*Proceedings of the National workshop on*

# Best Practices to Safeguard Endangered Nigerian Languages

*Organised by*

**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION (UNESCO), ABUJA.**

*In Collaboration with:*

**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE (NCAC)**

*Edited by:*
**Lizzy Ihezue**
&
**Onukwugha E. Osuji**

**UNESCO**

**UNESCO ABUJA PUBLICATION**

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE

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## PAPERS PRESENTED:

# Preface

A peoples' language is not merely a vocal form of expression. It is the principal vector that propels and often defines the identity, ideals, values and cultural perspectives of a group in exclusion of others in the committee of nations.

Given The linguistic and cultural plurality of Nigeria and the antecedent of colonial history which resulted in the contemporary dominance of English as the official language for formal business, many Nigerian Languages are, sadly, the worse for it.

This workshop aims at not merely documenting data on endangered Nigerian languages but on collating practical steps to and best practices on safeguarding these languages.

Our commitment is driven by the conviction that a dead language can be equated with a dead civilization with the whole spectrum of cultures, technological imperatives, and intangible values that only a language can give life to.

Today, we urge each of us to do their individual and corporate best in ensuring that the legacies our children inherit include a repertoire of vibrant and dynamic languages.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This workshop exemplifies team work, collaboration and partnership which is the current emphasis for positive achievements by UNESCO and affirmed by the National Council for Arts and Culture.

The successful implementation of this joint venture owes executive support to Mr. Hubert Charles, Director and Country Representative of UNESCO and ECOWAS, who coordinated this programme. Ms Lizzy Ihezue, the National Programme Officer (Culture) at the UNESCO Abuja Office, can rightly be called the engine room of strategic alliances in networking the success of this workshop.

The Director/Chief Executive Officer, National Council for Arts and Culture, Mr. M. M. Maidugu and the entire staff of NCAC, especially the very efficient Head of Secretariat, Dr. E. O. Ben-Iheanacho, showed quality delivery under constraints and challenges.

Our resource persons drawn from diverse institutions and areas of specialization deserve special mention for their commitment to this worthy cause.

Our thanks go to all participants who in one way or the other contributed significantly to this day.

Thank you all and God bless.

# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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# CHAPTER ONE
# DOCUMENTING ENDANGERED NIGERIAN LANGUAGES: CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

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## BACKGROUND

This year, 2006, has been named the Year of African Languages. We should ideally have had a lot of linguistic activity in the whole of Africa. Unfortunately, apart from the UNESCO/ACALAN meeting in Bamako, Mali in March 2006, and now this UNESCO/NCAC meeting here in Enugu this August, to the best of our knowledge, there is nothing else happening. However, a meeting is planned by the Austrian government in Vienna scheduled for October, 2006. Are we doing enough from within Africa as a people with the greatest stakes on African languages?

Every language has the right to be accounted for in any community, and a right to exist, whether it forms a 'majority' or a 'minority' language. Language is an extremely important aspect of a community. It is an important index of identity. It is used for all communicative functions that a community requires, and it serves as a repository of a people's culture, history and exploits. In fact it is language that differentiates the homo sapiens from other animals. It is so important to man that every community and every Government should address linguistic issues with the same vigour that infrastructures are developed.

With this background to the topic at hand, we begin with an exposition of the key terms in the paper, namely, Language Documentation and Endangered Nigerian Languages. In the next section, we present an overview of the status of Nigerian languages as further background, and we approach Language documentation from the point of view of 'Documentary Linguistics' as a new area of Linguistic research. We then look at the challenges and constraints that we face as Linguists attempting to document Nigerian languages, including the endangered ones.

# THE STATUS OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES

Let us now look at the linguistic situation in Nigeria. It is rather complicated. Within a hierarchy of a geo-political structure and ethnic groupings, there are over 500 languages and dialects. There is an official dichotomy between major languages (i.e. Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and the minor languages (i.e. all others). The three major languages have some kind of a 'national' status, and they enjoy a lot more government patronage from both the Federal and State governments where they are spoken. Perhaps due to this, awareness has been created in communities where these languages are spoken and the communities are more involved in their development.

On the other hand, the minor languages are at different levels of gross underdevelopment. The huge number may not be the only problem responsible for this lack of attention or interest. It may be more a problem of lack of advocacy and inadequate knowledge of the importance of the language of a people to both its speakers and humanity.

## NIGERIAN LANGUAGES



*Index to Maps (Grimes 2000)*

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The Ethnologies, one of the current references for Nigerian languages in fact records 515 languages for Nigeria. Out of these languages, 505 are still living indigenous languages, 8 are extinct while 2 are second languages (Grimes 2000:166). Although Ethnologue's sub-divisions do not exactly fit the current Nigerian geo-political partitioning, they provide a fair linguistic guide, and we adopt it here for some illustration.

These languages are spoken by about 373 ethnic groups (Otite 2000:14-20). Geo-politically, Nigeria is divided into manageable compartments : six geo-political zones (South South, South East, South West, North East, North Central and North West, and these are further subdivided into 36 States plus a Federal Capital Territory, and these are also further subdivided into 774 Local Government Areas. The linguistic situation, given this complex geo-political background is simply chaotic.

# ILLUSTRATION FROM SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

We illustrate this level of chaos with South-Eastern Nigeria, which is one of the most linguistically fragmented areas of Nigeria. Grimes (2000) records about 121 languages. From the index, she has 327-448.
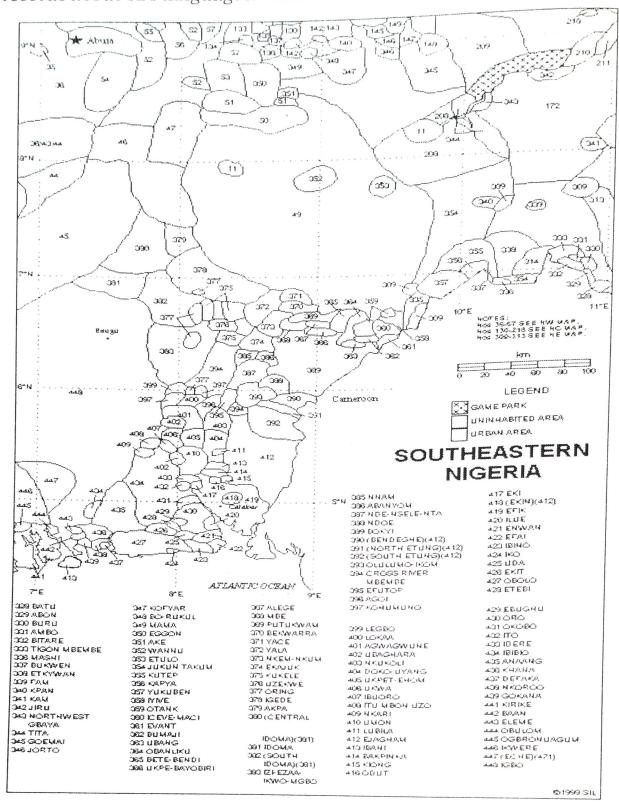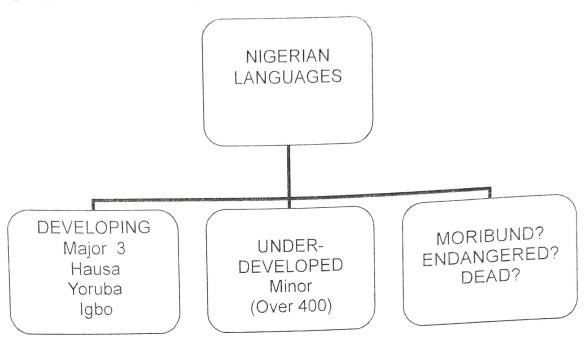


*Illustration for South Eastern Nigeria (Grimes 2000)*

On the basis of the dichotomy mentioned earlier, Nigerian languages can be classified into three groups: developing languages made up of the major three languages, underdeveloped languages made up of about 500 minor languages at different stages of under-development, and a small number that is highly endangered made up of moribund and dead languages. Grimes (2000) records eight in this last group.

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                    │    NIGERIAN       │
                    │    LANGUAGES      │
                    └──────────────────┘
                              │
        ┌─────────────────────┼─────────────────────┐
┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│  DEVELOPING  │      │    UNDER-    │      │  MORIBUND?   │
│   Major  3   │      │  DEVELOPED   │      │ ENDANGERED?  │
│    Hausa     │      │    Minor     │      │    DEAD?     │
│   Yoruba     │      │  (Over 400)  │      │              │
│    Igbo      │      │              │      │              │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
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*The Status of Nigerian Languages*

We define developing languages as those languages that have fairly developed orthographies, and they are in the course of setting a literary tradition, with the instruments put in place for developing a meta-language. Under-developed languages are those languages without orthographies, written literature and meta language. Moribund and threatened languages are languages that are not being used, and as such are not transmitted to the younger generation (Connell 1998:209). Such languages are threatened and endangered because they are on their way to extinction as a result of lack of use.

## THE ENDANGARED LANGUAGES

Endangered languages are languages that are threatened by extinction because they are not passed on to a younger generation. There are several causes of endangerment. They range from conquest, lack of relevance, political domination, trade, etc. Another language can be a threat. In Nigeria, the causes of endangerment border mainly on the relevance and the need to use a lingua franca for a wider communication, rather than a particular mother tongue that has a rather restricted use.

There are several levels of endangerment, and several indices are often used to define this. We use two of these: population and relevance or the lack of it. We consider endangered languages therefore to be languages that are spoken by less than five thousand people and/or languages that are not handed down to a younger generation because of the presence of another one to serve the needs of its people. Sometimes a whole language is threatened, and sometimes, only some varieties are affected. For instance, in the Cross River State, the Kiong language, an Upper Cross language spoken in Odukpani LGA is seriously endangered. Oral tradition has it that this was caused by war between the Akpap Okoyong and the Efik people. After the domination of the Efik following their victory in the war, the Kiong language was drastically dropped in order to identify with their new masters and for fear of punishment. However, today the language is understood by just about 20 speakers, and there are attempts to revive the language. In fact it is just being learnt as a second language, with a literacy project as a part of its revitalization. On the other hand, sometimes, it is a variety of a larger language that is threatened. Again in the Cross River State, the Qua variety of Ejagham (Ekoid Bantu) is spoken in the Big Qua area of Calabar. The Efik language which has been a trade language along the Cross River Basin has been responsible for this particular threat.

Generally, all six geo-political zones have endangered languages. They are found particularly in linguistically fragmented areas where there is a superimposition of another language meeting an important need. Such languages can be a foreign language, a trade language or a Nigerian language spoken by a larger population. In this paper, we limit our discussion to three case studies drawn from the South South Geo-political Zone, viz. Edo, Cross River and Akwa Ibom States (see section 2).

## DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTICS

Documentary Linguistics is a new area. It is based on American Anthropological concerns about the disappearance of Amerindian languages. Boas (1911:60) captures the picture very succinctly when he says that: "... much information can be gained by listening to conversations of natives and by taking part in their daily life, which, to the observer who has no command of the language, will remain entirely inaccessible".

As a theoretical basis, therefore, Documentary Linguistics draws from the Anthropological Ethnography of Speaking after Boas (1911), which was developed by Gumperz and Hymes (1964), and streamlined by Urban (1991). It conforms to the times in terms of practice, tools and products. It is actually a response to the growing crises of language endangerment, and it deals with the record and representation of

natural discourse. Since discourse is primary in Documentary Linguistics, then both description and analysis are secondary-products of the record of natural discourse which form the documentary corpus. Descriptive and explanatory materials like grammars, dictionaries, etc. annotate the documentary corpus. Documentary Linguistics curates texts, such that they can be both accessed and shared electronically using very special tools.

It encourages researchers to collect and record a wide range of linguistic phenomena in genuine communicative situations, and it uses high quality sound and video recording to make sure that the results are the best possible record of the language.

The tradition for the new discipline is being set, and its specifications for analysis and what can be considered as best Linguistic practices are currently being worked out in the areas of data annotation and mark-up, electronic and card catalogue for linguistic data in digital archives, general ontology, and what should constitute the best practices for language documentation. The curation of linguistic data is also being explored. Being a new area, the modalities and detailed specifications for its concepts need to be worked out. Much of that is going on now.

There are many language documentation projects all over the world and some of them are currently working on different aspects of formalizing Documentary Linguistics. For instance, the E-MELD has had about five workshops on different aspects, the latest being in June, 2006, which critiqued the tools used for language documentation.

Language documentation is done in connection with digital archiving. Emphasis is placed on how natural discourse data can be represented, transcribed, preserved, disseminated and made accessible worldwide. And such access is only possible in the space of flows. The focus at this stage therefore, is setting the right traditions for its formalism in the areas of data annotation and mark-up, as well as electronic and card cataloguing for linguistic data, especially multi-media data in digital archives.

## METHODOLOGY

Since language documentation project aims to collect and create data in different media covering use of language in different social and cultural contexts, its priorities are:
1. To create a range of high quality materials to support description.
2. To enable the recovery of knowledge of the language even if all other resources are lost.
3. To generate resources in support of language research.

Language Documentation projects create materials in the following media, each of which has both strengths and weaknesses:

- Video has immediate and rich authenticity. It is multi-dimensional in content and it can be produced by the community without the assistance of the researcher. On the other hand, it is more difficult to process and store, and it needs a lot of annotation which is time consuming and difficult to preserve.

- Audio contains less information, but it is simple. Audio files are easier to work with and there are several software for editing and sound presentation.

- Text this is the traditional way. It is a compact, stable and easy to store, access, index and revise. But when it is used to document language, it requires a lot of analyses and abstraction which can sometimes lose information that were in the original event.

- Meta Data data about data. It is structured information describing characters of events, recordings and other data files. It is in form of text, but it is an independent media. Its collection is dependent on the type of materials described e.g. Catalogue (speakers, collectors, time, place of recording, etc.), description (content, relationship to other resources, etc), technical (performance and preservation information), administrative (responsibilities, access statements, etc.).

Basically, the methods, terminology and media all aim at making knowledge about a language accessible to a wide range of audience -- academics, community members, learners, teachers, etc.

Given the nature of this new enterprise, special tools are needed. Of course, the basic fieldwork materials are still useful, like writing materials, recording (audio/video) equipment, etc, but in addition to this, computational resources are needed for creating, describing, analysing, viewing, querying or generally using electronic language data. Tools of application programmes, components, fonts, style sheets, converter programmes, etc. are therefore very important.

## KEY PLAYERS IN LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

Several groups of people are involved in language documentation. What principles govern each group in terms of behaviour? Right now, it appears as though researchers are operating independently and there are no professional requirements. But different bodies are preparing some guidelines. For instance, the Australian Linguistic Society, The American Anthropological Association, The Electronic Meta-structure for Endangered Language Documentation (E-MELD), etc. Even our own

ALT-I in Ibadan is working out something for African languages. Such guidelines are necessary, especially with the advent of global publication of the World Wide Web. All that is being done covers the different key players in language documentation like the funding agencies, the archivers, the researchers made up of Field Linguists, Anthropologists, IT Specialists, etc, the speaker communities, the users of the languages and the general public.

The study, documentation and teaching of Nigerian languages should contribute to this formalism, and I believe what we are doing here is a step towards that direction.

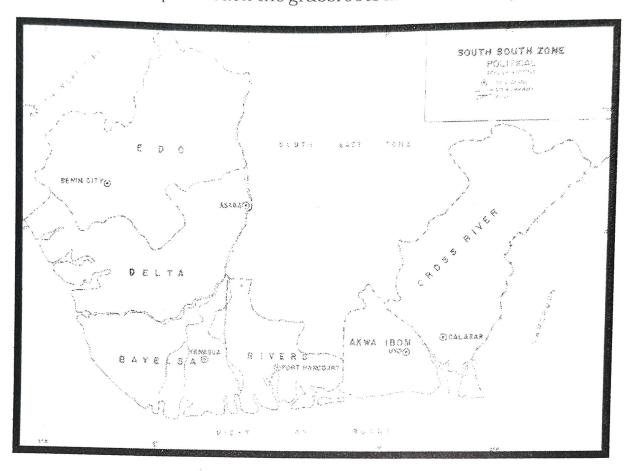## SOME LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION PROJECTS

A lot of work is being done on different aspects of language documentation. Most of the projects are in Europe and America. Some of these include among others: E-MELD, HRELP, SIL, OLAC, ALT-I, WALA, etc. The ALT-I, African Languages Technology Initiative is based in Ibadan. This is important to us. You may visit its website for more information. The West African Language Archive (WALA) is also close. This is one of the archives housing West African data. Currently, the WALA which is a result of a cooperation between the Universities of Bielefeld, Cocody and Uyo, has multi-media data on Ega, Iko and Ibibio. Data on more languages are needed.

Some of these projects and their websites include:
* E-MELD (http://emeld.org/)
* GOLD
* SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC BEST PRACTICES IN DIGITAL LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION (http://emeld.org/school/)
* QUERY ROOMS
* THE LINGUIST LIST
* SIL (http://www.sil.org/)
* OLAC (http://www.language-archives.org/)
* LT-I (http://www.alt-i.org/projects.htm/)
* WALA (http:coral.lili.uni-bielefeld.de/LangDoc/EGA/).

# CASE STUDIES FROM THREE STATES IN THE SOUTH SOUTH GEO-POLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA

The South South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria, shown in Map 0.2, is one of the six zones in the country. (Others are: South East, South West, North East, North Central and North West). The zone is made up of six States (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers). These States are further sub-divided into one hundred and twenty three (123) LGAs, in an attempt to reach the grassroots more effectively.



This zone is a major oil-producing area, and accounts for much of the revenue accruing to Nigeria from crude oil and palm produce. However, it is one of the least developed in terms of infrastructure. Although there are efforts to harness and develop its resources, the impact is not effectively being felt.

The South South is one of the heterogeneous zones in the country. It has about 119 languages. Two States in the zone: Bayelsa (Ijaw), and Edo (Edo) have one indigenous dominant language; while the other four States: Cross River (Efik/Ejagham/Bekwarra), Akwa Ibom (Ibibio/Anang/Oro), Delta (Urhobo/Itsekiri/Igbo), and Rivers (Izon/Ikwerre/Khana) have multiple dominant languages.

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For the purpose of this paper we have drawn from just three States:
-- Edo State (done by the first author).
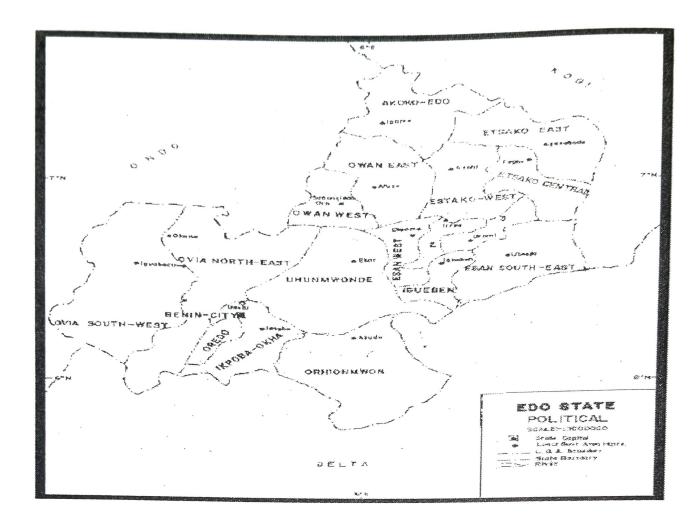-- Cross River State (done by the second author).
-- Akwa Ibom State (done by the second author).

The few cases we report here are by no means the only endangered languages in the area; they are presented by way of illustration.

The work on Edo State was done in the traditional linguistic fashion, and it has achieved a classification aim. However, the work on the Upper and Lower Cross languages was done along the lines of Language Documentation (see section 1.3). It is part of the language documentation effort of the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages in the ABUILD Project. Data on Iko and Nkari are stored in the WALA archive.

## EDO STATE

Edo State is one of the six States that make up the South South Geo-political Zone of Nigeria. It is a multi ethnic state. Many communities have ties with the Benin Kingdom. However, these communities have very close relationships deriving from these cultural and linguistic ties. The southern part of the state is more homogeneous. However, as you move towards the hilly northern parts of the state, the diversions become more, and more languages emerge. Such languages as Ebira, Okpameri, Uneme, Ososo, Igala, Yoruba, Izon, etc are spoken. Four language groups are found in the state: Edoid, Ijoid, Yoruboid and Igboid. The Edoid languages are more. Edo proper (Bini), is the dominant language, while a wide range of related varieties like Esan, Estako, etc. also are spoken in the State. Yoruba is threatening most of the languages spoken in the area.
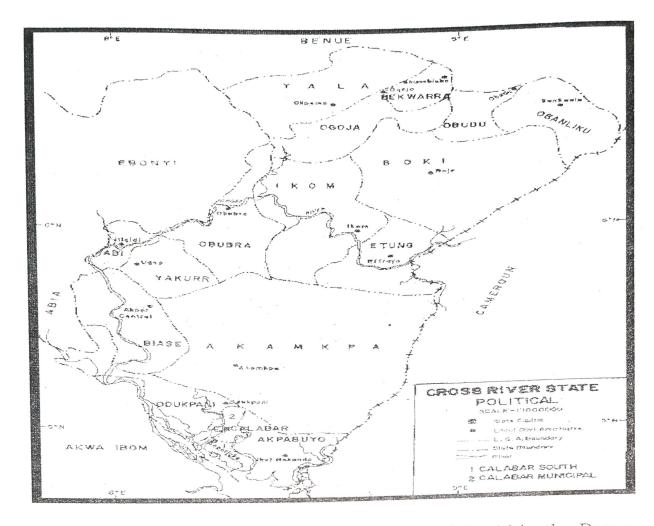
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2 This is a joint tripartite collaboration between the Universities of Cocody, Bielefeld, and Uyo.

3 Work on Edo State was done by the first author with support from the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig. The project started in 2001, and the result is that we now have data on several languages in the 'south western confluence area', and most of the languages in this area that had defied classification due to lack of information (Williamson 1989, Jungraithmayr (1973), Blench 1994. The methodology involved the traditional data collection through elicitation using wordlists ranging from 200-400 at different times of fieldtrip.

Several languages have now been identified. Some of these are the AIKA and Akpes languages which for a long time were unclassified. AIKA was referred to in the literature as Ukaan. It is actually a preference of the speakers of the language, and it is a acronym representing the four languages: Ayanran, Ishe, Ikaan and Iigau, which speak the languages Iyinno, Uyegbe, Ikaan and Iigau respectively. Akpes is made up of Ibaram, Ikaram, Gedegede, Ajowa, etc. A major achievement of this project (which is still ongoing), is a confirmation that Akpes and about nine varieties and AIKA are more Edoid than Yoruboid.

## CROSS RIVER STATE

Cross River State harboured the majority of the Lower Cross as well as the Upper Cross languages, and all of Bendi groups of languages, until 1987, when Akwa Ibom State was carved out of it. All of these language groups belong to the Benue-Congo family, following Crozier/Blench (1992) classification. About twelve of these LGAs are heterogeneous communities and they speak various languages with which they co-exist. The Lower Cross languages are spoken in the southern part of the state, while the rest are spoken in the middle and northern parts of the state. The Cross River State is therefore a linguistically heterogeneous state, with an extremely fragmented linguistic picture.

CROSS RIVER STATE
POLITICAL

All the languages spoken in Cross River State fall within the Benue-Congo sub-family of the Niger Congo larger family. Following Crozier/Blench (1992), three of the twelve listed major sub groups are represented adequately, viz, the Idomoid, the Cross River and the Bantoid. Of all three, Cross River, made up of Bendi and Delta Cross, constitute the largest number of languages. Only three of the Lower Cross languages are represented in the State: Efik, Ukwa and Ito, while the Upper Cross group dominates with several languages.

The large number of languages in the Upper Cross group may be due to wrong classification of some of these languages. For instance, Leyigha is actually a variety of Leggbo. It is highly mutually intelligible with other varieties of Leggbo which are not listed, namely: Lebamma, Letatama, Lekuleku, Lemmabana. These four varieties in addition to the Leyigha and Lenyima (listed as separate languages) all together make up the Leggbo language. Cross River State has about 37 languages, spoken in 18 LGAs.

There are several endangered languages in the state. The three cases presented here are threatened by Efik language which has been a lingua franca in the Cross River Basin for a very long time. They involve:

--    Efut spoken in Anantigha area in the Calabar South LGA.
--    Qua (variety of Ejagham, Ekoid-Bantu) spoken in Big Qua area of Calabar Municipality
--    Kiong spoken in the Akpabio Okoyong area of Odukpani LGA.


These languages are however under going a revitalization process. There has been a lot of advocacy, and the speakers are now interested enough to make some effort. There is a conscious effort to revive them, and they are now being learnt as second languages. If this interest is sustained, then it means that a literacy programme will be part of this revitalization. This means that the languages should have orthographies and other literacy materials, which should enhance the requirement of the National Policy on Education to use the language of the immediate community for instruction in the first three years of education.
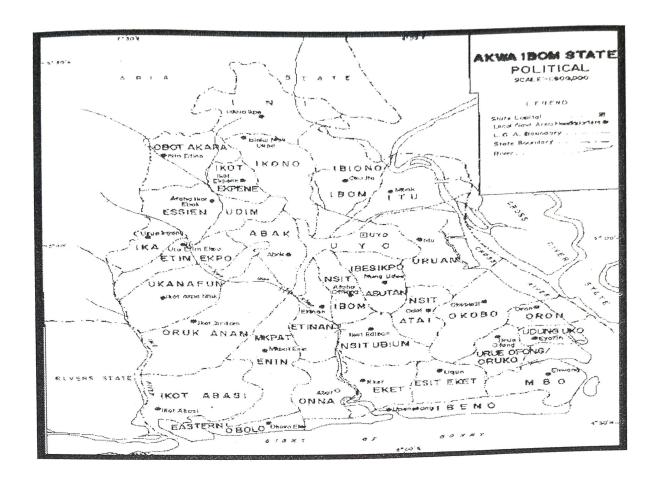
## AKWA IBOM

Akwa Ibom State has 31 LGAs. Previous classifications have identified many varieties spoken in the State. Essien (1990) suggested the proto term 'Ibibiod' for the languages spoken in the state, following classifications in other areas of the country. But the choice of the word raises the issue of domination, and other groups in the state seem to resent it.

There are at least twenty one varieties of the Lower Cross group spoken in the state. These have different levels of mutual intelligibility and on this basis, a pattern of internal grouping has emerged in linguistic classifications of languages of the State. At least eleven of these varieties are very closely related and the most marked variety is Obolo. Crozier/Blench (1992), Connell (1994), Urua (1996) have very close classifications, and they all agree that apart from Obolo, all others are very closely related.

Ibibio, Anang and Oro are the dominant languages spoken in the State. They are very closely related varieties. Iko is spoken in Eastern Obolo LGA, and Nkari is spoken in Ini LGAs. Both of them are threatened by Ibibio. Ilue and Mbo are spoken in Oron and Mbo LGAs respectively, and they are threatened by Oro.

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4 The 'Ibibiod' name was first suggested by Essien (1990) to the best of our knowledge.
5 Urua (2000), Egbokhare/Oyetunde/Urua/Amfani (2001), also used this classification.

## THE CHALLENGES

We define challenges as those things that test the Linguist's attempt at the documentation of these endangered languages. We are faced with huge challenges in the documentation of Nigerian languages.

The primary challenge is that research on Nigerian languages is haphazard. We have several Departments of Linguistics in Nigeria, and yet there is no coordinated research effort on our subject matter. We still do not know exactly how many languages we have in Nigeria, whether thriving or endangered

Language documentation is an expensive venture, and we lack funding for such projects. Besides inadequate funding, we have inadequate facilities. Equipments for documentation are expensive. Very basic equipment like cameras (video and audio), computers (laptops, desktops) etc. are expensive. Even when some of these tools are available, many linguists in Nigeria and teachers do not show enough interest in them, and ignorance of the use of the facilities is another challenge. Our public utilities are not very steady. Power supply is epileptic. Due perhaps to inadequate manpower, we have excess teaching workload as teachers, which leaves very little time for research.

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Another very serious challenge is the intangibility of language. It makes it difficult for speakers to see and feel its relevance sometimes. This sometimes leads to lack of interest of the speakers, as well as lack of interest of researchers.

There is an economic argument against Nigerian languages. The large number of languages in Nigeria discourages work on them. There is also another argument against Nigerian languages, i.e. an ideological argument against the number of languages as evidence of disunity. Even the latest Census had to information on language.

On the part of the researchers, epileptic public utilities, inadequate manpower, excess teaching workload for the lecturers who should be involved in fieldwork, at least in their environments, poor conditions of service for lecturers, lack of orientation and tradition of fieldwork in most of our linguistic programmes, all constitute very serious challenges indeed.

## THE CONSTRAINTS

Besides the challenges discussed above, there are constraints militating against language documentation. These we define as those things that impede the Linguist's attempt at the documentation of the endangered languages in Nigeria.

A major constraint is related to Sociolinguistic factors. We have already mentioned the lack of a clear picture of the linguistic situation in Nigeria. Related to this is the confusion surrounding the difference between a dialect and a language. Sometimes, the same language has different names by different groups. Place names also differ from the people's name. For instance, the Aggbo people speak Leggbo language (Cross River State), and Akaan people speak Ikaan (Edo State).

Sometimes, the speakers' wishes also change. A case in point is that of the Ibibio/Anang groups in Akwa Ibom State. The two groups belonged to one association and called themselves one ethnic group, Ibibio, but today, the Anang want to be known as a different group, though related. As far back as 1928, when the Ibibio State Union was founded as a political organisation, all the ethnic/linguistic groups in the state today belonged to the same organisation. One sure evidence of this fact today is the Ibibio State College which was and is still in Ikot Ekpene, an Anang community. Although we want to respect the such sentiments when expressed by a people, they pose a constraint for researchers.

Another constraint is related to geographical conditions. Hilly and swampy areas can sometimes be very trouble to access.

When near homogenous communities are restructured because of political restructuring in the creation of new LGAs and states, this creates some confusion.

## SOME COPING STRATEGIES
On the basis of these challenges and constraints, we propose some coping strategies to help us with the documentation of Nigerian languages. Our proposals cover all stakeholders in the languages of Nigeria.

## THE ROLE OF NINLAN
Although we are faced with several challenges, there are some coping strategies to help us document our languages. We have broken down these strategies for ease of handling into roles that the different key players in language documentation can play in Nigeria, beginning with NINLAN. We think that NINLAN should play more of a supervisory role for the different departments of Linguistics and Nigerian languages, as well as form a link with the government on issues pertaining to Nigerian languages. Specifically, NINLAN should:

-- Create forums for education on current trends and work out best practices for Nigerian language documentation
-- Run workshops to demonstrate new technologies
-- Set up working groups to develop different areas of Nigerian Linguistics
-- Coordinate the activities of the departments of Linguistics in Nigeria
-- Advise government on language issues
-- Streamline the tools for language description and documentation
-- Harmonise the orthography for Nigerian languages
-- Supervise language description and documentation projects
-- Contribute to the current theorization of Documentary Linguistics worldwide
-- Provide a website that can host documentation efforts of Nigerian Linguistics
-- Provide facilities for a search engine for Nigerian languages
-- Collaborate with LAN and other professional bodies to develop modalities that can be considered best practices for Nigerian Linguistics

For instance, NINLAN can organise workshops on different areas of linguistics and connect both the experts in those areas and those in the field and teachers. It is at such forums that both the experts, fieldworkers and teachers can form working groups to look at the different areas in Nigerian Linguistics, and then draw up what can be considered as best practices for the discipline. Beyond this meeting therefore, NINLAN has the structure and should indeed serve as a platform to work out and fine-tune the details of what can and should indeed constitute best practices to safeguard endangered languages of Nigeria.

## THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENTS OF LINGUISTICS

The Departments of Linguistics should try to meet the training needs, and do research so that they can contribute to the current theorization of new areas. They should specifically address the training needs of the students. In addition to the traditional linguistic programmes, the curricula should be revised to embrace new areas like:

--      Language documentation
--      IT and linguistic globalization
--      Use of video
--      Archiving practices
--      Writing metadata

The departments should encourage a team-oriented inter-disciplinary approach to research involving field linguists, other disciplines (like History, Anthropology, Sociology, etc.), speaker communities, and IT specialists. They should contribute to the current theorization of Documentary Linguistics.

We will like to announce that the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Uyo has started an M.A. programme in Computational Language Documentation with effect from the 2005/2006 session which has just started. This is the fruit of the tripartite collaboration with the Universities of Cocody, Corte d'Ivoire and Bielefeld, Germany mentioned earlier. We do not know if any other university is running a language documentation programme in Nigeria. We should not work in isolation. It is at forums like these that we can find out what we are doing in our different areas, compare notes, brainstorm and plan strategies to meet the challenge we face in dealing with so many languages.

## THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS [LAN, ANLAT, APNILAC, WALS, etc.]

Such professional associations should provide a platform of interaction for the different agencies involved in documenting these languages through conferences and workshops. These associations have annual conferences. We should plan strategies, review plans, organise workshops from updates, empower and encourage field workers and teachers of Nigerian languages, provide a platform for reporting on researches and fieldwork.

Each association can set up a working group at each conference and report on work in progress at the next meeting.

## THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The government should fund research, provide scholarships for training manpower, promote, and help to enlighten the public on language issues and its policies on it. The legislature should legislate on language matters, and the government should supervise language documentation projects through NINLAN.

The three tiers of government should be involved in different aspects of language documentation, and this is one of the aspects that NINLAN should coordinate.

## THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUALS, NGOs AND CORPORATE BODIES

Some individuals, NGOs and cooperate bodies have the where-with-all to assist in language documentation. They can specifically support in the following areas: assist in funding research on language and their documentation, development of tools, (both hardware and software), help in the area of advocacy.

An important area which we need to address is the use of NGOs for both advocacy and funding. There are numerous NGOs with a focus on politics, economy, social welfare, etc. There is none yet on language. It will help if we as linguists either in groups or individually form NGOs that can focus on language issues in the area of research, funding or advocacy.

## THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA AND THE ARTS

We need support from the media for publicity and advocacy through articles, commentaries, documentaries, etc. The media can help bridge the gap between public awareness and intellectual opinion in 'Linguistic Ecology' (Crystal, 2003:24).

Another untapped area that we can explore is the theatre. We need support from the arts for awareness through entertainment with language themes. We can do this through fiction, drama, music, exhibitions, etc.

## THE ROLE OF THE SPEAKER-COMMUNITIES

Even the speaker communities have an important role to play in the documentation of their language. We need the support of the speaker communities in the areas of funding, manpower and advocacy. Some members of the communities may be wealthy enough to provide some funds. Manpower for training can be drawn from the community, as the wealthy ones can be encouraged to give some kind of scholarship to those who may be interested and intelligent, but can not afford to pay school fees. The communities can also help in the promotion of the language.

## A PLAN FOR DOCUMENTING NIGERIAN LANGUAGES

The complicated linguistic situation in Nigeria should not be used as a continued excuse not to develop Nigerian languages. We do agree that all the languages cannot be attended to at the same time. What we need is a well thought out and worked out plan for documenting them. All agencies must be involved. Professional groups like LAN, ANLAT, APNILAC, NINLAN, Departments of Linguistics, the Government, International Bodies, etc. should all collaborate in this.

A possible plan for documenting Nigerian languages could involve a tripartite effort involving the government, the speakers and the specialists. But first, there should be a proper language policy, pluralistic in nature to cover every language, perhaps in stages. Such a policy can be implemented using the three-tier government structure, and the six geo-political structure already put in place.

Each L.G.A. should have an L.G.A. language to be chosen at that level, preferably the language spoken in the L.G.A. headquarters. The Local Government Area, which is the level of the grassroots, should play as active a role as the state and federal levels in the development and choice of an L.G.A. language. Each Local Government Area should have a language committee to look at language matters. Such a committee should be made up of members of the L.G.A. who may (or may not) be linguists. Linguistic specialists can be invited to provide the technical know how, especially with regard to the corpus planning.

Each State should have a State Language, preferably that spoken in the state capital. There should be a state language committee to address linguistic

issues. This way, several languages can be addressed at the same time. This proposal does not affect the major languages. Those are already developing.

## MAKING NIGERIAN LANGUAGES RELEVANT TO THE SOCIETY

Every Nigerian language is spoken in an area, but every Nigerian language is not relevant to every Nigerian. The languages that appear to have a regional spread should be empowered and encouraged to be used in the media, in government, education, etc., in those areas. The languages that appear to be state languages should be used at the state level in the same way, and the languages that appear to be L.G.A languages should be empowered and be so used.

Nigerian languages have to be made relevant to Nigerians. It is the need to use them at different forums that will motivate and attract both funding to language projects and interest in their fate. We believe that if some of the Nigerian languages are used for legislative business (even once in a week as is done in Ogun State House of Assembly every Wednesday with Yoruba), then its inadequacy to cope in terms of terminology will make the law makers look for the linguists to elaborate its code further. We believe that with conviction to use the language properly those who have the where-with-all to sponsor such a project will willingly do so.

Advocacy will help us in this area very much, and we should explore it. It is important that the languages be made relevant in the different communities where they are spoken. It makes practical sense.

Documenting Nigerian languages is a challenge we can handle if we put some things in place. Working on the languages can help us develop tools in line with modern technology and globalisation. We need to start from somewhere. We need to first draw up a proper plan for the documentation of these languages. While a new area of Linguistics is evolving in the area of Language Documentation, we need to contribute to that development, especially as we have the data resources from which we can tap. We need to join in the formalization of the subject. Nigerian languages have very special features and apart from developing them for posterity, they can contribute to linguistic theories. But if we are not working on them, then, we will not have much to offer. And while the specifications are being worked out, many interesting areas of Nigerian languages will be left out of the ontologies that are being fine-tuned now if we do not take part in what is going on globally.

We should begin to document Nigerian languages in the light of these new developments in the field, both for development and archiving. That way, we will be contributing to humanity and the development of a

linguistic formalism for modern language documentation. That way, we will be facing head on some of the challenges that Nigerian languages pose for the New Humanities. We can only contribute meaningfully to a formalism of 'best practice' for safeguarding endangered Nigerian languages if we have practical inputs from the field.

## DOCUMENTING NIGERIAN LANGUAGES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHIVING

In the light of these, what should we be doing with regard to language documentation in Nigeria? The area to cover is both vast and fruitful. We need to harness all our resources so that we can document Nigerian languages both for development and archiving. There should be a plan for regular convention of data into an archive format. This is considered best linguistic practice in the area globally.

The vibrant living and developing languages should be documented for development. Such development should aim at different things including producing databases to be converted to dictionaries, grammars, orthographies, etc. It should also aid the communities that speak these languages in preservation of the languages in developing teaching materials, in planning (both corpus and status) and revival of some languages that may be heading to a moribund stage.

For those languages that are threatened, they should be documented with the sole aim of archiving. There should be a plan for regular conversion of data into an active format using XML files, or even tab-delimited text, etc. And even as they archived for posterity, literacy and literary materials can still be developed for its relearning and teaching, even as a second language to its speakers.

## WRAP-UP

Several benefits accrue to us for the development of Nigerian languages. These include: linguistic analyses, database of primary language data to support this, orthographies, dictionaries, text collections, journal articles, primers, literary works, etc.

Several benefits also accrue to us for the archiving of Nigerian languages. Primarily, we will have huge databases of transcribed and annotated language data, searchable corpora that can be accessed and shared worldwide in the space of flows. These data can be in multi-media forms, metadata, talking picture dictionaries, audio CDs, web pages, search engines, etc. But we ought to have a plan for the documentation of Nigerian languages, among them the endangered ones. Details of the *modus operandi* for this should be coordinated by NINLAN through Linguistic departments, Working groups, NGOs, Speaker communities, Funding Agencies, International Bodies, etc.

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# ENDANGERED LANGUAGES AND UNESCO

## ENDANGERED LANGUAGES AND UNESCO

In the framework of UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Section, the Endangered Languages Programme aims to contribute to the promotion and protection of linguistic diversity throughout the world by:

• raising awareness on language endangerment through publications and media.

• strengthening and promoting local initiatives for developing writing systems and documenting previously non-written languages.

• ensuring the participation of speaker communities in activities related to the safe-guarding or revitalisation of their languages.

• Identifying and disseminating good practices in language preservation.

• mobilizing international cooperation through expert meetings and networks.



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