extinct, that language, together with its culture and history, vanishes completely, leaving no trace for us to investigate. This chapter reviews existing literature on language revitalization and related concepts, focusing on the historical reasons for language endangerment and current language revitalization efforts. The literature reviewed includes research on the use of technology in language revitalization initiatives, engages with the complexity of indigenous identity in practice communities, discusses how youth are occupying and employing technology, and examines how indigenous knowledge is used for communication online. The second section of this chapter presents the analytical framework used in this study.

2.1 The Urhobo People

According to Ojaruega (2014:88), “anyone born by an Urhobo parent is an Urhobo”. Located in southwestern Nigeria, close to the Niger Delta, are the Urhobos. Delta State is home to a large population of Urhobos, who make up a significant portion of the state's population. Language spoken by the Urhobos is known as Urhobo. Regrettably, not all people of Urhobo ancestry can communicate with one another in Urhobo. Studies show that many native speakers have forgotten how to properly pronounce Urhobo (Akpofure-Okenrentie, 2016).

In this context, the term "Urhobo" does not designate a specific geographical area, but rather a population of approximately two million people (Aziza, 2019). According to Elugbe (1986:3), the Edoid languages are divided into four groups: Delta Edoid, Southwestern Edoid, Northern Central Edoid, which includes Edo, and North-western Edoid. The Southwestern Edoid language family includes Urhobo, Okpe, and Uvwie. Edo state and the southern portion of Delta state speak many Edoid languages, which explains the social and cultural ties to the Edo people of Nigeria.

2.2 The Effects of Urhobo Language's Geographical Distribution

The Urhobo language is spoken in Nigeria's Delta State and the diaspora. According to a 2006 census, the number of Urhobo language speakers was over two million. According to Odiemo (2014), as cited by Akpofure-Okenrentie (2016:1), this figure might be disputed owing to probable survey failures. Gbemre (2019) argues that the majority of groups have cast such a shadow on the Urhobo tribe that the population figures are incorrectly represented. To what extent this is true is still decided by the population figures. The Urhobo population at home and in the diaspora was projected to be around five million in 2006. The Urhobos have large settlements/towns in Bayelsa, Ajegunle, Owo, Ore, Okitipupa, Oro in Kwara, and a sizable population outside Nigeria, in addition to being the dominant ethnic group in Delta State (Gbemre, 2019).

2.3 Language Endangerment

The rapid disappearance of most languages worldwide is now a concern to linguists and other stakeholders. According to Mowarin (2004), threatened languages are found mainly in Australia, North America (the United States and Canada), and Africa. Nigeria, as a linguistically diverse country, is currently said to have over five hundred languages, though only the dominant ones are officially recognized. The three official languages are Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. The number of spoken languages in Nigeria is unknown, as some languages are yet to be discovered. Linguists have debated what constitutes a language or a dialect for too long. Hoffman (1974) classifies 396 language families in Nigeria, excluding recognized dialects, while Hansford *et al.* (1976) recognize 395 languages in Nigeria. Blench & Dendo (2003), however, recorded 550 languages as spoken in Nigeria. To this effect, recent scholarship on linguistic diversity and multilingualism has focused on language endangerment and maintenance. For example, the indigenous languages of Australia and North America have been dominated by the English language, which is the language of Anglophone migrants. The 2000 indigenous languages in Africa spoken by about 480 million Africans (Crystal, 1997:316) are now threatened by English, French, and Portuguese and their Pidgins and Creoles. These are the languages of Africa's former colonial rulers.

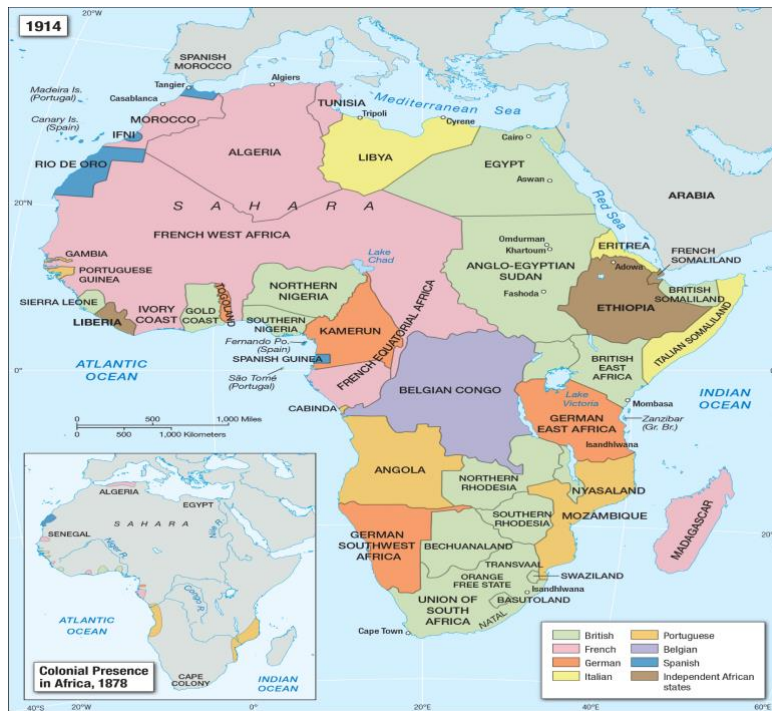


Figure 2.1: A map of colonized nations

Source: Google

The leading causes of the endangerment of indigenous languages in these regions are political, social, economic, and linguistic domination of the indigenes by migrant majorities, primarily anglophone. Due to Africans’ perception of the inferiority of their indigenous languages and the superiority of former colonial languages, African languages are vanishing (Mohr, 2018). Bradley and Bradley (2002) observed that “Various scholars have estimated that up to 90 percent of the world’s languages will disappear during the 21st century unless and maybe even if we do something now.”

African linguists’ prognosis for the future of African languages is bleak. Egbokhare (2004:13) observes this premonition thus:

There is a grim prediction that in the next 50-100 years, 90 per cent of the languages of Africa will be extinct; this, if allowed to happen, will be a tragedy given the colossal information base and folk wisdom that will perish. It touches on our identity and our continued existence as a people.

Language endangerment, therefore, is defined as a condition in which a language is threatened with extinction due to its lack of use. According to Hale (1992), an endangerment situation happens when a more dominant language controls a language. Because of a dominating and powerful language, the threatened language’s domain coverage tends to decrease. Linguists have developed several alternative classification systems for languages to grasp the wide range of linguistic contexts better. The term

'moribund' is used by Krauss (1992) to describe languages that are not taught to children as their first language. Moribund languages will be extinct in a generation unless something changes. The languages currently being taught to children but will no longer be taught during the next century are considered endangered.

Further still, language endangerment occurs when a language is neglected and replaced with another, putting it at risk of extinction, death, or loss. As Crystal (2008:168) posited, an *endangered language* is a language that is "at risk of extinction soon". This means that an endangered language is on the verge of extinction as its speakers pass away or switch to another language.

'Safe' languages are those that are neither extinct nor endangered; they are currently being taught to children and are, for the time being, safe from extinction. The words 'endangered language' is frequently used to refer to both endangered and moribund languages in Krauss' (1992) classification scheme. Even though the term 'extinct' is often used to denote languages that no longer have speakers, Leonard (2008) questions its use. Using the terms 'extinct' or 'endangered' to describe a language alludes to the biological parallel of an extinct animal. Indeed, extinct languages that are irretrievably lost are, by definition, no longer 'in danger of being lost,' and are thus difficult to conceptualize in terms of endangerment (Leonard, 2008: 27). Leonard's distinction between sleeping and extinct languages addresses the issue of language categorization. This, and other complex issues, can impact our understanding of what constitutes the definition of an endangered language. The four degrees of language endangerment, according to Ioratih-Uba (2009) are: weakening/sick (when older people speak a language and not fully used by the younger generations); moribund/dying (when you have only a few speakers, and no longer taught as a native language to children); dead (when a language is no longer spoken as a native language); and extinct (when a language is never spoken or rarely spoken).

According to Fakuade (1999:59), Hausa has posed a significant threat to minority languages in the Adamawa State in Northern Nigeria. To illustrate this further, in a report on the future of Nigerian languages, Ohiri-Aniche (2006) claimed that the marginalization of Nigerian languages in schools, particularly in nursery and primary schools, leads to their loss and eventual extinction. The survey found that just ten schools in the Lagos metropolis employed an indigenous language as a teaching subject (Nursery 1-3), while English is taught in all of them. Only four schools claimed to teach their students an indigenous language (Yoruba). This report demonstrates that even if the language is learned at home, which is not always the case, the child is pushed to forsake it because it is not used to acquire knowledge. According to Nishanthi (2020), speaking the mother tongue at home is natural because the medium of instruction at school for the first three years is their mother tongue. Even in the educational policy, it is

stated that the mother tongue should be the language of instruction for the first three years. Some people mistakenly believe that learning Urhobo as a child will impair their capacity to communicate in English.

If the endangered language is not revitalized, it will go extinct. A linguistic ‘end of days’ is occurring, a fight for domination and survival among the world’s languages. According to sociolinguists, approximately 10 per cent of the world’s languages will live to see the next century because of the global linguistic apocalypse, resulting in a worldwide mass murder of languages (Crystal, 1997). Languages like English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and others thrive despite this linguistic Armageddon. More minor languages will be absorbed by more prominent, prestigious languages, particularly those not based on information and communication technologies (ICT). “A language that is not on the Internet is a language that ‘no longer exists’ in the modern world”, according to Dlibugunaya ((2010:305), as cited in Odeh, 2016). Alamu and Ugwuoke (2010:57) posit that most Nigerian languages are threatened, and “a tribe that loses its language to another is reduced to the status of a ‘slave’”.

Darah (2014:54) states that the endangerment that a language faces is caused by the proximity it has to its neighbours, in the case of Urhobo that is: the Isoko to the east, Ukuani to the northeast, Edo (Bini) to the north, Ijaw to the south, and Itsekiri to the southwest. Due to this closeness, many Urhobo parents and children favour speaking Izaw, Itsekiri, Kwani, and other neighbouring tribes’ languages, including the Oyibo man’s pidgin (Nigerian Pidgin English), relegating Urhobo to a second language. Urhobo persons and the youth in the diaspora regard Urhobo differently from the persons in the rest of Nigeria (Mowarin & Oduaran, 2014).

The loss of a language constitutes a loss of history and culture, more than a mere withdrawal from a communicative instrument. Consequently, language death is vital to prevent. Revitalization of the language is the rejuvenation of the use of a language to avoid its death (Crystal, 2002). Anthropologist Akira Yamamoto identifies nine factors in language death, which he believes will prevent the demise of languages (Yuan, 2020):

- 1). There must be a dominant culture that favours linguistic diversity;
- 2). The endangered community must possess an ethnic identity that is strong enough to encourage language preservation;
- 3). The creation and promotion of programmes that educate students on the endangered language and culture;
- 4). The creation of school programmes that are both bilingual and bicultural;
- 5). The establishment of teacher training programmes for native speakers;

- 6). The endangered speech community must be completely involved;
- 7). The creation of language materials that are easy to use;
- 8). The language must have written materials that encompass new and traditional content; and
- 9). The language must be used in new environments and the geographical areas the language is used in (both old and new) must be strengthened (Crystal, 2014:191).

When a language is threatened, it is referred to as revitalization, but when a language becomes extinct, it is referred to as revival. These two strategies necessitate distinct approaches. Researchers must increase the number of speakers by promoting the language's use for revitalization; for revival, researchers must strive to motivate a group to begin learning the language, relying on materials left by previous speakers. There has been only one successful instance of language revival: modern Hebrew (Harshav, 2009). This revival was unique in that it was enabled by a shared cultural identity and a commitment to using Hebrew daily due to the strong religious beliefs associated with the language. There are currently only a few successful cases of language revitalization, such as Ainu in Japan, Manchu in China, or Quechua in Peru, according to Alicia (2018) as cited by Yuan (2020). In general, language revitalization is far more effective than language revival; languages are more likely to be saved when they still have speakers.

There are many reasons why a language becomes endangered, and these are discussed below.

2.4 How Languages Become Endangered

Language shift is “a phrase used in sociolinguistics to refer to an individual's or a group's gradual or abrupt change from one language to another” (Crystal, 2008:269). This happens a lot because of the heavy mobile world. The primary cause of language extinction and death is a lack of generational transmission. That is, speakers who are primarily parents, do not speak their native language to their children. Languages with fewer than 500 speakers are considered endangered (Ejele, 2003:121).

Language shift has been a research issue in linguistics for around half a century, according to Knooihuizen (2015); however, a precise and universal definition appears to be lacking. Different issues, on the other hand, dictate other definitions. The first issue is that language shift entails shifting language usage patterns. The second difficulty is that language shift occurs when two languages come into touch. With this in mind, one may reasonably assume that language shift refers to a situation in which a speech community's pattern of language use progressively alters, resulting in a gradual gravitation away from the community's language and toward another language with which it is in frequent touch. This frequently results in dangers to the language's survival. When a language begins to fall out of favour in

this situation, it risks becoming endangered and dying. Linguists frequently recommend methods to reverse the ‘shift’ process to avoid this. Such measures amount to language preservation or revitalization, one of this study’s critical objectives.

2.5 The Endangerment of Edoid/Urhobo Languages

According to Mowarin (2004), the Urhobo language is still extensively spoken in the Delta region. However, most speakers are bilingual and also speak Nigerian Pidgin English, the country’s most spoken language, raising fears that Urhobo will go extinct. Various community groups in Nigeria and expatriate communities around the world have begun to organize initiatives to conserve and teach the language to the youth. This, however, does not negate the threat to the language which has pushed to the brink of extinction.

2.6 The Current State of Urhobo Language Endangerment

This section will elucidate on the reasons for the endangerment of the Urhobo language.

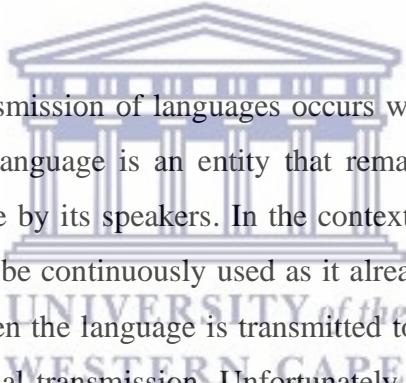
2.6.1 Polyglossic Situation

Africa is, overall, exceptionally linguistically diverse, and Nigeria is no exception to this. It has also been named among the most linguistically diverse nations in the world, along with Cameroon. Naturally, Nigerian people practise multilingualism; consequently, there are bound to be polyglots (Awah, 2021). The African polyglossic situation, therefore, puts other languages, including Urhobo, at the bottom of the preferred pile (Okal, 2014). Even the Urhobos prefer to speak the preferred languages of the locales they inhabit, and the language that they seem to favour the most are Pidgin and English. Several scholars have noted that the polyglossic situation in Urhoboland is that the languages have open social networks; they have contact with other indigenous languages that envelop them. The ethnic groups that neighbour (encircle) Urhoboland also have specific existing language situations that contribute to this polyglossic dilemma. The level of language and cultural contact through intermarriages, for example, has led to the diminishing use of the languages in Urhoboland because, in most cases, assimilation is preferred (Utulu, 2019; Adediji, 2016).

For the Urhobo in the diaspora, for instance, the lack of communities of practice engulfs the need to use the language, so the contextual language is used instead (Ejedafiru and Ejobee, n.d). The less preferred

and functional language may not be taken on or encouraged in the family that does not speak it, so the language and culture shrink (Ifesieh, 2013).

The acquisition and use of the community's heritage language alongside the area's dominant language contributes to language endangerment. To give an obvious example, no one in the Hawaiian language revitalization movement has recommended that children learn exclusively Hawaiian; instead, the goal is for them to learn both Hawaiian and English, resulting in bilingualism. Bilingualism appears to have several practical and cognitive benefits, ranging from increased chances for economic growth to possible improved control of attentional and processing resources, which is a crucial element in scholastic performance (Bialystok *et al.*, 2012). However, learning two languages takes more time and effort than learning one (Hoff *et al.*, 2012:20–22). Success in a bilingual setting depends on the right amount and type of input, just as it is in a monolingual setting. It is noted that multilingualism is costly, and only a few occurrences of balanced multilingualism have been documented (O'Grady & Hattori, 2016). As a result, the negative image of linguistic diversity serves to devalue Nigerian languages, portraying them as a problem rather than an asset (Haruna & Christopher, 2016).



Disruption in intergenerational transmission of languages occurs when the older generation is biased toward the indigenous language. Language is an entity that remains alive and keeps growing and developing through the constant use by its speakers. In the context of minority languages, it is even more important for the language to be continuously used as it already has a limited number of usage domains. This can happen only when the language is transmitted to its future generation by its older members, known as intergenerational transmission. Unfortunately, in the case of a large number of minority languages, this intergenerational transmission is often disrupted as the older members stop passing the language on to the next generation, for various reasons. It is often the fallout of the low esteem status accorded to the languages by its speakers, which gradually distances the younger members from using the language. It results in an infectious psychological impression attaching a sense devoid of practical utility or value to their native tongue. As a result, the young members of the community gradually lose the attachment to their native language, which, in turn, leads to a decline in the number of speakers in the language and, finally, language abandonment.

2.6.2 English And the Cultural and Linguistic Colonization of Nigeria

Post-colonial residue, especially from British occupation, is still felt in many countries and societies. English is also a cause of the language endangerment of the Urhobo language. English is the official

language in Nigeria; as such, Nigerians have a positive attitude toward it and a negative attitude toward their own indigenous languages. This means that Nigeria is existentially, culturally and linguistically colonized. The nativization and indigenization of standard English, making it a mash of both British and Nigerian cultures, has elevated it to a higher status than most Nigerian languages. Scholars such as Bamgbose (1995) have observed that the English language has modified the Nigerian environment; it has been pidginized, nativized, acculturated, and twisted to express unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction. The morphology of English in Nigeria has placed the minority languages in an endangered position, including Urhobo. This has a bearing on the language attitudes of the Urhobo people.

The attitudes of the older generation towards the use of Urhobo in their everyday lives are another reason contributing to the endangerment of the Urhobo language. The older generation is tasked with passing on the language to the younger generation. In Nigeria, in general, according to Mowarin (2005) many parents encourage their children to learn and speak English fluently. Most elites from Urhoboland now only teach English to their children as their first language in their homes. Such children have now experienced language loss in the Urhobo culture.

2.6.3 Nigerian Pidgin

The entire Niger Delta region is complexly multilingual and multicultural. Nigerian Pidgin has enjoyed a high status because it is, for the most part, preferred as a *lingua franca* following colonialism, and is the language of wider communication in the two senatorial districts of Delta State, namely Delta Central and Delta South. Faraclas (1996:1) states, “Nigerian Pidgin may soon become the most widely spoken language in Nigeria.” Egbokhare (2001:115) notes that Nigerian Pidgin is the “Nigerian language of wider communication.”

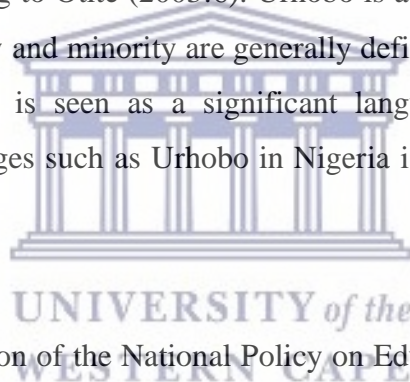
It is fast becoming advantageous to have Nigerian Pidgin as the language of inter-ethnic communication in Urhoboland, as seen in urban areas like Warri. For the Urhobo language, specifically, the western variety or Warri/Sapele variety of Nigerian Pidgin is used.

Nigerian Pidgin has been embraced as socially viable and Urhobo as socially unviable. Nigerian Pidgin is so favourable that it is used by illiterate and semi-literate Urhobos in their own homes. It is the language used to communicate across generations. Nigerian Pidgin has gained mother-tongue status for many children in urban areas and the diaspora, where it has already acquired many native speakers. The elaboration in the use and creolization of the language is the cause of the contraction of the Urhobo language.

2.6.4 Flawed Language Policy in Nigeria

Nigeria's indigenous languages are divided into majority and minority groups. The dominant languages are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, while 397 are minority languages. These minority languages also include the 100 languages spoken in the Niger Delta.

Nigeria's ethnic politics are firmly rooted. While speakers of the three major languages rule the country regarding socio-politics and economics, speakers of minority languages are side-lined. Nigerians are therefore separated into two groups of citizens, which Egbokhare (2001) refers to as the class of the advantaged and included, and the class of the disadvantaged and excluded. Minority language speakers despise their languages since they are not socio-politically or economically viable. As a result, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta, whose income is based on crude oil which accounts for 90 per cent of the country's resources, have been side-lined by the Government because they are seen as a minority group. Nigeria manages to "hold on together in a bungled democracy better described as ethnic majoritarian governance", according to Otite (2003:6). Urhobo is a majority language due to its large population. The concept of majority and minority are generally defined in quantitative terms, that is, a language with a million speakers is seen as a significant language, Webb and Sure (2000:41) acknowledge the decline of languages such as Urhobo in Nigeria is due to this poor language policy strategy.



Additionally, the non-implementation of the National Policy on Education (1977), revised in 1981, is part of what is causing the endangerment of Urhobo. The policy states that children should be taught either in their mother tongue or the language of the immediate community (LIC) from pre-primary to primary 3 (Bamgbose, 1992). Urhobos would be literate in their mother tongue if this language policy were implemented. Egbokhare (2004:16) observes the adverse effect of the non-implementation of this language policy on Nigerian children thus: "researchers have shown that a child learns faster when taught in his or her mother tongue rather than a foreign language". Experiments in the Philippines, Mexico, and Nigeria have proven this to be true.

Egbokhare adds that the high dropout rate and half-baked products emerging from our schools can be traced to the non-implementation of the language policy. Egbokhare (2004:17) concludes with a quotation from Dr Neville Alexander thus:

An English-only, or even an English-mainly, policy necessarily condemns most people, and thus the country as a whole, to a permanent state of mediocrity, since people cannot be spontaneous, creative, and self-confident if they cannot use their first languages.

Due to the dominant and pervasive nature of English in Nigerian society, Urhobo parents do not encourage their children to learn and speak the Urhobo language, leading to its shrinkage and endangerment.

Domains of use of languages are thus among the factors that determine the status of languages. Domains refer to places where languages are used, among which are: homes, schools, offices, playgrounds, and relaxation centres. For example, if a language other than the language(s) spoken in the immediate environment is used for business interactions and other purposes in the above-mentioned domains, that language may become threatened. In the school domain, the practice in many schools negates the provisions of many education ordinances, policies, and reforms introduced by successive governments in Nigeria. This has put many Nigerian languages on the endangerment list. For instance, Phelps Stokes' Commission to Africa (1920-21), cited in Crystal (2000:83), notes that using European languages to teach African children is pedagogically wrong. According to the commission, using European languages led to little learning and psychologically and emotionally damaged the children. The commission noted that "native tongue is immensely more vital in that it is one of the chief means of preserving what is good in native customs, ideas, and ideals and thereby preserving what is more important than all these, namely, native self-respect" (Ohiri-Aniche C. , 2016).



2.6.5 Language Competition from Urbanization and Globalization

As mentioned above, the Urhobo language is considered a minority language despite having over a million speakers. With the age of urbanization, for instance, lingua Francas like English and, in the case of Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, tend to be favoured over the other languages as these are the languages of advantage, and Urhobo is a minority language or language of disadvantage. The Urhobo people also travel out of their locale all over Nigeria and, as such, assimilate or adopt the most widely spoken language in that urban area. This applies mainly to urban areas outside the Niger Delta region. Globalization is coupled with technological advancements, and rarely are languages considered as minority used for these purposes. Some official languages, such as English, or languages that aid in trade, like Nigerian Pidgin, are employed. With the migration of Urhobo people to the diaspora, for example, they tend to use the language of the locale they have moved to. Upon having children, they adopt speaking the favourable language with the mind that speaking Urhobo is not

beneficial to their children even though they were born Urhobo but out of the Urhobo place of nativity, and so their decision is justified.

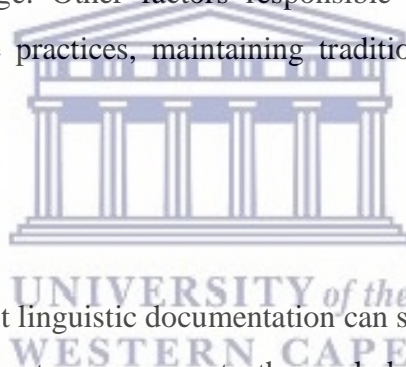
2.7 Language Revitalization

To revive the dwindling nature of the Urhobo language, many hands must be put on deck to ensure the successful implementation of this effort. Penfield and Tucker (2011) describe language revitalization as the process of re-awakening languages. It is multi-pronged and involves language documentation, rebuilding, maintenance, conservation, and sustainability. Furthermore, Tsunoda (2016:171) states that language revitalization aims to “maintain or restore a language to a state that a reasonable number of people speaks it, reasonably fluent, and in a reasonably intact form”. Languages targeted for revitalization include those whose use and prominence are severely limited.

According to Hinton (2010), there are five qualifications for the success of any language revitalization effort: preserving the language through documentation, literacy, new speakers, use of the language, and community control of the language. Other factors responsible for revitalizing language include encouraging endogamous marriage practices, maintaining traditional, religious, and cultural pride, orthography, and access to media.

2.8 Language Documentation

Linguists cannot save languages, but linguistic documentation can support community-based language revitalization programmes. According to many experts, the work done on language documentation has two purposes: preserving or reviving the language in question, and informing future generations about the language diversity and cultural riches of humanity. Language documentation, according to Himmelman (2004), as cited in Penfield and Tucker (2011:48), is meant to “provide a complete record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community”. Similarly, Evans (2010:218) contends that successful language documentation draws on and cross-pollinates the work of many people and achieves the best results when it capitalizes on the various talents and motivations that each brings to the task. Cultural documentation, for example, entails gathering folk tales, interviews with local artisans, oral histories, and other narratives. Grammar studies influence the language used in these narratives (Marlo, 2016). Jones (2014) asserts that the increasing availability of new technologies, ranging from visual to aural archiving to textual resource digitization and electronic mapping, has the potential to revolutionize the documentation, analysis, and revitalization of endangered languages for linguists and indigenous communities alike. As demonstrated above, Information and communication

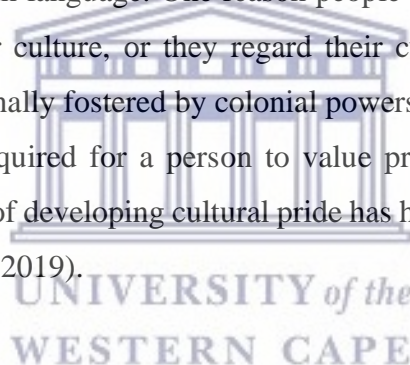


technology (ICT) gadgets abound in modern homes. Parents are also known to be their children's first language teachers. As a result, for the children to embrace the language at school, their education must begin at home. Therefore, ICT has the potential to play a critical role in the teaching, learning, and preservation of the Urhobo language.

The field of language documentation is concerned with creating a documentary record of a speech community's linguistic practices and a descriptive account of these practices. Three types of digital media are typically employed for this purpose: general-purpose tools (e.g., word processors, simple databases), specialized tools (e.g. advanced audio software, linguistic databases, multimedia, electronic dictionaries), and digital tools (e.g., CD-ROM, DVD, MPEG, image capture). Media products generated from language documentation and description applications are often considered authentic materials and become the permanent resource of the endangered language community.

2.9 Establishing Cultural Pride and Promoting Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is closely linked with language. One reason people give up their language is that they lack pride in their language and/or culture, or they regard their culture as inferior or economically useless. This belief is often intentionally fostered by colonial powers. Therefore, pride in one's culture, language, and ethnic identity is required for a person to value preserving their language. As such, encouraging language use as a part of developing cultural pride has historically been an effective means of language revitalization (Whaley, 2019).



2.9.1 Religion

One way to encourage language use is translating certain religious books into the endangered language, as demonstrated by Bible translators. By combining language use with the power of religion, speakers start to connect their religion with their ethnic identity, which helps them use their mother tongue more often. This method has been helpful in the Urhobo community. Many Urhobo speakers identify as Christian, and the Bible in Urhobo is even found online. The efforts have been successful, and the Urhobo Bible has quickly become a popular book found in most households. Speakers who had abandoned their language rediscovered their mother tongues by reading the translated Bible.

2.9.2 Cultural Traditions and Celebrations

Connecting language with indigenous traditions and festivals also promotes ethnic identity and language preservation. People of the Urhobo community celebrate several indigenous festivals. During these events, attendees only speak Urhobo, which allows them to bond with one another and associate the use of their language with these culturally significant celebrations. This encourages both cultural pride and language use, the one supporting the other.

2.9.3 Education

Another long-term method to revitalize a language is providing sustainable education on, and preferably in, that language. This is an effective way to ensure that younger generations keep learning the endangered language. This means that the language cannot be recreated from texts but can only be preserved through use by younger generations. The Urhobo language revitalization efforts through education have benefitted many generations, teaching students to treasure their language and culture. While this cultural appreciation may not be calculable, it is valuable. Urhobo has been designated as a study language at Delta State University, Abraka. It has also been included in the Delta State educational curriculum for lower secondary school-level study (Okenrentie, 2016).

2.9.4 Technology

Modern technology can be utilized to assist revitalization, both through the educational system and outside of it (Eisenlohr, 2004). Within the scope of education, technology such as CDs or videos can aid in language instruction. As technology continues to expand, more reference materials will become available on the Internet to access resources across the globe (Eisenlohr, 2004).

2.9.5 Utilization of Modern Technology

2.9.5.1 Social Media

In addition to educational CDs and DVDs, other forms of modern technology can facilitate revitalization. Linguists have proposed using social media, public blogs, and language channels (Eisenlohr, 2004). In the twenty-first century, social media has become a nearly universal global phenomenon. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, alongside local platforms, play an increasing role in the lives of individuals worldwide, especially younger individuals (Richter *et al.*, 2022). The Internet and social media can foster connections between speakers who are separated by physical distance and educate the international community at large. For those Urhobo speakers who

have migrated to more developed cities or integrated into larger tribes, social media can be used to maintain contact with their indigenous community and native language. This may be especially helpful for those who do not use their mother tongue daily. Social media could de-isolate Urhobo speakers and keep them connected to their mother language.

2.9.5.2 *Online Libraries*

Online libraries may also be beneficial, especially for languages without written scripts, as they contain information in various non-written formats such as videos, music, etc. (Eisenlohr, 2004). For example, an online library may facilitate the revitalization of the Urhobo language by providing videos related to the pronunciation of its various sounds or documenting traditional Urhobo songs, effectively circumventing the lack of an orthography. Online libraries or archives could offer people a chance to ‘borrow’ these materials to learn more about the Urhobo language.

2.9.5.3 *Language Learning Apps*

Language learning applications such as Duolingo, Babel, and Rosetta Stone may also prove helpful for language revitalization. These applications represent a significant trend: there are 300 million active users of Duolingo (Aulia *et al.*, 2020). Through these applications, native speakers, heritage speakers, and individuals with no connection to the language can all learn and use the language, bolstering the number of speakers and preventing language death. These online sources can also be updated to add new information, and old versions can be permanently preserved for future reference. Therefore, utilizing such applications can be an effective method in future revitalization work.

2.10 Future Development in Language Revitalization

Although there are numerous methods of language revitalization or language revival already in existence, the problem of endangered languages remain unsolved (Yuan, 2020). The Urhobo language revitalization future is not secured. If future generations do not learn the language, it may become extinct. Simple documentation or revitalization cannot guarantee the survival of any language in the long run. Therefore, it is essential to conduct further research on this issue to explore innovative and more efficient revitalization methods. To make matters more urgent, as more languages are becoming endangered, the materials and number of speakers left for researchers to utilize are also decreasing. As time passes, the difficulty of revitalizing these languages rises exponentially. Therefore, further efforts from linguists and scholars are needed to ensure languages can be saved. For instance, the Igbo language has been added to the list of modern languages taught at the prestigious Oxford University, and the Igbo

language lecturer is an Igbo man. This shows that the previously minority languages (minor to English) at least have a footing in revitalization. It is bold steps like this that bring about an unintentional revitalization of indigenous languages. Also, the diaspora recognizes that within it, there are endangered languages that need to be elevated for use in intellectual discourse.

2.11 Analytical Framework

2.11.1 Fishman's Theory

Several frameworks were created as a guide for revitalizing endangered languages. Fishman's framework is one of the most well-known frameworks used for the study of language vitality and endangerment. Fishman (1991) introduced an eight-level model called the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), which is used as an evaluation structure for language endangerment. The model proposed that the focus of any revitalization initiative should be determined by the level of the languages on the GIDS scale. The stages in reversing language shift (RLS), range from the highest level of disordering, with stage eight (8) indicating that "very few socially isolated old people use language, the language is at the verge of death", to the lowest stage one (1) indicating that "some use of the language in a higher level of educational, occupational, governmental, and media efforts, however excluding the additional safety provided by political independence" (Fishman, 1991:87-108).

This framework has been criticized for several shortcomings, including treating the family, home, and community as a bounded homogeneous space, and for making the 'biological' family the focus of intergenerational language transfer and the socialization of children in the face of forces of globalization and delocalization effects (Darquennes, 2007, as cited by Banda and Jimaima, 2017). Furthermore, the sixth stage received criticism for undervaluing the role of the media and new technological devices, socio-economic mobility and social actors, and factors outside the physical and immediate community in the linguistic socialization of a child, as well as the social structuring of minority and endangered languages.

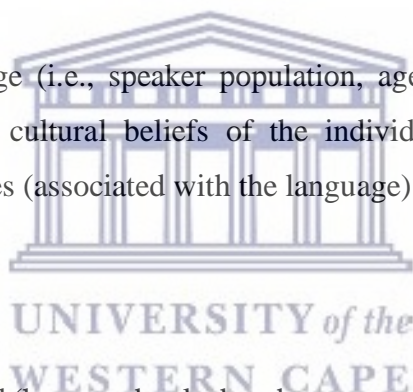
While recognizing aspects of Fishman's model and the caveats, this work will draw on the approach of the Technacy Framework for Language Revitalization (TFLR) as reconceptualized by Galla (2010), which investigates the social, economic, environmental, technological, linguistic, and cultural factors that affect language revitalization which Fishman's model lacks. As the world is rapidly becoming digital, technology can play a significant role in enhancing the teaching possibilities and learning opportunities much more effectively.

Technacy is based on a three-way ‘dialectic’ of necessarily interdependent parts; these are the human, technological and environmental ingredients of any technical undertaking. Each part defines and therefore requires the inclusion of the other two; that is, no pair can be adequately defined without the inclusion of the third part. Technacy is a comprehensive technological problem-solving, communication, and teaching-learning practice in any culture (Seemann, 2009). It is the ability to know, communicate, and exploit the characteristics of technology to discern how human technological practice is necessarily a comprehensive engagement with the world that involves people, tools, and the consumed environment, driven by purpose and contextual considerations, according to Seemann (2009), as cited by Galla (2010: 117-118).

In order to find the right technology that supports indigenous language revitalization and reclamation efforts, the framework, according to Galla (2016:1140-41), suggests a focus on the following five factors and related sample questions:

1. Linguistic and Cultural Factors:

What is the vitality of the language (i.e., speaker population, age group)? What are the language ideologies, traditions, values, and cultural beliefs of the individual or community? What is the language’s oral and literacy practices (associated with the language)?



2. Social Factors:

In what domains is the language used (home, school, church, community, university government, media, workplace)? What literary and communicative contexts does the written language appear in (i.e., books, newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs, email, social media, elections)?

3. Economic Factors:

What financial resources are available to support language revitalization and education efforts? What human resources are available to support language revitalization and education efforts?

4. Environmental Factors:

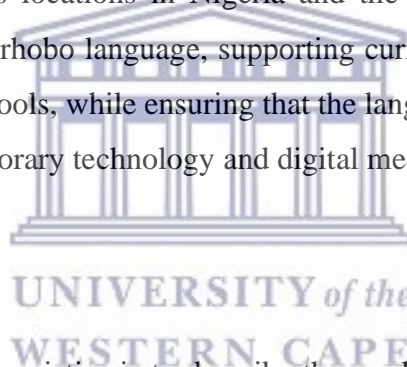
Where are language speakers geographically situated (i.e., on a traditional land base, urban, suburban, rural)? Is the language accessible outside the traditional or home territory (i.e., specific

cities/states/provinces/countries where speakers are located)? What natural elements minimize the amount of face-to-face interaction for an extended period (i.e., hurricane, flood, drought, blizzard, tornado, landslide, avalanche)?

5. Technological Factors:

What types of infrastructure are in place to support the use of technology? What types of technology are available (to support language learning and teaching)? What types of technology training and information technology support are available? (Galla, 2016:40-41).

The proposed study will use this framework to provide specific rationales that will lead indigenous language learners and speakers to use technology (Galla, 2016). Following Galla (2016), the combination of these factors will act as a starting point to discuss and identify which technology to deploy in the integration of the physical and virtual spaces, as well as to achieve the goal of digitizing, documenting, and revitalizing the Urhobo language. The idea then is to find ways to connect speakers of the Urhobo language in various locations in Nigeria and the diaspora, while at the same time supporting the digitization of the Urhobo language, supporting curriculum development and teaching materials online and in physical schools, while ensuring that the language structure and Urhobo culture is digitally captured, using contemporary technology and digital media.



2.11.2 Descriptive Linguistics

The scientific goal of descriptive linguistics is to describe the world's languages in all their diversity systematically, based on the empirical study of regular patterns in natural speech (François & Ponsonnet, 2013). Simply put, descriptive linguistics is the study of how languages are structured. Words are the essential building blocks of syntax (Carnie, 2021).

Depending on sense, outward morphological appearance, and syntactic connotation, descriptive linguistics can be divided into various lexical categories. It has been well discussed in the literature that natural language syntax and action grammar are similar in that both inhabit hierarchical patterns of various kinds (Arbib, 2012; Knott, 2012; Moro, 2014; Pulvermüller, 2014; Stout, 2010). The syntactic theory on which the research focuses is known as the X-bar theory. The entry behaviours of syntax are grammar, that is, the grammatical units, and morphology, that is, the word classes (Junaid, 2018). According to the X-bar theory, every phrase and every sentence in the mental grammar of every single

human language share the same fundamental structure. The X-bar theory states that each sentence has a head. The head is always the first (X) level, the phrase is the XP level, and X-bar is an intermediate level. The category of the sentence depends on the category of the head. A noun phrase is a collection of words that jointly name and define a specific entity, such as a place, object, idea, or person. These noun phrase patterns are identifiers, adjectives, noun modifiers, quantifiers, preposition phrases, participle clauses, conjunctions, and indefinite clauses. All of the patterns are headed by a noun. The phrase's head serves as its terminal node. This node is the one without daughters (Anderson, 2018). A specifier is a phrase associated (sisters) to the bar level and a daughter to the phrase level. Specifiers are often used as the subjects of sentences. Moreover, they differ from complements because they are not sisters of the head but rather sisters of the phrase formed by the head and the complement (Ball, 2003). The tree diagram below demonstrates the fundamental structure.

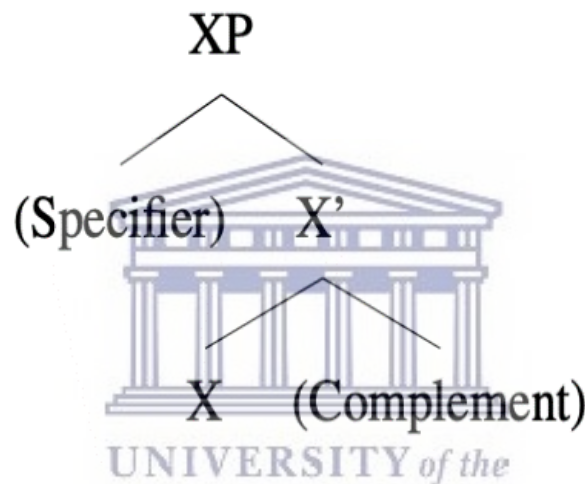


Figure 2.2: X-bar configuration with Specifier and Complement

Generalized X-bar template (for English, head initial)

2.12 Chapter Summary

Despite numerous language revitalization attempts using the popular strategies of cultural pride development, religion utilization, and the incorporation of cultural traditions and education, the Urhobo language is still at risk of extinction. This continued endangerment demonstrates the challenging nature of language revitalization in general. Considering these challenges, this paper proceeds to offer suggestions for strategies for future revitalization efforts, such as incorporating modern technology, social media, and apps into existing revitalization strategies.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The chapter begins by going over the philosophical foundations and establishing the particular paradigm that directs the choice of the research techniques employed in the study. An outline of the research methodologies and the study's research is then given in more depth.

3.1 The Positivist Paradigm

The research project, which deals with revitalizing endangered languages in real and virtual settings for future generations, aligns well with the positivist paradigm. The positivist view is predicated on the notion that reality exists independently of each human observer. The physical and social world, as well as human knowledge of it, are thus two separate and independent entities (Glesne, 2011). In this method, reality is seen as distinct. According to the positivist perspective, human behavior is influenced by their social environment, which is subject to patterns that can be experimentally observed. As a result, to comprehend a phenomenon, the positivist researcher focuses on the facts and the widely accepted ideas (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). In their research, experiments, surveys, and field studies, positivist researchers apply certain quantitative research techniques. Positivist research focuses on theories' ability to be empirically tested in order to identify the broad principles or laws governing the natural and social worlds (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Any scientific investigation is presumptively value-free, allowing the researcher to remain impartial, detached, and objective. Lee (1989) asserts that case-study research is developed and evaluated in accordance with the replicability, infer criteria, controlled observations, and controlled deductions of natural science research. Case study research does not allow for the definition and empirical evaluation of theoretical ideas (Lee, 1989; Cavaye, 1996). The case-study research findings are generalizable thanks to literal and theoretical replication (Lee, 1989; Yin, 1994). The positivist paradigm aligns nicely with the study's fundamental research challenge. There are at least two traditions in qualitative research: positivist and interpretative. Interpretive work, on the other hand, aims to synthesize the data into belief systems with manifestations unique to a given scenario.

3.2 The Critical Theory Paradigm

Multiple social realities that have been created by research participants are widely acknowledged to exist in the critical theory paradigm. Because of this, the reality that a specific social group has created

cannot be known as the truth (Easton, 1982). As the collaborative nature of the researcher-participant connection and the fact that knowledge is value-mediated, it is thought to be value-dependent (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The goal of a critical information systems researcher is to influence social behavior in addition to understanding it or providing an account of it. The critical theory makes the assumption that there are understandable social realities that evolve over time. Social, political, economic, ethnic, and gender values are criticized and changed by critical theory scholars. Long-term ethnographic and historical investigations of organizational procedures and structures may be part of research questions. The critical theory element enables the researcher to discuss the idea of Urhobo language endangerment. Additionally, this highlights concerns about the relevance of Urhobo in terms of its application in diverse social, cultural, educational, technological (in terms of social media), and economic contexts.

3.3 The Interpretivist Paradigm

The perspective on epistemology is where the interpretivist and positivist paradigms diverge most. The interpretivist method is based on the idea that people's knowledge of reality and how they see it are intertwined. People use language, shared meanings, technologies, and records to assign meanings and values to their particular circumstances, making reality subjective (Walsham, 1995). Human variables are intricate, entwined, and difficult to measure. The interpretivist research approach acknowledges subjectivity as a process element while aiming for a profound grasp of the topic under study. It simply means that one must interpret the world of meaning in order to understand it. The interpretivist approach uses research techniques that entail interacting with people in social situations to talk about their perspectives. This study is action research that uses data from real-world experiences, and the interpretivist research technique employed comprises ethnography, life history, grounded theory, case study, and action (Glense, 2011).

3.4 The Paradigm Guiding the Current Study

The researcher establishes her research on particular philosophical viewpoints; depending on the work being done, one, or more, paradigms, may be accepted. From the description above, it is clear that the interpretivist method was primarily utilised in this study's philosophical assumptions. The positivist perspective, which represents the research's objective position, is another area where the study leaves its mark. This study of Urhobo looks at how its speakers' environments have been revitalized. This study makes the supposition that reality is made up of participant perceptions, beliefs, and context. The interpretivist approach offers a methodology for examining participants' particular beliefs. The epistemology selected is a case study that employs qualitative methods and fits into the interpretive paradigm. An interpretivist case-study design prioritizes in-depth, ongoing conversations with pertinent

individuals in one or more locations. How effectively an explanation explains a phenomenon and makes sense to the population being researched determines how valuable it is (Walsham, 1995). Therefore, gathering information on relevant interviewees' subjective perceptions, beliefs, and opinions on Urhobo to the physical and virtual environments they occupy is a key component of this research's empirical work. This paradigm is more appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena that call for interacting with people and experiencing real-world situations, and where the researcher seeks to comprehend the research problem by reflecting, probing, comprehending, and revising meanings, structures, and issues (Hirschman, 1986; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). To put it another way, not all research questions enable a completely value-free, one-way mirror between phenomena and the researcher. In addition to addressing the "why" and "how" questions pertaining to Urhobo, the interpretivist method gives the researcher a wider scope to address problems that influence and effect the evolution and use of the Urhobo language (Yin, 1994).

3.5 The Research Designs

The research design is the overarching strategy or blueprint for how the study executed. It demonstrates how the various methodologies, activities, and approaches that make up the research study are interconnected, and it collaborates with other designs to answer the research questions (Scott & Garner, 2013). Empirical data gathering is linked to the study's hypotheses and final results in a case study research design. What topics to investigate, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyze the results are the four primary concerns that Yin (1994) corresponds to a research design. Surveys, experiments, histories, content analyses, and case studies are just a few examples of common research methods used to collect information. To begin answering the study's primary questions, the researcher reviewed the relevant literature, which informed the choice of research technique and ultimately, the data collection and analysis procedures. The primary categories or themes of the research become clearer as the data collected are analyze. These aid in answering the study's overarching question: what technologies are needed to bridge the gap between the real and the virtual worlds and revitalize the Urhobo language through digitization and documentation?

3.6 The Research Methodology

According to Henning, Van Rensburg, and Smit (2004), a methodology is a set of interrelated procedures that, when used together, provide the researcher with data and results that are representative of the research topic and useful for achieving the study's stated goals. Arbain and Sandi (2016) argue that all texts contribute to the formation of society and culture through the language they employ since all texts contain a system of knowledge and belief as well as a set of social identities and relationships.

Therefore, this study explores the revitalization of the Urhobo language through a qualitative case-study methodology. The research questions in this study are best answered through a case-study methodology since they are focused on the exploration of the actual experiences of the Urhobo people.

3.7 Quantitative Methodology

The positivist paradigm is closely linked to quantitative research methodology, which has its roots in the study of natural phenomena. In the quantitative research paradigm, there is a notion that many realities and truths are not possible. Humans are influenced by their social environments with established patterns that can be socially observed, and this is demonstrated by their perception of reality as objective, straightforward, and positive. Quantitative research approaches include survey research, observations, documentary research, laboratory experimentation, geographic analytical research, and numerical modelling. Valid and reliable findings are produced by using these techniques, which help mitigate the impact of methodological inconsistency in social science research (Bryman, 2008).

3.8 Qualitative Methodology

To better understand how social and cultural phenomena might be studied, the social sciences established the method of qualitative research. The research strategies are shaped by the interpretive paradigm. Ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, action research, and life histories are all types of qualitative research (Glense, 2008). Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, audio/video recordings, questionnaires, fieldwork, archival research, photographs, documents, and text analyses are all examples of qualitative methods of data collecting (Bryman, 2008).

3.9 Justification for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (2014), is undertaken in natural settings to better understand human experiences and social events, and aims to develop a comprehensive, holistic picture through the use of words to describe the in-depth perspectives of informants. Henning (2004:5) adds that if a study uses a qualitative research approach, it means the researchers are interested in learning more about the "characteristics or the features of a phenomenon."

To gather information, qualitative researchers often engage participants in discussions, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. Researching people's day-to-day lives in both real-world and online groups becomes possible with qualitative methods due to their ability to account for the unique contextual

details of these locations. The researcher was able to get insight into the Urhobo culture by taking this tack, learning about the ideology and social reasons that underpin the Urhobo people's ideas, values, and feelings. For this study, the researcher immersed herself in online Urhobo communities by joining a few related Facebook groups. This is supported by the idea that qualitative researchers, as stated by Kelle (2006:287), "seek to make sense of feelings and experiences." According to Tewksbury (2009), qualitative methods are used to learn everything there is to know about a problem, including how individuals think, feel, and act.

3.10 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Marshall and Rossman (1999:150) argue that data analysis is necessary because it gives meaning to a mountain of data. Creative and exhilarating, but also messy, uncertain, and time-consuming. Meaning making, interpretation, and idea formation are all activities that signify the quest for overarching claims within broad data categories. But its development is not predictable (Schwandt, 2007). Data analysis and interpretation, according to Best and Khan (2006), are the use of deductive and inductive reasoning in scientific inquiry. According to Antonius (2003:2), "data" means "information that has been methodically collected, structured, and documented in a way that makes it possible for the reader to comprehend the information appropriately." This means that data isn't gathered at random, but rather is used to address specific study issues. To construct a consistent interpretation of data, Atkins and Wallace (2012:245) and Tuckman and Harper (2012:387) argue, data collection and analysis must be conducted simultaneously in a qualitative study.

Similar to qualitative approaches, the end purpose of a quantitative study is to generate findings. To analyze data quantitatively, however, quantitative methods eschew the use of language (concepts, phrases, symbols, etc.) in favor of established procedures and techniques (Sesay, 2011). There is equal emphasis on quantitative and qualitative approaches to the data analysis presented here. It has been clear from the preliminary discussion of the data analysis and interpretation that the perspectives, thoughts, and proposals of other researchers and authors are essential for the success of this investigation. In what follows, the author discusses how she analyzed and interpreted the qualitative data she gathered for this thesis.

3.11 The Case Study Strategy

A person, group, organization, action, process, or event are all examples of cases since they are discrete units with clear boundaries (Christensen et al., 2011). Research uses cases for a wide variety of purposes. Applying the findings of this study as a foundation for legitimate case-study research in qualitative

inquiry is one of the main goals of the research. Case studies, on the other hand, are designed to help you learn about a single problem. Thus, the case-study approach can be defined in a variety of ways. Case studies, as described by Gillman (2000), are in-depth analyses of real-world occurrences that rely on data gathered on-site.

Case studies are also a form of empirical inquiry that can be used to learn more about pre-existing phenomena in a real-world setting where the boundaries between the environment and the phenomena are unclear (Yin, 1994). A case study is a report that describes and analyzes a specific case or cases. In order to "shed light on a phenomenon, be it a process, event, individual, or item of interest to the researcher," as Leedy (1997:157) puts it, case studies are conducted. In order to gain a thorough comprehension of a phenomenon and its context, case studies usually examine phenomena that have already been defined (Yin, 1994). When the researcher has no influence over the unfolding of the events being studied and the surrounding context is vital to understanding what is happening, case studies become invaluable. When it comes to information systems, the most popular qualitative research approach is case study research (Darke et al., 1998). According to Yin (2003), a case study approach should be chosen if answering questions like "how" and "why" are crucial to the research. By investigating potential strategies for revitalizing Urhobo, this study provides a response to the 'how' issue, while also addressing the 'why' question by outlining the importance of these recommendations.

Since it is hard to control the behavior of study participants, the researcher here made an effort to avoid leading questions in order to reduce the possibility of biasing the responses of the interviews. This study uses a case study approach to fill in the gaps in the understanding of how revitalization is viewed and conducted in Urhobo.

3.12 Categories of Case Studies

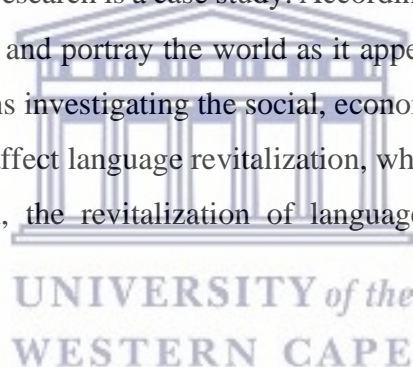
Descriptive case studies, explanatory case studies, and exploratory case studies are the three main types of case studies (Yin, 2004). Furthermore, Stake (2000:437) classifies case studies into the same three categories, naming them "intrinsic," "instrumental," and "collective." Case studies that focus on description are frequently used to shed light on the causes and effects of certain occurrences. Case studies that are descriptive in nature look for a causal relationship between an event and its consequences. This approach digs deep into the data to discover the phenomenon of interest. In order to better describe research issues and hypotheses, exploratory case studies are often used. They are employed when the researcher intends to probe some phenomena in the data. To understand what is meant by "opening the door to explore the observed phenomenon further," look no further than the questions themselves. Since preliminary data gathering for this study was rather small-scale, the

researcher opted for an exploratory case study approach. The data helped prepare a framework for the study, as Yin (1984) suggested. Researchers often dismiss case studies as "soft" or "qualitative" data. The case study is not confined to qualitative evidence even if it is a known method in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Consequently, case studies may include quantitative evidence as well (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003).

3.13 Design of the Case Study

The study uses a qualitative case study focusing on several village representatives and families. According to Cohen & Manion (1989:150), case studies recognize the “complexity and ‘embeddedness’ of social truth”; they are “strong in reality”, and their “strength lies in their attention to the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right”. Furthermore, Yin (2003:13) justifies this approach when he defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries and contexts are unclear”.

The explanatory description of this research is a case study. According to Hammersley (1994:179), case study research “attempts to capture and portray the world as it appears to the people in it”. Thus, this study provides elaborate descriptions investigating the social, economic, environmental, technological, linguistic, and cultural factors that affect language revitalization, which Fishman’s model lacks. As the world is rapidly becoming digital, the revitalization of languages can be significantly aided by technology.



The case-study approach has been criticized for its lack of rigor as a research instrument, hence it is crucial to develop a well-thought-out case-study design. Depending on the research objective, Yin (1994) advises that a case study can be conducted using either a single-case or multiple-case methodology. To better comprehend and guide the treatment of similar situations, researchers sometimes conduct studies based on specific cases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Detailed descriptions and comprehension of phenomena require in-depth evaluations of individual situations, which can be conducted by researchers (Walsham, 1995). Sometimes only one case is needed to prove or disprove a theory, or to illustrate an extreme situation (Yin, 1994). A researcher could choose to look at multiple situations. Commonly, these are referred to as "multiple-case studies." In this research, we compare and contrast a number of situations in order to draw broad conclusions and make suggestions (Yin, 1994).

3.14 Case Selection

Information about the sample size, the total number of interviews, and the interviewing procedure are provided in this section. The type of case study that is undertaken must be decided upon once it has been established that the research question can best be answered via the use of a qualitative case study and the case and its limits have been established. A growing curiosity about the practical implications of language revitalization for the study of languages motivated the researcher to focus on this particular case. As a form of qualitative research, case studies have found widespread use across disciplines. The researcher was also on the lookout for a method that would permit the collection of data through the use of several data sources in order to better distinguish between the various layers of complexity and zero in on the root of the problem with respect to language revitalization.

Consequently, “case-study research is an empirical investigation that analyzes a contemporary phenomenon inside its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear; and it relies on many sources of evidence” (Yin, 2009:18). (Yin, 2009:18). An in-depth comprehension of the real-world phenomenon is sought through the use of case studies, which necessitates consideration of relevant contextual factors. The phenomenon under inquiry is clearly defined and does not entail modifying variables (Cavaye, 1996). (Cavaye, 1996).

3.15 Case Study Strengths

There are several benefits in using the case studies methods. To begin with, a case study methodology allows the researcher to narrow in on problems specific to the activity context. Secondly, the researcher is encouraged to use a wide range of data collection methods when conducting a case study. These methods can include surveys, interviews, and document analyses. More detailed information can be gathered than with, say, a survey, if many data collection methods are used. Case studies differ from other research methods in that they do not try to control the background, while they can and often do employ quantitative data (Yin, 1994). The disadvantages and restrictions of the case-study approach are explained below.

3.16 Limitations of Case Studies

Although there are many benefits to using case studies in research, this approach is not without its disadvantages. Some authors have raised doubts in their assessments of the case-study technique, arguing that it lacks the accuracy of, say, a survey (Kyburz-Graber, 2004). Collaborating with participants for authentication, data analysis, and interpretation of surveys is a crucial aspect of a

successful case-study approach, which adds complexity to an already challenging research design (Kyburz-Graber, 2004). One typical criticism levelled against case studies is that it is difficult to draw broad conclusions from them because of the small sample sizes and/or single-subject nature of the research (Tellis, 1997). The selection of a few samples from a single case study and the subsequent assumption that they are indicative of the entire population, without properly analysing the evidence, is what some people say leads to overgeneralization, and they say this is what has happened with case studies (Glense, 2011). Instead of serving as sampling units, cases might be used for more theoretical or analytical purposes, such as expanding upon or testing established hypotheses (Dark et al., 1998; Yin, 2006). This study uses a case study methodology to inquire into and establish the perspectives on and potential avenues for resolving language endangerment. As a result, the results of this study solely apply to the Urhobo language. There is a risk that the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population because of the limited sample size in this case study. In essence, the evolution of theory-building may not be altered. However, the research may shed light on how to best revive other languages in jeopardy.

According to Yin (1984), this means that the researcher doing the case study may have preconceived notions that influence the study's findings and conclusions. There are a number of issues that arise while conducting case study research, and it can be challenging to formulate a comprehensive plan for answering all of your research questions within the confines of a case study. This strategy is extremely time-consuming and laborious, and often it leads in the build-up of vast volumes of data (Yin, 1994; Cavaye, 1996). (Yin, 1994; Cavaye, 1996). Because it requires extensive explanation, case studies are sometimes perceived as being too lengthy for their intended audience to read. It is, thus, crucial to incorporate detailed material presented in an accessible manner while writing case studies.

3.17 Sampling Design

The participants were selected via snowball sampling, a purposeful method of sampling in qualitative research. Snowball sampling starts with an initial participant from the studied population. These people are then asked to recruit more research participants from the same population. This process is repeated, with participants continuing to recruit other population members; the sample thus 'snowballs' to increasing size. In this way, snowball sampling can be used to access members of a population that could not feasibly be located by random sampling (Heckathorn, 2011). Additionally, this purposive sampling enabled the researcher to explore the participants' beliefs, thoughts, personal values, and social identities.

Sampling approach refers to the method used to choose a representative sample from a larger population. The goal is to obtain a sample that accurately reflects the characteristics of the entire population. In general, there are two distinct kinds of sampling: probability-based and non-probability-based (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Selecting a subset of a population at random using a combination of statistical methods is known as probability sampling (Cole & Ormrod, 1995). The terms stratified, proportional, cluster, and systematic all refer to different types of probability sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). These procedures are more reliable and grounded in science. Whether or not every component of the population is included in the sample can be difficult to predict using non-probability sampling. Convenience samples, quota samples, and purposeful samples are all types of non-probability sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Researchers in this study used a Purposive sampling strategy to select participants who were statistically representative of the whole. By using this tack, the researcher was able to identify study participants who had first-hand exposure to the pivotal idea under scrutiny. The quantitative instrument data were utilised to supplement the qualitative data, not for comparison or convergence.

3.18 Description of Data Collection Sites

The researcher chose the following geographical and virtual sites for this study: Cape Town, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Nigeria, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The data were obtained from participants living in these locations. The researcher is based in Cape Town, so being a part of the Urhobo community made it the most natural choice for the study. The same applies to all the other geographical areas. The United Kingdom was selected because several Nigerians live, work and study there. The researcher grew up in Nigeria, and the data were collected specifically from the area where Urhobo is mainly spoken. Because the demographics have shifted along with the changing global trends in recent years, the Urhobo speech community has been stretched out of the bounds of time and space. The heavily Internet-laden world has created and sustained entire speech communities outside the geography of the people. Because of this, the inclusion of Facebook and WhatsApp was fitting as the sampled communities and persons participating in the study exist in these spaces.

3.19 Document Analysis

To gain a general understanding of the research's focus areas, a variety of documents were studied. To gather data on the steps made in the revival of Urhobo, the online Bible, talking dictionaries, and other pertinent publications were obtained. All of these materials served as the foundation for creating and refining an interview guide, which was then utilised to describe the study sites. These documents also forms the beginning for the chapter five which delves into the grammar of the Urhobo language.

3.20 Interviews and Questionnaires

The researcher bases her study on distinct philosophical perspectives; one or more paradigms may be accepted depending on the nature of the work being done. Reading this far, it should be apparent that the interpretivist approach was fundamental to the study's underlying philosophical premises. The study also makes its impression on the positivist viewpoint, which stands for the neutral stance of the research. The revitalization of the communities where speakers of Urhobo live is the focus of this research. This research operates under the assumption that people's own experiences, perspectives, and worldviews comprise what they call "reality." The interpretivist method provides a strategy for investigating the unique perspectives of research subjects. The chosen epistemology is a case study in which interpretive paradigm-appropriate qualitative methodologies. A key component of an interpretivist case-study approach is in-depth, on-going interviews with key informants in one or more settings. The usefulness of an explanation depends on how well it describes the occurrence in question and how well it makes sense to the community under study (Walsham, 1995). Therefore, a significant part of the empirical work in this study is interviewing relevant individuals to collect data on how they personally relate Urhobo to the real-world and online settings in which they spend their time. Research problems that require the researcher to contemplate, probe, analyse, and revise concepts, structures, and issues, as well as those that necessitate interaction with others, are more suited to this paradigm (Hirschman, 1986; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). The value-neutral, one-way mirror between phenomena and the researcher is not possible for all study questions. The interpretivist approach allows the researcher to go beyond simply answering the "why" and "how" of Urhobo and instead focus on issues that affect the development and application of the language (Yin, 1994).

3.20.1 Interview

The researcher interviewed five purposively sampled older people (aged 40 years and older) for this study. The older people were interviewed because they are more familiar with and used to the language in question as they are custodians of the language now. The researcher's uncle was one of the participants; he recommended some of his friends and colleagues within the Urhobo community, while others are the administrators and members of some Urhobo Facebook groups and WhatsApp groups, such as the Urhobo Renaissance Society (URS) Facebook group, the Ukoko Uyono WhatsApp group, Urhobo people's Facebook page, and many others. The participants are based in the Urhobo-speaking part of Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and Cape Town, South Africa.

Face-to-face interviews, according to Neuman (2012), have the highest response rates and are one of the most popular methods for carrying out interviews in qualitative research. The Covid 19 pandemic

prevented this from being achievable. Interviews took place in August through September of 2021. These were created to assist the interviewer and make sure the topic was relevant to the primary problem's scope and content. Even though the interview guide's questions were predefined, probing and prompting were used to create the follow-up inquiries. The interview's direction and content could be controlled by the respondents using the questions in the interviewer's larger structure. According to Glense (2011), the researcher made sure that the conversation stayed on topic for the interview.

3.20.2 Questionnaires

To collect helpful information from several pertinent respondents, a questionnaire was developed that allowed for organised, close-ended responses from the participants. During the same time as the questions for the in-depth interview were being created, an online questionnaire was created using the results of the literature study. The questionnaire has four sections (See Appendix). The first section of the survey asked broad questions regarding the respondent's demographic and profile-related data. Section two subsequently asked questions about language proficiency based on the respondent's perceptions. The third section of the questionnaire inquired about the factors that Urhobos consider when using the language, as well as when and whether they are aware of revitalization attempts. The final section of the questionnaire questioned about the procedures necessary to make Urhobo revitalization possible. Two different styles of design were used in the surveys. The first part of the survey asked respondents to check the option that most accurately represented the specifics from a list of precisely defined features that were presented in a tabular manner. The second section was a checklist with a "yes" or "no" choice and a single, unelaborated response requirement. The remaining parts used a five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting strongly agree, 2 denoting agreement, and 3 denoting disagreement. D is for "strongly disagree," E is for "no opinion."

Where it was thought necessary, the participants were given the option to include their own opinions in this part. Since this made data processing easier, a Likert pre-coded scale was utilised extensively to determine participants' opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Emails with a site address link were sent to 60 responders, who were of various ages. The idea of intergenerational transfer makes age a crucial component of this investigation. Additionally included was a thorough information letter outlining the goals of the study for the respondents. The electronic questionnaire was created with the researcher's ability to monitor responses in mind. The respondents received an email reminder a few weeks later to finish the questionnaires.

3.21 Gathering Procedure

Virtual interviews were conducted using calls over the phone and WhatsApp. This was necessitated by the global pandemic (COVID-19), and it was cost-effective to use social media at the availability of the participants. To enable the researcher to understand the situation from the participants' viewpoints, a semi-structured question was posed. In order to help participants feel more at ease and have a better attitude toward answering questions, interviews were held in both Urhobo and English. This helped the participants identify with the identity of the Urhobo community. This made it possible for the researcher to get detailed data on people's viewpoints, ideas, experiences, and emotions regarding some of the key elements causing the endangerment of the Urhobo language..

3.22 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done once the data was collected. The process of examining, categorising, tabulating, or otherwise gathering data to address a study's initial idea is known as data analysis (Yin, 1994). It enables a researcher to obtain valuable information from raw data (Christensen et al., 2011). The research's theoretical foundation and methods were developed across three stages, based on the contextual and goal-oriented characteristics of practise: a scoping study (interviews), data collection and analysis, and a review of the relevant historical and contemporary literature (survey instrument).

3.23 Feasibility of the Study

When accurate findings are drawn through research, the research is said to be valid. The term "validity" in research refers to include a number of crucial elements into the study design to significantly raise the study's calibre or dependability (Baxter & Jack, 2008). When all the elements of a research study, the findings reached, and the applications based on them can all be of a high or low quality, or somewhere in between, this affects the quality of the answers offered (Bryman, 2001). Contrarily, reliability relates to repeatability. To guarantee the consistency of the outcomes, it concentrates on the data collection process.

Reliability aims to minimise the study's random errors and biases so that subsequent researchers would be able to get the same results if the study were replicated (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Both the population and the participants' linguistic habits could alter throughout the course of the study. As a result, the conclusions drawn from the study are only accurate and trustworthy temporarily. Nevertheless, they help the study's goals.

The perspective on validity changes in the contexts of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The measure of validity in quantitative technique is important in terms of internal, external, and construct validity (Yin, 2003). The causal connections between the variables and the results are referred to as internal validity. More emphasis is placed on how the findings corroborate the thesis. The capacity to confidently generalise the study's findings to other persons and other settings, as well as the assurance that the study's conditions were typical of the scenarios and time period to which the results apply, is known as external validity or generalizability of the results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The construct validity of a technique refers to how well a procedure produces accurate observation of reality, or how well a study explores what it promises to investigate (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The measurement's reliability is frequently dependent on logical choices and expertly communicated outside perspectives. To have a better grasp of how Urhobo speakers perceive their language's position, the study conducted preliminary semi-structured interviews with speakers of the Urhobo language. Quantitative and qualitative questionnaires were created in accordance with this. A lot of thought went into making and ensuring the two sets of questions were complementary and similar to one another. To assess the instruments' language, structure, methodological inaccuracy, substance, and overall presentation, a number of persons were consulted.

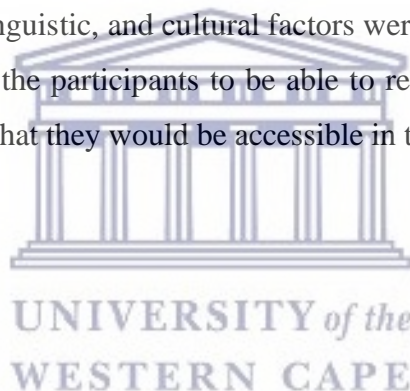
Credibility is preferred over internal validity, transferability and generalizability are preferred over external validity, dependability is preferred over reliability, and conformity is preferred over objectivity as the four criteria for validity and reliability in qualitative research (Guba, 1981; Yin, 1994). In order to ensure that qualitative research is reliable, the following factors should be taken into account: (i) triangulation; (ii) probing questions; (iii) rewording questions to see whether the participant was being truthful; (iv) a thorough methodological explanation provided in the study; and (v) an analysis of the previous findings (Shenton, 2004). Given the aforementioned debate, this study utilised qualitative methodologies; as a result, the data's dependability, believability, and conformability were taken into account.

3.24 Ethical Considerations

This study followed the ethical guidelines provided by the University of the Western Cape for employing individuals as research subjects. Social science researchers have underlined the significance of taking the necessary ethical norms into account while using human beings in research (Leedy &

Ormrod, 2013). This is because working with human participants raises ethical demands like confidentiality, anonymity, and trust. Three ethical problems were identified with this study: the right to privacy, honesty, and informed consent (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Because the topics under research involved participants in both physical and virtual locations, it was imperative that this study uphold ethical standards.

The data was predominantly collected through conducting interviews. Before each interview was conducted, the interviewer explained the research to the participants. All information provided by the participants was held in confidence. To assure anonymity, all interviewees signed a consent form that stated that they could choose to remain anonymous, and if they so wished, nicknames were used. The interviewees were also informed that participation in this research project was voluntary and not mandatory. The participants were informed they could withdraw at any time, and in those cases, all data produced through their participation would be destroyed. The researcher focused on questions related to the vitality of the Urhobo language. Therefore, in terms of observing social media interactions, only conversations or posts relating to the vitality of the Urhobo language addressing the technological, social, environmental, economic, linguistic, and cultural factors were captured as screenshots and used for visual analysis. In order for all the participants to be able to relate to the findings, the researcher gave the participants the assurance that they would be accessible in the University of the Western Cape library upon request.



3.25 Summary

This chapter defined the research design used in subsequent chapters: qualitative research. Qualitative research is the primary method in this study. This chapter also described the data collection methods, including conducting interviews, doing participant observation on social media groups, and document analysis. The interpretivist paradigm informed the study.

Chapter 4

The Grammatical Structure of the Urhobo Language

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the grammatical structure of the Urhobo language. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, traditional grammar is “a grammar which is usually based on the earlier grammar of Latin or Greek and applied to some other language, often inappropriately” (Xia, 2014). For this study, the researcher opted for Structuralism which the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* defines as an approach to linguistics which stresses the importance of language as a system and which investigates the place that linguistic units such as sounds, words, and sentences have within this system (Xia, 2014). Ferdinand de Saussure is the originator of the twentieth century reappearance of Structuralism. Saussure confirmed the legitimacy and importance of previous linguists’ diachronic approaches before introducing the new synchronic approach, which focused linguists’ attention on the nature and composition of language and its constituent parts.

To put it another way, Saussure believed language is an organic whole with internal and systemic principles. Language is a means of relation as it is used to express human thought. The human language is not simply random sounds or words tied together haphazardly without recourse to a system. For ease of explanation, examples of concepts will be given in English and Urhobo, but majorly in Urhobo.

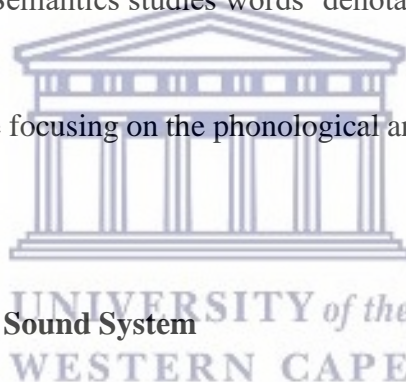
4.1 Language Structure

The structure of a language is the system of word arrangement and larger grammatical units, like the phrases and clauses that make up a sentence in a given language. Words grouped randomly may not provide complete meaning except for individual lexical meanings at the word level. A string of words lacking in the structural pattern may have no grammatical meaning. However, when a specific order of arrangement of grammatical structure is employed, meaning is quickly established based on the decipherable relationship between the string of words (Bernard, 2006).

4.2 Levels of Language

Generally, language is classified into five levels: they are the; phonetics/phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics. Phonetics/phonology and the sound level. Phonetics is the study of individual speech sounds, while phonology is the study of phonemes, which are the speech sounds of an individual language. Phonology is concerned with the classification of language sounds and how they are grouped in a particular language, for example, what distinctions of meaning can be made based on what sounds. Morphology is the level of words and endings. Morphology refers to the analysis of minimal forms of language, which comprises sounds used to construct words that have either a grammatical function or other meaningful units of language, like suffixes and prefixes. Syntax is the level of sentences and phrases. Syntax examines the meaning of words in combination with each other to form a sentence or phrase. Specifically, it involves the differences in meaning arrived at by changes in word order. Pragmatics is the level of linguistics concerned with language use in specific situations. The area of pragmatics relies firmly on its analyses of the notion of speech act, which is concerned with the actual performance of language. Pragmatics involves the notion of the preposition, that is, the content of a sentence and the intent and effect of an utterance. Semantics is the lexical, grammatical sentences and utterance meanings. Semantics studies words' denotative and connotative meanings and larger grammatical units.

For this study, the researcher will be focusing on the phonological and morphosyntactic structure of the Urhobo language.



4.3 An Overview of the Urhobo Sound System

Language is a significant and essential part of human behaviour; the spoken form of language is the predominant form of language. This does not mean that the written form of language is less important. Writing is paramount in any progressive society; hence, it must be noted that all writing systems are based on sound systems, and they attempt to describe the sound system using a written code (Ojaide & Aziza, 2007). Therefore, for any language to be adequately written, its sound system must be described because every language has a different pattern of sounds. Each language has a set of sounds that are combined and distributed in a particular way, making one language different from other languages. Although some languages may share some sounds, the arrangement of these sounds is different in word forms. Below are a few examples of sound systems between English and the Urhobo language:

<i>English</i>	<i>Urhobo</i>
a. <i>teik</i> ‘take’	<i>ta</i> ‘speak, say’
b. <i>reinz.</i> ‘rains’.	<i>ro</i> ‘grow’
c. <i>nəv</i> ‘no’	<i>nɔ</i> ‘grind’
d. <i>ləv</i> ‘low’	<i>lɔ</i> ‘grind’

In the above example, it is salient that the initial consonants /t, r, n, l/ occur both in English and Urhobo and has been used to form meaningful words in these languages, although patterned differently. An example, in ‘a’ and ‘b’, the sounds /t and r/ are initial consonants of words in both languages. However, while consonants can end a word in the English language, it is not the same in the Urhobo language; the Urhobo language syllables are open-ended, i.e., they end with vowels. In examples, ‘c’ and ‘d’, the English /n and l/ are different phonemes and can therefore distinguish word meaning; however, in Urhobo, they are allophones that can be used interchangeably in words because they do not distinguish word meaning.

The above analysis shows that each language has a systematic way in which the sounds are arranged. Behind each arrangement, there is a pattern allowing or disallowing certain sound combinations and distributions.



4.4 Consonant Segments

The sound system of the Urhobo language consists of 28 consonantal phonemes according to Rolle (2013) and they are depicted in the table below:

Consonants (Phonemic)	Bilabial		Labio- dental	Alveola	r	Post- alveolar	Palatal		Velar		Labial Velar	
	p	b					c	ç	k	g	kp	g b
<i>Plosive</i>	p	b		t	d		c	ç	k	g	kp	g b
<i>Nasal</i>	m			N			ɲ				ŋm	
<i>Fricative</i>	ɸ		f v	s	z	ʃ ʒ			h	χ		
<i>Approximant</i>			v				j				w	
<i>Trill</i>				R								
<i>Tap</i>				R								

The chart above depicts the 28 consonant sounds of the Urhobo language (Ojaide & Aziza, 2007). The following sections will present some analysis of Urhobo words and phrases using the above chart.

4.4.1 Plosives

The Urhobo language has ten plosive components. Plosives are consonants produced with complete obstruction of the airstreams and released with a kind of plosion. The plosive components of Urhobo are /p, b, t, d, c, ʝ, k, g, kp, gb/.

/p/ the voiceless bilabial plosive	/pane/ /upe/	[pane] [upe]	pànè upē	'peel lightly' 'scar'
/b/ voiced bilabial plosives spelt as 'b'	/bane/ /obɔ/	[bane] [obɔ]	bànè òbɔ	'splash' 'hand'
/t/ voiceless alveolar plosive spelt as 't'	/ta/ /ututa/	[ta] [ututa]	tá ùtutà	'speak, say' 'onion'
/d/ voiced alveolar plosive spelt as 'd'	/da/ /udi/	[da] [udi]	dà ùdì	'drink' 'a drink'
/c/ voiceless palatal plosive spelt as 'ch'	/co/ /ocɛ/	[co] [ocɛ]	chò òchɛ	'steal' 'water pot'
/ʝ/ voiced palatal plosive spelt as 'dj'	/ʝɛ/ /oʝa/	[ʝɛ] [oʝa]	dʝɛ òdʝà	'run' 'soap'
/k/ voiceless velar plosive spelt as 'k'	/oka/ /ukoko/	[oka] [ukoko]	okà úkókō	'type' 'association'
/g/ voiced velar plosive spelt as 'g'	/ga/ /ogo/	[ga] [ogo]	gà ogo	'Worship/serve' 'in-law'
/kp/ voiceless labial-velar plosive spelt as 'kp'	/kpa/ /upke/	[kpà] [ùkpè]	Kpà Ùkpè	'Vomit' 'Bed'
/gb/ voiced labial-velar plosive spelt as 'gb'	/ogba/ /ugbeja/	[ògbá] [ùgbèyán]	ògbá ùgbèyán	'Fence' 'Friend'

4.5 Immediate Constituents (IC)

An immediate constituent is any of the largest grammatical units that constitute a construction. Immediate constituents are often further reducible. This is a system of splitting a structure into two groups at a time until it reaches its minimal distribution of one word (Wells, 1947). According to Mish (1991:281), immediate constituents can include noun and verb phrases.

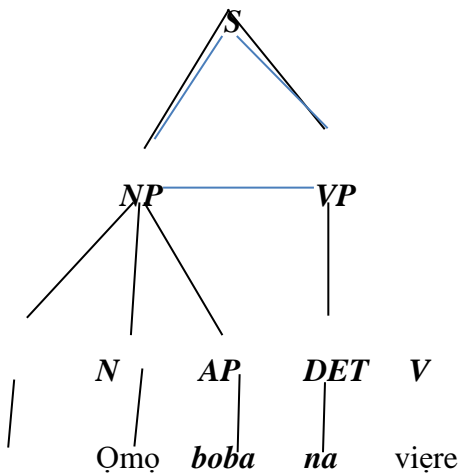
Immediate constituents can be separated using a tree diagram. See the example below.

Example 1:

- i. Ọmọ boba na viẹre (the little baby cried)

Baby young the cried

Fig 1:



4.6 Urhobo Morphemes

According to Aziza (2007:299), a morpheme is the smallest part of a word that cannot be further divided without losing its meaning. An attempt to analyse the structure of this component leads to morphology. Morphology thus deals with the internal structure of word forms. For example, **ékpo** (bag) is a meaningful word and a morpheme. However, if we break it down into two, /é/ and /kpo/, for instance, it does not give any meaning related to 'bag'. Similarly, Bello (2001) posits that a morpheme is the smallest significant component of a language's structure; here, she meant the unit cannot be further broken up without destroying or drastically altering its meaning. There are two types of morphemes: the bound morpheme, and the free morpheme.

4.6.1 Bound Morpheme

A bound morpheme, also known as an affix, refers to a kind of morpheme that cannot occur in isolation. This morpheme must be attached to a grammatical unit to be meaningful. According to Yule (1996), bound morphemes are morphemes that cannot normally stand-alone but are typically attached to another form. In English, *-ment*, *-ing*, *-ed*, and *-ness* are examples of bound morphemes. Bound morphemes, therefore, cannot stand or occur as independent words. They must be attached to a free or root morpheme to have a more precise meaning, such as 'government', 'dancing', 'accepted', and 'happiness'.

There are two types of bound morphemes that Katamba (2015) refers to as word-building processes, known as inflection and derivation.

Examples of bound morphemes in Urhobo are listed below:

1. O- **o**+v \acute{e} = ovi \acute{e} (cry)
2. -re tá+**r \acute{e}** = táré [conjugation] (said), ta means (say).
3. -ran yàn+**ràn** = yànràn (go), yan (walk)
4. -si- è+**si**+o = èsio (to write)
5. - **é**+om \acute{o} = em \acute{o} [plural marker] (children), om \acute{o} (child).

4.6.2 Free Morpheme

According to Aziza (2007), free morphemes are morphemes that can stand by themselves, and they occur in isolation without necessarily having to be attached to any other unit. Free morphemes are called stems and refer to the irreducible core of a word that can stand on its own as a full-fledged word. Free morphemes fall into two categories: the lexical morpheme and the functional morpheme. The former consists of nouns, adjectives, and verbs, which carry the content of the message conveyed. The latter consists of conjunctions, adverbs, prepositions, articles, and pronouns, which serve as the operative words in a language.

In the examples, the bold italicized features are the lexical free morphemes.

1. ***Om \acute{o}*** (child), om \acute{o} + t \acute{e} = om \acute{o} t \acute{e} (girl)
2. ***dj \acute{e}*** (run), dj \acute{e} + re = djere (ran)
3. ***Si*** (write), si + ri = siri (wrote)
4. ***Wian*** (work), o + wian = owain (job)
5. ***Ve*** (vow), ve + ri = veri (vowed).

Those functional morphemes are: na (the) v \acute{w} \acute{e} (in), and \acute{e} k \acute{e} v \acute{u} o \acute{v} o (although), etc. Morphemes enter relationships based on addition, substitution, and subtraction (Ayodele, 2001). In other words, a morpheme, free or bound, may be added to another to produce a word; for example, ‘om \acute{o} ’ + t \acute{e} ’ results in ‘om \acute{o} t \acute{e} ’ (girl). This type of addition is called affixation.

4.6.3 Inflection and Derivational Morpheme

Yule (1996) states that derivational morphemes create new words by either changing the meaning or the part of speech (syntactic category), while inflectional morphemes neither change the part of speech

nor the meaning, but only refines and gives extra grammatical information about the already existing word. Linguists define an inflectional morpheme as a mere grammatical indicator or marker (Embick, 2015).

When combined with a root, derivational morphemes change either the semantic meaning or part of speech of the affected word; for example, in Urhobo, Ghogho (happy) with the addition of bound morpheme 'A' becomes Aghogho (happiness). Inflectional morphemes, when combined with the root word, modify a verb's tense, aspect, mood, person or number, or pronoun without affecting the word's meaning or class (part of speech); example: Ukpe (bed) to ikpe (beds) – the prefix *-i* is added to have the same effect.

4.7 Word Formation Processes in Urhobo

Yule (1985:53-60) defines a word-formation process as a way of forming and creating new words from the use of old words. Word formation, according to Lieb (2013), is forming new lexical words from already existing words using a word formation process. Different word processes have been put forward by various scholars: coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, backformation, conversion, acronym, derivation, prefix and suffix, and multiple other processes.

These processes are mostly applicable to English because of its obvious status. Scholars like Peña (2010, Shahla and Amir (2013), and others, have made a case for the degrees of existence/absence/presence of certain word-formation processes in some languages and not in others. Some of these processes of word formation in English do not feature in Hausa, while some do exist in Hausa but not in English.

The next section discusses the major morphological processes involved in creating new words in Urhobo. They are affixation, lexical borrowing, conversion, and backformation.

4.7.1 Affixation

Affixation is a morphological process in which grammatical or lexical information is added to the root word. Ndimele (1999) defined affixation as a morphological process that attaches an affix to a root or base of a word. An affix is a grammatical entity that can be added to the base of a word. The process of affixation includes prefixes, infixes, and suffixes.

A prefix is an affixation that occurs before the root of a word. It is the process of attaching an affix to the front of the host morpheme. See examples of prefixes in Urhobo below.

	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Noun</i>
<i>i</i>	guṛṛṛ 'want'	ẹ-guṛṛṛ (ẹguṛṛṛ) 'love'
<i>ii</i>	ghṛghṛ 'be happy'	a-ghṛghṛ (aghṛghṛ) 'happiness'
<i>iii</i>	hwẹ 'laugh'	e-hwẹ (ehwẹ) 'laughter'
<i>iv</i>	ta 'talk'	o-ota (ota) 'word'
<i>v</i>	ga 'worship'	ẹ-ga (ẹga) 'religion'

A suffix is an affix that occurs after the base of the word. It is the process of attaching an affix to the end of the host morpheme. See examples of suffixes in Urhobo below.

<i>i</i>	si 'write'	si- <i>ri</i> (siri) 'wrote'
<i>ii</i>	so 'sing'	so- <i>ro</i> (soro) 'sang'
<i>iii</i>	riẹn 'know'	riẹn- <i>re</i> (riẹnre) 'knows'
<i>iv</i>	ta 'tell'	ta- <i>re</i> (tare) 'said'

An infix is an affix incorporated within a word's root. An infix, therefore, interrupts the sequence of a root. Some scholars have argued that the changes that occur in words like come – **came**, give – **gave**, tooth – **teeth**, and passersby, are infixes. Although most scholars argue that English has no true infixes, words are referred to as tmesis. Infixes in Urhobo include:

<i>i</i>	bi 'dark'	bi- e -bi (biebi) 'darkish'
<i>ii</i>	bu 'plenty'	bu- e -bu (buebu) 'plenteous'
<i>iii</i>	rho 'big'	rho- a -rho (rhoarho) 'magnificent'

4.7.2 Compounding

Hacken (2017) states that compounding is a word-formation process that combines lexical elements (words or stems). Depending on the language, the elements can be characterized as words, stems, or lexemes, compounding borders on syntax and affixation. Urhobo has compounding straight from its alphabet. The compound consonants are:

BR - CH - DJ - GB - GH - GW - KW - HW - KP - KW - NY- PH - RH - MW - SH - VW.

Additionally, there are complex compound consonants which are:

GBR - GHR -GHW - GHWR - KPR - VWL - VWR.

Examples of words using compound consonants:

BR: br anama - Show off	GW: ogwo - Old age	MW: amwa - Cloth
CH: ochẹ - Clay pot	HW: ehwè - Laugh	NY: nyovwe - Hear me
DJ: adjanakpo - Lion	KP: ẹkpa - Fool	PH: ophẹ - Free
GB: agbara - Chair	KW: kwa - Pack	RH: erhovwo - Prayer
GH: egha - Broom	MR: mrevwe - See me.	SH: sherẹ - Lie down

Examples of words using complex compound consonants:

GBR: agbroko - Name of person.
GHR: ghra - Melt
GHW: eghwa - Farm
KPR: kpregede - Sudden
VWL: ivwli - Wild sugar ants
VWR: evwri - Palm oil
GHWR: eghwro - Hoe

Examples of compounding in Urhobo:

i	omo (child) (N) + oshare (man)n = omooshare (boy) (N)
ii	udi (drink) (N) + ogagan (strong) (Adj) = udiogagan (alcohol) (N)
iii	èvùn (belly) (N) + èmré (seeing) gerund = èvùnèmré (pregnancy) (N)
iv	yònrẹ (hold') (V) + íghó ('money') (V) → ọ-yò nrèìghò '(treasurer) (N)
v	íhwè (ten)n + ọvò (one) (N) → íhwèọvò → Íhwöví (eleven) (N)

4.7.3 Reduplication

Reduplication is a standard language process in which a word or a portion of a word is repeated frequently (but not always) for morphological or syntactic reasons (Lành, 2016). According to Aziza (2007), during the morphological process of reduplication, a stem's entirety or a portion of it is replicated and joined to the stem. Aziza identifies two types of reduplication, partial and complete, which may be carried out on nouns or verbs in the Urhobo language. Urhobo derives nominal items/adjectives from verbs by partially reduplicating verbs and nouns. Below are some examples.

i	gbé 'dirty'	gbégbé	"very dirty"
ii	gró 'tall'	grógró	"very tall"

iii	dó ‘thin’	dódó	“very thin”
iv	ùdú ‘heart’	ùdúdú	“strong hearted”
v	ákpátá ‘fast’	òkpátákpátá	“most fast one”

Reduplication functions as an intensifier in Urhobo; it is used to show/describe the degree of the meaning of a word as either qualifiers, like in the case of *ùdúdú*; or modifiers, like in the case of *òkpátákpátá*, as exemplified above. The reduplicated word tells you more about the root.

4.7.4 Clipping

According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1975: 448, as cited in Maimota Shehu, 2015), the term ‘clipping’ signifies the deletion of one or more syllables from a word. Simply put, this process of word formation entails shortening a word by deleting one or more syllables. Academics identify three types of clipping: the front clipping, where the word is trimmed at the front, like in telephone - phone; back clipping, where the word is trimmed at the back, like in fanatic - fan; and front and back clipping, where the trimming takes place at both ends, like in influenza – flu.

In Urhobo, clipping is most common in the proper names of people. This is because Urhobo names are phrasal; they are usually clipped to shorter, more convenient forms for their users. A few examples are:

	Full form	Clipped form	Type of clipping
i	Efemena	Mena or Efe	front clipping, back clipping
ii	Adarighofua	Igho	front and back clipping
iii	Okurode	Rode	front clipping
iv	Onoriode	Onos	back clipping

4.8 Borrowing

Like other languages on the African continent, the Urhobo language has been influenced by colonial activities. This has resulted in the introduction of words that can be traced to colonial culture. These loan words were adopted following the morphological pattern of the Urhobo language (Onose, 2007).

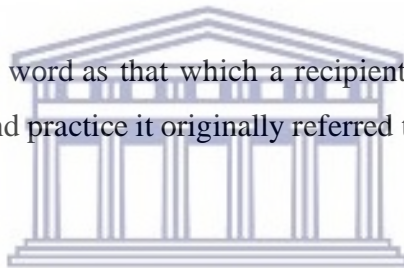
The Urhobo language is characterized by borrowing. Daulton (2012) defines lexical borrowing as adopting individual words or large sets of vocabulary items from another language or dialect. Aziza (2007) posits that Urhobo has borrowed from languages with which it has been in contact. Such languages include Portuguese, English, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Edo. Most of the words that come into the language have their sound and structure modified to conform with the phonological structure

of the language. For instance, all nouns in Urhobo begin with vowels, and all syllables end with vowels. Any loan word that does not conform to these structural elements is ‘repaired’ either by introducing an epenthetic vowel or consonant deletion. Epenthetic vowels are phonologically visible and repair the words or structures (Hall, 2011).

The language whose lexical item is copied is called the donor or source language, while the ‘copying language’ is called the recipient language. Linguistic or lexical borrowing is used to fill gaps in the recipient language’s lexicon, which may or may not have the means to designate newly introduced products or concepts (Bahumaid, 2012). Dzameshie (1996) believes that borrowing is not merely how the lexicon of one language interferes with that of another, it is the productive outworking of the social dynamics of a language-contact situation. There are four ways in which borrowing can occur. They are loanword, loan blend, loan shift, and loan translation. According to Moses and Ekiugbo (2019), only loanwords and loan translations are realizable in Urhobo.

4.8.1 Loan Words

Donwa-Ifode (1995) defines a loan word as that which a recipient language has lifted from a donor language to mean the same object and practice it originally referred to in the donor language. Examples of loanwords are given below.



	Urhobo	Donor Language (DL)
i	iboro	English ‘ball’ (ball)
ii	ejime	Yoruba and Igbo ‘ejime’ (twin)
iii	akpu	Igbo ‘akpu’ (fufu/pap)
iv	isuya	Hausa ‘suya’ (braai meat)
v	isabatu	Portuguese ‘sapato’ (shoes/sandals)

4.8.2 Loan Blend

Loan blends are hybrid borrowings that consist of partly borrowed and partly native material (the structural properties are also borrowed). An example given by Haugen (1950) is Pennsylvania German *bockabuch* ‘pocketbook’, where *bocka-* is a material borrowing (from English ‘pocket’) that is restricted to this word, and *-buch* is a native German element meaning ‘book’. A loan blend combines the lexical resources of both the donor and recipient languages. A loan blend combines the lexical resources of both the donor and recipient languages.

4.8.3 Loan Translation

Ndimele (1999) sees loan translation as a word created by using the morphemes of a recipient language to represent all the senses in the donor language. Loan translation entails copying all of the senses of an item or phenomenon from a donor language using the recipient language's lexical unit or inner resources. Compounding two or more morphemes results in Urhobo loan translation. A compound word or a compound-complex term is formed as a result (Moses & Ekiugbo, 2014).

4.8.4 Loan Translation in Urhobo

The Urhobo language also borrowed words that are used as synonyms to replace complex words in the language. That is, they borrow new words to use as synonyms for words that are already existing in the language. Native speakers also tend to borrow words when they do not know the native word for a particular entity or phenomenon. Below are some examples.

i	oweṽwe + echiro	“hunger + bearing”	oweṽwechiro	fasting
ii	udi + ogagan	“drink + strong”	udiogagan	alcohol
iii	oḃo + ine	“doctor + music”	oḃoine	musician
iv	Agbada + re + izobo	“bridge + sacrifice”	agbadizobo	altar

4.8.5 Nuances of Borrowing in Urhobo

One universal effect of borrowing in languages is a language change, which can easily be noticed in the written records of a language. Urhobo has undergone considerable changes over the years. A keen observation of written and spoken data shows that the two are different language varieties. The reason is that spoken Urhobo has extensively incorporated loan words into its vocabulary. In contrast, the written Urhobo is slow in adopting loan words, especially loan words from the English language. In most cases, loan translation is used in the written language, while the spoken language uses a loan word. Below are examples.

	<i>Written Urhobo</i>	<i>Spoken Urhobo</i>	<i>English</i>
i	ekpeti re ughe	itelevishoni	television
ii	ogba re eranvwe	Izu	zoo

Secondly, sounds that were alien to the sound system of Urhobo have been imported into the language through borrowing. A typical example is the voiced velar nasal sound /ŋ/, as shown in the examples below:

i	inki “ink”	/iŋki/
ii	ɔnku “uncle”	/ɔŋku/
iii	ibanki “bank”	/ibaŋki/

In addition, the language’s vocabulary has been enlarged to enable it to identify most concepts and entities in its culture. This has enabled speakers to express their thoughts effectively by using the exact lexical item for an entity or phenomenon and not the use of circumlocution.

4.9 Syllables

Vowels in Urhobo are A – E – Ɛ – I – O – Ɔ – U.

Haugen (1956:216) defines the syllable “as the smallest unit of recurrent phonemic sequence”. Simply put, a syllable is the basic unit of speech studied on both the phonetic and phonological levels of analysis. The syllable is a significant aspect of phonological representation because it holds the general principles that determine the proper distribution and prosodic elements. It has psychological reality because it is a unit that speakers of a language can identify. Speakers can count the number of syllables in a word and tell where one syllable ends and the next begins. Phonetically, it is claimed that when identifying syllables, listeners are responding to sonority. Sonority can be defined as a unique type of relative (non-binary) feature, like a phonological element that potentially categorizes all speech sounds into a hierarchical scale. For example, vowels are more sonorous than liquids, which are higher in sonority than nasals, with obstruent being the least sonorous of all segments (Van Oostendorp *et al.*, 2011).

The syllable branches into two constituents, namely: onset (O) and rhyme (R). The rhyme in turn branches into the nucleus (N) and coda (Co). The onset includes all consonants that precede the rhyme elements. The nucleus, as the designation suggests, represents the ‘nuclear’ or most sonorous element in a syllable. The coda includes all consonants that follow the nucleus in a syllable.

The morphology of the Urhobo language does not allow for consonant clusters; combined consonants are regarded as single letters. Hence, these combinations are not seen as clusters. Outside these digraphs, clusters of consonants are unacceptable. The syllable structure includes sequences of V, CV, VCV

(Ekiugbo 2011). Urhobo has very few consonant clusters. Only three consonants are allowed as the second consonant in a CCV sequence: /j/, /w/, and /r/. Some examples are below.

a. Examples for /j/

- i. [dĩ^h djódè wě́] “what’s your name?”
- ii. [ísjo] “stars

b. Examples for /w /

- i. [ĩ:xwè] “ten”
- ii. [ísâgwè] “groundnut”

c. Examples for /r/

- i. [àgb.ɾá.â] “thunder”
- ii. [ó b.ɾá.b.à] “it’s bad”

For example:

Urhobo Word	Syllabic Structure
Ha(rh)e	CVCV
(Vw)arié	CVCVV
(Hw)á	CV
Vu(gh)e	CVCV
(Gb)e	CV
E(ch)e	VCV
I(gh)ò	VCV
U(kp)é	VCV
(Ghr)o(ghr)o	CVCV
(Sh)e(sh)eri	CVCVCV

The phonology of the language allows for clusters such as V and CV, as shown in the below examples:

i	[e] ‘yes’	only V
ii) [da] ‘drinks’	CV

4.9.1 Open versus Closed Syllable

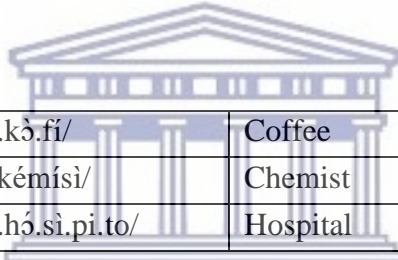
Closed syllables are syllables that have at least one consonant following the vowel. The most common closed syllable is the CVC syllable. Open syllables are syllables that end in a vowel. The most common open syllable is the CV syllable. All languages allow open syllables, but some, such as Urhobo, do not

have closed syllables. Hence, a syllable is closed if it has a branching rhyme, and open if it does not. Examples of open syllables are presented below.

i	V	/e/	“yes”
ii	V	/ã/	“exclamation of disbelief”
iii	CV	/mɔ/	“come”
iv	CV	/da/	“drink”
v	CCV	/kre/	“short”

There is syllable constitution of loan words that involves the lexical adaptation / nativization of the loan words, the adjustment is conditioned by the syllable requirement of the recipient language. Therefore, consonant clusters in the loan words are re-syllabified. The most common method for consonant cluster simplification is vowel insertion. For example, the epenthetic vowel /i/ is inserted to simplify consonant clusters, as shown below.

Cluster simplification /Lexical adaptation/nativization of English loanwords in Urhobo is taken from Ugorji (2013).



I7	/i.kɔ̃.fi/	Coffee
ii	/ikémísi/	Chemist
iii	/i.hó.sì.pi.to/	Hospital

Loan words that have closed syllables in the source languages are made to conform to the forms acceptable in the language. In the examples below, the epenthetic [i] is added to the words as affixation and this insertion is made to re-syllabify the coda from the English and Portuguese loans respectively.

ibọ̀rọ̀	Ball
itomatesi	Tomatoes

4.10 Urhobo Word Categorization

A word category or class is an identified group of words that belong based on their form, function in a construction (phrase, clause, sentence), individual meaning, or in relation to other words. It is a class of expressions that share a common set of grammatical properties (Ndimele, 1999).

4.10.1 Nouns

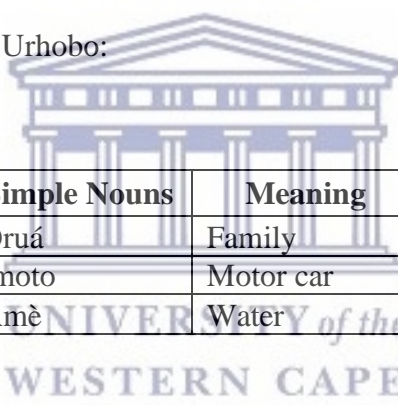
Generally, nouns are words that occur in subject and object/complement positions. Nouns in the Urhobo language may be derived from lexical entities or transformed by affixation, or the addition of a prefix to influence change in the primary function of a word. Following this, the new words take on nominal features.

4.10.2 Simple Noun

This class of nouns names persons, places, and objects. In Urhobo, names of persons are not mere lexical items but phrasal or sentential expressions denoting facts as opposed to simply naming a person. They are, however, generally regarded as names, and therefore, lexical elements.

Urhobo Names	Meaning
Mudiaga	stand firm
Omonigho	A child is better than money.
Omotekoro	A daughter is golden.

Some examples of Simple Nouns in Urhobo:



Simple Nouns	Meaning
Oruá	Family
Imoto	Motor car
Amè	Water

Some examples of compound Nouns:

Prefix Noun	Stem Noun	Combination	Meaning
Omo (child/baby)	Oho (hen)	Om(o)oho	Baby hen 'chick'
Omo (child/baby)	Óze (big basin) bowl)	Om(o)ðzé	Baby basin/bowl 'plate'
Omo (child/baby)	Osháre (man)	Om(o)ðsharé	Man child 'boy'

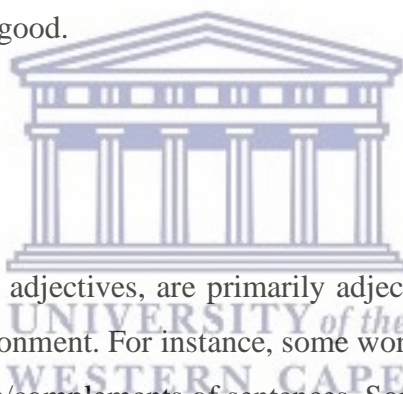
4.10.3 Colour Adjectives

This word category comprises adjectival words that assume the function of a noun in a sentence, occurring as subjects or objects of the given sentences. For example, 'ofuanfu' is white, and 'obiebi' refers to the colour black in Urhobo.

- i. Ofuanfu na jevwe
White the please me
I like the white.
- ii. Mi guono obiebi na
I want (+Present) black the.
I want the black.

This group of nouns known as colour adjectives are words formed by changing the prefix vowels of the adjectives presented in the preceding data. Again, though this is a change in the form of the adjective, it assumes the function of a noun when introduced into a sentence. Thus, the substitution of [o] in ofuanfo 'white', for [ó], results in the Urhobo word 'ófuanfu' which means 'whiteness'. Similarly, the substitution of [ó] in óbiebi 'black' for [ú], results in the word 'úbiebi' meaning 'blackness'. For example:

- i. Ubiebi yoonma
Blackness be (+Present) good.
Blackness is good.



4.10.4 De-Adjectival Nouns

This class of nouns, like the colour adjectives, are primarily adjectives but take on nominal features when introduced in a sentence environment. For instance, some words that fall into this category in the Urhobo language are used as objects/complements of sentences. Some are even inflected for numbers.

Examples of adjectival nouns acting as complements:

- i. Ovwata oviegbere
Ovwata poor person
Ovwata is poor/Iredia is a poor person
- ii. Ovwata ochibe
Ovwata impotent.
Ovwata is impotent.

Examples of de-adjectival nouns inflected for number:

- i. Odafe (singular) rich (person)

- ii. Edafe (plural) rich (people)

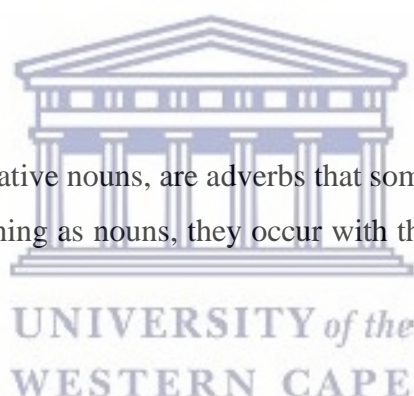
6.10.5 Locative Adverbs

This class of nouns is concerned with describing location. Adverbs in this class distinctively function secondarily as nouns (noun phrases). Besides indicating location in relation to space, they also act as subjects of the sentence and take on the definite determiner /na/. Examples:

- i. *Otorutie na djirori*
Under of Orange-tree the cool
It is cool under the Orange tree.
- ii. *Evunrúwenvwun na vwá rhuarhú.*
Inside of house the be (+Present) spacious
The house is spacious

4.10.5 Temporal Adverbs

This class of nouns, just like the locative nouns, are adverbs that sometimes appear as nouns, hence the name, temporal adverbs. In functioning as nouns, they occur with the definite determiner /na/ as well. For example:



- a. *Nóne na gróri.*
Today the long
Today is long.
- b. *Ukpe na yoonma.*
Year the good
The year is good

4.10.6 Deverbal Nouns

This class of nouns comprises verbs whose forms are changed by the addition of a vowel prefix to the verb stem. After this prefixing is introduced, these words take on nominal features relating to position, and occurring in subject, object or complement positions.

Examples:

Ùse: calling

- i. O nyó ùse mé.
He hear (+Past) calling my
He heard 'my calling'. (Object of sentence)

Òyan: walking

- ii. Òyan royin: his walking
Òyan royin vwá kpatapata.
Walking of him be (+Present) very fast
'His walking' is very fast. (Subject of the sentence)

Other prefixes attached to verbs or verb-nominal compounds to form deverbal nouns are:

Examples:

/Ó/ and **/O/** (One that does)

- i. -vwiomo: bring forth a child
Óvwiomo: One who brings forth a child.
- ii. -suotá: cause trouble
Osuotá: One who causes trouble.



/Óbú/ (One that does)

Examples:

- i. -osio: rain
Obúosio: Rainmaker
- ii. -evwá: Oracle
Obúevwá: Diviner

/Ògbá/ (Strong| Strongman| One who is good at something)

Examples:

- i. Ówian: Labourer
Ògbowian: Strong|skilled labourer

ii. Ikoko: stutter

Ogbikoko: A stutterer

Notably, in Urhobo, abstract nouns are also formed by prefixing specific vowels to verbal stems. These vowels are not randomly selected but chosen with regards to vowel harmony, a feature of the Urhobo language phonology.

Examples:

VERBS	ABSTRACT NOUNS
/roro/: think	/iroro/: thought
/guono/: like, love	/éguono/: Love
/kugbe/: come together	/okugbe/: togetherness

4.10.7 Collective Nouns

These are also formed in the same way as above, involving the prefixing of specific vowel(s) to indicate a collection of concepts or ideas.



Examples:

VERBS	COLLECTIVE NOUNS
/Koko/: come together	/Úkoko/: club, meeting
/krun/: load, parcel	/ekrun/: a pack
/ghwékoko/: come together	/Oghwékoko/: a gathering

4.10.8 Nominalization

This class of items is classified under the noun phrase. They are often introduced by complementizers /ni/: that, /tani/: that. These phrases occur in the subject and object positions – through a process known as extraposition.

Examples:

a. *Ni* wo wan odavwini wén yoonma.

That you pass (+Past) examination your good

That you passed your examination is good (Subject position)

b. O yoonma *táni* wo wán odavwini wén.

It be (+Present) good that you pass (+Past) your examination

It is good that you passed your examination (Object position)

4.10.9 Relative Clause

This is a clause embedded in a noun phrase (NP), and acting as a modifier to the head word in the sentence. It is often introduced by a WH-pronoun. Stockwell *et al.* (1973), as cited by Onose (2007), describes it as a sentence embedded as a modifier of an NP; the embedded sentence has within it a WH-pronominal replacement for a deep structure NP, which is in some sense identical to the head NP. In Urhobo, the relative pronoun that introduces this clause is *ri/ri*.

Example:

- a. Oze **ri** mi **deri** na kpokpori.

Basin which I buy (+Past) be (Present) new

The basin which I bought is new.

4.11 Classes of Urhobo Verbs

Verbs in the Urhobo language express actions with regard to time and aspects: past, present, progressive, future, and habitual actions. Despite the addition of the suffix (*ri/re/ru*) to the base of the verb to indicate immediate past tense, the tense feature in Urhobo is more of a phonological than morphological factor as verb tense is often expressed as a tonal change on the subject noun (Onose, 2007).

These sets of words are most commonly seen in the predicate position of a sentence and can be classed as transitive or intransitive. However, Ndimele (2003) posits that the division of verbs into transitive and intransitive groups cannot be done neatly since there are verbs which can occur as transitive in one context, and as intransitive in some other context. Urhobo verbs are the bases and centre of its expansion of its constructions. The argument structures identified in universal grammar (UG) align with the argument structure of the Urhobo language, that the verb assigns arguments to the noun phrases in a sentence. This can be traced back to the Urhobo language's subject-verb-object pattern (SVO) (Oghoghophia Famous, 2021).

4.11.1 Transitive Verbs

Transitive verbs can be defined as verbs that take objects in order to express complete meaning. Examples of such verbs in Urhobo are:

1. hwe: kill, beat

Umukoro **hwe** evwe.

Umukoro killed 'a goat'.

2. mrén: see

Omo na **mrén** ose ré oyin.

The child saw his/her 'father'.

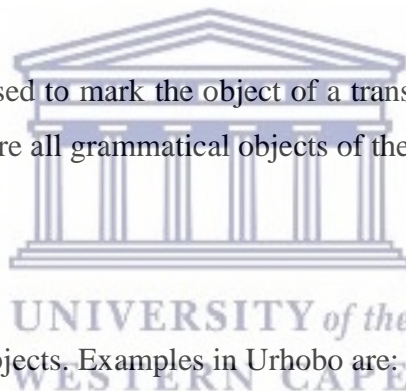
3. dà: drink

Onotu **dà** ame.

Onotu drank 'water'.

Okè pounded the palm nut

In Urhobo, the accusative case is used to mark the object of a transitive verb. In the examples above, evwe, ose ré oyin, ame, and ibièdi are all grammatical objects of the sentences.



4.11.2 Intransitive Verbs

These verbs do not take on direct objects. Examples in Urhobo are:

- i. **She:** fall

Idogho sheri.

Idogho fell.

- ii. **vre:** stand

Onotu vveri.

Onotu stood.

The simple past tense of verbs is formed by the addition of the suffix */ri/* to the base form of the verbs that specifically end with the vowels 'e, o, u'. Verbs that have 'a, e, o' take on the suffix */re/*.

Examples:

- i. she: fall

sheri: fell

- ii. da: drink
dare: drank

4.11.3 Split Verbs

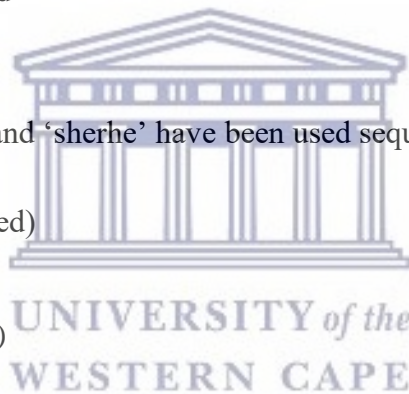
These are verbs that are placed together by reason of sentential construction, used serially, sequentially, or separated by a nominal element, to express meaning.

Examples:

- Orido ‘ri emu’ (ate)
- Orido ‘sherhe’ (lay down)
Orido ate and lay down
- Orido rie emu oki she re
Orido ate before going to bed

In this example, the verbs ‘ri emu’ and ‘sherhe’ have been used sequentially.

- Okoro ‘mren ri’. (saw/realized)
- Okoro ‘vugheri’. (knew)
- Okoro mren vughe (realized)
Okoro realized



In this example, the verbs ‘mren ri’ and ‘vughe’ have been serialized. In some cases, a nominal is inserted between two verbs, as in the example below.

- Umukoro *je ami* (Umukoro served water)
- Umukoro da ami (Umukoro drank water)

The two words ‘served’ and ‘drank’ are put together but separated by the nominal ‘water’:

- Umukoro *je* *ami* *da*
Umukoro serve + past water drink + past
That is; Umukoro served and drank water.

4.12 Other Lexical Categories

According to Carnie (2007:45), the lexical parts of speech provide the “content” of the sentences. Traditionally, nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions are lexical categories in structural terms. They are called heads.

4.12.1 Noun

Nouns are “items that display certain sorts of inflection (e.g., of case or number), have a defined distribution (e.g., they may follow prepositions but not, say, modals), and serve a specified syntactic function (e.g., as the subject or object of a sentence)”, according to Crystal (2008:333). In Urhobo, a noun can be simple: nouns can have an internal structure made up of a nominalizing prefix and a root which may be a verb or an adjective and/or complex; and nouns can have an internal structure that suggests a complex process of affixation and collocation of bound and/or free morphemes (Onovbiona, 2016). Examples of simple nouns are:

1. <i>ó</i> -	yònò(v)	òyònò
Nom prefix	teach’	‘teacher
2. <i>à</i> -	ghòghò(Adj)	àghòghò
Nom prefix	happy	happiness



Examples of complex nouns:

1. <i>ó</i>	- sì -	èbè	ósjèbè
Nom prefix	write	book	writer
2. <i>ó</i> -	kidià -	àgbàrà	ókidjàgbàrà
Nom prefix	sit	chair’	chairperson

4.12.2 Pronouns

Pronouns are words used instead of a noun. In Urhobo, pronouns play a big role on tones. Examples of pronouns in Urhobo are:

- i. Mẹ ‘me’
- ii. Wẹ ‘you’
- iii. Ayen ‘them’

- iv. Avware ‘we’
- v. O ‘Unisex (she/he)’ in Urhobo
- vi. Owan. ‘You’

4.12.3 Adverbs

Adverbs are words in a sentence that provide more information about the verb, adjectives, and other adverbs. Adverbs are called ‘orhuoba’ in Urhobo: “*orhuoba, oy n oghon r ejaje r o vw odjegba vwọ k otairuo, orhuonba ofa, ojedia ey orhuon*” meaning, the adverb is the part of speech that adds (sth) to (i.e modifies) a verb, another adverb, an adjective [sic] or a conjunction (Ajiboye, 2014)). He identifies four types: adverb of time, place, degree and manner. Examples of adverbs in the Urhobo language are:

- i. Ememerha ‘slowly’(manner)
- ii. Kpata ‘Quickly’(manner)
- iii. Mamọ ‘a lot’ (degree)
- iv. miðmióvwí Ugly (manner)
- v. ‘oghereuvo’ afternoon (time)
- vi. etíyi there (place)

4.12.4 Adjectives

Lamidi (2000:73) describes an adjective as “a category that can tell more about the noun and can be pre-modified by adverbials”. Adjectives are sometimes used in a comparative or in the superlative form. Adjectives are derived through the process of reduplication in the Urhobo language (Ekenerho, 2014). Examples of adjectives in Urhobo language are:

Examples:

- i. *Fuefu* ‘gentle’
- ii. *Ogrogron* ‘long’
- iii. *Foanfon* ‘white’

4.12.5 Preposition

Prepositions are called *dj di* in Urhobo. *dj di* means something that shows position. By this definition, any word that shows position in the language qualifies as a preposition. Some Urhobo nouns for body parts show positions, e.g. the nouns for ‘belly’, and ‘back’; some other nouns also show position, e.g.

‘up’, ɔ (‘down’) (Ajiboye, Vowel deletion in Urhobo culture and tradition: implications for Urhobo language teaching and learning, 2020) Prepositions are usually placed before a noun or a pronoun to indicate direction, place, source, or method.

Examples of prepositions in Urhobo language are:

- i. Enu ‘up’
- ii. Evu ‘inside’

4.12.6 Conjunction

A conjunction is a word or group of words that joins a word or group of words together in a grammatical sentence. Examples in Urhobo are:

- i. Vẹ/kugbe ‘and’
- ii. Yẹre ‘or’
- iii. Dede nẹ ‘even though’

4.13 Phrasal Categories

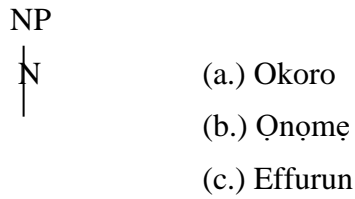
The Urhobo sentence structures are analysed using the X-Bar theory. The simple premise of the X-bar theory is that every phrase in every sentence in every language is arranged in the same way. Every phrase has a head, and each phrase may include other phrases in the complement or specifier position (Anderson, n.d). The phrase refers to a sequence of words that can function as a constituent in the structure of sentences. A sentence cannot make complete sense on its own unless it is combined with other elements. Noun phrases (NP), verb phrases (VP), adjective phrases (AP), and prepositional phrases (PP) are the four main categories used in X-bar syntax. They are named after the central categories for all of the major categories, which means that phrases are usually named after their head words.

4.13.1 Noun Phrases

According to Stockwell (1977:55), a noun phrase is a group of words with a noun as the nucleus or head word. The noun phrase, according to Yusuf (1997:8), is the category that classifies the participants in the action or state represented by the verb in a sentence or clause.

Basically, the noun phrase is headed by a noun and it could be made up of just a word or often co-occur with a class of words such as determiners as well as adjectives. That is, a noun phrase can be illustrated indicated in the tree diagrams below. The examples are names of people and places.

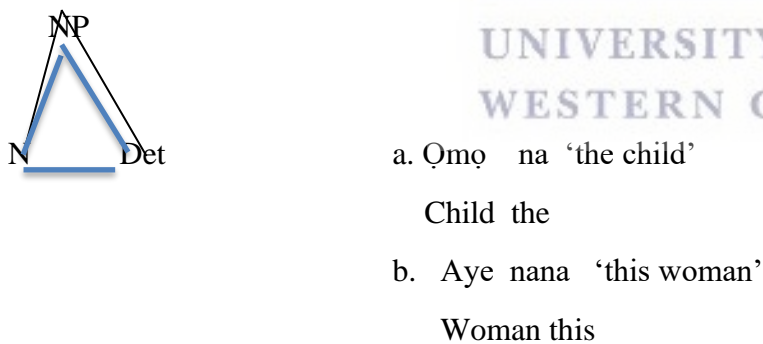
i. Noun phrase of only a noun



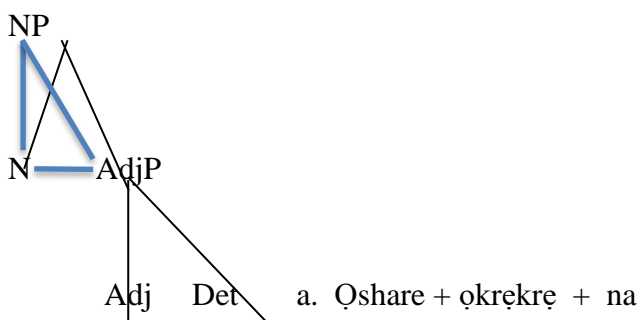
ii. Noun phrase of only a pronoun



iii. Noun phrase with a noun and a determiner.



iv. Noun phrase with a noun, an adjective, and a determiner.



Man + short + the

'the short man'

b. Onogbo + obiebi + yena

Cat + black + that

'That black cat'

4.13.2 Verb Phrases

According to Yusuf (1997:21), the verb phrase is known as the "predicate" because it contains the sentence predicator, the verb. It can be described as a syntactic category that contains a verb as the head word and other words or modifiers.

Example:

iv. Verb phrase of only a verb.



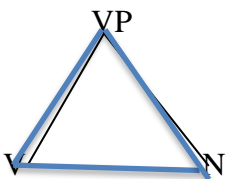
a. Dẹ 'buy'

b. She 'sell'

c. Pho 'jump'



v. Verb phrase of a verb and a noun.



a. Dẹ irosu

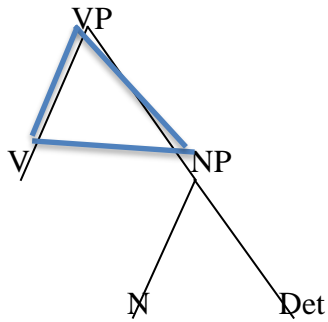
Buy rice 'buy rice'

b. She irosu

Sell rice 'sold rice'

vi. Verb phrase with a verb, a noun, and a determiner. We can also say a verb phrase and a noun phrase.

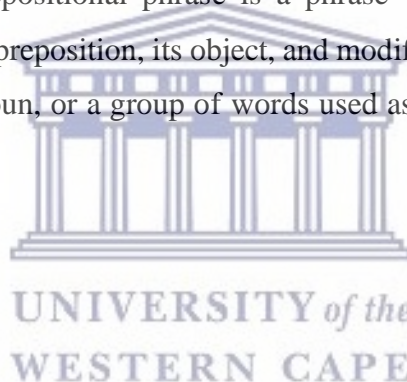
Example:



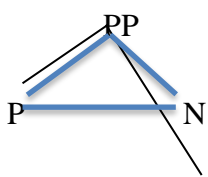
- a. She udi na
Sell drink the 'Sell the drink'
- b. hwa osa na
Pay debt the 'Pay the debt'

4.13.3 Prepositional Phrases

Radford (1997:21) says that a prepositional phrase is a phrase whose head is a preposition. The prepositional phrase consists of the preposition, its object, and modifiers of the object. The object of the preposition is always a noun, pronoun, or a group of words used as a noun. Prepositional phrases can be used as adjectives or adverbs.



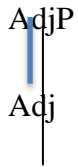
Examples:



- a. Enu ukpe
Up bed
'on the bed' (adverb of place)
- b. evu eki
In market (adverb of place)
'In the market'

4.13.4 Adjective Phrases

Greenberg (1966:115) states that an adjective phrase is a phrase with an adjective as its head, and it functions syntactically as an adjective phrase. Adjectives can consist of numerous words or one word that can act as modifiers or qualifiers. Examples in Urhobo are:



- a. grogron ‘tall’
Owo me vwa grogron
‘my person is tall’
- b. biebi ‘black/dark’
Omọ roye vwa biebi
‘Her child is black/dark’

4.14 The Clause

Omoze-plate

Kevwe omoze na- Give me the plate! (Command/Imperative sentence)

Omoze na vwa fuafo- The plate is white. (Statement or Affirmative sentence)

Omoze na fuoró- The plate is not white (negative marker sentence).

From the example above, it is important to note that tones exert a lot of influence on Urhobo grammar, as most of the grammatical information available is revealed through the manipulation of tones (Ojaide & Aziza, 2007). That is, most tense and aspectual information are indicated by tones, as seen in the negative marker sentence.

Tivo wo vwi’omoze na yo- Where did you keep the plate? (Question/Interrogative sentence)

On a basic level, a sentence can be described as any combination of words beginning with a capital letter and ending with a full stop. A more fitting definition is that a sentence is made up of a group of words containing a finite verb. The sentence, or clause, as it is better known in linguistics circles, is characterized by three types: declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Studies have found that different languages differ in their morphosyntactic behaviour. For instance, in a study done by Akpojishi (2016) it was noted that Urhobo adopts a process of vowel lengthening or duplication, which involves suffixation. Urhobo also has focus marking in some sentences, but without the negative marker ‘not’,

contrary to English for which ‘not’ is a negative marker. This section presents a sketch of the Urhobo language sentence structure. The examples below illustrate the existence of the finite verb.

1. Emọ na evun re uwevwi na - The children are in the house.
2. Ayen re emu - They are eating food.

Simple sentences carry one verb. However, despite the fact that simple sentences are short, basic, and easy to grasp, we do not always speak in them. This is because many of the short sentences we employ have something in common or have clear ties between them. When this is the case, it is preferable to link the sentences together, first to explain the precise relationship between them more directly, and second, to save space by eliminating superfluous repetitions and redundancies. Thus, when the sentences in 1 and 2 above are linked they become –

1. Emọ na evu'vevwi na, aye re'mu
The children in the house are eating (transliteration)
The children are in the house and are eating (equivalent in English)

These combinations are no longer simple sentences but are derived from simple sentences. We can therefore say that Urhobo sentences fall into two major categories, namely, simple sentences, and those that are derived from the basic sentences, sometimes referred to as compound sentences. In statement 1 above, only one verb is used. Therefore, what may be a compound sentence in English becomes a simple sentence in Urhobo, as seen above.

Urhobo simple sentences/declarative sentences.

- Akpo came
Akpo rere
- Igho went on an errand
Igho kpo'yan
- They ate yam
Ate riọ ọne

The Urhobo language usually only have one verb and no coordinating conjunctions (excluding phrasal conjunctions); they are declarative and do not use secondary operators like questions, commands, or negations (Okoro 1993).

4.15 Urhobo Derived Sentences

Questions, commands, and negations involve the addition of secondary operators to declarative sentences to change them to questions, commands, and negations.

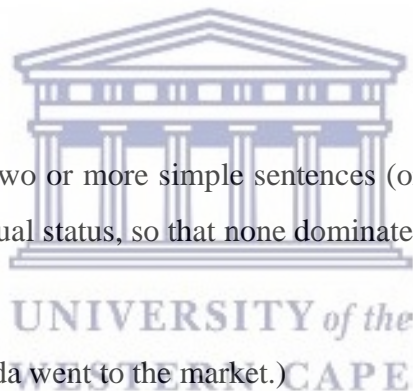
For example:

- a. Aziza rhere. - Aziza came (declarative/affirmative)
- b. Aziza rhere? - Did Aziza come? (question/interrogative)
- c. Aziza rhe! - Aziza come (Future tense command)
- d. Aziza yanrhe! - Aziza come (Present tense command)
- e. Aziza rheree - Aziza did not come (declarative/negation)

From these examples, it can be observed that: (a) question sentences simply observe the verb position in a typical SVO sentence; (b) commands employ the base (or infinitive) form of the verb; the morphology changes in the conjugation of the verb, as with the insertion of the affixation 'yan' to the verb; and (c) negation employs vowel lengthening 'ee' to the verb.

4.15.1 Compound Sentences

These involve the coordination of two or more simple sentences (or clauses) in such a way that each retains a separate identity and an equal status, so that none dominates the other(s). Examples are:



- (Akpo went to school but Ada went to the market.)
Akpo kpa'sa r'uyono, ekevuovo, Ada kp'eki (**Spoken form**)
Akpo kpo asa ru uyono ekevuovo Ada kpo eki (**written form**)
- (The man went to the market and bought a shirt.)
Oshare na kp'eki, o da ji de ewun (**Spoken form**)
Oshare na kp'eki, o da ji de ewun (**written form**)

These examples show that the two clauses in a compound sentence may or may not be linked by conjunction. Like in most African languages in cases where vowels exist next to each other, a contraction is sometimes made, as is evident in the sentences above.

4.15.2 Complex Sentences

These involve the subordination of one or more clauses to another clause so that there is a main clause dominating one or more clauses. These subordinate clauses occur in various forms. The relative clause is embedded in the main clause and modifies a noun phrase, optionally using the relative pronouns “re” and “ri”, for example:

- (The shoes (that) Akpevwe bought are very expensive.)
Isabato re Akpevwe de re na vwa ghaghare
- (The children who came here are my siblings.)
Emo na ri rie tine iniovo

The nominal clause is an embedded clause that functions like a noun in the main clause, for example:

- (Their wedding a week ago baffled everybody.)
Orowe raye edidjana rowan re na gb'ihwojobi unu
- (What caused the problem was Achojah's riding a bicycle through the market.)
Obo ro swota na, ifoke ne Achojah dje Idjighere roye evun eki na

In a non-finite clause, the verb form of the embedded clause remains unchanged regardless of the grammatical form of the verb in the main clause.

- Ejiro wants to go to the market
Ejiro guono yan kpe'eki na (**Spoken form**)
Ejiro guono yan kpo eki (**Written form**)
- Ese wants to go to market.
Ese guono yan kpe'eki (**Spoken form**)
Ese guono yan kpo eki (**Written form**)
- Tega is getting ready to go to market.
Tega muegbe o ke vwo kpe'eki (**Spoken form**)
Tega muegbe o ke vwo kpo eki (**Written form**)

The adverbial clause is an embedded clause that functions as an adverb to tell us the time, place, reason, manner, purpose, result, or condition for the action or event indicated in the main clause. For example:

- He/she returned from the market **when it was raining. (time)**

Ọke ro vwo ne eki na re **jo osio rọ** (Spoken form)

Ọke **re osio vwo rho** oyen o vwo ne eki rhe (Written form)

- Onome ate up all the food **because he was hungry**. (reason)

Onome rie emu na ijobi **ifoke nẹ owẹvwe hwe**

- **If I were you**, I would take his advice. (condition)

Ọ da dia nẹ mẹ owẹ, mi ra rie uchebro roye (spoken form)

Ọ da dia nẹ mẹ owẹ, me ra reyo uchebro na (written form)

As the examples show, Urhobo conditional clauses can occur before or after the main clause.

4.15.3 Focus Constructions

In this type, specific constituents of the sentence are focused on for emphasis. These constituents could be the subject of the sentence, the verb, the object, adverbs, noun qualifiers, and so on, and focus markers such ‘yẹ’ are used. Examples are:

- Ochuko bought a car. (basic sentence)

Ochuko do’kọrotọ

Ochuko de okọrotọ

- **It is a car that** Ochuko bought. (focus construction)

Okọrotọ yẹ Ochuko dẹ re

Okọrotọ oyẹn Ochuko dere

- Ochuko wants to see you. (basic sentence)

Ochuko guọnu mre vwe

Ochuko guọnu mre we

- **It is you that** Ochuko wants to see. (focus construction)

Owẹ yẹ Ochuko guọno mre

Owẹ oyẹn Ochuko guọno mre

- **(It is Ochuko who** wants to see you.) (focus construction)

Ochuko ye guọnu wo mre (spoken form)

Ochuko oyen guọnu mre we (written form)



As the translations show, Urhobo focus constructions are the equivalents of English cleft sentences. Cleft sentences are defined as complex sentences that have a meaning that could be expressed by a simple sentence. Clefts typically put a particular constituent into focus. In spoken language, this focus is often accompanied by a special intonation. Examples of cleft sentences are seen above in the focus constructions.

4.15.4 Active and Passive Voice

The form of a verb that specifies whether a grammatical subject performs the action or is the recipient of the action is referred to as voice. The subject does the action in an active voice sentence; the subject receives the action in a passive voice sentence (Murray & Rockowitz, n.d).

- They killed a snake. (active)
Aye hwo ɔɔdekɔ (**spoken form**)
Ayen hwe ɔɔdekɔ (**written form**)
- They were burgled. (passive – grammatical object deleted)
Akpau uwevwi raye ro (**spoken form**)
Akpape uwevwi rayen ro (**written form**)
- You are being called. (passive – grammatical object deleted)
E se we
- A snake was killed by them. (passive – grammatical object retained)
Ɔɔdekɔ raye hwe ri (**spoken form**)
Ayen hwe ɔɔdekɔ (**written form**)

4.16 Chapter summary

This chapter has shown that grammar is multifaceted. This chapter also reviewed some grammar types and focussed on the morphosyntactic and phonological aspects of the grammar of Urhobo. This chapter further expounded on the characteristics of word classes and phrases in Urhobo grammar and the passive and active voice specifically.

In the next chapter, the researcher will try to give details as to the many factors mitigating the vitality of the Urhobo language as shared by interviewees.

CHAPTER 5

Demographic and Biographic Background

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the captured data from the qualitative and quantitative research is presented, analysed, described, and interpreted systematically as the next step of the research process. This chapter contains three main details. The first is the demography of the respondents within their physical spaces. The second is to find out the domain and attitude of the respondents, and the third is to elicit how the respondents self-assessed their level of Urhobo proficiency. The vitality of the Urhobo language can only be effectively maintained if speakers, irrespective of location, continue to use it in various domains. According to UNESCO (2012), when speakers stop using a language, use it in fewer and fewer contexts, use it less frequently, register and speak styles, or stop passing it on to the next generation, it is considered endangered. The researcher explored the analysis and interpretation of data collected for this thesis regarding physical spaces in the following paragraphs.

5.1 Description of the Study Population

Guided by the sampling technique, of the 100 questionnaires sent out, 58 respondents from the mailing list completed the questionnaire. Research questions 1 to 9 of the survey gave details of the profile of the study population. Respondent data, including gender, age, home language, tribe, marital status, and linguistic profile, were presented afterwards.

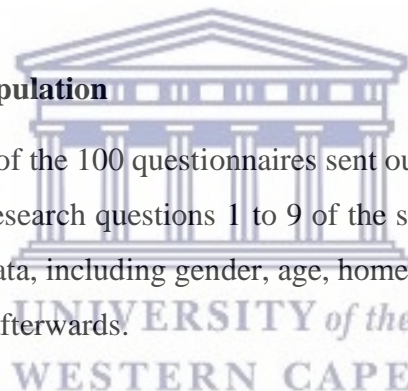


Table 5.1: Residence (Country) and State Question 1 profile

Current place of residence (Country)	Female	Male	Grand Total
United Kingdom	13	18	31
Nigeria	8	14	22
South Africa		2	2
USA		1	1
Ghana		1	1
Not Provided		1	1
Grand Total	21	37	58

The table above depicts the places of residence of the respondents. It was found that 22 respondents were based in Nigeria, 35 were based outside of Nigeria, and two did not state their location. Of those outside Nigeria, 31 reside in the UK, two in South Africa, one in the USA, and one in Ghana. Only one of the participants did not provide a current place of residence. The varying locations provided the study with the information it needed regarding the use of Urhobo in physical and virtual spaces inside or outside the language's place of origin. Question 2 of the questionnaire required the respondents to detail their exact current residence; this was better to narrow the location of each of the survey participants.

Table 5.2: Current Place of Residence (State or City)

2. Current place of residence (state)	Female	Male	Grand Total
Aberdeen, Scotland	1		1
Abuja		1	1
Accra		1	1
Akure	1		1
Buckinghamshire		1	1
Cape Town		2	2
Delta	4	6	10
England		3	3
England		1	1
Essex	1		1
Kent	1	1	2
Lagos	1	1	2
Liverpool	1		1
London	6	8	14
Nevada		1	1
Niger	1		1
Nottingham		1	1
Nottingham	1		1
Outside the USA/Canada/Australia		1	1

Oyo	1		1
River state		2	2
UK		3	3
(blank)	1	2	3
Edo State	1	2	3
Grand Total	21	37	58

Thirty-nine of the participants were born in Nigeria, seven were born in the UK, and 12 of the participants did not indicate their country of birth. The third question required a country of birth. This aided the study in establishing how many Nigerians, at least by birth, are involved in the study since this language has to do with the linguistic terrain of Nigeria as it pertains to the Urhobo language. The study found that 67 per cent of the respondents were born in Nigeria.

5.2 Gender and Age

The study found that all 58 respondents indicated their age, with 37 (64 per cent) being male and 21 (36 per cent) of the respondents being female. Only 57 of the 58 respondents indicated their age. The average age of these respondents was 42.5 years, with the youngest being 18 years old and the oldest 67. The average age of respondents indicated they were in the mid-life transition phase. Thus, they would be able to provide meaning and substance to the findings of this study. Age is vital because it tracks the patterns of change in the use of language according to generations and who uses it. Current studies have revealed the interest of research in the younger generation and what part the older generation plays in language maintenance, shift, and revitalization. According to a dearth of researchers, young people are the harbinger of the changing patterns of language (Cheshire, 2008).

5.3 Ethnicity of Parents

Questions 6 and 7 elicited the ethnicity of the parents of the respondents as there is “a considerable close connection between language and ethnicity” (Obeng and Adegbija, 1999). The researcher wanted to know the ethnicity of the parents of the survey participants to establish the linguistic profiles of the respondents further and how this, in the later responses, influenced the language use and proficiency of the respondents and, consequently, the vitality thereof. Parents’ language use affects the child-rearing process as well as the attitudes of the children toward the language (Roby & Scott, 2022). According to a study done by Cunningham and King (2018), many children raised with two languages go through

phases of not wanting to use the minority language or of answering their parents in the majority language, and several other scholars concur (Baker & Wright, 2017; Cunningham, 2011; De Houwer, 2015). Children’s reluctance to use the minority language may even lead to families abandoning the minority language entirely, especially when only one parent speaks the minority language (Cunningham & King, 2018).

The study found that most respondents (56) have an Urhobo father, while 49 said their mothers are from the Urhobo ethnicity. Akwa Ibom, Edo, Esan, and Itsekiri each had one respondent as the ethnicity of their mothers, two persons indicated they had Isoko mothers, while for the Urhobo Abraka, Urhobo Itsekiri and Urhobo Okpara dialects, they all recorded one parent each. This validates the data: since the child belongs to the father in African culture, the study dares to consider these respondents as experts by being Urhobo by descent and ancestry, which makes the ethnicity question robust. Additionally, the study may yet show the role of fathers in passing on the indigenous languages, which has long been attributed to the mother. Several studies position the father as an aloof figure does not interact with the children. Many available research studies have concentrated on indigenous women and their children, but indigenous males have received very little attention with regards to parenting (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2017; Walter, Martin, *et al.*, 2017). Indigenous fathers’ contributions to their children’s understanding of indigenous culture and traditional knowledge must be recognized (Collard *et al.*, 2016; Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012; Martin, 2017).

Table 5.3: Ethnicity of Parents

Ethnicity	Father	Mother
Akwa Ibom		1
Edo		1
Esan		1
Isoko		2
Itskekiri		1
Urhobo	56	49
Urhobo Abraka	..	1
Urhobo Okpara	1	
Urhobo Itshekiri		1
Did not answer	1	1
Grand Total	58	58

Table 5.4: Marital Status and Language Spoken by Spouse

Language	Married	Prefer not to say	Single	Blank	Grand Total
Anang, English & Pidgin	1				1
Bini	2				1
English	6	1			7
English & Urhobo	7		1		8
English & Bini	1				1
English & Igbo	1				1
English & little Urhobo	1				1
English & Yoruba	1				1
English, Igbo, Yoruba & Pidgin	1				1
English, Owan & Delta Igbo	1				1
English & Pidgin	1				1
English, Urhobo & Yoruba	1				1
Igbo	2				2
Isoko	1				1
N/A		1	2		3
Ndebele	1				1
Shona	1				1
Urhobo	7			1	9
Urhobo, Isoko & English	1				1
Blank		3	11	1	15
	37	37	14	2	58

Tables 4.4 show each respondent's marital status and the language(s) spoken by their spouses. Individuals' communication styles differ due to differences in their cultural backgrounds (Corbin & White, 2008). The breadth of research on the roles of mixed marriages in language shift validates this question because it identifies marital status as a determining factor in one's language use patterns. Thirty-two respondents, who made up the majority, indicated that they were married. Those who were

single numbered 14; five preferred not to say, while two did not answer. This data ultimately puts respondents married to Urhobo-speaking spouses at 41 per cent, and those married to non-Urhobo-speaking spouses at 59 per cent. Researchers have found that exogamous marriages cause language shifts (Fleming, 2016). It should be noted that homogamous marriages cause language shifts as well, but to a smaller extent.

Interethnic marriages between Nigeria’s numerous ethnic groups have a negative impact on the use of native languages, particularly minority languages. The majority of interethnic marital homes use English or Nigerian Pidgin as the primary language of communication. Such relationships result in children who learn the language spoken at home as their mother tongue and first language, demoting both of their parents’ native tongues (Ochonogor & Ikems, 2019).

Table 5.5: Marital Status and Language Spoken by Spouse

Languages spoken and being learnt	No
English Only	11
Urhobo & English	28
Other Language & Urhobo	0
English, Other Language & Urhobo	19
Grand Total	58

The data presented in 4-5 was to ascertain the language(s) spoken and being learned by the respondents. Those who can speak Urhobo and English take up the most significant number (28). Respondents who speak English, other languages, and Urhobo were 19, 11 could only speak English, while there was no record of any respondent who could speak other languages and Urhobo. It is evident that respondents who can speak or are currently learning Urhobo account for 81 per cent of the total, while those who cannot speak or are not learning account for 19 per cent. The data also puts non-Urhobo mothers who can speak or are currently learning Urhobo at 67 per cent, while non-Urhobo mothers who can neither speak nor learn the language at 33 per cent. This shows that a healthy majority of individuals are currently speaking the Urhobo language or learning it within their physical spaces.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the effort made by non-Urhobo mothers towards speaking or learning the Urhobo language. The data also evidences bilingual and multilingual physical and virtual spaces. Multilingualism is prevalent in digital surroundings. However, the definition of multilingualism varies

greatly. Some people may experience a dissimulation that allows them to participate in various venues, groups, and communication styles. In contrast, others may experience a more limited, private, and context-specific set of language resources (Fani & Husein, 2021). Additionally, the current work of Lee (2017) demonstrates the growing number of multilingual practices in the digital platform that resemble spoken communication (Lee, 2017).

Table 5.6: Languages Spoken as a Child

Which language/languages did you speak first as a child?	No
English	23
English & Pidgin	1
Not Sure	1
Urhobo	24
Urhobo & English	6
Yoruba & Urhobo	1
Blank	2
Grand Total	48

Many language experts agree that language exposure is critical for language learning. Twenty-four participants said Urhobo as shown in table 4.6, and another 23 said English in response to this question; six replied Urhobo and English; two said they did not know; one claimed English and Pidgin, Yoruba, and Urhobo; and one said they did not know. According to the data, 31 of the 58 respondents learned Urhobo as children, while 27 said they were not exposed to the language as a child. In the face of widespread language loss, Pye (2021) suggests that documenting the language of the last children to acquire indigenous languages and comprehend acquisition in different situations becomes crucial (Kelly *et al.*, 2015).

Table 5.7: Was Speaking Urhobo Language Encouraged?

Was speaking Urhobo language encouraged in your household while growing up?	No.
No	11
Sometimes	11
Yes	34
Did not Say	1
Grand Total	58

As shown in the table above, in response to whether speaking Urhobo was encouraged in their household while growing up, 34 respondents said yes. In contrast, 11 people said sometimes, 11 respondents said no, and one did not respond.

From the result of the data, 58 per cent said Urhobo, while 42 per cent of respondents said ‘Sometimes, No, or Did not say’. The majority ‘yes’ signifies that most households where the respondents resided encouraged the speaking of Urhobo. From the previous table, it is evident that a section of these respondents is bilingual, but being bilingual means that there is a dominant language despite having to use them interchangeably or contextually, according to Wermelinger (2017), and the dominance as per the research, is depicted in the table above.

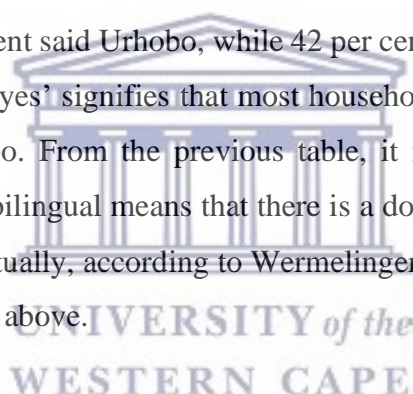


Table 5.8: How Often Urhobo Was Used

How often do you use Urhobo now compared to when you were younger?	No
Seldom	12
2	14
3	14
4	7
very Often	10
Blank	1
Grand Total	58

There were varying responses to how often respondents use Urhobo now compared to when they were younger. Respondents were given the option to choose from Seldom (1) to Very often (5), while levels 2, 3, and 4 were between these extremes. Twelve respondents indicated that they use Urhobo seldom, while 14 persons agreed to be in level 2. Another 14 opted to be in 3. Level 4 was chosen by seven respondents. Ten respondents said they spoke the language very often, and one did not respond. We can deduct from this data that not many persons use the Urhobo language as often as they should, with only 10 persons indicating a very good consistency of use. It may be hard to continue using one's language in adulthood, especially when one has left the geographical location where the language is primarily spoken. (Makulloluwa, 2016).

5.4 Questions 14, 15 and 16

Language experts have long recognized that a person's attitude toward a language is crucial to its survival. This is one of the UNESCO criteria for determining the vitality of a language (UNESCO, 2003). Attitude is a set of beliefs and psychological predispositions to act or evaluate behaviour in a certain way (Gardner, 1985). Language attitude is also described as a complex notion that can be defined as part of the existential competencies but also as a dynamic structure of learner attitudes (Tódor & Dégi, 2016). The attitude of the speech community in which a language is spoken is crucial to its proper development and maintenance. The language will gain strength if the speech community's attitude is encouraging (Fishman, 1991). The following three questions were designed to elicit responses on how respondents felt (i.e., their attitudes) when speaking or hearing the language, whether they speak it to friends and family, and how their attitude towards the Urhobo language has changed.

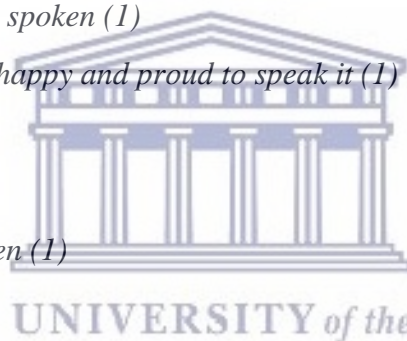
Table 5.9: How Respondent Felt When Urhobo is Spoken

How do you feel when Urhobo is spoken to you or you are heard speaking it?	No
I feel fine	23
I use it as a learning opportunity	20
Never really thought about it	4
Very excited to hear it being spoken	1
I feel extremely happy and proud	1
It is my language and I am proud and happy to speak it	1

Sometimes	1
I feel proud	1
Happy and elated	1
Happy to hear it being spoken	1
I feel pressured	3
Embarrassed that if I try and speak and comments are made about my pronunciation but I am fine hearing it spoken	1
Grand Total	58

From the table, the majority of the respondents (23) said they were fine with it, while 20 agreed that they use it as an opportunity to learn the language, and four indicated that they have never really thought about it. In contrast, three respondents admitted to feeling pressured. The rest of the options had one respondent each:

- *Very excited to hear it being spoken (1)*
- *It is my language, and I am happy and proud to speak it (1)*
- *I feel proud (1)*
- *Happy and elated (1)*
- *Happy to hear it being spoken (1)*



It may be determined from the data above that a substantial percentage of respondents were quite pleased with being spoken to in Urhobo or hearing it spoken and the use of the qualifier ‘happy’. What is interesting is the people who use it as a learning opportunity. On the other hand, an interesting response was, “(I am) *embarrassed that if I try to speak and comments are made about my pronunciation, but I am fine hearing it is spoken*”. This response shows that the participant likes their language but does not think they are competent enough to speak it as they refer to the pronunciation. The respondent appears to have encountered Urhobo speakers who are critical of how she uses Urhobo. The embarrassment speaks to the fact that the pronunciations are wrong. These comments tend to discourage people from speaking their native tongues because they feel a foreignness to what would otherwise be their heritage language (Yildiz, 2012).

Table 5.10: Is Urhobo Spoken Amongst Friend and Family?

Do you speak Urhobo language amongst your friends and family?	No.
N/A	2
Maybe	1
No	9
Rarely	1
Yes	18
Blank	27
Grand Total	58

According to the table above, 18 people said yes to speaking Urhobo with their friends and family, whereas nine said no, and 28 did not respond. However, one person each agreed to maybe and rarely. Respondents who did not say yes gave a variety of responses. One such response was “*I do not have anyone to talk to; I would talk if I knew more; most of my friends are non-Urhobos; I am not proficient in Urhobo, so I use it for pleasantries; I am married to a non-Urhobo*”. These responses reflect and support the findings of research on the causes of language death by scholars (Atifnigar *et al.*, 2021).

Table 5.11: Attitude of Respondent Towards Urhobo Language

On a scale of 1-5 How has your attitude towards Urhobo language changed over time	No
I feel Strongly	29
2	13
3	6
4	4
I care less	2
Blank	4
Grand Total	58

Crystal (2000) explains that other languages might be considered unnecessary when a particular language is actively in use. With this in mind, the researcher questioned respondents on how their

attitude towards Urhobo has changed. From the table, we can see 29 respondents indicated they feel strongly about it, which is 50 per cent of the study population. Thirteen people went with level 2, while levels 3, 4, and 5 (I care less), had six, four, and two respondents respectively, totalling 12.24 per cent. These findings show a positive attitude towards the language and, for this research, can be used to support language revitalization among the different stakeholders involved.

5.5 Questions 17, 18 & 19

The focus of table 4-5 and their accompanying figures (1, 2 & 3) is to show the respondents' proficiency in the Urhobo language with regards to three language domains: speaking, reading, and writing. According to Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan (2000), language proficiency exists when an individual can use a language accurately and appropriately in both its oral and written forms in different settings. The figures that follow each table present the details of the respondent's age with their self-assessed proficiency. This aided in showing the different generations and intergenerational language speakers. UNESCO (2003) instructs that a language is only safe if that language is used and transmitted from one generation to another. If language users are proficient across varying generations, then the vitality of Urhobo will remain positive.

Of the 58 respondents, 18 consider themselves fluent in Urhobo. This is the most significant number from the data in this question. For levels 2 and 3, the researcher recorded ten people each with an equal percentage of 10 per cent. Thirteen respondents agreed upon a level 4 as their level of speaking proficiency in Urhobo, which represents 23 per cent; six of the respondents were recorded as not being able to speak the language.

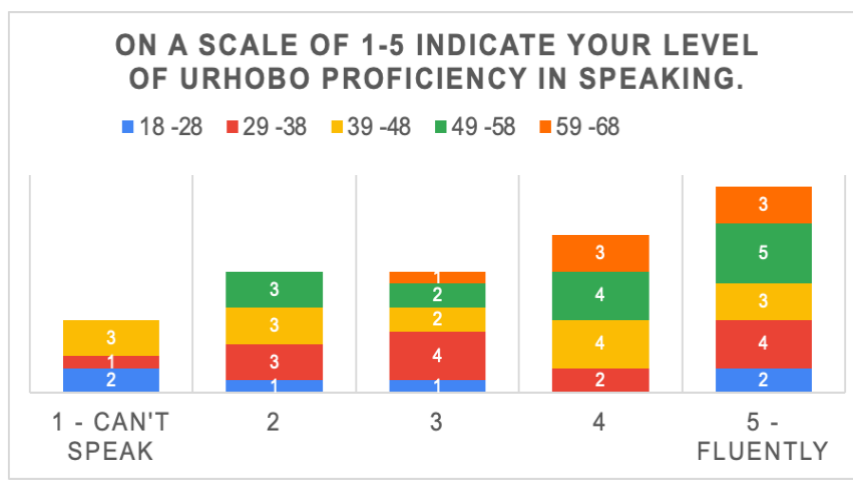


Figure 5.1: Speaking Proficiency in Urhobo

Figure 4.1 above details the speaking proficiency in the Urhobo language among five generations. We can deduce that ages 18 to 28 are the least proficient in speaking Urhobo, while ages 49 to 58 are the most proficient. Ages 29 to 38, 59 to 68, and 39 to 48 are marginally different in their speaking proficiency. The poor speaking skills of the younger generation could negatively impact the long-term maintenance of the Urhobo language. There is no transmission, as discussed above.

5.6 Urhobo Proficiency in Reading

In a technological age, most people are expected to possess basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic (Cabardo, 2015). Regarding reading proficiency, only three respondents indicated fluency level, representing 5 per cent of the total survey population. For levels 4 and 3, the researcher recorded 14 and 11 respondents, representing 24 per cent and 19 per cent respectively, while level 2 recorded the most significant number of respondents, 18 with 31 per cent.

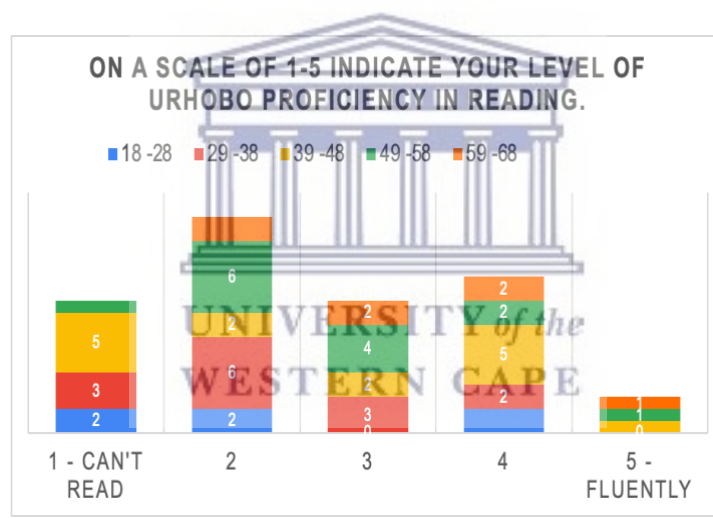


Figure 5.2: Proficiency in Reading Urhobo

In Figure 4.2, the scarcity of respondents who could read Urhobo fluently is evident. However, like in Figure 4.1, the youngest adult grade of 18 to 28 recorded the least proficiency in reading Urhobo. This is a worrying development as the ability to read materials in the language will foster the sustainability of the Urhobo language. One respondent wrote that “*Not enough reading materials are available*”. This puts language documentation under review, but the question is, are there enough reading materials supporting this language’s revitalization? Previous studies limited the reading of languages to the

education/school environment, but the dynamics have changed. For the language to be revitalized in spaces other than schools, they must have people who can read them.

5.7 Urhobo Proficiency in Writing

In the final proficiency test, the researcher elicited answers to respondents' ability regarding writing in Urhobo. Sixteen respondents, representing 28 per cent, said they could not speak, while 20 persons went with level 2, which constitutes 34 per cent. Levels 3 and 4 recorded seven and nine respondents representing 12 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. The lowest sample population, four, was for those who agreed they could write very well in Urhobo, representing 7 per cent.

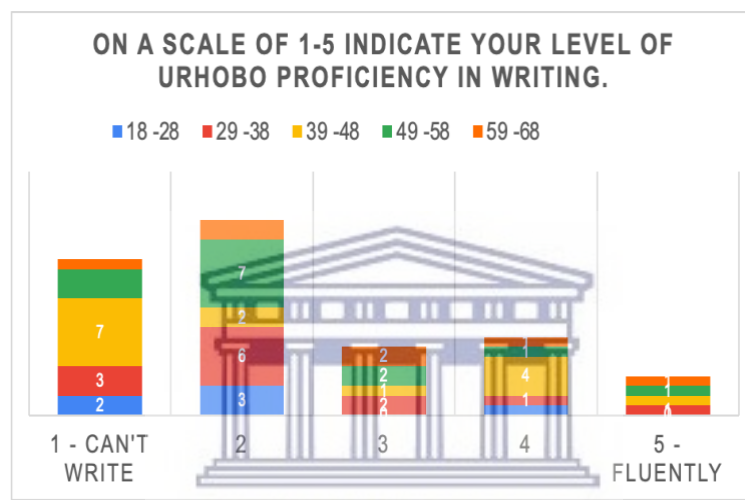


Figure 5.3: Writing Proficiency in Urhobo

In line with the previous numbers, we can see that the group's youngest members are the least adept at writing the language. Further research reveals that Urhobo writing proficiency is extremely low compared to the speaking proficiency seen in figure 4.1.

5.8 Urhobo Proficiency in Writing

The researcher asked the respondents if they were aware of and participating in any Urhobo community within their physical area for this survey section; 40 replied "yes", and 18 said "no". Each person presented different reasons for what they do in these areas.

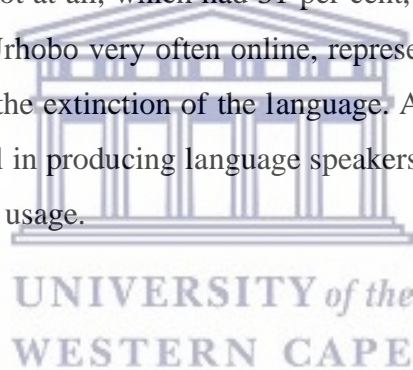
The respondents' use of Urhobo in their physical space revealed that the majority still promote Urhobo for cultural and identity reasons, which can aid in revitalization efforts. However, competency is low,

particularly among the younger generation (18 to 28). The lack of being in an environment where the language is actively used has hampered the growth of the language among those outside the state where it is constantly in use.

5.9 Question 21–24

The following questions demonstrate how technology and Urhobo language usage interact in virtual settings. Penfield, Cash, Galla, Williams, and Shadow Walker claim that (2006), many indigenous languages have embraced technology to help revitalize their languages. The emergence of virtual space has extended how we connect and utilize language as languages evolve to fulfil the demands of various communities. In our daily lives, we are constantly interacting with technology. Today’s children grow up in multiliterate situations where they read, write, listen, speak, and use computers. As a result, the researcher asked respondents about their Urhobo language activities in the virtual environment in order to determine the language’s vitality.

The options that dominated were Not at all, which had 31 per cent, and option two, which had 33 per cent. Only four respondents used Urhobo very often online, representing a low 7 per cent. The result demonstrates a trend that portends the extinction of the language. Although many researchers believe that technology remains less critical in producing language speakers, there is no doubt that it provides more platforms to support language usage.



5.10 Usage of Zoom

The COVID epidemic ushered in popular platforms such as Zoom, a video conferencing program that has continued to foster online language contact. The researcher wanted to know if respondents were involved in online activities where Urhobo was the medium of communication because virtual platforms of this type had become a venue where meetings and discussions were held.

Most respondents reported not having used Urhobo in a Zoom meeting, with 42 respondents (72 per cent) confirming this, and 16 respondents (28 per cent) confirming that they had been in a Zoom meeting where it was used.

5.11 Social Media Presence

The social media space is huge and has aided language in reach, usability, and permanence. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media platforms have created a more accessible and inexpensive way to access the Internet and, ultimately, to communicate. The researcher elicited information about what Urhobo online groups these respondents were involved in. Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube were chosen as they were among the most pervasive social platforms used by many people. Forty nine respondents (86 per cent) are not on any of the social platforms mentioned. In contrast, eight persons, representing 4 per cent, agreed that they were one or more platforms where Urhobo is being promoted.

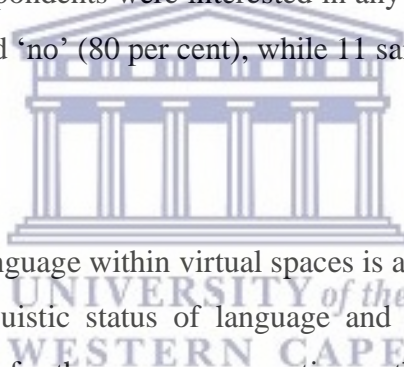
5.12 Subscribing to an Urhobo Learning Class or App

Language classes and apps are in demand, with varying reasons given as to why. Galla (2012) posits that some want to use any means necessary to preserve the language in hopes that future generations will be able to grow up learning the language, while others may want to learn the language for ceremonial purposes or communicate with the older generations.

Therefore, the question asked if respondents were interested in any Urhobo language class or learning app. From the result, 45 persons said 'no' (80 per cent), while 11 said 'yes' (20 per cent).

5.13 Summary

In the twenty-first century, using language within virtual spaces is a key indicator of the vitality of any language. It expands the sociolinguistic status of language and must continue to supplement the transmission of language, especially for the younger generation as they are the ones that interface with technology the most.

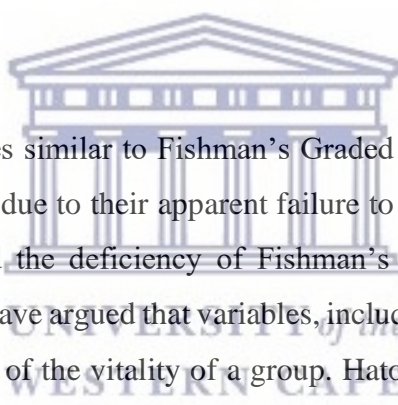


Chapter 6

Language Endangerment, Revitalization, Documentation and Identity

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher considered the findings based on the interviews and how these results configure within the research questions. The research further explored what the findings suggested within the areas of interest to the study, like language endangerment, revitalization, documentation and learning, and identity. These lenses informed the researcher's initial questioning of this area of research and were reflected in the participants' descriptions, and offered areas of established knowledge that could benefit from these findings. The findings from the interviews are presented in a narrative format, and direct quotes are provided in some areas. Finally, the research contextualizes this work within previous research and literature on the topics to locate the concepts outlined above. The researcher observed a depth of understanding in the areas of each participant. They were forthright about the limits of their knowledge but shared a genuine desire to gain access to materials that would aid in language revitalization.



Despite its wide application, theories similar to Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) have been largely criticized due to their apparent failure to be more domain inclusive. Several language scholars have highlighted the deficiency of Fishman's framework, which he anchors on physical domain analysis. Scholars have argued that variables, including migration, should be integrated as a significant facet in the analysis of the vitality of a group. Hatoss (2013) argues that localities are interconnected on multiple levels and that Fishman's concept of "domain" is weakened by the inability to capture the language and its dynamic use within a globalized world. According to Galla (2009), speakers of indigenous languages are now living everywhere in the world and not just within a particular geographical space. Similarly, Banda and Jimaima (2017) said that language vitality is not fixed in a particular physical space, especially with the onset of technology, unlike Fishman, who looks at speech communities as confined in a particular physical space.

The interviews were conducted with five respondents, four males, and one female. Below is a description of the participant profiles. Their real names are not used; pseudonyms are used instead, as stated in the methodology chapter.

Table 6.1:Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Birthplace	Current Place Residence	Job Description	Marital status	Language Spoken
Matthew	41	Delta State	UK	Businessman	Married	Urhobo, English, Pidgin & Danish
Mark	44	Delta State	USA	Information System Expert	Married	Urhobo, English & Pidgin
Luke	Did not say	Delta State	UK	Social care Consultant	Divorcee	Urhobo, English, Pidgin, Yoruba & Dutch
John	65	Delta State	UK	Accountant	Married	Urhobo, English & Pidgin
Mary	46	Delta State	Delta State, Nigeria	Fashion Designer	Married	Urhobo, English & Pidgin

As explained in detail in Chapter 2, this study is centred on revitalizing Urhobo, an endangered Nigerian language. Feedback from respondents was structured into recurring themes based on the questions asked, and matching codes were gathered after transcription to form more significant themes, aiding the researcher in answering some of the research questions in the study. Five overarching themes were identified from the respondents' narratives:

1. Migration, diaspora, and transgenerational agenda
2. Cultural identity, perception and the increase of Urhobo awareness
3. Recognizing dialectical varieties
4. Language choice and marriage
5. Redefining Urhobo language learning and usage.

Details concerning the data gathering procedure, data analysis technique, and the characteristics of participants for the interview have all been discussed in Chapter 3. They will only be slightly highlighted in this chapter. To understand the level of endangerment, vitality, and revitalization activities, the participants were asked to answer questions related to the study's objective. The questions were patterned to understand the effect of geographical distance on the day-to-day use of Urhobo.

6.1 Migration, Diaspora, and Transgenerational Agenda

According to Galla (2009), speakers of indigenous languages are now living everywhere in the world and not just within a particular geographical space. The five participants involved in the study interview give evidence to this phenomenon as four of the respondents lived outside of Nigeria at the time of the study, while only one lives in Delta state, Nigeria. The ever-increasing migration trend has transformed geographical spaces that were hitherto used as group identifiers. The desire for better opportunities has influenced large-scale migration, which has given rise to speakers in geographical spaces where their language cannot be spoken regularly.

In an attempt to highlight the positives of this phenomenon, Tsagarousianou (2017) posits that modern migration should be reinspected in terms of constant transnational interaction rather than a reality of seclusion. The author argues that globalization has nurtured elevated nearness and connectivity and, therefore, should not be viewed as simply the process of rapid movement across borders.

Migration has consequences on the language of an individual, as the language used for various purposes and contexts in the new space becomes the dominant language of use. Indeed, this phenomenon has spiralled towards dire manifestation based on language vitality. However, immigrants, like Urhobo speakers in the diaspora, cannot be measured as entities that alienate their language inclination, attitude, and all other cultural identifiers based on the spaces they settle in. Language scholars (Makoni *et al.*, 2007; Banda & Bellonjengele, 2010) assert that the migration of speakers to other areas has not always been accompanied by a loss of language(s) but rather, these speakers maintain their linguistic heritage, merging it with others found in their new settlement.

As one of the respondents, **Mathew**, explained:

My use of Urhobo is not the best now cause you know **going overseas**, being there for many years. You don't use the language all the time, so it diminishes. If you don't use the Urhobo language frequently, you tend to forget it but when I'm here (Nigeria) and some of my co-workers are Urhobo so once in a while we would throw in Urhobo in our conversations. If I wanted to say something to him I don't want people to get what I'm saying, I just speak Urhobo but not frequently, just once in a while.

Similarly, another participant, **Mark**, gave his view on how migration has affected his Urhobo usage:

Apart from my family, I don't see friends and even when we communicate with the Urhobo people from Delta State, we don't communicate with Urhobo fluently with them. So that is a lapse right there because the more you communicate with the people around you, especially friends from the same place, or where you are or maybe some people who are from the same place but when you call them or speak to them in Urhobo, they reply to you in English.

This data, compared with the quantitative data from Table 4.8 as shown in Chapter 4, agreed that the number of persons who actively use the Urhobo language is low for both those within the geographical area where it is spoken and in the diaspora.

A further consequence of migration for most indigenous language speakers, as with Urhobo speakers, has been the challenge of intergenerational transmission. Fishman's GIDS framework is based on intergenerational transmission. His argument is that any environment that seeks to promote language usage devoid of intergenerational distribution should be considered impracticable. The sustainability of a language depends on how it is used in and outside the home from one generation to the other (Fishman, 1991). The ability to identify with the language will largely be propelled by how much Urhobo children are exposed to.

Luke noted his situation with regards to the uncertainty of the transgenerational approach in the revitalization of the Urhobo language:

The only challenge I have at the moment is that my children struggle to speak but they understand. I think their level of understanding is commendable. I haven't really made any formal conscious effort but what I do is that whenever I speak to them, I use Urhobo language to give them instruction and they respond to me.

Elaborating on the difficulty of teaching his children, **Mr. Austin** had this to say:

I used to teach them (children) but I and their mum were always speaking English and so I mix it all, to be honest. I could not maintain speaking Urhobo to my children. I've got three girls. Now they are growing up and the senior one is very eager to hear and speak Urhobo. She's telling me she wants to learn it but work and other things have not really helped her to be focused.

Mary admits that speaking English has become a default situation that continues to challenge her best efforts. As interpreted, she notes:

Although my husband and I communicate mainly with Urhobo, we have to speak English to ensure our children understand what we are saying.

Mathew's response to what language he speaks with his wife and children in the house was:

English of course. I tried to teach my kids the Urhobo language but it is just a big stuff. I try to teach my kids the basic greetings and how to start a conversation in Urhobo. So sometimes when

I call my siblings, they (children) are able to hold a conversation of two to three sentences before they get quite depressed.

Based on GIDS, propounded by Fishman, the intermittent use of the Urhobo language in the respondents' homes portends a spiralling progress toward a total language shift. A significant feature that must exist for a language to show vitality is the transmission of the language within domains. Fishman (1991) posit in the 6th stage of his framework that the language is informally transmitted orally as a mother tongue to the children in the home, neighborhood, and community. Therefore, for any language revitalization effort to be described as practical, the language must be used in the home since this is the one place we can control (Bommelyn & Tuttle, 2018).

The argument amongst researchers has remained as to whether domains within physical spaces should remain the yardstick to measure vitality. Hatoss (2013) argues that Fishman's (1965) concept of 'domain' in this contemporary world may not be as helpful as the concept of 'space' which allows for a thorough investigation of the dynamism of language use. Darquennes (2007), as cited in Banda and Jimaima (2017), further posits that the linear progression, the rigidity of the stages, and Fishman's treatment of Stage 6 with Sacrosanctity, in particular, has received criticism for undervaluing the role of media and new technology devices, socio-economic mobility and social actors, and factors outside the immediate community in the linguistic socialization of a child, as well as the social structuring of minority and endangered languages.

The reality regarding the transgenerational efforts by respondents within the physical domain is very underwhelming. As with most migrant groups, people typically adopt the most favourable language of where they reside, and as such, the Urhobo language may or may not be all important based on place of birth. Nonetheless, the progressive result has manifested mainly in receptive competence, or in these children's use of Urhobo, for introductory pleasantries. Still, the physical space cannot be used as an absolute to measure the revitalization agenda of the Urhobo language with its people scattered across various borders.

6.2 Cultural Identity. Perception and the Increase of Urhobo Awareness

Ethnic identity is a standard metric used to assess the vitality of a language. According to Ayuwo (2013), and Onadipe-Shalom (2015), language functions not just as a tool for communication, but also as an identity marker. Cultural identity is the first step towards safeguarding any language as it ensures people are in acceptance of their unique cultural ways. It is the esteem they find in their language and the pride to use it irrespective of their domain. Still, identity is instead a complicated notion as theorized in

different fields, including the field of language revitalization. It is not one-dimensional but hydra-headed, with identities reflected in nationality, gender, personality, religiosity, and ethnicity (Albirini, 2016; Hatoss, 2013; Holmes, 2001).

In the essentialist and social constructionist perspective of identity, the former believe identity is a fixed, unchangeable concept that you attain at birth and hold on to until death as they are biologically and historically established (Christ, 2004; Joireman, 2003). The later argues that identity is “performed rather than possessed” (Joseph, 2010:14). The attitude towards using the Urhobo language will determine how its speakers speak it across spaces.

In migration and language attitude, scholars have expounded on the influence of identity perceptions of language and their speakers’ efforts to maintain their languages. It is suggested that those who strongly express pride in their ethnic culture and view language as inseparable from their identity are more likely to maintain their languages than those who lack positive attitudes towards their languages (Gibbons & Ramírez, 2004; Hatoss, 2013; Revis, 2015). Language identity and awareness remain great weapons to tackle any revitalization project. Therefore, the researcher detailed how respondents felt about the Urhobo language, the awareness and the possible cause(s).

Luke believes awareness is needed:

We need to do more because the awareness is coming up gradually and that is what prompted the establishment of the Urhobo school in the UK. I term the problem as cultural competence because if you don’t have that self-awareness about your culture and your language, you will not see the importance. Urhobo people should learn to give Urhobo names to their children. When two or more Urhobo people are gathered, they should learn to speak Urhobo among themselves. When Urhobos are having events, they should learn to value the language as well as play Urhobo music and not be influenced to play, say, Yoruba (one of the main languages in Nigeria) songs in Urhobo events. If you don’t place importance on your language, outsiders will not place importance.

According to Powell (2017), The degree to which a language is used as a means of communication in different social contexts for particular purposes serves as a measure of its vitality. A language with high vitality is widely spoken by all generations, both inside and outside the home, and for the majority, if not all, topics.

Luke explained further by giving an instance where he had the chance of helping someone who just moved into the country but had no place to stay, and this happened because he heard him speaking Urhobo to his daughter on a public bus. He elaborated on his thought:

Urhobos are always ashamed to speak the language in public, and that is a major problem. We must do everything we can to promote the language; speak it among ourselves and give Urhobo names to our children.

The main languages in Nigeria receive better appreciation from their speakers. **Mark** notes:

I don't know if they are shy or something. I don't know but some people you try to talk to in Urhobo, because you know they are from there. They respond to the greetings in Urhobo, but when you try to go further with the language, they respond in English. I don't know how that is even happening with Urhobo people. I don't see that with both the Yoruba and Igbo people of Nigerians in the diaspora.

Similarly, **Mathew** believes people prefer to speak other languages:

If we don't promote the language; if we are not proud of it then there will be problems over time even people back in Nigeria want to copy those that speak with an English accent rather than speak Urhobo.

In another agreement with this situation, **Gloria** blames mothers as she believes their attitude towards the language is the major factor preventing intergenerational transmission from taking place. In her argument, she notes:

I watched a video where a man was addressing the need for all of us to wake up as the Urhobo language is dying and how important it is to continue to speak the language to our children. For me, I believe if Urhobo mothers can be serious with this decision of teaching their children, the children will learn the language because they are happy to learn. Unlike the Igbo and Yoruba women who teach their kids their language irrespective of where they are, the Urhobo mothers are relaxed with the fact that their children can't speak the language. I have seen a Yoruba child that is less than four years speaking fluent Yoruba even in this Delta State and I was so worried as to how this child with the help of the mother has learnt how to speak Yoruba but children who stay in Delta State are unable to speak the language that is being spoken here. There is a sense of little language pride among the Urhobos.

The world remains a culturally plural entity and this plural society is characterized by the co-existence of a variety of distinct cultures, each ethnic group having its own heritage, its own assemblage of traditions, values and views. By this reality, the Urhobo people can only be identified by their language. Therefore, the survival of the language can be realised if the people continue to identify Urhobo as an essential element of their culture.

6.3 Acknowledging Dialectical Varieties

It is common knowledge that languages have varieties called dialects. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) argue that every language displays high levels of internal variation. The continent of Africa shares this feature of language as many languages reflect varieties. As typical heterogeneous communities, Africa has people speaking diverse, more or less related dialects on their own and in extended (multilingual) linguistic repertoires (Banda, 2016).

The introductory chapter of this study detailed that there are 24 clans or kingdoms in Urhoboland. Of the 24 clans, Okpe, Uvwie, and Agbarho are the accepted standard or accepted dialects of the Urhobo language. Although these differences show the rich diversity of the language, the criterion of mutual intelligibility must be tested as the difference between a language and dialect is not finely separated. Ekeh (2008) believes that most dialects in Urhobo are not mutually intelligible except for central Urhobo (Agbarho). The criterion of mutual intelligibility is framed within the question of whether the speakers of two different language codes readily understands one another. Linguists will consider the two reference codes as different languages if understanding is lacking.

Dialectical differences in codes can affect shared commonness. People speaking the same language typically have difficulty understanding each other if they are from different regions (regional dialects) of the same country (Abuarqoub, 2019). Their ideology also differs based on the cultural beliefs within their enclave. The argument is also stretched to question if they believe their language variant is a variety of a particular language within or outside the region.

In the Urhobo context, referencing clans within Delta State, Nigeria, are genetically related based on proximity, but only share a partial form of mutual intelligibility that might be too minimal to merit consideration as a language dialect.

Luke explains that any form of documentation must reflect the diversity and cultural riches of the language:

There is an Urhobo school here (UK), but I don't send my children there. The reason is that I want my children to speak my dialect. For instance, like where you (researcher) come from, you people say "*yareobone*" (come here) while my dialect says "*chariebona*" or "*charietine*".

He adds,

A lot of our people have a very narrow understanding of what the Urhobo nationality actually is and this creates a bit of a problem. I think there are more than 30 dialects in Urhobo, but there was what we called the Uwianughe convention where it was adopted far back in the 60s that the Agbarho Urhobo should be the official Urhobo language, but then within the Urhobo, we have

the Orogun, Udu, Olumu, Jesse and even Ujevwe dialect which many believe is quite difficult to understand. So, every educational material that will be developed should take into consideration the different dialects when teaching. By doing so, it will encourage every other Urhobo that speaks a different dialect to be involved.

John believes these dialectic varieties have weakened the course towards the revitalization of the Urhobo language:

The multiplicity of different dialects in Urhoboland is another problem. The Okpe person will not understand what another Urhobo man that speaks a different dialect is saying. They (Okpe) speak something different. I once had an experience where some people were speaking Okpe and I thought they were speaking Igbo (one of the main languages spoken in Nigeria) until they told me it was Okpe. Initially, when they were speaking the language, I said what kind of language is this and they said it is Urhobo, Okpe. So you see now for instance on campus me and Okpe people were sharing the room together I think four of us in the room then they will say:

“*wo cha remare* (do you want to eat food)” I will say what are you talking about? They say: do you want to eat food? In standard Urhobo, we just say *Vwo ka r’emu*, *vwo r’emu* which means the same thing but we all have different ways of speaking it. So, when many Urhobo people gather you will discover some will not hear you when you speak. So the multiplicity of dialects in Urhoboland is another problem that is driving the decline of the Urhobo language.

The revitalization project of the Urhobo people has to show inclusiveness if it is to make measurable progress within spaces. A major motivation to achieve this would be for all forms of documentation or teaching to capture the diversity of the Urhobo language. In the new age of documentation, these dialects must be digitally archived to ensure easy access. Also, as mutual intelligibility has been seen as a continuous process of learning that demands considerable time and effort, highlighting these diversifications in dialect can help to improve the shared meaning within the Urhobo language.

6.4 Language Choice and Marriage

The diverse region of the Niger Delta is home to over 250 dialects. Its oil-rich environment has attracted a large concentration of people from different ethnic groups around its major cities. The situation has promoted intermarriages and the use of Pidgin and English as languages of convenience in both homes and other domains. Utulu (2019) believes that the interplay of culture through intermarriages has fostered assimilation and weakened the use of Urhobo in the land. Pidgin has gained elevated status as the lingua franca of many persons in the region and amongst Urhobo speakers across continents. It has become the language of communication for most, irrespective of their social status, and sharing a large share of the blame in intertribal marriage.

In their study on language choice and family language policy in inter-ethnic marriages in South Eastern Nigeria, Ofiong and Mensah (2012), using three inter-ethnic marriage families, found that English was mainly used as the language of communication. Also, Ochonogor and Ikem (2019) concluded that indigenous minority languages are given less attention in inter-ethnic marriage homes in the Niger Delta region, when they investigated what influenced people's language of communication choices in inter-ethnic marriages. They argued that Nigerian Pidgin, followed by the English language, is preferred and that intermarriage should be blamed.

Respondents gave their opinions on what they believe has affected the preservation and revitalisation process of the Urhobo language.

Mark believes the Pidgin language is a pandemic that has affected the growth of Urhobo even in Delta State. He explains:

Most times, we (I and siblings or friends) just flow in Pidgin after we are done exchanging greetings in the language. As we continue to converse after the initial greetings, Pidgin just falls from nowhere and that is how we will all just continue with the Pidgin. One thing that will help Delta State is to minimize the usage of the Pidgin language.

Similarly, **Luke** believes the threat of Pidgin is now prevalent amongst all the generations of speakers of the Urhobo language:

my worry is if we are not careful, the Urhobo language will eventually go extinct, especially with those of us in the diaspora because even if you get back home (Delta State) now, unlike before, they used to speak a lot of Urhobo language in Warri (A major town in Delta) it's all gone now and replaced by Pidgin. Even if you go to all the neighbouring villages now, even all the Mamas (elderly women), they all speak pidgin English. The growth of pidgin English is now a major threat to the preservation of the Urhobo language.

Gloria, who resides in Delta State, Nigeria, and whose interview was conducted in Pidgin, highlighted the diversity of the region as a reason for the adoption of pidgin. As interpreted, she said:

Where I stay in Delta State is home to different ethnic groups. We have the Yoruba population, Igbo, Rivers, Calabar, and Isoko. I usually speak Urhobo with those I know are Urhobo and can speak but for every other person, we just speak Pidgin which is what we use mainly here.

Mathew also agrees with this worrying situation and reveals how he code switches when speaking to family and friends:

In Ughelli in Delta State, the only way to communicate is through the use of broken pidgin. So everybody now uses Pidgin as a first language. I speak both Pidgin and Urhobo to my mother and grandmother but with everybody else, I just speak either Pidgin or English.

John, who lives in the UK, believes the situation also affects highly educated individuals. He explains:

Even here (UK), many graduates that are Urhobos, some Master's degree holders, would prefer to speak Pidgin with you than Urhobo.

A few respondents revealed their worry over the effect of intertribal marriages amongst the Urhobo people. Ochonogor & Nkem (2019) posit:

If the interactions within inter-ethnic marriage homes are done with the language of the immediate environment, the official English Language or the Pidgin language, the place of the indigenous languages of the South-South people of Nigeria will be lost because children from such families cannot acquire their native language.

While **Mathew** only stated that intertribal marriage is one of the many challenges facing the preservation of the language, **Mark** explains how these inter-ethnic marriages have hampered the progress of Urhobo:

In our father's generation, you will hardly find an Urhobo man who married someone outside the Urhobo land which is the reason why everybody of that time can speak the language more fluently than their children because they marry within the land of the language. You will hardly find an Urhobo man of 60 years and above that is married to somebody who is not an Urhobo but this generation where we are today, because of the reason of people saying Urhobo men are not caring, they don't know how to take care of their wives, so most girls and most young ladies don't want to marry a man from that place. They prefer to go to Igbo land, Yoruba land and other places to marry. When they marry from another ethnic group and they have a child, will the child speak the language? The answer is no, he won't speak the language because the child learns from what the mother communicates at home. children learn by imitation and if a father doesn't speak the language and the mother doesn't speak the language and they both use a common language, English or pidgin, the children will learn from them, and their language will die and this is why the Urhobo language is declining. We must promote the Urhobo language. The way it was before is to encourage the young men and young ladies of the land to marry within the language and I believe this is a good solution.

In the same vein, **Mark** explains his situation:

My wife is Igbo (a major Nigerian language). I don't speak Igbo and I don't understand Igbo. I am Urhobo and she doesn't understand Urhobo apart from the greetings, and she doesn't speak so we speak only English. She only greets me with Urhobo.

The refusal to speak the Urhobo language and rather opt for languages like Pidgin and English continues to be a spanner in the works towards the revitalization of the Urhobo language. Intertribal marriage is seen as a major player that is threatening the continued existence of the language in various spaces.

6.5 Redefining Urhobo Language Learning and Usage

Although Fishman remained firm in his opposition to the extensive use of minority language media until stable intergenerational transmission had been accomplished, the reality of this is that minority languages were less encouraged to use modern resources, which ultimately made them less and less able to meet lexical demands of the modern world. In the end, focusing on “moving language forward to new users and uses” rather than trying to revive outdated usage patterns would be more realistic (Romaine, 2006:464).

Fishman’s (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) is constantly criticized due to its apparent downplay of the role of technology in assessing language vitality. The Technacy Framework for Language Revitalization (TFLR), as reconceptualized by Galla (2010), highlights that language revitalization can be affected by social, environmental, economic, linguistic, and cultural factors. According to Galla (2009), in the modern era of the Internet and technology, it would be difficult to quantify the survival of any indigenous language without the support of multimedia. Indigenous peoples are taking the initiative to learn what is necessary to revitalize their languages and discover technological tools that can assist in the process. The author states that technology could take many forms for indigenous groups, from wax cylinder records to digital audio recordings; emails to chat; video recordings for interactive audio-video conferencing; and Internet browsing to playing online games.

In line with this phenomenon, the researcher spent some time detailing respondents’ views on teaching aids and how best the Urhobo language can be documented and revitalized within spaces. A few ideas were listed as they also gave personal efforts towards revitalizing Urhobo.

Mathew factored in the need for more audio-visual content. He thinks this will help to improve the learning of the Urhobo language. He explains:

Based on my experience in a language school in Denmark, I believe audiovisual conversation is very effective. Part of the many materials we were engaged with was a series of real-life dialogues that came with questions relating to learning the Danish language.

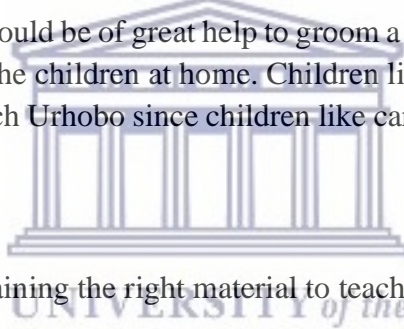
I believe we can set up a school that is built on real-time conversations. You can be given a random picture and you are now asked to write a story about it which will demand you use your intellect to puzzle it together. I believe if we use pictures and videos, it can help one to effectively master the language. Practice too is key as I wrote letters in Danish and it was quite helpful.

Gloria believes a teaching video, including the use of animation, can be of great value. She puts it thus:

Children will value any video that teaches Urhobo. Currently, I have some CDs of Urhobo lessons including three volumes of Aunty Rukky (an animated video lesson used to teach Urhobo) which I always play whenever electricity is restored. Even my eldest son listens to it as he is currently preparing for an Urhobo exam in school. He wants to know how to pronounce the alphabet and I put effort into teaching him while telling him situations like this are why he should be interested in learning Urhobo rather than putting all effort into English which we are not even perfect in.

Similarly, **Mark** believes visuals, as well as apps, are a key element to preserving the Urhobo language as he explains:

I think if we can have videos that illustrate words and their meanings in Urhobo, for example, *Uko*- Cup, Pot- *itaso*, that would be of great help to groom a lot of people, not even the Urhobos alone and it will help teach the children at home. Children like cartoons and making something in cartoon-like format to teach Urhobo since children like cartoons. This will help them to grow up speaking Urhobo.



John describes the difficulty of obtaining the right material to teach the language. He said:

Many Urhobo children, even those in the diaspora are very interested in learning the language but access to it is the major challenge. Sometimes they just go to the Internet to sieve through the many results to find the right meaning of a particular word in Urhobo. If we can create a dictionary both online and hardcopy that puts words alongside how they can be pronounced which is how I learnt English. Also, things like apps and cartoons can help with the foundational learning of the language and then the dictionary can be for advanced learners.

Respondents also listed spaces where the Urhobo language is in use and their effort toward the revitalisation of the language. Speakers of the language must take the initiative to develop materials to help preserve the language.

John explains:

There is one WhatsApp group that I've joined which is called Urhobo united assembly. It's a global group made up mainly of educated people. Regrettably, we only chat a few times with

Urhobo as English is the main medium of communication. Although I just started to teach Urhobo on the platform some days back. I've managed to completely load the Urhobo alphabet there and I've made an audio broadcast attached to each letter of the alphabet to explain how they can be pronounced.

I know in Delta State there is Urhobo news broadcast but that is not enough to promote the language. I believe a website would help as many people, young youths abroad would want to know more and be associated with the language and culture. If there is a website people can go to, it will help to promote the language.

Luke talks about seizing every opportunity to promote the language:

They wanted me to be teaching in the Urhobo school they have here, but my commitment wouldn't allow me. I do anchor events in Urhobo language and I write and perform my original songs during these events. I use every opportunity I have to promote the language. When I'm traveling with my kids, I always speak Urhobo to them. It's very rare that I speak English to my children when I'm in the midst of other people because I want to create something in the mind of the people around me. I want them to ask me what language I am speaking. Anyone that is curious and bold enough to ask me, I will say oh, that is Urhobo language, one of the tribes in Nigeria. So I want to promote it. These are the kinds of things I love to do.

Also, **Mathew** believes we have to find new ways to promote the language. He says:

One thing I didn't tell you is that I am a minister of the gospel so I get to travel and meetings. I am actually planning a meeting in Delta State in the stadium, where I am going to be having some of my foreign guests. Maybe what I am going to do is something nice. In terms of promoting the language, I would like to have a traditional choir dress in Urhobo attire and sing using the language. It would be live streamed all over the world to my partners and association and that would help to promote the language.

As far as usage goes, **Gloria** believes Urhobo is still very active within certain physical domains in Delta State, but she has never used it within any virtual space. She explained:

We do have Urhobo Sunday school classes in church as well as classes for the Igbo and English congregants. I do attend the Urhobo class but for the main service, the English language is used for the benefit of all.

She noted that, unlike what you find within the church, for ceremonies and festivals the Urhobo language is exclusively used. She puts it thus:

For community festivals, you are only allowed to use Urhobo as demanded by the tradition and if you default on this, the spirit can be angry and cause you harm as you can't offer any form of

sacrifice to the gods speaking another language other than Urhobo. The language is exclusively used during these festivals.

She also discussed the language used for weddings and burials and the struggle to use the language virtually.

We mainly use Urhobo language for burial ceremonies and traditional marriages. The only time English is used during the wedding is when the in-laws are not Urhobo so an interpreter comes in to explain to them as to what is being said. Facebook and WhatsApp? I don't really understand those ones that well and if you can't write well, it would be a headache to write anything in the language on these platforms so for now, I prefer to just speak it with people.

6.6 Summary

From the analysis, above it has been established that for minority languages like Urhobo, the existence of virtual communities has created a new solution to the challenge of learning the language only within a geographical space. Communication is no longer limited to a specific space or time. Instead, humans are able to converse across time and spatial boundaries. In fact, many have maintained that minority languages must establish a strong Internet presence if they are to survive over the long term (Soria, 2016).

Virtual communities are ideal to function as “breathing spaces” for minority languages (Blommaert 2019:1). This is even more important for a large number of speakers who have moved away in quest of better prospects, and as a result, are no longer in an environment where they can regularly use their language. Yet, the truth is that no language's vitality can be determined by a single component, as explained in the report of the international expert meeting of the UNESCO programme on Safeguarding of Endangered Languages in Paris-Fontenoy, 10-12 March 2003 (Colette, *et al.*, 2003). While the respondents agreed with the many challenges facing the preservation of the Urhobo language, they are learning new ways to support the goal of revitalizing the Urhobo language. The vitality of Urhobo, based on the discussion of the data, points to the language attitude of the speakers being a stark factor.

Chapter 7

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation

7.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the study and presents conclusions drawn from the findings of the study. The researcher also offers recommendations to further aid future research.

7.1 Summary of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate the revitalization of the Urhobo language across physical and virtual spaces. The researcher analysed the morphological and syntactic structure of Urhobo and the levels of ethnolinguistic vitality of the language within specific domains. The study also provided insight into how technology can be used to counterbalance the teaching and learning for the preservation of the Urhobo language.

The research used both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the assumptions, attitudes and actions around the revitalization of the language across physical and virtual spaces. Aided by the methodological position of the research, an outline was drawn that presented five themes gathered from interviews with Urhobo language speakers within Nigeria and the diaspora. These themes were aligned to answer the overarching theme: How do we ensure the preservation, documentation, and revitalization of the Urhobo language in both the physical and virtual spaces and what technologies are required to do so? To establish that this thesis has captured the aim presented in the opening chapter, the researcher briefly highlights the objectives of this study in this chapter. The researcher, thereafter, will provide the conclusions and recommendations needed to support future research.

7.2 Study Findings

7.2.1 To do a morpho-syntactic analysis of the Urhobo language

The findings revealed some important aspects of the phonological and morpho-syntactic structure of the language. Urhobo, just like many languages from the west Benue Congo, has pattern-sensitive rules which engender selective sound combinations and distributions. The syllables are open ended which ensures vowel endings. Its sound system consists of 28 consonant phonemes, and several of them can function as allophones as their interchangeable usage does not influence word meaning. Both bound and free morphemes exist in the Urhobo language, and affixation is the most common morphological

process in the language. New words are also formed through compounding, reduplication, and clipping, with the latter occurring mainly in proper names.

7.2.2 To Determine the Vitality of the Urhobo Language in Terms of Place and Domains of Use in Physical Spaces Such As Markets, Churches, etc.

The data revealed that speakers of Urhobo infrequently use Urhobo in their online interactions. Only 4.7 per cent of respondents stated that they use the language regularly within virtual spaces and even this minority only uses it to share pleasantries and other conversation starters. The COVID pandemic strengthened social networking applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. These social media platforms were examined based on how speakers of Urhobo established social connections using Urhobo. The findings revealed that less than 19 per cent of the sample population agreed to being on one or more social networking platforms where Urhobo was used or promoted. Video sites like YouTube and the video conferencing app, Zoom, all recorded an underwhelming percentage of active users who used these platforms to promote the language.

7.2.3 To Determine The Vitality of the Urhobo Language in Terms of Place and Domains of use in Virtual Spaces Such As Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.

The study found that the language enjoys a good level of vitality as people still promote Urhobo for cultural and identity reasons, especially within the area where it is mainly spoken. It was noted that sociolinguistic forces have propelled the value and usage of Pidgin and English within the primary domains investigated and proficiency of Urhobo appears low because of it, especially with the younger generation. Sociolinguistic variables including migration have ultimately affected intergenerational transmission. The immediate environment where respondents are based, and the need to be understood by spouses, children and other family members have influenced the language. In many cases, communicative interactions are achieved through code switching and code mixing: Urhobo and Pidgin conjoined with a scattering of a few standard English words.

7.2.4 To Explore how the Urhobo Language can be Digitized, Documented, and Revitalized Across Virtual and Physical spaces.

The consensus from the respondents was that Urhobo parents needed to be intentional with promoting intergenerational language transmission within their homes and across multiple social domains. This lends credence to the fact that parents are the first teachers of a language, and the children should first gain the education of the language at home. The policy of the Urhobo language being introduced into the Delta State University curriculum has elevated the status of the language in terms of functioning as

an academic language. The result of this finding also showed an overwhelming agreement that the use of audiovisual content can further facilitate the learning and revitalization of the Urhobo language, and any form of documentation must reflect the rich dialectical diversity that exists in the language.

7.2.5 To Establish the Attitudes And Perceptions of Urhobo People Towards the Revitalization of Urhobo; Do They Appreciate the Efforts of the Revitalization.

Even though the attitude of the people are right, there are other factors that do not allow them to use the language in their locations, especially those in the diaspora. The opportunities to use the language are limited. The participant are also not using the virtual spaces due to technological challenges, which includes accessibility to computers and smart phones, and cost of data/internet connection.

7.3 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the pattern of language usage within domains shows a steady decline in the transgenerational transmission of the Urhobo language, which is an indicator of language endangerment. Pidgin and English play major roles as languages of discourse, especially for speakers outside the area where Urhobo is mainly spoken. The existence and engagement of speakers within active virtual communities are overwhelmingly low in contrast to the physical space which continues to hamper further efforts of documentation and digitization of the language. It is well known that parents are their children's first language teachers. Therefore, children must start learning the language at home. As explained by McGuinne (2013), any attempt to revive a language will fail without a natural process of intergenerational transmission in place. For a language to be transferred from generation to generation, it should be used as a regular means of daily communication. McGuinne (2013) further adds that the use of natural language in the home, where children are encouraged to become active rather than passive language speakers, is one of the most effective ways to restore language.

7.4 Recommendations

It is recommended that this study be replicated for several other indigenous languages or even endangered languages in various countries because it is difficult to draw generalisations from an isolated study of a single endangered language that could be useful for other related endangered languages around the world. Triangulating the two methods is encouraged as well, hence it is suggested that quantitative analyses be employed in conjunction with qualitative analyses. Urhobo speakers should make it their primary language of communication at home and in various gatherings. There is need

for deliberate attempt from Urhobo language groups, including traditional leaders and cultural organisations in Nigeria and the diaspora, to protect and promote the language in both its physical and digital environments. The Urhobo people should take great pride in their language and culture and actively seek for opportunities to spread it in both the real world and the online sphere.



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