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ENDANGERED MINORITY LANGUAGE : A CASE STUDY OF THE ITSEKIRI LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The research investigates language endangerment in a minority language setting focusing on the Itsekiri language in Nigeria. It analyses how the Itsekiri language is being endangered in consonance with linguistic practices and behaviour of speakers of the language. The objective is to understand and uncover the reasons behind the phenomenon of non-inter-generational transmission of the Itsekiri language and the seeming preference for English and/or NPE (Nigerian Pidgin English), as well as to ascertain the underlying causes of language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Presenting the linguistic situation of Nigeria, the study dwells on the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group and examines the evolution of the Itsekiri language. The theoretical framework that underpins the study is based on studies on language endangerment in minority language settings as postulated by Fishman (1991), echoed by Olko & Sallabanks (2021). Findings derived from data collected from semi-structured interviews and participant observation, analysed thematically, reveal the way the Itsekiri language is being endangered through the linguistic practices exemplified in the use of NPE and Standard English as a common means of communication as a result of diverse languages in the community.

The study equally reveals the linguistic attitudes and behavior of the Itsekiri-speaking people and their perception of the language vis-a-vis English, the dominant language in their community.

As a pioneering scientific and academic research on the Itsekiri language, it opens a new vista to the study of heritage minority language and contributes to the construction of an original sociolinguistic database relating to language use in Warri, in the south of Nigeria.

Key words: language endangerment, language shift, linguistic attitudes and behaviour, non-intergenerational transmission

Résumé

En se concentrant sur la langue Itsekiri au Nigéria, la recherche porte sur la mise en danger des langues dans un contexte linguistique minoritaire. L'observation des pratiques linguistiques et du comportement des locuteurs, permet d'analyser comment la langue Itsekiri est menacée. L'objectif est de découvrir et comprendre les raisons du phénomène de non-transmission intergénérationnelle de la langue Itsekiri et de la préférence apparente pour l'anglais et/ou le Nigérian Pidgin English

(NPE), ainsi que de déterminer les causes sous-jacentes du changement linguistique dans la communauté Itsekiri.

Présentant la situation linguistique du Nigeria, l'étude s'attarde sur le groupe ethnique de langue Itsekiri et examine l'évolution de la langue Itsekiri. Le cadre théorique qui sous-tend l'étude est basé sur des études sur la mise en danger des langues dans les contextes linguistiques minoritaires, telles que postulées par Fishman (1991), reprises par Olko et Sallabanks (2021).

Les résultats tirés des données recueillies lors d'entretiens semi-structurés et de l'observation participative, analysées par thèmes, révèlent la manière dont la langue Itsekiri est menacée. Il s'agit des pratiques linguistiques dont l'utilisation du NPE et de l'anglais standard en tant que moyens communs de communication dans un contexte de diversité des langues dans la communauté.

L'étude révèle également les attitudes et le comportement linguistiques des locuteurs Itsekiri et leur perception de la langue par rapport à l'anglais, la langue dominante dans leur communauté.

En tant que recherche scientifique et académique pionnière sur la langue Itsekiri, ce travail ouvre de nouvelles perspectives à l'étude des langues minoritaires patrimoniales et contribue à la construction d'une base de données sociolinguistiques originales relatives à l'utilisation des langues à Warri, dans le sud du Nigeria.

Mots clés: changement linguistique, attitudes et comportements linguistiques, non-transmission intergénérationnelle

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my late parents. My father who believed in education and inculcated the idea of going to the university in me when her relation whom he left me with failed to send me to school even though I had attained primary school age.

To my mother who cooked my meals when I was always studying and did not bother to invite me to the kitchen to give a helping hand as would most African mothers.

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Table of contents

List of tables.....	12
List of figures	13
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	14
1. Chapter 1 General introduction to the study.....	16
1.1 Introduction.....	16
1.2 Defining languages	19
1.3 Situating language endangerment in the field of sociolinguistics	20
1.4 Research orientation and motivation for the study	23
1.5 Statement of the problem and rationale behind the study.....	25
1.6 Significance of the study.....	26
1.7 Focus and scope of the research	27
1.8 Research objective, hypotheses and research questions	28
1.9 The researcher as an activist	29
1.10 Structure of the study	30
1.11 Summary	31
2 Chapter 2 Context of the study.....	32
2.1 Introduction.....	32
2.2 Macro context-Nigeria.....	32
2.2.1 Geographical location and historical background of Nigeria.....	32
2.1.2 The socio-political and economic situation of Nigeria.....	36
2.1.3 Colonialism and introduction of exoglossic languages in Nigeria.....	38
2.1.3.1. The historical perspective of the English language in Nigeria	38
2.1.3.2. Specificities of the English language in Nigeria	42
2.1.4. The origin and evolution of Nigerian Pidgin English	44
2.1.5. The Nigerian linguistic situation	53
2.1.5.1. Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Nigeria	54
2.1.5.2. Classification of languages in Nigeria	55
2.1.5.3. The Status of heritage minority languages in Nigeria	58
2.1.5.4. Current linguistic practices in Nigeria	60
2.1.6. Current linguistic policies in Nigeria	62

2.2.	The Meso Context- Speakers of the Itsekiri Language	66
2.2.1.	The geographical location of speakers of the Itsekiri language	66
2.2.1.1.	Niger Delta Region of Nigeria	67
2.2.1.2.	Delta State of Nigeria and its linguistic situation	68
2.2.2.	The Itsekiri-speaking people	70
2.2.3.	Historical perspective and origin of speakers of the Itsekiri language.....	71
2.2.4.	The Socio-political framework of speakers of the Itsekiri language.....	75
2.2.4.1.	Political structure in the past and present	75
2.2.2.4.	The state of interregnum in the political history of the Itsekiri ethnic group 75	
2.2.5.	The economy of the Itsekiri speaking people in the past and present.....	78
2.2.6.	Historical evolution of the Itsekiri language and cultural practices.....	81
2.2.6.1.	The development of the Itsekiri language and language contact.....	81
2.2.7.	Literary works in the Itsekiri language	84
2.2.8.	Cultural practices of speakers of the Itsekiri language.....	86
2.2.8.1.	Marriage, burial and name giving ceremonies in the Itsekiri ethnic group .	86
2.2.8.2.	Language brokering and mediation as cultural and social processes in the Itsekiri- speaking community	87
2.2.9.	Religion in the Itsekiri-speaking community	88
2.2.9.1.	Deities in the Itsekiri-speaking community	90
2.2.10.	The Socio-economic context of Warri and language contact.....	94
2.2.10.1.	Demographic and linguistic transformations and the place of Nigerian Pidgin English in Warri	98
2.2.11.	Summary	99
3	Chapter 3 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	102
3.1	Introduction.....	102
3.2	Language shift and language endangerment.....	103
3.2.1	Langauge shift	103
3.2.2	Language endangerment	105
3.2.3	The notion of a threatened language and causes of language death.....	110
3.2.4	Implication of language endangerment and language death	113
3.2.5	Language attrition and language loss	114
3.3	Language ecology and language contact in a minority language setting	117
3.3.1	Language ecology, speech and linguistic community.....	117
3.3.2	Language contact, linguistic diversity and the hegemonic influence of English	119
3.3.3	Langauge contact.....	120
3.3.4	Linguistic diversity.....	121
3.3.5	Language hegemony	122
3.4	Linguistic colonialism and the spread of English language	123

3.5	Sociolinguistic descriptions of languages	129
3.5.1	Minority Language	130
3.5.2.	Majority language	132
3.5.2	Official language	133
3.5.3	National language	133
3.5.4	Heritage languages	135
3.5.5	Mother tongue	137
3.5.6	Indigenous language	138
3.5.7.	Vehicular language	139
3.5.7	Vernacular language	140
3.5.8	Pidgins and Creoles	141
3.6	Language Hierarchies	143
3.6.1	Language status and language vitality	144
3.7	Language Ideologies, Planning, Policy and management	149
3.7.1	Language ideologies	149
3.7.2	Language planning	150
3.7.3	Language polices and management	151
3.8	Language attitudes and behaviour	153
3.9	Family language policy, practices and transmission	156
3.10	Language Survival	160
3.10.1	Language maintenance, revitalization and reversing language Shift	160
3.10.2	Language Documentation	165
3.11	Concepts relevant to language use in multilingual contexts	169
3.11.1	Multilingualism	169
3.11.2	Plurilingualism	171
3.11.3	Translanguaging	172
3.11.4	Language brokering and cultural mediation	174
3.12	Summary	175
4	Chapter 4 Research Methodology	177
4.1	Introduction	177
4.2	A qualitative research methodology	178
4.2.1	An ethnographic approach in qualitative research	179
4.2.2	An ethnographic approach as a choice of methodology	181
4.2.2.1.	Participant observation in ethnographic qualitative research	182
4.2.2.2.	Linguistic interview in ethnographic qualitative research	183
4.2.2.3.	Field Notes	187
4.3	Methodological triangulation	188
4.3.1	Justifying methodological triangulation	188
4.4	Research design	189

4.4.1	Constitution of sample and interview questions	191
4.5	Gaining access into the research community	192
4.6	Data collection	194
4.6.1	Context and methods of data collection.	194
4.6.2	Participant observation as a method of data collection	195
4.6.3	The linguistic interview as a method of data collection	199
4.6.3.1.	Description of the interview informants	199
4.6.3.2.	Conducting the interview	200
4.7	The researcher's role: building the researcher-participant relationship.....	204
4.8	Ethics regarding data collection.....	206
4.9	Data Processing.....	207
4.9.1	Transcription conventions	207
4.9.2	Data transcription and treatment	208
4.9.3	Data analysis	211
4.9.3.1.	Thematic analysis.....	211
4.10	Strengths and limitations of chosen methodology	212
4.11	Summary	213
5	Chapter 5 Research Findings.....	216
5.1	Introduction.....	216
5.2	Ecological Forces: - The linguistic dimension	217
5.2.1	Language contact in the Itsekiri -speaking community	217
5.2.2	Language hegemony	219
5.2.3	English and Nigerian Pidgin English as lingua Franca in the Itsekiri-speaking community	221
5.2.4	Multilingualism and Translanguaging	226
5.3	Ecological forces: - The sociopolitical dimension.....	228
5.3.1	Inter-ethnic crisis and linguistic conflict	228
5.4	Ecological forces: - Socio economic dimension	231
5.4.1	Sociocultural aspect.....	234
5.4.2	Demographic, linguistic transformation and urbanisation	235
5.4.3	Attrition of the Itsekiri Language	236
5.4.4	The role of different institutions in the community	239
5.4.4.1.	The quest for education.....	239
5.4.4.2.	The non -teaching of the Itsekiri language in formal education.	243
5.4.4.3.	Religion.....	245
5.5	Socio-psychological forces	246
5.5.1	Itsekiri speakers' perceptions of the Itsekiri language	246
5.5.2	Linguistic attitudes and behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language.	247
5.5.3	Social standing and prestige	249

5.5.4	Linguistic hierarchy and social status	252
5.5.5	Family language policy, practices, and transmission of the Itsekiri language in the home	256
5.6	Domains of use of the Itsekiri language	261
5.6.1	Group identity in the Itsekiri ethnic group	262
5.6.2	Cultural heritage and patrimony in the Itsekiri ethnic group	267
5.6.2.1.	Traditional marriage ceremony and language mediation in the Itsekiri-speaking community	267
5.6.2.2.	Linguistic etiquette and norms in the Itsekiri Community	270
5.7	Use of Itsekiri in diverse contexts.....	273
5.8	Summary of chapter 5.....	281
Chapter 6	Discussion and interpretations of the research findings	285
6.1	The ecological perspective-.....	286
6.1.1	Linguistic dominance	286
6.1.1.1.	Language contact	286
6.1.1.2.	Language hegemony	287
6.1.1.3.	Standard English and NPE as lingua Franca in the Itsekiri-speaking community	289
6.1.1.4.	Multilingualism and translanguaging	290
6.1.2	Ecological perspective- Socio-political aspects	292
6.1.2.1	Inter-ethnic conflicts and crises	292
6.1.3	Ecological perspective -socio economic factors.....	293
6.1.4.	Ecological perspective -sociocultural factors.....	294
6.1.5	Ecological perspective- demographic and linguistic transformation and urbanisation in the Itsekiri-speaking community	295
6.1.6	Ecological perspective -attrition of the Itsekiri language	298
6.1.7	Ecological perspective -status and vitality of Itsekiri.....	299
6.1.8.	Ecological perspective- school locations and non-teaching of Itsekiri in schools	300
6.1.9.	Ecological perspective -the role of religion	304
6.2.	Socio-psychological perspective	305
6.2.1.	Socio-psychological perspective -perception of speakers of the Itsekiri language	305
6.2.2.	Socio-psychological perspective- family language policy, practice, and transmission of the Itsekiri language in the home	307
6.2.3.	Socio-psychological perspective -social standing and prestige.....	310
6.2.4.	Socio-psychological perspective -linguistic hierarchy and social status.....	312
6.3.	Domain of use of the Itsekiri language	314
6.3.1.	Group identity	315
6.3.2.	Cultural heritage and patrimony	317

6.3.3.	Use of the Itsekiri language in diverse contexts.....	319
6.4.	Summary	321
7.	Chapter 7 Concluding the study	323
7.1.	Introduction.....	323
7.2.	Brief key findings.....	324
7.3.	Contribution of the study to the field of language endangerment.....	326
7.4.	Future research directions	328
7.5.	Limitations of the study, constraints, and challenges	329
7.6.	Suggested strategies and recommendations to reverse language shift and maintain the Itsekiri language	331
7.6.1.	Inter-generational transmission of the Itsekiri language	334
7.6.2.	Teaching and learning the Itsekiri language in formal education	335
7.6.2.1.	Immersion schools	337
7.6.3.	Teaching Itsekiri in informal education	339
7.6.3.1.	Community- based work.....	339
7.6.3.2.	Task-based principle and curricular approaches.....	340
7.6.4.	Bilingualism in the education system.....	341
7.6.5.	Translanguaging Pedagogy	342
7.6.6.	Increasing visibility of Itsekiri via the internet	343
7.6.7.	Language Documentation	345
7.7.	Concluding remarks	347
	<u>Résumé de l'étude en Français.....</u>	<u>351</u>
	Bibliography:	395

List of tables

Table 1: Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scales	146
Table 2: Alternative labels for other special situations	148
Table 3: An overview of the Research design	190
Table 4: Contexts of observation in Warri.....	197
Table 5: Participants from socially diverse groups	203
Table 6: Transcriptions conventions	208

List of figures

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing major cities	36
Figure 2: A map of Nigeria showing diverse linguistic groups and languages	54
Figure 3: Map of Delta State of Nigeria Showing the location of the Itsekiri-Speaking Ethnic Group	69
Figure 4: The Dutch map of Negroland in 1747. (Ayomike, 2013) A historical map of the location of the Itsekiri -speaking people in Nigeria	72
Figure 5: Map of the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group in Warri with a large population of Itsekiri people living in the city.....	74
Figure 6: A map of Warri and its various neighborhoods	95

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ATR:	African traditional religion
CLP:	Community language policy
CEFR:	Common European Framework of Reference
EGIDS:	Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scales
ELODIL :	Eveil au langage et ouverture à la diversité linguistique
EUCRML:	European Union Charter for Regional and Minority Languages
FEL:	Foundation of Endangered Languages
FLP:	Family Language Planning
GIDS:	Graded Intergenerational Scales
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
HLs	Heritage Languages
ICT:	Information Communication Technology
LIC:	Language of the Immediate Community
NERDC:	Nigeria Education Resource Development Council
NPE:	Nigerian Pidgin English
NNPE:	Nigeria National Policy on Education
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDP:	Peoples Democratic Party
TETFUND:	Tertiary Education Trust Fund
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNDRIP:	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNPF	United Nations Population Fund

WASCE West African School Certificate Examination

WAEC West African Examination Council

1. Chapter 1 General introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

Languages are being endangered around the world. This is the cause of much concern, and it is particularly so for minority languages. It has been predicted that many will die in the coming years. There is concerted effort around the world to try to understand this phenomenon and to try to reverse this trend. In addition, there has been a lot of work to maintain endangered languages, notably by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) who has worked on and is still working on safeguarding endangered languages. This dissertation is set against this background.

The study investigates language endangerment in a minority language setting. It brings to the fore linguistic elements, which characterise speakers of a heritage minority language existing in the same extremely diverse linguistic landscape, as a non-indigenous ex colonial and exogenous language. Specifically, it explores the ways minority languages are becoming endangered and how they can be potentially saved, using the Itsekiri language as a case study.

The nucleus of this doctoral research is that languages are being endangered and the Itsekiri language being one of them, I am trying to understand how endangerment is happening in the Itsekiri-speaking community, what is causing it, how it manifests and what can be done to reverse the situation.

The attitudes and behaviour of speakers of a language have been pointed out in the language endangerment literature to be one of the ways languages are being endangered therefore this study centres on how this is happening in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

In understanding the phenomenon of language endangerment, the broad focus is how languages are endangered, the way people behave that endanger their language and put them at risk of extinction.

Taking a critical and theoretical approach in the discipline of sociolinguistics, particularly in the domain of language shift and language endangerment, the study explores relevant theoretical concepts in the field in relation to minority languages. It critically analyses sociolinguistic patterns and discourse within a minority language community. The literature review focuses on the

relationship between language endangerment, minority language, peoples' linguistic attitudes and behaviour including family, government policy and societal expectations.

Researching on the case of the Itsekiri language is important because, Itsekiri is one of the key ethnic groups in one of the leading States in Nigeria- Delta State in the Nigeria Delta Region, in Southern Nigeria, which contributes the highest amount of crude oil that boost the revenue of the country. Of essence, the oil fields that produce the largest amount of crude oil in Nigeria are located in the Itsekiri-speaking community, which positions the group as a powerful force within the country.

In addition, the Itsekiri language was the key language of trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries before the colonial era and remained an important trade language until oil was discovered in 1954. **(See details on pages 75-76).**

During that period, the Itsekiri ethnic group was politically, economically and linguistically strong. Before colonialism, the Itsekiris traded with European merchants, notably the Portuguese and the British trade merchants. The strategic position of the Itsekiri people, located in the coastal region around the Atlantic Ocean, afforded them control of the region. Their direct contact with the British placed them in a strategic position of trade. The flourishing economy of the Itsekiri-speaking people was a magnet to both foreign and local traders, which equally underpinned the attraction to the Itsekiri language (Ayomike, 2010).

Their political and economic power, demonstrated in the person of Chief Nana Olumu of the Itsekiri kingdom who traded with the British, gave credence to the language, which was the only means of communication then. Ayomike (2010) reports that the Itsekiri kings and chiefs controlled trade in raw materials such as palm oil, palm kernels, cocoa, peanuts, tin and columbite, which the Europeans needed during the industrial revolution and that the dominant language then was the Itsekiri language. During the trading period, people learnt the Itsekiri language because knowledge of the language was common and a necessity to do business in the coastal region.

Although a written language, in this doctoral research, the focus is on the oral use of Itsekiri with emphasis on the spoken aspect. It is mainly acquired orally from parents because Itsekiri was the language spoken in most homes. The Itsekiri language is hardly taught in schools; therefore, the

majority of speakers do not have reading and writing skills in the language. Only the aging population seems literate in the Itsekiri language.

The Nigerian government has not encouraged the teaching of heritage minority languages since the 1980s to date. Instead, the English language, imposed by the former colonial administration has been given institutional support. Therefore, a new generation of teachers has not been trained to teach the Itsekiri language. This shortcoming underpins the lack of/limited acquisition of oral linguistic skills in Itsekiri either in the home, within the family, or within the community.

This is in line with Wolf's (2021) assertion of the implication of the dominant presence of English in the Nigerian linguistic landscape, reflected in his remarks that African schoolchildren and university students are taught through the medium of a foreign language, a phenomenon that puts heritage languages at risk.

Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural country with more than 500 heritage minority languages (Jowitt 2020). These languages appear endangered due to insufficient use and shift to the English language. Austin & Sallabanks (2011) argue that language shift is frequently driven by socioeconomic factors. In their bid to add value to linguistic science, Austin & Sallabanks (ibid) posed this question: why worry about language endangerment? Their response suggests that throughout history, languages are dying and are being replaced by others either through language contact between groups of people speaking different languages, or through divergence due to lack of communication over time. They point out that the growing number of linguistic varieties no longer being learnt by children, coupled with a tendency towards language shift, where speakers move to languages of wider communication especially major languages like English or Spanish, are some of the reasons why people should worry about language endangerment.

Moreover, in Nigeria, there is the belief that, a shift to English can provide speakers with employment and access to international work. Awonusi (2013) argues that 71% of English Nigerian minority language bilinguals see English as the language of social and economic advancement and that 72 % of Nigerians cannot maintain a discourse in their language without code mixing and code switching to English.

In line with this and in the context of this study, it has been observed that members of the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group appear to have ceased speaking their heritage language with their children;

instead, they are speaking English, a situation that underlies this study. Fishman (1991) is of the view that the failure to transmit heritage languages from parents to children is a huge loss of identity that may be difficult to reverse and that a language that is not transmitted risks extinction.

1.2 Defining languages

Anthropologists and linguists alike have various assumptions about languages. On the one hand, anthropologists believe that languages play an important role in the lives of people and their communities. Duranti (2009) describes linguistic anthropology as a branch of anthropology that studies the role of language in the social lives of individuals and communities and explores how language shapes communication. Duranti (ibid) posits that language plays a huge role in social identity, group membership and in establishing cultural beliefs and ideologies.

On the other hand, scholars in sociolinguistics use various metaphorical expressions and tropes to categorize language, while describing them with related certain human related traits. Terminologies such as language endangerment, language shift, language attrition, language conflict, language discrimination, language rights, language vitality and language status, to mention but few have been used to describe language situations. Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (2011) remark that lawyers treat languages as having legal personalities with certain rights, in the same way as individuals and groups. Can we therefore pose ask: are languages living entities?

Languages are one of the key features that define human existence. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) remarks that languages are a social construction of the group that uses them. They are not inherited through the genes of a parent, neither are they a physical characteristic of a people. That is, they are not innate. No one person is born with a specific language gene. Languages are acquired or learnt. People are born into environments, and they speak the language of that environment. Skutnabb-Kangas (ibid) further opines that each language conveys a specific way of viewing the world and a collective imagery, which allows humans to name, organise and classify everything that surrounds them.

Furthermore, languages are tools that people use to communicate and share experiences, as individuals and groups alike. Languages do not exist in isolation and sociolinguists have described them as codes used by people in a society in a given social context. Wendel (2000) posits that a language does not exist in a vacuum and that languages are open, flexible, dynamic, and incomplete and are constantly enriched by other languages. Languages can adapt to new social requirements, whether through innovation or through enrichment thanks to contact with other languages.

The arbitrary nature of languages may render them abstract and intangible, but they remain functional in their use as means of communication. The ability of users of languages to arrange codes in sequence to make meaning in communicative, verbal and nonverbal forms underlies societal growth and development. The ability to speak, express and communicate emotions does not only reinforce societal relationships, but it also lays a solid foundation for sustainable human interaction and development. In line with that, Young (2017) remarks that languages reinforce relationships amongst users, and they help to foster amicable relationships.

In the light of the above, it can be said that languages are elements that contribute to human development and therefore must not be undermined by their speakers.

1.3 Situating language endangerment in the field of sociolinguistics

Various schools of thoughts have dwelt on language endangerment as it relates to minority languages. Terms such as silent extinction, language loss, language shift, language endangerment have been used by sociolinguists to describe linguistic situations as they relate to minority languages.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is interested in the phenomenon of language endangerment. In this respect, on the 21st day of February every year, UNESCO considers the question of language endangerment in relation to minority languages during the commemoration of International Mother Language Day.

Similarly, various scholars have different ways of looking at the phenomenon of language endangerment.

Highlighting the degree of endangerment of languages, Solash (2010) argues that as the world becomes globalized, more than half of the 6,000 to 7,000 languages spoken in the world are in danger of disappearing before the end of the century.

Olko & Sallabanks (2021) equally remark that at least half of the world's languages may no longer be spoken by the end of the 21st Century. The reasons given are economic, social, and psychological.

On his part, Gordon (2005), a member of the Foundation of Endangered Languages (FEL), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) observes that, of the 6,000 to 7,000 languages recorded in the world, very few are dominant and are spoken by more than half the world's population. He remarks that most human languages are spoken by exceedingly few people and that the majority of languages are about to vanish. Suggesting that speakers figures are available for only 6,600 languages, he further argues that of these 6,600 languages, 56% are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people; 28% by fewer than 1,000; 83% are restricted to small countries and that 10 major languages spoken by over 100 million people are the mother tongues of almost half (49%) of the world's population. "Almost all languages to disappear would be Indigenous languages, and most of today's indigenous languages would disappear, with the exception of very few that are strong numerically" (Gordon, *ibid*: pg.57).

Furthermore, Krauss (1992) estimates that as many as 90-95% of today's spoken languages may be extinct or could be very seriously endangered in less than a hundred years' time. According to Krauss, children are no longer acquiring languages with many thousands of speakers; arguing that at least 50% of the more than six thousand languages worldwide are losing speakers. In his estimate, in most world regions, dominant languages may replace about 90% of the languages by the end of the 21st century. Bernard (1996) on his part points out that about 96% of the world's people speak about 4% of the world's languages; and conversely, about 97% of the world's languages are spoken by about 3% of people in the world. He opines further that most of the world's language heterogeneity is under the stewardship of a very small number of people.

In addition, the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages (UNESCO, 2003), Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit, report on Language Vitality and Endangerment observing that there may be only 300 to 600 languages left as unthreatened languages transmitted by the parent generation to children. In the same vein, the International Expert Meeting from UNESCO's Programme on the Safeguarding of Endangered Languages held in Paris, from 10–12 March 2003 reports thus:

“Language endangerment may be the result of external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation, or it may be caused by internal forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language. Internal pressures often have their source in external ones, and both halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions. Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandon their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood, and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global marketplace.” (UNESCO 2003).

In line with this, sociolinguists and experts in languages believe that most of today's indigenous and minority languages are likely to disappear as the parent generation abandons their own heritage language for a dominant and ‘prestigious’ language. Harrison (2007) points out that when a language is not passed on to the next generation, its lifespan will only be as long as the lifespan of the last speaker, its death is almost inevitable.

Furthermore, Austin & Sallabanks (2011) project that only 40-50 languages will be available in the next few years for use. They are of the view that these are likely to be languages used in Information Communication Technology (ICT). They further opine that current languages and population distribution across the world are heavily skewed. That is to say, there is a small number of very large languages in the top twenty languages spoken in the world, such as Chinese, English, Hindi/Urdu and Spanish, which have over 50 million speakers each and are together spoken by 50 percent of the world's population. However, there is also a very large number of small languages with speaker communities in their thousands or hundreds. They opine that economic, political,

social and cultural powers tend to be held by speakers of the majority languages, while the many thousands of minority languages are marginalised and relegated.

Similarly, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (2000) argue that there are intrinsic pitfalls in identifying and quantifying languages. In their analysis of linguistic diversity the world over, they observe some fundamental facts that prove that there are probably between 6,500 and 10,000 spoken languages in the world and possibly an equal number of sign languages, with Europe and the Middle East accounting for 4% of the world's oral languages. Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (*ibid*) are of the view that of the 225 languages in Europe, 94 are endangered. The Americas, North, South and Central account for around 1,000 of the world's oral languages, which is 15%. They point out that 35% of the world's oral languages are in Africa, 30% in Asia and under 20% in the Pacific. They further argue that nine countries in the world have more than 200 languages each, accounting for more than half the world's languages, which is 3,490, while thirteen countries have more than 100 languages each. Twenty-two countries with just over 10% of the world's languages probably account for 75% (5,000) of the world's oral languages they opine.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the majority of the world's minority languages are under threat and may be endangered.

1.4 Research orientation and motivation for the study

Inspiration for the study focusing on the Itsekiri language is twofold. Firstly, a personal experience with my family and the use of the Itsekiri language and secondly, my academic and university life. The first experience is about a phenomenon that caught my attention in 2010 when I visited Nigeria following the death of my mother. During my visit to the city of Warri, the context of this research, I observed that family members including my siblings and extended relations were not speaking the Itsekiri language, their heritage language. They spoke either English or the Nigeria Pidgin English henceforth (NPE). In the course of our conversations, I spoke in Itsekiri, but their responses were in English. Several attempts to elicit a response in Itsekiri from my siblings, my nephews and nieces were unsuccessful. Though I resorted to some subtle coercion in Itsekiri, this was also unsuccessful. In fact, while the adults spoke English and NPE amongst themselves, my nephews and nieces spoke in Standard English. I was stunned at this linguistic behaviour.

Curiously but subtly, I asked why they were not speaking Itsekiri. The responses were quite amazing. The initial reaction to my question was a burst into a euphoria of laughter. The reasons they eventually gave were: one, most of their friends were non-Itsekiri-speaking, two, there were many different languages in the community and the environment, therefore English and NPE were the only common means of communication amongst friends. They also claimed to have become so used to speaking English and NPE that, they hardly remembered how to speak Itsekiri (a phenomenon that most of my interview participants corroborated.)

In addition to this, I noticed that children in the community were not speaking the Itsekiri language; neither did their parents speak Itsekiri with their children. There seemed to be a drift towards English monolingualism in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

To further satisfy my curiosity, I went out to observe linguistic behaviour and language use in public places such as churches, restaurants, markets and in the public transportation services. The situation was the same as that in my family.

At that point, I began recalling some characteristics of languages in danger I had read about in sociolinguistic literature.

The second experience that motivated this study is in connection with my familiarisation with some sociolinguistic notions relative to language endangerment I came across while taking a language policy course as an elective in the second year of my Masters' degree programme at the University of Strasbourg. Sociolinguistic terms such as language shift, language death, threatened languages, language vitality, language attrition, language contact, language hegemony learnt about in the course of the programme resonated with the sensed threatened situation of the Itsekiri language. In addition, elements indicative of language endangerment and language vitality equally caught my attention and made me realise that minority languages in Nigeria fell among the category of languages that may be threatened and endangered. Added to this, my exposure to a language awareness /*eveil aux langues* project, l'Eveil au langage et ouverture à la diversité linguistique (ELODIL) sensitised me further to the need to give minority languages a chance in the presence of dominant languages.

Consequently, with deep and continuous reflection, after several considerations including my readings on language endangerment, with considerable empirical knowledge on the subject, the

direction to take became clear. At that point, I thought I had a huge assignment beyond my rudimentary knowledge of language and worries about the future of heritage minority languages in Nigeria. Then came the urge to carry out an extensive study beyond the one at the Masters' degree level, with a view to understanding and ascertaining in depth the underlying causes of what appears to be language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community. After discussion with my then director of studies, with his encouragement, I decided to launch out and embark on a scientific and sociolinguistic study of minority languages and language endangerment using the Itsekiri language as a case study. This is because I consider the Itsekiri language, an example of a threatened and endangered language in Nigeria.

In view of the empirical and theoretical knowledge that characterise language endangerment at my disposal, most of the heritage minority languages in Nigeria seem to be in the same situation as the Itsekiri language.

1.5 Statement of the problem and rationale behind the study

From observation, in practice, English and NPE are the only effective means of communication among Nigerians from different linguistic backgrounds. Heritage minority languages seem to be losing their places to the dominant English language and NPE. Many seem threatened, endangered and are on the verge of extinction. Evidence from a linguistic survey carried out by Ayenbi (2014), indicate that the presence of the English language, the dominant and perceived official language in Nigeria considered as economically viable, appeared to be responsible for the switch from heritage minority languages.

The study observed that the Itsekiri language is increasingly declining due to insufficient use. Speakers of the language seemed to prefer the English language with high status existing in their communities to their own heritage minority language.

Sociolinguists, over the years, have increasingly advanced theories that tend to bring the question of language shift and language endangerment in a minority language setting into the limelight. However, further studies need to be undertaken in this domain as minority languages seem to be increasingly in a situation of threat due to abandonment by their speakers. With the presence of a dominant language, heritage language speakers may tend to adapt to the linguistic and

socioeconomic realities in their environment, and this appears to be the situation in the context of this doctoral research in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

In addition, there is the dearth and paucity of sociolinguistic research on the Itsekiri language. This research, which is exploratory, is the first attempt at an extensive sociolinguistic study of the Itsekiri language.

In his keynote address to the 1994 Conference of the Southern African Association of Applied Linguistics, Adegbija (1994), identified three problems faced by applied linguists in the African multilingual context. Firstly, Adegbija (ibid) notes that apart from the vibrant work in South Africa, there is very little focus on applied linguistic research in Africa. What there is tends to focus on the ex-colonial languages rather than heritage languages. Secondly, applied linguists in African countries other than South Africa tend to have very limited research resources. Thirdly, political, social, and economic instability in many parts of Africa seriously undermine the work of applied linguists. He points out, for example, that a program of work began in one political era can be summarily cut off in another. Therefore, the study is likely to fill in the gap caused by limited research in applied linguistics in Africa.

1.6 Significance of the study

In light of the above, given the paucity of research in applied linguistic in Africa, and especially in the field of language endangerment in relation to heritage minority languages in Nigeria, in general and particularly in the Itsekiri-speaking community, this research seeks to fill that gap. It contributes to the existing knowledge base in sociolinguistics research, in addition to opening a new vista of research in the Itsekiri language. It offers an insight into the sociolinguistic situation of the Itsekiri language while opening a new domain of research on endangered heritage minority language in Nigeria.

Considering the dearth of sociolinguistic material in the study of heritage minority languages in Nigeria, the study will serve as a reference point for Nigerian researchers who may be interested in carrying out similar research.

In addition, the research is likely to sensitise and create awareness amongst Nigerian and African sociolinguists with a view to drawing attention to the rapid loss of linguistic diversity in Africa in

general and in Nigeria especially. It is likely to provide useful guidance for further research in the field of language endangerment in Nigeria and the West Africa Sub-Region.

As the first sociolinguistic study on the Itsekiri language, findings in the research are likely to be of interest to a wide readership, including linguists, ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, sociolinguists, and educators whose domain of interest is heritage languages.

With the paucity of studies in language endangerment identified above, findings in this research may equally serve as a foundation for future studies in the field of language endangerment in heritage language settings. The study may create a basis for future scholars to play an active role in minority language maintenance and revitalization processes.

At the meso level, the study does not only suggest ways to resuscitate and rekindle the interest of Itsekiri speakers in their language, it equally suggests strategies to reverse the sensed language shift and loss of Itsekiri speech discourse with a view to averting decline in the language.

Finally, the study is equally significant as it proposes strategies to maintain, revitalise and document the Itsekiri language through provision of resource materials as well as pedagogical strategies for training Itsekiri teachers to boost the teaching and learning of the language.

1.7 Focus and scope of the research

Focusing on the linguistic practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community, the study examines language pattern demonstrated in what seems to be a shift from the Itsekiri heritage language to the prevailing and dominant English language and NPE in Warri. While analysing changing linguistic practices of speakers of the Itsekiri language in relation to the prevailing and dominant English language in their community, it focuses on language shift and change exemplified in the linguistic attitudes and behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language in relation to linguistic diversity in Nigeria. It equally examines the different ways in which the Itsekiri language is mobilised and used as a vehicle for personal and collective identity.

In addition, it investigates in-depth the remote and immediate causes of the seeming reluctance of the Itsekiri ethnic group to speak their language. Providing evidence of linguistic adaptation, it identifies changing linguistic practices in a socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural

context of the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group. The scope of this research is limited within the Itsekiri-speaking community and their changing linguistic practices.

1.8 Research objective, hypotheses and research questions

Based on the considerations expounded above I will now formulate the general research objective to guide the investigation. The objectives of the study are two-fold. In order to examine the phenomenon of language endangerment and language shift in consonance with the linguistic behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language, the study seeks first, to uncover and understand reasons behind the phenomenon of non-inter-generational transmission of the Itsekiri language and the seeming preference for the English language. Secondly, the study endeavours to ascertain the causes of the sensed language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Three key hypotheses underpin this research: The first is that Itsekiri is threatened and endangered due to inadequate use and non-intergenerational transmission, therefore risking extinction. I argue that in a situation where the present generation of Itsekiri-speaking parents are not transmitting the language to their children, their children will not have Itsekiri to transmit to their own children because they were not exposed to the language in the first place. Therefore, the third generation will not know Itsekiri. This is a threat to Itsekiri based on theoretical and empirical knowledge. Therefore, action is required to reverse the situation, and this research stands as one of the preliminary ways to address this challenge.

The second hypothesis is that proficiency in English is prerequisite to success in education and an effective means of social mobility, the Itsekiri language is not being used in regular families and social interaction.

A third assumption which seems evident considering the Nigerian linguistic landscape is that the Itsekiri-speaking people are adapting to the current and prevailing linguistic situation in their country, which requires not only successful communication with their neighbours, but also effective participation in the spheres of life in the local and the international community in consideration of globalization.

Therefore, in order to address the stated objectives, I ask the following directional questions in my fact-finding mission of which responses are likely to provide a direction to the investigative process.

- What are the causes of language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community?
- What are the factors responsible for non-intergenerational transmission?
- What is the role of English and NPE in the Itsekiri-speaking community?
- What could be the possible strategies to revitalize and maintain the Itsekiri language?

1.9 The researcher as an activist

I draw from Harrison (2007) who is of the view that when a language is about to die, speakers' efforts cannot bring it back from the brink. Only linguists can capture an accurate record in their recordings and analysis, which may be useful to future scientists, future societies, future generations and children of heritage-language speakers.

In as much as I do not entirely share Harrison's viewpoint in relation to speakers' effort to take their language from the brink, I see my role as a researcher contributing to the maintenance and survival of the Itsekiri language through the study, which stands as a way of creating awareness and sensitizing speakers of the language to the linguistic threat the language is facing in its current situation.

As a researcher and activist advocating for language survival, my initial posture and reasoning was to advocate for the survival of the Itsekiri language by proposing strategies to rekindle the interest of members of the ethnic group, including children and young people towards the language with a view to redressing the phenomenon of language shift. However, when I decided to embark on an academic study at the doctorate level, I came to the realisation that the thesis is an academic exercise that requires scientific knowledge and objectivity devoid of emotions and subjectivity. To this end, I became consciousness of the fact that I must keep a distance and not let my emotions take a better part of me in the course of the study.

Furthermore, as a research apprentice and a first-time sociolinguist from the Itsekiri ethnic group, I have not seen any sociolinguistic and ethnographic study on the Itsekiri language. I must acknowledge, however, the existence of some linguistic works on the Itsekiri language, which will be mentioned at the end of the study.

1.10 Structure of the study

As a general work plan, the thesis is structured in seven chapters. This first chapter is a general introduction to the study. It examines a general assumption about languages from the perspective of sociolinguists, a brief background on language endangerment in relation to minority languages, the research orientation and motivation for the study. It presents a statement of the problem, the rationale behind the study and its significance, the research objectives, the research questions and hypotheses as well as the research outline.

The second chapter dwells on the macro and the meso contexts that situate the study. It presents a brief history, the geopolitical, economic as well as the linguistic situation of Nigeria and zooms in on the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group. It examines the socio-political, economic and cultural contexts of speakers of the Itsekiri language as well as the evolution of the Itsekiri language. It equally highlights demographic and linguistic transformations in Warri, the principal city of the Itsekiri speaking people and brings to the fore the place of NPE in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

The third chapter examines the theoretical framework that underpins the study. It provides an overview of current sociolinguistic theories with a view to conceptualising the research. Drawing from experts in the field of language endangerment and minority languages, the two main concepts that operationalise the research, the chapter dwells on relevant literature directional to the research.

The fourth chapter examines the methodological framework of the study. It examines literature on ethnographic approach to qualitative research methodology. It details the research design, sample constitution, as well as the context and modes of data collection. It equally presents data processing and treatment, data analysis procedure and interpretation. Highlighting the role of the researcher, it briefly examines the researcher/participant relationship. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the challenges and limitations of the data collection process.

The fifth chapter, divided into three parts dwells on the research findings. The first part, which is further divided into four sections, presents ecologically related findings viewed from linguistic, sociopolitical, economic and cultural dimensions. The second part focuses on socio-psychosocially

related themes demonstrated in the Itsekiri speakers' perceptions of their language vis-à-vis the English language. The third part dwells on some important domain of use of the Itsekiri language.

The sixth chapter presents discussions and interpretations of the research findings vis-a-vis the theoretical framework that underpins the study while attempting to respond to the research questions and providing relevant information of the evidence of language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community as well as non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language.

The seventh and last chapter is in five parts. The first part presents a brief recap of the research findings; the second indicates contributions to the field of language endangerment in minority language settings, the third centres on future research directions fundamental to minority languages from the Nigerian perspective. The fourth dwells on limitations, constraints and challenges of the research process, while the fifth section presents a number of recommendations as suggested strategies to maintain and revitalise the Itsekiri language.

1.11 Summary

This introductory chapter opens the door to an investigative study of the Itsekiri language and the speakers of the language as well as the prevailing linguistic practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

The objective is to ascertain and understand the reasons behind the phenomenon of non-intergenerational transmission and the seeming reluctance and unwillingness on the part of speakers of the Itsekiri language to sufficiently use their language. The motivation for this study is driven by a number of factors that include observations, concerns and convictions relating to the Itsekiri language in Nigeria.

The chapter presents a few general facts about languages, an overview of language endangerment as observed by experts in the field of language endangerment, the research orientation and motivation for the study, statement of the problem and rationale behind the study. It equally presents the focus, scope, significance of the study, the research objectives, hypotheses, and research questions. It concludes with a reflection on the researcher as an activist, and the structure of the thesis.

2 Chapter 2 Context of the study

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the general context of the study. The aim is to provide relevant information that situate the study. Divided into three sections, it provides an insight that explains my research questions and findings within a broad societal context with a view to creating a more in-depth understanding of the sociolinguistic phenomenon under investigation.

The first section presents the geopolitical, the historical, the socioeconomic and the current sociolinguistic situation of Nigeria in general (what I have termed the macro context.) The second section examines the Itsekiri ethnic group and speakers of the Itsekiri language (the meso context). It presents their geographical location, historical, political, economic, sociocultural, linguistic context, and language use in particular. The description of the Itsekiri ethnic group and their community provides a deeper understanding of the phenomena of language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community. The last section dwells on the city of Warri, the principal city of the Itsekiri-speaking people and its specificities, demographic, linguistic transformations and the place of Nigerian Pidgin English in Warri. The city of Warri in which this study is situated is in the oil rich Niger Delta region and a host to several multinational oil corporations in Nigeria.

2.2 Macro context-Nigeria

2.2.1 Geographical location and historical background of Nigeria

Nigeria is on the African continent specifically in the west of Africa between longitude 3 and 14 degrees and latitude 4 and 14 degrees. It spans an area of 923,768 square kilometers. Surrounded by French-speaking countries, Nigeria is bordered in the northeast by the Republic of Chad, in the northwest by the Republic of Niger, in the southwest by the Republic of Benin and the Atlantic Ocean, and in the southeast by the Republic of Cameroon and the Mambila plateau.

The country of Nigeria came to be when Fredrick Lugard in 1914 amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates and instituted colonial administration. Before, then, the name Nigeria was not known. Historically, the geographical entity now called Nigeria used to be a vast territory made up of fragmented and diverse communities and ethnic groups with different cultures that lived independently of one another.

The people identified as the first indigenous ethnic group in Nigeria were the Nok people believed to be the first organized tribe in Africa. They lived in what is known today as Central Nigeria in 800 BC. In the 1884, what became Nigeria was a settlement of the Nok culture. The Terracotta art of the Nok settlement revealed a vast culture thriving in the area now called Kaduna State. **(See map of Nigeria on page 32).**

Before the arrival of Europeans to the coast of Nigeria, Osuntokun (2016) reports that it was dominated by independent empires, notably the Borno Empire in the north and the Benin Empire in the south. In the eighth century, the Kanem Bornu Empire was established in the north of Nigeria. Around 100 AD, the Hausa Kingdom and the Bornu Empire formed city-states in the north of Nigeria. Hausa and Fulani-speaking ethnic groups who originated from the Fouta Djallon Mountains and the Nok people of the Mambilla plateau near the Cameroun Mountains mainly populated the north. In the 11th century, the empire adopted Islam as a religion in consequence of the expansionary conquest of Uthman Dan Fodio (Osuntokun *ibid*).

According to Osuntokun (2016), around 100 AD, the inhabitants of the south- west region of Nigeria were the people of the cities of Ife and Oyo who were descendants of the Oduduwa lineage and constituted the Yoruba-speaking people who mainly inhabited the Yoruba-speaking states. Added to that was the Benin Empire, with the Edo-speaking ethnic group that formed the Benin tribes in the mid-west of Nigeria.

The south -east region consist of the Igbo linguistic ethnic group who occupied small communities and villages with community heads known as the red cap chiefs. Evidence of the Igbo civilization portrayed them as the first Bronze casters in Africa. This region of Nigeria has a boundary with the Republic of Cameroon.

The Mid-West Region, which was made up of the Bini-speaking people, some parts of Igbo-speaking, the Itsekiris, Urhobos, Ijaw and Isoko-speaking people was eventually carved out of the

Western region in 1967 to form the Mid-west province after Nigeria secured her independence from British rule.

These pre-colonial communities were highly organized societies with evolving administrative systems and core diplomatic functions, education centers and successful beehives of commerce. There were political structure such as the Benin Empire, Oyo Empire and the Sokoto Caliphate in the 19th century under the legendary Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio. The rulers of these empires expanded their economies through trade.

In the 16th Century, Amina, the warrior queen through her military conquest made Zazzau, now Zaria the centre of North Trans Sahara and the East -West- South Sudan Trade. Trade networks stretched as far as Europe and the Middle East and by the time the Portuguese arrived on the sea-coast of Benin in the late fifteenth Century, West Africans had been trading with foreign nations for 400 years (Osuntokun 2016).

Not all the states in Nigeria had centralized kingdoms or governments like the Itsekiri and the Bini Kingdoms. Ethnic groups like the Ibos in Eastern Nigeria were acephalous societies (Osuntokun 2016) without identified rulers or kings. The Ibo societies consisted of casts and clan heads with small communities led by chiefs. There were no centralized or united kingdoms headed by a king like in the North, the Southwest and the Mid-West.

Then in the 1400s, the first Europeans arrived. These were Portuguese who eventually started the slave trade off the west coast of Nigeria. The British, French and Dutch soon followed the Portuguese explorers. What attracted the Europeans initially were the Nigerian natural resources such as pepper, palm oil, peanuts, cocoa, cloth beads and ivory. However, they changed from trading in commodities to trading in human beings. Men, women and children were shipped away as slaves to the cotton fields of the Americas, and the plantations of the West Indies. (Osuntokun 2106). After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 in Europe and North America, the British used the combination of religion, commerce and politics to secure trading advantages for British companies. At the end of the slave trade in 1847, Osuntokun (2010) reports that the British became interested in Nigerian produce such as palm oil, palm kernels, cotton, cocoa, peanuts, tin and columbite.

It is noteworthy that the establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria was not without resistance and casualties. According to Osuntokun, the British trade merchants wanted to deal directly with the local traders in the hinterland, which the ethnic rulers, such as Olomu Nana of the Itsekiri, refused (see details in the meso context section on page 74) and their bid to control trade missions met with stiff resistance. When the indigenous rulers proved uncooperative, British diplomacy gave way to British gunboats (Osuntokun 2016). Their interests did not end with trade in Nigerian produce; they decided to administer conquered territories. The British established Nigeria as a colony in 1884 at the Berlin conference after the partition of the African continent into colonies by the European powers who eventually instituted colonial administration in their colonies of gain.

The British armed forces entered and captured Lagos Bay in 1851, deposed the king of Lagos, installed a ruler and formerly annexed it in 1861 as the first crown colony in Nigeria and governed it directly from Britain.

However, British rule did not run smoothly. Nigerians from north to south, east to west resisted and fought gallantly to preserve their freedom. Remarkable heroes according to Osuntokun (2016) include King Jaja of Opobo, the indomitable chief Nana Olomu of the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group who singlehandedly and independently protected the economic and political independence of the Itsekiri kingdom for several years until 1894 when he was forcibly deported for being a threat to colonial interest.

Furthermore, Oba Ovonramwen of the Benin Empire resisted the British attempt to take over his trade routes and banned them from entering his territories. However, the British military might, in 1897 overpowered the Oba of Benin and forced him into exile in Calabar in Southern Nigeria; while the British regiments entered the ancient city of Benin and annexed it to form part of the Lagos protectorate (Osuntokun 2010).

Finally, Britain took control of the northern and southern regions with Lagos as a separate colony and eventually merged both regions to become Nigeria with Lagos as the capital in 1914. Lord Lugard, the British colonial governor, was instrumental to the merger to facilitate colonial administration. The English language was then imposed to accelerate and facilitate communication for a smooth running of the colonial rule.

The eventual conquest of Nigeria by the British warlords, and the introduction of the English language saw the coming of European missionaries who brought Christianity to Nigeria. Jowitt (2020) remarks that early missionaries who arrived in Nigeria settled in the south -west regional cities of Abeokuta and Ibadan and established missionary schools and churches. Christianity was introduced and preached to the local people in southern Nigeria. Though Christianity spread to some parts of northern Nigeria, however, Islamic religion is predominant. The southern region of Nigeria is predominantly Christian oriented while the northern region is predominantly Muslim where Islam is practiced as religion. Nigeria gained her independence from Britain in 1960 and became a Republic in 1963. A civil war was fought in Nigeria from 1967 to 1970.

2.1.2 The socio-political and economic situation of Nigeria

According to World Bank sources, Nigeria's population was estimated to be 182,200,000 in 2015. However, recent demographic predictions estimate the Nigeria population to be about 200 million, which makes it the fastest growing population in the world. Nigeria is classified as the country with the largest population in Africa and the ninth most populous country in the world.



Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing major cities. Source: (New World Encyclopaedia)

The city of Abuja became the administrative capital of Nigeria in 1976 while Lagos, the former capital, remains the economic capital. According to the 1999 version of the Nigerian constitution, the country is officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Politically, Nigeria runs a presidential system of government modelled after the United States of America. It is divided into 36 states, with a federal capital territory and 774 local government municipal councils. At the helm of affairs, are the President and vice President. Power is centered in Abuja – the seat of the Nigerian Government. As stated in the Nigerian constitution, the 36 states are run by Governors, while the municipal councils referred to as local government councils are headed by chairmen and chairpersons (Nigerian constitution 1999).

Nigeria has a National Assembly which consists of the Federal House of Assembly with 509 members and the Senate with 109 members who represent different constituencies. (Nigerian constitution *ibid*).

The country was however divided into 6 geopolitical zones by a former Nigerian head of State General Sani Abacha. The former ruling party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for easy administration, implemented the zoning phenomenon. Though, this division is yet to be officially adopted by the National Assembly, it has come to be accepted by the public because it makes for easy identification of geographical regions. The zones are the Northwest zone with large cities such as Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto and Zamfara. The Northeast geopolitical zone with principal cities such as Maiduguri, Yola, Damaturu, Bauchi and Gombe. The North central zone with Makurdi, Minna, Lokoja- the first capital city of Nigeria before the amalgamation of the North and South. South- South known as the Niger Delta Region (**see detail on Niger delta on page 62 in the meso section**), with Port Harcourt, Warri and Eket - three cities that are hosts to multinational oil companies in Nigeria, as well as Calabar to mention but a few. The Southeast geopolitical zone consists of major cities such as Enugu, Onitsha, Aba, and Owerri, and the Southwest zone with Lagos and Ibadan as major cities. Important commercial cities in Nigeria are Lagos, the economic capital in the Southwest, Kano and Kaduna in the north, Onitsha and Enugu in the Southeast, Port Harcourt and Warri in the South -South region.

The Nigeria economic situation can be explained from the backdrop of her major source of income, which is oil. As Africa's largest oil producer, and the fifth largest oil producing country in the

world, Nigeria outpaced South Africa in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014 and became Africa's leading economic power.

The economy of Nigeria is mainly boosted by the presence of oil resources in the Southern region in which this research is situated. The presence of multinational oil corporations in the city of Warri, the capital of the Itsekiri-speaking people, is a magnet for job seekers who migrate from the countryside and environs to the city to seek greener pastures. Movement of people from the rural areas to cities for work in the oil industry explains the presence of many ethnolinguistic groups in the city of Warri.

Other natural resources that boost the Nigerian economy include tin, coltan, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead, zinc, natural gas, and hydropower. Nigeria consists of arable land: 33%, forests 12%, permanent crops 3%, permanent pastures 44%, and irrigated land 9,570 km².

As in many other countries, social stratification is exemplified in distinctions between the rich and the poor, between the elites who are schooled and the unschooled or people with limited education.

2.1.3 Colonialism and introduction of exoglossic languages in Nigeria

The introduction of foreign languages, referred to as exoglossic languages (Awonusi 2013) or languages non-indigenous to Nigeria such as English, French and Arabic, into Nigeria is highly relevant to this study.

The following section focuses on the emergence and development of the English language in Nigeria including its specificities within the context of this doctoral study.

2.1.3.1. The historical perspective of the English language in Nigeria

A very important phenomenon in the history of Nigeria is the emergence of English language on the Nigerian soil. A comprehensive sociolinguistic study of Nigerian cannot be carried out without the mention of English.

Various Nigerian sociolinguists have carried out extensive studies on the advent of English language in Nigeria. Jowitt (2020) is of the view that it is impossible to say exactly when the

English language was first heard in Nigeria. He reports two versions of the advent of English in Nigeria.

First, according to Jowitt (ibid), English was brought to Nigeria in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and became firmly established after the nineteenth century during the era of colonial rule, and has remained so after independence was attained in 1960. He maintains however, that no extensive study of the history of English in Nigeria has ever been carried out. Citing (Fafunwa 1991), Jowitt (2020) points out that what is known of this subject is what has been gleaned from books or articles primarily concerning the history of education in Nigeria or from general histories written by Crowder (1962), Isichei (1983), Falola (1988), Afigbo (2005), Ikime (2005). Jowitt (2020) opines that English came to Nigeria as in other parts of the world as a result of European trade missions manifested in commercial enterprises.

Second, Jowitt (ibid) reports that other Nigerian scholars in sociolinguistics attribute the emergence of the English language in Nigeria to the arrival of a certain Captain Windham with two ships and a crew of well over one hundred off the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, during the reign of Queen Mary 1 of England in 1553. Windham's mission was to seek trade with one of the Nigerian kings- the Oba of Benin, mentioned earlier, (**see section on the history of Nigeria, page 30**) whose ancient kingdom was the most powerful and extensive in the region at that time. According to Jowitt (ibid), the visitors must have spoken English in the court of the Oba of Benin.

Jowitt (2020) further reports that the Portuguese, who had reached the Gulf in 1472 and Benin in 1485, had preceded Windham's expedition. According to him, cordial trade relations were established between Portugal and Benin and Catholic missionary activities equally began and continued in Benin and Warri until the eighteenth century. Jowitt, (ibid) maintains that the first European language that Nigerians began to speak was Portuguese, manifested in the incursion of Portuguese vocabulary in the Itsekiri language (**see section on the development of the Itsekiri language in the meso context, page 76**).

In addition, NPE began to develop as a result of this early contact with the Portuguese (**see the origin of Nigerian Pidgin English, page 39**). According to Jowitt, Nigerian scholars commonly regard 1842 as the date of the simultaneous arrival of Christianity and the English language on the Nigerian soil. He remarks that, early missionaries who arrived in Nigeria settled in the south -west regional cities of Abeokuta and Ibadan and established missionary schools.

Furthermore, with reference to the Nigerian socio-political history, Nzeaka (2017), observes that the presence of the English language in Nigeria is linked to the British colonial administration and that English language was introduced in Nigeria when Fredrick Lugard, the then British colonial administrator, merged the two regions of northern and southern in 1914. **(See section on the history of Nigeria on page 30).**

According to Nigerian sociolinguists, in the pre-colonial era, African languages were oral and were handed down from generation to generation. These languages were embedded in the cultural norms of pre-colonial societies and speakers of heritage languages were proud of their languages. Then came the Europeans in the guise of religion, however, with economic interest. Contact with the West changed the social dispensation when foreign cultures met African cultural systems.

Nzeaka (2017) remarks that, after the amalgamation of Nigeria, against the backdrop of diverse linguistic groups and identities, Lord Lugard changed the society with the introduction of the English language into all facets of the country's social and administrative organization especially schools and churches. Christopher (ibid) further observes that at the early stage of colonial rule in Nigeria, English was taught first to converts to facilitate the spread of Christianity. He notes that Missionaries used the English language as a medium of converting Nigerians to Christianity and churches were established in various parts of the country.

He further reports that returnee slaves in the nineteenth century established churches in Nigeria. Catholic and Anglican churches were established in southern Nigeria, while Evangelical and Lutheran churches were mainly concentrated in Northern Nigeria, prior to the arrival of Othman Dan Fodio with his inordinate ambition to conquer the north and establish Islam.

Similarly, Ifemeje (1978) points out that colonial schools were introduced for the purpose of educating individuals to work in the public services such as postal services, railroad lines and the police force in addition to producing clerks for federal agencies. Ifemeje (ibid) remarks that students were required to compose essays and poems about snowflakes and London to the detriment of their environmental languages, in addition to being trained to become assistants to Missionaries, government and company officials. To strengthen staff capacity, subjects such as

English, Arithmetic, and vocational subjects/trades such as woodwork, printing, and bricklaying were taught he observes.

Furthermore, Nzeaka (2017) points out that the main thrust of colonialism was not to develop the Nigerian State but was rather driven by economic exploitation and the provision of commercial infrastructure for the evacuation of raw materials. State policies of the colonial times resulted in speakers of Nigerian languages disconnecting from their languages for fear of being sanctioned he observes. He further remarks that the colonial language policy signifies the difference between cultures and their possession of power, spelling out the distance between subordinate and superordinate, between bondsman and the lord in terms of their race and language. According to Nzeaka (2017) English was a subtle assault on the population and termed a form of attack on the existing social norms.

Furthermore, Nzeaka (ibid) is of the view that colonialism, termed cultural imperialism, diluted African linguistic patterns. He posits that the greatest achievement of colonialism is the gradual, but steady erosion of indigenous heritage languages in Nigeria. English language stymied the evolution of indigenous languages because it was used vigorously to protect a few educated Nigerians and the colonialist Nzeaka (ibid). According to him, while the Yoruba language was used to preach the gospel in some parts of Nigeria, especially in the southwest and local languages used in some northern states in Nigeria, the situation was however different in the southeast and the then mid-west where the English language was the main language of Evangelism (Nzeaka 2017).

Similarly, Ubaku & Ugwuaja (2016) observe that missionaries encouraged people to disassociate themselves from cultural affiliations claiming that they were satanic, un-Christian and that their heritage languages was retrogressive. In addition, the advent of colonialism and the introduction of English in formal education and in all domains including public functions, administration, media, and business transformed the Nigerian linguistic landscape. The sole dependence on English language as the overarching means of communication in important domains mentioned above explains its importance in the Nigerian context to date as well as its relevance to this study.

The introduction of the English language in Nigeria did not only facilitate colonial administration and rule and affected the convergence of the economic and political situation in Nigeria, but it also influenced the linguistic situation.

Moreover, the English language was not the only foreign language introduced into Nigeria. The Othman religious conquest in the early centuries saw the introduction of Arabic in the daily lives of people in northern Nigeria. Awonusi (2013) posits that early linguistic interaction between people in northern Nigeria and the Arabs via the twelfth century Trans-Saharan Trade and the Fulani Jihad resulted in the use of Arabic as a language of religious activities by Muslims, apart from the Shuwa Arabic settlers of Borno.

Similarly, Awonusi equally remarks that interaction between the European sea-merchants and the Itsekiri trade merchant, chief Nana Olomu in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (**see page 76**) resulted in the development of -the Portuguese Pidgin (now extinct) (**see page 40**). The use of English and the development of an English-based Pidgin is discussed later in this chapter.

2.1.3.2. Specificities of the English language in Nigeria

The presence of English language in Nigeria is laden with diverse peculiarities and distinctiveness. These peculiarities are entrenched in the government linguistic and educational policies that placed it well above other languages in Nigeria.

For effective communication between people of diverse linguistic backgrounds and to enforce relationship between the colonial masters and the Nigerian populace, English was taught in schools and used during the indirect rule where it was adopted and spoken by the locals who worked as clerks and office assistants in the British administration. Whereas the use of English was promoted and accelerated all over the country, Nigerian languages were relegated and confined to the communities and regions where they were located and mainly spoken.

In line with that, while tracing the historical perspective or linguistic neo-imperialism in general, Coupland (2010) is of the opinion that the present-day strength of English is a direct consequence of European expansion throughout the world since 1492 and successive waves of colonization. He is of the view that the political and economic influence of governments have supported the growth and expansion of the English language while marginalising indigenous languages with low status.

In that perspective, when Nigeria gained her independence from British rule in 1960, the English language spread all around the country with a large speakership whereas heritage minority languages remained confined to their regions. The subsequent adoption of English language, its important role and function as medium of communication in the country, following its introduction into the polity and education during the colonial era gave impetus to its hegemonic status in Nigeria (Awonusi 2007).

Furthermore, Nzeaka & Ehondor (2021) are of the view that colonialism harmed the prowess, linguistic attributes and progression of heritage and minority languages through conquest and imposition of cultural hegemony in Nigeria.

The spread of religious activities demonstrated in the propagation of Christianity by European missionaries using their language may be relevant at this point. Coupland (2010) argues that the promotion and hierarchization of languages often dovetailed with missionary activity. Christianity accompanied several European languages worldwide, just as Arabic has been an integral part of the spread of Islam (Coupland 2010).

In Nigeria, pupils and students in both primary and secondary schools learn English as a second language. It is equally acquired and spoken in homes and public places. It is dominant in domains such as education, politics, training, in the economy etc. Currently, English enjoys a positive status and plays an important role as an international language in Nigeria. Although, its status is not clearly defined as the official or national language in the Nigerian constitution, it has been adopted since the colonial era as the language of schooling, the media, administration and international relations. Despite its ambiguous status, it is nevertheless widely spoken in all major cities. As language of instruction, it is present in all levels of schooling from nursery to university. Akinnaso (1990) points out that the Nigeria national policy on education encourages the teaching and learning of English in schools. **(See section on the current linguistic policies in Nigeria, p 57).**

Not only is English the language of instruction in school, it is also the preferred language of education in Nigeria. The seeming preference of English appears to exclude the use of heritage languages in academic and public institutions. This is more the case in southern Nigeria where there is no specific dominant heritage language; unlike in northern Nigeria where English is learnt alongside the dominant Hausa language. English is the only effective means of communication amongst individuals from a wide variety of different linguistic backgrounds.

Danladi (2013) remarks that in the 1950s English was, for a vast majority of Nigerians, a second language whose acquisition was imposed by entry into school and later in interactions with the administrative environment. Presently in twenty first century Nigeria, English is not only a second, third or fourth language in speakers' linguistic repertoires, used much more than their heritage languages, it seems gradually becoming the home language of many families in towns and cities. English could be said to increasingly becoming the first language of children and the young generation, transmitted to them by their parents first in homes, then in schools especially in urban areas. Over time, English is becoming more and more important especially in the school system and in the public sphere (Danladi 2013).

2.1.4. The origin and evolution of Nigerian Pidgin English

In this section, I present the origin, the spread, nature and the changing profile of Nigerian Pidgin English, henceforth (NPE) described by Nigerian sociolinguists as a variety of standard English. Various schools of thoughts in the domain of sociolinguistics in Nigeria have advanced different hypotheses regarding the origin of NPE.

The initial accounts of the origin of NPE were traced to contacts between Europeans and ethnolinguistic groups in the coastal region of Nigeria between 1469 and 1650, first with the Portuguese and the Dutch, then with the British (Egbokhare, 2003). Mou et al (2017) observe that the origin of NPE is traceable to contact made between the riverine communities of the Niger Delta and the Europeans, pioneered by the Portuguese.

Elugbe & Omamor (1991), on their part observe that NPE arose from trade relationship between multilingual coastal communities of Nigeria and the Portuguese, their earliest trading partners in 1469, which brought about a Portuguese-based Pidgin language known as Negro or Pidgin Portuguese. Pidgin Portuguese was the trade language between the indigenous people and Portuguese trade merchants in the fifteenth century (Egbokhare *ibid*). However, the Portuguese Pidgin was short lived with the ousting of the Portuguese traders by other European traders namely, the French, the Dutch and finally the British. Among these European interest groups, the British trade contact, which started from the beginning of the 17th century endured, from which an English-based Pidgin was developed along the coast (Elugbe & Omamor 1991). Jowitt (2020) observes that the first European language that Nigerians spoke was Portuguese.

Similarly, the account of Faraclas (1978) traced the origin of NPE to missionaries and freed slaves from Sierra Leone. He reports that slaves from the Niger Delta had to speak a kind of Pidgin Portuguese to be able to communicate with their masters.

These two accounts suggest that the emergence of NPE was as a result of the communicative need firstly between early European traders and their indigenous trading partners and secondly between the early missionaries and freed slaves who had to devise a means of communication for the purpose of smooth interaction.

Further tracing the development of NPE in Nigeria, Elugbe & Omamor (1995) posit that the spread of NPE was due to the existence of many ethnic groups that did not understand each other's language, which invariable meant lack of a common language. Elugbe & Omamor attribute the rapid growth of NPE to the linguistically heterogeneous environment where contact was marginal and none of the languages in contact predominates literarily. In other words, the inability of one ethnic group or language to dominate the other is said to be a contributory factor to the rapid development of NPE, especially in southern Nigeria.

In addition, Elugbe & Omamor (ibid) observe that ethnic hostilities, historical rivalries and the politics of divide and rule by the British ensured communities were perpetually in competition and integration was minimal. Mutual suspicion, competition for resources, ethnic and religious conflicts due to diversity was the order of the day they opine. Consequently, NPE enjoyed ethnic neutrality, and this encouraged a horizontal and vertical spread within the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria especially.

Elugbe & Omamor (1992), posit that creation of political structures following the Nigerian Independence in 1960, government policy to regroup ethnic minorities created an impetus for interaction in which groups were forced to coexist. Cohabitation amongst ethnic groups with different languages was imperative and this engendered interaction.

They further maintain that rapid urbanisation of Nigeria through improved road networks, communication and creation of new states, migration of skilled workers and labour to the city centres of trade and the elimination of diversity through the creation of states along ethnolinguistic lines further encouraged the spread of the NPE. With the need for intergroup communication, the

people resorted to a common language not associated with any group. Since NPE was already in existence, it easily filled the gap thereby serving as a common means of communication (Elugbe & Omamor 1995).

Another factor attributed to the development and spread of the NPE according to Elugbe & Omamor (ibid) is the Nigerian Civil War, which took place from 1967 to 1970. Members of the Nigerian military and police force who fought in the war belonged to diverse ethnic groups and spoke different languages. According to Elugbe & Omamor, ethnic minorities who did not have a common language dominated the ranks of the Nigerian army and the police force. Converging at the war fronts, the need to interact linguistically saw NPE as the only means of communication common to them.

NPE was not only extensively used during the war and adopted as the vehicular language of the Nigerian Security Forces, it became the only linguistic communicative apparatus available in that context. Consequently, families of the security personnel from different linguistic background had to use it in various contexts in residential barracks. This is responsible for the NPE being referred to as “barracks language” in Nigeria, as members of the Nigeria military and police force transmitted it to their children (Akanke 2016).

Similarly, Jowitt (2019) maintains that in the First World War, Nigerian soldiers fought in the British army against the Germans in Cameroon and East Africa, and since they served in the ranks and came from different ethnolinguistic origin, NPE functioned as the common means of communication. According to Jowitt (2020), Army Barracks thus became a permanent community for the use and spread of NPE.

Furthermore, Filani (2016) observes that Nigerian government officials who had opportunity to work with the Whites as office employees during the colonial period wanted to identify with the later due to their prestigious status, therefore tried to adopt the colonial master’s way of talking especially in social interactions. He remarks that in trying to imitate the White man, the officials mixed English with their indigenous languages and were proud of their role as the white man’s friend.

Additionally, Mafeni (1971) observes that the existence of some forms of early Pidgin were based on Nigerian languages. It could be deduced therefore, that, the multilingual nature of Nigeria and its linguistic diversity may have paved the way for NPE, a newly developed speech code, which does not belong to any ethnolinguistic group in Nigeria.

Furthermore, (Jowitt 2000) posits that NPE is fast developing into Creole as most of its population use it as their first language in the oil rich Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, which records the most linguistically diverse population; notably in the coastal area of Delta State of Nigeria.

Although, it is not linked to any ethnic group, NPE is a vehicular language and *lingua franca* amongst diverse linguistic groups which (Frąckiewicz (2019) equally argues, is fast becoming a first language in some homes in Southern Nigeria especially in a milieu where parents are non-schooled or have limited education.

In describing the nature of the NPE, Omamor (1992) identifies four varieties of NPE. The Port Harcourt and the Warri-Sapele-Benin varieties spoken and used in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, the Pidginised Hausa spoken by non-native speakers in markets in the Northern Nigeria boundary with the Lake Chad region, and the Lagos variety spoken mainly in Lagos, South of Nigeria. The Lagos variety contains some Yoruba linguistic elements.

Omamor (1990) equally identifies two forms of linguistic creations that originated from Lagos which she terms “pseudo pidgin” attributed to the languages of “Waka about” (a popular column in the defunct Lagos *Week-end* newspaper and “Zebrudaya”, the hero of the defunct *Masquerade*, a popular comedy on television in the early 1980s). These linguistic forms mainly used by the public in Lagos and Port Harcourt cities were derived from the linguistic varieties used in the popular TV show and new paper columns (Omamor 1992).

Furthermore, Omamor points out that the language of “Waka about” hovers precariously between what many Nigerians term “pure” Pidgin and something that at the same time shares features akin to those associated with the language of Onitsha pamphlets substandard English. (The Onitsha pamphlets, according to Jowitt (2020) were written by persons of lesser education in Nigeria.

The Britannica Encyclopedia (2023) on its part refers to the Onitsha pamphlets as 20th-century genre of sentimental, moralistic novels and pamphlets produced by semi-literate writers such as fledgling journalists, taxi drivers, and sold at the bustling city of Onitsha market in eastern Nigeria. Omamor (1992) opines that these mixed languages or inter-languages could be termed “awful Pidgin” and does not belong to any ethnolinguistic group in particular. She describes the “pseudo pidgin” of “Waka about” and “Zebrudaya” as idiolectal and idiosyncratic inventions with some comical characteristics.

Furthermore, Obiechina (1984) observes that varieties of NPE emerged as a result of the linguistic diversity of the substrate situation. He classifies NPE into five (5) variants according to regions in which they are used. According to him, speakers of NPE are mainly found in the following regions and cities. South-West -Lagos and Ibadan. South Central, Abraka, Warri, Isoko, Sapele, Agbor, Effurun, Agbaraha-Oto and Ewu in Delta State of Nigeria. Cross-River -Calabar, Akwa-Ibom, Uyo, Eastern region – Rivers State- Port Harcourt, and Kalabari Regions, Anambra – Onitsha, Imo – Owerri, Abia – Aba, North-East – Maiduguri, North-West -Kano and Kaduna.

Similarly, in a sociolinguistic study on NPE carried out among Nigerian students in some Universities in Nigeria (Akande & Salami 2010) categorize NPE into three: (1) Ordinary NPE spoken by most Nigerians, (2) Wafe-rank, a special variety popular among Nigerian university students; and (3) Hooligan’s version popularly associated with touts, area boys or hoodlums.

Ibrahim (2016), on his part points out that, like other pidgin languages around the world, NPE is not only made up of substrate and superstrate languages, the structure of NPE derives its vocabulary from English (superstrates) and it sounds systems from the syntax of the local languages (substrate). In other words, it is a mixture of various heritage languages and English (Danladi 2013). As a substrate of the heritage languages, young people create new words and expressions to enrich its vocabulary (Ibrahim *ibid*). Expressions and lexical items are drawn from languages indigenous to the environment. Enriched with the heritage languages, its evolution could be said to be both vertical and horizontal among the old, the young, and across states in Nigeria.

Furthermore, NPE falls within the category labels proposed by Lewis & Simons (2010) on the Ethnologue website as languages of wide coverage.

NPE is known to have a wider coverage than any other language in Nigeria in terms of geographical spread and number of speakers besides English. BBC Pidgin news (2016), an arm of the the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), London observes that it is difficult to know the precise number of speakers of NPE in Nigeria as it is not formally studied in schools but spoken in varying degrees of proficiency especially among young people. Although Jowitt (2020) shares this view, nonetheless, various Nigerian linguists have attributed varying numbers to speakers of NPE. Faraclas (2013) remarks that about 140 million inhabitants of Nigeria are fluent speakers of NPE, making it the most widely spoken language in Nigeria, while Egbohare & Caron (2018) on their part maintain around 100 million people speak NPE.

Jowitt (ibid) further observes that NPE has become a famously spoken lingua franca in Nigeria and that many towns and city dwellers are at least bilingual in NPE and one heritage language. While pointing out that it is used in some regions as a second language, Ihimere (2006) argues that NPE has creolized into the native language of about 3 to 5 million Nigerians and used as a second language by at least another 75 million people. Without specifying any figure, Jibril (1995) equally posits that among the existing Nigerian languages today, NPE has the highest number of speakers.

One may be poised to ask: has NPE gained ground because of the myriad and diverse minority and ethnic languages in Nigeria? No ethnic group or community seem to identify with it, neither does it seem indigenous to any group. NPE appears to be a common language to all like the English language and serves as a vehicular language for some social strata of the society all over Nigeria. It could be said to serve as a means of communication among individuals who do not belong to the same ethnic group, who speak different languages.

Despite, the seeming rapid growth and development of NPE, its use and status seems polemical. It seems to have a controversial status in terms of speakers' attitude towards it.

Although in 1950s, 60s and 70s print media and television houses published and cast news respectively in NPE, the educated and elite families rejected it due to its demotic and anti-bourgeois connotations (Jowitt 2020). It was stigmatised, regarded as “unruly jargon”, “vulgar” and “broken English” associated mainly with a socio-economically deprived set of people; the image attached to it was derogatory (Agheyisi 1972). It was referred to as a language of peasants

and street language, used in homes where parents were unschooled or uneducated, especially by those from the lower class or bottom rung of the ladder in the Nigerian society. People who spoke NPE were relegated to the background. Agheyisi (ibid) observes that the typical users of NPE were those that had little or no formal education.

Nonetheless, this notion seems to have changed. NPE is now spoken by all and sundry in Nigeria regardless of one's educational background and social status. The idea that NPE is the language of the un-schooled is no longer tenable as many educated people use and speak NPE proficiently (Akande & Salami 2010). Akande & Salami point out that between 80% and 90% of university students in Nigeria claim to speak and read magazines in NPE. Although NPE is not a medium of instruction in Nigerian schools, students often use it in situations where rules are not regulated, notably outside the classroom. As a language of public announcements and information campaigns, university professors, graduates, lawyers and other professionals have all embraced NPE (Jowitt 2020).

Similarly, Ibrahim (2016) posits that NPE, which was considered a debased, bastardized, jargonized and intellectually inferior language in Nigeria, is gradually growing to the status of language of wider communication. It is commonly used within circle of friends informally especially in various public contexts and spaces such as clubs, restaurants, markets, in multi -ethnic neighbourhoods, on school playgrounds, hospitals, in common transportation systems, interstate motor parks, and carpooling spaces (Danladi 2013).

Considered a lingua franca in Nigeria, linguists are gradually recognising NPE and it is adjudged a variety of English with as much right to exist as any other variety of English (Elugbe & Omamor 1992). It is used freely by civil servants, security personnel and in all works of life in all social strata of the Nigerian society.

Additionally, NPE serves the larger group of unschooled or uneducated persons in communicating with each other. It seems to be fast becoming the first language of children from homes whose parents are unschooled or uneducated. It serves the out -of- school youth in communicating in their daily endeavours.

Furthermore, Owusu et al (2016) observe that because of the linguistic complexity of Nigeria, most ethnically heterogeneous cities such as Warri, Sapele, Port Harcourt, Lagos, and Abuja use NPE as lingua franca. NPE seems to have supplanted or overtaken English language in most communities especially in big cities in Nigeria. Warri, the principal city in this study is particularly known for the development and evolution of NPE in Nigeria.

Ayenbi (2014) observes that NPE is the trade language and means of communication amongst ethnic groups of diverse linguistic origins. It is used for buying and selling in various large and small markets. Beside the city of Warri, NPE thrives in other linguistically diverse and commercial cities such as Lagos in southwest, and Onitsha and Aba in the southeast regions of Nigeria. For example, it is the main trade language at various international markets in Nigeria, notably, Alaba International Market situated in Badagry, Lagos State, Onitsha main market and Aba International Market in Eastern Nigeria where Nigerian businessmen and women deal on imported goods worth millions of Naira.

As the language of business transaction common to buyers and sellers in these markets, NPE serves as means of livelihood to individuals and families and contributes to economic development of the cities in which the markets are located. Added to that, Danladi (2013) argues that NPE has become the regular medium of communication, as many tourists and foreigners are making efforts to understand it for the purpose of doing business especially in commercial cities such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Benin city and Warri in the Niger Delta region where many multinationals are found.

Furthermore, NPE is used in the social and mass media as well as the print media (Opeyemi 2021). Media houses such as Naija FM Radio Station and WAZOBIA Radio Station now exclusively anchor all their programmes in NPE. Others that broadcast some of their programmes in NPE include Radio Faaji (social commentaries, political issues and news), Purity FM (public interactive programmes), Lagos State Television Station (sports, news and social commentaries) and Delta Broadcasting Service news, sports and social issues.

In addition, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has recognised NPE, reputed to be a famous language fast developing and increasingly evolving, with some airtime dedicated to it on a BBC Pidgin English programme. This is a recognition of the influence of NPE as it makes waves in international arena. A BBC (2020) Pidgin programme commentator observed that “over 75

million Nigerians could know NPE known as “Naija” as a second language. The presenter remarked that “when a language gets support from a world organisation like the BBC, it is prestigious and an affirmation of that language. He was of the view that NPE is now a major language especially when people say it poses a threat to English.

In line with that, Akande (2016) opines that the NPE is not only in competition with Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo, the three recognised major languages in Nigeria, but in contention for official recognition in national debates. He remarks that there has been a call for the consideration of NPE as language of instruction in schools by Nigerian linguists. The Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) now recognizes NPE in its members’ literary works as many books and poetry volumes have been published in NPE (Ibrahim 2016). Some of the notable works written in NPE include: Eriata Oribhabor’s *If Yu Hie Se A De Prizin*, Ezenwa-Ohaeto’s *I wan Bi President*, Tunde Fatunde’s *No Food No Country* and Ola Rotimi’s *Grip Am*.

Similarly, NPE is used as a language of pleasure. Nigerian musicians and comedians are promoting NPE, to the extent that it has become an acceptable language in the entertainment industry in Nigeria. Among Nigerian musicians and comedians, NPE is the predominant language of expression. For example, comedians from the Warri extraction invent new neologisms, in addition to popular musicians such as Fela Kuti, D.Banj, Idris Abdulkarim, Wiz-kid, Daddy Shockey, Iyanya, 2-Face and P. Square, Basket mouth who use NPE in entertainment (Ibrahim 2016).

Furthermore, NPE seems to serve as a unifying factor amongst Nigerians in the Diaspora. It is the language common to Nigerians in the Diaspora, which they preferably speak within their circle. When Nigerians in the Diaspora come together for an event, the language they speak mainly is NPE. They take pleasure in speaking it. For them, it amounts to fun, and they are delighted and proud to speak it. For example, to some Nigerians living in the United Kingdom, NPE seems a delight to speak.

In a study carried out by (Ibrahim 2016) on NPE as a preferred medium of communication among Nigerian staff of Controlled Event Solutions, an event management company in Manchester UK; with the purpose of examining the effectiveness of NPE, Ibrahim (ibid) observes that Nigerians in the company expressed preference for NPE due to its simplicity and neutrality.

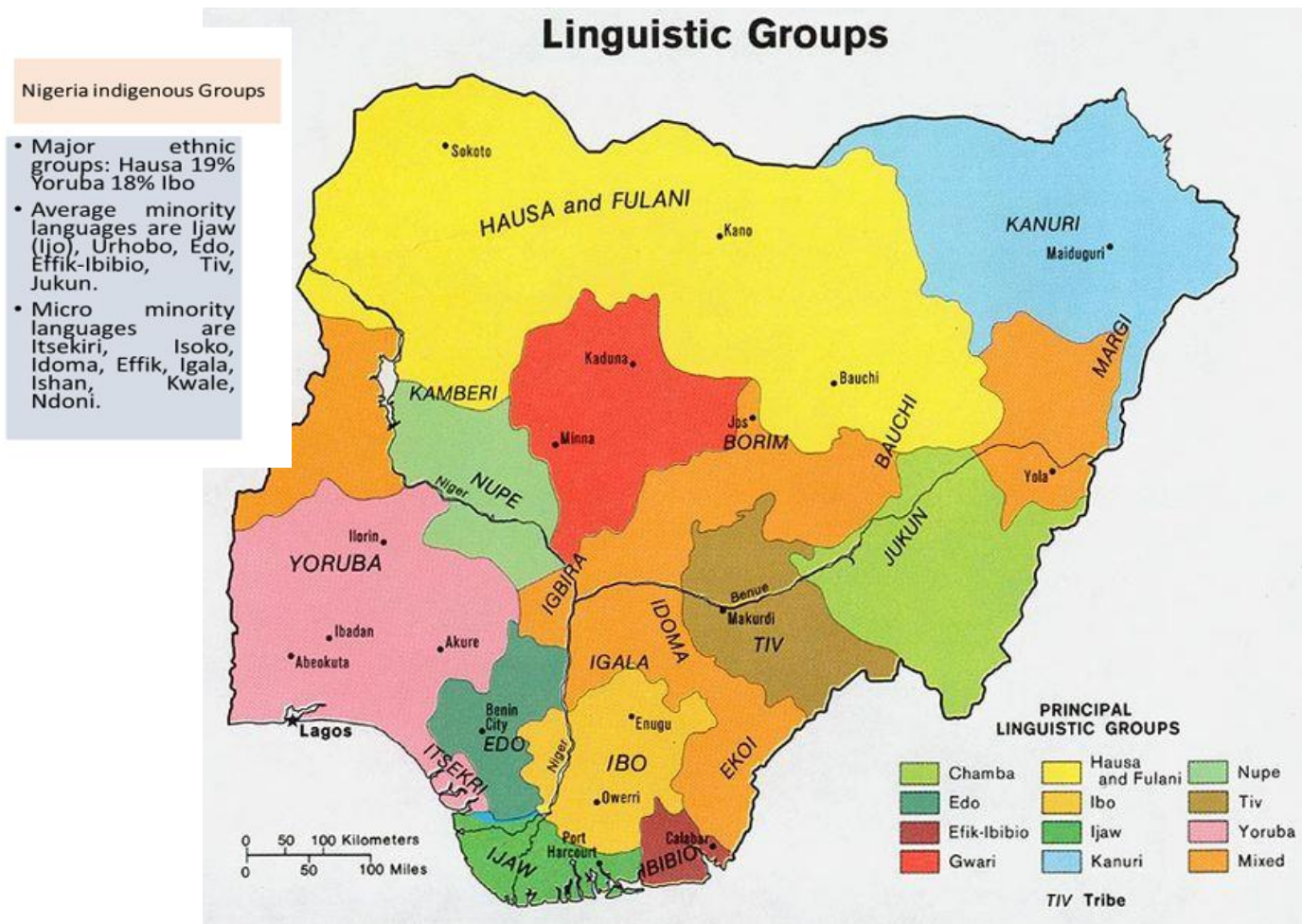
NPE appears to be the only language, which serves a communitive function amongst Nigerians from diverse ethnolinguistic background in Nigeria and in the diaspora.

Despite all its attributes, a section of the Nigerian society, the schooled and elite parents, though use it in social circles, seem to maintain their aversion for NPE, and would not have their children speak it; since it is considered a corrupt language, ungrammatical and suggests inferior intelligence and intellectual laziness (Agheyisi 1972). These parents believe it may affect their children spoken and written English especially in the compulsory English language final examination in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) (Owusu et al 2016). Additionally, Ndimele (2011) argues that NPE is bedevilled with communication problems such as lack of educational status, lack of standard orthography and lack of cultural attachment, which has engendered social acceptability.

Faraclas (1996), on his part, opines that even though NPE seems the most logical choice for a national language, it has received little recognition from those responsible for language policy in Nigeria. Official attitudes towards NPE remain negative, perpetuating erroneous notions inherited from the colonial period that NPE is some form of ‘broken English’.

2.1.5. The Nigerian linguistic situation

The linguistic situation in Nigeria is often described as a complex one. Of all the heritage languages, only Hausa (predominant in the north), Igbo (predominant in the east) and Yoruba (predominant in the west) are recognized as major languages in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Nigeria constitution 1999). It is estimated that over 70% Nigerians constitute speakers of the major languages (Bamgbose 2001). Each of these three languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo) plays a role in the country’s educational system alongside English.



Source: Perry-Castanea Library Map Collection

Figure 2: A map of Nigeria showing diverse linguistic groups and languages

2.1.5.1. Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Nigeria

With the presence of English and NPE, in addition to more than 500 diverse heritage languages and 250 ethnic groups (Nigerian constitution 1999), Nigeria can be termed a multilingual country with robust linguistic diversity (Abolaji 2014). This makes most Nigerians either bilingual or multilingual speakers.

The Nigerian linguistic landscape is characterised by both societal and individual multilingualism arising from its linguistic and ethnic diversity. Akinnaso (1996), remarks that Nigeria's complicated sociolinguistic landscape reveals three major categories of languages. Firstly, about

500 heritage languages and secondly, three exogenous languages – Arabic, English, and French. The final category is what he refers to as “neutral languages” namely Pidgin and English.

In describing the latent language hierarchy in Nigeria, Akinaso opines that these languages are characterised by a six- language formula stratified according to degree of official recognition, prestige, range and context of use, extent of development and population of speakers. He further argues that the Nigeria language-planning model is a system of stratified rationalization in which the majority (Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo) languages are accorded special status at federal, regional, state and local levels while the rights of minority languages to develop is respected. He observes that English is at the top of the language hierarchy carrying the heaviest functional load and functional transparency as the language of administration, education, media, commerce, judicial proceedings, as well as language of the literate profession like law, medicine and engineering. Akinaso (ibid) equally opines that in keeping with its colonial legacy as discussed earlier in this chapter, English is Nigeria’s official language, being the language of the constitution and of legislation. English carries the highest symbolic value as the language of mainstream institutions and activities. He points out that it is the most desirable language that parents want their children to learn in school and speak.

2.1.5.2. Classification of languages in Nigeria

Various scholars have classified languages in Nigeria into different categories according to geographical spread and population of speakers. Awonusi (2003) classifies languages in Nigeria into three different categories. He categorised Nigerian languages according to population of speakers in the following manner: (a) decamillionaire languages- often referred to as the three major languages in Nigeria: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. These multimillion-speaker languages function as lingua Franca in their regions or State languages in areas where they are mainly spoken. Bamgbose (2001) estimates over 70% of Nigerians speak at least one of these three languages. Speakers of these language mix codes and trade considerations encourage non-natives to use them except in the southeastern region where NPE thrives as the common means of communication. (b) Minor languages- these are numerous other languages literally with merely hundreds of speakers

used locally as mother tongues. (Some of these languages such as Koma in northeast Nigeria and others are said to be on the verge of extinction (Blench 2002).

Furthermore, Awonusi V.O., (1985) (different from Awonusi S mentioned earlier), on his part, divides languages in Nigeria into three categories according to functional use. These are (a) official languages, recognized by the constitutions and acts of State and National Assemblies, examples are English stipulated as the language of instruction in schools, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo, recognized as the majority languages, and minority languages in various states of the federation. (b) official languages recognized by public Government Policies but not the constitution. Example is French stipulated as an official language in the 1998 National Policy on Education by the then administration of late General Sani Abacha. In addition to English, Ezeafulukwe & Chinyeaka (2016) report that Nigeria recognizes French as an international language and a language of diplomacy. They maintain that in a bid to align with the international linguistic polity, when the Nigeria National Policy on Education was revised in 1998, and the nine-year basic education curriculum was introduced, it was stipulated that French language should be taught in both primary and secondary school as well as used as a second official language in Nigeria.

“for smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools but no vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School” (Nigeria Policy on Education 1998).

However, this prescription is not implemented in all states of the Nigerian federation. Only some private and public schools teach French both at the primary and secondary levels in some states in southern Nigeria (Ezeafulukwe & Chinyeaka 2016). (c) State Government recognized official languages as in the case of Kanuri by Borno State Government legislature.

In addition, Awonusi (1985) remarks that the growth of Statism described as a fierce or extreme loyalty to a speakers' State of origin and the fact that Federal and State Governments have concurrent jurisdiction over language policies led some states to accord official recognition to languages of their immediate communities which are predominantly used in such states. For example, Hausa language is not only used as a language of instruction in primary and secondary schools in Northern Nigeria, it is also used in some State Assemblies (Jowitt 2020).

Similarly, Ayomike (2013) on his part, equally, classified heritage languages in Nigeria into groups according to the population of speakers and geographical spread. These include majority, moderate or average minority and micro-minority languages. The majority and largest languages spoken by majority ethnic and linguistic groups are Hausa in the north, Yoruba in the south-west and Ibo in the southeast. These languages are spoken by 19%, 18%, and 17% of the country's population, respectively (Nigeria National population census 2006).

Though English is the dominant language in Nigeria, the 3 major languages, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo as well as NPE are used in commercial exchanges and trade as well as in schools in regions where they are localised. The press uses these languages in conjunction with English. These three languages officially recognised as major languages nationally in the Nigerian constitution are learnt as compulsory subjects in both junior and senior secondary schools alongside English.

Visible in the mass media, each of the three languages is used in the print media and to cast news on radio and in State television houses in their respective regions, as well as at the National level.

Furthermore, Ayomike (2013) used the term moderate or average minority to describe languages whose speaker populations are within the range of 5 and 10 million people. Although there are a large number of these languages which I cannot possibly indicate due to the dearth of statistical data in Nigeria, a few of the popular ones in this category of minority ethnic and linguistic groups are Edo, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Ibibio, Efik, Igala, Tiv, Ijaw (Ijo). They are mainly spoken in the regions where these ethnic groups are localized.

Similarly, Ayomike (2013) describes the micro minority languages as those spoken and used by small ethnolinguistic groups whose populations are about 4 million and below. Examples are Itsekiri, Urhobo, Idoma, Ekwere, Isoko, Ndoni, Igarra, Kwale Ebira Nupe to mention but a few.

Many languages in this category are spoken and used by very small and fragmented population of which statistics are not known due to paucity of statistics in Nigeria, which is one of the limitations of this study. These languages are spoken and used in the regions where they are located.

The average as well as the micro heritage languages are expected to be learnt in primary schools in regions where they are localised in addition to English. Though teaching of these languages is not very effective, they are equally used to cast news on radio and television in regions where they

are dominant. For example, news is cast in Uhrobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw, the three major languages as well as NPE in Warri, in the Itsekiri-speaking community daily. (105.5 FM station/Radio and Television channels). The media house allocates an equal proportion of broadcast time to the languages every evening at 8pm after the news broadcast in English at 7pm. In addition, religious programmes are broadcast in both Standard English and NPE on State Radio and Television weekly especially on Sundays.

2.1.5.3. The Status of heritage minority languages in Nigeria

Nigerian scholars in sociolinguistics have a lot to say on the status of heritage languages in Nigeria. Although the number of languages spoken in Nigeria is approximately 500, Danladi (2013) opines that the number of languages in Nigeria cannot be specified, pointing out that many languages are unknown and unwritten.

In Nigeria, heritage minority languages occupy various positions behind English and NPE, with Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo recognized as the major languages.

While describing the status of heritage minority languages in Nigeria, Gordon (2005) listed five hundred and twenty-seven (527) individual languages in the Ethnologue website belonging to the Foundation of Endangered Languages (FEL).

According to Gordon (ibid), of these languages, five hundred and twenty (520) are living while seven (7) are extinct. Of the living languages, five hundred and ten (510) are indigenous while ten (10) are non-indigenous. Twenty (20) of the five hundred and twenty (520) living languages are institutional, seventy-eight (78) are developing, three hundred and fifty (350) are vigorous, twenty-eight (28) are in trouble, and forty-four (44). The Foundation of Endangered languages listed Itsekiri as a dying language.

In addition, Roger Blench (2002) in his article, “Atlas of Nigerian languages” asserts that a large number of Nigerian languages are on the verge of extinction in consideration of factors such as number of native speakers, role in the educational system, level of development and existence of written literature. Babalobi (2020) maintains that twenty-nine minority Nigerian languages have gone into extinction. He maintains that the UNESCO (2006) Interactive Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger suggested twenty-nine (29) other Nigerian languages as endangered based

on five criteria in assessing endangered languages such as safe, vulnerable, endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered and extinct.

Reporting a plethora of Nigeria languages in various critical linguistic situations, UNESCO in Babalobi (ibid), reports vulnerable languages such as Bade, Reshe, and Gera language; definitely endangered languages such as Polci cluster and Duguza languages restricted to certain domains, which children no longer learn and use in homes, but perhaps only in the marketplace. Critically endangered languages such as Akum, Bakpinka, Defaka, Dulbu, Gyem, Ilue, Jilbe, Kiong, Kudu-Camo, Luri, Mvanip, Sambe, Somyev and Yangkum. Only young speakers, grandparents and the aged use them partially and infrequently.

Added to that, Babalobi (2020) lists severely endangered languages spoken by grandparents and older generations only, though parent generation may understand but do not speak it to their children or among themselves. These include Gurdu-Mbaaru, Fyem, Geji cluster, Hya, Kona, Ndunda and Nwagba.

Most minority languages in Nigeria seem to fall within the definitely endangered language category. (Ayenbi 2014) referred to the Itsekiri language as an endangered language according to views expressed by teachers and linguists in a linguistic survey she embarked upon between 2012 and 2013.

Blench (2012) in Babalobi (2020) reports twelve Nigerian languages that are extinct. These are Ashaganna, Fali, spoken by a few individuals on the Falinga Plateau in Southern Taraba State in Northern Nigeria, Shirawa, Auyokawa, Kpati, Taura, Bassa-Kintagora (only 10 speakers of Bassa-Kontagora were alive in 1987), Lufu, Ajanci, Akpondu had no competent speakers in 1987, Buta-Ningi had no remaining speakers in 1990 and Holma had only four aged speakers in 1987.

Similarly, the National Council for Arts and Culture in Nigeria equally lists nine heritage languages that have become extinct. These are Kubi, Ajawa, spoken in the past in the present-day Bauchi State, as well as Gamo-Ningi, a Kainji dialect in Bauchi State, Basa-Gumna in Niger State, Teshenwa and Auyokawa spoken in the past in Jigawa State. Others are Koma in Adamawa State, Kpati formerly spoken in Taraba State and Odut formerly spoken in Odukpani area of Cross River State.

In the same vein, UNESCO (2006) in Babalobi (2020) reportedly predicted the Igbo language spoken in Southeast Nigeria by over 20 million people may become extinct in the next 50 years.

Similarly, Babalobi observes that Akinyemi, a language teacher and author of “Ede Yorùbá kò gbòdò kú” (Yoruba Language Must Not Die) maintains that the Yoruba language could die in 20 years or less, lamenting that many Yoruba children cannot pronounce ‘*Mo fe jeun*’ [I want to eat] in their heritage language, their supposed mother tongue.

Consequently, the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) opines that, unless steps were taken, more than fifty (50) minority languages in Nigeria might become extinct in a few years.

Worthy of note is that there are underlying reasons for the state of these languages, which are yet to be researched. This is where my study is relevant. While there are some useful, but very small statistics or classifications, what we do not know in detail is why are people not speaking these languages? Extensive research needs to be carried out and this is the gap the study fills currently while further studies will be embarked upon at the end of this doctoral research by way of future directions.

2.1.5.4. Current linguistic practices in Nigeria

Linguistic practices in Nigeria are such that languages indigenous to regions are mainly used in their various localities. However, different languages are used for different purposes in diverse situations. For example, in Southwest Nigeria, the Yoruba language is used in all the Yoruba speaking geographical regions in addition to English and NPE especially in big cities. However, the Yoruba language and some of its dialects as well as NPE are mainly used in remote villages. English and Yoruba are used in government offices, with English as the official language in government related communications. English is used in work related, professional meetings while Yoruba and NPE are used in informal conversations on the street and public places. A common linguistic characteristic is translanguaging between Yoruba and NPE.

In Southeastern Nigeria, the Ibo language, the third majority language in Nigeria is mainly used alongside English and NPE in every facet of life. English is the official language used in schools

and in government related communications, while the Ibo language and NPE are commonly used in unofficial matters. In most towns and cities, the Ibo language and NPE are predominant on the streets, in marketplaces, in hospitals, in public transports especially amongst the unschooled. In these areas, translanguaging is equally a common phenomenon. It is common to see an aged female or male patient in a hospital address a medical doctor in either Ibo or NPE. If the latter happens to come from a different linguistic group from the former, there is tendency that they communicate in either English or Pidgin. It may be pertinent to note that a significant proportion of the population in Southern Nigeria speak English.

In contrast, linguistic practices in Northern Nigeria are significantly different from that in southern Nigeria. The Hausa language is predominantly used in the entire Hausa speaking region in nearly all domains and spheres of life. Hausa is the general and main language of communication in government offices, in mosques, marketplaces, in hospitals, and in public transports.

Although, several small heritage and ethnic minority languages exist in the North, the Hausa language is dominant due to the numerical strength of its speakers, which translates to 19% of the Nigerian population. The Hausa language is the common language spoken despite the presence of smaller heritage languages. Non -Hausa speakers are obliged to learn and speak Hausa for the purpose of interaction.

Although English language is taught as a subject and the expected language of instruction and medium of communication in classrooms in secondary schools, higher education and in government official matters, Hausa is mainly used in primary and secondary schools and commonly spoken outside the classrooms and around campuses. English is minimally used in the North unlike in the Southern states where English is the main language of communication and vast majority of the population use it daily.

Furthermore, a common linguistic phenomenon in Nigeria worthy of mention, is a situation where smaller languages are influenced by larger and dominant ones in which case, members of smaller ethnic groups tend to speak the language of the larger ethnic group for survival.

There are several examples, but I will mention a few. There is the case where speakers of Yoruba dialects switch to the standard Yoruba variety, especially in big cities such as Lagos and Ibadan in

the Southwest region of Nigeria. While in the Southeast region, speakers of Ibo dialects switch to standard Ibo language especially in big cities such as Onitisha, Owerri, Aba and Enugu.

What seems evident is that the three majority languages, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo, which are the big and strong languages with more numerical strength in terms of population, high vitality and status seem to dominate the small and weak languages with less numerical strength and low vitality. Predominant in their regions, they seem to be swallowing up smaller languages located in the same region.

In addition, a significant phenomenon is the switch from heritage languages to English and NPE in big cities. Austin & Sallabanks (2011) are of the view that when languages come in contact and speakers of one language are learning another, a change in language use takes place. A vivid and typical example is the case of the Itsekiri language Vis a Vis English in this study. English seems to be gradually swallowing up heritage languages including Itsekiri in Southern Nigeria.

2.1.6. Current linguistic policies in Nigeria

There appears to be a consensus amongst Nigerian sociolinguists that Nigeria does not have a policy document on languages according to what experts and scholars describe as language policy. Nigeria does not have a language policy but rather an educational policy, which touches on some aspects of language (Ugal 2011).

According to Fakeye & Ogunyemi (2017) the discussion going on among Nigerian scholars is whether Nigeria as a nation can boast of a National Language Policy. Fakeye & Ogunyemi (ibid) observe that there are arguments and counter claims as to the availability of an explicit National Language Policy in Nigeria. They observe that Nigeria is bereft of a clear-cut language policy that is capable of implementation, pointing out that there is nothing, which resembles a Nigerian Language Policy in the form of an official document.

In Nigeria, there is an absence of a well-articulated and explicit national language policy that can be found in one document. What may be referred to as a language policy is the language in education policy as contained in the National Policy on Education that was first published in 1977,

revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004 (Ogunfemi 2014). Added to that Ogunyemi & Fakeye (ibid) asserts:

“There has not been a comprehensive language policy for Nigeria as a deliberate and planned exercise. Indeed, language planning as an organised and systematic pursuit of solutions to language problems has remained largely peripheral to the mainstream of national planning. What can be regarded as our language policy came about in the context of other more centrally defined national concerns, such as the development of a National Policy on education and the drafting of a constitution for the country. It is in connection with these two documents, i.e. National Policy on Education and the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that we can talk about language policy and planning in Nigeria” (page 107)

However, Nigeria recognizes the rights of heritage language speakers to use the languages existing in their locality with which they identify. It may appear that Nigeria has not been able to elaborate a framework on language policy because of the political history discussed in the section on the geopolitical situation in Nigeria and complexities resulting from linguistic diversities. Although the Nigerian constitution recognizes the use of English in all government documents, public functions and in education, it is not designated as the official language of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Neither is any of the three major languages (Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo) designated official language. They are not recognised as national languages either. In other words, there is no law that officially recognizes any language as a national language in Nigeria. The Nigerian constitution nonetheless states in article 55 that:

“The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore” (Nigerian constitution 1999).

The Nigerian constitution recognizes ethnic differences and leaves each State Government the prerogative to identify and recognize languages spoken within its boundaries in public communication, function, and political relationship. This is because there are well over 250 ethnic groups who speak over 500 languages. Complexities and the history of war in the country may be responsible for this gap. Efforts aimed at promoting social cohesion and nation building along linguistic lines have mainly been made through the teaching and learning of the English language.

The except below is illustrative of this point.

“Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures” (Nigerian constitution 1999).

Rather than have a language policy document, Nigeria took a different approach to language policy by making provision for policies on language use in Education. In other words, Nigerian linguistic policy is embedded in the Nigerian policy on Education. What may be referred to as National Language Policy in Nigeria is the provision for language learning in the National Policy on Education as well as the section on language in the Nigerian constitution. There is a framework for education policy elaborated by the Nigerian Education Resource Development Council (NERDC), in which the languages to be used and taught in schools are stipulated.

To illustrate my point, I would like to quote from the 2014 edition of the Nigerian Policy on Education as stipulated in the Education Policy Framework. Ugal (2011) observe that the 2014 edition is not elaborate concerning the use and importance of language. It stipulates in section 1 (g) of the National Policy on Education that: start.

“every child shall be taught in the mother tongue or language of the immediate community for the first four years of basic education and, it is expected that every child shall learn one Nigerian language. The curriculum of primary classes from first to third year will include the teaching of English studies and one Nigerian language. At the primary classes from fourth to sixth year, the curriculum shall include English Studies, one Nigerian language and French language. The medium of instruction in the Primary School shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years in monolingual communities. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction as well as the language of the immediate environment; French and Arabic shall be taught as subjects” At the Junior Secondary Education, the curriculum shall include English Studies, one Nigerian Language and French language” (Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2014).

However, these policies are yet to be implemented to the latter. The fact remains that not every State of the Nigerian federation use and teach the language of the immediate environment at the

primary school level. According to Igboanusi (2008), although Nigeria's National Policy on Education provides for a multilingual policy involving the learning of a child's L1 or language of the immediate community (LIC), one of the three major languages (i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) and English, this policy has not been effectively implemented.

Ugal (2011) observes that, at the pre-primary school level where the policy states that the mother tongue or language of immediate community should be used initially and English at a 'later stage', the policy is not followed especially in the private nursery and primary schools. It does not seem that public schools implement these policies either. The main medium of instruction at pre-primary and lower primary is principally English Language rather than the mother tongue (Ogunfemi 2014).

Attempt at public schools to implement these policies seem to be met with challenges ranging from lack of trained teachers in Nigerian languages to lack of teaching materials. However, the three major languages (Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo) are taught as subjects at the Junior and Senior Secondary levels and students are obliged to take at least one of them at the compulsory West African School Certificate Examination at the end of secondary school. (WASCE). (This is a final and compulsory examination conducted every year by the West Africa Examinations Council (WAEC) for secondary school students at the last year of senior secondary school education. The age of students who sit for this examination ranges from 16 to 20 years (WASCE website).

In Nigeria, English is not only taken compulsorily and must be passed at credit level to be admitted into any of the higher educational institutions in the country, but it also remains the medium of instruction from the Early Child Care Development Education (ECCDE) to the Tertiary level.

Commenting on the Nigeria National Policy on Education Weber & Horner (2012) opine that it consists of two main pillars. The mother tongue medium policy and the multilingual policy. According to Weber & Horner, the former encourages the use of children's first language in pre-school and early primary education, while the later provides on the one hand, a switch in the medium of instruction from heritage languages or first language to English halfway through primary education. On the other hand, it expects all secondary school students to learn one of the

major languages - Hausa, Yoruba, or Ibo at secondary level. Weber & Horner (2012) further observe that, children would then be trilingual in English and two of the major languages.

The questions that come to mind are, has the strong emphasis on English, which is both a medium of instruction and a core subject led to preference for the latter? Has this phenomenon caused a shift from heritage languages to the more dominant English language? Could this be what is responsible for the hegemonic status of English, which is generally perceived as a language of prestige (Igboanusi 2001), closely followed by the major languages Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo?

In Nigeria, general ideas and views responsible for the non-elaboration of a clear language policy among others are not unconnected with the complex linguistic situations resulting from the mosaic of languages, as well as fear of linguistic marginalization of the minority groups by the majority groups. Speakers of heritage minority linguistic groups do not seem to be disposed to get to the drawing board to discuss the issue with speakers of the majority languages. Therefore, over the years, the question of language policy seems to be left in limbo. Could it be that the Nigeria National and State Assemblies are not disposed to discussing it? Is it lack of political will on the part of Nigerian leaders?

Having discussed insight into the geopolitical and linguistic situation of the macro context in this research, we now move on to the meso context of the doctoral study presented in the second section in this chapter.

2.2. The Meso Context- Speakers of the Itsekiri Language

2.2.1. The geographical location of speakers of the Itsekiri language

While interviewing Mene Brown in 2021 (not one of the respondents in the data), a chieftain in the Palace of the Olu of Warri, King of the Itsekiri speaking people in the Warri Kingdom, the historical name of the ethnic group was emphatically reiterated. According to Mene Brown, the people who speak the Itsekiri language are called “Itsekiri”.

The Itsekiri language belongs to the Niger-Congo linguistic family. Found in Delta State, in the West of the Niger Delta Region, South of Nigeria, speakers of the Itsekiri language are geographically located in the estuary of the Benin River around the mangrove swamps in the coastal region of the Atlantic Ocean along the sandy beaches of the Bight of Benin. The Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group is a micro minority linguistic group in Nigeria (Ayomike, 2013) with a population of about 2.5 million people (The Advocacy group, 2021).

The territory of Itsekiri settlement covers about 1,520 square kilometres. Their immediate neighbours include the Edo speaking, the Urhobos and the Ijaw people. Their numerical strength notwithstanding, Mene Brown (2021) points out that the Itsekiri people are one of the most educated and civilised ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Before delving in depth into the makeup of the speakers of the Itsekiri language, it is expedient to present in brief the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. An insight into the linguistic profile of the Niger Delta Region is necessary to give a clear picture of the linguistic situation of the Itsekiri language.

2.2.1.1. Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

The region known as the Niger Delta in Nigeria is of paramount importance to this study being the location of the Itsekiri people and their language. A large concentration of micro and average minority languages in Nigeria are in this region. The Niger Delta is located in Southern Nigeria in the axis known as “South- South”. The term “South South” was framed by General Sani Abacha, a former head of state of Nigeria to describe the oil producing States in Nigeria. This term has come to stay and is currently used to refer to regions with large deposits of crude oil in Nigeria. The region comprises nine of the 36 States in Nigeria known as the “oil producing states”. These states are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers.

The Niger Delta is bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean with its vast linguistic and cultural diversity and to the east by Cameroon. It occupies an area of approximately 112,110 square kilometres representing about 12% of total area of Nigeria. According to the Nigeria 2006 census, its population is around 28 million. The Niger Delta Region is crucial to the Nigerian economy.

As an oil rich region, it produces over 90% of the wealth of Nigeria and provides the largest source of the country's revenue economically.

The Niger Delta Region is characterized by substantial linguistic diversity and complexity. Ethnic and socio-linguistic groups in the area are Itsekiri, Ilaje, Ekwere, Isoko, Ibibio, Effik, Aboh, Kwale, Ijaw, Bini, Ishan Urhoho, Ibo and Kwale to mention but a few. The distance that separates the people who speak these different languages is sometimes not more than one or two kilometres.

Due to the rich linguistic and cultural diversity, English and NPE are the languages common to all as a means of communication. Significantly, young people characterize the Niger Delta region population. According to the Nigeria 2006 census, 62% of the population is under the age of 30. Adults in the 31-69 age group make up 36% of the population, while those aged 70 and above make up only 2% of the population. People aged 13-59 rarely speak these languages. They communicate more in NPE and the English language. Children aged 2-12 have limited knowledge of their heritage languages. Those who speak their heritage language are mainly adults aged 60 and above. Most languages in the Niger Delta region are located in Delta State, one of the nine oil producing States in the region.

2.2.1.2. Delta State of Nigeria and its linguistic situation

To situate the geographical location of the Itsekiri language in Nigeria more precisely, it is expedient to mention Delta State, the home State of the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group. Delta State is one of the 36 States that make up the Nigeria entity. An insight into the linguistic situation of Delta State will provide a better understanding of the linguistic situation of the Itsekiri-speaking community.



Figure 3: Map of Delta State of Nigeria Showing the location of the Itsekiri-Speaking Ethnic Group

Source: Wikipedia

The map equally shows neighbouring ethnic groups to the Itsekiri-speaking people. The names of the groups are synonymous with their languages. For example, just as the Itsekiri people speak the Itsekiri language so also the Urhobos, Isokos, Ijaws speak Urhobo, Isoko and Ijaw languages respectively. While the Urhobos and Isokos are neighbours to the Itsekiris in the hinterland, the Ijaws share boundaries with and are neighbours to the Itsekiris in the coastal region around the Atlantic Ocean. Speakers of these ethnic groups shown in the map are present in Warri, the Itsekiri-speaking community and its environs.

Situated in the West of the Niger Delta Region, South of Nigeria, Delta State it is one of the nine oil producing states of the country. The State was carved out of the former Bendel State in the former Mid-West region in 1991 by President General Ibrahim Babangida, a former Nigerian head of State, as a result of clamour for self-rule by some ethnic nationalities in Nigeria in the late 1980s. The State consists of mixed ethnolinguistic groups and rich linguistic diversity. These diverse groups cohabit with one another and with few people learning the neighbouring language. The

most widely spoken heritage languages indigenous to Delta State are Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijaw, Ukwuani, Ika, Isoko and Ibo, to mention but a few.

Other heritage languages in Nigeria present in the State, but not indigenous to Delta State include Efik, Ibibio, Igala, Hausa, Yoruba and Idoma, to mention but a few. These languages coexist with Standard English and NPE which are vehicular languages spoken in the city of Warri and other major cities in the State such as Sapele, Ughelli.

The Itsekiri language, one of the major languages in Delta State functions as a vernacular language in Warri, Sapele, Ogidigben, Omadino, Escravos., Koko, Jakpa to mention but a few towns in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Escravos, is a host town to the multinational oil company Chevron Nigeria Limited and the multinational Escravos Gas to Liquid Project.

Of the nine Oil producing States mentioned above, Delta State and the Itsekiri-speaking community produce the largest percentage of the country's oil revenue. Warri, the principal city of the Itsekiri people, is host to many multinational oil corporations. Thanks to its resources, the Itsekiri community attract people and workers from different parts of the country. Contact with these people who come with their languages to the Itsekiri-speaking community has contributed to a heterogeneous linguistic cohabitation and rendered it a multilingual society with diverse linguistic and cultural groups.

2.2.2. The Itsekiri-speaking people

The Itsekiri nation has evolved from a kingdom, traditionally ruled by a monarch and council of chiefs who constituted a nobility and aristocracy, to a modern-day kingdom, still headed by a king assisted by a council of chiefs, however, devoid of nobility and aristocracy in an era of a democratically elected system of government. It is worthy of mention that the government of Nigeria recognizes monarchical institutions in Nigeria. Almost all the ethnic groups in Nigeria have a traditional ruler or king. The king is the traditional head of the group. The Nigerian government recognize and respect the kings.

The Itsekiri people refer to their ethnic group as the Itsekiri nation or kingdom. This is as a result of their political system that dates back to the fifteenth century when they had their first king (Ayomike 2010).

Speakers of the Itsekiri language that make up the Itsekiri ethnic group run a monarchical system with the king as the head of the ethnic group. They see themselves as ‘one body’, ‘one nation’ with ‘one king’. They go by the slogan “Itsekiri one people, one language, one king” (Brown 2021).

To explain the slogan, “one people” is used to mean the Itsekiris are one group of people united by their love for their kingdom and mutually work together for the welfare and prosperity of the Itsekiri nation. One language indicates that the Itsekiri people speak a common language devoid of dialects, no matter where they are, and this has been intact for over 500 years. One king demonstrates loyalty and reverence to the King who rules over a great kingdom.

2.2.3. Historical perspective and origin of speakers of the Itsekiri language

The history of speakers of the Itsekiri language has been recorded from a variety of perspectives, leading to conflicting versions. While various people have attempted to write or tell the story of the emergence and existence of the Itsekiri-speaking people, in this study, I explore the version written by Moor (1920), revised by (Ayomike 2013) and corroborated by Mene Brown on an online television broadcast channel in Nigeria (The morning show *Arise News*, 2021).

According to Moore (1920) in Ayomike (2013), the people who make up the Itsekiri ethnic group have diverse backgrounds. On the one hand, in his account, Moore (1920) reports that migrant settlers from Ijebu and Ondo in the former Western region of Nigeria; from Igala, Ebu and Aboh in the old Mid-Western region of Nigeria moved at various times to different Itsekiri villages. These are Omadino, Ureju, Ugborodo, Inorin and Irigbo, all located in the old Midwest region of Nigeria. On the other hand, Ayomike (2013) records that towards the end of the fifteenth century, a part of the Bini royal family, established a monarchy consisting of autonomous small communities in the Itsekiri town of Ode in the then Warri Division and Province in the old Mid-West region. According to Ayomike, (ibid), the people who lived in these autonomous communities make up the Itsekiri nation of today.

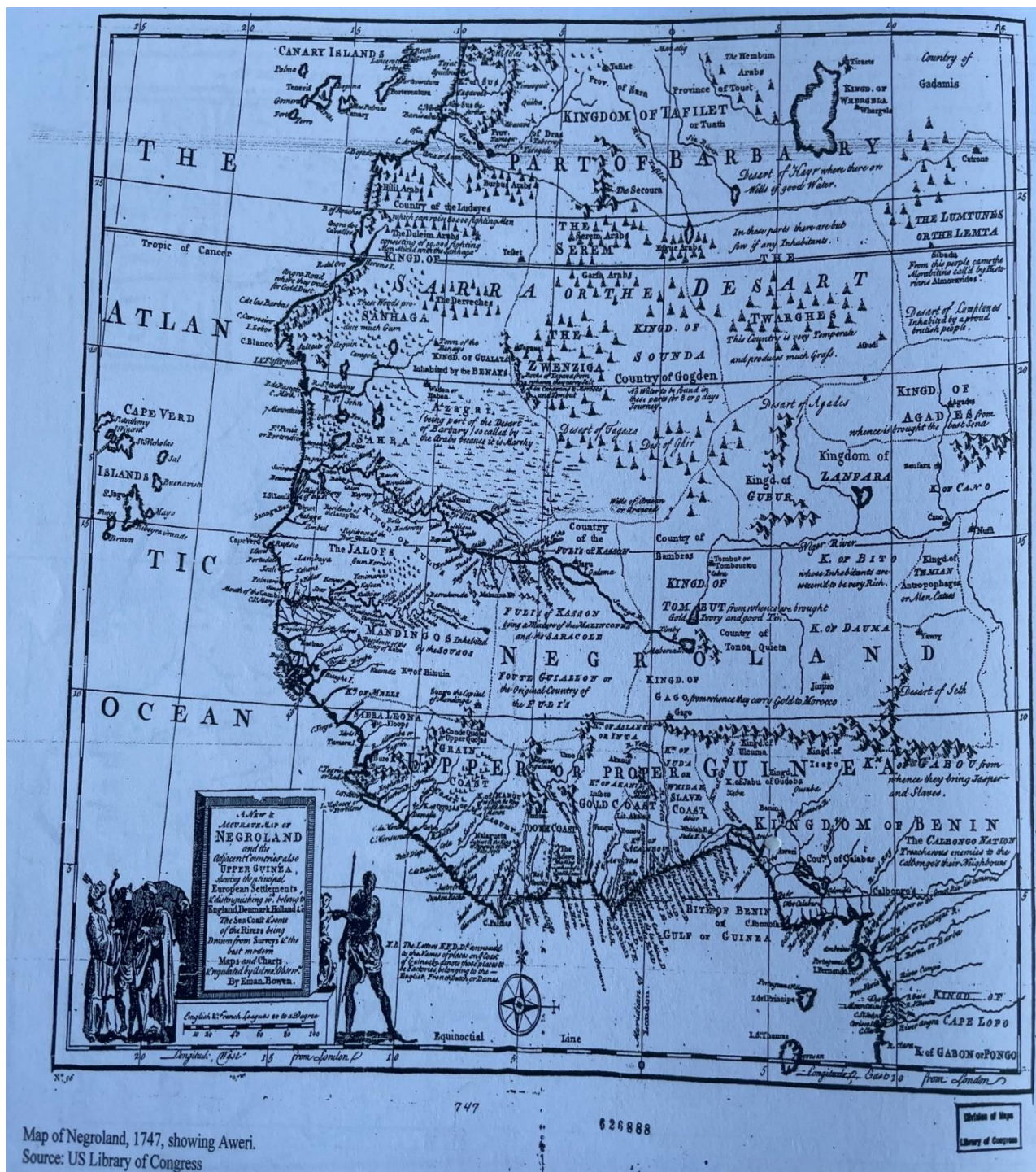


Figure 4: The Dutch map of Negroland in 1747. (Ayomike, 2013) A historical map of the location of the Itsekiri -speaking people in Nigeria

Warree, Wari, and now Warri. The Binis and Yorubas called it Iwere. The word Itsekiri was also variously spelt as “jekri” “Ishekiri” or “chekri”. Professor P.C. Lloyd (1747) reports that the Itsekiris were known as Warree or Jekri, but in the nineteenth century, they were called “Binis” since the first contact was made on the banks of the Benin River.

Another account recorded by Ayomike (2013) recalls the story of a prince Ginuwa who fled from the Bini kingdom to settle at a place known as Forcados River in the middle of the fifteenth century, before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1485. Ayomike observes that before the arrival of Prince Ginuwa and his forty chiefs, there were natives known as “Umale” a people who spoke a language like the Yoruba language and practiced a traditional religion similar to that of the Yoruba people. These people were the Itsekiris. However, the Itsekiri social structure is very different from that of the Yorubas.

According to Ayomike (ibid), the Itsekiri people recognized Prince Ginuwa as their king given the radiance, splendour and the paraphernalia surrounding his arrival. The prince later founded the Iwere (Warri) kingdom around 1480. This underlies Itsekiri royalty bearing pseudonyms as those of the people of Bini (Ayomike ibid). Pseudonyms such as Iyatsere, Ologbotsere, Uwangwe, Otsodin are few examples of traditional titles the Itsekiri kings inherited from the Bini kingdom. The kingdom of the Itsekiri people is located in Warri and widely known as the Warri Kingdom.

Furthermore, Ryder’s research (1785), adapted by Moore (1920) reported that the Portuguese and the Dutch visited the Warri and Bini Kingdoms in the sixteenth century. Impressed by the peace and order that existed in the Warri kingdom, the Portuguese established a relationship with the sixth Olu of Warri, Atorongboye (known as Sebastian). This led to the Olu marrying a Portuguese woman, which eventually extended to a diplomatic relationship with the King of Portugal, which culminated into a strong Portuguese influence on the Itsekiri people.

Ayomike further reports that in the beginning of the seventeenth Century, the Olu sent his son, Domingos, to Portugal to be educated. Domingos returned ten years later with a Portuguese wife and later reigned and became king with the title Atuwatse 1.

Olu Atuwatse attended Coimbra University in Portugal, graduated in 1611, became the Olu of Warri in 1625 and died in 1643. It is worthy of note that the Itsekiris were the first Africans to

receive a university education, in the person of Olu Atuwatse 1 and the first to be baptised and was christened Dom Domingo.

In 1600, the prince introduced Christianity- the European religion into his palace. Antonio Dom Domingo built the only Catholic church in Ode-Itsekiri, the traditional and ancestral home of the Itsekiri people. Ode-Itsekiri, also known as Big Warri, located on an island within the creeks around the marshes and the mangrove swamps of the Warri River, is a town roughly two kilometres from the city of Warri.

Ode-Itsekiri town was a settlement of the British consular officials and traders in the fifteenth century (Ayomike, 2010). The city of Warri lies within the traditional boundaries of the Warri kingdom and is the capital city of the Itsekiri-speaking people. The king's (Olu's) palace is situated

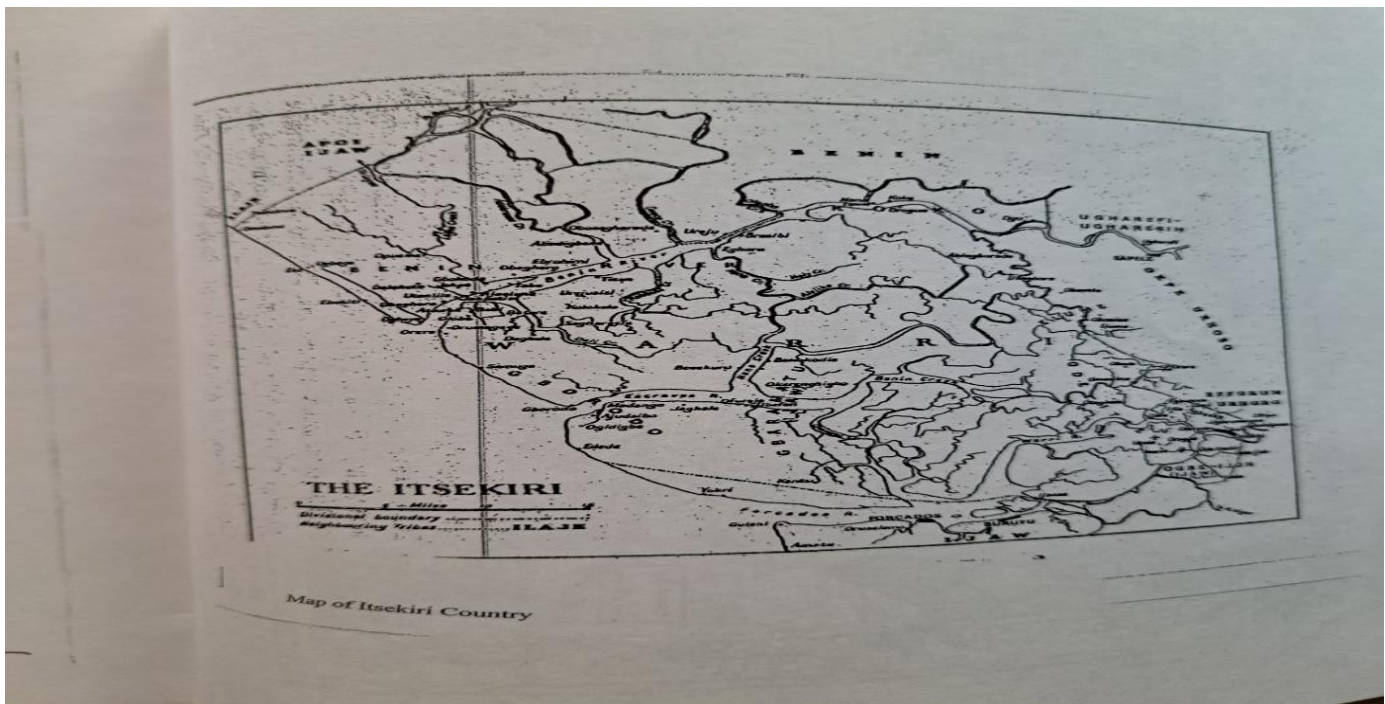


Figure 5: Map of the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group in Warri with a large population of Itsekiri people living in the city.

Source: (Ayomike 2013)

in the city of Warri.

2.2.4. The Socio-political framework of speakers of the Itsekiri language

2.2.4.1. Political structure in the past and present

The socio-political framework that underlined the Itsekiri ethnic group in the past was that of kingship and chiefdom, represented in aristocracy and nobility. The political structure of Itsekiri society was monarchical. The Itsekiri-speaking people were politically organised and united under a monarchical institution.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, according to Ayomike (2013), the Warri kingdom was a force of civilization and great splendor that attracted European adventurers, missionaries and trade merchants. Ayomike observes that before the arrival of the Europeans, the monarch and the council of chiefs who constituted the nobility and the aristocracy administered the Warri kingdom. The king, known as the Olu, was the traditional and political head of the Itsekiris. Ascendency to the throne was by inheritance in which ruler ship passed from father to son. On the demise of a king, his son inherits the throne.

The Itsekiri king was economically powerful thanks to the slave trade and commodity market that thrived in his domain. According to Moore's (1920) account, economic activities in the Itsekiri community greatly influenced Itsekiri politics in the past.

Ayomike (ibid) posits however, that the abolition of the slave trade saw a decline in the wealth of the Warri kingdom, and this led to the collapse of the political order. Consequently, there was a state of interregnum following the death of the Olu Akengbuwa in 1848. After the collapse of the monarchy, a new political structure in which 'clan heads' were recognised by the British consuls as "Governors" of the Benin River emerged.

2.2.2.4. The state of interregnum in the political history of the Itsekiri ethnic group

The political history of speakers of the Itsekiri language cannot be written without mention of the state of interregnum that pervaded the Warri Kingdom in the nineteenth century. The interregnum

was a period in the history of the Itsekiri people without a king. This lasted for 88 years starting from 1848 to 1936 when Olu Ginuwa 11 was eventually crowned.

During this period, there were internal conflicts amongst the Itsekiri people, which led the British administration to intervene by appointing governors then known as “gofines”- (a corrupted version of the word governor) who ruled over the Itsekiri people in the Warri Kingdom.

Although there was the absence of a monarch, the influence and power of the kingdom did not diminish. Ayomike (2010) reports that this period saw the emergence of a political structure where Itsekiri society was organised along social strata of upper, middle and the lower class. The upper class was made up of the royal family and the aristocracy. These were the “Ojoyes and Olarajas” mainly drawn from the Noble “Houses”.

The prominent Houses were those of the Ologbotsere (Prime Minister or kingmaker) and the Iyatere (Defence Minister). The middle class or Omajaja were freeborn Itsekiris. Those in the lower class known as “Oton-Eru” were descendants of slaves whose ancestors came from elsewhere to settle on Itsekiri land. This phenomenon emanated from the institution of the slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ayomike (ibid) remarks that in the past, parents sold children who exhibited traits of stubbornness into slavery to make money due to poverty. In modern day Itsekiri society, this class system no longer exists. Everyone is freeborn and of equal status.

Furthermore, in the nineteenth century the ‘Houses’ were structured and determined according to descents and wealth. There were two major factions, those of Ologbotsere and Emaye.

The Itsekiris lived mainly on the Benin river estuary, which consisted of the north and south banks around the Atlantic Ocean. The Ologbotsere, in the eighteenth century led the establishment of the Itsekiri settlements on the north bank of the Benin River, while those who traced their descent to Emaye, wife of the Olu Erejuwa and his son Akengbuwa, settled on the south bank of the Benin River. Rivalry between these two factions was often intense and the governorship of the kingdom passed from one to the other.

Ayomike (ibid) reports that during the state of interregnum, the governors were involved in trade with the Europeans. A very prominent governor was chief Nana Olomu, an astute businessman

who traded in slaves and palm kernel with the European trade merchants. Chief Nana Olomu is known in history to have gone to war against the British colonial masters and was defeated and exiled by the British in 1894.

The first governor appointed by the British was Diare, followed by Dore Numa. The demise of Nana Olomu saw the emergence of Dore Numa. Chief Dore Numa rose to prominence through his opposition to Nana within the Itsekiri community. His literacy and skills attracted the British colonial masters who appointed him as an “agent” to oversee the Benin River, the hinterland and Warri, a political office he held for a considerable period. As a paramount chief of the Warri kingdom and of the Urhobo land, Chief Dore Numa wielded great influence, exercised power over Warri Kingdom, and perpetuated his influence throughout his reign in the region.

After a long leadership of governors, “gofine”, the Itsekiri people got together, put their differences behind them and decided to revert to the old system of government, which heralded the emergence of Olu Ginuwa the 2nd in 1936 after 88 years of interregnum.

Currently, the twenty-first century political structure of the Itsekiris remains monarchical. The Warri kingdom is still governed by a traditional monarchical institution recognized by the Nigerian Federal Government. The king, the Olu of Warri, remains the traditional ruler of the Itsekiri ethnic group, alongside the council of chiefs. The king appoints the chiefs as representatives of various clans and “Houses” as it was in the past in the king's palace. The chiefs hold ministerial positions in emulation of conventional democratic administration. They are vested with various responsibilities in running the affairs of the Warri kingdom. There are also sub-chiefs called "Olare a ja" who are village heads. An "Olare aja" is the oldest man in the village. In times of external aggression, the Itsekiris wield all resources within their means, cooperate and are always ready to fight the opposition.

The Olu of Warri confers chieftaincy titles to sons and daughters of Itsekiri adjudged worthy of occupying such revered positions, particularly those who have contributed to the social and political development of the kingdom as well as the well-being of the Itsekiri people.

Suffice to say Iwere also known as Warri kingdom has had more than 30 kings since 1480 to date. The current Olu of Warri, Atuwase 111 was crowned the 21st Olu of Warri on the 21st day of August 2021, after the demise of Olu Ikenwoli, the 20th Olu of Warri.

2.2.5. The economy of the Itsekiri speaking people in the past and present

The Itsekiri people's contact with the Europeans was responsible for the early development of the Warri kingdom as the British traded with the Itsekiris. Ayomike (2013) reports that after the death of Olu Akengbuwa and the abolition of the slave trade in the 1850s, the Itsekiris migrated to new settlements on the banks of the Atlantic Ocean. The Itsekiris rulers were reported to have welcomed the Portuguese missionaries when the Bini people rejected them.

According to Ayomike (2010), in the first half of the nineteenth century, trade in palm oil flourished and was profitable. When the European trading vessels began to berth at Ode Itsekiri, Ughoton and the port of Benin, the Itsekiris were trade intermediaries on the Benin river axis in the Western Niger Delta region of Nigeria. They performed an intermediary role between the local traders in the hinterland and the Europeans working in the palm oil trade and the supply of slaves. These commodities were the economic main stay and resources of the Itsekiri people during that period.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Itsekiri people had become rich as a result of the development of slave and palm oil trading with Europeans who berthed their ships on the banks of the Benin river.

In addition, business with Urhobo traders, neighbours to the Itsekiris, who produced much-needed commodities in the hinterland, was also contributory to the wealth of the Itsekiri people. The Itsekiri strategic and advantageous location on the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean was equally a contributory factor to the economic development of the Warri Kingdom (Ayomike, *ibid*).

The trading empires of the governors, especially those of Diare and Nana of the Ologbotsere lineage, extended into the hinterlands of the Benin and Ethiope rivers in Nigeria. They were more active in the southern area of Ode Itsekiri, an area that grew in commercial importance towards the end of the nineteenth century.

From the time of governor '*gofine*' Diare Uwangue to governor '*gofine*' Nana Olomu, the Itsekiris exercised direct sovereign control over their resources, the regional economy and the general environment (Ayomike 2010).

Furthermore, Ayomike reports that Nana Olomu, known in history as Nana of Itsekiri, a prominent chief in the Warri kingdom, a slave trade merchant and a warmonger, did business with the Europeans. When slave trade was abolished, the famous and renowned merchant, chief Nana Olomu went into palm kernel trade and acted as an intermediary between local traders in the hinterland and the Portuguese and British former slave merchants. Chief Nana Olomu monopolized trade in the coastal region, buying slaves from the Urhobo-speaking people in the hinterlands of the country and selling them to the British and Portuguese merchants on the Atlantic coast. However, chief Nana's monopoly and control of the trade did not go down well with the European merchants. The British saw the monopolistic position skilfully manipulated by the powerful Itsekiri trade merchant as an affront. They used their military might to try to get rid of him so they could trade directly with the Urhobo in the hinterland. Chief Nana Olomu was therefore in constant conflict and at war with the British as a result of the latter's intention to have control over trade, commodities and resources in the region.

In 1894, the British colonial masters overthrew Nana's monopolistic control of trade in the Benin River which led to the latter's down fall. Chief Nana Olomu was deported to the city of Calabar, southeast of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Nana's defeat paved the way for British penetration into the hinterlands. Ayomike (2010) reports that the British lust for economic control led to the eventual political control that ushered in the era of British colonialism in Nigeria and a decade of indirect administration that largely used men selected for their ability as warrant chiefs.

Besides trade in palm oil, other industries that thrived in the Itsekiri community during the early nineteenth century were salt manufacturing, bead making and the fabrics industry. The Itsekiris were also good fishermen with traditional fishing skills. The fishing industry flourished in the

nineteenth century. These trades were however not developed because of the presence of crude oil popularly referred to as “black gold” in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Presently, the Itsekiri community is home to several multinational companies owing to its oil resources. As an economic powerhouse, the community produces 40% of Nigeria's oil with Warri as the principal commercial city.

The city of Warri is host to several oil and multinational companies such as Chevron Nigeria Limited, Shell Petroleum Nigeria Plc, Texaco/Exxon/Mobil and many other companies. In the 1960s and 70s, Warri was known as the Nigerian oil rich city. Oil servicing companies and ancillary services ranging from small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) dominated economic activities in the community.

Oil industry activities boosted the growth of tertiary activities such as insurance, entertainment, leisure, real estate, hotels, restaurants significantly, in addition to rapidly expanded port facilities that made it easy to transport products.

Thanks to her economic resources, the Itsekiri community attracted many people and workers from different cities in Nigeria as well as ethnic groups who spoke different languages. While coming to earn a living, these people brought their languages with them. Consequently, the presence of multinational oil corporations in the community brought about a beehive of activities in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Some Itsekiris work in these oil corporations occupying various positions, while others work as contractors in the oil industry supplying labour to Multinational corporations operating in their communities.

The presence of Multinational companies instrumental to a burgeoning and economically thriving community, which seemed to have engendered ethnic and linguistic diversity, has produced a far-reaching consequence on the Itsekiri language. Contact with non-Itsekiris in places of work seems to account for less use of the Itsekiri language in daily activities and in various contexts. This phenomenon seems to have greatly affected the Itsekiri language to the extent that family members increasingly speak to one another, including their children, in English and NPE.

2.2.6. Historical evolution of the Itsekiri language and cultural practices

A brief examination of the historical interplay of colonial relations and the development of the Itsekiris will provide insight into various ways in which Itsekiri colonial status influenced the cultural norms and linguistic behaviour of the Itsekiri-speaking people. This aspect is prioritised due to its importance to this study, especially as language contact and linguistic change are intergral parts of this doctoral research. Examined below are elements that shape the development of the Itsekiri language as well as cultural practices that influence the linguistic behaviour of the Itsekiri- speaking people.

2.2.6.1. The development of the Itsekiri language and language contact

The development of the Itsekiri language and contact with other languages can be traced to the coming of Europeans to the coastal regions of Nigeria mentioned earlier.

At the inception of the triangular trade between Europe, Africa and North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Itsekiri was the language of trade and communication in the coastal region of Nigeria due to the geographical location of the Itsekiri ethnic group. The development of the Itsekiri kingdom and the language owed much to contact with the Europeans (Ayomike, 2013).

When the Portuguese, Dutch and the British arrived on the Nigerian coastal region, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, they met with the Itsekiris who lived and still live mainly on the seacoast of Nigeria. The Itsekiri people traded with their European counterparts, especially the Portuguese and the British. This was due to their advantaged position and proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. During this period, Ayomike (2010) reports that the Itsekiri kings and chiefs controlled the trade, and that the dominant language then was the Itsekiri language.

In addition, the aforementioned diplomatic relationship between the Itsekiris and the King of Portugal in the seventeenth century paved the way for the incursion of Portuguese lexical items into Itsekiri linguistic structures, as attested by Mene Brown, (a historian and prominent chief in the Warri Kingdom) in an interview held with him on the 29th of October 2021.

Additionally, Brown (2021) corroborated Ayomike's report that the Itsekiri vocabulary was developed due to not only contact with the Portuguese and the British, but also contact with the

Bini and Yoruba peoples in Nigeria. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Bini culture influenced the Itsekiri culture.

Linguistic contact and interactions with these people seem to have had a lasting influence on the Itsekiri language. Some examples of words derived from the Portuguese language include kutele, (rat) sangi (blood) eroso (rice), matata (potato), kanaka (coffee cup), garafa (bottle), bedere (flag) and kujere (spoon), to mention but a few.

Furthermore, the flourishing economy of the Itsekiri speaking people discussed above was a magnet to both foreign and local traders. At the end of the Trans-Atlantic trade, and with the advent of British rule in Nigeria, though English was introduced and used in different fields such as education, medicine, media, public functions and administration, the Itsekiri language was still spoken, and it maintained its position as the dominant language of trade and communication in the coastal region of Nigeria.

During the trading period, people learnt the Itsekiri language because knowledge of the language was common and a necessity to do business in the coastal region. The Itsekiris held prestigious positions as clerks during the British administration in the early seventeenth century. Their direct contact with the British placed them in an enviable position, which equally underpinned the attraction to the Itsekiri language (Ayomike 2010).

Furthermore, with the discovery of crude oil in 1954 in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, people from different ethnic groups inundated the Itsekiri community, as previously mentioned. Warri, the principal city of the Itsekiri ethnic group became a renowned commercial centre with the development of overseas trade and an influx of foreign trade merchants. The presence of multinational oil corporations became a magnet for people. Other minority language speakers, such as the Urhobos, the Ijaws and the Isokos moved into Warri in search of greener pastures. According to Ayomike (2013), people from the neighbouring rural areas flocked into the city of Warri to trade and find jobs. Speakers of the majority languages such as the Hausas, Yorubas and Igbos were equally attracted to the oil rich city of Warri. To date, these languages non-indigenous to the Itsekiri community are still in existence in Warri and its environs. These new arrivals into the community overshadowed the small population of the Itsekiris and Itsekiri lost its position as a dominant language (Ayenbi 2014).

Oil industry activities boosted the growth of tertiary activities such as insurance, entertainment, leisure, real estate, hotels, restaurants significantly, in addition to rapidly expanded port facilities that made it easy to transport products.

Ayomike (2013) maintains that the post oil period since 1954 and the modernisation process that swept across the Niger Delta Region had a lasting effect on the Itsekiri-speaking community and consequently on the language. Industrialisation and subsequent presence of multinational oil corporations in the Itsekiri community did not only change the economic landscape and the way the people earned their living; it equally affected the linguistic landscape (Ayenbi 2014).

The historical and social trajectories of the Itsekiri nation over the last 70 years has transformed the Itsekiri language from the dominant and strong language it used to be, to a less powerful and less sort after language (Erumi, 2010). On the one hand, one may enthuse that the evolution of the Itsekiri language in the nineteenth century was largely influenced first by interactions with the Portuguese language, then with the Bini and Yoruba languages and British English. On the other hand, British English and (NPE) may have contributed to its gradual attrition. Moreover, the variety of Yoruba language, spoken mainly in Lagos has also influenced the Itsekiri language because of the similarity between the two languages. Erumi (ibid) maintains that although the Itsekiri language consists of linguistic traits similar to a Yoruba dialect spoken in Ondo State of Nigeria, however, Itsekiri is not a dialect of the Yoruba language. Erumi (2010) equally opines that the Itsekiri language is a mono-language, with some traces of differentiation in the pronunciation of some words due to modernisation. According to him, there are no marked varieties or dialects of the Itsekiri language.

Erumi further observes that the ease of absorbing terms and expressions from neighbouring languages by the Itsekiri population that lives in cities has brought about some linguistic varieties in the Itsekiri language morphology in recent years. Similarly, the incursion of NPE which derives some of its vocabularies from heritage languages into Itsekiri, is also a strong influence in the decline of the language (Erumi ibid).

Some literary works authored by Itsekiri writers are discussed here under.

2.2.7. Literary works in the Itsekiri language

While speaking about the development and evolution of the Itsekiri language it may be necessary to mention some existing literary works in the Itsekiri language. Though there is a limited number of literary works with which people can learn the language, only a handful of literature and language textbooks are written in the Itsekiri language. The following are some books written in the Itsekiri language as well as Itsekiri speaking authors who wrote about Itsekiri in English.

The first known books written in the Itsekiri language were the Bible and the Orthodox catechism with dates unknown to this doctoral research. Literary works available include: *Baible ni Owun Itsekiri* (The Itsekiri Bible), *Katikisim ti Ugbajo Katolik, Siemuesi, Afrika biri Kraist Apostolik* (Itsekiri catechism) printed by Abiodun printing works Ltd., Ibadan (the third largest city in Nigeria). The New Testament in Itsekiri, entitled *Faith Comes by Hearing, the words of God in the New Testament and the Oath of Matthew*, written in Itsekiri and available in audio file can be found online on mixcloud.com. Equally in existence are Itsekiri language biblical songs, stories and lessons as well a film shot in the Itsekiri language entitled *The Jesus Film Project* by Jesus Film media.

There are also numerous religious pamphlets and leaflets in Itsekiri, in addition to literary works written about Itsekiri by Itsekiri-speaking authors, some of which include literature about the history and culture of the Itsekiri.

Writers such as Ayomike J.O.S., Mac Eyioyibo and Mark Oghanranerumi who are the most renowned Itsekiri writers wrote different genres in English and in the Itsekiri language.

Ayomike J.O.S works centre mainly on historical narratives such as *BENIN AND WARRI: meeting points in History* (1993). The Itsekiri perspective, Mayomi publishers, Warri. *SELECTED ESSAYS: A mixed Grill*, Ilupeju press ltd, Benin- (2012). *A History of Warri*, Ilupeju press ltd., Benin city, 1998. *Nana: British Imperialism at Work, Warri: A Focus on the Itsekiri*, Dorrance publishing Co., Inc. Pittsburgh 2009. There are also a few non-academic articles tracing the Itsekiri monarchy from the sixteenth century to date edited by Ayomike published on the Ugbajor Itsekiri, USA yearly convention website.

In addition, Mac Eyeoyibo wrote storybooks on Itsekiri folktales, which hitherto were orally transmitted in the Itsekiri language. These books portraying the Itsekiri culture were written in the Itsekiri language.

Some of his books are *Tales by moon light in Itsekiri and English*, *Moonlight plays and games/sports Itsekiri* and *Hated for her beauty*, (2002) written in the Itsekiri language and simultaneously translated in English in the book. This is for a clear understanding of Itsekiri speakers who may not understand the Itsekiri language. Others are *Modern Itsekiri for today- Itsekiri gbe onuwe* Vol. 1, Mofe press, Benin City. 2002, *Modern Itsekiri for today, Itsekiri gbe onu we*, Iwe Okeji, Vol. 2. Mofe press, Warri 2017. These two books are equally written in the Itsekiri language with translations in English. Others are Itsekiri names and meanings, what is in a name? Mofe press, Benin City, 2008, Mofe's Dictionary in ITSEKIRI, IWE UMOFO, Mofe press, Benin city, 2008, Cookbook in Itsekiri, Mofe press, Warri, 2012.

Similarly, Ogharanerumi M., wrote *A handbook on Itsekiri Language, Ikoni owun Itsekiri* published by centre for Itsekiri studies, Warri, 2010. *A pedagogical Perspective of Itsekiri Language* aimed at teaching the Itsekiri language.

Other Itsekiri writers and their books are Sagay: *The Warri kingdom*, progress publishers: Sapele, 1981. Moore W., *History of Itsekiri*, Frank Cass & Co., Ltd. London, 1970. Ogbobine, R.A.I., *The Iwere (Warri) Kingdom and the Olu's overlordship rights in Itsekiri land*, Benin city, 1979. Rewane, A., *Link with the past*, Verity printers Ltd., Ibadan, 2000. *Studies in Itsekiri Culture*, Ireyefoju J.O and Ireyefoju F.E., 2014.

Furthermore, it is appropriate to mention an important and relevant book written by Obaro Ikime, a retired professor of History from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, *Merchant prince of the Niger*, centenary Edition, published by Obaro Ikime, Ibadan, 1968, 1995 and reprinted 2016.

However, I do not know of any academic work in Itsekiri. Perhaps there are some which are unknown to this study.

It may be expedient to mention that the volume of books published to date using the Itsekiri language is negligible. I am not aware of the distribution or availability of these books. Perhaps, they might be available in bookshops in Warri, Nigeria. The ones I got were offered to me by the writers themselves as complimentary copies.

2.2.8. Cultural practices of speakers of the Itsekiri language

In this research, language is deemed an aspect of the culture of a people; therefore, the history and evolution of the Itsekiri language is treated in conjunction with its culture. Copland & Creese (2015) suggest that language cannot be set apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determine the textures of peoples' lives. They argue that language and culture are inseparable. A language cannot be studied or learnt in isolation of the culture to which it belongs. Both concepts are socially inherited and have considerable relationship with each other. Culture and language are makers of identity in the Itsekiri speaking community. Some cultural activities of the Itsekiri speaking people related to their linguistic practices are examined in the following section.

2.2.8.1. Marriage, burial and name giving ceremonies in the Itsekiri ethnic group

Marriage, burial and name giving ceremonies are important cultural practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community. These activities exemplify domains in which the Itsekiri language is largely used.

In as much as English language and NPE are common means of communication in some homes and in the Itsekiri-speaking community, the Itsekiri language is largely used in conducting marriage, burial and name giving ceremonies.

The customary and traditional marriage ceremony is an important aspect of the Itsekiri culture. During the ceremony known in Itsekiri language as 'Temotsi, the family of the groom pays the dowry (a token amount of money - symbolic 12 shillings, historically inherited from the Europeans) on behalf of their son, to the family of the bride to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage. Thereafter, marriage rites are performed in which the intending couple is joined in marriage and pronounced husband and wife. The ceremony begins with the oldest man in the bride's family welcoming the groom's family while breaking the traditional kola nuts and pouring drinks on the floor and praying for the couple. In the ceremony, elders from both families present speak the Itsekiri language. There is also the presence of two spokespersons, each representing the bride and groom's families.

Furthermore, in his account of Itsekiri cultural practices, Ayomike (2010) observes that funeral or burial ceremonies are celebrated with fanfare. According to him, although this is a period of mourning the dead, it seems that a befitting ceremony with pomp and pageantry is necessary for the deceased to rest in perfect peace. Contrarily, it is believed that the spirit of the departed will keep wandering around in the world and will not be able to join his ancestors in the great beyond.

The Itsekiri people hold a grandiose and elaborate reception to welcome guests, friends and well-wishers of the deceased during which food and drinks served during funeral ceremonies are symbolic. The Itsekiri people believe a large ceremony ensures that the deceased has sufficient food to eat in his new world. They perform two types of dances known as “Ibiogbe” "Ukpukpe" derived from the Bini culture. The Ibiogbe dance is a rendition of seven songs to pay tribute to the dead. The Ukpukpe dance is military in nature and symbolic of war, depicting a war situation. It is believed that these symbolic dances in honour of the dead are evidence that the cause of death was not as a result of war and that the deceased is expected to go peacefully into the great beyond.

In addition, a very important culture of the Itsekiris is name giving. First names or given names are a veritable means of identification in the Itsekiri ethnic group. Akinnaso (1981) observes that names are very important personal markers of identity. He opines that personal names are distinguishable by language because each ethnolinguistic group name its members, places and things according to the sociolinguistic norms of the group.

2.2.8.2. Language brokering and mediation as cultural and social processes in the Itsekiri- speaking community

Two key features in the Itsekiri community are language brokering and language mediation. Tse (1996) suggests that language brokers facilitate communication between two linguistically and/or culturally different parties. Unlike formal interpreters and translators, brokers mediate, rather than merely transmit, information she remarks.

As a cultural and socialization process, translating and interpreting language for others, proficient Itsekiri speakers facilitate interaction by mediating between people from different ethnic groups who do not understand one another's language. This occurs mostly in cultural activities such as or

interethnic traditional wedding and child naming ceremonies. It is not uncommon to see spokesmen representing each ethnic group facilitating communications between both families. This phenomenon also takes place during traditional marriage ceremonies in which the groom may understand but cannot speak Itsekiri. In this respect, a mediator is usually seen facilitating communication between the groom and the elder members of the bride's family.

Similarly, Guan et al (2015) suggest that mediating information for members of different cultural and linguistic groups strengthens awareness of linguistic cultural and social processes. They maintain that this cultivated awareness, in turn, is leveraged for social and cultural processes as identity formation and transcultural competences. For example, people who mediate between different cultural groups express pride and identify in and with Itsekiri language.

2.2.9. Religion in the Itsekiri-speaking community

Modern anthropology considers religion as a sociocultural phenomenon, which has always been a significant characteristic of a peoples' civilization. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa it may be said that religious practices are similar in the mode of practice with few exceptions. Most people in Sub-Saharan Africa share the same religious beliefs and values. From the Anglophone to the Francophone regions of West, East and Central Africa, religious activities and practices seem to have no great variance. Cultural and religious practices in Sub-Saharan Africa are essential ways of life of the people. In Nigeria, religion is considered a way of life therefore, people regularly go to church in their best interests.

In that respect, religious activities often linked to the cultural practices of a people, is evident in the lives of speakers of the Itsekiri language. As part of their culture, the Itsekiri people accept religion as a way of life (Ayomike, 2010). A phenomenon central to their lives and seems to address certain social questions discussed in this section.

The Itsekiri people practice both the Western or Christian religion and the African traditional religion henceforth (ATR) which are functions of the Itsekiri peoples' belief systems.

In this doctoral study, the advent of Christianity in the Itsekiri society and (ATR) practices are mentioned briefly with emphasis on ATR as practiced in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

In discussing ATR, the focus is on the Itsekiri deities and their mode of worship and cultural beliefs. These elements are relevant to this study in relation to the linguistic behavior and practices of the Itsekiri-speaking people.

Ayomike (2013) argues that the Itsekiri people's religious systems are twofold. The Western or Christian religious practices, which originated from Egypt; propagated by the European missionaries, and imported to Africa, and ATR indigenous to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Researchers have linked Christian religion in the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group to the arrival of Europeans on Itsekiri soil in the sixteenth century. Ryders (1920) in Ayomike (2013) reports that the evolution of Christianity in the Itsekiri-speaking community was in the era of trade contact between the Itsekiris and the Europeans.

Ayomike (ibid) observes that a king in the Itsekiri kingdom, one of the Olus's sons, who was educated in Portugal, married a Portuguese woman, and eventually introduced Christianity into the king's court. Subsequently, other "Olus" followed suit and Christianity spread in the Itsekiri kingdom, though not without initial resistance due to the people's belief in their traditional religion.

Ayomike further reports that, in the nineteenth century, Christianity was only practiced in the king's court due to the inflexibility of the Itsekiris who refused to accept this "new religion" because the people preferred their traditional religion and their deity. Ayomike equally reported that the first church in Nigeria was built in Ode-Itsekiri, the ancestral home of the Itsekiri-speaking people. However, with modernization and western civilization, the Itsekiris have come to accept and embrace the "white man's" religion, as it was then known. Itsekiri Christians seem to have appropriated biblical doctrines, which are practiced using the English language largely and minimally in the Itsekiri language.

In most churches in the towns and cities in the Itsekiri-speaking community, Christian religious activities such as bible readings, Sunday school classes, praise and worship songs are in English. Preaching is mainly in English and sometimes translated into Itsekiri in the interest of older people

who may not understand English. Prayers are equally said in English. However, a handful of churches carry out Christian religious activities in Itsekiri, especially in the villages.

Recently, however, with awareness of the declining use of the Itsekiri language, some Itsekiris Christians are beginning to produce audio and video recordings of Christian activities in the Itsekiri language with subtitles in English. The aim is to encourage the use and speaking of the Itsekiri language.

As far as ATR is concerned, the Itsekiri traditional religion is polytheism, characterized by the belief in many gods, ancestral and idol worship (Ayomike 2010). Although, most modern Itsekiris are predominantly Christians, some still believe in the traditional and indigenous religion. Before the introduction of Christianity into the Itsekiri-speaking community, the form of religious practice was idol worship.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Itsekiris worshiped deities believed to be representative of God on earth. Some of the important deities are Umaleokun, Eburu, Ife and Ogun. In general, the worship of these deities takes place mainly in the rural areas and is generally marked by the worship of small gods belonging to the realm of the sacred. The language used in conducting religious activities in a traditional religious setting is mainly the Itsekiri language. Worshipers sing and chant incantations in Itsekiri (Ayomike 2010). This is because most of the sights and sounds are largely traditional and require the use of the Itsekiri language. Vocabularies applicable to traditional religious activities in the Itsekiri-speaking community appear non-existent in English since such deities are not known in the English-speaking societies. In this regard, the names of the gods examined below are difficult to translate into English given the fact that such deities are indigenous to the Itsekiris.

2.2.9.1. Deities in the Itsekiri-speaking community

In view of the linguistic importance to this study, presented below are some popular and important deities that existed before the introduction of Christianity into the Itsekiri community. These are Oritsenebruwe, Umaleokun, Eburu, Ogun and Ife Oracle

2.2.9.1.1. Oritsenebruwe

Ayomike (2010) reports that traditionally, the Itsekiris believe in the Supreme ‘being’ known as Oritsenebruwe. “Oritse” is a short form of Oritsenebruwe, which means Supreme God. Ayomike further reports that the conception of this supremebeing whom the Itsekiri fear and revere, as the creator of heaven and earth, is crystallized in the form of sacrifice offered through worship and adoration. This belief is evident in most Itsekiri first or given names, which often begin with “Oritse” meaning Almighty God. Some examples of such given names include Oritsetimeyin, Oritsejolomi, Oritseweyinmi, Oritgbubemi, Oritsetsolaye and Oritsemuoyowa, Utseoritselaju, to mention a few.

2.2.9.1.2. Umaleokun

Umalokun is a sea god, which some Itsekiris revere and adore. According to Ayomike (2013) historically, “Umale okun” was a legendary god who lived in the sea but went from time to time to live among human beings on land. The “Umales” were immortalized human beings who married women in the early times. However, with the introduction of Christianity, the “Umale” returned to the sea wherefrom the name “Umaleokun literarily known as the ‘sea god’ which, is said to be the fertility god.

The Itsekiri people believe that the sea god can help an infertile woman become fertile. It is believed that Umaleokun is the giver of children, therefore Umaleokun priests pray for infertile women to have children. He can heal the sick. If there happens to be a curse in the family, the former must offer a sacrifice with a hen or goat to appease the god for forgiveness. The people offer food items such as yam, ram and palm wine to worship him. While worshiping Umaleokun, libation is poured, and some incomprehensible words are chanted in the Itsekiri language.

2.2.9.1.3. Ebura

The worship of Ebura, a deity that depicts ancestry is commonplace and critical in the Itsekiri society. To non -Christians, Ebura is a very important part of their lives. This form of religious belief is centred on ancestral worship as well as the worship of the dead. The Itsekiris believe in life after death and that the dead transforms into ancestors. Some Itsekiris believe that the fate of

the children of the dead is in the hands of the ancestors; therefore, Ebura worship is important in their lives.

During the worship of Ebura, domestic animals, such as goats or cocks are slaughtered, and the blood spilled on the wall of a house. Traditionally, libation is poured on the floor, while breaking kolanut simultaneously and the name of the ancestor is called while praying. The chief priest makes the following pronouncements in the Itsekiri language: our father, here is your drink and your animal, which is sacrificed on behalf of your children; eat, drink and protect your children from evil. The priest prays for the family members asking for guidance and safety wherever they live in the world.

Ebura is equally believed to unite the family as no member is expected to harm the other otherwise the wicked is punished by the ancestors. A ceremony is organised yearly in memory of the deceased as a form of thanksgiving, during which the head of the family converses in prayer with the ancestors. In some homes, it is not unusual to find wooden statues depicting small gods which people appease. However, Christian families do not believe in ancestral worship.

2.2.9.1.4. Ogun deity

A popular god in Itsekiri traditional religious practices of old is “Ogun” – the god of Iron, war and technology. The worship of Ogun was copied from the Yorubas who migrated to the Itsekiri Kingdom in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Ayomike 2013). The symbol of Ogun is a sword. The people believe Ogun is a warlord, a warmonger, a warrior and patron of hunters. Not only Ogun is believed to have paved and led the way for other gods down to earth, he is equally known as a god who protects and takes away obstacles from people’s lives. As a leader, he is an innovator and a mediator. He is the supreme teacher, an archetype of destruction and creation. Believers in Ogun see him as their trusted savior. Those who believe in Ogun offer a yearly sacrifice as a way of adoration and worship.

2.2.9.1.5. Ife Oracle

In addition to the worship of deities, a religious belief equally common amongst non- Christians is the consultation of Ife oracle. The Ife oracle, known in Yoruba language as Ifa, is a belief system and practice the Itsekiris inherited from the Yoruba –speaking people who migrated from Ode, a Yoruba community in Southwest Nigeria in the fifteenth century.

According to UNESCO Intangible cultural heritage (2008), Ife oracle is a divination system, which employs spirit mediumship and uses extensive corpus of texts and mathematical formulas to uncover or unearth difficult issues. It is a system of signs that are interpreted by a diviner known as Ifa priest or Babalawo literally « the father of medicine ». The word Ifa refers to the mystical figure Ifa regarded by the Yorubas as the deity of wisdom.

The Itsekiris believe consulting Ife oracle when a person dies, is a way of determining the sanctity of the deceased. When a non- Christian Itsekiri dies, the Ife oracle is consulted to determine whether the deceased could be interred in the community or not. If the Ife oracle finds the deceased guilty of wrongdoing during his lifetime, he is not interred appropriately; rather he/she is left in the forest to be devoured by vultures. Where no wrongdoing is reported by the Ife, he/she is not only interred in the community, children of the deceased and family members organize a befitting burial ceremony in his honour. This practice is common in the villages mainly amongst non- Christians.

In addition, besides being a traditional healer and herbalist, the Ife priest is also known to be a soothsayer and a fortuneteller. Usually, an Ife priest appeases the gods on behalf of those who consult the oracle. When a person goes to consult the oracle, the Ife priest who mediates between the spiritual forces and the individual consulting the oracle, interprets what the gods say. Believers seek the guidance of the Ifa priest to uncover their destinies. Many hold the belief that the priest possesses the ability to reveal insights about their future. In times of misfortune or social challenges, individuals consult the Ifa priest to understand the root causes of their problems and seek solutions.

In addition, very importantly, the Ife oracle is used in the selection of a potential Olu of Warri through a detailed divination process. At the demise of a king, the Ife divination is consulted in view of ascertaining and eventually determining the next king amongst the children of the deceased king.

Although an important cultural belief in the Itsekiri-speaking community, Ife practice is generally limited to certain individuals who still believe in it. Itsekiri Christians do not believe in Ife worship as it is regarded as primitive and unchristian.

2.2.10. The Socio-economic context of Warri and language contact

An important feature in this research is the socio-economic context of Warri. It is expedient to bring to the fore the city on which this doctoral study focuses and chosen site for data collection. There are several reasons for this. Not only is this research situated in the city of Warri, it is the main and largest city of the Itsekiri ethnic group, where a large population of the Itsekiri-speaking people inhabit. Additionally, the fieldwork for the study, which produced data from observations as well as interviews, took place in the city of Warri. Added to that, the question of language contact in Warri is worthy of examining in relation to its importance in this study.

Warri is a multilingual and linguistically diverse city with latent linguistic transformation and linguistic conflict resulting from inter-ethnic crises amongst various neighbouring ethnic groups. As a principal commercial city, Warri attracts economic migrants from different ethnic groups who move in daily to work.

Warri and neighbourhood

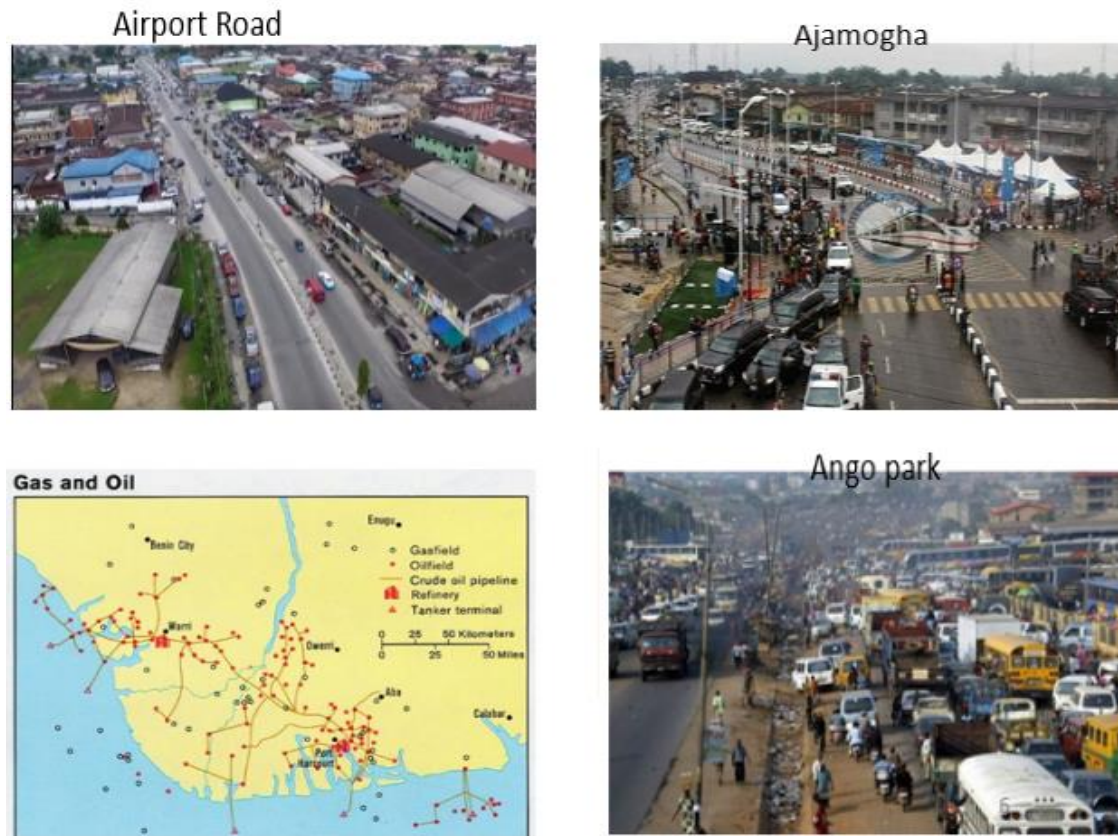


Figure 6: A map of Warri and its various neighborhoods

Source: Wikipedia

Situated in Delta State, in the Niger Delta region, South of Nigeria, the city of Warri has seen rapid growth since the oil boom of the 1950s.

In the past, Warri was a host to European trade merchants and missionaries. With the presence of foreign trade merchants in the coastal region of Nigeria in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Warri developed a huge trade relationship with foreign and multinational corporations and became famous and prosperous. As a commercial city with a seaport, it was the headquarters of several multinational corporations such as United Africa Company, (UAC), Niger Delta Tobacco Company (NBTC), John Holt Ventures and the Nigeria International Supply Services Company Overseas (NISSCO), which earned it the nickname “oil city” in the 1970, 80s and 90s.

As a multi-ethnic city with diverse ethnic nationalities, linguistic characteristics and heterogeneity consequent upon different languages in contact, Warri could be referred to as a super diverse city (Creese et al. 2018). Neighboring towns and villages contiguous to Warri are linguistically diverse and individual linguistic practices reflect the diversity of languages in contact in the environment.

The city of Warri can be characterised as linguistically diverse due to the presence of various ethnolinguistic groups. The two dominant languages present in Warri are Standard English, referred to as “good English” by Nigerians and NPE. The major heritage languages indigenous to Warri are Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijaw and Isoko. Languages non indigenous to Warri brought in by migrants and settler groups include Yoruba, Igala, Ibo, Effik, Edo, Ishan, Igarra and Hausa to mention but a few (Ayenbi, 2014). Members of these ethnic groups moved into Warri in search of means of livelihood.

With the growing presence of migrant languages in Warri over the years, speakers of these languages have spread across various communities in the heart of Warri. Having lived in Warri for decades, members of these ethnic groups interact with the autochthones, which renders the Itsekiri-speaking community an increasingly linguistically mixed society. Most of the ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria are found in the Warri metropolis and in towns contiguous to it (Ayenbi, 2014).

The case of the Hausa language, one of the major languages in Nigeria is worthy of mention in this study. The Hausa settler community has been in Warri since the early 1970s after the Nigerian Civil War. A neighbourhood known as “Hausa quarters” lies in the heart of Warri. Individuals who live and interact with the Hausa settlers acquire the Hausa language, in addition to English and NPE.

Warri has experienced and is still experiencing not only rural urban migration but also inter-state migration. A very recent phenomenon is internal migration from northern Nigeria to Delta state in southern Nigeria and especially to the city of Warri due to religious conflicts and insecurity following the famous Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria. Consequently, the Hausa community in Warri has not only been inundated by an increase in the population of Hausa who fled from Northern Nigeria to the South, neighbouring towns and villages contiguous to Warri

have witnessed influx of internal migrants. Hausa migrants have pitched their tents in every nook and cranny of Warri and its environs with exponential increase in their population in all parts of Delta State. Their mainstay is trade in food items such as tomatoes, onion, and vegetables as well as small ruminants such as goats, lambs, cocks, and hens, which are imported from Northern Nigeria.

Furthermore, the choice of Warri city as a focus of this study builds on Calvet's (2004) view of multilingual cities. According to Calvet (ibid), the rate of urbanization in cities in different countries of the world, makes cities a destination for people from rural areas who rush towards development with the hope of getting lucrative jobs.

With the discovery of oil and the development of infrastructure and urbanization in Nigeria, the city of Warri seemed the Eldorado of Nigeria where people from different ethnic groups converge and coexist. The convergence of migrants in Warri has significance linguistic consequences as rural inhabitants migrate to the city of Warri in search of means of subsistence.

Calvet (ibid) opines that city dwellers transmit languages acquired in the city to their children, and such language may enable people to find jobs. In the same vein, migrants as well as indigenous people in Warri seem to acquire the English language and NPE, which they in turn transmit to their children. Children from different ethnic groups attend the same school and are in the same class. They engage in shared recreational activities, dine together and speak either NPE and or Standard English. This dynamics portray a multilingual reality that may lead one to conceive the idea of the city as a factor of linguistic unification (Calvet ibid) and a place of language interaction and language hybridity. In other words, a place of linguistic cross breeding and the development of new linguistic varieties as remarked by Calvet (ibid).

Of essence, Warri as a focal point for migrants and convergence of different languages was a cynosure for observation and deemed an important city for the research. In Warri, multilingualism is manifested concretely in all public places such as markets, schools, commercial centres and on the streets. Evident in the city is linguistic integration often dominated by NPE and Standard English, which perform vehicular functions.

In addition, a common phenomenon that can be observed in the city of Warri is diverse linguistic competition and conflict amongst ethnolinguistic groups. Calvet (1994) cites the example of “moore” and jula” two competing languages in Songhai, and Hausa in Niger and Burkina Faso. Referring to the city as a crossroad for linguistic varieties, Calvet (2004) further remarks that it is a likely place for language conflict and language hybridization. In the same vein, with a demonstration of visible concentration and movements of people from different linguistic groups, Warri may be termed a crossroad for linguistic varieties with its share of linguistic conflicts.

2.2.10.1. Demographic and linguistic transformations and the place of Nigerian Pidgin English in Warri

In addition to the mosaic of languages indigenous to Warri, NPE, though not indigenous to any group, is a very important lingua franca, which serves as a means of communication amongst diverse ethnic groups that do not understand each other’s language. In the last few years, movement of people between states in Nigeria has increased exponentially.

Beside ethnic groups indigenous to Warri, the influx of internal migrants from other ethnolinguistic groups accross Nigeria, looking for means of livelihood has not only altered the demography in Warri, it could be said to have contributed to an increase in the city’s population currently estimated at approximately 1.5million people. UN world urbanization 2023). These different ethnic groups come with their languages and in a bid to communicate with one another in the absence of a common language; NPE emerged as the lingua franca in the city.

Creese (2018), while describing the changing patterns and variables that altered the composition, distribution and status of immigrant communities in Britain and Europe, used the term super diversity to refer to the meshing and interweaving of diversities, in which not only ethnicity, but other variables intersect and influence the highly differential composition, social location and trajectories of various immigrant groups.

In this respect, the city of Warri could be likened to one of such super diverse cities in Britain as a result of mass movement of people from accross Nigeria, who speak different languages, particularly the north due to religious violence. Inter-ethnic conflicts and wars have caused people

from diverse ethnic groups to move from their home states to the city of Warri. Although Warri is an economic destination for people searching for greener pastures, it has equally experienced its share of inter-ethnic conflicts. Folami (2017) reports the Niger Delta conflict which manifested in various dimensions among the Ijaws, Urhobo and Itsekiris notably, inter-ethnic conflict between Ijaw and Urhobo; Ijaw and Itsekiri; Urhobo and Itsekiri ethnolinguistic groups cohabiting in Warri. The conflict popularly known as Warri crisis that occurred intermittently between 1996 and 2003 was an offshoot of the unwillingness of the Delta State government to address problems associated with resources sharing in the State. The conflict resulted in internal migration in which people fled their remote villages and moved into the city of Warri.

On arrival, these internal migrants do not only cohabit and interact with members of the Itsekiri-speaking people, but they also intermarry with them. Consequently, there comes the necessity to find a common means of communication, a gap that NPE fills. Invariably, speakers of the Itsekiri language had to resort to speaking NPE, which serves as a lingua franca in the Itsekiri-speaking community. As the overarching means of communication common to all in diverse contexts, and a vehicular language all over Nigeria, the dominance and prevalence of NPE in the city of Warri and its environs is remarkable.

Various types of NPE were mentioned earlier in this chapter. Warri is famous for its linguistic creativity, therefore, the Warri variant of NPE may be said to be famous for its expressiveness and its uniqueness. The term Warri Nigeria Pidgin English (WNPE) is used in this doctoral study to refer to the distinctiveness of the type of NPE spoken in Warri, which is known as the capital city of NPE in Nigeria. According to Mou et al. (2017), NPE is spoken across the length and breadth of Nigeria, perhaps more than any other language today. NPE which has come to stay in Nigeria, is English based and it could be said that it serves as Nigeria's lingua franca especially in southern Nigeria in general, and in the south-south zone in particular.

2.2.11. Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to describe the context in which this thesis is situated. I have presented the macro and meso contexts, which are Nigeria, and the Itsekiri-speaking community respectively. To provide a better understanding of not only the extent, but also some of the

influencing factors of language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community, it was necessary to bring to the fore the general linguistic situation of Nigeria.

Situated on the West of Africa, Nigeria is a linguistically diverse and highly multilingual country. Although, the number of Nigerian languages and dialects spreading around 250 ethnic groups is not exactly known (Babalobi 2020), Nigerian linguists and researchers in Nigerian sociolinguistics have estimated between 500 and 650 languages of which major and minor ones are intertwined with dialects.

Roger Blench (2002) estimates the number of languages to be 678, while Solash & Gregory (2010) on the Ethnologue website estimate that 517 languages are spoken in Nigeria.

Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo, recognised as majority languages statutorily in relation to their population, are spoken predominantly in the north, south-west and south-east Nigeria respectively. Average minority (Ayomike 2013) languages are Fulfulde, Kanuri, Efik/Ibibio, Tiv and Ijaw. Micro minority languages are Itsekiri, Urhobo, Isoko, Idoma, Igala and Ekwere, Chamba, and Bachama to mention but a few. Most languages have a minority status due to the population of speakers, geographical spread and usage. In other words, the number of speakers and usage determine the status of these languages.

In addition, the Nigerian linguistic policies contained in the Nigeria Education policy (Nigerian policy of Education 2014) embrace the English language as language of education, which accords it the status of official language of instruction not only in schools, but also in public domains such as administration, the media, international relations and business.

The Itsekiri-speaking community examined in the meso context of the study, the major focus of the thesis, is a community with a population of about 2.5 two million people (the advocacy group 2021) situated in the Niger Delta Region, south of Nigeria. The Itsekiri language spoken by the Itsekiri ethnic group was formerly a very important and attractive language during the era of trade in palm oil with the early European explorers and slave traders in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was the language of trade amongst people of the coastal region of Nigeria and the European trade merchants. Contact with the Portuguese saw the incursion of the former's lexical items into the Itsekiri vocabulary, which was responsible for an upward evolution of the language.

However, things took a downward trend when in 1914, Lord Lugard, the then Governor of the colonial administration, merged the Southern and Northern Protectorates of Nigeria to create the country Nigeria and English was introduced for easy communication and administration.

The discovery of oil in the twentieth century saw a drift from the Itsekiri language to English, considered a neutral language with more functional load and functional transparency. The institutional support the English language enjoyed, backed by government language planning, management and policy changed linguistic practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Warri, the principal commercial city of the Itsekiri-speaking people, a host to multinational oil corporations, is a magnet for migrants from various parts of Nigeria. Job seekers, people searching for greener pastures and means of livelihood all converge in Warri. The arrival of people who come with their languages and cultures transformed the demographic and linguistic situation of the Itsekiri-speaking community. Linguistic diversity consequently led to the need for a common means of communication, a role that NPE and English play in the daily lives of the people. NPE and English serve as the overarching means of communication amongst ethnolinguistic communities with diverse languages. They are both used by people from different strata of the society and share the features of neutrality (Mou et al. 2017). This appears to account for the changes in the linguistic patterns and practices of speakers of the Itsekiri language who increasingly and currently use the English language, in apparent adaptation to the linguistic reality and ecology of their community; in addition to using it as a springboard for upward social mobility in the face of globalization.

3 Chapter 3 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines relevant theoretical and empirical literature that guide the study. The main objective is to present sociolinguistic concepts that operationalize the study, while highlighting existing views, opinions, and thoughts of scholars that are related to endangered minority languages in the field of language endangerment.

In operationalizing this research, language endangerment and minority languages, the two major theoretical frameworks that underpin this study are examined in relation to other sociolinguistics concepts related to heritage minority language setting. These notions are related directly or indirectly to language endangerment and heritage minority languages. (It is expedient to mention that heritage minority language is the preferred term used in this research instead of indigenous minority language. **(See details on heritage language on page 131).**)

In addition, conceptual metaphors and tropes used by sociolinguists to describe heritage minority languages are presented. Concepts examined in this chapter overlap and are interrelated as they may influence one another. For example, language endangerment may be due to language shift demonstrated in the linguistic attitudes and behaviour of speakers of a minority language, which may have been a consequence of language contact in a linguistically diverse environment.

Where there are diverse languages with the presence of a dominant language with more functional load (Pandarhipande, 2002) and use in important domains such as education, public and private administration, business, media and the judiciary to mention but a few, there is a tendency towards linguistic hegemony in society.

When members of a linguistic community become attracted to a dominant language because of its importance in the key domains mentioned above, they tend to adapt to the linguistic reality in their environment. They make a choice and manage language use in their homes and family language policy becomes noticeable; especially where the dominant language is backed by government

policies and planning and enjoys institutional support. Such a situation may not only result in language shift, but also non-intergenerational transmission of a heritage minority language, which may invariably result in the lesser used language suffering attrition and may engender language loss.

Grenoble (2011) remarks that the primary cause of language loss is language shift, a situation where speakers cease to speak their own native tongue in favour of what is usually a politically and/or economically dominant language.

3.2 Language shift and language endangerment

The focus of this study is language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community in Nigeria using the Itsekiri language as a case study. In examining language endangerment, it is necessary to equally analyse language shift as both concepts are interrelated since the latter may lead to the former in language contact situations in a minority/majority language settings. In this regard, the first part of this section focuses on the phenomenon of language shift, while the second examines the notion of language endangerment as postulated by sociolinguists.

3.2.1 Language shift

Austin & Sallabanks (2011) describe language shift as a situation when speakers of a language cease to speak their indigenous minority language in favour of a dominant and economically viable language in their environment. This is a situation where speakers from one generation to another abandon their heritage language for a language perceived as more useful language to them.

In most cases, the dominant language may be more prestigious with more political clout, more economic and social power over the minority language.

Igboanusi (2010) points out that language shift is the abandonment of one's own language in favour of another perhaps voluntarily in response to various types of pressures such as social, economic and cultural pressures in a community.

Elaborating further on the notion of language shift, Igboanusi distinguishes three major patterns of language shift. The first pattern is a shift from indigenous minority languages to the ex-colonial

and exoglossic languages, namely English, French, Spanish and Portuguese, considered the most common threat to linguistic diversity in West Africa. The second is a shift from minority languages to the dominant West Africa languages such as the Hausa language in Northern Nigeria and the Bambara, Jula and Wolof languages in Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal. The third type is a shift from minority languages to regional Lingua Franca such as NPE and Français Moussa in West African Francophone countries.

Examples of the first pattern of shift is that from the Itsekiri language to English in the Niger Delta region, Southern Nigeria, which according to Igboanusi (2010) is facilitated by urbanisation, industrialisation, and immigration. The second is a shift pattern from Ondo, a heritage minority language, to Yoruba, a majority and vehicular language in Southwestern Nigeria. Another example is a shift from Nupe, another heritage minority language, to Hausa, a majority and vehicular language in Northern Nigeria. An example of the third pattern of shift is from heritage languages such as Dioula, Baoulé, Malinke, to mention but a few to Nouchi in Côte d'Ivoire. Nouchi is a popular language spoken by young people in Côte d'Ivoire (Boutin & Dodo 2018). It was created from different languages to serve, as a means of communication among the unschooled. It is a mixture of French, English, Dioula, Baoulé Spanish, Malinke etc.

In addition, Leonore (2017) remarks that people shift to dominant languages due to urbanization especially in rural urban drift situations. This is an observable phenomenon in the Itsekiri community, although not peculiar to the community as it is common throughout Nigeria. As stated earlier, the Itsekiri-speaking community is endowed with economic resources, which attract people from neighbouring towns and cities, as well as people from across Nigeria. People seeking greener pastures and means of livelihood move into the city of Warri to find jobs. Often than not these people come with their languages and settle in the Itsekiri community.

Essentially, when various languages come into contact, there is a tendency that a switch to a different language, perceived to be more important in all fields of endeavour, takes place. Minority language speakers have a tendency to switch to the dominant language, especially in a cosmopolitan environment. The implication is that the minority language becomes threatened and endangered.

3.2.2 Language endangerment

Haugen (1972), known as the first sociolinguist to highlight the concept of language endangerment related it to the notion of language ecology (Mufwene 2001) and recognized that the later could not be studied in isolation independent of linguistic communities and environments. In that respect, languages may be endangered in an ecological space inhabited by a small number of people who speak minority and lesser-used languages.

Sociolinguists are of the view that the field of language endangerment gained prominence with scholars such as Fishman (1991), recognised as the precursor of the concept in applied linguistics. Before Fishman, it is on record that the domain of language endangerment was sparsely researched and minimally explored. Since Fishman, the domain has become increasingly visible as sociolinguists and ethnologists have extensively researched the phenomenon.

Studies and research in language endangerment is increasingly gaining visibility with scholars such as Fishman (1991), Grenoble & Whaley (2006), Igboanusi (2010), Austin & Sallabanks (2011), Olko & Sallabanks (2021), who have extensively researched on the phenomenon.

These scholars are consensual on various ways in which languages become endangered. In describing language endangerment experts in the field have identified various determinants of languages in danger with consensual opinions regarding indicators of a language in danger. They argue that, in order to determine the extent to which a language is endangered, it is necessary to assess the degree and factors responsible for language endangerment. They are of the view that a language is endangered when it is on a path toward extinction and when its speakers cease to use it, or perhaps use it in a reduced number of communicative domains and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. When there are no new speakers among adults or children, such languages may be said to be endangered.

Austin & Sallabanks (2011) opine that language endangerment may be the result of external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation, or internal forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language. They point out that internal pressures often have their source in external ones, and both halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions.

On their part, Grenoble & Whaley (2006) are of the view that many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They argue that minority language speakers abandon their languages and cultures in the hope of overcoming discrimination, securing livelihoods and enhancing social mobility.

Olko & Sallabanks (2021) observe that globalization, education policies, political, economic, and cultural marginalization of minority groups endanger languages.

Austin & Sallabanks (2011) identified three determinants of languages in danger, while maintaining that such factors relate to the causes of language shift or language change. Notably, the nature of the speaker base (adult, youth or children), domain of use and both internal and external support for or pressures against using the language. They further highlight different scales in use that suggest the level of endangerment in relation to speaker vitality, in relation to the percentage/proportion of speakers across generations and language use in terms of which domains the language is used and in which it is not used.

In addition, drawing from Grenoble & Whaley (2006), who followed Fishman's (1991) Graded Disruption Intergenerational Scale (GIDS) of measuring language vitality and status; Austin & Sallabanks (2011) propose six levels of endangerment: safe, at risk, disappearing, moribund, nearly extinct and extinct. These stages of language endangerment are examined below.

The first stage, "safe", is when a language is adjudged to be stable. That is all generations use the language in all or nearly all domains and the language has a large speaker base relative to other languages spoken in the same region. A safe language usually has official status and typically functions as the language of government, education, commerce, media, and international relations. Safe languages generally enjoy high prestige. Examples of safe languages are languages with high functional load (Paparipande, 2002) and wide geographical coverage, such as English and French.

The second stage is when a language is "at risk". This is a situation in which there is no observable pattern of a shrinking speaker base, nonetheless, the language lacks some of the properties of a

safe language. For example, it may be used in limited domains or have a smaller number of speakers than other languages in the same region.

According to Austin & Sallabanks, the third stage is when a language is adjudged to be “disappearing” and there is an observable shift towards another language in the community where it is spoken. They point out that disappearing languages are used in a more restricted set of domains and languages of wider communication begin to replace them in a greater percentage. An example is the observable shift from the Itsekiri language to English and Nigerian Pidgin English, a phenomenon that is common in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Furthermore, Austin & Sallabanks opine that with an overall decreasing proportion of intergenerational transfer, the speaker base shrinks because it is not being replenished. Significantly, a remarkable decrease in intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language is likely to shrink its speaker base, which may reinforce endangerment of the Itsekiri language.

The fourth stage of language endangerment is when a language is “moribund”, it is no longer transmitted to children and the speaker base is consistently shrinking.

In accordance with Harrison (2007), Krauss (1997) and Grenoble & Whaley (2006), Austin & Sallabanks (2011) are of the opinion that a language no longer being learnt by children as their native tongue is moribund. Its days are numbered, as speakers grow older and die, and no new speakers appear to take their place.

Lewis and Simon (2004) further add that a language becomes moribund when the only remaining active users are members of the grandparent generation and older people. This presupposes that a language may be moribund when young adults and children are not using it. A Fifth level of language endangerment is the “nearly extinct” stage in which only a handful of speakers of the oldest generation remain. The sixth and final stage in the language endangerment spectrum is an “extinct” language level when there are no remaining speakers.

Similarly, Krauss (1997) proposed the following stages of endangerment, which he enumerates alphabetically: A) the language is spoken by nearly all generations and learned by all or mostly children. B) the language is spoken by all adults of a parental age but learned by few or no children

(ie. the language is spoken by adults aged 30 and older, but not by younger parents), C) the language is spoken by adults aged 40 and older, D) all speakers of the language are aged between 60 and 70 and older, with fewer than 10 speakers, E) the language is extinct and has no speakers.

Some of the causes attributed to language endangerment range from massive language planning projects, the spread of killer languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) such as English through the dissemination of mass media, to the attitudes of speakers of minority languages who believe that no economic gain is to be had if children learn the vernaculars. Gordon et al. (2005) provide examples of countries like China and Indonesia that deliberately pursue policies inimical to sustaining endemic linguistic diversity.

Furthermore, the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ad hoc expert group (2003) on endangered languages proposed nine determinants of language endangerment considered as key factors in assessing language vitality. These include inter-generational transmission, absolute number of speakers, proportion of speakers within the total population, trends in existing language domains, response to new domains and media, materials for language education and literacy, governmental and institutional attitudes and policies including official status and use, community members' attitudes towards their own language and amount and quality of documentation.

The (UNESCO) experts (2006) classify endangered heritage languages into various categories such as vulnerable, definitely endangered, critically endangered and severely endangered languages. Specifically in Nigeria, they identify three vulnerable languages spoken by children and restricted to certain domains: Bade, Reshe, and Gera languages; and three definitely endangered languages, which include the Polci cluster and Duguza languages that children no longer learn as heritage language in homes. Fourteen critically endangered languages are also identified that only the young, grandparents and the aged speak partially and infrequently. These include Akum, Bakpinka, Defaka, Dulbu, Gyem, Ilue, Jilbe, Kiong, Kudu-Camo, Luri, Mvanip, Sambe, Somyev and Yangkum. Finally, there are seven severely endangered languages, spoken by grandparents and older generations only, though parent generation may understand but do not

speaking them to their children or among themselves. These include Gurdu-Mbaaru, Fyem, the Geji cluster, Hya, Kona, Ndunda and Nwagba.

Similarly, Blench (2002) in Babalobi (2020) equally cites examples of languages adjudged critically endangered in Nigeria. These include Akum, Bakpinka, Defaka, Dulbu, Gyem, Ilue, Jilbe, Kiong, Kudu-Camo, Luri, Mvanip, Sambe, Somyev and Yangkum, most of which are in Northern Nigeria. Ayenbi (2014) identified threatened languages in Southern Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta region. These are Itsekiri, Urhobo, Efik Ibibio, Ijaw, Ekwere and Isoko, to mention but a few.

Furthermore, Gordon (2005), Nau & Hornsby (2015) and Coupland (2010) report examples of endangered languages with the latter particularly arguing that almost all languages about to disappear are heritage languages. Nau & Hornsby (ibid), while giving examples of languages in danger observe that in New Zealand, the Māori language, a co-official, indigenous minority language belonging to the East Polynesian group of languages, is being efficiently revitalized and supported by a varied array of campaigns, including educational policies. Gordon (2009) maintains that Hawaiian, an East Polynesian language, is equally counted amongst languages in danger and more seriously endangered than Māori, as the number of its speakers is estimated to be from 1000 to 8000 regardless of the fact that there are 240,000 native Hawaiians in Hawaii.

Other examples of languages in danger enumerated by Nau & Hornsby (2015) include Catalan, a minority language spoken in France, reported to be by every means endangered as it is threatened with a break in intergenerational transmission and with the shrinking number of domains of usage in France where only about 100,000 users speak it. Similarly, Nau & Hornsby (ibid) report that the Turkic Karaim language situated on Crimean Peninsula used by around 120 speakers as well as an unverifiable number in the Ukrainian part of the peninsula is another example of a language in danger. The Karaims are the smallest of the officially acknowledged ethnic groups in Poland with around 50 people and 270 people in Lithuania respectively Nau & Hornsby (ibid).

Furthermore, Nau & Hornsby report that Võro and Seto, varieties of languages used between 13,000 and 70,000 people in the south of Estonia on the border with Russia are in an endangered situation. They maintain that despite a different history of development, a separate linguistic,

cultural and religious identity from that of the Estonians, the Voro and Seto languages have no official status in Estonia, a factor that is strongly impeding their vitality. Nau & Hornsby nonetheless report that school and extra-school language courses have been organized in recent times to revive these languages.

3.2.3 The notion of a threatened language and causes of language death

The phenomenon of language shift and language endangerment are in direct correlation with phenomenal threatening situations that languages may face. The element of threat in the life of a language is somewhat linked to language status which is determined by the degree of use of a language. A language may be considered threatened if its speakers stop speaking it and the language is not being transmitted from one generation to another. Linked to this notion is the position that a language occupies in the country or society in relation to its status and vitality.

These two vital elements may be determined by the degree as well as the domain of use in various important sectors, such as education, politics, public administration media, business to mention but a few. Added to that, are the attitudes and behavior of speakers of a language towards the language in relation to their decision whether to use the language or not. Where a language is not used sufficiently in the domains mentioned above, a situation of threat may be envisaged which may invariable in the long run result in language disappearance or extinction of the language. In examining the question of language endangerment, disappearance and extinction of languages may be considered synonymous with language death.

Furthermore, the notion of language death has been on the front burner in endangered language forums in the last decades. According to Harrison (2007), “languages do not literally die or go extinct, since they are not living organisms. Rather, they are crowded out by bigger languages. “Small tongues get abandoned by their speakers, who stop using them in favour of a more dominant, more prestigious, or more widely known tongue” Harrison (2007, p:5).

Equating language death to language loss earlier discussed, Harrison (ibid) posits that languages are lost when people shift en-masse from speaking the language of their parents to speaking a different language. He argues that when people exchange their ancestral tongue for the dominant

language of their country, they become culturally assimilated and linguistically homogenized. Arguing that the process of language death could be gradual, Harrison (2007) further notes that the death of a language begins with political and social discrimination against a language or its speakers. He remarks that official state policies on languages deliberately or otherwise to suppress minority languages could be utter neglect.

Painting different scenarios of language death, Harrison (2007) cites the example of Constantine Mukhaev, one of the last speakers of Tofa language in Siberia who recalls being punished for speaking his native language instead of Russian in school. In a similar vein, in a broadcast on a Canadian radio station, Kenedy (2017), reported that Lorena, a PhD student painted a picture of linguistic discrimination against Cree, a micro minority language in Canada. Describing a scenario that portrays deliberate government discrimination against a minority language, Lorene was particularly concerned about her daughter who would not know her heritage language because government linguistic policies require only the official language to be learnt in schools.

Similarly, examples in the context of this doctoral research are reports of pupils and students of primary and secondary schools being punished for speaking their heritage languages in classrooms in the Southern region of Nigeria. Ayenbi (2014) mentions that she experienced similar prohibition of speaking heritage languages in the classrooms in the 1970s. Pupils were punished for speaking NPE or their heritage languages in the classroom. According to Nzeaka (2017) prohibition of speaking NPE and heritage language in the classrooms is still in place in schools in some parts of the Southern States in Nigeria.

In the face of such pressures, many young speakers may be forced to abandon their heritage and Ancestral languages and not deem it necessary to transmit them to their children when they become parents. Since these languages are not used in important domains in their countries, they may not find it expedient to ensure the languages are used by the next generation. Such a situation could result in language shift and eventual death of a minority language.

Citing examples of near extinct languages worldwide, Harrison (2007) observes that in 2005, 204 languages had speaker communities numbering fewer than 10 people and that a further 344 languages had between 10 and 99 speakers. He argues that as their speakers grow old and die, these languages will descend to the level where only a few people will be left to speak them. He

observes that the 548 languages with fewer than 99 speakers make up nearly one-tenth of the World's languages, and all are faced with almost certain disappearance. Such languages become moribund because they are not being learned and spoken by young people.

In the same vein, linking linguistic genocide (Skutnab-Kangas 2013) to heritage minority language endangerment and language death, Coupland (2010) maintains that the poor economic and powerless political situation of minorities and indigenous people who live in the world's most diverse eco-regions are important background factors associated with language death. Coupland (ibid) added that formal education and media in dominant languages are the most common factors behind the macroeconomic, techno-military, social and political causes of linguistic genocide.

Furthermore, alluding to how minority language speakers suffer destitution and are forced into assimilation by governments, Coupland (ibid) posits that heritage indigenous language do not just disappear, but that many States seek to eliminate or to 'murder' minority languages through language policies and decisions that do not favour them.

Languages may disappear due to linguistic hierarchy or language discrimination against minority languages via language policies that favour dominant languages. Coupland (ibid) maintains that minority languages are adjudged unfit for a postmodern, digitalized age because people opt out voluntarily or decide not to use minority languages.

In multilingual societies, minority language speakers are forced to make choices that may not be favorable to their languages, as they are obliged to adapt to government linguistic policies with a view to surviving. One of the fundamental issues that can easily be identified in multilingual societies is that of inequality in the use of languages which results in the marginalization of minority languages and eventual death of the language.

In making what might seem a positive choice in moving forward linguistically in the face of globalization, speakers of minority languages make informed decisions to speak the predominant language in their locality; that which is most beneficial to them for reasons ranging from economic, educational and political. They adopt languages that enable them to communicate with the outside world, which may in the long run have a negative impact on their heritage languages. Additionally, identifying with the preferred dominant and more powerful language in their community, minority

languages speakers demonstrate linguistic behaviour that may not only pose a threat to their language, but also endanger their language.

A positive attitude towards a minority language may reinforce its vitality, while negative attitudes may pose a threat and contribute to endangering the language.

3.2.4 Implication of language endangerment and language death

The implication of language endangerment and death is of relevance in this research in the sense that the heritage minority language in question – the Itsekiri language is hypothetically facing a significant threat in the light of the prevailing linguistic situation relating to its use both internally and externally, that is in the home and in the community.

While advancing various scenarios underlying language endangerment synonymous with minority languages, scholars in sociolinguistics have highlighted various implications of the phenomenon. (Fishman 1991), (Kraus 1997), (Gordon 2005), (Grenoble & Whaley 2006), (Harrison 2007), (Simons & Lewis 2010), (Austin & Sallabanks 2011) and (Olko & Sallabanks 2021), key scholars in the field of endangered languages have identified major implications of language endangerment and language death. In this study, I highlight some of the implications of language death advanced by Harrison (2007).

Harrison (ibid) is of the view that language disappearance is an erosion or extinction of ideas; of ways of knowing and of ways of talking about the world human experience. Underscoring a plethora of consequences of language death, he points out that when you lose a language, you do not only lose a culture, intellectual wealth and a work of art, but also, people's patrimony, identity and human knowledge base are eroded. Unorthodox and traditional medicine is lost when no one speaks the language in which the knowledge could have been transmitted, he argues.

Additionally, he observes that modern technologies, modern farming implements, laboratories, calendars, and libraries render traditional knowledge obsolete. He argues that human natural knowledge that lies completely outside of science textbooks, libraries, and databases, only exists in unwritten languages in people's memories. Harrison is of the view that if this knowledge is not handed down or passed on to children and younger generations, it is only one generation away from extinction and jeopardy. He opines that, such an immense human knowledge base remains

unexplored and uncatalogued if not passed on and that most of what humans have learned over the millennia about how to thrive on the planet is encapsulated in threatened languages.

Furthermore, Harrison (2007) remarks that not only our rich patrimony of human cultural heritage is lost, but traditional wisdom also found in oral history, genres, the product of human ingenuity, wordplay and creativity found in human languages such as poetry, epic tales, creation stories, jokes, riddles, wise sayings and lullabies are lost when languages die.

According to Harrison (ibid), belief systems, songs and epic tales will be gone if not passed on to younger generations. We will be condemned to cultural amnesia that may undermine our sense of purpose and ability to live in peace with diverse people if we allow our own history to be erased by not speaking our language (Harrison 2007). He argues that when a mother tongue or a minority language is abandoned, the collective wisdom of entire human societies languishes for lack of attention from outsiders and for lack of interest by the culture bearers themselves and lack of interest on the part of their children.

Following Harrison's (2007) thought process in relation to language death; implications associated with language disappearance are enormous and may leave speakers of heritage minority languages thinking. The implications of language death may equally be evident in the Itsekiri-speaking community, which will therefore require concerted efforts on the part of speakers the Itsekiri language to maintain it.

Examples of languages experiencing decline around the world have been of concern to sociologists who work in this field. Beside language decline and language death, other phenomenon exhibited in endangered minority languages settings are language attrition and language loss examined hereunder.

3.2.5 Language attrition and language loss

The twin phenomena of language attrition and language loss are equally relevant to the question of language shift and language endangerment. In sociolinguistics, these concepts are closely associated with language contact and linguistic hegemony, which are sometimes evident in minority language contexts.

The Cambridge Advanced Dictionary defines attrition as becoming and making less strong. Gradually making something weaker and destroying it, especially the strength or confidence of an enemy by repeatedly attacking it can cause attrition. In the workplace for example, a reduction in the number of people who work for an organization that is achieved by not replacing those people who leave could be termed workplace personnel attrition.

Terms such as language attrition and language loss used by sociolinguists emerge when languages are described considering the above painted scenarios especially in relation to language situations and statuses.

Language attrition according to sociolinguists, psycholinguists, linguists and neuro linguists is a relatively new concept in applied linguistics. A phenomenon which researchers in the field of sociolinguistics refer to as individual language loss was first discussed in 1980 at a conference at the University of Pennsylvania (Schmid 2011), where indicators of attrition such as language loss in children and adults' first (L1) and second (L2) language were highlighted. In that conference, loss due to pathological conditions such as aphasia or dementia and loss in healthy individuals were differentiated.

In this doctoral study, emphasis is laid on language loss resulting from language shift and language change. In discussing language shift and language attrition, (Muhlhauser 2003), refer to language loss, also called "abrupt language loss", as a condition considered uncommon. He is of the view that language loss is a result of language shift and language attrition; a gradual kind of loss where speakers of a language decide to stop speaking their ancestral language/tongue or not to speak it to their children and to use another language instead.

Schmid (2011) distinguishes language loss at the individual and the community levels while describing language attrition as the forgetting process of a language by an individual. She points out that language attrition refers to the total or partial forgetting of a language by a healthy speaker. While according to her, language loss results from a pathological condition due to asphyxia, she defines language attrition as the loss of, or changes to grammatical and other features of a language as a result of declining use by speakers who have changed their linguistic environment and language habits. Schmid (2011) argues that the speaker's environment as well as his or her attitudes and processes of identification can affect changes in the linguistic features.

Schmid (2011) further posits that the process of forgetting takes place in a setting where the source language is rarely used, especially in the situation of immigrants where the language of the country

in which they live is the predominant medium of communication in everyday life. An individual who has migrated to a different country from his country of origin and who has no contact with his heritage language of origin is likely to lose it due to non-use.

There are examples of Nigerians in the diaspora who have lived in the United Kingdom and the United States for over 30 years and who share their inability to speak their heritage languages as a result of their absence from Nigeria.

At the community level, Schmid (2017) observes that when speakers of a community language stop speaking their heritage indigenous language, the tendency to lose that language may be evident. She points out that language loss is the same as language shift or language death.

Certain elements such as violence, hardship, humiliation, conflict and war situations may affect the quality or frequency of use of a language. The presence of the aforementioned, which may result to displacement of speakers of a language to a new environment, whereby they may need to learn the language of the new country or environment can cause language loss. The situation can pose a threat not only to the displaced individual's heritage language, but also to the language of the community thereby leading to language endangerment.

Schmid (2017) is of the view that, while attrition is considered the beginning of the process of language loss in a situation of language contact, a person's language may undergo attrition, partly through non-use and partly through interference from the dominant contact language without being completely lost.

When members of a linguistic community become attracted to a dominant language because of its importance in the key domains mentioned above, they tend to make a choice of language to be used in their homes and family language policy becomes noticeable; especially where the dominant language is backed by government policies and planning and enjoys institutional support. Such a situation may result in non-intergenerational transmission of a heritage minority language, which may invariably result in language threat and language endangerment.

Grenoble (2011) remarks that the primary cause of language loss is language shift, when speakers cease to speak their own native tongue in favour of what is usually a politically and/or economically dominant language.

Sociolinguists, over the years, have increasingly advanced theories that tend to bring the question of language shift and language endangerment in a minority language setting into limelight. However, further studies need to be undertaken in this domain, as minority languages seem to be increasingly in a situation of threat due to abandonment by their speakers. With the presence of a dominant language, heritage language speakers may tend to adapt to the linguistic and socioeconomic realities in their environment.

Having discussed the main theoretical concepts that underly the study, it is equally pertinent to examine other important notions that are relevant to and evident in the context of the study. The first of these are the notions of language ecology and language contact in speech and linguistic communities.

3.3 Language ecology and language contact in a minority language setting

This section examines the interrelationship that exists between language ecology and language contact in a speech and linguistic community.

3.3.1 Language ecology, speech and linguistic community

Language endangerment does not occur in a vacuum. It occurs in an environment in which speakers of languages exist. This invariably necessitates analysis of the notions of language ecology and language contact in speech and linguistic communities.

The concept of language ecology generally associated with Haugen (1972) dates back to Voegelin et al. (1967). Austin & Sallabanks (2011) taking further the term language ecology, refers to it as the relationship between a language and the people who speak it. “It is a field that studies the interrelationship between speakers and their languages in their contemporary and historical context” (Austin & Sallabanks, 2011:30).

The concept of language ecology explains the interaction between language, social, cultural, and ecological factors within an environment or a community. Such factors which may be of economic or political in nature, include the presence and use of other languages within linguistic and non-linguistic spheres.

Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (2011) define language ecology as an ecological approach to language that considers the complex web of relationships that exist between the environment, languages, and their speakers. They refer to the environment as physical, biological and social environments. This implies that language ecology considers relationships between speakers of a language, the social, physical and biological context and by extension, people's feelings, their beliefs and behaviour towards languages.

Wendel (2012) argues that a language does not exist in a vacuum and that language is a function of the human species. According to him, languages occupy ecological niches, as do biological organisms. He describes a language niche as the network of social, political, economic, and environmental spheres within which a community of speakers carry out their activities. The physical and cultural environment may be either favourable or unfavourable to a language. When the environment in which a language exists is favourable, meaning the users of the language are positively disposed to using the language in all domains, the language is likely to thrive in that ecological space. Conversely, the language either may be in an endangered or threatened situation or may be heading towards extinction, as exemplified in case of the Itsekiri language in Nigeria.

Drawing from Wendel (2002), Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (2005) observe that as the environment favours certain features over others, producing organisms that are better adapted to it, so does the physical and cultural environment interact with and favour characteristics in a speech community. People individually or collectively use languages within groups in speech communities in an ecological space.

Spolsky (2007) describes a speech community as those who share a communication network and are united by agreeing on the appropriateness of the use of the multiple linguistic varieties used in that community. He remarks that a speech community may be a family or a group of people who regularly use the same coffee shop, work in an office, or live in a village, a city, a region, or even

a nation. For example, Spolsky suggests that the English-speaking world could be a demonstration of a speech community. Spolsky's description of a speech community may imply that there are speech communities all over the world who speak varieties of languages.

Kachru (1986), on his part, draws our attention to the many varieties of speech communities that constitute World Englishes, or those of the Francophone world. He argues that the entire world is laden with pockets of speech communities. A concrete example of a speech community is the community of reference in this study. In the Itsekiri-speaking community, people relate and interact while using diverse languages in their daily lives.

Furthermore, Spolsky (2007) observes that a linguistic community encompasses all those who speak a specific variety of languages. Linguistic and speech communities can be found within minority groups who are in contact with one another in an ecological space.

The presence of varieties of languages in a community portrays the phenomenon of language contact and linguistic diversity, which are key features in minority language settings and are phenomenal in language shift situations.

Since language ecology results from the environment and the interactions between the people who inhabit that environment, the relationship between a language and the speech community is therefore a determinant factor in the survival of minority languages. The existence of various speech and linguistic communities in contact and their interrelationships in the Itsekiri ecological space constitutes an essential part of this study and therefore requires ample attention. This is with a view to analysing language shift in relation to the linguistic attitudes and behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language in connection with the linguistic practices in their community.

3.3.2 Language contact, linguistic diversity and the hegemonic influence of English

Relative to the context of this study with its myriads of languages are the phenomena of language contact, linguistic diversity linguistic hegemony. These notions are key elements that require in-

depth analysis. Language contact, linguistic diversity and hegemony drive language shift and language endangerment especially in a multilingual context such as the Itsekiri-speaking community in Nigeria.

The Itsekiri-speaking community comprises several heritage minority languages with a phenomenal language contact situation and a rich linguistic diversity notably, Uhrobo, Ijaw, Isoko, Edo, Hausa, Ishan, Igala, Effik to mention but a few. Speakers of these languages cohabit and interact with one another in a linguistically diverse country.

3.3.3 Language contact

Sociolinguists describe language contact as situations in which speakers of different languages interact with one another, and their languages influence each other, especially in a multilingual environment. Austin & Sallabanks (2011) opine that social and structural factors underpin language contact phenomena. They argue that speakers of different languages come into contact with each other for various reasons such as migration, trade, colonization or military occupation which involve the mobility of speakers.

A typical example of language contact in history is that which existed amongst slaves in the era of slave trade in Nigeria in the nineteenth century. The mix of the slave languages with the Portuguese language produced a simplified form of language structure, or Pidgin used as a means of communication.

In Africa, many languages are in contact. For example, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijaw, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, English and NPE are languages in contact in Nigeria. Akan, Twi, Dagbani, Gagaare, and Gaand English are in contact in Ghana; Wolof, Pular, Serer and French in Senegal. Minna, Ewe and French in Togo; Kikongo (Kituba), Lingala, Swahili, Tshiluba and French to mention but a few are spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Similarly, amongst the large number of languages present in South Africa, government recognizes eleven of them officially. English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa (Fought 2006) are a few of them.

The language contact situation in Nigeria may be attributed to regional boundary adjustments, which brought linguistic groups together in one community (Nigerian constitution 1999). This is

a consequence of colonial regroupings in Nigeria in which community boundaries were adjusted and different ethnic groups and their languages were lumped together.

Language contact is not a phenomenon found exclusively in Africa. In other parts of the world, some examples of languages in contact include Catalan and Spanish in Spain, Alsatian and French in France, Flemish, French and German in Belgium, Malay and Tamil in Singapore, Spanish and English in the United States of America. Contrarily, the linguistically complex phenomenon due to a high degree of linguistic diversity is intensified in the African context. Some common features of language contact include pidginisation, code-switching and lexical borrowings. Others are bilingualism, multilingualism and translanguaging. (See pages 163-166) These elements are exemplified in the context of this research and are demonstrated in the linguistic practices of speakers of the Itsekiri language.

In Nigeria, members of linguistic communities exhibit language contact induced linguistic features such as code-switching, code-mixing, lexical borrowing, approximation and convergence in their discourses. These linguistic features, which are consequences of linguistic diversity, are characteristic of the linguistic behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language.

3.3.4 Linguistic diversity

Linguistic diversity, the presence of several linguistic varieties in a country or community (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002) is evident in the Nigerian ecological space. Diverse languages and cultures characterize the world. Mesthrie (2011) argues that the highest levels of linguistic diversity (number of languages per square mile) are found in countries like Papua New Guinea and Nigeria with around 820 and 516 languages, respectively. Linguistic diversity can arise from migration especially when economic migrants import their languages to their new settlements. For example, in the context of this study, the Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and other heritage minority languages in Nigeria are present in the Itsekiri-speaking community owing to migration.

In recent years, between 2002 and 2022, terrorism and banditry in Nigeria has caused people to migrate from Northern to Southern Nigeria, especially to the Niger Delta region. The region in which this study is situated is increasingly experiencing influx of speakers of different languages into its territory due to its economic prosperity and relative peace. What may be referred to as

intra-regional migration, in which people move from North to South in Nigeria, is a common phenomenon. The city of Warri and its environs are attractive destinations for internal migrants seeking for means of subsistence.

Linguistic diversity in the Itsekiri-speaking community is a phenomenon that has largely engendered diverse linguistic discourses, linguistic creativity as well as language hegemony.

3.3.5 Language hegemony

An equally fundamental element to the question of language endangerment and heritage minority languages is the phenomenon of linguistic hegemony. The Merriem Webster dictionary (2000) defines hegemony as the controlling power or influence over others. Scholars associate the word hegemony metaphorically with languages, giving rise to the concept of language hegemony.

Yeonhee & Namkung (2012) define linguistic hegemony as the influential or dominant role of a widely accepted language by a large population in terms of spread over a less accepted language in terms of population and spread. In other words, it is the controlling influence and power of a high and dominant language over minority languages with low status.

Tollefson (1991) drew an analogy from existing hegemonic situations in Britain and the United States where, according to him, linguistic minorities are denied political rights where multilingualism is widespread and are invisible in the major mass media, in government and in most public discourses such as radio talk shows and newspapers. He describes the exclusion of minority languages in public discourses, as linguistic hegemony.

Linguistic hegemony is evident in situations where languages are in contact, and one language is dominant and serves the majority of the population as a communicative tool used in all domains. Scholars in sociolinguistics often cite the English language as an example of a dominant language when discussing linguistic hegemony in relation to minority languages (Mustapha 2014). While arguing that the theoretical framework of linguistic hegemony is closely related to linguistic imperialism, they are of the view that the power of English affects other countries through political, socioeconomic and cultural dynamics. Phillipson (1992) & Yeonhee & Namkung (2012) posit that English achieved its dominant position as the principal world language owing to the fact that,

it has been actively promoted as an instrument of foreign policy of the major English-speaking States.

In the face of globalization, exogenic languages such as English, French and Spanish, considered more important than heritage languages and receive government and institutional support are seemingly imposed on speakers of heritage languages who have no choice but to learn and use them in order to adequately into the society.

Globalization seems to have paved the way for English to be accepted as an international and world medium of communication in nearly all fields of endeavour, especially in the domain of academia, international relations, media, politics, information and communication technology (ICT), as well as business.

The English language functions as an effective means of communication the world over. For example, “English commands the largest number of speakers around the world (1.5 billion). The only language with official status in over 60 nations of the world; it is the dominant language in scientific communication with 70-80 % of academic publications in the language, the de facto official and working language in most international organisations and the most taught second/foreign language across the world” (Abolaji, 2014 p: 60).

The above assertion has implications for language endangerment in a minority language speaking community, as speakers would prefer to identify with and adopt a medium of speaking that will enable them to participate in society. This may not be different from the context of the study as, the Itsekiri-speaking community mirrors the larger Nigeria linguistic space. The Itsekiri-speaking context appears to conform to the linguistic culture demonstrated in the adaptation to the global world English represented in the use of the internet, mass media, information technology (Copland 2010) due to globalisation, an offshoot of colonization examined in the following section.

3.4 Linguistic colonialism and the spread of English language

Equally relevant to the study is the phenomenon of colonialism and the spread of English language. A lot has been written on colonialism in Africa. In view of the broadness of the notion of

colonialism and its impact on African languages, this section focuses on British colonialism, the introduction of English and its linguistic consequences in context of this study.

In view of identified impact of colonialism on African languages, this study reviews some positive and negative impacts of colonialism exemplified in the changing linguistic patterns and discourses in Africa with special reference to the Nigerian linguistic landscape in general and particularly in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

After the scramble for and partition of Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European countries moved into self- apportioned countries and introduced politics of divide and rule (Garba 2012). Leith (2002) observes that the British colonialists established colonies in Africa after 1880 and African cultures were heavily influenced in various domains especially in the area of languages which is the main focus of this doctoral research.

The first attempt to gain control of the people of Africa was the introduction of schools and churches (Nzeaka 2017). The early European missionaries, essentially the British missionaries brought western education and religion to the parts of Africa acquired and introduced the English language to facilitate communication between the Africans and Europeans (Nzeaka 2017).

Before we go on to analyse the impact of colonialism in detail, it is necessary to define the notion. Colonialism, often used interchangeably with the term imperialism, has been defined by different scholars who interpret it variously in their own ways.

Garba (2012) defines colonialism as a situation of a powerful country taking over the political, economic, social and cultural control of a less powerful country and rules it as a subordinate nation. Garba (ibid) observes that the phenomena associated with colonialism include monopolistic seizure of territories, enslavement of the indigenous population, racism and militarism.

Formunyam (2020) on his part observes that colonization is the enthronement of political influence by one powerful nation over a weaker nation. Osterhammel (2005) defines the term colonialism as a relationship between an indigenous majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The foreign invader, in this case, the British colonizers, in their expansionist activities, spread to other regions of the world and settled in countries such as Australia, United States, Canada referred to as settler countries. They equally settled in other countries such as Nigeria, Sri Lanka, India, South Africa, Ghana, Jamaica to mention but a few, referred to as non -settler countries (Sekhar 2012).

Leith (2002) observes that unlike Australia and America in which British colonizers migrated and settled, the situation was different in British West African colonies such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone where a small number of British official employees ruled. The British colonizers did not quite settle in Africa, perhaps due to the unfavourable tropical weather and the presence of mosquitoes which caused malaria that led to the death of the colonizers. To the contrary, the weather in Australia and the Americas may have been conducive for habitation, which could explain the settlement in such countries.

Similarly, Mufwene (2002) echoing Leith (ibid) describes these two types of British colonies: settler colonies and non-settler colonies. According to him, in the settler colonies, the British colonizers lived amongst the autochthones and integrated into the community. While in the case of non-settler colonies, they lived separately from the indigenous people they colonized depicting a different type of settlement in which the colonial masters lived in segregated neighbourhoods away from the indigenous people. Mufwene further observes that during the European exploitation and colonization of Africa and Asia, the colonizers lived in their own separate quarters and communicated with the masses and the natives through intermediaries identified in history as colonial auxiliaries. This multilingual situation was equally manifested during the colonial era in Nigeria when locals acted as interpreters between the indigenous people and the British colonial masters.

Furthermore, the arrival of British colonizers and their subsequent introduction of the English language in Africa, Australia, Asia and America resulted in language contact. In the various colonies, English language came in contact with indigenous languages (Rihane 2013).

With the introduction of western education into the British colonies and the focus on English language as the medium of instruction, the indigenes perceived English as the language of power and prestige (Rihane 2013). Rihane observes that after their independence from the British Empire, West African countries such as Nigeria, Sierra Leon, Ghana and Liberia adopted English in their schools and it became the medium of instruction.

One of the linguistic consequences of British colonization is the formation of new pattern of speech. The use of English by non-native English speakers from different parts of the world as

mother tongue and second language (Kachru 1983) led to the creation of new varieties of English influenced by aboriginal languages of the countries colonized (Rihane 2013).

In the same vein Mufwene (2002) observes that the variety of languages in the populations of colonies, in addition to regular interaction between the people led to the formation of new languages that can either be labelled as Pidgins or Creoles (**see detail on page 135**). New dialects of the English language, such as Australian English, in addition to formation of new Englishes with their own standards and codes, such as South African English emerged (Mufwene 2002), as well as Nigerian English.

Rihane (2013) observes that the native South African languages spoken in South Africa influence South African English. Elmes (2001) asserts that more than half the lexis of the South African English are derived from Afrikaans, a South African language. He points out that Afrikaans words which are associated with the South African culture and heritage are present in South African English. Some examples are “kloof” and “vled” which means valley and open country respectively.

Similarly, Jowitt (2020) observes that Nigerian English, which differs from NPE is a variant with distinct characteristics and forms; one of the outer circle varieties found in the world today, likely to evolve its own endoglossic standard internally accepted in Nigeria. Illustrative examples of Nigerian English are sentence forms such as “He is not on seat or Master, they are looking for you”, “barb” which means “to cut and dress someone’s hair”.

Furthermore, linguistic colonialism engendered by the expansion of English language from the British Isles to different parts of the world and its imposition on the British former colonies led to increase in the number of English speakers in the world (Rihane 2013). Phillipson (1992) refers to the expansion of English as linguistic imperialism, which he describes as the dominance asserted and retained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.

In addition, one of the negative effects of colonialism is the designation of African languages as indigenous languages. African languages are often referred to as indigenous language (Wolf 2021). Wolf opines that Africa being the home of almost one third of the world’s about 7,000 languages,

the pre-colonial sociolinguistic situation was aggravated by colonial imposition of foreign languages of mainly European provenance. This according to him is evident in more than 20 percent Sub-Saharan Africa population's competence in the official European languages. He argues that African schoolchildren and university students are taught through the medium of foreign language. Consequently, majority of African population do not enjoy the rights and privileges listed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (Wolf 2021).

Wolf (ibid) argues that Africans are excluded from the right to recover, use and pass on to future generations their histories and languages, oral traditions, writing systems and literature, and to be heard and understood in their own languages in different settings.

Advancing what seems an impact on the educational system in Africa, he points out that Africans are excluded from the right to ensure that their children get the same benefits from the education systems as others in ways that respect their own indigenous cultures and languages. He argues that colonialism had de-indigenised Africans in relation to language rights, which makes them second class citizens in their own countries, locked in their decision to speak the foreign language with their children to maintain certain status and be relevant in the society.

Wolf (ibid) argues that autochthonous African populations were forcefully deprived of the territorial basis of their existence as indigenous peoples of their lands by the cultural imperialist land-grabbing tendencies. Consequently, the pre-colonial existence of afro phone territories on which African languages were spoken as significant markers of indigenous identities, was politically and ideologically re-constituted as post-colonial Anglophone, francophone, luso-phone and arabo-phone states, which according to Wolf (ibid) is strategic de-indigenisation.

In effect, it may not be out of place to imagine that colonialism had important effect on cultures, education, and language as well as politics in some African countries as current language policies in Africa serve neither the interest of learners and speakers of colonial languages nor that of the post-colonial societies in relation to sustainable development (Wolf 2021).

Beside languages, the other most affected domain is that of education, of which Wolf argues that multilingual strategies involving both African and ex-colonial language practices in Africa culminates in subtractive bilingualism beneficial to the exoglossic languages- imported foreign language (Wolf ibid), which continues to discriminate against African mother tongues and lingua Franca – referred to as marginalised indigenous languages (Wolf ibid).

To this end, the vast majority of African languages and their speakers have become almost invisible, de-indigenised and practically exiled within their own countries and annihilated or caught up between two poles (Wolf *ibid*) of institutionally and government supported national and official language policies.

In the context of this study, it is imperative to relate the impact of colonialism to the West African country of Nigeria.

According to Garba (2012), colonialism in Nigeria is considered as having begun in 1807, when Great Britain abolished the slave trade. Generally, historians trace Britain's increasing involvement through signing of treaties and arrangement with Nigerian rulers. In 1865, Britain took a more active role in Nigeria and eventually occupied the Niger area. In 1885, Britain administered Nigeria in separated British protectorates until 1914 when she unified the country, while maintaining considerable regional autonomy among the three major regions. British colonialism created Nigeria by joining diverse people and regions in an artificial entity along the Niger River.

Nzeaka (2017) is of the view that colonialism, termed cultural imperialism, diluted African linguistic patterns while State policies of the colonial times resulted in speakers of Nigerian languages disconnecting from their languages for fear of being sanctioned. He observes further that the colonial language policy signifies the difference between cultures and their possession of power, spelling out the distance between subordinate and superordinate, between bondsman and the lord in terms of their race and language. According to Nzeaka (*ibid*) English was a subtle assault on the population and termed a form of attack on the existing social norms.

Other consequence of the British colonialism is the effect of English on the culture of the indigenous people in which African literature was equally impacted.

While most works on colonialism dwell on the negative consequences in Africa, it may not be out place to mention some positive impacts. Garba (2012) points out that advocates of colonialism argue that it was meant to promote the welfare of colonized nations as illustrated in the quote below: Garba citing (Ronal 1971).

“In many of the new states we performed the tasks of an imperialist power without enjoying the economic or territorial advantages of empire while we instructed the new nations in the proper principles of foreign policy. We did things with good intentions because we really did believe in self-determination for everybody as a guiding moral principle, and because we thought it was our obligation to help the less fortunate “modernize” their societies by making them more like ours”. (Garba 2012, pg 54).

Garba (ibid) however remarks that despite the claim of the colonialists, it was observed that the colonizing nations dominated the resources, labour and market of the colonies and imposed socio-cultural, religious and linguistic structure on the indigenous population. This phenomenon went a long way to affecting not only the linguistic patterns and discourse of the colonies, but it also created hierarchical tendencies in which people shifted from using their heritage language in preference for the English language in diverse domains such as education, administration, media and international relations.

3.5 Sociolinguistic descriptions of languages

In this section, I examine different terms experts in the field of sociolinguistics have used to describe languages. Various scholars have used specific labels in prior sociolinguistic studies to describe endangered languages in relation to their statuses, population, geographical spread, functionality, and vitality.

Some language terms used in sociolinguistics considered relevant to this study include minority, majority, vernacular, vehicular, heritage, mother tongue, indigenous language, official and national languages as well as pidgins and creoles. These notions are somewhat intertwined and related to one another in terms of functionalities and usage.

Different languages have diverse functions, roles, statuses or vitality in an ecological space or country, with diverse functional load and functional transparency (Paparihpande 2002) depending on the degree of use, recognition and institutional support from governments. For example, a language could be a heritage, minority in terms of description and indigenous to a community or a country and could also be a vehicular, vernacular, mother tongue, official and national language.

These different terms used in describing or categorizing languages are examined hereunder.

3.5.1 Minority Language

Various sociolinguists have defined minority languages in different ways. Grenoble & al. (1999) define minority language as one spoken by less than 50 percent of a population in a given region state or country. According to them, the determinant of a minority language is the size of the speaker population within a specific geographical context.

The European Union Charter for Regional or Minority Language (1998) define minority languages as those used traditionally within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State, who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population. These are languages different from the official language(s) of that State. It does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants.

On his part, before describing a minority language, Tollefson (1991) first and foremost defines the word minority as commonly used to refer to groups distinguished by gender, ethnicity, religion, race and social class, then associates these elements with a group that uses a particular language. Tollefson (ibid) opines that minorities may include indigenous peoples or immigrants residing permanently or temporarily in a country. He opines that in describing minorities, size is less important than power even though the term minority focuses attention on numerical strength or size, that is, groups that are numerically smaller than the dominant group, with more emphasis on the rights and privileges of speakers. He posits that the term minority refers to groups with relatively less power, rights and privileges than one or more dominant groups.

Going by Tollefson's argument, if the word minority denotes small, minority languages may therefore be defined as languages spoken by a small group of people, used by small ethnic groups with less power, rights and privileges as far as their language is concerned. These languages typically have small populations, are weak, and without official status in the countries where they are located. They generally do not enjoy a wide and high level of speakership and are restricted to a small locality without a wide coverage of use.

DaCosta et al. (2018) associate minority languages with their speakers and refer to linguistically marginalised social actors as members of communities whose communication practices are in a minority language situation. They use terms or labels such as autochthonous, alien, indigenous, colonial, native or new, vital, or endangered to describe minority or majority languages. They characterise minority groups as being cast aside by a dominant group for being separate or different in terms of customs, language, or institutions who view themselves as different. They add more importantly that the notion of minority group is a product of the enlightenment phase of modernity and nineteenth century Romanticism and Nationalism.

DaCosta et al. (2018) are of the view that the idea of the minority group goes hand in hand with the birth of modern nation-states. They remark further that the concept of minority language is an expression of the relations between groups and not an inherent or essential quality of a language or group.

On her part, Pandharipande (2002) describes minority languages based on either numerical or functional criteria. She argues that numerical criteria delineates a language as minority if the speakers of the language, that is the speech community, is relatively small. Whereas functional criteria marks a language with relatively low power of dominance in the economic, political and social domains. Pandharipande (2002) equally characterises minority languages along the lines of functional load, arguing that minority languages have this one feature in common, regardless of their numbers. She qualifies tribal languages as minority languages numerically because they carry a marginal functional load in the domains of education, business and inter-group communication. She cites the example of Kashmiri, (which became an official language by the Indian State in 2020), a majority language in Jammu and Kashmir in India, viewed however, as a minority language because it does not carry a heavy functional load in the public domain in India.

Identifying socio political factors as instrumental in creating minority languages, Pandharipande (2002) opines that a language in the process of being eliminated from the public domain, whose functional load is decreasing, will be reduced to the status of minority language. This implies that, a stable or increasing functional load is conducive to language retention, while a decreasing functional load leads to language attrition. This predicates on the fact, that a minority language can acquire the status of a dominant language if its functional load increases in the public domain. She cites example of the English language in certain regions in India.

It is pertinent to mention that some minority languages are recognized as official languages in some countries. For example, the South African constitution recognizes some heritage minority languages as well as the South African Sign language as official languages. That said, in this study, however, we prefer to stick to the definition of minority languages as languages used and spoken by a small population confined to a geographical location of a country. A language that is not vehicular and is not a lingua franca in the country where it is used. The Itsekiri language, which is central to this study, is a minority language with small geographical spread and limited in scope in terms of demography and functionality.

3.5.2. Majority language

While comparing minority and majority languages, Deuchar & Martin-Jones (1985) describe majority language from a demographic viewpoint. They argue that though there may be a far greater number of speakers of minority languages and language varieties, the majority language is that which has greater value in the linguistic marketplace with a legitimized place within the institutions where power and control of a state are vested.

As opposed to minority language, a majority language is a language spoken by a large population with a wide coverage or geographical spread in a country. Examples of majority languages in West Africa include Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo in Nigeria, Twi in Ghana and Wolof in Senegal. Swahili recently announced, will be taught alongside other foreign languages in schools in Malawi, is spoken in most countries in East and Southern African countries. Other majority languages are Lingala and Amharic in Congo- Central Africa, and Arabic in North Africa. Europe projects a number of majority languages such as English, French, Italian, Spanish, German to mention a few, as dominant languages.

Pandharipande (2002) notes the existence of some minority languages that function as lingua franca and some officially recognised majority languages that function as minority languages in certain communities in India. She cites the example of English, which functions as a minority language in communities such as Jammu and Kashmiri in India.

Similarly, in the context of this doctoral research, Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo though recognised as majority languages in Nigeria function as minority languages in some parts of southern Nigeria. Minority and majority languages are categorised sometimes, based on speakership, population, status, vitality and most importantly on government policies and institutional support.

3.5.2 Official language

Contrary to minority and majority languages, official and national languages are languages with ascribed status officially recognised by the constitution and government of a State or country. Gordon (2005) argues that the identification of national and official languages on the grounds of distinctions vary from country to country. In some countries, a law may recognise a language as official and national languages which citizens may be identified with. For example, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German are official and national languages and citizens are identified with them.

Though some of these languages function solely as official languages in some former European colonies such as Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Cameroon Cape Verde and Morocco to mention but a few, citizens of these countries may not identify with them since they have their heritage languages. An official language of a State is used in the general administration and running of the government. It is the generally accepted language in the judiciary, executive, legislature and in education.

3.5.3 National language

Simon & Lewis (2010) identify various types of national languages. They refer to a statutory national working language which may be designated the official language of a country, as a language in which the business of the national government is conducted and is mandatory by law. However, this is not the language of national identity for the citizens of the country. Some examples are English in former British colonies such as Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. French in former French colonies such as Togo, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, to mention but a few.

Pulaczewska (2012) on her part opines that designating a particular language as a country's national language means that it is intended to perform a unifying and nation-building function. She points out that the term national language can apply to an official language that is indigenous. Citing examples of India, Pakistan and the Philippines, she argues that the term national language is used as a bestowment of a distinguished status upon a language with native roots. According to her, the scope of the privilege enjoyed by a national language differs from country to country and is fixed by individual legislations. She cites examples in Africa where French is an official language and Sangho a national language in Central African Republic, while English is an official language with Swahili as a national language in Kenya, and Mauritania where Arabic is an official language while Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof are national languages.

Simon & Lewis (2010) associate National languages with various functions such as statutory language of national identity, De facto national language, De facto national working language, and De facto language of national identity.

They describe a statutory language of national identity as the language of national identity mandated by law. However, such a language may not be developed enough to function as the language of business. Examples are Kituba in Congo, Maori in New Zealand and Irish in Ireland. Added to that is the De facto national language, which according to Simon and Lewis, is a language in which the business of the national government is conducted. Though not mandated by law, it is the language of national identity for the citizens of the country. Examples are Standard German in Germany, Japanese in Japan, and Setswana in Botswana.

In contrast, a De facto national working language is that in which the business of the national government is conducted, but not mandated by law, neither is it the language of national identity of the citizens of the country. An example is the English language in Nigeria and in Botswana, Spanish in Andorra and Tagalog in the Philippines.

According to Simon & Lewis (ibid), a De facto language of national identity is the language which citizens identify with but not mandated by law, neither is it developed enough or known enough to function as the language of government business. Examples are Algerian Arabic in Algeria, Jamaican Creole, and English in Jamaica and Tokelauan in Tokelau.

They equally argue that, in some countries, there may be a De facto provincial language in which the business of the provincial government is run, but not it is mandated by law. It is the language of identity for the citizens of the province. Examples are the majority languages in Nigeria. Yoruba in Southwest Nigeria, Hausa in Northern Nigeria, and Ibo in the Southeast.

Hausa is not only a language of identity, it is also used as a language of instruction in schools at the elementary schools. It is used alongside English in some State Assemblies and in the judiciary in Northern Nigeria, as well as functional in informal communication in government offices and in daily activities.

Other languages of identity in Nigeria include many of the heritage languages some of which are Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijaw, Ibibio, Efik, Ebira to mention but a few. Other examples are Yue Chinese in China and Faroese in Denmark.

3.5.4 Heritage languages

The notion of heritage languages henceforth (HLs) seems to be problematic in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics research. Seals & Shah (2018), observe that it is not always simple to identify heritage languages. They opine that some countries prefer terms that are related to sociolinguistic descriptions such as minority language, community language or mother tongue, while others perhaps researchers and authorities have no specific terminology to refer to the concept of heritage languages. Seals & Shah point out that the meanings of terms vary across contexts such that different people use the same terms in different ways. In the opinion of Seals & Shah (ibid), there is concern about which languages should be included in the term 'heritage language' They wondered if the focus should be on immigrant languages, indigenous language, or a specific subset of minority languages, or all of the above. Despite Seals and Shah's observations above, various scholars have used varying terminologies to refer to heritage languages in different contexts.

According to Enns-Kananen & King (2012), the term heritage language was originally coined in Canada to describe any language with official status, other than English and French, meaning languages spoken by indigenous people or immigrants. They observe however, that the term heritage language is commonly used nowadays to refer to any language other than the dominant ones in a country. They argue that while the term heritage language is often taken to be the language used in the home or familiar contexts, it may or may not be spoken in the home.

Fishman (1999), in addition, asserts that heritage languages are languages of one's origin, inherited from ancestors and acquired from home within the family setting. These are languages used and spoken by parents, grandparents and handed down to children. They may be transmitted from one generation to another and indigenous to those who speak them. They are characteristically ethnicity, tribe and community based (Fishman 1999).

Furthermore, besides acquiring heritage languages from home or the community, they may be learnt as second languages either, formally or informally by people whose home languages are different from their presupposed heritage languages and are willing to learn them in addition to their first languages (Fishman 1999). Fishman observes that all languages are heritage languages and indigenous to a people or space depending on how they were acquired or learnt be they minority, majority, mother tongue, vernacular, vehicular, national or official languages.

On their part, Seals & Shah (2018) classify heritage languages in various categories according to the United States context. In the first category, heritage languages are indigenous languages spoken by Native American tribes that existed before the arrival of European settlers. The second category refers to heritage languages as colonial languages such as French, German, Italian, Spanish, which earlier European settlers brought into the United States and lastly, heritage languages are immigrant languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Cambodian or Korean that went along with more influxes of immigrants to various destinations.

In specific terms, Seals & Shah (2018) remark that a heritage language is defined in conjunction with its speakers raised in minority language speaking homes and people who have ancestral connections to a language that is not the dominant societal language in their current region of residence, who use their agency to identify with the heritage language (s).

According to Seals & Shah (2018), the term heritage language is self-identifying and focuses on identity agency and cultural history. Therefore, it is up to the individual and/or community to decide if they are willing to identify with the language. They argue that a person may identify with a particular heritage language based on their personal background without having proficiency in the language. Considering the importance of identity in determining heritage language, they cite examples of heritage language such as immigrant/diaspora, indigenous and ancestral languages.

From the foregoing, heritage languages may have a geographical spread and may not necessarily be indigenous to the locality where they are spoken or the community where they exist. These may

be immigrant languages imported by their speakers to a new environment. Heritage language speakers may constitute a community in an ecological space foreign to them. Examples are Turkish and Arab languages in Germany and France respectively.

In addition, heritage languages may exist in a community not indigenous to the speakers due to internal migration in a country. In Nigeria, there have been cases of people of different ethnolinguistic groups migrating from one region to another due to wars and internal crisis. The Itsekiri-speaking community accounts for various heritage language speakers who migrated from their community of origin into the city of Warri, the context of this research and its environs in search of means of livelihood, which explains the presence of diverse ethnolinguistic groups in the community.

Examples of internal migration are associated with some Hausa, Ebira, Igala, Calabar, Efik and Yoruba language speakers, to mention but a few, that constitute the demography of the Itsekiri-speaking community. Another typical example is the case of some Itsekiri-speaking people who had to move from their communities to other parts of Nigeria between 1996 and 2003, when there was ethnic crisis between the group and their neighbours.

This study is in accordance with Fishman's (1999) assertion that all languages are heritage languages and indigenous to a people or space depending on how they were acquired or learnt; be they minority, majority, mother tongue, vernacular, and vehicular, national or official languages.

3.5.5 Mother tongue

Sociolinguists use the term Mother tongue to describe a language of communication within the family or home. Garcia (2009) notes that a common concept in the literature on bilingualism is that of mother tongue. She defines mother tongue as the language usually spoken in the individual's home in his or her early childhood, although not necessarily used by him or her currently.

Igboanusi, (2012) asserts that one major instrument of a child's socialisation is the mother tongue. Awoniyi (2013) remarks that the mother tongue is the language of a speech community acquired by an individual in the early years and becomes his instrument of communication.

On her part, Skutnabb-Kangas (1995) defines mother tongue based on four different criteria. Linking the first criteria to the origin of a speaker, she describes mother tongue as the language (s) one learned first during childhood. She associated the second to competence; while stating that mother tongue is a language an individual knows best highlighting proficiency in the language.

The third criteria is function which considers mother tongue as the language ; that is the language one uses most in daily life and the fourth identification-further classified as internal, referring to the language(s) one identifies with and external- the language(s) an individual is identified as a native speaker by others.

Going by Skutnabb-Kangas's (ibid) definition and the criteria articulated, the an individual can have different mother tongues depending on the criteria used. She argues that a person's mother tongue can change during his/her lifetime, even several times, according to all other definitions except the definition by origin.

The mother tongue could be the language one learns first and identifies with. It could be the language acquired from home during childhood. It could be the language he/she is most proficient in and has mastery of. This implies that one may be identified with several mother tongues if one has acquired different languages in which one is proficient.

3.5.6 Indigenous language

The United Nations Permanent Forum (UNPF) on Indigenous issues (2018) declares that indigenous languages are not only methods of communication, but also extensive and complex systems of knowledge that have developed over millennia. They are central to the identity of indigenous peoples, the preservation of their cultures, worldviews and visions and an expression of self-determination.

According to UNESCO (2023), indigenous languages are languages that do not only identify the origin of their speakers or membership of a community, but they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors. - knowledge systems that make them identify with the land and are crucial to their survival and hopes.

The free encyclopedia on its part describes an indigenous language, or autochthonous language as a language that is native to a region and spoken by its indigenous people. It is a language that is indigenous to either a community spoken by an ethnic group or speech community that identifies with it.

In the Nigerian context, indigenous languages still perform the function of mother tongue not only in remote villages, but also in some homes in the cities. The mother tongue remains the medium of intimate communication in most families and is largely a language of customs and traditions. Nonetheless, in some cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta region where this research is situated, increasing changes in what constitute mother tongue can be identified. For example, cities such as Warri, Sapele, Port Harcourt, Uyo and Calabar in the Niger Delta region South of Nigeria, Lagos in the Southwest and the capital city Abuja are experiencing growing changes and decrease in the use of mother tongue. The languages that seems used as mother tongue, which is the language of first socialization within the family, are English referred to in various ways by Nigerians as “correct” English, “good English” or “normal English” (Standard English), spoken in elite homes where parents are schooled or educated; and (NPE), spoken in homes where parents are unschooled or not educated. Put differently, in homes, where parents are illiterate or semi-literate, in which fathers are low-level workers or artisans and mothers are small-scale traders.

3.5.7. Vehicular language

Lewis and Simon (2013) describe a vehicular language (whether written or unwritten) as that which is widely used by others as a second language and as a means of intergroup communication with proof of greater vitality than a language with a smaller number of users, which is seen as being less useful by outsiders. Gordon (2005) categorises vehicular languages as those with wider coverage of communication. Pidgin and Creole are good examples.

Trudgil (2016) describes vehicular languages as standard form which have undergone significant regularization, often considered the ‘correct way of speaking and writing, used in formal and official settings such as education government administration, media, international relations, to mention but a few.

For the purpose of this study, NPE discussed in chapter two falls within this category suggested by Lewis & Simon (ibid) as it is known to have a wider coverage than any other language in Nigeria beside the English language (Jowitt 2020). English is also an example of a vehicular language in the context of this study.

3.5.7 Vernacular language

Trudgil (2016) defines a vernacular language as a speech variety spoken locally between groups usually within a particular region. According to Trudgil they are typically everyday language used in informal situations by people within a community. Vernacular languages have their speech patterns, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciations which have been developed over time and differ from the standard form. Trudgil (ibids) notes that vernacular languages are simply the usual day-to-day language people use within a community and include the slang they use and the changes in pronunciations.

In the context of this doctoral study, a vernacular language may be used within a small community amongst an ethnic group and may equally have a wide coverage. The speakership may be limited in coverage to a locality. For example, Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo are also vernacular languages with which their speakers identify. Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijaw, Efik and Ibibio are typically vernacular languages in Nigeria.

These languages could be heritage depending on the group to which they belong. They may be mother tongues and indigenous to ethnic groups who speak and use them as a means of group identity and communication.

The three major languages in Nigeria (Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo) are classified in this research as both vehicular and vernacular languages in view of the fact that they cover a wide geographical spread and at the same time are heritage languages or mother tongues to groups that identify with them as their tribal or ethnic languages.

3.5.8 Pidgins and Creoles

Different sociolinguists have described Pidgins in different ways according to the contexts in which they developed. Some Sociolinguists maintain that what is known as Pidgin today developed from existing languages in slave plantations in the seventeenth century. Others argue that some Pidgins developed from contact between people who spoke different languages who had to find a common means of communication. This is the case of NPE described by Elugbe & Omamor (1995) on page 39.

Mufwene (2002) maintains that the variety in the populations of colonies, in addition to the regular interaction between the people, led to the formation of new languages. These can be either labelled as either Pidgins or Creoles; new dialects of the English Language, such as Australian English, in addition to the formation of new "Englishes" with their own standards and codes, as the case of South African English.

Mesthrie (2002) seems to echo Mufwene (ibid) when he observes that Pidgin is a product of the colonial masters' policy of linguistic segregation. He maintains that the emergence of Pidgin and Creole is a result of language contact during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade era. According to Mesthrie (ibid), slaves from different parts of Africa taken across the trans-Atlantic Ocean to the West Indies or New World colonies, who were unable to maintain their ancestral or heritage languages and were neither able to communicate with one another nor with their colonial masters, had to invent or create a language of communication. He argues that slaves from the same linguistic regions were separated from each other to avoid insurrection. Therefore, the search for a common means of communication saw the development of a linguistic code that seems comprehensible to all parties at that point in time (Mesthrie 2002).

This linguistic code gave birth to what is known today as Pidgin. According to Mesthrie (ibid) vertical slave/master communication or and horizontal slave/slave communication was difficult, the need for a common means of communication gave rise to the creation of simple forms of languages which culminated into a lingua franca in the plantations.

Sociolinguists who have studied these forms of speech and the structure of Pidgin and Creole maintain that these languages were either superstrates -languages created from the colonial

languages or substrates -derived from languages of slaves. This resonates with Muhlhauseler's (1986), observation that Pidgin draws vocabularies from languages around it.

Mesthrie R et al. (2000) opine that the creation of a Pidgin depends on contact between speakers of three or more mutually unintelligible languages. The need for a means of communication results in the creation of types of languages, which may draw on the different languages in contact. Mesthrie et al. (ibid) therefore conclude that the term Pidgin denotes a simple form of language showing signs of language mixing, which no one speaks as a first language. They refer to Pidgins as examples of partially targeted or non-targeted second language learning that develop from simpler to more complex systems as communicative requirements become more demanding. Pidgins by definition have no native speakers, they are social rather than individual solutions and are therefore characterised by norms of acceptability (Mesthrie 2002).

While arguing that researchers differentiate Pidgins in terms of their complexities and grammatical structures, Mestrie et al. (2000) further point out that, a jargon or pre-pidgin is composed of a limited vocabulary with an unstable structure. They opine that a stable Pidgin is a recognisable structure with fairly developed vocabulary. They describe an expanded Pidgin as that which is highly developed with a degree of sophistication of structure and vocabulary as a consequence of being used in many domains such as interpersonal and domestic settings as well as formal domains like public speeches or political pamphlets. They observe that Pidgin is limited in use to a few domains like the workplace and marketplace and usually accompanied by gestures when used.

Furthermore, Mesthrie (1989) identifies various types of Pidgin. The regional Pidgin such as Fanakolo, a stable Pidgin mainly spoken in some parts of South Africa, which originated from contacts between the English and Afrikaans with Zulus in the province of Natal in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bamboo English which developed as a result of the American wars in Asia specifically Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Thailand.

According to Mesthrie (ibid), the Bamboo English is a simplified form of English with many words from local languages used by American military personnel and Japanese on the US military base in Japan during World War II.

A different type of Pidgin is Tok Pisin, a type of Pidgin English in the island of Papua New Guinea in the Pacific Island, developed from contact between different ethnic groups in the labour force (Mesthrie et al. 2000).

Creoles, according to Mesthrie et al. (ibid) are languages, which developed out of Pidgins to become the first language of a speech community. They are mainly languages, but not exclusively spoken by former slave-holding societies. Sociolinguists distinguish two types of creoles. Fort creoles developed at fortified posts along the West African Coast, where European forces held slaves until the arrival of the next slave ships. An example of a fort creole is Guinea Coast Creole English (Hancock, 1996).

There are two types of plantation creole. The first is known as superstrate languages and socially dominant languages, in contrast with the second, substrate languages of the slaves that denote subordinate position of the slaves, which evolved in the New World colonies under the dominance of the European languages. Globally, Pidgin and Creole emerged from languages around slaves. (Hancock 1996).

Though languages are described according to their functions and roles in an ecological space, they essentially thrive in an environment when people use them not only as means of communications, but also as markers of identity, means of socialisation, interactions and in interpersonal relationships in a community. Languages in general serve the people who use them. They serve different communicative functions according to institutional supports received in relation to a country's language planning and policies. Languages are described in relation to the criteria used, or standards by which they are assessed or evaluated in a country, especially in consideration of the institutional support or government backing they may receive. The way languages are defined and categorized may engender the phenomenon of linguistic hierarchies in societies in which speakers situate one language above the other in their linguistic choices.

3.6 Language Hierarchies

Language hierarchies can be seen from various perspectives. According to Risager (2012), language hierarchies may be exhibited in the diversity of languages worldwide and the power

relations among their speakers. These hierarchies may be measured according to parameters such as the number of native and non-native speakers of the relevant languages, their status in international and transnational institutions, their status within individual states and their institutions, or their identity potentials for various groups and individuals. Risager (2012) equally observes that language hierarchies may be constructed from the global scale to small groups and may also be relevant for single individuals to the extent that he/she may view his/her language abilities in hierarchies of competence and /or identity. He is of the view that language hierarchies may be strong, explicit or implicit factors in the development of languages policies be it official, written or governmental, that define the framework for the distribution of the use of different languages.

While distinguishing various levels of language hierarchies, Risager (ibid) asserts that language policies may differ regarding what parts of the language hierarchies they promote and what categories of language they construct. While categorizing languages on various levels in language policy documents, Risager suggests that languages may be hierarchized in the following ways: national language, international language, minority language, or heritage language. Suggesting languages that may be used in a country, he questioned if it could be indigenous, immigrant languages or foreign languages. Or only native language use? In other words, government language planning and policies may categorize languages according to different levels of hierarchisation depending on whether the language is used internationally or locally.

In his analysis, Risager (ibid) enumerated various parameters used in classifying language hierarchies such as the status of a language, government policies and the individual abilities demonstrated in his competencies and identity.

In line with Risager regarding language hierarchies, terms such as language status and vitality, language planning, policies and family language policies are examined in relation to the context of this study in the following sections.

3.6.1 Language status and language vitality

The status and vitality of a language, an important element in language endangerment discourse is examined from the perspective of hierarchisation of languages in this research.

In considering the vitality of a language, Mufwene (2002) alludes to English, a colonial language with more vitality in terms of language of economic exchange than heritage languages. Mufwene suggests that the notions of colonisation and globalisation regarding language vitality has an impact on language endangerment. For example, the colonisation of African countries according to Mufwene (ibid) in the mid-nineteenth century, in spite of independence, still has an impact and continues to determine communicative processes in Africa. He argues that English, portrayed as a “killer language” about to replace all other languages, (Crystal 2002), (Nettle & Romane 2000), is perceived as a more vital language in Africa. Mufwene further submits that language endangerment is better understood if discussed in the broader context of language vitality.

In addition, other sociolinguists such as Fishman (1991), Simon & Lewis (2010) have also discussed language status and language vitality in relation to language endangerment with reference to the intergenerational transmission of a language.

In assessing language vitality, Fishman (1991) established the Graded International Disruption Scale (GIDS), a framework for evaluating languages. The Graded International Disruption Scale (GIDS) was later adapted by Simon & Lewis and expanded to be known as the Expanded Graded International Disruption Scale (EGIDS). This tool has been a reference point in various studies or initiatives when measuring or evaluating language endangerment in correlation with the status or vitality of a language in relation to the intergenerational language transmission.

In this doctoral study, I adopt the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Simon & Lewis 2010) which consists of 13 levels with each higher number on the scale representing a greater level of disruption to the intergenerational transmission of a language. Below are two tables indicating descriptions of labels and levels of use of a language in hierarchical order.

The first table provides summary definitions of the 10 levels of the EGIDS while the second lists the alternative labels that are used for special situations as suggested by Simon & Lewis (2010).

Table 1: Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scales

Level	Label	Descriptions
0	International	The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the national level.
2	Provincial	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within major administrative subdivisions of a nation.
3	Wider communication	The language is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.
4	Educational	The language is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.
5	Developing	The language is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.
6a	Vigorous	The language is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.
6b	Threatened	The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children.
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.
8b	Nearly extinct	The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community, but no one has more than symbolic proficiency.
10	Extinct	The language is no longer used, and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language

(Source Simon & Lewis in Ethnologue website)

Providing an extensive explanation of the use of the EGIDS, Simons & Lewis (2010) report that the EGIDS levels are designed to largely coincide with Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale with additional factors at both the stronger and weaker levels of the scale. They point out that the EGIDS level 2 (Provincial) and EGIDS level 1 (National) focus on the level of recognition and use given to the language by the government of a country. Beyond purely official use, however, the focus includes the widespread use of the language in the media and the workplace at either the provincial (sub-national) or national levels. They further maintain that EGIDS level 0 (International) is a category reserved for those few languages that are used as the means of communication in many countries for the purposes of diplomacy and international commerce.

Simons & Lewis (*ibid*) report that the Ethnologue website, owned by the Foundation of Endangered Languages (FEL (a research project involving linguists and researchers around the world providing information and statistics for the world known living languages according to regions and countries); organizes the language entries by country and uses the EGIDS levels as language vitality descriptors. They categorize level 1 (National) as the strongest vitality level which presupposes that the EGIDS levels are hierarchical in nature.

Furthermore, in the EGIDS, two of the levels in Fishman's original GIDS (6 and 8) are further split (into 6a, 6b and 8a, 8b) to allow for a finer-grained description of the state of intergenerational transmission in the presence of language shift (or revitalization). Simon & Lewis (*ibid*) argue that the EGIDS use letters to distinguish these divided levels in order to maintain numbering alignment with Fishman's better-known GIDS. Each number on the EGIDS was assigned a one or two-word label that summarizes the state of development or vitality of the language. They point out that the labels are intended to provide mnemonics for those who prefer to use words rather than numbers. In a few cases, alternative labels are assigned to a level in order to distinguish significantly different situations that are associated with the same level on the scale. According to Simon & Lewis, the EGIDS could be applied to all languages of the world.

Table 2: Alternative labels for other special situations

Level	Label	Description
11	Dispersed	The language is fully developed in its home country, so that the community of language users in a different country has access to a standardized form and literature, but these are not promoted in the country in focus via institutionally supported education.
12	Reawakening	The ethnic community associated with a dormant language is working to establish more uses and more users for the language with the results that new L2 speakers are emerging.
3	Second language only	The ethnic community associated with a dormant language is working to establish more uses and more users for the language with the results that new L2 speakers are emerging.

(Source: Simon & Lewis in Ethnologue website)

In line with Simon & Lewis assertions, the Itsekiri language seems to fall within the shifting category described as a situation in which the child –bearing generation can still use the language among themselves but are not transmitting it to their children. This situation, which scholars in the field of language endangerment have highlighted to be a threat to heritage minority languages, appears to be common in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Furthermore, unequal status and inequality in the use of languages could be induced by government policies regarding language practices in a country. Dragojevic (2017) argue that government policies, media representations and educational practices promote linguistic behaviour and attitudes, which in turn shape speakers’ linguistic ideologies exhibited in a relationship of domination and subordination between languages ascribed with high status and those labelled with low status. This relationship is engraved in the vitality of a language of a standard dominant variety against the non- standard minority (Dragojevic 2017), which could result in the latter being threatened due to reluctance on the part of its speakers to transmit it to their children.

Ryan et al. (1982) on their part argue that the vitality of a language exerts a tremendous influence on language preference, and this is determined by three key elements: (a) status, economic social

and political power; (b) demographics, number and distribution of its speakers and (c) its institutional support. Ryan et al. (1982) further argue that the status and value ascribed to a given variety tends to be closely related to its vitality. For example, Rakic & Steffens (2012) note that although standard German (Hochdeutsch) is an official language in Switzerland; Swiss German tends to maintain a high degree of vitality among the local population and is spoken in a wider range of settings than the standard German.

From the foregoing, it may be implied that the sufficient use of a language in important domains underpins the status and vitality of a language. Simply put, the use to which speakers deploy their language may determine its status. The functional load (Pandharipande 2002) speakers' accord their language may qualify it to be of high or low status. For example, the use of a language be it minority or heritage in education, the media or administration can bolster its position, however, if a language is used mainly in the cultural domain and limited to its geo locality and used within the home only, the position will be low and as such its vitality may not be high. Invariably, speakers may be reluctant to transmit it to their children. Nevertheless, if the speakers identify with it, they may want to transmit it. This is beginning to be rare in the face of globalisation (Copland 2010).

3.7 Language Ideologies, Planning, Policy and management

Equally relevant and related to this study are the key concepts of language ideology, language planning and language policy. These concepts are analysed together given their interrelationships.

3.7.1 Language ideologies

The notion of language ideology is closely related to language planning and policy, which are not only interlinked but may also be associated with language hierarchies. One of the parameters in determining language hierarchies is government language policies. Risager (2012) observes that government language planning and policies are associated with language hierarchization. These notions could influence speakers' language choice.

In this doctoral study, it is believed that before language use is planned and policies guiding the use are set and adopted, there is an ideology or a philosophy that forms the backdrop on which policies are planned, which in turn births language policy.

Various sociolinguists have defined these notions differently. Hornberger & Putz (2013) describe language ideology as an abstract and implicit belief systems related to language and linguistic behaviour that affect speakers' choices and interpretations of communicative interaction. It refers to beliefs, statuses, and values that language communities assign to their languages, be they national, ethnic, or heritage.

Hornberger & Putz (ibid) argue that in a linguistically diversified society, language planning and policy are determined by government ideology of language. Therefore, the use to which a language is put may be considered in line with government decisions regarding language planning.

3.7.2 Language planning

Fishman (1972) opines that language planning is a government authorized, long term, sustained and conscious effort to alter language functions in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems. Language planning and policy are both about planning and managing policies that emphasise the use of language in society by national governments (Ugal 2011).

Language planning is similar to language policy in the sense that they are both concerned with the development and use of language in a territory or country. Both concepts consist of decisions by governments, institutions or NGOs to accord one or two languages official or national status.

Ugal, (ibid) refers to language planning as a set of deliberate activities systematically designed to organize and develop the language resources of a community in an ordered schedule of time. He describes language policy as a binding language guide meant to be enforced by the society that formulates it through a political process. Ugal observes that both language planning and policy go hand in hand and that one is a binding guide meant to be enforced and operated while the other gives room for projecting into the possibility of operating such a guide to achieve the desired goals.

Similarly, Dogancay-Aktuna (1997), an English professor refers to language planning as activities that attempt to bring about changes in the education functions of languages or language varieties, using sociolinguistic concepts and information to make policy decisions and to implement them, in order to deal with linguistic and extra-linguistic problems at the national, international or community level.

From the foregoing, language planning seems a government prerogative, which points to the fact that Nigeria, which is the context of this study could be said to be late in planning her language policies around the myriads of languages according to Nigerian sociolinguists. Nonetheless, languages to be used in official contexts and public administration are outlined in the Nigeria National Policy on Education (**see page 51**).

3.7.3 Language polices and management

Furthermore, Spolsky (2004) observes that language policies are decisions taken by an authority, be it the government, head of a family, a group or a school to outline, determine and establish language practices and beliefs and rules to be implemented and legislations to be passed within the context of language management. According to Spolsky, the most obvious form of language management is a constitution, or a law established by a nation-state determining some aspect of official language use, a requirement to use a specific language as medium of instruction or in business with government agencies.

Nau et al. (2015) describe language policy as a set of legislative acts that strive to shape the relations between society and the language or languages that exist and are used in societies. They observe that language policy is concerned with the official language or languages, known also as state or national languages, that function either *de jure* (through legislative proceedings as French in France or Polish in Poland) or *de facto* in practice as in English in the United Kingdom or the United States. It is also concerned with regional languages ethnic/national, minority languages, sign languages -used by the deaf, deaf-mute and hard-of-hearing communities, immigrant languages, foreign languages that are taught and spoken. Nau et al. (ibid) cite the following examples: classical/dead languages existing in the education system and certain occupations; Latin

in medicine or used in religious context. Ancient Greek, Old Church Slavonic, Biblical Hebrew, Quranic Hebrew, Sanskrit, and the classical Grabar language of Armenia.

In this regard, various elements such as the European language policy, a country's language policy, or efforts by immigrant parents to maintain their heritage language or to persuade their children to learn the new language in the country they migrated to may be examples of language policies. These could also be referred to as the language ideology of a state, an institution, a group or a family.

In the same vein, Spolsky (2004) further observes that the explicit and observable effort by someone or some groups that have authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs, could be driven by the policy in relation to the existing languages in that country.

Language policy according to Spolsky has three interrelated but independently describable components. These are practices, beliefs, and management.

According to Spolsky (2007), language policy could be analysed from different points of view: the individual, State or nation. From the individual standpoint, Spolsky (ibid) is of the view that the goal of a theory of language policy is to account for the regular choices made by individual speakers based on patterns established in the speech communities of which they are members. In building a theory of language policy, he emphasizes the domain as a defining unit, with reference to different domains such as family, workplace, school, and coffee shop. He maintains that each domain has its own policy, with some features controlled internally and others under the influence or control of external forces. He equally views language policy from the stand- point of a social phenomenon dependent on the consensual behaviours and beliefs of individual members of a speech community. Spolsky observes that the belief system of a group or of a state in relation to language management is key in planning language policy especially as it relates to values assigned to the varieties and features of the languages in question.

In line with Spolsky's view as it concerns the state or nation, Tollefson (1991) is of the view that language policy is language planning by governments. According to him, it involves all conscious effort by governments to create orthographies, standardization and modernization programmes or

allocation of functions to certain languages within multilingual societies especially as it affects the structure or function of language varieties.

Tollefson (1991) nonetheless, opines that language policy institutes inequality in societies by creating criteria for the use of languages, arguing that language planning-policy as a means of institutionalization of language is a basis for distinctions among social groups/ classes. He implies that language planning-policy is a mechanism for locating language within social structure so that language determines who has access to political power and economic resources.

He further views language policy as a mechanism by which dominant groups establish hegemony in language use. Citing the example of the United States, he argues that the United States variety of English is imposed in education and conditions access to get a good job.

In addition, Tollefson (ibid) describes language policy as a deliberate means to create hierarchical social systems associated with exploitative language policies, which give advantages to groups speaking a particular language variety. For example, he argues that exploitative policies are evident in educational systems that impose disadvantages on students who speak minority languages.

Having established that language policies are efforts by governments or institutions to establish rules guiding and determining the language to be used in their countries, it may be implied that certain degree of importance and values are attached to languages in a country in relation to government language planning policies. Such importance may be political, economic or educational, depending on the functional load ascribed to the language. The premium placed on or accorded to a language in the policy statements of a country may influence the level of use which may not only determine the people's language preference, but also influence their linguistic attitudes and behaviours. This may consequently influence language transmission.

3.8 Language attitudes and behaviour

Equally relevant to this study is the notion of language attitudes and behavior. The concepts of language attitudes and behaviour are examined against the backdrop of language ideologies, beliefs, and opinions of users of languages in relation to linguistic diversities and language policies within the purview of this study context.

Centering on the causes of language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community, the linguistic behavior and attitudes of speakers of minority languages are important phenomenon that should be examined.

Attitudes and behaviors are traits characteristic of a person's inner qualities. According to Rakic & Steffens (2012), language attitudes do not exist in a social vacuum, nor are they stable and immutable frames of reference. Rather, they are a product of diverse, and sometimes competing, cultural, historical, and ideological forces, and can quickly shift in response to the radically changing political and technological landscape that constitutes the modern (globalized) world.

Language attitudes and behaviour could manifest in the image, opinions and beliefs an individual may have of a language.

These notions are relevant to this study in view of the perceived linguistic practices exhibited in the linguistic attitudes and behaviours seemingly associated with speakers of the Itsekiri language.

Castelotti & Moore (2002) are of the opinion that the shared images that exist in a social group or society about people and their languages can have significant effects on the attitudes towards those languages. While linking speakers' linguistic attitudes and behaviour with their representation of a particular language, Castelotti & Moore (ibid) argue that speakers' representation of languages may shape the processes and strategies developed in language transmission and practices. There is always a link between representation, desire or choice of language to be transmitted from one generation to the other (Castelotti & Moore ibid).

In the Itsekiri speaking community, the social representation of the Itsekiri language seems to determine its use and function in various contexts. People's ideologies surrounding their languages seems to determine the extent of their use. Spolsky (2004) argues that a person's beliefs about varieties of languages, from which he may choose, based on his perception of their use inside and outside the family domain, help account not just for language choices but also language belief systems, ideologies, and language management efforts.

Linguistic attitude and behaviour may be influenced by language policies put in place by governments especially as they concern a dominant language with relevant functional load and transparency (Pandharipande 2002), several elements may inform the linguistic attitudes and

behaviour of speakers of a language and may determine their attitudes towards minor and major languages. Beside the officially designated role of exogenic languages (Adegbite 2004), English, for example, in education, media, administration, international relations, to mention but a few, identity ideology and indigenous culture could further influence the behavior of people towards languages.

In this regard, the linguistic behavior and attitudes of speakers of the Itsekiri language may be a function of their representation of the language which is directly linked to the functional load and vitality of the language when compared with the dominant English language in the larger society-Nigeria. In other words, the role that the Itsekiri language plays in the daily life of its speakers may have a direct correlation with intergenerational transmission decision of the language.

Similarly, the image and representation of the English language in the Itsekiri-speaking community appears to be in consonance with the colonial mentality (Mufwene 2002) that portrays English as a more important language than the Itsekiri language. Such mentality could influence Itsekiri families in their decisions on and choices about a language to be used in the home with their children. Such a decision may be in favour or disfavor of a language, especially heritage minority languages.

Though groups or individuals may have their own ideologies about a language, the imposed language policies of a country may take precedence over people's ideologies and the latter may be obliged to adapt to government decisions about that language. For example, if a linguistic policy stipulates the use of a particular language in important domains such as education, administration, and the media, essentially in public functions, people will adapt and imbibe those ideologies. Consequently, this adaptation may engender an unconscious switch to the dominant language, which appears to be the situation in Nigeria in general and in the Itsekiri-speaking community in particular.

Spolsky (2007) is of the view that the domain produces forces that account for language choices by participants and informs language practices. In switching to the important variety, decisions on which language to use may be made, which could lead to families giving preference to certain varieties in different contexts in society.

In the context of this study, families in the Itsekiri-speaking community seem to make informed decisions about the language considered important to be used and transmitted to children in consideration of its functional load, vitality and status. They seem to manage language use within their homes consciously or unconsciously. This brings us to the concept of family language policy examined in the next section.

3.9 Family language policy, practices and transmission

Family language policies, practices and transmission are important determinants in language shift and endangerment. To remain relevant in society, families sometimes consciously or unconsciously establish policies guiding language choices in their homes. Family language practices as well as decisions to transmit a language to children can be influenced by government language policies. A critical example is the context of this study where the Nigerian Educational Policies and the prevailing dominant language in Nigeria influence the language policies in homes of speakers of the Itsekiri language.

The concept of family language policy (FLP), an emerging field of study in applied linguistics, found its root in the sociolinguistic field of language loss and language maintenance within the context of minority and majority languages.

Fishman, (1991), Spolsky, (2004), Schwartz & King (2008), have variously reviewed family language policy in the field of sociolinguistics.

According to Lanza & Gomes (2020) FLP emanates from the field of language policy and was originally defined as explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members with a firm anchoring onto the decision-making processes families undertake in the home and how these may relate to child language learning outcomes.

Inspired by Spolsky's (2009) tripartite model of language policy, FLP has focused attention on language ideologies, language practices and language management in the family with Spolsky (2012) himself referring to the family as "the critical domain" of language policy.

Furthermore, Spolsky (2007) classifies the concepts of family language ideology, management, and practice as components of a/the language policy model in relation to the speech community. In planning family language policies, Spolsky notes that people's language practices -the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up their linguistic repertoire, their language beliefs or ideology – the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning or management are considered.

Lanza & Gomes (2018) opine that FLPs shape children's developmental trajectories, connect in significant ways with children's formal school success, and collectively determine the maintenance and future status of minority languages.

Bezcioglu-Goktolga & Yagmur (2018) posit that family language policy is about implicit and explicit language planning in the family, involving family members' linguistic ideologies, practices and management in relation to language preferences and literacy practices.

King et al. (2008) on their part maintain that family language policy provides an integrated overview of research on how languages are managed, learned, and negotiated within families.

Kayam & Hirsch (2014) describe (FLP) as explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members from a language socialisation perspective.

Curdt-Christiansen (2018) research in Singapore on three ethnic groups shows how pressure to use the dominant variety does not only apply to immigrants and speakers of indigenous languages, rather, the mechanisms by which large-scale economic and social realities establish new dominances affect language use in the family. According to her study, a number of families orient towards English use due to conceptions of English as a global language.

In line with that, the socioeconomic viability and importance of a language may influence planning and management of languages in homes and eventually determine language use and linguistic practices.

In this study, it is believed that language planning, policies and management and the choice of English, the dominant language in Nigeria may influence language practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

The conception of English language as a global language used in important domain such as education, media, international relations, information and communications technology (ICT), business, public administration, to mention but a few, underpins the attraction to and attention given to the English language in the macro and meso contexts of this doctoral study. Given the pressure families and communities seem subjected to regarding English language dominance, one may ask: how relevant or important is the Itsekiri language to the users? Does the status and vitality of Itsekiri necessitate an inter-generational transmission? Do the speakers of Itsekiri consider their language worthy of use in important domains such as education, professional endeavours, public administration etc beside social linguistic identification and belonging as well as in cultural practices?

Linked to the concept of family language policy are language practices and transmission. Language practices “are the observable behaviour and choices – what people actually do, the linguistic features chosen, the variety of language used” (Spolsky, (2009 p:4). Language practices are the varieties of languages in many peoples’ linguistic repertoires they choose to communicate with daily.

In the Itsekiri -speaking community, family language policies are manifested in language practices which may have a direct correlation to intergenerational transmission.

One of the research questions in this study is on inter-generational transmission of Itsekiri language, therefore, the notion of family language transmission becomes relevant in the sense that family ideologies and beliefs about language influence decisions and choices of languages to be transmitted to children or used in the home.

Moreover, Fishman (1991) observes that children’s acquisition of languages depends largely on the language practices to which they are exposed. He argues that language shift can be reversed if ethnic languages are retained within the family and in the community. Fishman (ibid) further argues that the family contains a natural boundary that serves as a bulwark against outside

pressures. “The most common and inescapable basis of mother tongue transmission is bonding, use and stabilization” (Fishman 1991 p:94).

In agreement with (Fishman 2000), Schwartz (2002) identifies the most important point of intergenerational language transfer as the use of the heritage language at home by women of childbearing age with their children, because the family and community are critical in the maintenance of the home language.

In consequence, parents may decide which language to use in the home with their children. When a parent chooses to speak a particular language to his/her child, it reveals certain social expectations, motivations, and aspirations of the parents for the child.

In addition, Cunningham (2019) is of the opinion that non-intergenerational transmission of heritage minority languages may occur in situations where a majority language and culture provides a dominant political and social landscape, which is often not conducive to raising a child bilingually. According to Cunningham, parents' decisions concerning family language policy will often attempt to consider the perceived cultural identity and ethnicity needs of the child from the perspective of both the majority language in the environment and the minority or indigenous context. Unless the minority language has high status (like English) the resulting tensions presents an additional challenge to parents who decide to raise their child bilingually (Cunningham, 2019).

In that respect, Nigerian parents may be unconsciously transmitting the dominant language in their ecological space to their children without realizing the damage being done to their heritage, language as well as the child's cultural identity. Schwartz & Verschik (2013) argue that intergenerational transfer or transmission of a heritage minority language builds the vitality of the language especially in the face of a dominant language with favourable planning and policies from governments and institutions. She argues that lack of inter-generational transfer of a heritage language puts it in some form of endangered situation especially where children may neither recognize nor identify with the language (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013).

Speakers of the Itsekiri language may be vertically transmitting the mainstream language, which is English to their children, while implicit and explicit decisions on language preferences

surrounding languages in the environment may be instrumental or responsible for the languages they use in their homes and are transmitted to their children. Such a decision may be informed by government language policies, which influences the attitudes and behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language towards their heritage languages.

In a situation in which languages are hierarchized in relation to language preferences and choices, the onus lies on speakers of heritage minority languages to initiate efforts to maintain their languages which takes us to the element of language survival examined in the following section.

3.10 Language Survival

In the previous sections, I presented various notions on language hierarchies in consideration of how speakers position and assess minority languages in relation to their statuses and vitalities.

In this section, I examine some key concepts that dwell on language survival such as language maintenance, language revitalization, reversing language shift and language documentation and their connections to the question of non-intergenerational transmission.

One of the objectives of this research, in addition to investigating causes of language shift and endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community, is to suggest strategies to reverse the phenomenon of language shift with a view to maintaining the Itsekiri language. Therefore, I consider it necessary to review literature on relevant concepts pertaining to language survival with a view to understanding related strategies that could be proffered in the maintenance of the Itsekiri language and perhaps other heritage languages in Nigeria.

3.10.1 Language maintenance, revitalization and reversing language Shift

In broad terms, language maintenance, language revitalization and reversing language shift are critical to minority language survival. Before dwelling in-depth on the discussion, it may be crucial to define these concepts. The Cambridge dictionary defines maintenance as keeping in good condition while revitalization is defined as an act of imbuing something with new life or vitality. The term “reversing” is an indication of a feature that is going in the wrong direction. Understandably, the use of metaphors or tropes such as maintenance, reversing, revival or

survival in connection with languages by sociolinguists may imply that some languages are in a state of “disrepair” or in “bad condition”, “in a declining state” or attrition, which requires maintenance or revival.

The seemingly precarious situation of minority languages in many countries may have led sociolinguists to research ways to redress the phenomenon of language endangerment. In so doing, they identify, propose and suggest strategies to deal with the challenge of endangered languages, which are often small and minority languages.

To examine what these notions entail, their roles in language shift, and language endangerment in a minority language setting, it is imperative to trace the advent of these concepts in sociolinguistics.

Language maintenance and language revitalization concepts have attracted a great deal of attention in sociolinguistic scholarships since the early 1960s. Studies of language maintenance have been traced to Fishman (1964) and Kloss (1966). Hornberger & Putz (2013) acknowledge that the field of language shift and language maintenance was first developed by Fishman (1964). According to Mesthrie (2000), Fishman, the pioneering author of the concepts of language maintenance and language revitalization, mentioned the terms “maintenance” and “shift” in his article entitled ‘Language maintenance and language shift as a field of inquiry: A definition of the field and suggestions for its further development’ in 1964.

Other studies, referred to as notable classics include Mesthrie (2000) in the field of language shift and Nancy Dorian’s case study (1981) on the demise of Gaelic in North-East Scotland. Mesthrie (2011) describes language maintenance from the perspective of dispossession. He posits that reversing language shift constitutes that corner of the total field of status planning that is devoted to improving the sociolinguistic circumstances of language that suffers from a negative balance of users and uses.

As both notions imply, language maintenance and revitalization are sociolinguistic terms used to refer to actions or activities embarked upon to inject new life into threatened languages with a view to reinvigorating them. They are strategies aimed at reversing language shift.

Additionally, another sociolinguistic term in this context is language revival, which refers to reawakening, renewal, restoration of vigour and activity with the aim of arresting decline or discontinuity (Mesthrie 2011). For a clear understanding, Mesthrie observes that language

maintenance denotes the continuous use of a language in the face of competition from a regionally and socially more powerful language. He views the opposite of language maintenance, language shift, as the replacement of one language by another as the primary means of communication and socialization within a country.

Similarly, Austin & Sallabanks (2011) observe that the main goal of promoting a language revitalization approach is the maintenance of living languages in their sociocultural contexts, which implies in linguistic ecologies, giving speakers the possibility to continue their use as well as passing them on to their descendants. In this vein, the young generation is an important agency in language maintenance and language revitalization.

Languages evolve by continuous transmission from one generation to the next, especially to the younger generation who will in turn transmit them to their children when they become parents. In the maintenance of a language, intergenerational transmission is a vital component in the reinvigoration process (Schmid 2008).

Furthermore, family language transmission may be an important factor in the maintenance of languages on the verge of extinction. Languages are likely to survive when parents transmit their heritage languages to children through socialisation. Transmitting languages from one generation to another is key to the survival of minority languages (Fishman 1991). Fishman observes that if transmission is sustained, language maintenance is assured, if it falters or ends, the language becomes vulnerable, and its maintenance threatened. This implies that the home and the family are key factors in language maintenance, revival, or survival.

On his part, Spolsky (2009) is of the view that language management in the family is partly under the control of family members, but the goals are regularly influenced by the outside community.

Social relationships in the home may sometimes be managed through family linguistic practices, Sometimes, influenced by the external world, as individuals may want to adopt the language practices in the outside world. Given the situation, there may therefore be an urgent need to transfer the endangered language to children and youth. Otherwise when the adult generation who currently speak the language is no longer alive, there is the likelihood no one would be there to

account for the language especially if the language has not been learnt in schools as in the case of the Itsekiri language.

In addition, Edwards (2010) argues that the minimum requirement for long-term maintenance seems to be the persistence of domains of use that are associated with one, but not both languages, since one language is used in and around the home and the other in work settings. A good example is the case of heritage minority languages, used within the home and among members of the same ethnic group, and the English, a dominant language, used as means of communication among diverse groups in the context of this study.

Furthermore, language maintenance is needed when “the intrusion of English seems excessively common in governmental and everyday affairs” (Hornberger & Putz, 2013 p:130). When the Government of a country promotes a dominant language through policies at the expense of minority languages, the onus lies on the speakers of the latter to take matters into their own hands and devise strategies to encourage their group members to sustain the language. However, as observed by Austin & Sallabanks (2010), speakers may be aware that their language is endangered, but not aware of or confident about their own role in its maintenance.

In the same vein, in his contribution to language maintenance, Harrison (2007) observes that the human mind is a puzzle of human cognition. The ability to understand how the mind organizes and processes information are reasons languages must be preserved and not allowed to go extinct (Harrison *ibid*).

According to Harrison, no one can discern the inner workings of the mind; we can only know its thoughts by what comes out of it in the form of speech. Languages hold the keys to unlocking the mind according to Harrison; therefore, documenting endangered languages while they may still be heard and revitalizing mother tongues that may still be viable must be viewed as the greatest conservation challenge of our generation. Harrison is of the view that, in working with speakers of disappearing languages, it is hard not to take seriously their own feelings of sadness, regret, and perhaps anger at the fate of their languages. Harrison reports that Svetlana, a speaker of Tofa, a critically endangered language spoken in villages in the Irkutskaja Oblast region of Russia, told

him in an interview in 2001, “the other day my daughter asked me, mom, why did you not teach us Tofa? (Harrison 2007).

Furthermore, focusing on reversing language shift, Hornberger & Putz (2013) observe that efforts to bolster intergenerational ethnolinguistic continuity by returning the language to major institutional functions of modern life through efforts of the school, the church, the workplace, the media and the Government, at least in their local or regional manifestations are rightly referred to as reversing language shift’ efforts. Both scholars are of the view that, the language in question is being returned to functions that were associated with it, which any community in touch with the surrounding modern world must wish to influence and regulate on its behalf; if its own intergenerational ethnolinguistic viability is to have at least a chance of succeeding. Examples of languages that are being reversed as reported by Hornberger & Putz (2013) are certain first nations languages, particularly in Canada, Maori in New-Zealand; Navajo in the USA and Basque in some parts of the Basque country in France.

Blench (2000) equally reports on reversing language shift for northern Nigerian languages such as Bakpinka, Defaka, Dulbu, Gbem, Ilue, Jilbe, Kiong, Kudu-Camo, Luri, Mvanip, Sambe, Somyev and Yangkum in Nigeria

According to Hornberger & Putz (ibid) reversing language shift is about reinforcement. They enumerated key elements in the reinforcement process such as the development of community organizations for economic assistance and job training, political participation and involvement, childcare, recreational activity- all of which constitute the modern neighborhood and community; and are the modern supports of home and family life. Other processes of revitalization are the building blocks of societal efforts to relinguify or co-relinguify the major institutions of modern life: the schools, the church, the workplace, the media and the government in their local or regional manifestations.

Furthermore, highlighting the idea of speakers’ solidarity in language maintenance, revitalization and reversing language shift, Giles & Marlow (2012) argue that despite the association of high status to a dominant language, minority language speakers can possess covert prestige in terms of solidarity with members of their own linguistic community. In other words, speakers of

minority languages can solidarize to uphold their own and ensure their language is maintained. Giles & Marlow (2012) opine that whereas the association of a dominant and standard language with high status tends to be rather uniform across strata and linguistic groups, the ascription of solidarity valued by speakers may tend to protect minority languages and help them to survive. In this respect, community efforts to foster language maintenance may be crucial to reversing language shift.

In a nutshell, language maintenance, language revitalization and reversing language shift are critical to heritage language survival. They are factors to be considered in the language endangerment process. Linguistic speech communities cannot afford to look the other way if they wish to preserve their languages. The onus lies on users of languages to garner all the paraphernalia and mobilize available resources within their reach in language maintenance activities. In this respect, the home, community effort, school and the individual seem to be agencies that should initiate processes and interventions to preserve their language while at the same time adapting to the reality of the dominant language in their community in the face of globalization and socioeconomic mobility. Language survival seems predicated on speakers' linguistic attitudes and behaviour in connection with their linguistic practices, especially in societies where multilingualism is the norm.

Another effort to maintain a heritage minority language may be language documentation examined in the following section.

3.10.2 Language Documentation

In language revival and survival efforts, scholars in sociolinguistics are unanimous on the idea of preserving endangered languages using diverse strategies. In addition to language survival strategies examined above, documenting language may equally be crucial. Language documentation may be a possible initiative in response to dying languages and one of the measures to address the research question on strategies to maintain the Itsekiri language. Austin & Sallabanks (2011) identify documenting dying languages as a key strategy in the language survival process.

According to sociolinguists working in the domain of language shift and language endangerment, language documentation is a relatively new initiative in sociolinguistics that emerged barely 30 years ago. Tracing the emergence of language documentation, Seyfeddinipur & Chambers (2016) suggest that language documentation as a discipline was first mentioned by Hale et al. (1992) during a conference in North America with insights and ideologies from participating Australian Sociolinguists. After the first conference where the question of documenting languages was discussed, Krauss (1992) reports that, other sociolinguists followed suit and set out an urgent need for the documentation of endangered languages.

Seyfeddinipur & Chambers (ibid), Austin (2017) Grenoble & Furbee (2010), Woodbury (1999) have all worked on language documentation while describing it in various ways.

Austin (ibid) observes that language documentation as a sub-field of linguistics aims at producing well-structured, archived, annotated corpora and associated resources (metadata, meta-documentation, grammar/dictionary/text, mobilization products) for community use. He maintains that it is a worldwide development with increasing numbers of people working in this framework and increasing interest, especially for endangered languages and language revitalization.

Seyfeddinipur & Chambers (ibid) in turn maintain that language documentation centres on linguistic investigation, the collection of linguistic data, detailed description of language use and its sociocultural context for a better understanding, interpretation of current language ecologies, gathering of documentary and descriptive data in languages. They argue that the main objective is to have a broader understanding of a larger set of language use patterns, linguistic contexts and ecologies, an understanding of how languages evolve, shift and change as well as how multilingual patterns arise, decline, or are preserved. Seyfeddinipur&Chambers are of the view that documentation is usually grounded in language description and the goal of writing grammar, supplemented by a lexicon or dictionary and text collection, which entails annotating corpora of small languages and collecting texts in endangered languages.

Furthermore, Austin (2017) and Woodbury (2011) have proposed various approaches to language documentation as a discipline. One of the approaches which is fundamental to this study is the ethnographic approach that centres on data collection methods such as participant observation in which naturally occurring language practices or usage are recorded, linguistic interviews and questionnaires to mention but a few.

Woodbury (2011) sets out as good documentary practice, an approach that focuses on actual language behaviour in contemporary speech communities, on linguistic creativity and adaptation, that sees language and communication not so much as things, but as ways and strategies.

In this respect, Seyfeddinipur & Chambers (2016) point out that language documentation aims at recording linguistic practices and traditions of a speech community. They are equally of the view that documenting contemporary community ecology will produce a community-oriented ethnography of speaking that will not only focus on a single code but will reveal an overall communicative ecology where each different code and way of speaking will have a place.

Other elements in language documentation that have retained the attention of scholars according to Seyfeddinipur & Chambers, are the evaluation of concepts in endangered language documentation discourse, assessments of concepts such as language endangerment and language shift, the documentary practices of scholars in the field and digital archiving practices.

In acknowledging their newness to the enterprises of a large-scale documentation of languages, while trying to define the domain and its activities, Grenoble & Furbee (2010), drawing from Austin (2017) describe language documentation as a systematic record of representations of spoken and written forms of a language in their appropriate sociocultural context. Grenoble and Furbee (ibid) is of the view that language documentation as a field of linguistic inquiry and practice is concerned with the compilation and preservation of linguistic primary data and interfaces between primary data and various types of analyses based on the data. They equally observe that, in language documentation, data collection and diffusion are the main research goals, with grammar, dictionaries and text collection as secondary.

After consideration of other scholars' views of language documentation, Grenoble & Furbee (2010) developed their own description of language documentation. Observing that language documentation should be seen within the context of language vitality, they argue that language documentation implies preserving a language without necessarily preserving the speakers; it may imply creating a record of the language or making a record of a culture. They suggest an effort to separate a language from the people who speak it, is to treat natural language as if it were a commodity, a specimen, and not a feature integral to human existence.

In addition, while making a case in favour of language documentation, Harrison (2007) argues that speakers' efforts cannot bring back languages that are on the verge of dying from the brink. Only

linguists can capture accurate data in the recordings analysis, which may be useful to future scientists, future societies, future generations, children of heritage-language speakers and perhaps new generations of speakers. According to Harrison, where a language is not documented, there will be no trace of the existence of that language.

“As languages fall out of use into forgetfulness, entire genres of oral traditions – stories, songs, and epic tales rapidly approach extinction; perhaps only a small fraction has ever been recorded or set down in books; the tales captured in books, when no longer spoken, will exist as mere shadows of a once vibrant tradition” (Harrison 2007pg:40).

While documenting language efforts receive institutional support worldwide, Seyfeddinipur & Chambers (2016) observe that various organizations have set out to support this initiative. They report that various international non-governmental organizations support interventions that underpin language documentation discourse and research. Some of such interventions include major funding initiatives in Germany such as *Dokumentation Bedrohter Sprachen (DoBeS)* funded by the Volkswagen Stiftung) and training courses to keep up language documentation research worldwide. The UK *Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP)* funded by Arcadia, the US *Documentation of Endangered Languages (DEL)* funded by the National Science Foundation have enabled more and more scholars and students to conduct fieldwork and to document languages for which little or no documentation exists. Seyfeddinipur & Chambers (ibid) equally maintain that teaching theory and methods in language documentation, building capacity not only in Western academic institutions but also in the countries and communities where many undocumented languages are spoken constitute initiatives in ensuring language survival.

Scholars in the field of language endangerment have extensively acknowledged the need to document languages. Documenting language initiatives, especially threatened, dying and endangered languages, could be a veritable tool, not only in revitalizing and in preserving small languages, but such activities will also see the provision of relevant linguistic materials and linguistic treasures for future generations to leverage on. Archived linguistic material can also boost archeological interventions that could be used to teach the history and traditions of a language. This will go a long way to prevent attrition and the complete extinction of a heritage minority language such as the Itsekiri language that appears to be competing linguistically with diverse ethnolinguistic groups in the community and in a multilingual context.

3.11 Concepts relevant to language use in multilingual contexts

This doctoral study would not be complete without highlighting some relevant notions and concepts relational to multilingual contexts such as that of this study. These include sociolinguistic concepts such as multilingualism, plurilingualism, translanguaging, language brokering and linguistic mediation.

Multilingualism and translanguaging are particularly of interest and key elements in this study not only because they are characteristic of the Nigerian linguistic space with a myriad of languages, but also of speakers of heritage minority languages such as the Itsekiri language.

In addition to the notions of multilingualism and translanguaging, which are relevant in the context of this study, plurilingualism, a term that originated from the European linguistic context, is equally examined as a way of sharing alternative insights with readers in Africa and especially in Nigeria. Since, this s thesis is written in Europe, I thought an understanding of the notion of plurilingualism may be of interest to Africans and Nigerian sociolinguists and scholars in other domains.

3.11.1 Multilingualism

Many sociolinguists have worked on the concept of multilingualism, accounting for its robust literature. They use the term multilingualism to describe the existence of several languages in a community, a society or in a Nation State.

The Common European Framework of References, henceforth (CEFR) (2001) refers to multilingualism exclusively as the presence of several languages in a given space, independently of those who use them or the co-existence of different languages in a given society. According to the CEFR, the fact that several languages co-exist in the same geographical area does not indicate whether inhabitants know all the languages. The CEFR (ibid) reports that multilingualism may be attained by simply diversifying the languages on offer in a particular school or educational system.

Mesthrie (2011) on his part defines multilingualism as the use of more than one language by individuals within societies or countries. He differentiates individual multilingualism from societal multilingualism and maintains that individual multilingualism is a situation where almost every individual in a society has proficiency in more than one language and speaks it on a regular basis; while societal multilingualism is where more than one language is used within a given territory or society.

He maintains that the overlap of individual and societal multilingualism is common in African countries. Citing examples of Kenya and Tanzania, Mesthrie (2011) points out that majority of people are proficient in their local languages as well as Kiswahili, the national lingua franca and English. Mesthrie is nonetheless of the view that, societies are characterised by extensive societal but not necessarily individual multilingualism. He equally cites the example of Switzerland, which according to him is a multilingual country without widespread individual multilingualism. According to Mesthrie (2011), Switzerland has four national languages: German, French, Italian and Romansch. However, majority of Swiss citizens speak only the dominant language in their area (Mesthrie, *ibid*).

Similarly, Mufwene (2016) equally makes a distinction between two kinds of multilingual situations. The first involves two or more ethnolinguistically distinct populations that share the same topographic space but do not generally interact with each other. Mufwene observes that the populations are bridged only by a few plurilinguals, such as, when the first European colonists settled in the Americas and in Australia and the Europeans lived segregated not only from the indigenous populations but also from each other. He opines that the same situation was observed during the European exploitation and colonization of Africa and Asia, and the colonizers lived in their own separate quarters and communicated with the masses and the natives through intermediaries identified in history as “colonial auxiliaries”. This multilingual situation was equally manifested during the colonial era in Nigeria when locals acted as interpreters between the indigenous people and the British colonial masters (Nzeaka 2017).

In addition, the second kind of multilingualism according to Mufwene (*ibid*) involves ethnolinguistically different populations that coexist in a topographic space that are not rigidly segregated, where they can interact with each other by learning the other’s language. He cites the example of the French and English speakers in cities like Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal in Canada. This is also the case in point in the context of this research. Different ethnolinguistic populations coexist in the same communities in Nigeria. Though they speak different languages, they however

interact with one another in language contact situation, which is significantly the case in the city of Warri, the main location of the Itsekiri speaking people.

3.11.2 Plurilingualism

Furthermore, the (CEFR) (2001) equally elaborates the concept of plurilingualism, which is nonetheless different from Multilingualism. The concept of plurilingualism is “the knowledge of several languages by an individual” (CEFR, 2001, p. 4). The ability to speak several languages makes one plurilingual. From the description of plurilingualism, individuals in a multilingual society with proficiency of varying degrees in several languages could be said to be plurilingual.

Similarly, Conteh (2017) maintains that the term ‘plurilingual’ is used to describe individuals who use more than one language to live in multilingual contexts. This is similar to Mesthrie’s definition of individual multilingualism examined above. According to Conteh, the term plurilingualism is commonly used in Europe to refer to the use or the presence of several languages in a geographical space as opposed to multilingualism in other parts of the world. Conteh remarks that plurilingual competence includes knowledge of languages picked up in everyday life and learned informally, not just in formal education. Conteh further points out that plurilingual competence is linked to the idea of language repertoires; the resources of language that all individuals possess and are part of our toolkits for getting things done in the world.

While multilingualism often refers to the spatial context, plurilingualism refers to the people who use the languages in the environment. Mesthrie’s (2011) definition of multilingualism - the use of more than one language by individual in a society or country and Conteh’s definition of plurilingualism demonstrate some elements of similarities, therefore, it may not be out of place to introduce the later in the African context in general and in Nigeria in particular in this doctoral research.

With Multilingualism and plurilingualism, comes new forms of speech patterns. Multilingual and plurilingual speakers have tendencies to mix languages in their repertoires in everyday life; characteristic sociolinguists refer to as translanguaging examined below.

3.11.3 Translanguaging

The concept of translanguaging is equally of relevance in this research because it is a major linguistic characteristic of the speech community of reference in this research- the Itsekiri-speaking community, with diverse languages in contact. When languages are in contact, speakers of the different languages tend to learn one another's language through interaction; therefore, the tendency for the individuals to translanguage may be high.

In addition, where many languages coexist in a community, speakers tend to be multilingual and the phenomena of codeswitching and code mixing in the use of different codes in the linguistic repertoire of an individual are sometimes inevitable. The act of switching and mixing codes is rather described in this research using the translanguaging terminology especially as it relates to the individual performing the act. Experts in socio and applied linguistics have used the term to describe traits of language mixing from the perspective of the individual speaker, or the use of different codes in a discourse by an individual.

Garcia (2009) is reputed to be the proponent of translanguaging, a concept historically traced to Cen Williams (1994), known to have observed the phenomenon of translanguaging in some schoolchildren in Wales, a situation where children in a linguistically diverse community had to mix the different languages in their multilingual repertoire to remain relevant and participate in classroom lessons.

Cummins (2019) equally corroborates this assertion in his reference to translanguaging as a construct originally proposed in the Welsh context as the alternation of input and output mode in bilingual instruction. He observes that students may receive information through the medium of one language (e.g., Welsh) and then talk or write about this information through the medium of the other language (e.g., English). Citing the example of internet recourses in English, Cummins observes that translanguaging construct emerged from instructional practice and represented a pragmatic solution to the different affordances of each language.

In addition to Garcia and Cummins, other sociolinguists acclaimed to be in the forefront in the advancement of the translanguaging concept are Blackledge & Creese (2017) as well as different scholars using various terms to refer to translanguaging. Blackledge & Creese (ibid) describe

translanguaging as the communicative practices in which people engage as they bring into contact different biographies, histories, and linguistic backgrounds. They argue that translanguaging has the potential to be transformative and creative and enable people to communicate with whatever resources are available to them, rather than constraining them within prescribed limits.

Translanguaging is the strategic use to which people put their linguistic resources in contexts of linguistic, social, and cultural diversity (Creese, Blackledge & Hu 2017).

Furthermore, García & Wei (2014) remark that translanguaging differs from the notion of code-switching and code mixing. They posit that translanguaging refers not simply to a shift or a shuttle between two languages, but to the speakers' construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of language; but that which make up the speakers' complete language repertoire. The speaker is at the center of translanguaging, which is essentially viewed from the former's perspective.

Garcia & Sylvan (2011) used the metaphor of an all-terrain vehicle that adjusts and adapts to different types of terrain to describe how individuals flexibly adapt linguistic resources for different communicative contexts.

To translanguage means the ability of a multilingual speaker to use his linguistic repertoire freely and flexibly. It is the mixture of languages or shuttling between languages to make meaning. It entails using and mixing all languages in one's linguistic repertoire freely and flexibly to meet one's needs at a given time depending on the situation. Cangarajah (2011) observes that translanguaging should be studied in contexts where there is a mix of speakers in order to understand the strategies of communication of translanguaging.

Moreover, a major context in which translanguaging may be valorized is the classroom therefore, it may be worth mentioning that the evolution of translanguaging especially in classroom situations is traced to Garcia (2009), who is the precursor of translanguaging pedagogy. Garcia and Li Wei, (2009, 2014), Creese & Blackledge (2010, 2015), renowned scholars in the domain of education propose translanguaging pedagogy as educational resources in classroom learning particularly in the West.

Although translanguaging is a common characteristic demonstrated in the linguistic practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community, it is not deployed in educational settings. It may therefore be necessary to introduce translanguaging pedagogy in classroom situations in the Itsekiri-speaking community and in Nigeria at large. This may be relevant in addressing the research questions asked in this study.

Furthermore, beside a few mentions of translanguaging outside the classroom, not much has been done in other contexts where translanguaging characteristics are evident, especially in the daily activities of people either individually or collectively in social cultural contexts. This doctoral research therefore highlights an entirely different contexts of translanguaging outside the school and academics systems. It brings to limelight translanguaging characteristics in various contexts including socio cultural context.

Translanguaging is demonstrated in the macro, the meso, as well as the micro contexts in this doctoral study. In Nigeria, translanguaging is evident in the use of different languages in the individual multilingual repertoire, a phenomenon that is equally common in the Itsekiri-speaking community. For example, it emerges from meaningful interactions of individuals from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds in the country, in which individuals leverage resources from their linguistic repertoire while interacting with one another in a communicative situation. While exhibiting translanguaging traits in communication, speakers of the Itsekiri language may mediate in language brokering situations in which they mix languages in their discourse.

3.11.4 Language brokering and cultural mediation

It is expedient to mention other linguistic phenomena that are equally common in the Itsekiri-speaking community and relevant in this doctoral study. These are language brokering and language mediation.

Tse (1996) defines language brokering as the facilitation of communication between two linguistically or culturally different parties. Tse (ibid) asserts that language brokers, unlike translators and interpreters, mediate rather than transmit information.

Guan et al. (2015) refer to language brokering as a variety of activities such as reading, interpreting and writing of texts, speaking to and for other people in a variety of settings, for

example, at parent-teacher conferences, over the phone etc. Guan et al. (2015) argue that because cultural beliefs, values and norms shape communication, language brokers always perceive process and paraphrase cultural information along with language in these interactions.

In the context of this study, language brokering does not involve any of those activities enumerated by Guan et al. rather; it is about facilitating communication and mediation between people in cultural contexts such as traditional marriage, funeral ceremonies and sometimes in situations of settling internal conflicts amongst family members. This sociocultural linguistic process is an important aspect of the Itsekiri cultural and group identity (**See page 255**).

3.12 Summary

This chapter examines various concepts that have bearing with the question of language endangerment in a minority language setting in relation to the Itsekiri-speaking community. While operationalizing the study, it presents the conceptual framework on which the investigation is predicated. It focuses on concepts such as language shift, a major mechanism for language endangerment and language death as well as the implication in a minority language setting. Other relevant concepts examined are language attrition and language loss, language contact and linguistic diversity involving interactions and cohabitation of different languages in a community, and linguistic hegemony, the controlling power of a dominant language over a lesser used language and its consequences. It dwells briefly on colonialism and its linguistic consequences demonstrated in the introduction of English language in former British colonies in the nineteenth century.

Highlighting various ways in which sociolinguists have described language types while categorizing them according to their statuses and vitalities in relation to numerical strength and demography, the chapter analyzes linguistic hierarchization illustrated in language status and vitality determined by usage and functional load of a language.

It equally presents language ideology, planning and policy, linguistic attitudes and behaviour, which has to do with speakers' way and manner of behaving linguistically due to language preference and choice; consequent upon government and institutions linguistic policies, family

language policy practices and transmission informed by individual or collective decisions about language use in homes and families and in the community.

While examining language survival with a focus on language maintenance and language revitalization as well as how language shift can be reversed, the chapter concludes with concepts relevant to the doctoral study such as multilingualism, plurilingualism translanguaging language brokering and linguistic mediation.

Though not exhaustive, these notions form the nucleus and the theoretical framework that underpin this doctoral study.

4 Chapter 4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology and the process of how this study was conducted. The aim is to explain the process of data gathering as well as selecting information using reliable methodological approaches suitable to the research objective. Focusing on the physical aspect and operationalizing the research, this chapter highlights the ethnographic approach to qualitative research and explains the methods of data collection of the research. While examining ethnographic approach, it presents the methodological tools and some of the reasons they are best suited in addressing the research questions: what are the causes of language shift and language endangerment of the Itsekiri language? What are the factors responsible for non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language? What is the role of the English language in the Itsekiri-speaking community?

The decision to conduct qualitative research stems from the research topic, which deals with a sociolinguistic investigation of the use of the Itsekiri language in Nigeria.

Hornberger (2013) observes that methodological choices are often determined by the question being investigated. In the same vein, the choice of using an ethnographic approach is informed by the objective of this doctoral study. The research investigates the linguistic behaviour and attitude of the Itsekiri-speaking people demonstrated in the non-intergenerational transmission of their language. The aim is to understand and uncover the reasons behind the phenomenon of non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language, the seeming preference for English, and NPE as well as the underlying causes of language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community. To achieve these objectives, the methodological tools employed endeavour to identify the factors responsible for non-transmission of the language, find out elements contributory to language shift and the endangerment of the Itsekiri language, as well as reasons for the seeming unwillingness of speakers of the Itsekiri language to speak their language and their preference for the English language and NPE.

The chapter is structured in two parts. The first part focuses on the description of the methodological framework, focusing on the ethnographic approach in qualitative research elucidated by scholars in sociolinguistics, the research design, corpus constitution, sample and constitution of the interview questions and various ways of gaining access into the community of investigation.

The second part, subdivided into three sections, dwells on the practical aspects of data collection and data analysis. The first sub-section dwells on the different methods of data collection through participant observation, linguistic interviews, focusing on the mode and context of the interview sessions. The second sub-section examines ethical considerations in relation to data collection as well as the role of the researcher in ethnographic research. The last section in this part examines data processing as well as strengths and limitations of the research methodology.

4.2 A qualitative research methodology

Various sociolinguists have described the notion of qualitative methodology in different terms. Walliman (2011) observes that qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena, observe feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and the beliefs of a given society. Nolen (2020) is of the view that practitioners in the field of social and behavioural sciences employ qualitative research methodology essentially to study issues relating to human behaviour and functioning.

This doctoral research being qualitative in nature necessitates the use of qualitative research methods in finding answers to the research questions. This is with a view to uncovering the reasons for non-transmission of the Itsekiri language from one generation to another as well as ascertaining the underlying causes of language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Strauss & Corbin (1991) are of the view that qualitative methodology is used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known. While pointing out that qualitative research methodology can provide intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods, they note that, it enables the researcher to gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known.

The use of qualitative research methodology did not only offer insight during the data analysis and interpretative procedure, it equally provided a direction to my findings and concretised the hypotheses. It was also fundamental to the fieldwork, which involved mainly written and verbal reports of naturally occurring linguistic practices in the Itsekiri -speaking community.

Employing qualitative research methodology led us to uncover many hidden and more detailed elements that quantitative methodology may not have revealed, essentially in relation to the linguistic behaviour and attitude of speakers of the Itsekiri language towards their language and the linguistic practices within the Itsekiri speaking-community.

Furthermore, Strauss & Corbin (1991) argue that the use of qualitative research methods may lead to unveiling much hidden and very detailed information that quantitative methods may not reveal. Consistent with that, talking to people and asking questions were ways deemed efficient and effective in digging into people's minds with a view to getting them to unfold and divulge many concealed traits and characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher shows interest in the conversations of participants in qualitative investigations and refrains from revealing his/her personal opinion and avoids subjectivity yet provides a prompt to strengthen the interview process.

In addition, qualitative methodology is an important research strategy in studying and generating data from participant observation, field notes and interviews using ethnographic approach; a key data collection technique in qualitative research examined below.

4.2.1 An ethnographic approach in qualitative research

Ethnography as a method of data gathering is widely recognised in qualitative research. Various scholars seem to have a consensual view of what ethnography entails. Thoughts and opinions of sociolinguists who use ethnographic research methods relevant to this research are highlighted below. Their descriptions of ethnography align with the decision to use it as a methodological approach of investigation in this doctoral study.

Leeds-Hurwitz (2004), asserts that ethnography, as an investigating methodology that originally developed within anthropology, has been used to study language and social interactions overtime. As a methodological approach, ethnography entails a description of everyday human behaviour (Leeds-Hurwitz 2004) in relation to languages and relies heavily on participant observation in

natural settings. Leeds-Hurwitz (2004) notes that the term ethnography is a synonym for qualitative or naturalistic research. According to him, it is used to document daily occurring events through taking field notes, videotaping during observation, and audiotaping during linguistic interviews.

According to Leeds-Hurwitz (ibid), information can also be collected through conversation and narratives from texts.

Similarly, a school of thought attributed to Martin-Jones & Gardner (2012), is that ethnographic practice primarily involves three fieldwork methods: participant observation, field notes and interviews with recordings of naturally occurring interactions. These three sources of ethnographic material become data through the transcription of interactional and interview data and through the amplification of field notes from initial jottings while observing behavioral patterns occurring during participant observation (Martin-Jones & Gardner 2012). These three forms of data collection provide a fuller account of moments of interaction undertaken during this doctoral research.

Furthermore, Creese et al. (2016) are of the view that linguistic ethnographic approach enables greater understanding of the role of multilingualism as a resource where multiple repertoires are at in play in cities. Warri, the principal city of speakers of the Itsekiri language, the city of reference in this research is surrounded with multilingual resources, evident in the individual's repertoire. Data collected present individuals' multilingual resources from linguistically diverse environment and contexts.

In the same vein, Li Wei et al. (2008) believe that observation, interviews, tape-recorded interactions, and activities are a range of methods that can form part of ethnography or an ethnographic approach to sociolinguistic research. Copland & Crease (2015) are of the view that ethnography allows us to get at things we would otherwise never be able to discover. They are of the view that these methodological strategies allow us to see how language practices are connected to the very real conditions of people's lives, discover how and why language matters to people in their own terms, and to watch processes unfold over time. Copland & Crease (ibid) argue that these methods do not only allow us to see complexity and connections, and understand the history and geography of language, but also to tell a story. Not someone else's story exactly, but our own story of some experience; a story which illuminates social processes and generates explanations as to why people do and think the things they do.

Copland & Creese (2015) further point out that linguistic ethnography is an interpretive approach, which studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and considers how interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures. While pointing out that the linguistic ethnographic approach requires that social practices surrounding people in contemporary life can be examined, they posit that interpretive approaches are necessary because of the invisibility of everyday life and activities. They further argue that an interpretive approach of linguistic ethnography is required in order for attention to be paid not only to linguistic practices in their environment, but also to interactions people engage in repeatedly daily. According to Copland & Creese (ibid), people take such routine practices for granted and are ignorant or are not sensitive to important issues such as communication, language use and cultural practices. In asking questions such as what is it about the way we use language that has an impact on social processes? What is it about social processes that influences linguistic ones? Copland & Creese highlight the necessity of looking in our own backyard to understand shifting cultural meanings, practices and variations. According to Copland & Creese, ethnography has brought these issues to the attention of human beings.

4.2.2 An ethnographic approach as a choice of methodology

In order to find answers to the research questions, I had to make decisions about the methodological approach suitable to the doctoral study. Sociolinguists and ethnographers recommend participant observation and linguistic interviews in ethnographic research, among other research tools, when studying beliefs and feelings about language. Therefore, I opted for ethnography as a methodological strategy. Justification for this choice is that the study focuses on people and their community while investigating their beliefs and feelings about their language. Seeking to know people's opinions of their language helped me to address the question of language shift and change in the Itsekiri –speaking community.

Campbell-Kibler (2013) posit that in understanding how people use language, sociolinguists often want to understand what people think about the languages they use or that other people use. She remarks that peoples' beliefs and feelings are related to their linguistic behaviour, and that feeling about language forms impact people who use those forms.

A multiplicity of data collecting methods is not only necessary to investigate and substantiate the complex language use in a given community, it is also meant to generate robust data. Some methodological tools of ethnographic approach in qualitative research that I used in my research are examined in more detail below.

4.2.2.1. Participant observation in ethnographic qualitative research

Observation in qualitative and ethnographic research is used as a veritable strategy in investigating social cultural and linguistic phenomenon in the social sciences. According to Kawulich (2005), participant observation, considered a staple, in anthropological and ethnographic studies, has been used as a data collection method for over a century.

While maintaining that participant observation is the primary method used by anthropologists doing fieldwork, Kawulich (2005) defines observation as the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study. He adds that participant observation is used as a mainstay in fieldwork in a variety of disciplines, and, as such, has proven to be a beneficial tool for producing studies that provide accurate representation of a culture. Dewalt & Dewalt, (2002) opine that participant observation provides the context for the development of sampling guidelines and interview guides.

In the same vein, while pointing out that observation is a strategy to ascertain language use and attitudes towards languages, Altuna & Basurto (2013) argue that observational data collection can reveal patterns and behaviours about speakers, which they are often unaware of or take for granted. For example, they opine that speakers of a language may not be able to identify certain accents, perceive code switching and code mixing or accurately gauge the amount of interrupting that they do. (Garcia, 2014) adds that speakers may also not be aware of translanguaging, or multimodality in which they are involved.

Altuna & Basurto (ibid.) further opine that observation is one of the main qualitative techniques for social research, even though other methods such as questionnaires are generally used more often. They define observation techniques as a method of examining and analysing people's behaviour systematically in a controlled way, without any kind of manipulation or mediation. Unlike other techniques, they posit that individuals' behaviour is observed directly in direct observation. The goal of direct observation, according to Altuna & Basurto (2013), is to measure

language use in spoken interactions in various places and locations as well as examine and analyse people's behaviour in their natural state. On their part, Martin-Jones & Gardner (2012) note that participant observation is the hallmark of data collection in ethnographic research. According to them, communicative practices provide the focus in linguistic ethnography.

Furthermore, the use of observation as a method in ethnographic qualitative research has varying advantages. In this doctoral research, participant observation provides the enabling environment to learn about the activities of the people under study in their natural setting through observing and participating in their activities. The process of participant observation was not only used to obtain data, it helped me to understand peoples' linguistic behaviour and beliefs. In addition to providing insight into multilingual and linguistic resources embedded in the repertoire of individuals observed in the community under reference, it enabled me to uncover the reasons they use a particular language in a given situation.

Observation presents opportunities to observe naturally occurring interactions, as the case was during my fieldwork where I witnessed people's language practices during their natural interactions.

In addition to participant observations, linguistic interviews served as a veritable tool not only in gauging the linguistic practices and behaviour of people; it also helped in identifying linguistic diversity as well as assessing the linguistic landscape, from the viewpoint of language contact in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

4.2.2.2. Linguistic interview in ethnographic qualitative research

Interview as a choice of data collection tool in ethnographic research is very common in social science research. Litosseliti (2015) remarks that the use of interview is widespread within the social and human sciences due to a general shift from quantitative towards qualitative methods, in response to a growing disenchantment with laboratory-style experiments. Litosseliti (ibid.) is of the view that the basic principle for any social research should be to treat people as if they are human beings. He argues that people are not robots; their behaviour is meaningful rather than mechanical; therefore, rather than concoct all kinds of experiments in an attempt to know the

causes of human behaviour, why not simply talk to people, and ask them to account for their own actions? By so doing they can explain the reasons they behave in a certain manner.

Litosseliti (2015) equally observes that linguistic interview, as a research method is very popular with social research projects in education, linguistics, and health research. Essentially, within academia, as well as in the media, interview has been on the top echelon of methodological tools in carrying out investigation. It has proved to be the commonest way of accessing news and happenings around the world (Litosseliti, 2015).

In addition, Litosseliti further remarks that interviews are means of accessing information that cannot be obtained by direct or participant observation. In an interview, questions are designed to elicit all kinds of information from the interviewee. According to Litosseliti, interviews provide a window into the mind or life world of the interviewee.

Furthermore, while using interview as a method of data collection, Hornberger (2013), asserts that social scientists and educators obtain informants or interviewees' perspective on their beliefs, values and understanding of life and other topics or cultural events. Interviews makes it possible to explore participants' feelings, attitudes and decisions relating to maintaining communications in multilingual settings (Hornberger, *ibid.*), essentially in the kind of contexts described in this research.

On his part, Labov (1984) defines the sociolinguistic interview as a well-developed strategy in qualitative and ethnographic research. His methodology involves recording one to two hours speech and a full range of demographic data for each speaker within one sample design. He adds that the interviewer should remember that for each sociolinguistic interview, the underlying aim is to progress from general, impersonal, non-specific topic/questions to more specific, personal ones. In support of Labov's sociolinguistic interview method, Tagliamonte (2006) opines that one way of eliciting useful data on vernacular depends on the age of the speaker and the type of community. To substantiate her argument, she emphasizes that the ideal sociolinguistic interview begins with questions relating to demography, community, neighbourhood, and progresses to more personal variables such as family status, age, occupation etc.

To this end, I consider linguistic interview as a fundamental social research tool used in social science and the humanities to collect data.

Several underlying reasons gave impetus to opting for interview as a tool in this doctoral study. The interview is a simple mechanism by which researchers extract vital information from

interviewees. Edley & Litosseliti (2018) argue that interview provides privileged access to the interviewee, as well as gives first-hand information or an intimate sense of what the person thinks of the situation being researched. The use of interview is advantageous in the sense that it gives privileged access to those being interviewed. The relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is cordial and the former guarantees the anonymity of the latter. In airing their views freely, interviewees express themselves without restraint and provide vital information at their disposal without inhibition. Edley & Litosseliti (ibid) further maintain that, in asking people to account for their own actions, they are more likely to provide researchers with good or plausible explanations of why certain phenomenon takes place.

Furthermore, making a case for interview as a choice in data collection process, Calvet & Dumont (1999) remark that the values of interview rest upon the fact that all the words stated, the sounds of interaction, intonations, gestures, as well as the first reactions on certain issues are preserved through recording. According to Calvet & Dumont (ibid.), non-verbal parameters are reliable indicators to measure the sincerity or not of the interviewee's speech and his/her state of mind during the interview process. The researcher can observe the interviewee's complicity, his/her distance, his bitterness, his satisfaction, his confidence, his hesitation, and his volunteerism (Calvet & Dumont ibid). While arguing that the goal of interview is to gather experiences, facts and opinions, they add that respondents are given the opportunity and time to express themselves freely on a subject that directly concerns them, and they can freely verbalize what they feel.

Other advantages offered by the interview as a method for gathering spoken data are that it is relatively easier to set up an interview with selected informants rather than to get permission to record naturally occurring talk (Codo & Moyer, 2010). According to Codo & Moyer (ibid), interview offers a more controlled environment for researchers looking for specific language forms than naturally occurring interactions.

From the foregoing, it could be implied that interview gives the respondent the opportunity to express himself/herself freely without limit and hesitation. The respondent may let go and divulge everything in his mind and not hold anything back. He /she may speak frankly without fear of being challenged according to scholars of sociolinguistic research.

Practically, in talking to respondents during the course of this doctoral study, beliefs and opinions regarding the Itsekiri language were ascertained. Starting with questions bordering on the general situation in the community in a face-to face conversation, I obtained first-hand information regarding the phenomenon of language shift and change in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Talking with Itsekiri people directly about the research and asking relevant questions was very fruitful as vital information relevant to the investigation was collected directly from them. The interview sessions provided a good opportunity for the Itsekiri-speaking people to air their views concerning the phenomenon. All informants expressed some form of contentment and willingness to provide information, perhaps because the topic of investigation or the research questions concern the people directly. The participants were pleased to participate in the interview sessions. They were willing to say all they knew regarding the subject, as they saw themselves as contributors to the research. The interview is therefore a practical and convenient method of obtaining information that becomes data from the participants.

Information collected from respondents pertaining to the opinions of people with respect to the Itsekiri language provided insight to understanding the community members' language practices. I was able to ascertain to what use the language is put, to what extent it is used and how much of it is used in various contexts be they educational, political, economic, home/family, in socio cultural activities such as religious ceremonies including marriages, funerals, as well as in comedy and leisure. Concisely, interview as a process of data collection, complemented by field notes made during observations, provided detailed insight in response to the research questions. For example, I was able to collect data that related to the following: language diversity in the community, domain of use of the Itsekiri language, family language policy with a focus on the choice of languages spoken in homes and general linguistic practices in the environment. These were some of the reasons I opted to use the interview as a data collection instrument.

It is pertinent to add that during the observation sessions, and the interview process, the researcher consciously takes down notes to help him or her retain essential information in form of field notes discussed in the section below.

4.2.2.3. Field Notes

In addition to the methodological tools described above, field notes are generated during the field work while investigating a phenomenon in ethnographic research. DeWalt & DeWalt (2002) argue that fieldwork involves active looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, writing detailed field notes, and perhaps most importantly, patience.

Martin-Jones & Gardener (2012) observe that, in addition to documenting actual interactions taking place at the time of observation, field notes describe different actions and inactions happening in the contexts of observation. Field notes are recordings of happenings at the time of observation. They capture what takes place at a particular time. Field notes record the time or moment an action is carried out. They are like the brain box of the researcher at the time of observations (Martin-Jones & Gardener 2012). According to Gardener & Martin-Jones (ibid), field notes are quick jottings the researcher can always refer to and can be amplified quickly after observation in the field as well as during data analysis process. They shape participant observation and can sometimes complement interviews. As a methodological strategy during data collection, jotting down activities while observing the different ways people use language in the community proved to be very useful in capturing what takes place on the spot. It is a very important aspect of the fieldwork. It acts as a reminder of actions that took place, which one may not remember after observation in the field.

An important aspect of my field notes is that they served as references when I was treating the data. This method of capturing what takes place on the spot helped me to record in written form what was happening in the different contexts of observation. While writing the report, I had to crosscheck facts from time to time to verify claims from my notes.

In addition, considering Ebersold's (2018) argument of a diary as a type of field note, a large amount of information noted during observation was kept in a notebook in the form of a diary. Throughout my six months stay in the Itsekiri-speaking community, wherever, I went, I noted naturally occurring language use in diverse situations and contexts; especially what was relevant in terms of language practices on every occasion. Most of the linguistic characteristics buttressed what was said during the interview sessions. Notes taken during observations served significantly, as they became handy during data analysis and interpretation. Martin-Jones & Gardner (2012) argue that field notes are essential elements in the interpretative process of research data analysis, in addition to interviews and especially in relation to multiple data sources.

4.3 Methodological triangulation

Methodological triangulation, the scientific process employed to carry out the investigation in this research appears very common in qualitative and ethnographic research. Before going further, it may be necessary to define triangulation.

Heale & Forbes (2013) describe triangulation in research as the use of more than one approach to researching a question with the aim of increasing confidence in the findings through the confirmation of a proposition using two or more independent measures. They argue that the combination of findings from two or more rigorous approaches provide a more comprehensive picture of the results than either approach could do alone. While arguing that triangulation may be the use of multiple theories, data sources, methods, or investigations within the study of a single phenomenon, Heale & Forbes (2013) assert that the triangulation technique is used to confirm suggested findings as well as determine the completeness of data. Studies that use triangulation may include two or more sets of data collection using the same methodology.

In the light of the above, to investigate the linguistic practices of the Itsekiri -speaking people and collect data for the research, I opted for methodological techniques such as participant observation with field notes and semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions.

4.3.1 Justifying methodological triangulation

Several reasons could be advanced for using observation and linguistic interviews. Observation and interviews in this research were not only chosen to complement each other, they were also selected to determine the completeness of the data (Heale & Forbes 2013). Justification for using both methodological techniques stems from the realisation that one source of data collection technique would not provide sufficient information. Therefore, a multiple data sources was considered in order to provide robust data required to answer the doctoral research questions. In essence, using methodological triangulation provided significantly rich and more reliable data. Linguistic interviews provided detailed information through semi directed conversations while participant observation provided data through naturally linguistically occurring speech and behavioural patterns in relation to non-intergenerational transmission and language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community. The multiplicity of data collecting methods was not only necessary

to investigate and substantiate the complex language use in the Itsekiri speaking-community; it also helped to identify possible causes of language shift.

Although, I was curious to observe what people do with the language, what it is used for, and how it is used, it was also necessary to ask questions relating to people's views and opinions about their language use by interviewing them. I was curious to hear speakers of the Itsekiri language talk about their language attitudes and use. In other words, the role language plays in their lives and it is perceived, and if at all, they are conscious of the phenomenon of language shift in the community.

It is in accordance with the ideas advanced by the above scholars in sociolinguistics, that I am further convinced that the choice of ethnography as a research methodology is justified and fundamental to this doctoral research. For example, going into the community, observing language and communicative practices as well as linguistic behaviours associated with linguistic realities of the Itsekiri people in their natural habitat, provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

In the review of relevant literature, I have observed that scholars in this domain of methodology do not only focus on communicative practices and linguistic behaviours related to people's linguistic realities when conducting ethnographic research, they equally adopt the triangulation methodological strategy in investigating linguistic related phenomenon.

In every meaningful research, a roadmap that leads the direction of the research is expected. Below is the research design detailing various phases and stages of this doctoral research.

4.4 Research design

The research design is a crucial and important aspect of any research study. The research design refers to the plan or structure of the research. It is similar to a work plan outlining various aspects or phases of the research. According to Seele (2015), the research design incorporates a descriptive analytical framework of the research. It consists of several sections including the conceptual or theoretical framework, sample constitution, constituting research questions, methodological strategy, data collection process as well as analysis and interpretation of findings.

In like manner, the design for this doctoral research consists of four main phases: Preparation, data collection, data analysis, and report writing.

The preparation phases include sample constitution and constituting research questions; theoretical framework, data collection, data analysis and report writing.

In preparing to take a Ph. D degree, my first reflection was to identify the topic and the case study. Then, I reviewed scholarly writings and works relevant to the topic of research. I then wrote the research proposal based on an identified conceptual framework. Thereafter, I reflected on the data collection method that led me to reflect on constituting samples as well as interview questions. Next, I embarked on the fieldwork, which took place from January to June 2018, followed by the transcription of data from August to December 2018. The next phase was the analysis and interpretation of the data from January to August 2019. Collection and further reading of relevant material simultaneously with writing of various drafts and corrections of the thesis took place from September 2019 to the time of submission in November 2024.

Table 3: An overview of Research design

Phase 1 – PREPARATION: (June 2016 – January 2018)	
Stage 1	Reflection on research topic, identification of case study, review of relevant literature, research questions/hypothesis, reviewing documents on the Itsekiri ethnic group and the Itsekiri language.
Stage 2	Research proposal writing, reflection on sample constitution and constituting interview questions, data collection methods, the context of observations, who to interview, how to go about field work, mobility around the community
Phase 2. - DATA COLLECTION (January -June 2018)	
Stage 1	Field work: - Observations- field notes, interviews- audio recordings
Phase 3: DATA ANALYSIS: (January- August 2019)	
Data processing treatment, transcription, data analysis and interpretation.	
Stage 1	Listening to audio files and reflection on data and trying to make sense of raw data.
Stage 2	Transcription of interviews, reading, rereading of field notes and writing a literature and development of participant observation and field notes. During this period, preliminary analysis inspired presentation of my research at international conferences, in my research laboratory seminars, as well as seminars organised by doctoral students in my laboratory team.

Stage 3 Making sense of preliminary analysis of emerging themes and concepts, reviewing of related material on emerging themes, synthesising and making material coherent

Stage 4 Analysis and interpretation, personal reflections during analysis, collating material draft writing ideas and noting down new reflections.

Phase 4 REPORT WRITING: - writing of various drafts, correction of drafts and final thesis.

After designing the various phases that direct the research, it was necessary to constitute a sample as well as the directional questions to help find answers to the research questions. These questions served as guidelines to achieving the research objectives.

4.4.1 Constitution of sample and interview questions

Sample constitution is about selecting those who will participate in the research, and it varies with the type of research or questions to be investigated. Li Wei & Moyer (2010) define sampling as a process of selecting a few individuals from a larger group in order to estimate or predict aspects of the larger group. The type of investigation may determine the choice of participants.

Investigating language use requires a variety of people from different social backgrounds, to create a widespread sample that will provide diverse opinion and views of the situation. Therefore, in this research, I considered social diversity to determine interview participants. I interviewed people with different social economic status and backgrounds considering elements of social identity such as gender, ethnicity, age, and social class since all of these may influence linguistic behaviour. People from different fields of endeavour such as teachers, engineers, public servants, traders, government representatives in Warri, artisans, small-scale businesspersons as well as a school principal make up the interview participants (see table on page 197).

Although the individuals interviewed which are mainly samples in this research, do not in any way fully represent the Itsekiri population; for the purpose of this research, which is exploratory and the first sociolinguistic study of the Itsekiri language, these respondents from different

backgrounds provided a wide variety of views and information that constitute the data for this doctoral research. Lanza (2010) argues that sampling allows the selection of a few individuals from a larger group in order to estimate or predict aspects of the larger group.

Regarding interview questions, Hornberger & Putz (2013) opine that the researcher is confronted with an array of methodological choices and that approaches are linked to questions being asked and addressed. They remark that ‘why’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ questions provide responses in relation to people’s opinions and views. Hornberger & Putz observe further that questions to be asked depends on the type of research being undertaken.

Focusing my thoughts on this observation, after reviewing various articles and reading publications on research methodology, I was able to decide on the types of questions to ask that would address the research questions. Considering the research questions and hypotheses, specific questions that addressed language contact in the community, language transmission, language practices, and peoples’ use of the language, beliefs, feelings, and opinions of the language came to bear. Other questions focusing on the use of the language in daily conversations, choice of language use in families and homes, people’s opinions on the presence of English in the community were equally elaborated.

Furthermore, Hornberger & Putz (2013) suggestions on how to elaborate qualitative research questions, I asked semi-structured and open-ended interview questions based on ‘how’, ‘why’ and ‘when’ questions. After constituting the samples and elaborating the interview questions, it was then necessary to go into the field.

4.5 Gaining access into the research community

Gaining access into a research community may not be easy, especially where the researcher may be a stranger to the community. However, in this doctoral research, gaining access to the Itsekiri-speaking community was not difficult. Sheena & Martin-Jones (2012) are of the view that researchers who belong to communities in which a research study is carried out, tend to have easy access especially when the topic or subject of the research relates to the community. They remark that gaining access could be through societal networking strategies where individuals are

contacted through friends of friends, noting that societal networking strategies are sometimes employed when making contacts with participants.

In this doctoral research, I explored various avenues to gain access into the Itsekiri-speaking community. As a member of the community living abroad, my approach was informal. Friends who are residents of the community introduced me to potential interviewees. Sheena & Martin-Jones (2012) equally argue that researchers who are members of linguistic minority communities could use their social networks to contact families and friends.

Before my arrival in the community, I had made contacts by phone to friends and relations who prepared the ground. There was neither much of a challenge accessing participants nor was it difficult to access information. Accessibility, feasibility, and relationships in the field did not pose any problem. I was able to gain access through friends and family members who went ahead to solicit participants' consent while mentioning and explaining who I was and my intentions. I did not have to negotiate access with participants directly, except on one occasion when I decided to go to a secondary school. Apart from this one occasion, telephone calls and arrangements had been made on my behalf initially before I met with interview participants and although, some participants had questioned my intentions before appointments were made, that did not constitute any hindrance.

When I was introduced as a researcher into the Itsekiri language and a member of the community, people were ready to talk to me. Two questions that come to mind in relation to the ease with which I gained access: firstly, is it because it was not a common phenomenon to see researchers visit the community? Secondly, could it be because there has never been any research that dwell on the Itsekiri language?

In addition, access to various contexts of observation was equally easy. All I did was to simply walk into an identified observation location, sit in a quiet corner and note naturally occurring use of languages. Whenever I was invited to an event, be it cultural or political, I saw it as an opportunity and did not hesitate to note language practices and various multilingual resources available in the individual's repertoires. Concisely, going into the Itsekiri-speaking community to collect data was not difficult.

4.6 Data collection

Data collection is the practical aspect of a fact-finding mission in research. Before I proceed to describe the data collection process, it is imperative to state the location of data gathering.

4.6.1 Context and methods of data collection.

The investigation was conducted in the city of Warri, the principal city of the Itsekiri-speaking people, in Delta state of Nigeria. All data was collected in Warri. The reason is that a large population of the Itsekiri-speaking people reside there. As stated earlier in chapter two (**see page 91**), Warri plays a very important role as a commercial city that attracts people from other parts of Nigeria to the Itsekiri-speaking community. It is a very diverse city, with different languages, similar to the four burgeoning cities of Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds and London in the United Kingdom described by Creese et al (2016).

Furthermore, in order to find answers to the research questions with a view to ascertaining the reasons for non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language, as well as understanding the phenomenon of language shift and endangerment in the Itsekiri community, it was imperative to go into the field.

To explore the research questions, I employed an ethnographic approach of qualitative research, (Heller & Li Wei 2008), (Gardner & Jones 2012), (Hornberger 2013), (Copland & Creese, 2015) using methodological triangulation. (**See page 180**) combining data sourcing tools such as participant observation and linguistics interview.

Within this ethnographic framework, the principal tools of data collection in this doctoral research therefore are participant observation with field notes and linguistic interviews with audio recordings.

Details of linguistic interviews and participant observations are written in appendices 1 and 2 respectively in volume 2 of this doctoral study. These methods are examined below starting with participant observation.

4.6.2 Participant observation as a method of data collection

This section presents participant observation in various contexts in the data collection process of this study. The first sets of data were gathered from participant observation, in which I limited myself to noting the languages of conversations of people without asking any questions. Considering the objective of this research which is to ascertain the causes of language shift and language endangerment as well as the factors responsible for non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language, I thought it wise to observe the linguistic practices of people in both public and private places.

Kawulich (2005) notes that participant observation is a situation where a researcher simply observes an activity in a setting without being involved or participating in the activity. She related an instance where students were asked to find a setting they wished to observe, in which they would be able to observe without interruption and in which they would not be participating. The students were required to record for a specified length of time, about 15 to 30 minutes, everything they could take in through their senses about the settings and interactions. They were to record on one side of their paper their field notes and on the other side their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about what was happening. Kawulich (ibid) adds that this exercise is good practice for researchers to write detailed notes about what is or is not happening, about the physical surroundings and about interactions.

In like manner, I observed language practices and use of different languages existing in the environment every other day over a six-month period. On every occasion, I observed for about 35 minutes to 7 hours without interruptions. I spent 5 months in my host home and a total of 60 hours observing in 14 other contexts (**see table 3 on page 190**) and I was able to record in written form everything I could take in through my senses (Kawulich 2005) about people's linguistic interactions and behaviour.

Observation sessions were planned and unplanned. While contexts of planned observations were intentionally selected, those unplanned occurred as the opportunity availed itself. Observations that were strategically planned took place in identified contexts. For example, I deliberately chose to observe language use in certain public places such as restaurants, marketplaces, hospitals and schools. This was in view of the densely populated nature of these places. I thought these contexts significantly represented the multilingual environment of the city of Warri and were likely to

provide specific data required to find answers to the research questions. Unplanned observation sessions were happenstances, which I took advantage of while taking care to observe through the lenses of a researcher. Examples of such contexts were at the tailoring shop, bus stations, (known as Motor Parks in Nigeria), telecommunication network enterprise, and share ride transportation system.

During on-site observations, I limited myself to noting the languages of conversations without asking the speakers any questions. For example, at a bus station, I simply noted the different languages the bus drivers and passengers spoke during conversations. Similarly, at the marketplace, while noting language use between buyers and sellers, I listened to a telephone conversation between a man who translanguaged using both the Urhobo language and NPE to communicate as he compared prices of a commodity he wanted to buy. During observation sessions at a hospital and at a maternity ward, I noted the language use of pregnant women and mid-wives. At the hospital, the nurses and mid-wives spoke NPE with their patients and pregnant women who were attending antenatal appointments.

While observing language practices in a classroom in one of the secondary schools in the city of Warri, I noticed that students spoke Standard English with their teachers during classroom activities and spoke NPE when interacting with one another during lunch breaks on the playgrounds. I equally observed that during weekly Christian fellowship sessions, the students interacted in Standard English known as “good or correct English” in Nigeria.

Additionally, I noted speaking patterns regarding translanguaging (Garcia & Li Wei 2009) (Crease, et al. 2015). Olatz & Basurto (2013) argue that data collection during participant observation sessions can reveal patterns and behaviours about speakers, which they are often unaware of or take for granted. For example, they remark that speakers may not be able to perceive code switching, and code mixing in their speech patterns, neither are they aware of translanguaging or the multimodality in which they are involved.

I used the opportunity of being invited to events such as marriage ceremonies, birthday parties, and funeral ceremonies to note naturally occurring language use. These occasions presented ample opportunities for rich data collection. A significant opportunity worthy of mention was an event organised by the then newly created Itsekiri Resource Centre (IRC) on February 21st, 2018 to mark

the UNESCO International Mother Language Day (see **detail in volume 2, appendix 2, page 189**). The Itsekiri resource centre was established to teach the Itsekiri language as well as encourage Itsekiri speakers to speak their language among many other aims and objectives.

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to observe language brokering (Tse 1996) and language mediation (Guan et al. 2016), two very common features in the Itsekiri-speaking community, especially during inter and intra ethnic traditional marriage ceremonies. In such occasions people from different ethnic groups who neither speak nor understand each other's languages, as well as people from the same ethnic group were present. Practical examples of language brokering and mediation are described in detail in chapter five (see **page 260**) in the section on domain of use of the Itsekiri language).

During these occasions, I did not only listen to the Itsekiri people's conversations, I recorded language use that caught my attention and wrote down my thoughts as field notes in a notebook. My actions were often spontaneous and impulsive. After every observation, I compiled and rewrote my notes when they were still very fresh in my memory.

Below is a table showing various contexts of observation in Warri

Table 4: Contexts of observation in Warri

No	Place of observation	Date	Description	Languages spoken	Duration
1	Funeral memoriam	20/01/2018	Reception ceremony	English Itsekiri, NPE	4hr 35 minutes
2	Child birthday party	11/02/2018	Birthday celebration	English, Itsekiri, NPE	6hours
3	King's palace	21/02/2018	Mother langauge day commemoration	English, Itsekiri, NPE	7hours
4	Hospital	12/02/2018	Health care delivery	English, NPE	5hours
5	Church	25/02/2018	Church service	English, NPE	2hours 30minutes
6	Market	01/03/2018	Buying and selling	NPE, English	6hours

7	Bus station	08/03/2018	Transportation services	English, NPE	1h 20 minutes
8	School premises,	09/04/2018	Classroom and playground at lunch time	English, NPE	2hours 35minutes
9	Restaurant	14/04/2018	Catering services	NPE English,	55minutes
10	Telecommunication store	17/04/2018	Telecommunication services	English, NPE	2hours 15minutes
11	Itsekiri elite Forum	4/05/2018	Discussion on the use of the Itsekiri language	English, Itsekiri	5hours
12	Tailoring shop	21/05/2018	Dress making	English, NPE	1hour 45minutes
13	Family home	January to June	Host family	English, NPE	5 months 20 days
14	Traditional Marriage ceremony	09/06/2018	Reception ceremony	English, Itsekiri	7hours
15	Ride share	14/03/2018	Travelling in a public vehicle	NPE, English	8hours

The aim of this table is to show in detail places and dates of observation, as well as description of activities and languages spoken. The languages predominantly used at these different contexts were Standard English and NPE. The Itsekiri language was rarely spoken except at the Mother Language Day commemoration and the Multidimensional forum and at a traditional marriage ceremony in which only the elderly people spoke Itsekiri during the joining of the couple. Young adults at the ceremony including the couple spoke Standard English and NPE.

Furthermore, Kawulich (2005) divides participant observation as an ethnographic method of data collection into three phases: participation, observation, and interrogation. At the contexts of observation, there was sometimes a need to ask questions, especially on occasions where I was invited as a guest and a participant at the same time. As I watched language practices, and listened to language use, I curiously asked questions sometimes, in a bid to find out the reasons for the use of a particular language, especially when one language noticeably dominated the conversation. One of the challenges though, within the context of data collection through observation, was the fact that it was impossible to count the number of people who spoke different languages on each occasion. For example, contexts such as churches, hospitals, schools and the traditional wedding

ceremonies were generally crowded. However, I observed that the two main languages spoken were Standard English and NPE.

4.6.3 The linguistic interview as a method of data collection

Another method of data collection used in this study is linguistic interview. This concerns the interview process and circumstances surrounding it. In the following subsections, I present the interview informants, the interview process, and some of challenges encountered.

4.6.3.1. Description of the interview informants

Before going further, I would like to mention various ways of referring to the informants in this doctoral study. Scholars in sociolinguistics categorise various types of informants in an ethnographic approach of a qualitative research methodology. They name those who provide information with various designations. Blanchet (2012) believes that it is customary to use the term “informant” for the people who provide information that researchers gather and analyse in response to their research questions. He argues that providers of information in research can be referred to as informants, or witnesses.

In this study, people who contributed to the spoken data are referred to as either interviewee, interview participants, informants, or respondents. These terms are used interchangeably. Coded names are used to replace participants’ real names for the purpose of anonymity, to keep their privacy, even though respondents were not worried about their names being mentioned. One of the respondents wanted his names mentioned in the thesis. He particularly told me to write his real names, but I explained to him that real names are not mentioned in scientific research and that, for ethical reasons, I must keep strict anonymity. In addition, data from 17 interviews with 20 respondents were analysed in addition to those collected from my field notes during observation sessions. Some of the interviews sessions had more than one respondent. (See **Volume 2, appendix 1**).

Furthermore, the respondents whose data was analysed were aged between 35 and 65 years, with different social backgrounds and levels of education, and were drawn from Warri. There are five

men and five women who have university education, with high social economic status; and five men and five women with limited education and average socio-economic status. The men and women with university education work in various public and private sectors. Some of the men without university education have some form of lower -level schooling and run their private small-scale businesses; while some of the women are traders in the market who admitted have no formal education.

The main reason I opted to interview people within the age range of 35 and 65 with different social backgrounds is the supposition that they have experienced and are still experiencing the phenomenon of language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

The phenomenon of language shift in the community could be said to be relatively recent; arguably, beginning from the early 1990s, at the dawn of interethnic crisis in Warri (**See page 88**). This group of people were thought to be in a position to provide data that would help analyse the research questions: What are the causes of language shift and language endangerment, what are the factors responsible for non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language?

Additionally, the choice of people with different educational backgrounds was to create a certain balance. I thought it would be judicious to obtain the views and opinions of people from across a variety of social backgrounds and of different economic status to avoid skewed findings restricted to a specific group. It was important to gather information not only from the schooled or educated but also from the unschooled or uneducated/semi-educated who are also experiencing shift from their heritage languages to NPE. Moreover, language shift in the community cannot be associated with a particular social group. It cuts across the entire Itsekiri- speaking community. The views and feelings of the different socio-economic categories of people invariably provided a robust data collected during interview sessions.

4.6.3.2. Conducting the interview

The interview sessions which took place at different venues, in a friendly atmosphere, were face-to-face and convivial, with participants who were enthusiastic. Some sessions took place in homes, marketplaces, while some others were in the office of the respondents. The interview atmosphere was cordial everywhere I went, and respondents were welcoming and willing to respond to my questions.

The interview questions, which were semi-structured with open-ended questions, were written in English and asked orally in English, Itsekiri and NPE. The aim was to give respondents the opportunity to provide in-depth information and explanations of their experiences in relation to the Itsekiri language. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to air their views extensively regarding the situation of the Itsekiri language. It gave interviewees the chance to express themselves freely without inhibitions. It also allowed respondents to divulge all they had to say, with some form of guidance on specific areas, tailored towards the objectives of the doctoral study.

This interview method was used to explore in detail the phenomenon being investigated. The use of open-ended questions provided opportunities for follow-up questions in relation to participants' responses. It may be pertinent to mention that I prepared about 20 questions to guide the interview process, however, as the interview went on, I realised I could not follow the questions systematically. In most cases, as I worked my way through the interview schedule, respondents had already answered some of the questions on my interview guide. Some questions that were not thought of initially, but came up, engendered themes and concepts, which were not envisaged, however, provided pertinent findings relevant to this doctoral research.

The interview sessions were in varying forms: asking and answering questions and audio-recorded conversations. Interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 1 hour 20 minutes, with a total of 24 hours of audio recording (**see table 5 showing interview participants on page 198**).

The method of starting an interview session was not the same for every participant. It varied according to the demeanour of individual participant and the atmosphere in the environment. During one of the interview sessions, the person scheduled for the interview had his children with him in his office, where it was to take place. Before starting the interview, I made some jokes with the children regarding language use. The children merely smiled and said they could communicate only in English. Their father then told them to remain silent and listen to our conversation. This was after I had explained my mission and elaborated the objective of my research. I noticed that the language of communication between the respondent and his children was English and not Itsekiri.

In addition, at every interview session, I remained conscious of the scientific and academic nature of this research, which should be devoid of all emotions. I took a distant position and tried as much as possible not to ask leading questions. Whenever participants digressed, I let them end what they were saying and tried to bring them back to my question. I was conscious of the need to be flexible and listen carefully to interview participants. My role during every session was mainly to ask for clarifications and elaborations and pursue new themes introduced by the interviewee, then go on to the next question.

Furthermore, I designed a language biography form which each participant filled out. The aim was to identify and obtain correct information on the language profiles of respondents. The form contained basic demographic biodata with coded names, age, and gender, level of education, occupation and languages spoken. Other variables on the form were respondents' residence, self-reported proficiency in Itsekiri and the English language, as well as other languages, either spoken or written, and languages spoken by respondent's parents. Residences, languages used in early childhood and during schooling were information respondents equally supplied in the language biography form.

It is expedient to highlight some challenges encountered during the interview sessions. Ideally, interview sessions were intended to be with one participant at a time in a quiet and serene environment devoid of interruptions from unauthorized persons. Nonetheless, this was not the case. There were a series of intrusions ranging from unsolicited persons, to cries from children, as well as noise around the vicinity of interviews. For example, the interview that took place in the office of a school principal had various challenges. Reaching the principal to schedule an appointment for the interview was a bit of a challenge. While the interview session was going on in her office, teachers and office staff interrupted us at intervals for official reasons. Added to that, there was a lot of noise from students playing at the school courtyard right behind the principal's office.

An interview that took place in a respondent's private office equally had some challenges. As the interview progressed, there was a lot of noise of blaring horns from passing vehicles, which sometimes forced me to either pause the recording, or speak at the top of my voice. This respondent's office was located right on a high street in a business neighbourhood in the city of Warri.

In addition, buyers and friends of a shop owner of an informant also interrupted our interview session at intervals. Although, she was the only one scheduled for the interview, when I arrived at her shop, one of her friends was present. The moment I introduced the topic, the friend voluntarily chipped in her opinion. I could not stop the unscheduled friends from talking, therefore, her discourse, though minimal was equally recorded and analysed.

Other interview sessions took place in a noisy environment such as the marketplace with interference. Of the three interviews held at different times in various marketplaces in the city of Warri, one of them, which was particular, was that which took place at a market closed to a mosque. The noise of Islamic scholars calling for prayer from the nearby mosque was of immense challenge. Transcriptions of all the interviews are in appendix 1 in volume 2 of this doctoral research.

Table 5: Participants from socially diverse groups

Respondents	Age	Sex	Level of Education	Languages spoken	Marital status	Occupation	Date	Place of interview
1. Aaron	50	M	Masters	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Engineering	20/01/2018	Home
2. Adam	51	M	Masters	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri Yoruba	Married	GovtLiasing officer	27/01/2018	Office
3. Abel	55	M	Masters	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Agriculture	01/02/2018	Office
4. Elijah	58	M	Bachelor	ENG,NPE Itsekri	Married	Business	10/02 /2018	Office
5. Jonah	65	M	Ph.D	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Teaching	21 /02 /2018	Seminar
6. Micah	51	M	National Diploma	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Business	28/02/2018	Home
7. Abner	60	M	Pri. Sch	ENG,NPE, tsekiri	Married	Carpentary	10/03/2018	Carpentary shop
8. Jabess	49	M	Sec. Sch	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Helper	17/03/2018	Home
9. Lucas	57	M	Diploma	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Driving	27/032018	Home
10. Noah	53	M	Sec. Sch	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Business	07/04/2018	Shop
11. Adah	58	F	Masters	ENG,NPE,Itsekri	Married	Teaching	15/04/2018	Principal's office
12. Abigail	50	F	Masters	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Pub Admin	24/04 /2018	Home
13. Esther	46	F	Bachelor	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Single	Pub Admin	10/05/2018	Market
14. Leah	48	F	Sec.Sch.	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Trading	15/05/2018	Home
15. Lilah	35	F	Sec,Sch	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Single	Trading	20/05/2018	Market
16. Phoeb	45	F	Sec. Sch	NPE,Isoko,Hausa	Married	Trading	25/05/2018	Market

17. Debora	47	F	Diploma	ENG,FR,NPE,Itse	Married	Trading	10/06/2018	Market
18. Ruth	50	F	Bachelor	ENG,NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Trading	17/06/2018	Market
19. Dorcas	40	F	Sec Sch	NPE, Itsekiri	Married	Trading	17/06/2018	Market
20. Sarah	56	F	Masters	ENG NPE,Itsekiri	Married	Teaching	23/02/2018	Respondent's home

4.7 The researcher's role: building the researcher-participant relationship

Sociolinguists encourage researchers to build relationships with informants in ethnographic research, especially when it involves verbal communication in a linguistic interview. While elaborating on the use of linguistic interview in ethnographic research, Beaud & Weber (1998) suggest that the interview reflects a particular social relationship, which involves the investigator/respondent relationship that spurs respondents to speak frankly and pour their hearts into the subject of investigation. Calvet & Dumont (1999) equally allude to the interactive aspect of the interview. Consistent with Calvet & Dumont's allusion to interaction between the researcher and the respondents, I tried to build a cordial relationship with interview participants by establishing mutual trust and engaging with members of the community in cordial interactive sessions.

Whenever I met with participants, I introduced myself as a member of the Itsekiri ethnic group, living in France, teaching English language at the University of Strasbourg and taking a PhD. Then I explained my mission in detail; the objectives and what the research is all about. As a member of the Itsekiri-speaking community, and with a Masters in applied linguistics, my position is that of an insider and an outsider, which scholars refer to as etic and emic in scientific research.

Researchers refer to etic and emic approach in scientific research as two complimentary ways of understanding human behaviour. According to Rota & Mostowlansky (2020), the etic perspective refers to the objective or insiders account while observing, measuring and analyzing human behaviour. While emic perspective focuses on the subjective and insider's account based on the

idea that human behaviour can be understood in consideration of the cultural, social and historical context. It emphasises the subjective experiences, values and meanings people attach to their behaviour.

Conscious of my position, I had to be objective, impartial and distant myself from the subject of discussion. I told participants the aim of the investigation was to understand reasons behind the perceived language shift in the community and the sensed non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language. Having noticed that not only the Itsekiri language was not being spoken as previously but also, it did not appear to be spoken with children, between children or with, and between young people, and that the latter too seemed to hardly speak the language.

Furthermore, an approach I used frequently was the “soften the ground” method. By this, I mean exchanging pleasantries on a lighter note. Whenever I met with interviewees, I endeavoured to make them feel at ease and comfortable with some ice breaking questions such as “how are you doing” “how are the children”? “I hope business is going well” (for those in business).

Exchanging pleasantries and asking about their family’s welfare and after their children was an in-road into getting the attention of respondents. This is a culturally appropriate norm, which Nigerians take seriously and appreciate. It shows one is interested in their affairs. This approach yielded the expected results with participants pouring out their hearts, expressing their views of the linguistic situation of the Itsekiri language and the behaviour of speakers of the language, including the effects on the language. Respondents’ responses were not only enriching, they were equally relevant to the doctoral research topic.

All the participants were willing to take part in the interview as they willingly provided information without hesitation. I was not surprised by this disposition because Nigerians are generally easy-going. They were not worried about what I was going to do with the data. None of the informants questioned my motives for the interview. That notwithstanding, I did not hesitate to explain my mission before starting an interview session.

4.8 Ethics regarding data collection

The question of ethics in data sourcing is an important aspect in research. It is regarded as very crucial in linguistic ethnography.

While reviewing the relevant literature and preparing to go into the field, I was conscious of the importance of ethical considerations such as anonymity in research. I was mindful that ethics in data gathering are as essential as the research itself, without that, the research might not be valid. I was equally conscious of the fact that data collected are safeguarded and not compromised.

Sheena & Martin-Jones, (2012) remark that researchers in contact with people in multilingual settings are required to work with the principles and codes for ethical behaviour for academic and professional bodies and for the ethical governance of services. They opine that, it is of absolute necessity that codes are designed, and principles followed to protect families and individuals who participate in linguistic interviews.

In addition, Copland & Creese (2018), point out that the researcher may be dealing with people who are sometimes recognisable informants or participants. They further point out certain principles the researcher should adhere to: respect for autonomy, participants' right to refuse to participate in the investigation, the researcher should ensure the study is in the interest of the participants, he/she should do no harm but justice and ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equally.

In explaining the right to autonomy, two elements were highlighted: informed consent and the right to withdraw. This implies according to Copland & Creese (*ibid*), that the researcher explains to the participants the purpose of the research and the participant's role in it. This position gives the potential participant the option to consent to be interviewed or not.

Accordingly, I sought the consent of interviewees, explained the intention as well as the aims and objectives of the research, which is primarily an academic exercise. In compliance with keeping and safeguarding participants' anonymity, every respondent was allocated a name code for easy identification in the appendix section in volume 2 of this thesis. I equally gave respondents the

option and explained that they were not obliged to participate in the research, while being conscious of deontology in research.

Finally, adhering to Creese & Copland's (2018), view that the research should be in the interest of the participants, this doctoral study meets this obligation, as respondents were excited that research of this nature that concerns the Itsekiri language is being carried out. Participants seem to be of the impression that, a study that focuses on their language may help to suggest ways to draw the attention of people to the seeming decline in the use of the Itsekiri language.

4.9 Data Processing

Carporal-Ebersold (2017) remarks that, beside capturing naturalistic human behaviour, during participant observation, the researcher equally has the primary responsibilities of transforming human behaviour into data sets, analysing the perceptions and cultural values of the informants, and presenting insights that are acceptable and comprehensible both within and outside the observed community.

After collecting data, it is imperative that sourced data be processed and transformed for the purpose of analysis. Consequently, my field notes, audio-recorded interviews, video recordings of participants' observations, were transformed into data sets.

While considering transcribing raw data into readable form in preparation for analysis, I adopted some existing transcription conventions to facilitate this process.

4.9.1 Transcription conventions

Crease & Copland (2018) suggest that researchers are at liberty to use simple transcription codes, therefore, in accordance with their argument I opted for simple conventions during the transcription of recorded data. I adopted the transcription conventions from Heller et al. (2018). This is because their suggested conventions correspond to the different mannerisms exhibited by interview participants while speaking.

Below are transcription conventions used in this doctoral study to transcribe respondents' mannerisms

Table 6: Transcriptions conventions

Symbols	Definitions
Words	Speaker emphasis
. hh	Speaker in-breath
Hh	Speaker out-breath
[!]	Stressing
[=!]	Loud voice
[=! s]	Soft voice
()	A stretch of unclear or unintelligible speech
(x)	Inaudible utterances
(h)	Laughter in the speech
#	Short Pause
Underlining	A rise in volume
##	Long pause

4.9.2 Data transcription and treatment

To make sense of the data, it was necessary to transcribe the information gathered from respondents into usable form to enable the researcher find meaningful answers to the research questions.

Various scholars have different thoughts on the transcription process. Li Wei & Moyer (2010) observe that transcription is the process of representing oral language with orthographic conventions. They argue that transcription is the first step in interpretation and analysis. Lawson & Sayers (2016) opine that the goal of transcription is to produce a permanent written record of communicative events that allow for analysis and re-analysis. Arguing that transcription is not always user-friendly, they opine that employing conventional writing where possible can enhance readability. Transcription helps the researcher to get data into an organised format and provides a sense of direction and focus (Lawson & Sayers 2016).

In line with the above thoughts, to examine the raw data, I transcribed and transformed the audio file into a written version to make it easier to work with. I manually transcribed audio files recorded during interview sessions with word processing software. Whilst transcribing the data, I had a word document file open on my laptop and a notebook in which I made notes. The handwritten notes were handy and vital during the process of data interpretation and analysis as they provided information needed; in addition to field notes taken during participant observation.

Thereafter, I summarised the content of each interview and this did not only help me to navigate and identify the respondents' language ideologies, it was also a tool to help me better understand the data and identify the respondents and their ideologies.

After the initial transcription process, I listened to the audio file several times and tried to visualise and understand what was going on, before verifying and comparing with my field notes to determine segments that reinforce or corroborate the language practices described in the field notes.

While treating the interview transcriptions, respondents' discourses were captured word for word and left as naturally as they were said. Therefore, the transcription was verbatim. I retained grammatical errors relating to present and past tenses agreement. Reading and rereading the raw data helped me to become familiar with information provided during the interview sessions.

Though the transcription process was time consuming, it helped me to be intimate with the data, collate similar ideas, discover and organise emerging themes; in addition to providing an idea of possible response to the research questions.

Getting familiar with the data while transcribing the data did not only provide greater understanding and sense of direction, some ideas similar to key concepts and notions I had read during the literature review stage started emerging as potential findings of the investigation.

It is pertinent to mention that data collected during interview sessions presented in Appendix 1, volume 2 are in three different languages: English, NPE and Itsekiri. While some data are exclusively in English only, Itsekiri and English, and Itsekiri only, others are in English, NPE and Itsekiri. There were situations in which respondents translanguaged using all languages in their linguistic repertoires to convey ideas.

In the interest of non-Nigerians and non-Itsekiri readers, data in NPE, Itsekiri, and instances in which respondents translanguaged have been translated in the following manner for a clear understanding.

Extracts in which Itsekiri was used exclusively were transcribed verbatim in the original Itsekiri language, followed by translations into English. Those in which respondents translanguaged using English, Itsekiri and NPE, were transcribed verbatim in the 3 languages, followed by the English translations.

While translating an extract that contains all three languages, I repeated the parts in which English was used initially and then translated the parts in NPE and Itsekiri into English. This is to simplify the reading process. Additionally, some parts where the language changed into Itsekiri or NPE were translated and written in square brackets.

I initially used different fonts to differentiate the languages in an extract but realising that it was cumbersome and difficult to decide where one language starts and where the other ends, I had to use font 10 for all translations for uniformity and ease of identification.

In addition, all the interview extracts are in italics with a view to differentiate them from the font of the thesis. That is, while the raw interview data is in italics, my translations are in font 10.

Below is an example of an extract in which English, Itsekiri and NPE were used.

The children speak English amongst themselves aghana ka ka fo oyibo.

During the Warri crisis, one of them, ta gba mu BAKA, a te tse usobo te nemi fo a ma ka kpa. see my senior brother for yere, in his house, he speaks Pidgin to his child Toka, you don chop? (**Sarah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.3**).

The children speak English amongst themselves [they speak English]. During the Warri crises, when one of them, [Baka was caught, but for the fact that he spoke Urhobo, he would have been killed]. Look at my brother, in his house, he speaks Pidgin to his child, [Toka, have you eaten]?

Another extract in NPE only

“Na broken English we de take sell for this market o because many tribe dey yer. So na oyibo we dey speak. People dey come from different different places to this market. Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Ijaw, Urhobo Itsekiri dey this market. So na this Pidgin we dey speak.” (Dorcas, Vol. 2, appendix 1).

[The language of trade in this market is broken English. (NPE) People come from different places to this market. There are Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Ijaws, Urhobo, and Itsekiri speakers in this market. So, we speak Pidgin.]

4.9.3 Data analysis

This section describes how data was analysed and interpreted using thematic analysis as framework.

4.9.3.1. Thematic analysis

To analyse the data thematically, I adopted the framework for thematic analysis suggested by Maguire & Delahunt (2017) and Heller et al. (2018). Maguire & Delahunt propose six steps in thematic analysis while Heller et al. suggest four strategies in the identification and organisation of data. While the former opine that the researcher got familiar with the data, generated codes, searched for themes, reviewed them, defined and wrote the literature, the latter suggest mapping or categorising, tracing, and connecting the data. All of these to my understanding are sets of activities the researcher had to carry out in analysing his/her data.

Specifically, I read the interview transcripts several times to understand and be familiar with the data. While reading the transcripts, I searched for instances in which respondents made statements that are related to the idea of language shift and endangerment demonstrated in their actions.

Several readings of the transcripts and field notes helped to uncover salient themes that emerged from informants' discourses. I identified themes and categorised them in relation to theoretical concepts in the literature review of this study and finally, I was able to identify themes that addressed the research questions.

In addition, I analysed the data content based on similarities and dissimilarities between respondents' discourses. While making sense of the data, comments that corroborated notes made during observation sessions in various contexts and extracts from different respondents with similar ideas were identified, noted, outlined and categorised thematically.

With a clear picture in mind, I embarked on the writing process while describing, interpreting and analysing of findings of the investigation.

4.10 Strengths and limitations of chosen methodology

A significant element a researcher must not fail to highlight in his/her research is the strengths and limitations in the chosen methodology. The strengths and limitations of the method used to collect data in research may vary according to the type of research- be it qualitative or quantitative.

In this qualitative doctoral research, the chosen methods of investigation are participant observation and linguistic interview common in ethnographic approach in qualitative research. Although, there are some strengths in these methods, challenges and constraints that could be classified as limitations are equally evident.

The main strength in the chosen methodology is the robust data collected from both methods. Participants' observation contexts validated the way people act and behave while using various languages in their linguistic repertoire. I noticed people's natural linguistic attitudes towards different languages in the community. Participants' observation was flexible since I did not have to organise any focal group; I walked freely into different contexts and observed freely without obtaining permission from anyone.

Nevertheless, there were some limitations. While observing naturally occurring language use, it was difficult to decipher the people's thought processes regarding the languages being used. It was impossible to know their beliefs and their opinions of the languages they use on a daily basis. This method was time consuming since I had to observe in several contexts to gather sufficient information to help address the research questions.

As far as the linguistic interview was concerned, I was able to listen to people's opinions and beliefs about their language and why and what they use their languages for. It provided insights on the topic of investigation as I found individuals with knowledge and understanding of the research topic through purposive sampling.

However, challenges associated with conducting the interviews were time management on the part of interviewees, digression and translanguaging. Respondents had so much to divulge that they talked at length and more than necessary. Some spoke extensively and often digressed or deviated from the relevant topic. Many were verbose and sometimes lost in the conversation. Others beat about the bush without answering the questions directly, which left me with no option but to try to decipher what was being said. I often had to repeat the same question to bring them back to the focus of the interview. Although, this posed quite a challenge and constraint because I had to go back and forth, which caused long interview sessions. As a researcher looking for useful information, I let them pour out their feelings and opinions without interrupting them. Some respondents gave contradictory information.

In addition, it was not possible to follow the interview questions according to initial numberings because a question could lead to another question, which was not initially amongst the stipulated interview questions. For example, a participant's response may result to another question; therefore, I had to follow the flow or direction of the responses within the confines of the investigation.

4.11 Summary

What I have described in this chapter are the methodological approaches, the different tools used to collect data and the reasons I thought they were best suited for the doctoral research.

My fieldwork and data gathering took place from January to June 2018. Amongst an array of methods in ethnography, considering the qualitative nature of this doctoral study, I opted to use participant observation as well as semi-structured interview as research methods to investigate the Itsekiri people's language practices, language use, and their linguistic behaviour and attitudes to provide answers to my research questions.

Using participant observation provided an array of opportunities of observation in diverse contexts. On the one hand, observations that I did myself took place in a variety of contexts such as restaurants, schools, hospitals, homes, marketplaces, bus stations, during socio-cultural activities such as marriage, funeral ceremonies, birthday parties, and organised seminars; all of which provided robust data. Some observations were planned in which case I deliberately opted for contexts considered important and with many people. Others were spontaneous.

On the other hand, linguistic interview helped to ascertain the Itsekiri-speaking people's opinions and beliefs about their language. Information gathered provided valuable data that enabled me to address the question on language shift and language endangerment in the community.

Investigation was conducted in the city of Warri, Delta state, Nigeria, amongst people of age range between 35 and 65 years old. I purposely chose Warri as data collection site because it is the principal city of the Itsekiri-speaking people.

Data solicitation was through face-to-face interviews with respondents who were drawn from socially diverse backgrounds and status, such as schooled, and unschooled. Others were those with high and low status such as public servants, artisans, as well as traders in the market. This is to avoid lopsided results, skewed towards one social milieu. Data and information drawn from these groups helped to address the research questions as well as identify suggested strategies to revitalise and maintain the Itsekiri language

Participants were very cooperative given the willingness with which they divulged information without hoarding or keeping any to themselves. Participants aired their views with keen interest while sharing their opinions about the phenomenon of language shift.

Interview questions covered general domains such as economic, religious, academic, and socio-cultural issues pertaining to inter-ethnic marriages, ethnic crises, family language policy and transmission, and the influence of English, as well as the role of NPE in the community.

I conducted all interview sessions myself, with participants being interviewed orally in English, Itsekiri and NPE. Some interview participants had native fluency in Itsekiri and NPE, others in Itsekiri, English and NPE. Some were fluent in other languages like Yoruba, Urhobo, Ibo, Hausa, and Ijaw, according to their language profile.

Interview sessions lasted for between thirty minutes and one hour twenty minutes per participant and were audio recorded. Interviews were conducted in whatever language was most convenient for each participant.

Before starting an interview, I always asked to know in which language respondents were most comfortable. The literate responded in Standard English and Itsekiri, while the semi -literate spoke in English, Itsekiri and NPE. The self-acclaimed non-schooled spoke in Itsekiri and NPE, therefore I was obliged to use all three languages, English, Itsekiri and NPE. There were main questions and follow-up questions elicited from participants' response. I could not follow my interview schedule rigorously as participants' answers required follow-up questions.

My exploratory fieldwork took me around the city of Warri and environs. Gaining access was easy and since I know the context very well; I was able to go into the community easily and confidently without hindrance. Though not without some challenges.

Some participants were recruited informally through friends while others were through direct solicitation as in the case of the school principal whom I solicited myself by going to her school.

Finally, the triangulation of different data sources offered an understanding of how participants make use of their linguistic resources while articulating their views of the language situation in the community. The different sources of data collection equally helped me to understand the diverse ways languages are practiced in the environment.

Interview transcriptions, readable narrative of field notes from participant observations are added as appendices in volume 2 of this doctoral research.

5 Chapter 5 Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to present the findings of my investigation descriptively without going into detailed explanation. Insights, implications and interpretation of the data are elucidated in chapter 6.

The chapter consists of the relevant findings in relation to the defined hypotheses of the research. It presents the original data collected in three languages: English, Itsekiri and Nigerian Pidgin English henceforth (NPE). The extracts quoted in their original form, in the Itsekiri language and NPE have been translated into English for the understanding of the reader. All the data are written in italic while translations from the Itsekiri language and NPE are written in font 10. This is to differentiate the main texts of the thesis from the raw data.

Extracts from the interview transcripts as well as field notes from participant observations are used to support explanations regarding themes that emerged from the analysis of the data gathered from responses to questions relating to language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

The chapter is structured in three parts. Some of the parts are further divided into sub-sections. The aim of this division is to provide a better understanding of the linguistic practices of the Itsekiri-speaking people.

The first part dwells on themes related to the ecology of the Itsekiri -speaking community, viewed from four dimensions: linguistic, sociopolitical, economic and cultural. The second part centers on socio-psychologically related themes such as perception of speakers of the Itsekiri language vis-à-vis the English language, linguistic attitudes and behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language, social standing, linguistic hierarchy and family language practices. The third part focuses on the domain of use of the Itsekiri language.

Emerging themes from the data appear as potential indicators of language shift and language endangerment as well as contributory factors to non -intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language. These findings attempt to provide answers to the research questions.

The findings equally help to attain the research objectives, which are to ascertain factors responsible for language shift and language endangerment, in relation to the linguistic behaviour and attitudes of the Itsekiri- speaking people and uncover reasons behind non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language.

I would like to mention that most of the findings are interlinked and therefore difficult to examine in isolation. One element can be a consequence of the other, for example, language contact may have a repercussion on language shift and language endangerment, while linguistic diversity may engender language hegemony in a situation where one language is dominant.

The data is presented faithfully, as originally produced by the participants whose names have been replaced with pseudonyms. No attempts to change, rewrite or correct the language have been made to guarantee authenticity.

The first element examined in the ecology of the Itsekiri-speaking community is the linguistic dimension.

5.2 Ecological Forces: - The linguistic dimension

The major themes that emerged in these aspects are language contact, linguistic hegemony and linguistic dominance, English and NPE as lingua Franca, as well as multilingualism and translanguaging.

5.2.1 Language contact in the Itsekiri -speaking community

An element that occurs frequently in my data is language contact arising from linguistic diversity in the Itsekiri -speaking community. All 20 respondents mentioned the existence of many different languages and several ethnolinguistic communities alongside the Itsekiri language in Warri, a cosmopolitan city that attracts people from all parts of Nigeria. To buttress this point, I present below, three extracts in which respondents mentioned language contact in their discourse.

“There are many languages in Warri. Ibo, Isoko, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijaw. These languages are spoken in Warri. Hausa is spoken too. Calabar is spoken too in

Warri. When you take Keke¹, they speak, Calabar, Ijaw, Urhobo. In Warri, the languages that you will hear people speak mainly are Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw”
(Jabess, Vol. 2 appendix 1, interview No 15.)

Jabess is 49 years old and works as a roastabout² staff in one of the multinational oil companies in Warri. He describes a context that portrays the presence of languages in contact in the Warri metropolis and environs. People use these different languages in various contexts such as marketplaces, public transport, hospitals, public schools, homes, and around the different neighbourhoods.

Further evidence of language contact can be observed from Lilah’s comment below:

“There are many local languages in this town like Ijaw, Urhobo Itsekiri, Isoko and Hausa. But there is also Pidgin and normal English” **(Lilah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No 8).**

Lilah’s observation corroborates Jabess’s argument about linguistic diversity. Lilah is a political science graduate, aged 35 and works as a marketing agent at a superstore in the Warri metropolis. I had the opportunity of speaking with her in the company of Ruth, another respondent in one of the markets in Warri. She did not stay until the end of the interview, as she had to leave for another assignment.

She remarks that Warri attracts speakers of various languages because of job availability.

In addition, Jonah opined thus:

“These are not indigenous to Warri because Warri is an urban cosmopolitan city. Different ethnic groups have invaded here. You have Itsekiri Urhobos, Ijaws, Benins, Ishans, Ibos, Isokos, Hausas, and even people from Kogi. I don’t know what

¹ A Keke is a tricycle, a commercial means of transportation in Nigeria that takes about five passengers. The term “Keke” means bicycle in the Yoruba language.

² A Roastabout is an unskilled labourer in the oil industry. As the word implies, he is multi-tasked and does all kinds of blue-collar jobs in an oil field location.

language they speak. Many of them are from Benue; they are here just like New York.” (Jonah Vol. 2 appendix 1, interview No. 5).

Jonah is a 65-year-old professor of English literature in one of the universities in Nigeria. In his argument, he compares the city of Warri to New York in the United States, while enumerating various ethnic groups who speak diverse languages. According to him, speakers of these languages present in Warri are from other parts of Nigeria.

The presence of these different languages engenders the phenomenon of linguistic hegemony in the Itsekiri-speaking community examined below.

5.2.2 Language hegemony

A key finding in this research is the evidence of linguistic hegemony in the Itsekiri-speaking community. An example of linguistic hegemony is demonstrated in the dominance of English in important domains such as education, public and private administration, and the media in Nigeria.

A majority of the respondents in the interview sessions expressed views that point to language dominance in Nigeria and by extension in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Below are three extracts to support this point.

“Now, the reason they speak English is that it is the lingua franca, official language in this country. These children go to school. The official language spoken in school is English. For them to understand what is taught in school, they need to speak English” (Adam, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No 4).

Adam is a 51-year-old government official and a liaison officer. He is university educated and married with children. He liaises between the Itsekiri-speaking community and the government. In his remarks, Adam alludes to the dominance of the English language in the Nigerian educational system. He affirms that English does not only function as the officially recognised language in Nigeria, but it also has a privileged position in education as the main medium of instruction in the school system in Nigeria.

In like manner, Aaron, a 50-year-old Chemical Engineer in one of the oil companies in the city of Warri remarked in the extract below.

Majority of them speak the general conventional English because of the way things are today. So, it's easier to learn faster from school. And the school does not teach the languages from creche. So, 90% of the time, it is the English language which is the conventional language” (Aaron, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 1).

In line with Adam's assertion above, the question of language of instruction in schools seems to resonate with Aaron who opines that English language is the conventional language used by everyone in the country, which further amplifies its dominance in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

In addition, a phenomenon that further emphasises the element of linguistic hegemony in the Itsekiri-speaking community is the tradition of name giving in the community. A very common practice is bearing of English names. Below is a comment from a respondent, Jabess, an employee in a multinational oil company in Warri.

“That is why many people do not know my English name which is Samuel. Even at work, I use my native name. It is only just recently I have started putting my English name” (Jabess, Vol. 2 appendix 1, interview 15)

A common phenomenon in Nigeria is the bearing of English names. Jabess's reference to his English name is evidence of people's attraction to English. The importance attached to the use of English undergirds this societal norm, which may be attributed to contact with the British at the time of their arrival in the West Coast of Nigeria in the early 19th century.

Marriages between the Itsekiri people and the “Whiteman”- (Europeans) produced children named after their European parents be it father or mother. Although children born into Nigerian British marriages sometimes bear both heritage language and English names. Parents sometimes give their children English names alongside Itsekiri names. Some Itsekiris bear heritage names as first names and English names as middle and family names. This is the case of Professor Oritsejomi Horatio

Thomas, the pioneer provost of the college of medicine of the University of Lagos, Nigeria and the first Nigerian to be admitted into the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Sometimes, others have English names as first names, Itsekiri names as middle, and English names as family names. Professor Grace Alele Williams, an Itsekiri woman, the first female vice chancellor of a university (the University of Benin) in Nigeria, as well as in Africa is an example. Sometimes there is no trace of the heritage language names, in which case, both names are English names. An example is the case of Hope Harriman. There are many of such examples, but only a few are mentioned in this doctoral research.

The idea of naming children after their British parents may be as a result of not only the hegemonic nature of the English language in Nigeria, but also its dominance as a lingua franca. The phenomenon of giving children English names remained until the 20th centuries when the Itsekiri people started naming children in their heritage languages only. At the end of the 20th century, there appeared a reassertion of ethnic identity and perhaps a rejection of the English language hegemony.

5.2.3 English and Nigerian Pidgin English as lingua Franca in the Itsekiri-speaking community

Beside the hegemonic influence of English in important domains mentioned above, English language equally acts as a lingua franca in addition to NPE. In view of the diverse languages in the community, English language and NPE, the two vehicular languages in the macro and meso contexts of this research, play the overarching role of lingua franca in the community. Similar examples that support this point abound in the data, a few of which are provided below:

“I spend most of my time every day in environments, in places, like at workplaces, the people I work with are non –natives. They are not Itsekiris. The only lingua franca that is allowed, that I can communicate with, the language, the medium I can communicate with the people I come in contact with is English language because they are non-native. One is constrained to speak English because of the nature of the business” (Abel Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 9)

Abel is 55 years old. A university graduate and a public servant who equally serves as a pastor of a church in the community. He is also the deputy principal of a school that belongs to the church where he is a pastor.

What is remarkable in Abel's comment is the need for a common linguistic medium of communication for people from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds. According to him, as a member of the school's management board, he meets with parents of children as well as colleagues from different linguistic groups. The only means of communication with these people is English. In the same vein, Aaron, the 50-year-old employee of a multinational oil company has this to say:

“You know professionally, you go out, you mix up with people, and eh 40 or 50% of those you mix up with are not Itsekiris. So, because of that, that other 50 or 60% are non Itsekiris, so depending on the person you are talking with, you might want to speak Pidgin English because of the person's understanding, or you may want to speak the simple and correct English, which is the Queens' English because of that person's understanding too. I don't want to call it the lingua franca but is common among all tribes available here” (Aaron Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview. No 1).

According to Aaron, NPE is commonly used in the community as a result of diverse linguistic groups in the community. People interact at various levels depending on the degree of understanding of the people. Some people speak NPE according to their educational level. Others may speak Standard English, which he refers to as the Queen's English. Both languages act as a medium of communication and lingua franca in the community.

In addition, Lucas, another respondent made the comment below, which corroborates other respondents' discourse on linguistic diversity in the Itsekiri-speaking community. This equally offers an insight into the common use of NPE by people from different linguistic backgrounds.

“This is because there are many different languages in this town. People from different ethnic groups who speak different languages can only interact in Pidgin

English. Sometimes, I may speak the English language and my interlocutor may not understand, in that case, I will have to switch to Pidgin. Everyone understands Pidgin in this city. Both young and old all understand and speak Pidgin” (Lucas, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.13).

Lucas is a 57-year-old public servant who holds a diploma in English language. Lucas captures the linguistic context in which NPE thrives in the community. Since members of the different ethnic groups speak their heritage languages, for interaction to take place between him and members of the different ethnic groups, he explains that he is obliged to speak NPE since that is the language common to everyone. According to him, everyone understands NPE in the city of Warri. On the streets of Warri, at the banks, in hospitals, shops, at every public place, NPE is the language everyone speaks.

Furthermore, a characteristic that has fanned the use of NPE and encouraged language shift is the type of habitation in the community. In the Itsekiri community, people from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds commonly use English and/or NPE. The extract below supports this point.

“Because this one will say you de take Itsekiri dey insult me, this go say you dey take Urhobo dey insult me because there no understand each other but if the general play dem they use that in English, dem go flow together” (Noah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.12).

[This is because this one will say you are insulting me in the Itsekiri language, the other one will say you are insulting me in the Urhobo language. Nevertheless, if they all speak the general language, either Pidgin or English, things will be smooth].

Noah is a 53-year-old businessman and holds a secondary school certificate. His assertion can be understood from the backdrop of the presence of diverse ethnolinguistic groups in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Noah alludes to children who live in tenement buildings and share a common courtyard, who, while playing in the courtyard, are not expected to speak their heritage language. They are expected to speak NPE otherwise arguments or fighting will ensue. He cites occasions of misunderstanding among children and adults during interactions, when they speak their heritage

languages. This is because of the assumption that one person may be speaking badly of the other if he/she speaks in his/her heritage language. In such a situation, everyone will have to use a language understood by all. This gave rise to people speaking either Standard English or NPE to avoid misunderstandings.

In addition, during my field investigation, I had the opportunity to observe the use of English and NPE in various contexts such as churches, weddings, funeral and child-naming ceremonies.

Presented below are brief descriptions of some of the contexts of observation. (Detailed descriptions of these contexts are in **(Vol. 2, appendix 2)**).

On many occasions, I witnessed church programmes conducted in English since I attended church services every Sunday during my visit to Nigeria. Church activities were conducted in English and NPE. Praise and worship songs were sung in English as well as in diverse heritage languages. Prayer sessions and the pastor's preaching were conducted in English and interpreted in NPE, as well as in some heritage languages indigenous to the community, in the interest of the aged who might not understand English.

Other evidence of language practices which exemplify the use of English or NPE as a lingua franca in the community were captured in other contexts of observation such as bus stations, communication service and network providing company, birthday party, maternity ward in a hospital, school playground, restaurant, market and a tailoring institute to mention but a few. In these places, the languages mainly used were either Standard English or NPE. Both languages serve as a means of inter-ethnic communication in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Brief descriptions of the some of the contexts are below:

On a certain day, while at a bus station, waiting to travel to the city of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, my attention was drawn to the languages being spoken. Those present were mainly workers, drivers, travellers, and relations who were seeing family members off. I spent over an hour waiting to take the bus. All through this time, the languages being spoken were English and NPE. The

number of persons present that day could be estimated to be about 50 or more. All the bus drivers spoke NPE amongst themselves.

Similarly, I went into a communication's service and network provider company where I wanted to get a mobile phone and a sim card. On entering into the shop, I had to wait for a while. During this time, I noticed the main languages of communication were English and NPE. Clients hardly spoke any of the heritage languages present in the city of Warri. I spent over one hour thirty minutes in the shop observing and listening to the languages being spoken.

Furthermore, during an observation at a birthday party organised for a two-year-old child, the common languages spoken were English and NPE. Various genres of music that were being played to entertain the audience were both in English and NPE. Although some people chatted in Standard English, while others mixed languages, the main language of conversation was NPE. It was a mixed crowd with people from different socio-economic backgrounds. While parents who seem educated spoke Standard English with their children and others who seem to be less educated spoke NPE with their children, adults interacted mainly in NPE. Of all the adults present, only two women conversed in Itsekiri. While this was going on, one of the women discussing interjected in NPE.

Similarly, during an observation at a maternity ward in a public hospital, I noticed the languages of communication were also English and NPE. The nurses and midwives addressed pregnant women who were attending antenatal clinic in NPE, while they addressed their colleagues in Standard English.

Similarly, students on the playground of a secondary school where I observed spoke NPE, while teachers and students interacted in Standard English in the classrooms. The students interacted in Standard English during a religious activity held in the school during their break period.

In view of the diverse languages in the Itsekiri ecological space, common linguistic phenomenon such as multilingualism and translanguaging highly prevalent in the Itsekiri- speaking community

and appear to contribute the phenomenon of language shift in the community are discussed in the following section.

5.2.4 Multilingualism and Translanguaging

Two linguistic phenomena evident in the community of reference in this research are multilingualism and translanguaging. Multilingual interactions in Warri, a city with diverse ethnic groups are due to different languages in contact situations, which results in multilingual homes and families.

Individual and societal multilingualism are commonplace in the Itsekiri -speaking community. The society is characterized by a myriad of languages, which has resulted in individuals, especially the older generation, being either bilingual in two languages- NPE and one heritage language or trilingual in English, NPE and one heritage language. Additionally, cases of individuals who speak NPE, Standard English and 2 heritage languages equally exist. This applies especially to individuals whose parents are from different ethnic groups.

Here is a respondent's remarks regarding the use of various languages in an individual's repertoire.

"The Itsekiri language spoken these days is not as good as the one spoken in the past because, what we see now a days is that, once Itsekiri language is being spoken, the speakers change to a different language, That is, he switches to another language without completing his sentence in Itsekiri. While someone is speaking Itsekiri, before you know it, he adds oyibo³, before he completes a sentence, he switches to English. That is what is happening these days" (Lucas, Vol.2 appendix 1, interview No. 13).

Lucas is 57 years old public servant. He observes that a common linguistic practice characteristic of people in the community, is switching and mixing languages. According to him, individuals

³ Oyibo is NPE equivalent of the English language. It may also mean the Whiteman depending on the context of discussion

have a tendency to switch from either Itsekiri to English or Itsekiri to NPE at will. This is evidence of translanguaging, the fluid transition from or the use of various languages in a speakers repertoire, which is characteristic of multilingual societies such as Nigeria in general and the Itsekiri community in particular.

Below are examples of respondents translanguaging (or code-mixing) between two or more languages in their discourse during interview sessions.

“Like my mother in-law will say Abigail, uwo bi ri okore, oma ti Itsekiri meji bi, aghan ai bi oma ghan fo Itsekiri; aghan ka fo oyinbo gbo ton aghan e san o, e san”.
(Abigail, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No 6).

[My mother in-law will say, Abigail, you and your husband are both Itsekiris. You do not speak, Itsekiri with your children, you are speaking English. This is bad]

Abigail is 50 years old, a university graduate and works in the municipal council in the city of Warri. She is of Ghanaian origin but married to a man from the Itsekiri ethnic group. According to her, she left Ghana with her parents for Nigeria when she was very young. She understands and speaks Twi, a Ghanaian language, in addition to English, Itsekiri and NPE. In the above extract, Abigail, while translanguaging in English and Itsekiri, recounts her mother in-law’s displeasure over the choice of language spoken in her home. Her mother in-law draws her attention to the fact that, though she and her husband are Itsekiri speaking, they speak English with their children in their home.

Similarly, the extract below is another example of a respondent, Sarah, translanguaging while mixing Standard English, NPE and Itsekiri.

The children speak English amongst themselves aghan ka ka fo oyibo. During the Warri crisis, one of them, ta gba mu BAKA, a te tse usobo te nemi fo a ma ka kpa. See my senior brother for here⁴, in his house, he speaks pidgin to his child Toka, you don chop? **(Sarah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 3)**

[The children speak English amongst themselves. They all speak English. During the Warri crisis, one of them, BAKA was kidnapped, but for the fact that he spoke Urhobo, he would have been killed. Imagine, in my brother's home, he speaks pidgin to his child. Toka, have you eaten?]

Sarah is 56, a university graduate and teachers in one of the secondary schools in Warri. While explaining security challenges in the community due to inter-ethnic clashes in the city of Warri, she spoke English, NPE and Itsekiri passing seamlessly from one language to another.

Translanguaging is a common characteristic in Nigeria as well as in the Itsekiri-speaking community. The Itsekiri-speaking people use and adapt languages flexibly in various contexts and domains. I equally noticed people translanguaging in some contexts during participant observation such as schools, marketplaces, public transport, restaurants, marriage and child naming ceremonies. In these places, people tend to mix languages freely in their daily activities.

Next in line is this section is the socio-political dimension examined below.

5.3 Ecological forces: - The sociopolitical dimension

Various remarks from respondents depict socio-political factors that address the research question on language shift and language endangerment. Examples are inter-ethnic crises and linguistic conflict as well as linguistic discrimination.

5.3.1 Inter-ethnic crisis and linguistic conflict

What appears to be a consensus among interview participants is the prevalence of ethnic rivalry and competition amongst speakers of coexisting languages in the community. Speakers of heritage languages in contact with one another seem to regularly be in a situation of conflict in the community. Inter-ethnic clashes leading to linguistic conflict was common in the 1990s in Warri, the capital city of the Itsekiri -speaking ethnic group. This phenomenon seems to have engendered language shift.

A majority of respondents attested to this as illustrated in the following extracts

“Another thing that made the Itsekiri language to go out, I want to blame it on the last crisis. This Itsekiri /Ijaw crisis; you discover that a time came that people were scared of speaking their language because of what? Being abducted, that is one thing that happened in this town; then, if I want to go to MacIver market, my mother in-law will say, wo ka fo Ghana, u wo Ghana ren, re gba ra be mi ra eja, [you are a Ghanaian, speak Ghanaian language. Please go and buy me fish.] If dem hold me na I no go speak Itsekiri, I go speak Ghana, so a no be Itsekiri [If I am attacked, I will not speak Itsekiri, I will speak Ghana language. I’m not Itsekiri.]. When they came and burnt our house, my father was sitting in front of the house, they said you Ghana man we tin you dey do fo here? U dey stay for here? O y a comot.. [You Ghanaian, what are you doing here? Do you live here?] They knew him as a Ghanaian, so they told him to leave. So, he left with nothing except what he was wearing. Then they burnt the house. If he had said he was Itsekiri or if they had known him as an Itsekiri man, they would have pushed him into the house and burnt him. So that is one major thing made this language, it was a sharp drop, a sharp drift. Itsekiris were speaking Itsekiri in this town. But after this problem, the language just went away because of fear of being abducted or being killed” (Abigail, Vol. 2 appendix 1, interview No. 6)

Abigail relates an incident that took place during the inter-ethnic clashes between the Itsekiri - speaking people and other ethnic groups in Warri, Delta State of Nigeria. Recounting the incident in which her parent’s home was burnt, she devised a security strategy. According to her, whenever, assailants attempt to attack her, she will not speak Itsekiri; rather, she will switch to a Ghanaian language. She is referring to a possibility of being attacked by members of the opposing ethnic group who according to her go about attacking, abducting, and killing the Itsekiris. She states that before the crisis, Itsekiris were speaking their language; however, they shifted from speaking the Itsekiri language to English and NPE for security reasons.

Similarly, below, is a remark from a different interview participant referring to inter-ethnic clashes.

” Urun okan to fe worsten urun we ka tsi crisis weh. Ni ren re weh aka gin oma fo tisekri a ka mu e gbe. Owun weh le re ebi ren ene si gba ka fo Pidgin gbo tan ghan. Te re I ra crisis wey, we gbo Itsekiri ni aja weh. One ubo bo bo ti owo ma bogho a ma kpi ye omere ne, o ma tsu yin da mu e gbe. So I re ye gi di je e sin ka fe fo a ja wey. Tabi owun e no affecti I rene we. Teri owun we do si ni ni. Ire ne kpo ro kpo ro ni tsekiri ni office, wo ka ki aghan ni Itsekiri aghan e answer re ni oyibo ” (Ruth, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 8)

[One thing that has worsened the situation is that crisis. During that period, when you spoke Itsekiri, you were kidnapped. That is the reason many Itsekeris started speaking Pidgin English to their children, so that their enemies would not recognise them as Itsekiri. During the crisis, you would not hear anyone speak Itsekiri in this town. In certain areas, once you were called “ome re ne ne”⁵, if you looked back, you were kidnapped. So many people no longer want to speak the language. Perhaps, that is what is affecting our people, because the situation is getting worse. Our highly placed people in offices, when you greet them in Itsekiri, they will not answer your greeting. Or they will respond in English].

This extract endorses Abigail’s argument above. Ruth, a 50-year-old businessperson, equally observes that people were afraid to speak Itsekiri due to insecurity in the community. According to her, Itsekiri people resorted to speaking either Standard English or NPE to avoid either being kidnapped or killed. She points out that the situation was so bad that, highly placed Itsekiri people stopped speaking the Itsekiri language. Many families resorted to speaking English and NPE in their homes she argues.

In addition, a similar comment that supports this finding is analysed below:

“One could not speak Itsekiri because when you speak it you are in trouble. You do not want people to identify you with Itsekiri language; even up till now, when people are in a gathering, and are asked where they come from, they pretend not to know how to speak the language. People are suspicious of each other. People are still living in fear” (Micah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No 10).

⁵ A humorous language used by members of the Urhobo and Ijaw ethnic groups to refer to the Itsekeris

Micah is 51-year-old man and holds a certificate in business. In his observation corroborating the two previous extracts, he maintains that Itsekiri people were scared of being identified as Itsekiri and have therefore stopped speaking the Itsekiri language. He points out that, in public gatherings, Itsekiris were reluctant to disclose their ethnic groups for security reasons. According to him, people have become suspicious of one another.

5.4 Ecological forces: - Socio economic dimension

Furthermore, an important element that may be considered contributory to language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri- speaking community is the quest for economic advancement. Several respondents spoke of English and NPE as languages used for business and commercial transactions in the community. A few examples from the data are used to support this point.

A respondent commented thus:

“ I spend half of the month at work and I spend half of the month at home. At work, for instance, I know that 90% of the time I work I speak good English because I interact with people from all nationalities, both Americans, Europeans, Asian. So, I try my best to be fluent in the Queens English to ensure I’m clear and be sure I’ve communicated. If I’m getting feedback from the man I’m talking to; he speaks English too despite his own tribe” (Aaron, Vol. 2 appendix 1, interview No. 1).

Aaron is in the engineering profession and university educated. He works in a multinational oil corporation, an intercultural and multilingual environment that requires the use of an international language, therefore proficiency in the English language is vital in his workplace, as he emphasises in the extract. In other words, what resonates from Aaron’s comments is that, for the purpose of work, which implies economic advancement, he is obliged to use Standard English, which he refers to as “good English” as it is known in Nigeria. According to him, 90% of his time at work is spent interacting with people of diverse nationalities.

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In Nigeria, Standard English and NPE are languages used in offices and business transactions. The schooled or college educated people such as Adam, Abigail, Adah and Abel to mention but a few respondents claimed they use Standard English at work, while respondents such as Dorcas, Leah, with limited schooling or education use NPE daily to trade.

Similarly, mention was made of NPE as a lingua franca earlier in this chapter. In this section, NPE emerges once again as a major commercial language as seen in the comments below:

“Na broken English we de take sell for this market o because many tribe dey yer. So na oyibo we dey speak. People dey come from different different places to this market. Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Ijaw, Urhobo Itsekiri dey this market. So na this Pidgin we dey speak” (Dorcas, volume 2 Appendix1, interview No. 16).

[Broken English (NPE) is the trade language in this market. People come from different places to this market. There are Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Ijaw, Urhobo, as well as Itsekiri speakers in this market. So, we speak Pidgin.]

Dorcas is 40 and a trader in a market in the city of Warri. She affirms the presence of NPE as the common means of communication and trade language in the market. According to her, people from different ethnic groups buy and sell in the market. This buttresses other respondents' affirmations of the existence of diverse languages in the city of Warri and the need for a common language of communication among speakers.

In the same vein, Deborah corroborates Aaron's and Dorcas's systemic use of Standard English and NPE for commercial purposes in Warri due to linguistic diversity in the extract below.

“In Warri yer, we speak English and Pidgin when we de sell our goods. You know that in this Warri, there are many tribes. Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko, Ibo are all here. Even Hausas are in this town. Because we cannot understand each other, it is only this oyibo [NPE/English] – explain language of the white person and Pidgin that we speak so we can be able to do our business” (Deborah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 17).

Deborah is a 47-year-old trader in a market in Warri, she holds a higher diploma in business administration. She equally attests to the dominant role of English and NPE as the languages of trade and the means of communication common to all in the Warri metropolis. According to her, the presence of diverse languages in the city of Warri caused people to find a common means of communication with which to do business. To support this point, for example, during observations at a market, I noticed buyers and sellers negotiating prices in English and NPE exclusively.

In Nigeria, besides, shop owners with lock-up stores, there are mobile traders who hawk goods from one place to another in the streets. Common sights are hawkers at various marketplaces hawking their wares, advertising goods, and calling for buyers in NPE. During one of my observation sessions, I heard a hawker calling out for buyers “*come and buy your tomatoes*”, “*come and buy your pepper*”, “*sweet jollof rice*”. [Tomatoes and pepper for sale, tasty jollof rice⁶].

Deborah equally confirms that NPE is the trade language in Warri.

“Pidgin English is the language of trade” (Deborah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 17).

According to Deborah, with whom I interacted in Standard English, no one transacts business in any of the heritage languages in Warri. A few persons with higher education such as Deborah, who trade in the market, may sometimes speak Standard English, particularly when the potential customer speaks to them in Standard English.

In addition, local advertising generally in NPE, is the basic method of soliciting or calling buyers’ attention. When a potential buyer is envisaged, sellers call out in NPE as in the extract below:

“Customer, wetin you wan buy, customer check yer or check o. Customer, what do you want to buy? Come over to my shop and check please. How much you dey sell am? What is the cost? (Deborah, volume 2, Appendix 1, interview No. 16)

⁶ Jollof rice is a popular Nigerian dish cooked with rice and tomato sauce served with fish or meat

According to my data, majority of the people in the city of Warri mainly express themselves in NPE. This general linguistic practice, which is equally prevalent in socio cultural contexts seems to have become natural to all in the community and has possibly contributed to language shift in the Itsekiri -speaking community.

5.4.1 Sociocultural aspect

A significant phenomenon in the community is mixed or interethnic marriage. Economic interest due to the presence of multinational corporations in the Itsekiri community is an attraction for people searching for greener pastures. Economic mobility has not only resulted in language shift, contact between people from different linguistic backgrounds has brought about linguistic co habitation and mixed marriages. This seems to have equally contributed to language shift and language endangerment in the community. The following extract supports this point.

“You know my wife is not an Itsekiri woman. We communicate in this pidgin. Majority of the children speak the general conventional English because of the way things are today, because of inter-marriages from different tribes. Some wives are not the same tribes with the men” (Micah, Vol. 2, appendix 1 interview No.10)

Micah is a 51- year- old businessman, married with children. He asserts that families make informed decisions to speak a common language in a mixed marriage situation. For example, Micah’s wife comes from a different ethnic group, while he is Itsekiri -speaking. Therefore, the self-reported language of communication between him and his wife is NPE. According to him since some couples do not speak the same language, they therefore choose to speak languages common to all in the environment, which in most cases are English and NPE.

Similarly, the comment hereunder supports the argument that mixed marriages may be a factor in the non-intergenerational transmission of Itsekiri.

“Because not all Urhobo speak Itsekiri and not all Itsekiri understand Urhobo. Not all Ijaw understand Uhrobo not until they started fusing in and they started intermarrying” (Adam, Vol. Appendix 1, interview No. 2)

In his comment, Adam argues that people from diverse ethnic groups who could not understand one another’s language started intermingling and interacting with the Itsekiris and began to get married to one another.

Additionally, influx of people of diverse ethnic groups into the Itsekiri community, who come with their languages to work and do business, has brought about both demographic and linguistic transformation examined hereunder.

5.4.2 Demographic, linguistic transformation and urbanisation

The occurrence of demographic and linguistic changes in the community has a far-reaching consequence on the Itsekiri language. Language contacts occur when speakers of different languages interact, and their languages influence one another, especially in a multilingual society such as Nigeria. Interactions amongst speakers of different languages in the community have further brought about linguistic changes in the community. A typical example from my data is the comment from a respondent below:

“We moved from our communities, the exodus from Jakpa, Deghele, Bateren to Escravos, to Warri. There were not enough secondary schools in our places. Then people in other places like Deghele who have relations in Warri bring their children to Warri. Then they start to speak Pidgin English and English. So, when they return to the township they emulate. So, the environment influences what you speak. The environment can push you to speak Pidgin English. Life now moved to Warri. When life came to Warri, people from the Urhobo division moved to Warri to work in UAC, John Holt as night watch men, as clerks. Our parents moved from Escravos to Warri to go to school. They later had jobs” (Adam, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 2).

Adams' assertion regarding the exodus of people from rural to urban areas explains the current linguistic situation in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Not only did the quest for education engender the movement of people from various villages to the city of Warri in search of schools for their children, but there was also the need to search for a means of livelihood Adam observes.

The Itsekiri community is a host to important multinational oil corporations, which makes it cosmopolitan, therefore attracts people from other areas. Adam opines that in-flux of people with diverse languages into the city of Warri did not only change the demographic milieu of the Itsekiri-speaking community, social and economic interaction between Itsekiris and their non-indigenous neighbours led to linguistic and economic co-habitation. He affirms further that the increasing movement of people from various ethnic groups into the Itsekiri-speaking community has brought about demographic changes as well as linguistic transformations, exemplified in people ceasing to speak the Itsekiri language and speaking the dominant English language and/or NPE. Consequently, attrition of the Itsekiri language became noticeable.

5.4.3 Attrition of the Itsekiri Language

Contact with other languages has meant a gradual attrition of the Itsekiri language. Majority of the interview participants observed that a common characteristic of the Itsekiri language is a noticeable decline in the use of the language as illustrated in the extract below:

“It has actually gone down. Then days, 30 years ago, I discover that the language that people spoke around in our home front as Itsekiris was Itsekiri. But these days, there is a shift to English because many societies, class and all that e ghen, superimposed culture. We have dropped that aspect of our culture, apart from the language, there are so many other things that has dropped culturally but the language is actually going into extinction” (Abigail, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 6).

Abigail, a public servant affirms that the Itsekiri language was present in homes of the Itsekiri speakers in the past. According to her, Itsekiri was prevalent when people spoke it. The situation changed when people dropped the linguistic aspect of their culture and shifted to English. She opines that the language is gradually going into extinction as a result of a decline in its use.

Similarly, the following remark by Elijah, a respondent, 58 and a businessperson in Warri, points to how much Itsekiri is being used and how it has fared over the years.

“For the past 30 years, the way Itsekiri language is being used in our homes as a means of communication is 30 years down. The language is dropping because of the drifting of our people from the rural area down to the township in the name of civilisation. Our children will have to go to school. That has taken over part of the home. Hardly you find mothers speaking Itsekiri to their children. We say mother’s language, because the children are close to their mothers and when the mothers do not communicate in Itsekiri to their children; the easiest way, from 30 years up now, the language is dwindling” (Elijah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 4).

Elijah argues that for the past 30 years, not everyone including children have been using Itsekiri in homes. According to him, mothers hardly communicate in Itsekiri with their children, and that intergenerational transmission of the language has been on the decline over the last 30 years. He equally points out that the Itsekiri language is declining due to rural-urban migration in the quest for education.

In the same vein, Aaron, another respondent, remarked thus:

“We are losing Itsekiri already, ‘I think loss of culture and identity is already in process. Our parents’ generation spoke a lot of Itsekiri. While growing up, I and my siblings did not get to learn Itsekiri, we acquired it from our parents at home. Although, we did not learn to read and write Itsekiri, we spoke it at home. I did not speak Itsekiri in my home with my children and I think that is a shame, I feel very bad about it. Because now when I speak to them in Itsekiri, they do not understand.

When I try to teach them, they are not interested. Some of them confuse my language Itsekiri with other languages in the environment” (Aaron, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.1).

What may be deduced from Aaron’s remarks is that not only is the Itsekiri language undergoing some form of attrition, there is also evidence of cultural and identity loss. Consistent with other respondents, his remarks suggest non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language in contrast with his parents’ generation. According to him, he acquired the Itsekiri language from his parents who spoke it with him and his siblings at home while growing up. He regrets not transmitting the Itsekiri language to his children.

Furthermore, another interview participant, Abner observes thus:

“When I see Itsekiris, I speak Itsekiri, but they respond in Pidgin or correct English. That is not good because though they grow up being Itsekiri, they do not know Itsekiri. Many cannot speak it” (Abner, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.11).

According to Abner, 60, a furniture maker, efforts to encourage Itsekiri speakers to speak the language seem to be an uphill task. He maintains that whenever he speaks Itsekiri to fellow Itsekiri speakers, they respond in either NPE or Standard English. He points out that, when some people are addressed in Itsekiri, though they understand what is said, they cannot respond in Itsekiri, rather, they respond in either English or NPE. The inability to speak Itsekiri is a common phenomenon in the community he enthuses.

Similarly, during observation sessions in various contexts, I noticed situations in which Itsekiri children, young people as well as adults were not speaking the Itsekiri language. A particular occurrence that caught my attention was during my visit to the king’s palace. That very day, I noticed some chiefs were conversing and interacting using NPE. As a duty, the chiefs participate in cultural and social activities whenever the King calls for one. Activities such as town hall meetings, cultural dances are generally conducted using the Itsekiri language. The chiefs, who under normal circumstances are custodian of the Itsekiri culture and are expected to demonstrate

the culture and identity by speaking the Itsekiri language, were speaking NPE in the palace secretariat instead of the Itsekiri language. This linguistic practice illustrates language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community and portrays attrition of the Itsekiri language.

Some other findings in relation to the causes of language shift and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language are in connection with the role of certain institutions in the community, as examined in the following section.

5.4.4 The role of different institutions in the community

Other important elements in this section are educational and religious institutions in the Itsekiri community. These institutions are relevant to this research, in view of their role in language shift in the Itsekiri community. The first element in this section is the school system.

5.4.4.1. The quest for education

An essential factor, which may be attributed to the language shift in the Itsekiri community, is the quest for education. Most respondents attested to the need for education as a driving force behind parents sending their children to schools in the urban cities to acquire good and proper education. The following extracts support this point.

“When children from Ugborodo are brought to Warri and Sapele to school, when they return on holidays, they speak only Pidgin. The other children are happy saying, Leah now understands and speaks English, I would like to go to the township so I can speak English too” (Leah, Vol.2, appendix 1, interview No.14).

According to Leah, children who move from the villages to school in the city of Warri, learn and speak English and NPE, the two main languages of communication. She maintains that when the children return to their villages, they no longer speak Itsekiri; they rather speak NPE. She equally maintains that other children wish to emulate her by their desire to go to the township, in order to

speaking NPE; which corroborates Ruth's argument about children who no longer speak the Itsekiri language, but NPE. Leah claimed that she had to move from her village to go to school in Warri where she learnt to speak English.

Leah's remarks seem to suggest that when people move from rural areas to cities, they tend to adapt to new situations including learning and using the dominant language present.

In addition, a phenomenon common in Nigeria, which equally occurs in the Itsekiri - speaking community, is schooling away from home. Below is a remark made by Noah, a respondent.

“Because of the boarding house they speak English that side; so, when they come home, they want to speak the English.” (Noah, Vol.2, appendix 1, interview No.12). [In view of the fact that English is spoken in the boarding houses, when they come home, they want to speak the English].

According to Noah, with the introduction of boarding schools, most children who are sent to school away from their homes and are boarded on the school premises, speak English. When they return home, they no longer speak Itsekiri. They prefer to speak English.

In the early 1970s and 80s, in Nigeria, it was the trend to send children to boarding schools, especially when Missionary schools were commonplace in Nigeria.

In line with Noah's assertion, the extract below equally supports the finding on the role of education in the linguistic transformation in the Itsekiri -speaking community.

“Up to when I went to college and beyond, de mi e si kwi loli, itsekiri owun ene ka fo ni lo li. Te mi gba re school, a ma to i skool a ka fo oyi bo” (Jonah, Vol 2, appendix 1, interview No.5).

[Up to when I went to college and beyond, before I left home, I used to speak Itsekiri at home with my parents. However, when I went to school, I started speaking English. When you get to school, you speak English.]

According to Jonah, a professor of English literature in a University in Nigeria, going to school added a new language to his linguistic repertoire. Before going on to boarding school, he spoke Itsekiri at home with his parents. He maintains, however that, on getting to school, he spoke only English. When he returned home from the boarding school, he no longer spoke Itsekiri. He seems to have gotten used to English since it is the language of education in Nigeria.

These respondents argue that the trend of sending children to boarding schools has contributed to change in the linguistic practices in the community.

In a similar vein, another factor that may be responsible for language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community according to the extract below is the language allowed and used in classroom interactions.

“But they will tell the children not to speak vernacular. If they want to talk, they say good English and everywhere will be silent. It is only the few ones that can speak good English that will be talking” (Micah, Vo. 2, appendix 1, interview No.10).

The argument according to Micah that speaking heritage language in the classrooms is prohibited in the Itsekiri- speaking community seems to echo Jonah’s discourse on speaking English in schools, in view of the fact that vernacular languages are not allowed in the classrooms.

Prohibiting heritage languages termed vernacular in classrooms is not restricted to the community, but a common phenomenon in schools in Southern Nigeria. Teachers appear to believe that heritage languages are not suitable for academic learning. For example, during my fieldwork, in the school where I observed, all subjects were taught in English and teachers and students interacted in English. Nevertheless, the students spoke NPE on the playground during recreation and used Standard English when interacting during extra-curriculum or extra school programmes linked with sociocultural activities. (See Vol. 2 appendix 2).

Similarly, the remark of the respondent below equally supports the role of education in language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri - speaking community.

“It is our generation that actually started it, probably because we went to school, we thought if we taught our children English, it would do them more good, now our children do very well in English, now our language is suffering” (Adah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.3).

As an educated person, Adah, a principal in one of the secondary schools in the Itsekiri-speaking community, maintains that she thought English was the best language for her children, so she did not deem it necessary to transmit Itsekiri to them. According to her, she spoke English with her children at home.

In line with the element of non-transmission of the Itsekiri language, during the interview, Adah told a story of what transpired at an airport in New York when her daughter, a student in the United States was trying to pass through the police border control. Girlie was having difficulty with her luggage. A woman with whom she was travelling spoke in their heritage language telling Girlie she could help her with her luggage. Unfortunately, Girlie did not understand the language the woman spoke. Girlie had to throw away some of her very important items. After passing through the police border control, the woman told her in English that she wanted to help her with her luggage, but she did not understand what she said in their heritage language. On getting home, Girlie narrated the incident to her mother, and both of them felt very bad and her mother regretted not transmitting Itsekiri language to her children.

A majority of the interview participants were of the view that the school system contributed in no small measure to language shift in the Itsekirispeaking community, in addition to non - intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language. This is equally evident in the element examined below.

5.4.4.2. The non -teaching of the Itsekiri language in formal education.

In addition to acquiring a language from home, a different context in which a language can be learnt is formal education. However, data gathered during the course of this research indicates that the Itsekiri language is barely taught in the schools.

A majority of respondents affirmed this point; however, a few participants' comments are shared in this section.

“What I think is responsible for that is the educational system. The educational system do not encourage the children at that tender age, at kindergarten, pre - primary and primary school to learn their own languages.” (Aaron, Vol.2, appendix 1, interview No.1).

Aaron remarks that the education system does not encourage the learning of heritage minority languages. He points out that children are neither taught nor encouraged to learn their heritage languages in schools in the community.

Similarly, the extract below seems to corroborate Aaron's assertion above.

“Insincerity on the part of politicians would not let them implement educational policies put in place to teach indigenous minority languages in the Local Government Councils” (Ruth, Vol 2, appendix 1, interview No.8).

In line with the idea of non-teaching of heritage languages in schools mentioned by Aaron, Ruth appears to suggest that non-implementation of policies regarding teaching of heritage languages in the community arising from politicians' insincerity may equally be responsible for non-teaching of the Itsekiri language in schools in the community.

In the same vein, non-teaching of the Itsekiri language and linguistic discrimination seems to resonate with Adam's comments below.

“Warri is a place where we have ethnic rivalry and Itsekiris are in the minority in class. If you have a class of 40 pupils in primary schools in Warri, you may not have more than five pupils who are Itsekiri in that class and Urhobos might be 20.

Parents may ask do you want to impose your language on my children? It becomes an issue. Due to this fact, it becomes difficult” (Adam, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 2)

According to Adam, the question of ethnic rivalry amongst ethnic groups in the community is an important element that militates against teaching of the Itsekiri language, in addition to the fact that parents may not be disposed to their children learning a heritage language other than theirs.

Furthermore, others challenges attributable to non-teaching of the Itsekiri language can be deduced from the extract below:

“The department of local languages was established to feed the state with local language teachers. I visited them and discovered that the attitude to learning and teaching the languages was a problem. Lack of seriousness on the part of the teachers was a major issue. Currently, there are no trained teachers to teach those languages. Because they only get Itsekiri speakers to teach Itsekiri; but these people do not have the teaching methodology to teach the language.” (Adah, Vol. 2, Appendix 1, interview No.3).

Adah maintains that teaching of the Itsekiri language is fraught with problems of lack of trained teachers, poor teaching methodology as well as lukewarm attitudes of teachers to teach heritage languages in the community. This may be responsible for the peoples’ unwillingness and lack of interest in learning the language she argues.

Besides the school system’ role in the phenomenon of language shift and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language, religious institutions were mentioned as elements that may be instrumental to language shift and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language.

5.4.4.3. Religion

Two types of religious practices are common in the Itsekiri –speaking community: Christianity, and African traditional religion, henceforth (ATR). (See Pages 87).

As said earlier, during my field investigation, I did observe in various churches and witnessed funeral services conducted according to Christian doctrine. The main language used during church services was English. Church pastors and bishops preached their messages in English. Prayers were said and worship songs were sung in English. Although two respondents mentioned that, the Itsekiri language is used in two churches, while one, who is a pastor, said he preaches in the Itsekiri language in one of the villages near Warri; the frequency or rate of use of Itsekiri in church activities is negligible compared to English.

Some data to buttress the use of English in churches are presented in the following extracts.

“I pray in English I cannot pray in Itsekiri because I did not learn it when I was young. Besides my parents were not Christians, so I did not grow up in that culture”. (Aaron, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.1)

Aaron argues that he is unable to pray using the Itsekiri language. However, it is unclear whether he implies that, this is because he did not learn to pray in Itsekiri or because he did not learn Itsekiri perhaps in formal education. Recall he said earlier that he acquired the Itsekiri language from his parents since his parents spoke Itsekiri to him at home. Nevertheless, he can pray in English.

In the same vein according to this extract:

“I cannot pray in Itsekiri. I can sing Itsekiri gospel songs but cannot pray very well in Itsekiri. I cannot pray in Pidgin. If I want to pray, I can only pray in good English.” (Leah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.14)

Like Aaron, Leah maintains that she cannot pray in Itsekiri, but in English when the need arises. However, she can sing gospel songs in the Itsekiri language.

In a similar vein, I was also present at some traditional funeral ceremonies in which English and the Itsekiri language were the languages of communication. Traditional religion does not seem to be very prominent in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Besides the roles ecological forces play in the linguistic situation of the Itsekiri language, other findings that further illustrate linguistic preferences and behaviour of the Itsekiri-speaking people, viewed through socio-psychological lens in relation to language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community are examined in the following second section.

5.5 Socio-psychological forces

The previous section dwelt on ecological factors viewed from linguistic, socio-political, socio-economic as well as socio-cultural dimensions. This section presents socio-psychologically related findings with emphasis on the perception of speakers of the Itsekiri language.

5.5.1 Itsekiri speakers' perceptions of the Itsekiri language

In addition to findings related to ecological elements in the investigation, the Itsekiri people's perception of their language is an important factor related to the phenomenon of language shift and language transmission in the community. This is in line with the people's behavior and their attitudes towards their language. The Itsekiri people's disposition to their language seems to be a function of the prevalent linguistic diversity in the community against the backdrop of globalisation and the role of the English language in Nigeria. Several extracts from my data supporting findings related to this point are presented below:

An interview participant argues that:

"The thinking of the modern-day life is, Itsekiri will not take you anywhere. The children want to go to the best schools, have the best worlds, and travel to places. Nobody is thinking of taking them back to the village, where else will they speak Itsekiri? Is it UK, America"? (Elijah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 4).

Elijah, a businessperson, is of the view that the Itsekiri language may be limited in certain ways, essentially in functional load. He argues that, if the children must go to the best schools and travel to places, the Itsekiri language cannot serve such purposes.

Other evidence from the available data similar to the above assertion is reproduced below:

“I reye gidi je ro gin Itsekiri wey local. Etsi a ja ti a ne mi fo ni eri miren, ni nokuu.. E ye tse ekpikpome wey. Aghan ro gin etsi aja ti a ka fo ni eri nokuun. O local. Gbi ne ni Warri Itsekiri inferior ren. Aghan ro gin wo ma fo oyibo, wo ne I gbi ka ni e ju out re” (Abner, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.11).

[People think Itsekiri is a local language not internationally accepted. That is a major factor; they think it is traditional and local. To us in Warri Itsekiri is inferior; people feel it is only when you speak English that you can raise your shoulders amongst your friends.]

Abner, a furniture maker, appears to suggest an impression that people have of the Itsekiri language. According to him, the Itsekiri people believe the language is restricted to its environment and cannot not be used internationally. He points out that the Itsekiri-speaking people perceive the Itsekiri language as a local and an inferior language in comparison with English.

Abner argues that some speakers of the Itsekiri language view it as a heritage and an ethnic language with little socio-economic importance that cannot fulfil the socio-political needs or aspirations of its speakers. This perception is in line with the linguistic attitudes and behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language examined below.

5.5.2 Linguistic attitudes and behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language.

As established above, the linguistic attitudes and behaviour of the Itsekiri people vis-a-vis their language is a derivative of their perception of the language. Below is a participant’s view on the language of communication and its effect on the Itsekiri language.

” “I do not think there is any big deal about speaking Itsekiri language; we can communicate in any language. You , an Itsekiri person, you are saying you don’t see any big deal about speaking Itsekiri language, your Uhrobo partner or counterpart, your Ibo partner sees the need; there is a big deal in speaking Urhobo, why are you making a mess of your own? Why don’t you value your own? Why is Itsekiri language not important to you? Why is it of less importance to you compare to the others. So if we don’t change our attitude, if we don’t change our mindset, if we don’t do a review of our orientation that it is not by mistake that we are Itsekiris;” (Abel, Vol 2 appendix 1, interview No. 9).

In his remarks, Abel refers to Itsekiri speakers who seem to attach little or no importance to speaking their language, but rather prefer a different language in society. He equally speaks about people who do not value the Itsekiri language, who seem to suggest that the language is of no importance to them. He alludes to attitudes that place the Itsekiri language in an unfavourable position in relation to the mind- set of the people, exemplified in its reference as a non-viable language.

Additionally, the extract below corroborates the above thought process.

“It is elitism. All of us who went to school felt it was not necessary to speak Itsekiri to our children; the issue is that they speak English so that “I can belong” yes they speak English so that I can belong” (Adah, Vo.2, appendix 1, interview No.3).

Adah, a senior official of a secondary school in the city of Warri suggests elitism as a major factor in the non-transmission of the Itsekiri language. She remarks that those who are educated think it is not necessary to transmit Itsekiri to their children. According to Adah, parents in her generation regard English as an important language to be transmitted to children instead of the Itsekiri language.

The mentality of the Itsekiri- speaking parents demonstrated in the above assertion seems to suggest that English is not only of more benefit to their children in terms of upward mobility than the Itsekiri language, it equally exemplifies the element of social standing and prestige.

5.5.3 Social standing and prestige

A linguistic attitude commonly exhibited by the Itsekiri people is linked to superiority complex, associated with speaking Standard English. The ability to speak English is not only prestigious, it is perceived as evidence of civilisation and social status. Ruth, a respondent, referred to it as elitism especially amongst the educated. The majority of respondents seem to believe that the influence of globalisation is responsible for this behaviour. Ruth refers to the act of “speaking English only” as ‘open eye’ a pidgin term, which means “civilization”. Ruth equally commented thus:

“ Te ri aghan feel gi gin one to fo ja weh eju aghan efen. I Yaghan bi de de, a ma ri one ti fo yibo we dan ghan ro gin oyi bo we owun re tsi best, so oyibo ke owun aghan fe fo. Ire ye bo bo ka kwo to ghan twi Eko wa, oto ghan ka gbo a ja itse kiri we ju re ye to wi ode ja nu bo we; tori aghan to we Eko no ghon wee, o ma to oghon Yoruba ghan fe gin do wo for gban ghan, Uwo de to tsi Itsekiri, wey fe fo Itsekiri ogbo ton re ni no ni. One to wi ode ja ni yan yin de ene feel gin eju ene wen efen. Aghan to wi village no gh on we, wo ma fo Itsekiri gba bi aghan ro gin Iyere se? My mummy nor dey. Aghan answer bi re bo oyibo.” (Ruth, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.8).

[There is a general feeling that those who speak their language are not civilised. When mothers and some others hear someone speaking English, they all wish to speak it too. They think that is the best thing to do. Mothers in the villages no longer teach their children the Itsekiri language. Some people in Lagos speak Itsekiri better than those in the community do. They send their children to the community to acquire Itsekiri. Those in Yoruba land wish to speak Itsekiri. Whereas those who are in the community do not want to speak Itsekiri with their children. This will lead to the loss of the language. We in the community feel we are civilised. When you speak Itsekiri to those in the village and ask where is your mummy? They respond in English “my mummy is not around”.]

Ruth remarks that people in the villages have the habit of speaking NPE, which to them is evidence of enlightenment and prestige. According to her, people are of the view that it is good for their children to speak English; therefore, they do not speak Itsekiri. In the same vein, they believe that in the civilised world of today, English is the language to be spoken so they do all they can to speak it in spite of themselves she observed. She adds that Itsekiri -speaking people in other parts of the country teach their children Itsekiri, citing the example of Itsekiris in the Yoruba-speaking

region in southwest Nigeria, who teach their children Itsekiri, and sometimes send them to the Itsekiri community to acquire the language in an informal immersion setting.

Similar to Ruth's argument above, is Leah's comment below:

"If you are out for instance at a shopping mall and you speak Itsekiri or your language with someone, others will regard you as uncivilised. They will say look at you, you are speaking vernacular. A woman said to another lady speaking her language to her child, why did you bring this local woman here? See how well dressed she is, yet she is speaking local language. She cannot speak English"
(Leah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.14).

Leah, a trader in one of the markets in Warri observes that some people frown at others who speak their heritage languages in public places. She emphasises that people are mocked or ridiculed and are termed uncivilised when they speak their heritage language. For example, the woman who was speaking her heritage language to her child was referred to as a local woman, according to Leah. The fact that the woman was well dressed is an indication of social standing which demands the speaking of Standard English and not her heritage language.

In like manner, the comment below, from Esther, a 46-year- old public servant working in a municipal council in the city of Warri equally supports the question of social standing and prestige.

"Most at times, if I'm outside, and I'm with the chairman's wife or I'm with other women, I will not speak Pidgin English. I must still command some kind of respect in the midst of all these women that are running politics. Those illiterate women who did not go to school that are doing politics; if they want to run their mouth; especially if you decide to dine with them in this their language, their Pidgin English, they will not have respect for you. By the time you make them understand; there at times you speak pidgin English with them, occasionally. It is not something you just sit down, and you start speaking pidgin English with them; they will not respect you" **(Esther, volume 2, Appendix 1, interview No.7).**

In addition to her position as a public servant, Esther runs a shop in which she trades in household goods in one of the markets in the city of Warri. According to her, she maintains a particular social standing by speaking Standard English. By so doing, she is distinguished from some illiterate women with whom she associates, she admitted. She maintains that she chooses her language amid a certain class of people in a gathering. Alongside working as a public servant and running a shop, Esther participates in local politics. During political gatherings, she meets with female politicians whom she refers to as illiterates. To maintain her social status as an educated person, she distances herself by speaking Standard English.

The use of Standard English in certain contexts is considered prestigious and gives the individual an edge over others especially in the situations described above. To make herself relevant in certain contexts, Esther expresses herself differently in her choice of language when she is in a particular group. This is a common phenomenon in the Itsekiri-speaking community. People choose and tend to hierarchize their language according to the occasion.

In another development, the extract below illustrates speaking English as an indication of prestige in conjunction with superiority complex.

“Now when they are copying the white man, they do not even want somebody to know that they are Itsekiri or they are from one language. Like Dr Okriobo,, when we went to visit him in Warri South, when we got there, we went there as National Association of Itsekiri graduate, we spoke Itsekiri. We greeted him in Itsekiri, he responded in English. We spoke Itsekiri to him, he spoke English. I now looked at him and I said jegin we ka gbo aja re ju we re? Ene gbi Itsekiri kin ye, o gbo owun Ighe re e gba je, e ne da tun gin gbe re urun to gbe ene wa, wo gba oyibo gba je ene. Wo ro gin wo gbo yibo we ju e ne to wi ubo weh ? I ra ti wo efe ri ene, ene no re. .” (Esther, volume 2, appendix 1, interview No.7).

[Now, when they are copying the white man, they do not even want somebody to know that they are Itsekiris, or they are from the ethnic group. Like Dr Okribobo, when we visited him in Warri South, we went there representing the National Association of Itsekiri graduates. On getting there, We greeted him in Itsekiri, he responded in English. We spoke Itsekiri to him and he responded in English. I looked at him and I said so, you no longer understand your language? We greeted you in Itsekiri, you answered us in English. We responded in Itsekiri and told you what brought to us your

office. You replied in English. Do you think you speak better English than all of us here? If you are not willing to receive us, we beg to take our leave.]

Esther describes the behaviour of a principal officer of a municipal council when a group of Itsekiri-speaking undergraduates visited him in his office. She mentions that, when she was a student, she led the Association of Itsekiri graduates to the Warri municipal council. On arrival, they thought it wise to speak in Itsekiri to the officer, who was a fellow Itsekiri man. The officer responded in English and not in Itsekiri. All efforts to entice him to speak Itsekiri proved abortive. According to Esther, the group had to walk out on the officer, before he realised his mistake and called them back.

This behaviour may be viewed in two ways. Either it was a clear expression of a superiority complex or prestige of wanting to distinguish himself from the student visitors or it may be that the officer in question wanted to pass a message for the students to understand that he was at his workplace, which required him to speak English and not the heritage language.

This brings us to the phenomenon of linguistic hierarchy in the Itsekiri - speaking community, which may be considered a contributory factor to language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri community.

5.5.4 Linguistic hierarchy and social status

A linguistic phenomenon that is evident in the Itsekiri speaking-community is language hierarchisation. There are occasions when people deliberately choose the language they prefer to use in various domains, especially in relation to their social status. The extract below supports this point.

“To be honest with you, it is correct English that I speak the most. The major reason is actually the people I am in contact with on a daily basis. I am a board member of the great establishment called Eagle Heights International School. I come in here every other day so to speak. I communicate with the management staff, the principal as well as the teachers. And the lingual franca allowed here is English language; so when I leave this environment and probably see some officers, I can’t see myself speaking Pidgin English except where it becomes extremely necessary

and I manage to speak Pidgin English; and it's against the ministerial ethics to speak Pidgin English" (Abel, Vol, 2, appendix 1 interview No. 9).

Abel is a university graduate, pastor of a church and board member of one of the private primary and secondary church schools in the city of Warri. In his remarks, he demonstrates evidence of linguistic hierarchy in his language choice in relation to his workplace. According to him, he deliberately speaks English to maintain his status.

As a member of the school's management board, he asserts that he is not allowed to speak NPE in his work environment, claiming it is against the work ethics in his workplace. However, he may speak NPE when according to him, "it becomes extremely necessary I manage to speak Pidgin English" By virtue of Abel's job, he positions himself in the operation and hierarchy where he is not expected to go against the workplace policy. He seems to imply however, that when he meets workers of certain category, perhaps of a lower status such as a janitor or a gateman⁷, he is forced to adapt to their level, in which case, he becomes accommodating and speaks the language these categories of workers understand and speak, which is NPE.

Furthermore, an example of linguistic hierarchy is evident in the extract below:

"Somebody has insulted me here. Somebody was passing, I called her madam wetin you wan buy? Come make I sell for you. She looked at me and said, the way you are, can't you speak simple and correct English? Then I said to her for inside market ther nor dey speak good English. So I told her, na market na, market place meaning say na people wey nor go school nai de sell for market. Na people wey go school nai dey dey office dey work. She say my friend get out you cannot even speak correct English, the way you look like this. I say madam nor be like that o nor be the way there take dey speak English. At the end of the day, the woman quarrelled and left. Then my neighbours said, sister, why you nor speak oyibo for am. I said why I go speak oyibo. De dey speak oyibo for market? Na bicos e wan buy pot I go kon de speak oyibo for am" (Esther, Vol 2, appendix 1, interview No.7).

⁷ A gateman is the NPE word for security personnel who mans the gate of either a private building belonging to an individual, or an office building owned by a company.

[Somebody has insulted me here. Somebody was passing, I called out madam, what would you like to buy? Come to my shop, I will sell to you. She looked at me and said, the way you are dressed, can you not speak simple and correct English? Then I said to her, in the market no one speaks Standard English. This is a market; it is the unschooled who sell in the market. Those who are schooled work in offices. She said, get out; you cannot speak correct English, the way you are looking. Then I said, that is not the case, this is not where to speak English. At the end of the day, the woman quarrelled and left. Then my neighbour said, Sister, why did you not speak Standard English to her? I said, why would I speak Standard English? Do people speak Standard English in the market? Is it because she wants to buy a pot, I must speak Standard English?]

Esther trades in household goods in one of the markets in Warri alongside her official job as a public servant. After close of work, she goes to her shop in her smartly looking, white-collar job attire. On this day, a woman, a potential customer was passing by her shop, and in the usual manner of every market woman in Warri, she called out to the woman in NPE to call by her shop to see what she was selling. The woman reproached her because she was speaking NPE. The cause of disagreement here is that Esther was well dressed and looked educated therefore, was expected to speak in Standard English. There she was speaking NPE. The woman in question could not reconcile such a distinguished-looking person with the one speaking NPE.

What played out in the conversation between Esther and the woman echoes Abel's view above on the use of either English or NPE in accordance with the situation. Standard English is sometimes associated with those who are educated and people who look well dressed and clean looking. While NPE is perceived as a trade language expected to be used in the market, especially by those with limited education and sometimes people who look haggard and unkempt (although, NPE is sometimes used by the educated amongst friends and comedians as a language of entertainment *(See chapter 2, page 50)*).

Similarly, the extract below, a continuation of Esther's encounter with the woman at the market, equally reveals linguistic hierarchy in the Itsekiri -speaking community.

“After some 2 months, the lady now came to Ogbe Ijaw, she wants to do certificate of local government origin and they were talking about the community she came from. I was just looking; then they said some-body is coming to meet you and then I said let the person

come na. As the lady opened the door, immediately she saw my face she just ran away and was panting. Some people came to me and asked why she was panting, I told them shebi I told you people one woman came to the market to cause the hell out of me the other day that I cannot speak English; I say is the woman. So I said to them to tell the woman to come... When she came in, she started apologising; so I told her not to worry ... I told you that when you are in the marketplace, you behave like them in the marketplace. But when you go to offices, they will not speak Pidgin English. Assuming you meet me in this office and I'm speaking Pidgin English, then you know that something is wrong. But you met me where I am selling my goods; you don't expect me to be speaking grammar there".

(Esther, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 7).

In a turn of event, co-incidentally, as recounted in the data, it happened that, that same woman had a need to procure an official document from the Municipal Area Council and found herself in Esther's office. The woman was shocked to see the same person she had chided a few weeks back in the market, in the office where she was to obtain a document. On catching sight of Esther, she took to her heels and ran to Esther's colleagues in a different office. Nevertheless, Esther told her colleagues to send her back to her office and the woman apologized.

In their conversation earlier at the market, Esther had told the woman she could not have expected her to speak Standard English in the marketplace. NPE is the market language while Standard English is the language of the workplace she argues. She then reminded the woman of their arguments where she told her that she spoke NPE because she was in the market. This is a good example of linguistic hierarchy. Situations where people choose their languages according to their positions, social statuses and circumstances are common in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

In the same light, another extract illustrating how linguistic hierarchy influences language choice is described below:

"You know professionally, you go out, you mix up with people and err 40 or 50% of those you mix up with are not Itsekiris. So, depending on the person you are talking with, you might want to speak Pidgin English because of the person's understanding, or you may want to speak the simple and correct English, which is the Queens' English because of that person's understanding too. So, it depends on

whom you are interacting with. If you are interacting with someone who is not as educated as you are, you may not want to say things that will not augur well with the person, because he may not understand you. You might start, but if you see his or her own response, you may want to go to the persons' level by probably speaking the pidgin which is, I don't want to call it the lingua franca but is common among all tribes available here" (Aaron, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.1).

From Aaron's observation, language practices vary according to some variables: level of education of speakers, level of understanding of users of the different languages in the environment as well as socio-cultural contexts. The university-educated who generally speak English at their workplaces, are likely to speak NPE when buying goods at the market. According to Aaron, at some point, as he puts it "you may want to go to the person's level" linguistically, so one is not perceived as unaccommodating when speaking Standard English.

To explain further, in the home, a university-educated speaks NPE with the housemaid⁸, whereas he/she speaks Standard English with his/her wife/husband and children. This characteristic played out in my host family during my field work (see **appendix 2, page 206**), an indication of the choice of languages used in homes, which demonstrates elements of family language practices examined in the section below.

5.5.5 Family language policy, practices, and transmission of the Itsekiri language in the home

Language use in homes and in various contexts is central to this doctoral study. Findings that emerged from the data collected reveal that most of the families, especially the elite and university-educated, prefer to speak English in their homes. While the non-elite and unschooled or non-college educated parents speak NPE with their children. This is in relation to their social status and milieu in the community.

The extracts below express views that indicate varieties of family language policies and practices in homes in the Itsekiri -speaking community. Most of the respondents mentioned that they speak

⁸ In Nigeria, people who work as house helps are referred to as house maids and often have limited education.

only English with their children during their formative years to ease their transition into formal schooling.

Although several similar comments that buttress this point were collected during the interview sessions, however, only a few respondent's remarks are presented and examined in this section. For example, Ruth opines thus:

“kpeju ti osa bi ri ore gba bi ri oma fo Itsekiri , aghan ka fo oyibo bi ri pidgin. Owun re tse ti oma ghan gba la, aghan e si ma bi ri a te fo Itsekiri. k eke ren oyibo weh bi ri Pidgin na kan. Wo ma si fo Itsekiri gbi oma, aghan ki gin “I nor dey yeay o, my papa nor de quick speak fo me o” Inghan oma de ti Itskeiri bi. (Ruth, Vol. 2, Appendix 1, interview No.8).

[Rather than speak Itsekiri with their children, parents speak English and Pidgin, consequently, as the children grow, they cannot speak Itsekiri but English and Pidgin. When you speak Itsekiri to them, they respond saying -I do not understand. My father does not speak to me in the language. These are children born of Itsekiri -speaking parents.]

Ruth's assertion suggests the prevailing language practices in the Itsekiri- speaking community. She maintains that Itsekiri -speaking parents speak Standard English and NPE rather than Itsekiri in their homes. Consequently, as the children grow up, they are unable to speak the Itsekiri language. According to her, when one speaks Itsekiri to the children, they respond saying; they do not understand the language because their parents do not speak in Itsekiri to them at home.

In the same vein, another respondent's remark below supports this point.

“Every situation, every occasion I speak English in my house; I seldom, I say seldom speak Itsekiri. My mother in-law will come and say Abigail, uwo bi ri oko re, oma ti Itsejiri meji bi, aghan ka bi oma, aghan ai fo Itsekiri; aghan ai ka fo Itsekiri gbo ton aghan e san o , e san ” [You and your husband, both of you are Itsekiris, you do not speak Itsekiri with your husband, you are speaking English. It is bad]. “When she is around, I will now struggle to speak Itsekiri just to make her happy. But the English flows, we communicate very fast with English that is why I think it is the most convenient means of communication, so we just flow through that means.” (Abigail, Vol. 2, Appendix 1, interview 6).

In the above remark, Abigail explains the difficulty in speaking the Itsekiri language in her home. She admits that her mother-in-law reportedly rebukes her for speaking English instead of Itsekiri. Abigail argues that speaking English is convenient and renders communication easy. Could she be implying that the Itsekiri language slows down communication?

Furthermore, the extract below expresses a similar view from another respondent:

“Itsekiri language is the less of it all. Even in our homes, our children cannot speak it these days. Our wives, even though they are Itsekeris, cannot speak Itsekiri. In most homes, plus my home, we speak good English because of education. In the street of Warri, majority of the people speak Pidgin. That is the easiest way of communicating by the Warri people. In the palace too, it is difficult for people to speak Itsekiri fluently, it is mixed up with Itsekiri and English. If something is not done, it will go out of existence” (Elijah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview 4).

According to Elijah, a businessperson, parents prefer their children to speak English so that it will not be difficult for them to learn when they go to school, since English is the medium of instruction in schools. Education plays an important role in family inspirations for their children. Many parents believe that if their children speak English at home, they are most likely to understand teaching in schools and succeed in examinations. This respondent shares the same opinion as that of Abigail above in relation to communicative practices in homes in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Linked to family language policy and practices is the element of language transmission. Families decide which language they deem necessary to transmit to their children. The extract below suggests the choice of language transmitted in Itsekiri-speaking homes.

This is what I am saying, parents from the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group speak English and Pidgin with their children. This is why the children speak English and Pidgin. (Lucas, Vol 2, appendix 1 interview No. 12).

Lucas works for the Warri city municipal council. His discourse corroborates Elijah and Abigail's remarks on the non-use of the Itsekiri language within the family. He argues that Itsekiri-speaking parents prefer to communicate in English language with their children rather than their heritage language. According to him, these practices are responsible for the inability of children born of Itsekiri parents to speak the Itsekiri language. They rather speak English and NPE he maintains. These practices may have influenced the language transmission process in the community.

Furthermore, in the extract below, the respondent claims it was a deliberate decision not to speak Itsekiri with his children.

"It was a deliberate choice to speak English with them. If I had decided then to speak Itsekiri, we would not have this problem today. Because everybody was speaking English, and you don't want to be the only one speaking Itsekiri" (**Elijah, Vol 2, appendix 1, interview No.4**).

In his argument, Elijah maintains he intentionally chose not to speak Itsekiri but English in his home because the latter is the prevalent language in the community. According to him, everyone speaks English in the community; therefore, he decided to follow suit. His choice to speak English instead of the Itsekiri language, in accordance with Abigail's choice of home language, illustrates the phenomenon of language shift as well as non-intergenerational transmission in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Similarly, the comment below suggests an opinion shared in relation to non-transmission of the Itsekiri language, which corroborates those expressed by other respondents earlier.

You find out that you meet two Itsekiri young men and women. That is, one is from Itsekiri background, the other one is from Itsekiri background, they are married now; it is expected that their children should be able to speak Itsekiri, but today we don't; yes we don't speak the Itsekiri; I think I'm a case study, we don't speak Itsekiri to the children" (**Abigail, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.6**)

Abigail's remark further illustrates the non-transmission of the Itsekiri language. According to her, a couple from the Itsekiri - speaking ethnic group who expectedly should speak their language hardly do so. Abigail does not hesitate to use herself as an example. She states that she and her husband belong to the Itsekiri ethnolinguistic group; but they do not speak the language with their children.

In line with Abigail's argument above, Esther's assertion below suggests non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language.

“We are even praying that it doesn't go into extinction because if you look at the growing mothers and fathers these days, they don't take cognisance of their language. They just believe in this foreign language. That is what they speak to their children, and the children do not ask. If you look at it, so many homes, they don't know how to speak the language” (Esther, Vol. 2 appendix 1, interview No.7).

According to Esther, Itsekiri parents believe firmly in the “foreign language”, which implies English, in the context of this doctoral study. Her argument resonates with that of Abigail and Elijah regarding language preference within families in the Itsekiri -speaking community.

Other ideas that suggest non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language may be deduced from the comments below:

“The languages that readily comes to my mind whenever my wife and children are around English and Itsekiri. The English is an attraction; If I had my way, I will not speak it. Whenever she tries to speak it, I insist, do not speak it. Speak Itsekiri; these children will soon go back to school; this little time that they are at home; speak Itsekiri” (Abel, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.9).

Abel attempts to speak the Itsekiri language even though English seems to be the language prevalent in his home. He is of the view that the English language is an attractive language, which people tend to gravitate towards. According to him, when his children are home on holidays, and

his wife is tempted to speak English, he quickly intervenes and encourages her to speak Itsekiri. For him, this should be an opportunity for his children to acquire the Itsekiri language.

From the foregoing, findings reveal that the preferred language in the Itsekiri-speaking homes and within families is the English language, which may have significantly encouraged non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language. Nonetheless, the data collected in this doctoral study reveal important use of the Itsekiri language in certain domains in the community. Some important uses of the Itsekiri language are examined in the following section.

5.6 Domains of use of the Itsekiri language

In the last two sections, ecological and socio-psychological elements that could be considered as factors responsible for language shift in the Itsekiri -speaking community, as well as non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language were examined.

In the concluding section of the findings chapter, I present different aspects of use of the Itsekiri language. The aim is to highlight various contexts in which the language is significantly deployed in the community.

Considering factors instrumental to the phenomenon of language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri community, one may wonder if there are any important domains of use of the language.

In my investigation, evidence from the data drawn from observations and linguistic interviews indicate specific areas in which the Itsekiri language is deployed; notably as identity marker and in cultural activities.

General linguistic practices and oral use of the Itsekiri language can be observed in essential features that are related to group identity, cultural heritage and patrimony, various contexts such as marriage ceremonies, funerals ceremonies and community language policies (CLP). Other important areas in which the language is used are language brokering and mediation processes as well as linguistic etiquette and norms.

The first element examined in this section is the aspect of group identity within the Itsekiri – speaking community.

5.6.1 Group identity in the Itsekiri ethnic group

One of the features that demonstrates the importance of the Itsekiri language is group identity. According to respondents, the Itsekiri language fulfills the role of a marker of identity to its speakers.

Most of the participants maintain that whenever they meet Itsekiri people, they identify with them. However, only a few respondents who spoke in detail on group identity are presented.

The following extract in NPE, translated in font 10 sheds light on the idea of identity.

“Itsekiri is very important. If you can speak it very well maybe by the time you leave this Warri, you get to somewhere else, maybe you are speaking Itsekiri with somebody, then the person in, maybe Lagos, ah, this is my people, he will just answer, ah aghan Itsekiri fo? From there dem flow This always happens, when I get to Kaduna. Years back, the way my mother dressed, somebody just speak Urhobo, she just answers, from there dem rush her, play together, they said Urhobo and Itsekiri we are one. What I am saying is, in Kaduna, about 30 years back. They flow together. Those same Urhobo ladies take my mother to some Itsekiris in that Kaduna. These are your people, and we just go to the market to buy things o. After 3 days they told her to come back. Someone to send letter, do this do that. So tribe is very important. It is useful” (Noah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview 12).

[Itsekiri is very important. If you can speak it very well and you move to live somewhere else, for example, Lagos, and you come across someone who speaks Itsekiri, he will ask are you Itsekiri? This always happens. When my mother and I got to Kaduna about 30 years ago, we went to the market. As soon as some women saw the way my mother was dressed, someone spoke in Urhobo and she answered, they rushed to her, chatted with her, and said Urhobo and Itsekiri are one. Those Urhobo women took my mother to some Itsekiri people in Kaduna and introduced her to them saying these are your people. She was told to return in three days’ time. Some of them sent letters and messages. Therefore, tribe is very important. It is very useful.]

Noah is in his fifties, holds a secondary school certificate and runs his private business in Warri. He spoke Itsekiri, NPE and English during the interview session. His comments express the theme of belonging and cultural identity. Noah tells a story of a visit he and his mother embarked on about 30 years ago to Kaduna, a city in Northern Nigeria. According to him, during that visit, they went shopping at a marketplace and his mother was easily recognized and identified as an Itsekiri woman belonging to the Itsekiri ethnic group by some women from Warri. This was due to her dressing in Itsekiri attire. According to Noah, the women did not only identify with him and his mother, but they also entrusted them with letters and messages to be delivered to their relations back home in Warri. This is an expression of group identity. The women who identified with his mother were Itsekiris who had migrated to Northern Nigeria in the 1970s. In this case, there is a demonstration of oneness and solidarity, which the language brings.

According to respondents, speaking the Itsekiri language provides some sense of belonging. It may be necessary to mention that when Nigerians who belong to the same ethnic group and speak the same language meet in a different environment other than their own, there is a tendency to rally round and associate with one another. Association along ethnic lines is a common phenomenon amongst Nigerians especially when they meet in a different part of the country. This equally happens in the diaspora.

Similarly, the comment below equally supports the theme of group and identity ideology.

“I’m an Itsekiri before being a Nigerian, before being a civilised man, I’m an Itsekiri. The language gives you an identity with your people, Itsekiri is very useful to me; it is my identity. I know if I do not have identity I’m not fit to live”. (Adam, Vol 2, appendix 1, interview No.2).

The vehemence with which Adam, an Itsekiri-speaking and a government official asserts his identity is instructive and suggests linguistic adherence and a sense of belonging. While maintaining that Itsekiri is his identity, he affirms that his language gives him a sense of identity and pride. In his statement, he claims to be an Itsekiri before being a Nigerian.

In line with Adam's assertions regarding identity, Jonah a university professor expresses the view that without the language, he may not be known and recognized.

“It is the language that makes one and one can be identified by, without which you are not known” (Jonah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 5).

To buttress his argument, Jonah further relates an anecdote regarding an incident when his daughter attended an international competition in Asia. According to him, his daughter did very well during the competition. However, when she was told to speak her heritage language, she could not, claiming that English was her home language. The panel of judges told her to speak the Nigerian language spoken in her home. At that point, she broke down and wept saying she knew there was a language her parents spoke, but she could not speak it because her parents did not speak it with her and her siblings. Therefore, she knew nothing about the language. The language in question was the Itsekiri language. On her return, she expressed her disappointment to her parents for failing to transmit Itsekiri to her.

In a similar vein, Abigail claims that Itsekiri is what makes her different from members of other ethnic groups in the environment. She observes:

“Itsekiri distinct me. I am from this tribe; I belong to this cultural group. You can depict my tribe when I speak Itsekiri. Ah she is Itsekiri woman” (Abigail, Vol.2, appendix 1, interview No.6).

According to Abigail whenever she speaks Itsekiri, she is easily identified with the ethnic group, claiming that the Itsekiri language is her mark of identity.

In line with that, an incident, which portrays and expresses identity described below, seems to reverberate succinctly what Abigail may be suggesting when she says Itsekiri “distincts” her, meaning that the Itsekiri language differentiates her from members of other ethnic groups in the community.

The incident occurred during one of my observation sessions at a bus station in the city of Warri. On the occasion, I was about to embark on a trip to the city of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. I

decided to use the opportunity to enrich my data collection through observation. It was going to be a road trip, so I decided to travel by car. Therefore, I went to a bus station belonging to a transportation company that transports passengers in buses and cars to different parts of the country. At the bus station, there were people from different backgrounds, various socio-economic status, and different linguistic groups. At the station, were workers including bus drivers, tally clerks all from different ethnic groups. The drivers were hanging and loitering around vehicles assigned to them, waiting to welcome passengers assigned to their vehicles for the journey to Abuja and conversing amongst themselves in Standard English and NPE. The number of persons present at the station were around 50 or more. Of all these people, only one person spoke Itsekiri.

This was a woman in her twenties, whose duty it was to take record of checked in passengers and issue insurance travel tickets. After paying for my ticket, I went to her to add my name to the insurance list meant for passengers. On getting to her, she addressed me in Itsekiri. Once that happened, the researcher in me was spurred on and I asked why she resorted to speaking Itsekiri having spoken to me earlier in English. She said she recognised my name and that of my next of kin as Itsekiri names; therefore, she identified me with the Itsekiri ethnic group. I noticed that her working language was English, therefore; she spoke English to everyone who went to her to be registered into the insurance list constituted for travellers.

The above scenario is an illustration of the importance of the Itsekiri language exemplified in name giving, (**see page 86**), which is a vital socio-cultural aspect of the Itsekiri ethnic group.

In addition to the expression of identity, Jabess, a respondent dwells on the question of unity, which he emphasised succinctly in his remarks in the extract below:

“Ene ma wi ubutse, a ja aghan ye, aja gi di dje owhun re wi ubutse mi. but, ke ni ke de, ene ka fo Itsekiri gi di gbo di ene gba gbara jo gba tsi okan, di ene gba de sin ara e ne. Te ri e re ye bo bo e ka jo lo gbo a ja wey ti ri bi ri a t e mu aghan la »
(**Jabess, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.15**).

[When we are at work, though there are many languages, we speak Itsekiri most of the time so that we can be united and know one another. Although some do not understand Itsekiri due to their upbringing.]

Jabess works in a multinational oil corporation located in one of the Itsekiri villages, in the Niger Delta Region, in the South of Nigeria. The multinational company employs a handful of locals in the community. One of the work ethics and ground rules is the speaking of English, considered an official and recommended language of the company in consideration of the multilingual and intercultural environment.

In the extract above, Jabess asserts that he generally speaks English at his workplace, nonetheless, whenever he comes across a colleague from the Itsekiri ethnic group, he identifies with him by speaking Itsekiri. According to Jabess, colleagues who recognise one another as members of the Itsekiri ethnic group speak Itsekiri with one another in the interest of cohesion and unity.

Similarly, the extract below equally illustrates the idea of identity.

“Ni ubu tse mi, wo ma wa e ma ma gin uwo Itsekiri, Itsekiri mo gba bi uwo fo gba tsi business me na ra. E ma fe tse business wé, mo fa e tse teri gin gin emi bi re uwo aja oka ren” (**Abner, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.11**).

[Whenever a customer comes to my workshop and I identify him as an Itsekiri man, I speak Itsekiri to him while transacting business. I become considerate once I know my customer is Itsekiri speaking. I do business with him as my kinsman.]

Abner, a 60-year businessperson who owns a furniture company, corroborates Jabess’s idea regarding identity. According to him, he tends to be considerate while dealing with a fellow Itsekiri person when doing business. This is a demonstration of unity and togetherness that the Itsekiri language brings.

Most of the interviewees expressed their beliefs in group identity and cultural unity while identifying with the Itsekiri ethnic group and the language. According to them, they feel a sense

of belonging whenever they speak the Itsekiri language. A sense of Itsekiri identity appears to be important to them and they seem sensitive to the issue of cultural and linguistic identity.

This may be an expression of belonging and the quest for preservation of the Itsekiri language as well as linguistic and cultural identification in relation to the theme of cultural heritage and patrimony discussed in the following sections.

5.6.2 Cultural heritage and patrimony in the Itsekiri ethnic group

According to respondents, besides linguistic identity, of importance to the Itsekiri-speaking people are their cultural heritage and patrimony illustrated in the use of the Itsekiri language. Traditional marriage ceremonies and language mediation, linguistic norms and etiquettes, are key components that make up the Itsekiri cultural heritage and patrimony, in addition to uses in various contexts. These elements considered important in the Itsekiri ethnic group, constitute the cultural landscape in which the Itsekiri language is continually deployed.

5.6.2.1. Traditional marriage ceremony and language mediation in the Itsekiri-speaking community

One of the ways in which the Itsekiri culture is demonstrated using the Itsekiri language is in the traditional marriage ceremony expressed in the extract below.

“Like in Itsekiri marriages, they speak Itsekiri when they are paying the dowry, but when they come out at the reception, they speak English” (Abigail, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No. 6).

Abigail maintains that the Itsekiri language is used when traditional marriage rites are performed during the joining of the couple in a traditional marriage ceremony. During payment of the dowry⁹

⁹ A dowry is a token amount of money a groom's family pays to a bride's family to ask the hand of the bride for marriage. This customary and cultural act in the Itsekiri ethnic group is still very important in modern times.

in a traditional wedding ceremony, elders from both families present speak in the Itsekiri language. Further details on the traditional marriage ceremony are elucidated on (**page 86 in chapter 2**).

While the ceremony is going on, language mediation equally takes place. Language mediation as a cultural and social process is an essential constituent of cultural heritage and patrimony in the Itsekiri-speaking community. This phenomenon in the traditional marriage ceremony process, evident in the discourse of some respondents further suggests an important use of the Itsekiri language.

Whenever there are cultural activities involving intra-ethnic or interethnic groups such as traditional wedding ceremony, two language mediators facilitate the process by mediating between families using the Itsekiri language.

An example of language mediation in an intra- ethnic wedding ceremony is exemplified in the extract below:

“In Itsekiri marriage, you have 2 spokespersons, if the person that is giving the daughter out happens to be an Itsekiri, the spokesman will be an Itsekiri. That is the person that will represent the in-law that is coming to marry a wife. The wife will also have spokesman who is also an Itsekiri; So, it is the spokesmen that will interpret the process, or the procedure to the couple and the family. Usually it is conducted in Itsekiri” (**Elijah, Vol.2, appendix 1, interview No.4**).

According to Elijah, two spokespersons are present in intra-ethnic traditional marriage ceremonies where they are required to mediate between the families of the intending couple. Elijah maintains that these two people representing the bride and groom’s families respectively are present at the ceremony. The language used in conducting the ceremony is Itsekiri and the spokespersons equally speak the Itsekiri language.

Fundamentally, a language mediator whom the respondent refers to as spokesperson facilitates communication between the families of the bride and groom, as well as between the elders and the prospective couple during the ceremony.

To further buttress this point, at a traditional marriage ceremony in the city of Warri, I observed the presence of two spokespersons who acted as mediators representing families of the bride and groom. The responsibility of these spokespersons was to collect information from one family and transmit to the other on behalf of the couple.

I learnt that, culturally, the intending couple is not expected to speak in the presence of their parents and elders during the process of joining them in marriage. They are silent while the official traditional negotiation between both families goes on. The language mediator representing the bride collects information from the elders of the bride's family and transmits it to the family of the groom. Similarly, the mediator representing the groom, in turn takes the groom's family response to the bride's family, and vice versa. There is a somewhat symbiotic linguistic relationship. At the conclusion of the joining of the bride and groom, the ceremony, which compulsorily takes place in the home of the bride, the groom is expected to speak and expresses his gratitude to everyone present in the Itsekiri language.

However, at the end of the joining ceremony, after the departure of the couple's parents and elders, I noticed that the bride and groom interacted with their friends and well-wishers speaking English and NPE at the reception party. As part of my investigation, when I asked to know the reason, younger people spoke English and NPE, and not Itsekiri, I was told friends and well-wishers present were from different ethnolinguistic groups. Therefore, for proper interaction and inclusiveness, a common language had to be used in the interest of everyone present at the occasion.

In the same vein, the extract below equally illustrates the importance of using the Itsekiri language in the context of inter-ethnolinguistic traditional marriage ceremony.

“Like I said, we have a variety of languages around, tribes, etc, depending on which one is going on, for instance, if a Yoruba man is giving out his daughter in marriage to an Itsekiri man, they try to speak both languages. Because, the bride and the groom may not understand each other, the family of the groom may want to speak in their own language and there will be a man who acts as an interpreter between the two families. Another man who understands the language of the bride will be there to interpret. Then, there is also an English person who is a middleman who

understands both languages, who takes information from both and interprets to the understanding of both families” (Aaron, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.1).

Echoing Elijah’s comment above, Aaron affirms that when a couple from two different ethnic groups are getting married traditionally, a language mediator intervenes between the families of the bride and groom. According to him, the Itsekiri family speaks in Itsekiri, while the non-Itsekiri speaking family speaks in their heritage language. A representative of the prospective in-law’s family, an Itsekiri speaker who understands the prospective in-law’s heritage language translates and interprets into English in the interest of the non-Itsekiri speaking family. In a mixed or inter-ethnic marriage ceremony, the language mediating process helps to facilitate interaction between the families of the intending couple from different ethnic groups who do not understand one another’s language,

In addition to the cultural practices described above, linguistic etiquette and norms in the Itsekiri-speaking community is an essential part of the Itsekiri people’s cultural heritage and patrimony as outlined in the section below.

5.6.2.2. Linguistic etiquette and norms in the Itsekiri Community

Other social settings in which the Itsekiri language is deployed are in prescribed sociolinguistic norms such as linguistic etiquette, idiomatic expressions as well as semiotic expressions.

To illustrate linguistic norms in the Itsekiri-speaking community, Micah, a respondent shares examples of situations where he was not expected to use idiomatic expressions.

“If I hear any Itsekiri idiom from you now, I will go back home and ask my father. What is the meaning of this word in Itsekiri? He will tell me he will advise me where to speak that one and where not to speak it; because an idiom has a place where you speak and where you are not to speak it. An idiom is deep Itsekiri. U wo ma mo gbo Itsekiri, o ma w a ni ubo wé, wé wa ma uhrun to fo. [Though, you may understand and speak Itsekiri, you may not understand an Itsekiri idiom when it is used.] (Micah, Vol. 2 appendix 1, interview No.10).

Micah highlights the importance of idiomatic expressions in the Itsekiri language, which he refers to as deep Itsekiri and may not be easily comprehensible. According to him, whenever he hears an idiomatic expression, he asks his father who then explains what it means. His father will then advise him where to use such an expression.

Similarly, the extract below is an example of idiomatic expressions used by a respondent during the interview.

“Arira wi étin ègere” (Abner, Vol. 2, appendix, interview No. 11).

[Walls have ears]

In line with Micah’s remarks, Abner, a furniture maker affirms the importance of the Itsekiri language using idiomatic expressions, which according to him is a common linguistic practice of the Itsekiri speakers when they want to be discreet or circumspect. This is in maintenance of intimacy, privacy, and secrecy.

In the same vein, in a family home, where I observed, friends who were visiting were all discussing in a light mood and the main language of conversation was English. However, I noticed the host would speak intermittently in Itsekiri to her husband. When I asked her the reason she spoke in Itsekiri, she said it was to maintain some secrecy with her spouse. According to her, she did not want other people present to share in the information she was passing to her husband. This linguistic behaviour resonates with Abner’s affirmation on the idea of secrecy, a value that the Itsekiri language conveys, even though this may not be peculiar to the Itsekiri- speaking people only.

In addition, the extract below illustrates the use of semiotic expression in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

“Ejoji ma wa whe ne mi gin gbi oton re do ra me yi wa. mummy what did you say? Are you talking to me? Why are you making your eye for me?” (Micah, Vol.

2, appendix, interview No.10).

[When a visitor comes to your home you cannot tell your child to go get you something. Mummy what did you say? Are you talking to me? Why are you batting your eyes at me?]

In line with the maintenance of secrecy, Micah emphasises that parents may not necessarily convey a message verbally to children in the Itsekiri language. Rather, certain dynamic semiotic resources and modes such eye batting, looking straight in the eye of a child, nodding and moving the head side-ways sometimes serve as semiotic usage between parents and children. These gestures employed when a parent disapproves of the child's behaviour in certain circumstances especially in public contexts are cultural and linguistic resources and values used to convey non-verbal messages in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Furthermore, one of the values of the Itsekiri ethnic group in which the Itsekiri language is equally deployed is in prescribed norms. Certain linguistic expressions considered improper are avoided so as not to offend people's sensibilities. The extract below sheds light on this idea.

“When a man wants to use the restroom; or a typical Itsekiri woman may want to use the restroom, she needs to say mofe gba sen, I would like to use the toilet. They no longer say that. The best she would say, mofe ra tor I want to use the toilet. Otherwise, they will rather speak English. A typical Itsekiri man, who wants to use the restroom, will say mofe ra kpute I would like to use the toilet. But, these days, they will say mofe ra tor I want to use the toilet. So they are leaving the difficult one. They are going to the mild one. Mofe tor looks raw and more literary. Mofe kpute is for you to be calm so everybody understands. It is more polite. In Itsekiri, you say, mofe tso bi te I would like to use the restroom. It is more familiar and informal. But the raw one is mo f era tsu, I want to use the restroom, which is the language used in Warri these days by young people, but our fathers tried to talk in a manner that is not offensive. They want to be polite” (Adam, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.2).

[When a man wants to use the restroom, or a typical Itsekiri woman wants to use the rest room, she needs to say, I would like to use the toilet. They no longer say that. The best she would say, I want to use the toilet. Otherwise, they will rather speak English. A typical Itsekiri man, who wants to use the restroom, will say I would like to use the toilet. Nevertheless, these days, they will say I want to use the toilet. Therefore, they are leaving the difficult one. They are going to the mild one. I want to use the toilet looks raw and more literary. I would like to use the bathroom is for you to be calm, so everybody understands. It is more polite. In Itsekiri, you say, I want to use the rest room. It is

more familiar and informal. However, the raw one is I want to go to the toilet, which is the expression young people use in Warri these days, but our fathers tried to talk in a manner that is not offensive. They want to be polite.]

In the comment above, Adam illustrates elements of linguistic etiquette and norms in the Itsekiri ethnic group. He cites various linguistic nuances to express the desire to use the restroom, while identifying differences in language use according to gender. He points out that people are polite in the use of certain expressions in the Itsekiri language. According to him, choosing the right and appropriate language to express one's desire to use the restroom, especially in the presence of others, is an important aspect of cultural socialization. He argues that this is to avoid being offensive to the sensitivity of others.

Furthermore, the Itsekiri language is significantly used in many other diverse contexts elucidated below:

5.7 Use of Itsekiri in diverse contexts

Besides its use as a marker of identity and in cultural heritage settings, respondents affirmed the use of Itsekiri language in diverse contexts such as, communicating in family meetings and reunions, religious activities in church, in traditional funeral ceremonies, as well as in community or group leadership.

The extract below supports communication within the family.

“In most cases, it is in family meetings that we speak Itsekiri. Because it is Itsekiri that has dropped. Brothers communicate in pidgin or in English. It is very rare you see two Itsekiri brothers and sisters speak Itsekiri. But, in meetings, most meetings, like the one you witnessed the other day in the palace, people are supposed to communicate in Itsekiri. They usually communicate in Itsekiri”. (Elijah, Vol. 2, appendix, interview No.4).

While asserting that siblings mainly communicate with one another in NPE or Englishy informally, Elijah observes that Itsekiri is used in family meetings as well as in community gatherings. Perhaps, this is to maintain sociocultural ties of bonding and oneness and intimacy as a respondent argued earlier.

Furthermore, an equally important aspect of use of the Itsekiri language lies in religious activities. This is examined in relation to Christianity and African traditional religion (ATR), illustrated in church activities and Itsekiri traditional funeral ceremonies respectively. These two religions traditions are foregrounded in the Itsekiri community.

Although, it has been established in this thesis that English is the main language of communication in churches. However, in this section, some respondents highlight the use of the Itsekiri language, though in a small measure in some churches as illustrated in the extract below:

“What I am saying now is not interpreting in the church. Sunday school is in sections. We have Itsekiri section. I pray more in English, but I still pray in Itsekiri language because my branch or Parish is in an Itsekiri location. For the benefit of their assimilation of the prayer that we pray, I prefer to pray in Itsekiri language. It helps them; it hits their faith, their belief. So, I believe God will easily answer in the interest of the aged one” (Abel, Vol 2, appendix 1, interview No. 9).

Abel, a civil servant in one of the government ministries and a pastor in a church in the city of Warri, maintains that he preaches and prays in the Itsekiri language in his church in one of the villages, especially in the interest of the aged. According to him, Itsekiri is used to teach the old people biblical doctrines during Sunday school¹⁰.-

In addition, the comment below corroborates Abel’s argument above.

“When Baba the late Atuwatse was alive, in Four Square church, they had Itsekiri session; he made sure; and up till now, there is still Itsekiri session. A teacher translates in Itsekiri as the sermon is going on. They have Itsekiri bible. On

¹⁰ A bible study group, where biblical doctrines are taught on Sundays before the main church programme begins in earnest. This sometimes lasts for about an hour.

weekends when I'm at home, I carry my bible and read with my mum and read the portion in Itsekiri for her to understand" (Sarah. Vol. 2, Appendix, interview No.3).

It is equally instructive that Sarah, a schoolteacher in Warri, maintains that during his lifetime, a onetime monarch Atuwatse 11, "Olu of Warri", encouraged the use of the Itsekiri language in his church. In the context chapter, (see page 88 in chapter 2). I mentioned that the Itsekiri ethnic group practices a monarchical system of government recognised by the Federal Government of Nigeria. "Olu" is the traditional title of the king of the Itsekiri ethnic group in Warri Kingdom in Nigeria. The king is known as Olu of Warri, a traditional rulership that dates back to the sixteenth century.

Sarah affirms that, the late king encouraged the use of the Itsekiri language in conducting church services in his palace. The palace is an epitome of the Itsekiri culture and tradition, therefore a place where the language is entrenched. According to her, there are two church sessions. The first session is conducted in Itsekiri language only, while the second is conducted in English with interpretation in Itsekiri in the interest of the aged who may not be able to attend the first session. However, the fact that a few churches use Itsekiri to conduct services may not necessarily boost the status of the Itsekiri language, as this is insignificant compared to the number of churches in which English is predominantly used in the community.

Conversely, the data suggest Itsekiri is mainly used in conducting ATR activities, especially when they concern traditional burial ceremonies as the data below suggests. Individuals who adhere to certain deities and gods, (see page 87 in chapter 2) worship them. Those who believe in deities perform traditional religious rites during traditional funeral ceremonies as attested by the respondent below:

"As Itsekiri normally do, whether you are a Christian, Itsekiris still believe in that culture. If you have not done traditional burial, you have not done burial. They still believe that until tomorrow. That is why in the same burial ceremony, some are doing Christian burial this way, some are doing native burial that way. Maybe he has two or three children, some children will say no, we must do native, because

the family on their own, it is only native they believe in. They do not believe in Christian burial. Therefore, if you do not do that native, you have not done burial. This is the Itsekiri belief. If you do not shoot a gun seven times, they will say the burial has not been done.” (Micah, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.10).

An important feature in the Itsekiri ethnic group is the traditional funeral ceremony, which according to Micah is enshrined in their culture, and they hold on to steadfastly as illustrated in his statement above “they still believe that until tomorrow”. He remarks that the type of funeral ceremony conducted when a person dies is determined by the religious belief of the deceased when he was alive. Micah argues that, even if the deceased was a Christian, members of his extended family will insist on conducting a traditional funeral ceremony. They will celebrate the funeral ceremony by observing all traditional burial rites and pouring libation¹¹, to worship their ancestors, in accordance with the people’s traditional belief system, in addition to ensuring that the seven mandatory gunshots¹² are observed. Those who perform or conduct burial rites speak the Itsekiri language while carrying out these activities.

Above all, the type of ceremony will determine what language is used. This may depend on the religious beliefs of the deceased. For example, I witnessed three funeral ceremonies on different occasions during my observation sessions. Two of the ceremonies were conducted in churches, which meant the deceased were Christians; therefore, they were buried according to Christian burial rites. English was the language used in conducting the funeral services. At the reception, people spoke Standard English, NPE and Itsekiri depending on the group of friends with whom they interacted.

In the third ceremony, traditional burial rites were performed because the deceased was not a Christian. Traditional songs were rendered in the Itsekiri language, while heritage dances were

¹¹ An African traditional religious practice demonstrated in pouring alcoholic drinks such as schnaps, whisky or ogogoro, locally produced in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, on the floor during a traditional ceremony to pay homage to the ancestors.

¹² The act of shooting a gun seven times is a traditional obligation that must be observed in a traditional funeral ceremony in the Itsekiri ethnic group.

performed according to the Itsekiri culture (see page 85 in chapter 2). Individuals who participated in the cultural performances were mainly old people who spoke in the Itsekiri language. The young people present expressed themselves in NPE and English.

At the funeral reception, languages were mixed in order for the deceased's children's friends and well-wishers, who were from different ethnic groups to participate in the interaction. NPE though was largely used for ease of communication. Remarks in the interviews and observation sessions, suggest that, for the purpose of inclusiveness, the languages used during religious activities are English, Itsekiri and NPE.

Furthermore, an aspect of use of the Itsekiri language that emerged from the collected data is what may be referred to as community language policy (CLP). I am using the term CLP, a phenomenon that appears common in the community to mean rules and regulations guiding an obligation to use a community's heritage language in a public function exclusive to the community, or in a gathering exclusive to an ethnic group. The obligation to use the Itsekiri language compulsorily in a gathering exclusive to the ethnic group may be referred to as CLP -a prospective domain for future research in the context of the Itsekiri ethnic group.

The following extract illustrates this point.

“To make me understand Itsekiri the most I have a social Itsekiri club. We do not speak English. If you are a chairperson of a community, you cannot speak English. Not all the elderly men will understand what you are saying. You must therefore learn Itsekiri. If you cannot speak, you cannot talk. The reason why it is important to me as I am talking now, it is because I am a community leader. Itsekiri is useful for me to communicate with people in the community.” (Micah, Vol. 2, appendix, interview No. 10)

Micah points out that heads of communities, clans and community leaders are required to speak Itsekiri when addressing members in gatherings. He asserts that as a community head, he is not expected to speak in English when addressing members of his community. According to him, one of the important aspects in the use of the Itsekiri language is in social inclusion and recognition of

cultural capital. Although, in his early forties, Micah claims he is a community leader with importance responsibilities in his community. He states in the extracts below that he is sometimes invited to speak on important matters concerning the Itsekiri ethnic group.

“As small as I am, when this Olu died, there was a gathering in the palace, so many people called me, my Uncle who teach me Itsekiri, called me, I heard Baba gin a no bi ro me, a fe kpi ta bat é wa mi Olu je. [Baba said, they are looking for me, they want to discuss the installation of the next Olu]. [but ti de Owami kpita gbe mi. [my father told me our history and I know it] ; Mo ka kpi ta [I know our history and I tell it] They called me to become secretary of that group. I enjoy it too. I enjoy the usefulness of the language. So It is useful. That is the usefulness of the language”. (Micah, Vol.2, appendix 1, interview No.10).

During the interview, Micah alluded to the fact that due to his knowledge of the Itsekiri language, elders do not only recognise him, but they also invite him to contribute to important matters related to the Itsekiri-speaking community. According to him, he was invited to join a group constituted to choose the Olu of Warri after the demise of the former Olu of which he was secretary. This is perhaps as a result of his in-depth knowledge of the language and culture.

In the same vein, heads of Itsekiri social and cultural groups are equally expected to use the Itsekiri language in conducting their activities. An example of community or group language policy is demonstrated among Itsekiri undergraduate students in Universities in Nigeria. Though this is within a small group at a micro level, nonetheless, the ability to speak Itsekiri is an essential criterion to accede to positions of leadership in the Itsekiri students' association.

The following extract illustrates this point.

“I learnt more of Itsekiri when I went to the University. I was hearing Itsekiri but I was not speaking it. But when I went to the University; of course, (kpa ra kpo na)

[members of the same ethnic group], so I became the Vice President of Nigeria Association of Itsekiri Students, University of Benin chapter (NAIS). Now how do you address your people in the meeting? Olaga ewa na, [the president is not present at the meeting], so you cannot hold meeting, I should be able to say something, anchor before (Olaga), [the president] comes. So, I started struggling it. Then days, I do not know of now; we spoke Itsekiri in our NAIS meetings. Those that cannot speak Itsekiri sat close to those that can hear and speak” (Abigail, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.6).

Abigail, a public servant, and a one-time vice president of National Association of Itsekiri Students, henceforth (NAIS) asserts that as an Itsekiri student, if you must occupy a leadership position in the association, one of the key requirements is the ability to speak the Itsekiri language. NAIS is a body that assembles students of the Itsekiri ethnic group in Universities in Nigeria. According to Abigail, the students are conscious of the fact that most young people from the ethnic group cannot speak Itsekiri, therefore, they made ability to speak Itsekiri mandatory and a criterion to contest for leadership position in their association. She remarks that she endeavoured to speak Itsekiri especially when she became the Vice president of the Association. Before then, she could understand Itsekiri but could not speak it. To emphasise the obligation of speaking the Itsekiri language as a prerequisite to contesting for a position of leadership in NAIS, Abigail cites another example in the extract below:

“Of late, one of them went to Ozoro Polytechnic and of course he went to join NAIS too and was vying for a position. He wanted to become the president of NAIS, and they told him you cannot speak Itsekiri, so you cannot lead us, you cannot be our President. So when he went for his one year Industrial training, (IT), he decided to go and stay in Koko, to learn the language. Today he can speak very well” (Abigail, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.6).

To buttress her argument above, Abigail further affirms that her son was not allowed to contest for the post of president of NAIS because he could not speak the Itsekiri language. According to her,

the son had to move and live in an Itsekiri-speaking town, Koko, with the aim of learning the language.

To corroborate this point, in a context of participant observation, I attended a face-to-face public discussion forum where I equally observed language use in the Itsekiri-speaking community. The objective of the forum referred to by the organisers as a “multi-dimensional chat” was to discuss socio economic and political issues plaguing the Itsekiri ethnic group. In the forum, it was mandatory to speak Itsekiri if one wished to address the audience.

The group in which well over 60 persons were present consisted of eminent and renowned Itsekiri men and women. A fundamental rule on that occasion was the obligation to speak Itsekiri. Most people present had to introduce themselves in Itsekiri nonetheless; interactions were in English and in Itsekiri. In essence, a key focus of the discussion was the declining use of the Itsekiri language. Therefore, the convener of the meeting, a former member of the Nigeria National Assembly from the Itsekiri ethnic group, had to address the audience in Itsekiri, even though he had prepared and written his speech in English he admitted. **(See detail on Appendix 2).**

Similarly, I equally attended a public discussion on the theme “Mother language Day” at the Olu of Warri’s palace during the commemoration of the mother language day February 21st, 2018, a day set aside by UNESCO to commemorate mother tongue. Itsekiris from all walks of life were invited to the occasion in addition to primary and secondary school pupils from the Itsekiri ethnic group. An Itsekiri speaking professor from one of the Nigerian universities delivered his speech in Itsekiri even though he admitted he had written his speech in English. During this observation session, I noticed that the main language of discussion was the Itsekiri language. **(See detail in Appendix 2).**

Although the Itsekiri language may not carry a large functional load to reinforce its vitality and status, there may be some form of community language policy guiding associations and communities. Evident in the discourses of respondents is the fact that proficiency in Itsekiri is required to be able to lead any group in the community, which further emphasises the importance of the Itsekiri language.

Currently, Itsekiri remains the language of communication mainly spoken by the older generation. During my observation in churches, it was evident that elders and the aged still communicate daily in the language especially in the rural areas. People who are 60 and above still speak the Itsekiri language in the city of Warri. However, they frequently translanguaged in English and NPE. In addition, children and young people are encouraged to express the cultural norm of greeting elders in the Itsekiri language. I witnessed situations in which parents encouraged their children to greet older people in the Itsekiri language. Besides simple norms of greeting, most children and young people are unable to speak the Itsekiri language as maintained by most respondents.

5.8 Summary of chapter 5

This chapter centers on the findings of my investigation and attempts to address the questions of language shift, language endangerment and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri. It highlights ecological and socio-psychological factors that may be considered responsible for language shift and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language as well as domain of use of the Itsekiri language.

The ecological components are in relation to elements that are linguistic, socio political, socioeconomic, and social cultural in nature. Inter-ethnic crises and linguistic conflict, demographic and linguistic transformations in the Itsekiri speaking community equally falls into this category. The role of institutions such as schools in view of the need to acquire education, an element that is very crucial to the way of life of the Itsekiri people as well as religious practices in the community were equally examined in this section.

While dwelling on the ecological factors, language dominance, linguistic hegemony as a result of language contact and multilingualism in the meso/macro contexts were highlighted. The linguistic aspect was elaborated extensively in relation to language use influenced by the overarching presence of the English language and NPE in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Sociopolitical factors were examined based on what appears to be lack of political will demonstrated in the attitudes politicians who appear reluctant to implement educational policies concerning heritage languages. Such attitudes may have adversely affected the teaching and learning of the Itsekiri language in schools. Other elements include linguistic conflict and

interethnic crisis, which may have led to the reluctance of the Itsekiri people to speak their language for security reasons.

Socioeconomic findings were considered in relation to the trade language in the community. English and NPE, two vehicular languages and lingua Franca in Nigeria and in the Itsekiri-speaking community are the main languages with which people do business. Multilingual interactions in Warri, the principal commercial city of the Itsekiri-speaking community with different ethnic groups and linguistic heterogeneity due to diverse languages, appear to have equally brought about language shift in the community.

In addition, the Itsekiri-speaking community is host to multinational oil corporations that provide jobs and encourage small business enterprises. Economic activities in the community attract migrants from different parts of the country, seeking greener pastures. These migrants come with their languages, cohabit, interact, and intermarry with the Itsekiri-speaking people. Consequently, the phenomenon of linguistic diversity and language contact has gradually transformed the demography and linguistic landscape of the community. In a bid to find a means of communication, people had to resort to speaking NPE and Standard English – two languages common to all which serve as a means of communication in Nigeria.

Additionally, findings that are culture related dwell mainly on the type of relationship established due to linguistic interaction and cohabitation. Inter-ethnic marriages have led to families seeking a common language of communication, causing people to cease speaking their heritage languages.

Furthermore, a key component in the section on socio-psychological factors that encompasses all other elements is the perception of the Itsekiri language. The Itsekiri people's perception of their language is highly connected with their linguistic behavior and attitude. Other factors such as social standing and prestige, linguistic hierarchy, and family language policies, practices, and transmission in the Itsekiri-speaking community were also identified as contributory to language shift and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language.

The Itsekiri people seem to believe their language is of little socio-economic and political importance, not essentially valuable for upward social mobility, neither does it serve essential purposes such as fulfilling their political needs or aspirations. Some Itsekiri people consider the language uneconomically viable in terms of securing a job and doing business. As a result, they

have switched to the English language, perceived as a prerequisite to academic success and an important asset to attain professional goals.

Additionally, speakers of the Itsekiri language suggest their language is of low status and vitality in terms of its functional load and domain of use. Considering their language ineligible for self-development and economic growth, the Itsekiri speakers may have resorted to using the English language, considered more viable and presumed to accelerate growth and development, thereby ceasing to speak their language.

Furthermore, a characteristic common to the Itsekiri people is to hierarchize languages, illustrated in the phenomenon of social and linguistic hierarchy in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Members of the Itsekiri ethnic group appear to consciously choose the language they prefer to use in various domains such as education, business, and public administration in relation to their social status. Conscious of their status and social standing, they increasingly speak English, the predominant and most important language in the macro-Nigerian society. As far as speakers of the Itsekiri language are concerned, the ability to speak English is not only prestigious; it is also an indication of being cultivated, educated, and status symbol.

The phenomenon of family language policies, practices and transmission, informed by the choice of languages parents prefer to use in their homes and transmit to their children was also elucidated. Data collected in this study provide evidence of Itsekiri families making a conscious decision to speak mainly English with their children in their homes. This may have had a far-reaching consequence on the use and vitality of the Itsekiri language.

Other findings of my investigation focus on the domain of use of the Itsekiri language. As a marker of identity, a symbol of cultural unity and social cohesion, the Itsekiri language provides a sense of belonging, pride, affinity, and ethnic consciousness to the users. Itsekiri is the language of intimacy, which serves to maintain some secrecy. It is equally important in the expression of cultural heritage and patrimony such as inter and intra-ethnic marriage ceremonies, child naming ceremonies, as well as language mediation processes, an essential cultural and social practice in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Itsekiri is used during family meetings and social gatherings, essentially in religious activities such as Christianity and African tradition religion, which include church activities, deity worship and traditional burial ceremonies respectively.

In addition, the Itsekiri language serves as a means of expressing linguistic etiquette and norms that are traditional and customary to the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group. Social linguistic norms of politeness in addressing elders as well as expressing certain natural and inevitable needs are visible in the Itsekiri language. The use of inoffensive lexical items that portray sensitivity and respect for individuals are present in the Itsekiri language. Evident Itsekiri related semiotic communicative elements used in non-verbal communications are common linguistic practices in the community.

Finally, an element of community or group language policy demonstrated in the obligation to use and speak the Itsekiri language in Itsekiri-centred groups was brought to the fore. Of essence, the Itsekiri language is significantly deployed in group and community leadership. The ability to speak Itsekiri is a vital requirement to head a clan, in addition to small groups such as, student's associations, local associations and clubs with ethnic membership.

These findings are thematically analysed and discussed in detail in chapter 6 in line with the sociolinguistic related notions and concepts that underpin this doctoral research.

Chapter 6 Discussion and interpretations of the research findings

This chapter is in two parts. The first part divided into two sections presents the discussion and interpretation of the findings of the investigation in relation to the research questions that guide the study. The second focuses on the important domains of use of the Itsekiri language.

While highlighting significance of the findings in relation to sociolinguistic notions and concepts elucidated in the literature review, it attempts to provide detailed explanations regarding evidence of language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community as well as non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language. These evidences derived from collected data are examined in the following two sections viewed from ecological and socio-psychological perspectives.

The section on ecological perspectives is sub-divided into various aspects such as linguistic dominance, which presents language contact in the Itsekiri-speaking community, linguistic and language hegemony, English and NPE as lingua Franca, as well as multilingualism and translanguaging. Socio-political aspects deal with elements such as inter-ethnic crises and linguistic conflict, as well as linguistic discrimination. Socio-economic aspects are viewed in relation to the quest for economic advancement, while socio-cultural aspects centre on mixed or inter-ethnic marriage. Other elements in the findings are demographic and linguistic transformation, and urbanisation, attrition of the Itsekiri language, location of schools and non-teaching of the Itsekiri language in formal education as well as the role of religion.

The socio-psychological findings centre on elements such as Itsekiri speakers' perceptions of the Itsekiri language, family language policy, practices and transmission of the Itsekiri language in the home, social standing and prestige, linguistic hierarchy and social status.

The domains of use of the Itsekiri language are related to group identity within the Itsekiri ethnic group, cultural heritage and patrimony, traditional marriage ceremony, language brokering and mediation in the Itsekiri-speaking community, linguistic etiquette and norms in the Itsekiri community as well as the use of Itsekiri in diverse contexts.

The first element examined in the ecological perspective is linguistic dominance.

6.1The ecological perspective-

6.1.1Linguistic dominance

Examined under linguistic dominance are the phenomena of language contact and language hegemony in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

6.1.1.1. Language contact

An important element in the aspect of linguistic dominance is language contact. The data collected reveal that the Itsekiri language is in contact with many languages such as Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko, English language and NPE to mention but a few in the community. The Itsekiri-speaking people cohabit and interact with people from diverse ethnic groups. The only languages common to all are English and NPE. Wendel and Heinrich (2012) are of the view that contact between languages could lead to disruption of language ecologies of less powerful communities through language shift and attrition. Contact-induced phenomenon due to linguistic diversity is not solely responsible for massive language shift and seemingly negative attitudes towards Itsekiri; the dominant nature of English also seems to pose a threat to the language thereby leading to a gradual decline of the language.

English being the dominant and powerful language in the community appears to attract members of the Itsekiri ethnic group, who switch from speaking their own language to speaking English. All 20 interview participants are of the view that it is convenient to speak in either English or NPE for easy understanding of one another in a conversation. Consequently, language shift occurs in favour of the powerful and/or dominant language, leading to language hegemony. It may be implied that when languages of unequal power, status and prestige come into contact, the less dominant, powerless, and less prestigious language is threatened and endangered.

6.1.1.2. Language hegemony

Where languages are in contact, the chances that the most prevalent and most spoken language dominates could be high. The linguistic situation in the Itsekiri-speaking community exemplified in the dominance of the English language, which renders the Itsekiri language less attractive to its users, could be described as hegemonic. The English language was introduced and imposed in Nigeria by the British administration during the colonial era. The subsequent institutional support English enjoyed and is currently enjoying from the Nigerian government lends credence to its dominance in the Nigerian linguistic landscape. Studies have shown that government language policies have a great impact on the linguistic landscape of a country. The dominant presence of the English language and its impact on the linguistic situation in the Itsekiri community could be as a result of encouraging use English in education and in other important domains.

The overarching influence of the English language in Nigeria in general and in the Itsekiri-speaking community in particular has tremendous bearing on the decision and choice of languages employed in various contexts, such as schools, public administration, media, etc., and therefore constitutes a determinant factor in the phenomenon of language shift in the community.

Identifying the impact of the English language on indigenous languages during the neocolonial era, Coupland (2010) remarks that the language of colonial administration compounded the linguistic situation of communities in the sense that minority language speakers found themselves learning this “new language”. They remain oblivious of the consequence of not speaking their home language and not transferring it to their children.

The Itsekiri-speaking community presented in this doctoral research, as speakers of heritage minority languages tends to give priority to the English language and less attention to their own language in the guise of finding a common means of communication in the face of a myriad of languages. Tollefson (1991) remarks that the policy of requiring everyone to learn a single dominant language is widely seen as a common-sense solution to the communication problem of multilingual societies. This may be true of the macro-Nigerian society and invariably the Itsekiri-speaking community, nonetheless, the repercussion of the presence of a dominant language seems enormous on the heritage language that tends towards linguistic decline.

In addition, the influence of English over heritage or lesser-used languages in Nigeria may be explained from the standpoint of globalisation in which the former is being accorded the status of

a global language worldwide. According to the data collected, users of smaller languages such as the Itsekiri language are obliged to accept English, a widely acclaimed language across the world. Consequently, the hegemonic status of English in relation to heritage languages exemplifies power dynamics in languages and amplifies language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Shohamy & Putz (2010), Mesthrie (2000), Silverstein (1996), Bourdieu (1991) have critically examined power dynamics in languages and its implications. The dominance of English in Nigeria can equally be viewed from the standpoint of power and legitimacy as highlighted by Mesthrie et al (2000).

In Nigeria, English is empowered through its entrenchment in core institutions such as universities, the Nigerian public services, media, the National Assembly etc. The Nigerian linguistic ideology promotes and values various aspects of linguistic capital defined as the accumulation of a person's linguistic skills that predetermine his position in society (Bourdieu 1986). The use of English in the public domain, for example, in education, the judiciary, the National Assembly in the Nigerian context, is an illustration of acquisition of linguistic capital, which is a demonstration of language hegemony that the English language exemplifies in Nigeria and in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Added to this, is the quest to attain political power and high economic status using the English language. The data collected reveal members of the Itsekiri ethnic group, like any other group in Nigeria, seek political and economic power by acquiring English, since this seems largely the major route to upward mobility, greater heights and becoming relevant in the mainstream in Nigerian society. Ndhlovu & Siziba, (2018) argue that the English language assumed the hegemonic status of language of access to political power and social and economic opportunities in southern Africa from the early years when it was introduced by the first waves of British immigrants. The forces that therefore have a strong impact on the linguistic situation in the Itsekiri community are linked to not only the system of education, but also to political power, socio economic opportunities (Ndhlovu & Siziba 2018), government policies and global processes such as media, international relations as well as technology.

According to Simon et al. (2022), English is the most widely spoken language in the world. It has the widest coverage in terms of geographical spread in relation to the number of countries in which it is spoken, including its use in technology, international relations and business. Evident in the

data is that members of the Itsekiri-speaking community are increasingly in the pursuit and acquisition of English, which they believe could enhance social political and economic advancement. All 20 respondents reiterated the importance of inter-ethnic and international communications, which the English language provides. Awoniyi (2013) refers to English as an exoglossic language that serves national and international communicative needs in the Nigerian State. He further emphasises the influential role and hegemonic status of English as compared to non-exoglossic, indigenous languages such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo in the Nigerian context and the impact of the former in the lives of Nigerians. Interviewees argued that in view of the diverse ethnolinguistic situation in the Itsekiri-speaking community, people have to find a common means of communication. The consensus is that people have to accept the English language, which plays the role of a lingua franca to all.

6.1.1.3. Standard English and NPE as lingua Franca in the Itsekiri-speaking community

Language contact in the face of linguistic diversity in the Itsekiri-speaking community brought about two dominant languages: Standard English mentioned above and NPE, which serve as vehicular languages in the macro and meso contexts of this doctoral study and play overarching roles as lingua Franca in the community beside the many languages indigenous to Warri.

At the inception of colonial administration in Nigeria by the British (**see chapter 2, page 32**), English language was introduced and compulsorily learnt and used in formal education, whereas heritage languages were hardly taught and learnt, and therefore used sparingly in educational pursuits. Copeland (2010) remarks that the introduction of the English language – the language of colonial administration, and subsequent introduction of same in formal education in former British colonies, with little or no encouragement of the teaching of local or domestic languages, compounded the linguistic situation of communities or home language speakers.

Pulaczekwska (2012) equally remarks that British colonial expansion in the 19th century and the military, political and economic expansion of the United States in the last century caused some local languages in the post-colonial regions to lose their importance in favour of English. This is because the latter is associated with education, power, business and professionalism. This situation

is equally evident in the Itsekiri-speaking community according to the data gathered during field investigation.

Data collected in this doctoral study reveal evidence of linguistic power dynamics in relation to the influence of the macro-Nigerian society over the meso Itsekiri -speaking context as far as the linguistic situation of Nigeria is concerned. In other words, the multilingual macro society is replicated in the multilingual meso communities. The presence of diverse languages engenders linguistic interactions mainly in English and NPE. This phenomenon attested to by all interview participants and evident in all contexts of my observation invariably resulted in a shift in language use by heritage language speakers, including the Itsekiri-speaking people.

6.1.1.4. Multilingualism and translanguaging

Two linguistic phenomena evident in the community of reference in this study are multilingualism and translanguaging. Communicative practices and multilingual interactions in Warri, a city with diverse ethnic groups and linguistic heterogeneity, as a result of different languages in contact situations result in multilingual homes and families that invariably impede inter-generational transmission of the Itsekiri language.

According to data in this study, individual and societal multilingualism are commonplace in the Itsekiri-speaking community. The community is characterized by a myriad of languages, which makes individuals either bilingual in two languages- English and one heritage language or trilingual in one heritage language, English and NPE. This linguistic situation has engendered translanguaging in which people mix all kinds of languages from their multilingual repertoire in daily interactions. A characteristic common amongst the Itsekiris is the tendency to move from one language to another in speech discourse. Evident in the data set are examples of individuals mixing two or more languages in their discourse during the interview sessions. The Itsekiri-speaking people use and adapt languages flexibly in various contexts and domains. For example, I observed translanguaging practices in schools, marketplaces, in public transport, restaurants, marriage and child-naming ceremonies, where people mixed languages in their linguistic repertoire freely. Garcia and Sylvan (2011) use the metaphor of an all-terrain vehicle that adjusts and adapts to different types of terrain to describe how individuals flexibly adapt linguistic

resources for different communicative contexts. One would have thought that such communicative practices would boost and encourage the speaking of the Itsekiri language.

Although the Itsekiri-speaking people know multiple languages, they seem to give preference to English and NPE as confirmed in the interview and observation data. In other words, Itsekiri is still present in the community and is still being used through translanguaging, however minimally, as its space is being reduced and encroached upon by English and NPE.

Translanguaging seems to be promoting the decline of the Itsekiri language, due to the evident switch to either English and/or NPE depending on the educational status of the speaker. Although Itsekiri still survives in this translanguaging space to some degree, its use is significantly reduced; therefore, one may pose a question, is translanguaging in this context announcing the decline of the Itsekiri language rather than its continuous use?

During participant observation sessions, I noticed that, speakers of the Itsekiri language seem satisfied with speaking English or NPE in conversational discourse, while adding some Itsekiri words or making short sentences in Itsekiri and using it sparingly. Can it be inferred that individual multilingualism in the face of linguistic diversity is one of the remote and subtle factors responsible for language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community, while translanguaging could strengthen maintenance of the Itsekiri language if developed? Since the Itsekiri-speaking people translanguage by mixing all the languages in their repertoire, of which Itsekiri is one of the languages, can it be imagined that, they may transmit it to their children by using it as home language in their homes, if translanguaging is developed and encouraged in schools?

Data collected reveal that speakers of the Itsekiri language are ceasing to speak their heritage language and are swapping it for English, and NPE, and by implication endangering the Itsekiri language linguistically by not transmitting it to their children. Itsekiri is rather impoverished because of the use of English and NPE.

6.1.2 Ecological perspective- Socio-political aspects

Socio-political aspects consist of the following elements examined below

6.1.2.1 Inter-ethnic conflicts and crises

Findings point to inter-ethnic conflicts and crises are major socio-political factors contributing to language and the endangerment of the Itsekiri language. According to the data, ethnic rivalry, mutual suspicion and political misconceptions and mistrusts in the Itsekiri-speaking community have been a common phenomenon in recent years. An example of inter-ethnic conflict is that which took place from 1997 to 2003 between the Itsekiri-speaking people and other ethnic groups in Warri, Delta State of Nigeria. **(See page 214 in chapter 5).**

Ruth, one of the respondents argued that the crisis engendered reluctance to identify with the Itsekiri language for security reasons. She maintained that members of the Itsekiri ethnic group became afraid of identifying with the language therefore they no longer speak it. This has consequently led to a reduction in the number of people who speak Itsekiri. “What seems to be background to language conflict in Nigeria can be understood from the spate of conflicts amongst ethnic groups” (Igboanusi 2001). Igboanusi opines that language conflict in Nigeria can be understood in relation to the backdrop of numerous ethnic languages, all of which are in competition for supremacy and survival.

In addition to encouraging suspicion and hatred amongst people of different ethnic groups, Noah, an informant argues that the inter-ethnic crises resulted in ethnic regroupings, which led people to move to locations where members of the same linguistic ethnic groups were mostly concentrated. **(See Vol.2 appendix 1, interview No.12).** This meant relocation along ethnic lines. Before the inter-ethnic crises, people of various ethnic groups lived and cohabited in the same neighbourhood without recourse to ethnolinguistic considerations. However, after several repeated crises spanning several years, Itsekiri speakers in other neighbourhoods in the Warri metropolis were forced to relocate to Itsekiri settlements in the city of Warri, so they could live amongst people they could trust. This according to Noah was thought to be a positive development as it was expected that the phenomenon of ethnic regroupings would encourage the Itsekiri people to speak their language. However, the reverse was the case. The renaissance of the Itsekiris did not bear positive fruits, as

those who came from different areas did not speak Itsekiri exclusively. They spoke English and NPE due to contact with other ethnic groups in the neighborhood they lived before regrouping. In other words, the Itsekiri people who regrouped in their settlements continued speaking English and NPE, which they were speaking in the areas they lived previously. They were not speaking Itsekiri.

In addition, non-Itsekiri economic migrants who were attracted by the economic development in the Itsekiri-speaking community, due to the presence of Multinational Oil Companies, moved in to the Itsekiri settlements to do jobs that the Itsekiris would not do. The migrants who originally spoke different languages from the Itsekiri language had to speak the common and dominant language in the community with the Itsekiri people. Interaction of the Itsekiris with their new neighbours in English and NPE engendered linguistic changes in the Itsekiri-speaking community, which appears to have not only resulted in language shift, but also posed as a threat to the Itsekiri language, which was dissolved even more. These factors meant that Itsekiri was not the major language of the community.

6.1.3 Ecological perspective -socio economic factors

The quest for economic advancement and upward mobility have determined language use in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Austin & Sallabanks (2011) are of the view that language shift is frequently driven by socio-economic factors where speakers of lesser-used languages shift from the less economically viable language to a more viable one in terms of securing a job or doing business. They acknowledge socio-economic advancement as an important variable in the choice of languages people make in their linguistic ecology.

According to data collected, the major languages of doing formal business in Nigeria and in Warri, a business hub and the principal commercial city of the Itsekiri people are Standard English for the educated and NPE for the less educated. The presence of multinational oil corporations in the Itsekiri community is a magnet for job seekers and an attraction for people in search of greener pastures. Many people come to Warri from neighbouring villages to trade. Private and public businesses use Standard English as medium of communication in the workplace, while traders in

the market use NPE as a trade language. My data reveal that most people in the city of Warri use mainly NPE and Standard English to transact businesses. According to my observation, people hardly use their heritage language in business or as a trade language. It does appear that English is used for business with a view of upward social mobility and greater economic independence. According to my data, it is believed that English is critical to transforming people's socio-economic situations since it is a prerequisite to obtaining most jobs in Nigeria, whereas Itsekiri is not. By implication, English is critical to improving quality of life in the Itsekiri-speaking community. For example, in a linguistic interview conducted by Ayenbi (2013), in the city of Warri, a respondent argued English, Itsekiri cannot be used to write aptitude tests to secure employment or to qualify one in obtaining a job. The respondent's assertion may imply that it is pointless to transmit the Itsekiri language to children, as it is of no use to them in the longrun in the global socio-economic world. The Itsekiri language is deemed less useful in providing job opportunities and invariably socio-economic advancement to this extent.

These socio-economic considerations together with the linguistic practices in Warri appear not only to have contributed to language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community; it has equally contributed to truncating intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language.

6.1.4. Ecological perspective -sociocultural factors

A critical element that requires our attention in the context of language shift and endangerment in the Itsekiri community is sociocultural. In this aspect, a significant phenomenon in the community, which is mixed or interethnic marriage, is examined. We saw earlier that economic growth due to the presence of multinational corporations in the Itsekiri community is an attraction for people searching for greener pastures. According to the data, internal economic migration from rural areas to the urban cities is a recurrent phenomenon in Nigeria. Economic mobility has not only resulted in linguistic mobility, contact between people from different linguistic backgrounds has brought about linguistic cohabitation and mixed marriages.

The presence of diverse ethnic groups has naturally resulted in people falling in love and getting married to persons from ethnic groups other than theirs. One of the respondents, Micah claimed that his wife is from a different ethnic group therefore Itsekiri is not spoken in his home. Couples

from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds have had to find a common means of communication in their households. Evident in the data, for peaceful coexistence, couples who are from different linguistic groups, opted or choose to speak either Standard English or NPE, the language of communication in most families, depending on their educational background. For example, Micah admitted that he resorted to speaking English in his home to avoid misunderstanding with his wife. According to respondents, children born in mixed marriage situations do not speak Itsekiri. Their parents speak to them in the common lingua franca in the community, depending on their level of education and social milieu.

The result of either using Standard English or NPE only in homes seems to be monolingualism, (an emerging field of research in the Nigerian context that would require further studies), remarkable in the linguistic repertoire of children and young adults in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Children and young adults seem to be becoming monolinguals in English or NPE depending on their social milieu but not in their parents' heritage language. By implication, intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language is lacking. Fishman (1991) argued that, where there is no intergenerational transmission of a language, such a language is endangered. According to the data, it may therefore be inferred that Itsekiri is an endangered language.

Furthermore, during observation sessions in various contexts, such as wedding ceremonies, funeral ceremonies as well as churches, I noticed that the Itsekiri language was not used in communication amongst the people present. The languages commonly used were English and NPE.

Linguistic practices prevalent in socio cultural contexts in the Itsekiri-speaking community, in which English and NPE are mainly used are indications of language shift. Such a phenomenon illustrates a potential threat to the Itsekiri language as it is being abandoned by its speakers.

6.1.5 Ecological perspective- demographic and linguistic transformation and urbanisation in the Itsekiri-speaking community

The occurrence of demographic and linguistic transformation as well as urbanisation in the city of Warri and environs has engendered linguistic changes and practices that may have resulted in

language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Factors such as economic advancement and urbanisation may have contributed to this phenomenon.

As stated earlier, economic mobility resulted in the emergence of internal migrants into Warri, a host city to diverse linguistic groups. According to my data, people from contiguous, and adjoining neighbouring villages, as well as those from other regions of Nigeria, have been moving to Warri in search of means of livelihood. Adam, a respondent, remarked that the configuration of the city of Warri with its business prospects and infrastructure and social amenities, as well as the presence of multinational oil companies, has been an attraction to people from other parts of Nigeria.

With urbanisation, the need for social amenities induced the exodus of Itsekiris from their villages in the riverine areas in the coastal region of Nigeria to the urban city of Warri. The presence of infrastructure in the urban areas is undoubtedly an attraction for migrants. When people move from rural areas to cities, they tend to adapt to new situations including leaning and using the dominant language present in the environment for various purposes, especially, economic and social interactions, a phenomenon, which portends language shift. Grenoble (2017) observes that urbanisation is a veritable instrument that propels language shift in communities where a particular language is dominant.

As an important commercial city, people from different ethnic groups move into Warri daily to work. Beside linguistic groups indigenous to Warri, the influx of ethnic groups from other regions of Nigeria has resulted in increase in the population of Warri. Some of these internal migrants are members of ethnic groups non-indigenous to the Itsekiri-speaking community who speak different languages.

To maintain a social life with their neighbours, the Itsekiri people have not only accommodated them, they have had to look for a common means of communication with them. Consequently, the linguistic profile of the Itsekiri-speaking community has changed due to interaction between non-indigenes and indigenes, which subsequently transformed the demographic and linguistic landscape.

Added to that is the quest for education. In pursuit for better education, parents send their children from villages to the city of Warri to school. A respondent, Leah, attested to this in her discourse. (See Vol. 2. appendix interview No. 14). According to Leah, the presence of developed infrastructure such as schools in cities was a magnet for people in the rural areas. Rapid

industrialization in cities triggers rural urban migration. This respondent was born and bred in a village. The quest for education saw her moved to the city to school. Even though English is the medium of instruction in schools, she acquired NPE, according to her, in Warri, the city in which her school was located. This may be due to the fact that NPE is a common and vehicular language in the city of Warri.

Corroborating Adam's assertion above, it can be deduced from Leah's discourses, that some speakers of the Itsekiri language who lived in rural communities migrated to cities to seek better life. On arrival in the metropolis, they learnt and acquired the dominant language existing in their new environment and developed linguistic skills in NPE and Standard English. Consequently, in a bid to adapt to their new realities, they stopped speaking their heritage language and started speaking the new language they were in contact with in the city. The ultimate result was a shift from Itsekiri to English and NPE. Simon & Lewis (2013) recognize the need to acquire proficiency in the dominant languages of the urban centers as posing a new threat to the vitality of minority languages, as large numbers of people are moving from rural to urban areas. Tandefelt (1994) observes that members of a linguistic minority will show greater tendency to shift language in an urban setting than a rural one.

Furthermore, the increasing presence of internal migrants has not only altered the demography of Warri, it has also transformed linguistic practices. This phenomenon has not only rendered the city multilingual; it has equally transformed it into a veritable economic hub with evidence of interlingual communication; with little presence of the Itsekiri language in the mainstream in important domains like education and trade.

Creese (2016) echoing Vertovec (2007) describes the changing patterns and variables that have altered the composition, distribution, and status of immigrant communities in Britain and Europe. She used the term 'super diversity' to refer to the meshing and interweaving of diversities, in which not only ethnicity, but other variables intersect and influence the highly differential composition, social location and trajectories of various immigrant groups. In the same vein, the city of Warri and its environs have been experiencing super diversity resulting from mass movement of people from all over Nigeria, especially the North, due to religious violence and inter-ethnic conflicts.

Internal migration, which brought about language contacts and the quest for a common means of communication, has led to language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community and affected inter-generational transmission of the Itsekiri language. It is commonplace to hear diverse languages spoken on the streets of Warri, with NPE as the dominant language of nearly all commercial transactions. According to the data collected, urbanisation, demographic and linguistic transformation may have engendered attrition of the Itsekiri language.

6.1.6 Ecological perspective -attrition of the Itsekiri language

The above painted scenario has had a far-reaching implication for the Itsekiri language, to the extent that the language may be adjudged threatened and on the verge of declining. According to my data, the Itsekiri language was the language of trade between the European and the local traders on the seacoast of Nigeria during the colonial era (**See page 15**). However, change in the socioeconomic ecology (Mufwene 2002), as well as socio-political transformations in Nigeria, foregrounded by the discovery of oil in 1954, led to population growth resulting in an influx of people into the Itsekiri-speaking community. Subsequently, speakers of larger minority ethnic groups in contact with the Itsekiris outnumbered the Itsekiri-speaking people, who eventually became a minority.

The use of English in important domains such as administration, media, socioeconomic and political spheres made people switch from Itsekiri to speaking and using English extensively and Itsekiri was no longer required for business. My data reveal that most respondents use the English language in their places of work, for example Abel argued thus “when I get to my official place of work, the ministry of Agriculture, because it is a government setting,, I speak English”. (**See Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview 9**).

Moreover, with the presence of other language varieties in the environment with larger populations, Itsekiri was no longer attractive, and its vitality was no longer guaranteed as it lost to its peers that could guarantee surer economic survival (Mufwene, 2002). Consequently, contact with other languages led to the attrition of the Itsekiri language, with a noticeable downward trend in the use of the Itsekiri language. Erumi (2013) argues that the English language continues to exert a strong influence on the Itsekiri language both in influencing its development and in its widespread usage as a first language amongst the younger generation.

Furthermore, Micah, a respondent and businessperson, maintained that the non-development of Itsekiri grammar, lexical items and insufficient literary writings are equally affecting the language. In effect, the Itsekiri people have become reluctant to speak their language and there has been a gradual loss in the knowledge of the language especially amongst children and young people.

The absence of the Itsekiri language in education has not only affected acquisition of the language, it has also led to a decline in its usage. Added to that is the lack of motivation to learn and speak Itsekiri compared to English. Evident in the data collected, is the fact that, Itsekiri is no longer the dominant language in the Itsekiri-speaking community, since people are shifting to English and NPE. According to the data, the Itsekiri language is currently experiencing a decline, and by implication, suffering attrition due to insufficient /non-use. This accentuates the question of the status and vitality of the Itsekiri language examined below.

6.1.7 Ecological perspective -status and vitality of Itsekiri

A key element in this research is the status and vitality of the Itsekiri language, a major determinant in its use and transmission. Although no respondent remarked explicitly on the status and vitality of the Itsekiri language, therefore there is no specific extract to buttress this point, the entire data set delineates the status and vitality of the language.

The status and vitality of a language are key determinants of its use in important domains. Fishman, (1999) and Simons & Lewis (2013) have expressed the importance of these elements in relation to the phenomenon of language shift. One of the discoveries of this doctoral study is that the Itsekiri language is low in status due to its assigned role in Nigeria in general and in the Itsekiri-speaking community in particular. According to my data as far as language use is concerned, the Itsekiri language is limited to its locality with no extensive communicative domain and appears useful only in the cultural domain. It is not used in important domains such as education, administration, media, and public services. According to Elijah, one of the respondents, Itsekiri has not been used by everyone, including children, in the last 30 years. The language is not used in homes and mothers do not communicate in Itsekiri with their children, therefore, giving the criteria of language assessment proffered by Fishman (1991) in his graded international disruption scale (GID), Itsekiri seems unsafe. Fishman argues that a language is adjudged safe with vitality when it is used by all generations, adult, old and young. According to him, a safe language has an official status, and typically functions as the language of government, education and commerce.

Elijah's remark may imply that the Itsekiri language is not being used by all generations neither is it visible in all domains.

In addition, Itsekiri was not used at the various contexts in which I carried out observations: family home, birthday party, funeral reception party, wedding ceremony, to mention but a few (**see table on contexts of observation on page 196**). In these contexts, the languages I observed people speaking were English and NPE. Even though the people involved in these activities were all Itsekiri-speaking. This is an indication of low vitality of the Itsekiri language. Ryan et al. (1982) argue that the vitality of a language exerts a tremendous influence on language preference, which they allude to the following key elements: status, economic social and political power, demographics, number, distribution of its speakers and its institutional support. They further argue that the status and value ascribed to a language variety tends to be closely related to its vitality. Lacking in these elements, the Itsekiri language's status and vitality does not seem to attract its speakers to willingly transmit it to the next generation. The implication of inadequate use of the Itsekiri language is low vitality, which poses a threat leading to the potential disappearance of the language. Restricted use of languages in cultural contexts, and minimal use in homes and amongst families are major sources of endangerment to heritage minority languages.

It may be expedient to mention that in Nigeria, the three major languages, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo enjoy a high degree of vitality due to their large population and government support, which encourages the teaching and mandatory learning of these languages in junior and senior secondary schools.

6.1.8. Ecological perspective- school locations and non-teaching of Itsekiri in schools

Other important factors contributory to language shift and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language are location of schools and non-teaching of the Itsekiri language in schools. The quest for education and the important role it plays in the lives of people may lead them to go to great lengths to acquire it. As Leah and Adam maintained, parents in the Itsekiri-speaking community would send their children from their villages to school in the city of Warri. Data collected revealed that children who left their villages to attend schools in urban cities, abandoned

the Itsekiri language and started speaking NPE, the common language of communication in the city of Warri.

Furthermore, the educational system in Nigeria is such that, heritage languages are hardly taught in schools. Besides acquiring a language from home, another domain of language acquisition is through formal learning in an academic context. The data gathered in this research reveal that the Itsekiri language is barely taught in schools. Itsekiri is portrayed less useful for educational pursuit in the community and in the country at large.

When the British colonial administration introduced English in Nigeria, it was not only used as a medium of instruction and communication in classrooms but was also learnt as a subject in schools. Bamgboshe (1994) laments that local languages were seen incapable of use in teaching in schools. According to him, this was the attitude of schoolteachers when the colonial teachers were mostly Europeans. Brown, (1994) notes that the study of English has not only impeded literacy in mother tongue languages, but it also has thwarted social and economic progress for those who do not learn it. According to Brown (ibid), teachers believed heritage languages were not suitable for academic learning. Evident in my data is the prohibition of the use of heritage language in classrooms. For example, in the school where I observed, all subjects were taught in English. Students spoke English with the teacher and one another in class but spoke NPE during lunch break on the playground.

One of the respondents, Micah maintained that the speaking of heritage languages was prohibited in class in the Itsekiri- speaking community. This is, however, not restricted to the community but, a common phenomenon in some parts of the Southern States in Nigeria. In a linguistic research carried out by Ayenbi (2013), she observes that the use of heritage languages was forbidden in schools. Teachers reiterated the prohibition of the use of heritage languages except English in classrooms. Pupils were not allowed to speak their heritage languages in the classroom while lessons were taking place, if they did, they were sanctioned.

In schools in the Itsekiri-speaking community, teachers remind children that the language of instruction is English; therefore, communication must be in English. With such pressures, young members of the Itsekiri ethnic group may not appreciate the importance of speaking their heritage language and may decide to abandon it. The implication is that when they become adults and of

childbearing age, they may not deem it necessary to transmit the language to their children to ensure its use and sustainability.

Elijah, an interview participant, observed that the speaking of Itsekiri has been on the decline for the past 30 years. This may be consequential to the discouragement people got when they were in school. In line with that, Dacosta et al. (2018) argue that speakers of minority languages experience varying degrees of marginalisation in different contexts with the exclusion of their language from schooling, the judicial system, and other prestigious, social settings. This can in turn have an impact on their linguistic behaviour and attitudes towards languages in their community, which may not only engender language shift, but non-inter-generational transmission of their language.

Similarly, education policies put in place to encourage the teaching of heritage languages in communities were hardly implemented in the Itsekiri-speaking community. According to my data, Ruth, a respondent, asserted that tribalism and nepotism in the implementation of national laws concerning education policies in relation to teaching heritage languages are hardly implemented. This is due to ethnic rivalry amongst heritage language speakers in the community. The obstacle to teaching and learning the Itsekiri language in schools illuminates the fact that the Itsekiri language has not been accorded with the necessary institutional or government support for it to be taught in schools.

According to Ruth, those at the helm of affairs and in authority seem to lack the political will to implement educational policies in favour of heritage languages. This has subsequently driven the unwillingness and lukewarm attitudes of teachers to teach the Itsekiri language. Adah, another respondent, argued that teachers have not been trained, therefore lack the pedagogical skills and methodology to teach heritage languages. Added to this, there seem to be a paucity of pedagogical material, such as textbooks and literature books, in the Itsekiri language. The aforementioned may have rendered the teaching and learning of the Itsekiri language ineffective and uninteresting.

Besides political challenges, Adams's remarks in the supportive data acknowledged some sociolinguistic complexities in the Itsekiri-speaking community. On the one hand, some non-Itsekiri-speaking parents living in the community have not been favourably disposed to their children learning the Itsekiri language because they did not want them to learn a language different

from theirs; therefore, teachers have not been motivated to teach Itsekiri due to small numbers of pupils in classrooms. On the other hand, teachers who belong to different ethnic groups do not want the Itsekiri language taught in schools in their communities, a situation which has driven the unwillingness and lack of enthusiasm in teaching and learning the language. Where Itsekiri was taught in one or two schools, Abner, a respondent, maintained that it was taken as an elective and not as a compulsory subject. In line with this, Tollefson (1991) argues that dominant and subordinate groups often engage in struggle over recognition of diverse languages and cultures in the school curriculum.

Evidence from data collected in this research reveals that not many pupils want to learn the Itsekiri language, as parents prefer their children to learn English instead. This is in view of the conviction that proficiency in English is more beneficial to their children than Itsekiri since the former is the mandatory language used in the educational system.

A national language research survey carried out in Nigeria, reported in a paper presented by Agbedo et al. (2012) revealed that over 95% of teachers, parents and pupils not only prefer English to mother tongue as the language of instruction, but they were also strongly opposed to the teaching of indigenous languages as a subject in schools. The research also revealed that mother tongue was neither used as the medium of instruction nor taught as a subject in schools. Added to this, most parents equally agreed that they do not use the mother tongue as a medium of interaction at home and would not support its use in schools for their children. According to Agbedo et al. (ibid) over 90% of pupils interviewed in their research, preferred English to their mother tongue either as medium of instruction or subject.

In Nigeria, parents insist that their children learn and speak English rather than their heritage languages due to the values attached to English. Often pupils opt for English and one of the three majority languages Hausa, Ibo or Yoruba. This linguistic behaviour, in no small way, contributes to language shift and places the Itsekiri language in the category of endangered languages.

6.1.9. Ecological perspective -the role of religion

Religious practices have played an important role throughout history and across cultures. In discussing the theme of religion in this doctoral study, emphasis is on Christianity and African traditional religion (ATR) prominently practiced in the Itsekiri -speaking community. Whereas the Itsekiri people seem to be very religious, the language used mainly in churches is the English language. Although some people who still practice ATR use the Itsekiri language in their activities.

The proliferation of churches in the city of Warri has a tremendous influence on the daily life of the people who read the Bible, pray and sing gospel songs in English. In churches in the Warri metropolis, gospel messages are preached in English and interpreted into the Itsekiri language and NPE in the interest of elderly people and those who do not understand English.

Only a handful of people use Bibles translated into the Itsekiri language as observed by Adah, one of the respondents. Additionally, respondents argued praying is immeasurably important within the family. The data collected revealed that prayer and worship sessions are held in English and not in Itsekiri. This is illustrated in Aaron's discourse in which he maintained that he prays in English but cannot pray in Itsekiri. The reason for this is unknown as it is not clear if he is implying that it is because he neither learnt to pray in Itsekiri nor learnt the Itsekiri language. What may be deduced from this is that he is not literate in the Itsekiri language, which goes further to prove that certain languages are used in certain domains in the community. What is clear is that English is the language generally used in churches in the community.

Although, the Itsekiri language is used in traditional religious practices, people who believe in ATR are very few, which implies that the use of Itsekiri is insignificant compared to the use of English in the community. The aforementioned are contributory factors to the phenomenon of language shift and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language.

Other elements, which may be contributory to language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community as well as non-inter-generational transmission of the language are socio-psychological factors mentioned in chapter 5 and treated extensively below.

6.2. Socio-psychological perspective

Some of factors potentially contributory to non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language, which are socio-psychological in nature, revealed in the data collected include perception of the Itsekiri people of their language, linguistic hierarchy and social status, family language policy, practices, and transmission of the Itsekiri language in the home, and social standing and prestige. These elements, which drive the linguistic attitudes and behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language, may not be far from responsible for the causes of language shift and endangerment of the Itsekiri language.

The first element examined in this section is the perception speakers of the Itsekiri language have of the language.

6.2.1. Socio-psychological perspective -perception of speakers of the Itsekiri language

The previous section dwelt on linguistic domination viewed from sociolinguistic, socio-political, socio-economic as well as socio-cultural dimensions. This section dwells on socio-psychologically related findings with emphasis on the perception of speakers of the Itsekiri language.

Language ideology and beliefs may determine language use. The opinion people have of a language can sometimes influence their use of that language. The linguistic attitude and behaviour of the Itsekiri people is in relation with their perception of their language. According to my data, critical elements underlying the behaviour and attitude of speakers of the Itsekiri language are driven by their opinion of their language, the role it plays in their lives and the status and vitality of the language compared to the English language. The people's belief sets (Gibbon & Ramirez, 2004) and attitudes associated with the language are not favourable to the development of the Itsekiri language. The Itsekiri people's disposition to their language is a function of the prevalent linguistic diversity in the community. Elijah, a respondent, opined that the use of the Itsekiri language is limited in important domains and that if Itsekiri -speaking children must go to the best schools and travel to places, the Itsekiri language could not serve such purposes. This may imply that Itsekiri is only a heritage and an ethnic language, with little socio-economic importance, that does not fulfil the political needs or aspirations of its speakers.

Understandably, speakers of the Itsekiri language may be adapting to the linguistic realities in their community for socioeconomic reasons. The general beliefs and attitudes towards the language seem to have undermined transmission of the language. Just as said Spolsky (2007) referred to the importance of the belief systems of a group in relation to the values assigned to the varieties and features of their language.

Negative or positive attitudes and beliefs will make or mar the transmission or growth of a language and such variables can affect language learning and acquisition positively or negatively. For example, Elijah, one of the respondents, argued that some speakers of the Itsekiri language consider the status of their language low compared to English. According to Elijah, the Itsekiri people regard the Itsekiri language as a local and not an internationally accepted language. Their perception of the language is that it occupies a less prestigious position in the country.

In a study carried out by Ayenbi (2013), it was observed that the Itsekiri language was not an academic language that could be used to compete for both national and international aptitude tests to obtain jobs and attain social mobility; therefore, there was no need to teach or transmit it to children.

In the same study (Ayenbi 2013), some members of the Itsekiri-speaking community asserted that the Itsekiri language was limited in scope, and could not take them anywhere; neither could it be used in professional fields such as technology, medicine, and education. In other words, the Itsekiri language is neither a language of mobility nor an international language that could be used outside of the community. In line with that, Mugaddam (2007) argues that many Africans view their own ethnic languages as unsuitable for use in official domains; they believe that their languages lack the capacity for expressing ideas in a variety of domains.

Information in the data collected reveal that the consensual opinion of respondents is that the Itsekiri language is invaluable for upward social mobility. This could be responsible for the Itsekiri speaker's unwillingness to transmit it to the next generation. According to my data, Itsekiri people speak English in formal family gatherings while NPE is mainly used in social gatherings. By implication, speakers of the Itsekiri language seem to evaluate their language differently and associate it with linguistic competitiveness and power dynamics. Substantively, elements that emerged from the data in this research, reveal that the Itsekiri language may be competing with NPE and English.

An anecdote that seems to exemplify the behaviour, attitude and perception of the Itsekiri speaking people could be deduced from Beyogle's (2016) example of the perception that speakers of local languages in Burkina Faso have of their language and French in connection with power dynamics and language. Beyogle (ibid) notes that French language is associated with power and prestige and used by only the educated elite in the society. According to him, in Burkina Faso, French is referred to as a language used by people with high profiles and in high positions, therefore reserved for them only.

To buttress this point, Beyogle further gave an anecdote of a scene that took place at a certain ceremony in Burkina Faso. The Master of ceremony (MC) spoke French and requested that a certain individual with reduced mobility be served some food. The later was served the local dish, which he rejected and rather demanded for the continental dish, stating that if the MC wanted him served the traditional local dish, he would have spoken in the heritage language and not in French. This goes to explain the power dynamics of a language while portraying the position of a language in the power hierarchy amongst languages. This anecdote illustrates the perception of the man with reduced mobility of his heritage language and the French language as well as his attitude towards both languages.

Furthermore, language practices may vary according to users and contexts. Data collected in this research revealed that the university educated who generally speak English at his workplace, would speak NPE when buying goods from the market woman. Aaron, a respondent asserted that people might have to accommodate one another linguistically, to avoid being perceived as offensive. During an observation session in a home, I noticed that the father, who is university educated spoke NPE with the house help, an uneducated care giver whereas, he spoke Standard English with his wife and children - evidence of different types of family language practices described below.

6.2.2. Socio-psychological perspective- family language policy, practice, and transmission of the Itsekiri language in the home

A general belief in the sociolinguistic sphere shared by Pandharipande (2002) is that minority languages cover the home domain. However, this is not the case with the Itsekiri language as

revealed in this study. The Itsekiri language neither functions in its capacity as a home language, nor covers the family domain. Its function as a home language is being eroded due to family choices and decisions to adapt their socio-economic reality to the prevailing linguistic situation in the macro society. The Nigeria linguistic landscape appears to drive the macro/meso societal dynamics. Government educational and linguistic policies, which made English language the sole medium of instruction in schools in the country have a remarkable influence on language practices in homes and in the community. My investigation reveal that one of the forces that may have given rise to non-intergenerational transmission of Itsekiri is language choices in family settings in the Itsekiri-speaking community. “Language management in the family is partly under the control of family members, but the goals are regularly influenced by the outside community” (Spolsky, 2009 p:3). Families in the Itsekiri- speaking community make deliberate choice of languages they prefer to use in communicating with their children because of external forces. Micah, a respondent, cited the example of children sent to crèche as early as 2 years old whose parents had to speak English with them at home, so they could communicate with the crèche attendant because he/she speaks English.

In southern Nigeria, in which this research was carried out, the choice of language spoken in the family seems determined by the linguistic contexts. Parents believe their children will excel in schools and do well in the society if they have good command of spoken and written English from home before going to formal school. Evidence in my data revealed respondents preferred to transmit the English language to their children at their formative years to ease their transition to formal schooling, in addition to providing a pedestal for upward social mobility. Skutnabb-Kangas, (1986) opine that to achieve academic and social success in schools, one had to speak the language that would provide the means of empowerment and advancement. According to the data collected, the Itsekiri-speaking parents believe that it is more beneficial to transmit English instead of Itsekiri to their children.

Jones &Ogilvie (2013) share a view about Spanish families in the United States in a linguistic survey. They argue that families are of the view that besides being able to learn in English at school, their children will encounter English at the workplace, therefore, the necessity to know English. These families opine that if their children do not know English, they will have a problem at work. This idea echoes with Schecter & Baylay (2002) who argued that parents seem more

interested in English as an instrument or a tool to achieve their socio-economic objectives in the society.

With the existence of diverse languages and the presence of English as a dominant language in the Itsekiri-speaking community, families have adopted various language policies in their homes. The data in this research reveal evidence of variety of family language policies, language choices, use and practices in the community. This phenomenon depends on the circumstances, as well as with whom people speak a particular language at a given time. For example, some families have adopted the English only policy in preference for the dominant language in the country, in their homes. Most families especially the elites and university educated prefer to speak English in their homes, while non-elite and unschooled or non-college educated parents speak NPE with their children. For example, there are individuals who use only English with their children and speak Itsekiri with their siblings and spouses, while some speak Itsekiri only with their parents and grandparents and house helps. Abel, a respondent maintained that he speaks Itsekiri with his mother and siblings, but the general language in his home is English. Aaron, Jonah and Elijah, to mention but a few respondents affirmed that they speak only English in their households. Adah equally confirmed that, she thought speaking English only in her home would help her children do well in school. Abigail equally maintained that it was easier to communicate in English with her children than in the Itsekiri language.

The implication of what may be referred to as selected family language policies and transmission in the context of the Itsekiri-speaking community is the impact such a preferred language choice may have on the Itsekiri language.

As far as language transmission is concerned, Itsekiri-speaking parents are influenced by the prevailing linguistic situation in the country. Children are socialized in the family preferred language, demonstrated in the transmission of English language by elite parents. The data reveal that most Itsekiri children acquire and speak English in the home, being the language they first heard from their parents when they were growing up. This illustrates the fact that the Itsekiri language is hardly transmitted from one generation to the next; a situation that places the Itsekiri language in a somewhat precarious situation.

Besides educational and social benefits that English provides, the Itsekiri -speaking people consider the ability to speak English as prestigious, which takes us to the next element discussed below.

6.2.3. Socio-psychological perspective -social standing and prestige

Equally associated with language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri linguistic context are the phenomena of social standing and prestige. A linguistic attitude commonly exhibited by the people is in relation to superiority complex. The linguistic practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community is characteristic of a lifestyle in which speaking of Standard English is considered prestigious. People increasingly crave to speak English for prestige and social standing.

According to the data collected, to maintain a social standing and prestige, most people speak Standard English to distinguish themselves from others, especially amid certain group of people. For example, during an observation session, I noticed that Caleb, a medical intern spoke Standard English with his patients. When asked why he spoke English and not NPE, he said, it was meant to distinguish himself from his patients and maintain a particular status. According to him, most of his patients were pregnant women who spoke only NPE. He could not bring himself to the level of the women by speaking NPE. To him, it was about earning respect and not rubbing shoulders with his patients. The ability to speak English appears an act of social symbol in the community.

In addition, Esther maintained that she had to speak Standard English to distinguish herself, establish her relevance, earn respect and keep a distance from some women she was interacting with in a political gathering. Esther equally narrated an incident regarding a behaviour exhibited by a principal officer of a municipal council when a group of Itsekiri graduates visited him in his office.

She went in company of her schoolmates when she was in the University to visit an official of a municipal council in the city of Warri. On getting there, the students greeted the official in Itsekiri, but he responded in English. All efforts to get him to speak Itsekiri, according to Esther were unsuccessful. It was after the students left in annoyance, that the official realised his perceived arrogance and called for them and apologised. The official's behaviour may be interpreted as either

superiority complex or the idea of English only in the workplace, since English is the official work language in Nigeria therefore, any language short of that was out of place.

Furthermore, Abel a member of a management team in a private secondary school maintained that some people may be willing to identify with their language but may not be proud to speak it in public places. People's lifestyle in the Itsekiri-speaking community seems synonymous with Mesthrie's (2010) description of power in relation to the impression that ability to speak English portrays class, affluence, wealth, power, and authority.

Furthermore, in the Itsekiri-speaking community, evident in the data is that illiterate or uneducated parents speak NPE to their children in the villages. People are shy to speak Itsekiri for fear of being laughed at or ridiculed for their inability to speak English. They believe that in a civilised world of today, English is the language to be spoken so they do all they can to speak it because "they want to feel belong" according to Ruth an interview participant.

Similarly, Leah, another respondent remarked that some people might not be comfortable speaking their heritage language in public places since it is considered inappropriate, frowned at, and downgrading. According to her, people were mocked or ridiculed and termed uncivilised when they speak their heritage language. Noah equally cited an example of a child who refused to speak Itsekiri when addressed in Itsekiri, so he was not regarded as uncivilised. This is because the ability to express oneself in English is associated with prestige and perceived as a language used by those in high positions. Therefore, people with limited education who crave to speak English rather speak NPE.

It could be said that linguistic attitudes exhibited in taking pride in speaking English as a symbol of prestige, social standing and respect foregrounds language shift in the community and contributes to endangering the Itsekiri language. Invariably those who speak heritage language seems perceived uncivilised and being in the lower rung of the society, therefore they prefer to speak English. This may imply that the ability to speak English especially in the public sphere gives credence to status symbol and prestige, which explains the clamour to speak it at all costs.

A common phenomenon in the Itsekiri- speaking community is that individuals choose their language according to the occasion, illustrating the notion of social and linguistic hierarchy discussed below.

6.2.4. Socio-psychological perspective -linguistic hierarchy and social status

One of the overt causes of language shift suggested in respondents' discourse is the fact that Itsekiri speakers hierarchize languages. There is a distinction between those who use Standard English and NPE in Nigeria as well as in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Although NPE is widely spoken, it is however, regarded as bad English by educated parents, who would not have their children speak it, as they believe it will negatively affect their spoken and written English. Aaron, Abel, Jonah, Elijah, Adah, to mention but a few respondents maintained that they would not have their children speak NPE.

In addition, people are inclined to speak a particular language in specific contexts in relation to their social status. According to the data collected, respondents deliberately choose a language suitable to their social standing. The languages they speak at a given time is a function of the milieu or context. For example, contexts such as public fora, workplaces, schools, and markets, formal or informal occasions will determine the language use.

My data revealed that language practices vary according to the level of education of speakers as well as the level of understanding of users of different languages in various societal contexts. The university-educated who generally speaks English at his workplace, is likely to speak NPE when buying goods at the market. For example, Abel, a respondent maintained that he uses different languages in different contexts. He speaks Standard English in his workplace with members of staff in the same hierarchy as him, while he speaks NPE with people regarded as low-level workers.

Similarly, Aaron observed that he uses English at work because it is the language allowed in an official environment. However, when he is in an informal occasion and he is with his friends and people he is familiar with, he speaks NPE. In the same vein, Esther, a respondent equally demonstrated the idea of linguistic hierarchy in her conversation with a potential customer in her shop in the market when she chose not to speak Standard English. Esther, a public servant speaks

Standard English in her workplace but not in the market. According to her, NPE is a market language while Standard English is the language of the workplace.

Additionally, Noah attested to the fact that some government officials prefer to speak Standard English in their places of work. He mentioned that when one speaks Itsekiri at the workplace, people respond in Standard English. A typical example is the incident Esther recounted (**see Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview 7**), about a chairperson of a municipal council who was greeted in Itsekiri but responded in Standard English. This linguistic behaviour could be interpreted as an illustration of the importance of English in the society as well as a demonstration of social standing and prestige that comes with speaking English.

Furthermore, Caleb, a medical intern in the hospital maintained that he made a deliberate decision to address his patients in Standard English. According to him, this singular act is a form of politeness as he deemed it impolite to speak NPE with his patients. He emphasised that he prefers to interact with his patients in Standard English to keep a distance and avoid unnecessary familiarity as NPE is adjudged a street language. According to Caleb, he had to distinguish himself from his patients by virtue of his education and social status in the society, a behaviour that demonstrates linguistic and social hierarchy and illustrates language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Pulaczekwska (2012) remarks that the British colonial expansion in the 19th century caused some local languages in the post-colonial regions to lose their importance in favour of English because the latter was associated with education, power, business and professionalism.

In a country with a robust linguistic diversity as Nigeria, interaction amongst speakers of different languages may lead to the larger and dominant languages swallowing up the smaller ones, which may consequently engender notable changes in the linguistic behaviour of speakers of the smaller language. For example, Muhammad et al. (2024) observes that Tera (Nyimatli) language in North East, Nigeria is shrinking and the language has been or is being replaced by Hausa language and by migrant Hausa speakers from the Northwestern Nigeria like most minority languages in northern Nigeria.

Norde et al. (2010) note that smaller ethnic groups in a country where a language different from theirs is dominant are under increasing pressure to adapt to the dominant language.

The phenomenon of language hierarchy revealed in respondents' discourse are commonplace and typical occurrences in situations where languages are delineated as either high or low status and hierarchized. While relating this to the Itsekiri language, what is evident in the data collected in this research is that, the Itsekiri language is not visible in the linguistic landscape and sphere, which further illustrates language shift and portrays it as a threatened language.

Despite shortcomings associated with the Itsekiri language, respondents maintained that it is crucial in certain domains examined in the session below.

6.3. Domain of use of the Itsekiri language

In the previous sections, certain elements potentially instrumental to the phenomenon of language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community were examined. The last part of this chapter dwells on the domain of use of the Itsekiri language revealed in the data collected. Presented below are information highlighting important use of the Itsekiri language as remarked by interview respondents.

Some important areas in which the Itsekiri language is deployed revealed in the data include group identity, cultural heritage and patrimony, traditional marriage ceremony and language brokering and mediation. Other uses of the language are in linguistic etiquettes and norms as well as diverse contexts, such as family meetings, religious activities as well as public fora involving members of the Itsekiri ethnic group. Spolsky (2007) asserts that certain level of importance and values are attached to the different existing languages in an environment. Data collected from interview respondents and sessions of observations in the field corroborates Spolsky's assertion considering the values speakers of the Itsekiri language attach to their language as well as identifying with their ethnic group.

6.3.1. Group identity

An important element that emerged in the data of this doctoral study is group identity. The theme of group identity seems to resonate strongly with respondents who identify with their heritage language and their culture, a phenomenon that seems to help them uphold their beliefs and cultural values in the community.

While expressing an awareness of identity in relation to their language, respondents demonstrated attachment to their culture and their language. According to Adam, one of the respondents “the language gives you an identity with your people” Affirming to what extent the Itsekiri language is his identity, Adam argued that the Itsekiri language is not only useful to him, it equally gives him a sense of identity and pride. His statement “I am first an Itsekiri before being a Nigerian” is illustrative of a sense of linguistic adherence and belonging that further enhances cultural identity, which the Itsekiri language confers on its speakers. Adam demonstrated what seems to be a strong attachment to the Itsekiri language when he decided to invite his children to the interview session I had with him. See extract below

They speak English. David, ofor wa ron;; agba gin do wo ka kor aghan Itsekiri, ugbo? David, [Are you listening? You were told to teach the children Itsekiri. The issue has come up]. Peter, are you listening? You have been told to speak Itsekiri. Ghein [yes]. (Adam, Vol. 2, appendix 1, interview No.2

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Just before the interview started, he reminded the children that he had been telling them to speak Itsekiri, but they refused, so he brought them to witness the conversation, which was centered on the Itsekiri language. According to Adam, he deliberately brought his children and his brother-in-law who lives with him to the interview session to listen to our conversation. This was intentional and perhaps to sensitize the children and reiterate the importance of the Itsekiri language. While lamenting his incessant absence from home due to work schedule, he expressed his dissatisfaction that his children could not speak the Itsekiri language.

Similarly, Jonah, a respondent argued that he is known and recognized by the Itsekiri language. He buttressed his argument as he recounted his daughter's experience at an international event in which the organizers recognized the importance of one's heritage language as a marker of identity. Abigail, another respondent equally expressed a sense of identity when she remarked that "Itsekiri distinct me". Speaking about distinctiveness, according to her, she can be easily identified when she speaks Itsekiri.

It may therefore be inferred that the the Itsekiri language fulfills the role of a marker of identity to its speakers. A sense of Itsekiri identity appears important to the Itsekiri people and they seem sensitive to cultural and linguistic identity, which according to respondents provide a feeling and sense of belonging whenever they speak their language. This is illustrated in their belief in group identity and cultural unity while identifying with the Itsekiri ethnic group and the language.

Additionally, Jabess, a respondent and staff of Chevron Oil Company, in Warri, maintained that, whenever he comes across a colleague from the Itsekiri ethnic group, he identifies with him by speaking the Itsekiri language; although, he generally speaks English at his workplace. According to him, the Itsekiri language unites them.

Furthermore, the Itsekiri language provides a sense of oneness and solidarity. According to the respondents, speaking the Itsekiri language provides a sense of belonging. The theme of belonging and cultural identity amongst Itsekiris equally resonated in Noah's description of his mother's encounter with other speakers of the Itsekiri language during their visit to the city of Kaduna, in Northern Nigeria. While in Kaduna, Noah went to the market with his mother to purchase goods. His mother was dressed in the Itsekiri traditional George wrapper and headscarf. On sighting, Noah's mother in Itsekiri attire, other Itsekiri women in the market, rallied around and identified with her.

Not only are the Itsekiri people happy to speak the Itsekiri language, despite the fact that, the data collected reveal lack of inter-generational transmission of the language, they also feel a sense of belonging whenever they speak it.

Although, the Itsekiri language may simply be a maker of identity, limited to oral use and cultural activities, speakers of the Itsekiri language appear to pride themselves in their cultural and linguistic identity.

According to respondents, a sense of Itsekiri identity seems important to them and they appear sensitive to the issue of cultural and linguistic identity, which illustrates belonging and preservation of the Itsekiri language in accordance with the theme on cultural heritage and patrimony.

6.3.2. Cultural heritage and patrimony

Another domain of importance of the Itsekiri language is cultural heritage and patrimony. Besides linguistic identity, of importance to the Itsekiri-speaking people are their cultural heritage and patrimony. Interview respondents did not only express their beliefs in group identity, but they also suggested cultural unity in their discourse while identifying with the Itsekiri ethnic group and the language.

An example of the Itsekiri cultural heritage is the traditional marriage ceremony. During an observation session, I noticed the Itsekiri language was used when traditional marriage rites were being performed in the joining of the couple. While the dowry (a token amount, the groom pays to the family of the bride to ask the hand of their daughter in marriage); was being paid, elders of both families spoke in the Itsekiri language. Details on the traditional marriage ceremony are elucidated in **(Vol. 2, appendix 2)**.

Similarly, the Itsekiri language is used in mediation between families, an element in the traditional marriage ceremony process revealed in the discourse of respondents, is an important cultural heritage and patrimony of the Itsekiri- speaking people.

The use of language brokering and mediation between families in inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic marriage ceremonies is elaborated in detail on **(page 86 in chapter 2)**. Guan et al. (2015) highlight language brokering as an important aspect of family identity, values, beliefs and practices in relation to heritage cultures. The data collected revealed cultural activities involving inter and intra ethnic traditional weddings ceremonies in which two language brokers/mediators representing

both families mediated between them using the Itsekiri language. Deploying the Itsekiri language in these activities demonstrates its usefulness to the people.

Furthermore, according to the data collected, linguistic etiquettes and norms in the Itsekiri-speaking community are features that illustrate cultural heritage and patrimony. These elements are entrenched in the culture of the Itsekiri ethnic group and exemplified in social norms such as greetings, politeness, as well as respect for the elderly and older people.

According to Adam, while speaking to an older or elderly person in Itsekiri, a younger person is expected to address him or her as an uncle or aunt irrespective of the relationship, whether they are related or not. Csajbok-Twerefou, (2010) notes that appropriate use of linguistic etiquette in a speech is considered an appropriate behavior, while inappropriate use of speech etiquette is taken as a desire to offend or as bad manners. These societal norms are linguistic routines (Csajbok-Twerefou, (ibid) that are engrained in the culture of the Itsekiri ethnic group. They are social legacies transmitted by parents to children through the language and are used in daily interactions. Itsekiri children who were born abroad who could not speak the Itsekiri language were taught norms as forms of cultural identities.

During an Itsekiri cultural event in the United State, where I made presentations regarding the vitality of the Itsekiri language, I observed that children were taught to greetings in the Itsekiri language.

Similarly, according to my data, various accepted sets of language requirements and prescribed norms that portray appropriate behavior are used in governing the Itsekiri community. Certain behaviors considered improper and anti-social are avoided so as not to offend people's sensibilities. Culturally, Adam observed that, certain expressions considered obscene should not be used in the presence of others, especially when addressing elders or older people. In his discourse, he noted that people endeavor to speak in a polite manner and avoid using offensive language. *"but our fathers tried to talk in a manner that is not offensive; they want to be polite"* (Adam, Vol. appendix 1, interview No.2).

Adam illustrates linguistic etiquette and norms in the Itsekiri - speaking community with the use of appropriate language to express one's desire to use the restroom. A typical example is

differences in gender related language use. According to him, the language a man may employ to express his desire to use the bathroom is different from that a woman would use.

Similarly, the Itsekiri language is equally rich in idiomatic expressions, an important linguistic aspect in the Itsekiri community. The use of idioms is attributed to elders who deploy them in certain nuances. Micah, a respondent, while reiterating the importance of idiomatic expressions in the Itsekiri language, noted that as a young man, he was not expected to use idioms, especially in the presence of an elderly person. According to him, it is regarded as disrespectful and impolite for a child to use certain language or expressions in the presence of his/her parents or older people.

In addition, certain dynamic semiotic resources and modes, (Creese 2017 et al.) such as eye blinking, lid biting, gestures, finger snapping are non-verbal body movements deployed in communicative practices in the Itsekiri- speaking community. These resources, which are essentially used to convey nonverbal messages by parents to children, are fundamental cultural values in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

6.3.3. Use of the Itsekiri language in diverse contexts

Other important contexts in which the Itsekiri language is deployed are family meetings, orthodox religion-Christianity, and African Traditional Religious (ATR) activities especially as it concerns traditional funeral ceremonies, and community-based associations, such as Itsekiri students' unions in higher institutions in Nigeria, Itsekiri forums, community clubs, etc. In these contexts, the main language of communication is the Itsekiri language according to sources from my data.

Elijah maintained that the Itsekiri language is used in family meetings that involve parents, children and siblings. It is equally used in churches, though minimally. However, in traditional religious practices illustrated in traditional funeral or burial ceremonies, the Itsekiri language is deployed extensively. Itsekiri is used when performing rituals and traditional rites during such ceremonies. During funeral ceremonies which involve consulting oracles known in Itsekiri as 'Ife bibi'[oracle consultations] , worship songs and incantations are chanted in the Itsekiri language. According to Micah when a person dies in the Itsekiri community, there is an obligation to consult

the oracles. While consulting oracles, the priest speaks Itsekiri while using some incomprehensible codes to communicate with spirits. The priest alone understands the codes, which he interprets to people whenever he is called upon to do so. A typical example is, where there is doubt as to the ‘sanctity or holiness’ of a dead person, before he or she is interred, the oracle is consulted to ascertain the eligibility of the dead, to be buried according to the Itsekiri customs and tradition (Ayomike 2012).

Furthermore, I observed that speaking the Itsekiri language is mandatory in socio-cultural contexts. For example, I witnessed two public discussion forums in which participants were obliged to speak Itsekiri during conversations and discussions.

Additionally, the Itsekiri language is not only used in community-based associations; it is equally deployed in student unions. For example, the National Association of Itsekiri Students, (NAIS), an association that assembles students from the Itsekiri ethnic group in Universities in Nigeria made it mandatory for members to speak the Itsekiri language during their meetings. They equally made ability to speak Itsekiri mandatory and a criterion to vie for a post in their associations. For example, Abigail admitted that she was obliged to learn to speak Itsekiri before vying for the post of vice president of the association. Prior to that, she could understand Itsekiri but could not speak it. The same applied to her son.

Micah equally maintained that it is obligatory to speak Itsekiri in his club. “With my Itsekiri brothers, we do speak Itsekiri. I have a social Itsekiri club, we don’t speak English.....in the community, if you are a chairman of a community, you cannot speak English. Not all the elderly men will understand what you are saying. You must therefore learn Itsekiri. If you cannot speak, you cannot talk”. (**Micah volume 2, Appendix 1, interview No.10**).

In that respect, can it be implied that the Itsekiri-speaking people were conscious of the fact that most people including young adults from the Itsekiri ethnic could not speak Itsekiri? Did they have to institute such rules to encourage speaking of the language?

The idea of obliging the Itsekiri people to speak the language compulsorily in the Itsekiri ethnic group centred forums, revealed in the data collected is referred to in this doctoral study as

community language policy, (CLP). This is an initiative in which rules are set or laid down to ensure that the Itsekiri language is used and spoken in an Itsekiri centred public activity. CLP, a term that emerged in this study stands as a prospective research field that would require further studies.

6.4. Summary

The discussion chapter centres on interpretations of findings of my investigation in relation to sociolinguistic theories that underpins this doctoral research. While attempting to respond to the research questions with a view to attaining the objective of the study, findings describing various factors that might have given rise to the phenomenon of language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language were examined from ecological and sociopsychological perspectives.

Ecological perspectives were viewed from various aspects such as linguistic dominance, which presents language contact in the Itsekiri-speaking community, linguistic and language hegemony, English and NPE as lingua franca, as well as multilingualism and translanguaging. Socio-political aspect deals with elements such as inter-ethnic crises and linguistic conflict, as well as linguistic discrimination. Socio economic aspect is viewed in relation to the quest for economic advancement and upward social mobility, while socio-cultural aspect centres on mixed or inter-ethnic marriage.

Other elements in the findings are demographic and linguistic transformation, and urbanisation, attrition of the Itsekiri language, location of schools and non-teaching of the Itsekiri language in formal education as well as the role of religion. These factors appear to have given rise to the phenomenon of language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community and seem to have accentuated the seeming reluctance of the Itsekiri people to transmit their language to their children.

Focusing on socio-psychological finding elements such as Itsekiri speakers' perceptions of the Itsekiri language, family language policy, practices, and transmission of the Itsekiri language in the home, social standing and prestige, linguistic hierarchy and social status are perceived as

contributory factors to language shift and non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language as revealed in the data collected.

Furthermore, despite what seems a threat to the Itsekiri language owing to the factors enumerated above, data collected in the doctoral research equally reveal important areas in which the language is deployed. The Itsekiri language is used as a marker of not only individual but also group identity. It is deployed in key cultural practices and activities such as funeral, traditional marriage and child ceremonies. Its usage in diverse contexts such as family meetings and social reunions, community-based groups as well as linguistic etiquettes and prescribed norms demonstrates its importance to the Itsekiri ethnic group.

7. Chapter 7 Concluding the study

7.1. Introduction

The concluding chapter of the doctoral study is in five parts. The first part presents a brief synthesis of the findings, the second, contributions of the doctoral research to the field of language endangerment in a heritage minority language context and the third centres on future directions. While the fourth dwells on the limitations of the study, constraints and challenges encountered during fieldwork, the fifth part suggests strategies and recommendations to revitalize and maintain the Itsekiri language. The chapter ends with concluding remarks highlighting some personal thoughts on the subject of the doctoral study in general.

This research on minority language and language endangerment was carried out focusing on the Itsekiri language spoken by the Itsekiri ethnic group in Nigeria as a case study. The aim is to ascertain the causes of the perceived phenomenon of language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community in Warri and uncover reasons underlying non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language by speakers of the language. The study focuses on the linguistic attitudes and behavior of speakers of the Itsekiri language in relation to the changing linguistic patterns of language use which manifest in the phenomenon of language shift in the community.

The doctoral study was born out of an observation of the seeming reluctance and unwillingness of speakers of the Itsekiri people to speak their language, exemplified in the choice of language spoken within their internal environment -their homes /families and the external environment- outside their homes/in the public sphere. To ascertain the reasons behind non-intergenerational transmission of Itsekiri, the study investigates language use in the community, perceptions of speakers of the Itsekiri language of their language- the image they have of the language and the role the language plays in their lives as well as its importance to them.

7.2. Brief key findings

The data in the study, collected using qualitative methodology and focusing on an ethnographic approach, highlighted in chapter 4 of this doctoral research, reveal that Itsekiri speakers have been using English, introduced in Nigeria by the British colonial regime during the colonial era, and appear to prefer the former to their heritage Itsekiri language. This is evident in a linguistic behaviour which reveals the fact that the present generation of Itsekiri speakers seem not to speak Itsekiri at home with their families but exclusively English or (NPE) depending on the educational level and socioeconomic status of the individual family.

The study equally confirmed that forces of globalization may have assigned the English language a global role as an international language, widely used as a means of communication in key domains such as education, economy, politics, international relations, media, and information communications technology (ICT). With a wide geographical spread, spoken all over the world, English seems to have become the world language. These functional attributes and values attached to English, which seem attractive not only to speakers of the Itsekiri language, but also most people in Nigeria, appear to have made it the preferred language in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

In addition, the study also ascertained that the level of speakership of the Itsekiri language in relation to English is closely related to the values the Itsekiri people attach to their language. The Itsekiri people's beliefs about their language and the values they attach to it, in relation to identity and economic advancements seem to determine the use to which the Itsekiri language is put and influences its status and vitality in the larger society. This is demonstrated in the seemingly negative linguistic behavior and attitudes of the people towards their language as revealed in the data collected. The behavior and attitudes of speakers of the Itsekiri language towards their language and the subsequent changing linguistic practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community evident in the data may be due to linguistic pressures resulting from the dominance and use of English in important domains. Policies set up to regulate language use in Nigeria, such as the National Policies on Education (NPE) associated with and backed by the Nigeria Government, arising from governmental linguistic ideologies may have legitimised the presence of the English language in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Furthermore, it is evident in the discourse of respondents that, amongst the estimated 500 languages present in Nigeria (Simon & Lewis 2013), English comes top in the hierarchy. The Itsekiri-speaking people seem to hierarchize languages in their community with English on the top rung of the linguistic ladder accorded priority in usage, as it is the dominant and legitimate language in the educational system and in important domains. English is the most prevalent and privileged language used in Nigeria. It functions in nearly all communicative domains and contexts earlier mentioned in this doctoral research.

With its social status and prestige, English has more political and economic power than any other language in Nigeria. The status and the significant visibility and vitality of English as the main language of education and public administration in Nigeria underpins the choice of speakers of the Itsekiri language and their preference for it.

According to the data, the Itsekiri-speaking people seem to accord English a high premium in their choice of home language and therefore appears reluctant to transmit the Itsekiri language, their heritage language, to their children.

Furthermore, the study also discovered that language contact situations resulting from linguistic diversity, a common phenomenon in Warri, the principal city of the Itsekiri-speaking people appears to have necessitated the search for a common means of communication, a gap that the English language and NPE fill in the community.

Additionally, interactions between speakers of different languages may have resulted in smaller languages being influenced by larger ones and smaller ones seem threatened. Relative to this, speakers of the Itsekiri language, a heritage minority language, appear to be shifting from speaking their language due to contact with dominant languages such as English and NPE as well as cohabitation with speakers of other languages present in their community. Consequently, the Itsekiri language seems threatened with attrition and loss arising from perceived insufficient use by its speakers as well as non-use in important domains such as education, business, media, international relations, and administrative functions.

In the same vein, the seeming shift in language use may be affecting the Itsekiri language that appears to be dying, as their speakers seem not to consider their language viable and tend to prefer English due to economic reasons and sometimes-social affordances.

Moreover, economic growth and developed social amenities in urban cities have attracted speakers of the Itsekiri language from surrounding villages to big cities and urban areas, according to the data. Urbanisation, which Simon et al. (2013) describe as a significant threat and a pattern of economic contact with the external world and the development of infrastructure in cities could be essential magnet for people in rural areas. The description of urbanisation observed by Simon et al. (ibid.) seems evident in the Itsekiri-speaking community, as Warri, the major dwelling place of speakers of the Itsekiri language and a commercial city hosting multinational oil companies, attracts people from neighbouring villages and contiguous towns, as well as economic migrants from other regions in Nigeria.

Therefore, the changing composition of the indigenous population and the radical linguistic change in the fabric of the community demonstrated in the linguistic practices evident in the data are cases in point. Demographic and linguistic transformations, which may have propelled the Itsekiri speakers to switch from speaking their heritage language to the dominant English language and /or NPE are not only threats to the Itsekiri language, but also indications of language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

7.3. Contribution of the study to the field of language endangerment

In sociolinguistics, the domain of language shift and language endangerment of heritage minority languages seems to have received significantly less attention in Africa in general and particularly in Nigeria. This study is therefore a contribution to language shift and language endangerment research, in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

Besides filling the gap in language endangerment related studies in the African context, the research adds value to the field of language endangerment in heritage minority language settings through linguistic information collected in the data of the doctoral research. While analysing the linguistic behaviour, attitudes, as well as language preferences of speakers of the Itsekiri language

in Nigeria, the research contributes to the construction of an original sociolinguistic database relating to language use in the city of Warri, in southern Nigeria.

Hypothetically, the first sociolinguistic study of the Itsekiri language, the research opens a new vista to the scientific study of the Itsekiri language while uncovering its linguistic status and vitality in the field of sociolinguistics. It provides relevant academic references and useful directions for further research in the domain of language shift and endangerment in a minority language context. The research equally opens a new door for future Ph.D. students who may want to embark on a similar study of other heritage minority languages in Nigeria. It may be of interest to a wide and an extensive readership including linguists, ethnographers, educators and scholars in this domain, and assist them to play an active role in the maintenance and revitalization of heritage minority and lesser-used languages.

Additionally, applied and sociolinguists in Africa and in Nigeria may build on findings from this research to investigate similar phenomenon in other heritage minority languages in the Nigerian and African contexts.

Furthermore, this research draws the attention of researchers working in the domain of language shift and language endangerment to the seeming imminent loss of linguistic diversity in Nigeria. In this respect, the study provides the opportunity to understand fundamental phenomenon in the domain that sounds familiar and are often taken for granted. A phenomenon such as shifting from speaking a language considered “non- economically viable” to a supposedly “economically viable language”, with reference to the Itsekiri and English languages respectively is a typical example. The research has also raised awareness of language speakers’ created linguistic dichotomy between heritage minority languages and dominant and powerful languages, which are the Itsekiri and the English language respectively.

Ceasing to speak ones’ heritage language or mother tongue and shifting to a dominant one may not be considered important because it seems normal; therefore, little or no attention is paid. This is a phenomenon currently being demonstrated in the Itsekiri-speaking community that people seem to be unconsciously living with daily. The study therefore offers an insight into the limited knowledge about bilingualism in the Itsekiri- speaking community, an area that requires further study.

Furthermore, analysing and interpreting the data in this research reveals the power dynamics that play out when dominant languages and heritage minority languages are in contact. The doctoral study reveals a power play between the Itsekiri language with seeming low status and vitality and NPE as well as English with high status and vitality, which receives substantial institutional support with all the paraphernalia of government backing, rendering it attractive in view of its functions and provision of social capital to speakers.

Going into the field as a member of the Itsekiri-speaking community helped me to uncover what an outsider would not see from the exterior. Investigating causes of language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community and the underlying reasons for non-intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language has brought to the fore the linguistic ideologies of the Itsekiri people and their perceptions of the Itsekiri language. The research has equally helped to ascertain what is, as far as the speakers are concerned, the place of the Itsekiri language, the various uses to which it is put, and the role it plays in their lives.

7.4. Future research directions

Embarking on this research on language endangerment in a heritage language context in relation to the linguistic behaviour of speakers of the Itsekiri language, in addition to reviewing literature on sociolinguistic concepts relevant to this study, has offered insights into linguistic practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Added to that, the linguistic ideologies of members of the Itsekiri ethnic group in relation to their choice of language(s) and language management in their homes have been equally revealed through data collected in the field.

To this end, an important study in the future would be to trace the historical interplay in the increasing use of English and the decreasing use of heritage languages in relation to the impact of colonialism on the cultural inclinations of heritage minority languages speakers in Nigeria. This implies that it would be interesting to conduct research into the impact of linguistic colonialism on the culture of the Itsekiri-speaking people in relation to their language choices.

Significantly, a diachronic study of the Itsekiri language and a project on language awareness to sensitize the Itsekiri people to the importance of intergenerational transmission of their language

and the consequences of the perceived shift to English and NPE, suggested in the data of this study, would help to stem the tide of language shift in the community.

Furthermore, in-depth research into translanguaging in Nigeria with a view to exploring bilingual teaching in classrooms, in which heritage languages and English are the instructional languages could increase the vitality of heritage languages with a view to enhancing their status and vitality.

In addition, it may be worthwhile to study the phenomenon of community language policy (CLP) and its significance with respect to the Itsekiri language. Though intergenerational transmission of the Itsekiri language appears lacking amongst the Itsekiri-speaking people, the data in this study reveal that the Itsekiris identify with their language and are conscious of the importance of deploying the language in social cultural contexts. A feat which has resulted in the establishment of explicit rules obliging speaking of Itsekiri language during formal and important gatherings such as family meetings, community gatherings and clubs, Itsekiri students' unions, to mention but a few contexts.

7.5. Limitations of the study, constraints, and challenges

I would like to acknowledge that fifty-seven hours of observations in 15 different locations and twenty-four hours of interview from 20 respondents that make up the data collected in this research may not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that the Itsekiri language is threatened or endangered. Although, a small-scale qualitative study, however the data suggest a strong indication that the Itsekiri language might be endangered.

In line with this, presented below are some limitations of the study, constraints and challenges encountered during field investigation.

Firstly, a general dearth of public documents, statistics and data in Nigeria made it impossible to obtain the required official documents to buttress some of my claims about the linguistic situation in Nigeria, since the country seems to lack a substantial database system in many domains. Added to this, I could not find documents that dwell on language policy planning and management in Nigeria. The only document available during the period of my fieldwork in 2018 was the 2004 Nigeria National Policy on Education, revised in 2014, in which the use of English as medium of

instruction in schools is mentioned. Even though the English language appears to act as an official language in Nigeria, it is not clearly designated in the Nigeria constitution as the official language.

Similarly, the meso research context, the Itsekiri-speaking community lacks substantive research resources and material that doctoral study could draw from. For instance, there were no previous and existing studies/research as well as background information in the field of sociolinguistics on the use of the Itsekiri language on which the study could be based. In other words, there has neither been any published sociolinguistic research, nor a doctoral study on the Itsekiri language; therefore, there was no reference point. Paucity of sociolinguistic and ethnographic studies about the Itsekiri language caused the review of the literature on the Itsekiri language to be limited to information gleaned from historical books, speeches and articles written by a few Itsekiri-speaking individuals such as Ayomike (2010) Brown (2021) and Erumi (2013) to mention but a few.

From observation while reviewing relevant literature to the doctoral research it does not seem that African leaders and policy makers are interested in and conscious of the need to research into heritage languages. They seem to be mainly preoccupied by economic and political issues. Could this be responsible for the dearth of funding in the field of applied and sociolinguistics in Nigerian universities? For example, in Nigeria, the existing Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) provides funding for research in the natural science and engineering domains but none in the humanities. There is quite simply no funding for applied and sociolinguistic research in Nigeria to the best of my knowledge.

In addition, some key challenges in this doctoral research were of academic, infrastructural, and climatic nature.

Academic challenges are in relation to data transcription resulting from some respondents' use of Itsekiri and NPE during the interview. Some interviews were conducted in three languages: Itsekiri, English and NPE. It was a herculean task translating the interview data from Itsekiri and NPE into English. Intermittent translanguaging characteristics from respondents further rendered transcription difficult. For these reasons and others previously mentioned, I decided not to translate all the interview data.

Similarly, I encountered infrastructural challenges resulting from inadequate amenities such as electricity supply and public transportation system in the city of Warri where the fieldwork was carried out. Nigeria is an emerging economy where infrastructure is yet to be extensively developed.

During the six months spent in Warri, there was no constant electricity supply. Persistent power failure all through the period of my ethnographic investigation made research in Nigeria quite a challenge. It was sometimes difficult to power the electronic device I used to record interviews and type field notes from observations.

Logistics was a challenge as a result of the poor transportation network. Movement from one location to another was difficult. Although I hired a guide to drive me to meet scheduled interview participants, there were occasions when I had to travel by public transport (a difficult moment) when he was at work and not available to take me to the venue of the interview. I also had to walk long distances in the scorching sun to areas where public transportation were inaccessible.

Nigeria is in the tropical region on the West of Africa; therefore, temperatures can be as high as 50° Celsius. The city of Warri is generally hot and humid and the environment dusty during the dry season, which starts from October and ends in March when the rainy season sets in.

Although the fieldwork presented an array of challenges, I found my way around, surmounted the difficulties and managed to collect a very robust and rich dataset.

7.6. Suggested strategies and recommendations to reverse language shift and maintain the Itsekiri language

This doctoral research is a diagnosis of a seemingly unhealthy situation or an ailing condition, not of a physical or an identified human being, but of a language and the linguistic practices of people who speak it. The perceived condition prompted a detailed investigation and diagnosis of the underlying causes of language shift and language endangerment in the Itsekiri-speaking community. Subsequently, an analysis of the linguistic behaviour and attitudes of speakers of the Itsekiri language was carried out in relation to the presence of the English language and NPE, two dominant languages in the community.

To address some of the findings that seem to pose linguistic challenges to the Itsekiri language, this section of the concluding chapter presents suggested strategies and recommendations to reverse language shift in the Itsekiri-speaking community and maintain the Itsekiri language.

As an investigative researcher, going into the field opened my eyes to certain hazy phenomenon that were difficult to decipher as far as the research topic was concerned.

I reviewed relevant sociolinguists' thoughts in the field of language shift and language endangerment; carried out observations in various contexts and interviewed respondents in the Itsekiri-speaking community. The data collected from these endeavours provided a direction that suggests what seem to be strategies, if implemented, may serve to reverse language shift in the Itsekiri community and maintain the Itsekiri language.

Furthermore, findings from the analysis of the data did not only suggest possible causes of endangerment of the Itsekiri language, but they also revealed the sensed language shift in view of the Itsekiri speakers seeming preference for English and NPE, as well as evidence of non-intergenerational transmission, demonstrated in language practices in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Some of the suggested strategies in my data may not only contribute to preserving endangered heritage minority languages in general but may also help in resuscitating and rekindling the interest of speakers of the Itsekiri language in maintaining their language.

Having said that, it is pertinent to acknowledge that suggested strategies and recommendations being made in the light of the findings of this research, which are by no means exhaustive, are presented through the lenses of scholars in sociolinguistics, in addition to discourse from respondents that constitute data set in this doctoral study.

Various scholars in sociolinguistics in the field of language shift and language endangerment have worked actively and extensively on the question of reversing and maintaining endangered heritage minority languages in varieties of ways. Those whose ideas have been adopted in this doctoral research include: Spolsky (2004, 1998), Mufwene (2002), Olko & Sallabanks (2021), Panharipande (2002), Austin & Sallabanks (2010), Hornberger & Putz, (2013), Nau et al (2015),

Mesthrie (2011), Gibbon & Ramirez (2004), Garcia (2009), Crystal (2002), May (2005), and Warner & Wilson (1999).

Drawing from the above scholars' knowledge on reversing language shift and maintaining endangered languages, as well as ideas from respondents that aligns with scholars, efforts and initiatives to maintain heritage languages presented in this research may serve to reverse and maintain heritage minority languages in Nigeria in general and the Itsekiri language in particular.

Pertinent ideas raised at the 31st session of the UNESCO General Conference (2001), in which participants unanimously adopted the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* and recognized a relationship between biodiversity, cultural diversity, and linguistic diversity are adopted in this study as important strategies to maintain a threatened heritage language. In the conference, UNESCO's action plan recommends that Member States, in conjunction with speaker communities, undertake steps

“To ensure sustaining the linguistic diversity of humanity and giving support to expression, creation, and dissemination of the greatest possible number of languages. Encouraging linguistic diversity at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the youngest age; incorporating, where appropriate, traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge. And where permitted by speaker communities, encouraging universal access to information in the public domain through the global network, including promoting linguistic diversity in cyberspace” (UNESCO 2001).

Similarly, Nau et al (2015) are of the view that endangered languages require decisive and informed language campaigns in the following areas: education, support in publishing industries, raising the prestige and status of the language in public life, promoting bilingualism in the workplace, in administration and increasing the presence of the language through vigorous use in the local linguistic landscape.

In conjunction with the above, other succinct ways to reverse language shift, revitalize and maintain heritage minority languages suggested by other scholars in sociolinguistics and buttressed by participants' discourse are presented in the following sections.

7.6.1. Inter-generational transmission of the Itsekiri language

One of the ways in which a heritage minority language may be maintained argued by Fishman (1991) and attested to by respondents, is inter-generational transmission of the language. Therefore, the family institution will play a key and vital role in the maintenance and revitalisation of the Itsekiri language through vertical and lateral transmission within the home. Besides Fishman, Spolsky (2009), Schwartz (2008), Austin & Sallabanks (2014), and Olko & Sallabanks, (2021) have extensively written on inter-generational transmission of languages as a strategy to revitalize and maintain endangered languages.

In addition, consensus of the interview participants is that transmission of Itsekiri should start in the home. They are of the view that parents should be responsible for transmitting the Itsekiri language to their children. They believe that Itsekiri will thrive if it is used extensively within and amongst family members. Elijah, Lucas, and Ruth three respondents, particularly suggest that parents should speak Itsekiri to their children at an early age when they begin to express themselves, before going to school.

In line with that, Fishman (1991), Spolsky (2009), Schwartz (2008), Olko & Sallabanks (2021), have all argued that the best place to learn and acquire a heritage minority language is the home. They maintain that vertical transmission of languages are relevant to the survival of minority languages. In other words, transmitting languages from one generation to another is key to the survival of heritage minority languages. Where parents expose their children to their heritage language through language management (Spolsky 2009), their language will be sustained and can survive competition with other languages in the same environment. This implies that the home and family have major responsibilities in ensuring survival of the Itsekiri language.

In the same vein, Mesthrie (2011) asserts that a language is maintained if speakers effectively pass it on to the next generation, and that transmission may fail if speakers do not use it sufficiently in the learner's presence; or because the learners themselves do not make use of it. Fishman (1991) is of the opinion that language shift can be reversed if ethnic languages are retained within the family and at the community level. He argues that the family contains a natural boundary that serves as a bulwark against outside pressures. "The most common and inescapable basis of mother tongue transmission is bonding, use and stabilization" (Fishman 1991 p: 94). Fishman further adds that the desire to maintain and transmit the home language is not anti-modern and represents a welcome alternative to complete globalization.

In agreement with Fishman, Schwartz (2008) posits that the most important point of intergenerational language transfer is the use of the ethnic language in the home by women of childbearing age with their children, because, according to her, the family and community are critical in the maintenance of the home language. Schwartz (ibid) equally points out that family language policy studies provide an integrated overview of research on how languages are managed, learned and negotiated within families.

Abel, a respondent agrees with the above suggestions affirming that when he meets with his mother, he naturally speaks Itsekiri, considering it out of place to speak either English or NPE with her. He is of the view that it is imperative that Itsekiris speak their language within families in their homes and amongst themselves to prevent it from going extinct.

7.6.2. Teaching and learning the Itsekiri language in formal education

One of the findings in this study is that the Itsekiri language is not present in formal education since it is not adequately taught and used in schools. The non-use of Itsekiri as a means of instruction at the early learning stages of education and the dominant use of English in schools may have caused a decrease in the domain of use of the Itsekiri language.

In suggesting ways to revitalise endangered languages, Spolsky (1998) observes that school-based learning is the primary tool for language revitalisation. According to him, school-based programmes are good examples of language revitalisation, as a large group of potential language learners are obliged to be present in schools for a large portion of the day. Schools provide the opportunity to teach a generation of future speakers of a language he opines.

In addition, Crystal (2000) suggests that an endangered language will progress if its speakers have a strong presence in the educational system and they can write their language down. He further suggests that the teaching of literacy though a major educational function, plays a major role in the maintenance of endangered languages. Literacy programmes should be a priority in revitalising an endangered language he enthuses.

Crystal (ibid) equally maintains that an endangered language could be sustained if an orthography is devised and materials to aid learning in the form of dictionaries, grammars, manuals and literature books are provided. He suggests that school pupils can be taught their mother tongue while they are still at the stage of life where language learning takes place most quickly and easily. Crystal however remarks that the effectiveness of such programmes will depend on the quality and quantity of exposure and levels of motivation of learners of the language.

The above idea resonates with interview participants who are of the view that heritage languages should be taught in formal school environments, in classrooms, as any other subject or discipline in higher education in which case, language curricula for endangered languages should be developed in the formal or official context of state-run schools in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Similarly, Cortina (2009) suggests that in order to avoid English monolingualism, more heritage language courses to increase students' literacy in their heritage language, and availability of dual-language schools to increase literacy in both languages should be introduced in schools. Additionally, Cortina (ibid) views professional development opportunities for educators regarding language learning and cultural identity as ways to avoid English monolingualism, which appears to be evident in the repertoire of children and young adults in the Itsekiri-speaking community.

In the same vein, Valdiviezo et al. (2014) propose bicultural programmes that promote parallel linguistic and cultural development that would allow students to develop the tools to be successful in their two languages. This, they argue, would further reinforce language maintenance as well as help to preserve minority languages. In that light, language programmes from preschool to college and university could be designed to maintain the Itsekiri language.

In a similar manner, other initiatives to revitalize and maintain heritage languages could be introduced through immersion schools examined in the following section.

7.6.2.1. Immersion schools

Another strategy to maintain the Itsekiri language may be through immersion school initiatives in the formal education system. Cummins (2000) describes language immersion as the use of target language as a medium of instruction in schools.

The idea of immersion schools as a strategy to maintain threatened languages is common in western civilization. Besides the first language immersion school that opened in Quebec Canada in 1965, Warner (2002), and Wilson & Kamana (2011), report the first immersion pre-school called Aha Punana Leo' meaning voice nest or language nest that was established in 1983 in Hawaii in the United States. According to Wilson & Kamana (2011), family-run pre-schools facilitate interactions between children and fluent speakers entirely in the indigenous language. "The aim is to cultivate fluency and knowledge of the indigenous language and culture in as much the same way that they were in the home" (Wilson & Kamana 2011). Other examples are Full-immersion Maori Language Nest preschools, or Te Kohanga Reo, in New Zealand.

Additionally, Fishman (1996) reports of similar initiative otherwise known as language survival schools. According to Fishman, language survival schools are programmes in which the language of instruction is the endangered language itself. He observes that language nests have proved to be a simple but highly effective means of bringing children to fluency in their ancestral language and giving them early education in indigenous culture and values.

Fishman further posits that the teaching methodology of immersion schools considers classroom books, with materials on the walls and around the classroom written in the endangered language. Other strategies employed in immersion schools, Fishman suggests could be field trips to communities where the language or culture is in use and playground activities structured in such a way that the heritage language is used. This is where folk tales, storytelling, and games becomes useful as traditional songs are taught in the heritage language.

In the same vein, to maintain the Itsekiri language, certain elements could be borrowed from the language nests initiative or immersion schools programme and replicated in formal education in the Itsekiri-speaking community to encourage the teaching and learning of Itsekiri. Such initiatives may be better introduced at the pre-school and primary school levels while the learners are still young and at a stage where informal language learning may be easier for learners.

Some respondents from this study are open to these ideas. For example, Aaron's discourse supports the idea that the Itsekiri language be taught effectively in both formal and informal education, while suggesting the provision of teaching or pedagogical material by both the community and government to enhance teaching of the language.

In this respect, including the teaching of heritage languages in the Language Education Policy in Nigeria would need to be considered. Therefore, the Nigerian education system should provide materials and design curriculum to teach heritage languages in order to encourage pupils to learn, appreciate and speak their heritage languages.

Similarly, promoting and effectively teaching Itsekiri alongside English and including it in the school curriculum may not only enhance its status and vitality, the language may become attractive to its speakers. This could pave the way for more in-depth study of the Itsekiri language in higher education and may produce teachers to teach the language.

According to my data, teachers do not have the requisite knowledge of the language; therefore, teaching Itsekiri in higher institutions should be encouraged to provide the requisite qualifications to teach it in primary and secondary schools. In this regard, one of the ways to achieve this may be the creation of teacher-training schools to train teachers to teach heritage languages. Such initiative is likely to boost teaching and learning of Itsekiri.

To achieve this objective, proficient speakers of the Itsekiri language could be employed as teaching assistants to assist teachers who are non-Itsekiri speaking in the classroom. This is in line with a respondent's idea, Aaron, who suggests that seminars, workshops and in-service trainings should be organised to empower Itsekiri language teachers to prepare them adequately for the job.

7.6.3. Teaching Itsekiri in informal education

7.6.3.1. Community- based work

Another strategy to maintain the Itsekiri language could be informal community-based work. The community-based approach centers on the establishment of informal schools or after-school programmes and summer programmes organised within the community. Various respondents in the doctoral study advocate for informal learning of Itsekiri in which efforts of community members would be required in the maintenance process. Micah, a respondent, suggests creation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that would establish language learning centres to teach the Itsekiri language.

In pursuit of the goal of teaching Itsekiri informally, Adam, another respondent, maintains that Itsekiri should not only be transmitted via extensive use in the household, it should also be taught effectively in an informal school setting. According to Adam, collective or individual initiatives aimed at establishing informal teaching and learning centres would be a step in the right direction in the maintenance process. Adam further suggests that the centre could also organise evening classes in locations close to people's homes, in addition to organising seminars aimed at developing language awareness to sensitise the Itsekiri language speakers to the advantages of bilingualism discussed later in this chapter.

In line with Adam's suggestion above, to sustain the maintenance effort of the Itsekiri language, a respondent, Aaron is of the view that there is a need to establish community libraries stocked with linguistic resources produced in the Itsekiri language. According to Aaron, the establishment of sociocultural centres and after school classes would attract children and youth to lean Itsekiri. Parents may also be encouraged to send their children to such after school classes, he opines. Most interview participants are disposed to this strategy if implemented.

The methodology of teaching informal classes would be the use of audio files and or videos with Itsekiri language centred contents, as well as other Itsekiri-based linguistic pedagogical material such as books written in the Itsekiri language. Aaron equally maintains that children and young people can listen to folktales, watch short films or movies in which the Itsekiri language is spoken, as well as tell stories in Itsekiri with the aim of not only learning the language, but also preserving

the linguistic and cultural patrimony. Aaron further argues that interested individuals in the community can be encouraged to teach the Itsekiri language informally to resuscitate interest in and use of the Itsekiri language. This, according to him would inject a new linguistic life into the Itsekiri speech community. He however adds that, support from the government would be required to sustain such initiative.

7.6.3.2. Task-based principle and curricular approaches

In addition to teaching endangered heritage languages in formal and informal education, Austin & Sallabanks (2011) suggest the task-based principle and curricular approaches to acquiring endangered heritage languages as strategies in revitalisation and maintenance efforts. To achieve this objective, they propose a master-apprentice approach in the curriculum design for endangered languages.

They argue that, to teach and learn a heritage language, interested individuals, parents and families could turn to elders and tribal networks as essential curriculum resources. Aaron, a respondent, seems to share this view in his discourse *“important and qualified and capable Itsekiri personality could be invited to deliver lectures on important subjects using Itsekiri language”*.

In the same manner, Hinton et al. (2001) suggest the California ‘master-apprentice’ language learning approach, which could be a reference point. “This is not a traditional classroom situation where a trained teacher decides what the students should learn” (Hinton et al. 2001b: 223). While echoing Hinton, Austin & Sallabanks (2011) report that the master-apprentice approach is a situation where master speakers/teachers are paired with younger language learners in a one-on-one immersion setting. The methodology of this approach is that teams work together for a number of hours between 10 and 20 hours per week for one to three years at a time sometimes longer, depending on the team.

Unlike the formal language learning approach that focuses on the formal study of linguistics and grammar structures, Austin & Sallabanks (ibid) observe that the master-apprentice curriculum is geared towards communication between the master and the apprentice in the context of everyday activities and tasks.

Contrary to the grammar-based language learning and teaching methodology, this approach is task-based learning of which the starting point is not a list of linguistics items, but a collection of tasks they posit. They maintain that task-based language learning provides learners with meaningful opportunities to explore the peculiarities of the language through a set of tasks in order to be exposed to practical, authentic and functional language use in a systematic way.

Furthermore, Austin & Sallabanks (2011) note that in the context of master-apprentice tasks and activities, both learner and master teacher interact in the language using gestured and spoken commands and visual cues to aid comprehension. Assessment in this approach includes a periodic oral test in which the master teacher asks questions and observes how the apprentice responds. He then gives the apprentice a picture and asks him or her to say anything he/she can about it in the target language. The goal is for the apprentice to be conversationally proficient in their language and ready to teach it to others within three years they argue.

Additionally, the master-apprentice strategy helps in strengthening intergenerational ties, brings people back in touch with their roots and encourages cultural revitalisation.

In like manner, the master-apprentice approach to language maintenance could be applied in the process of ensuring reversing language shift in the Itsekiri community. As suggested above by Aaron, a respondent, Itsekiri-speaking parents or individuals who are proficient in the Itsekiri language could take the responsibility of handling the master-apprentice learning approach as a way of getting young people and children interested in the Itsekiri language.

7.6.4. Bilingualism in the education system

One way to maintain the Itsekiri language could be bilingual education. Garcia (2009) is of the view that bilingual education, as a strategy in reversing language shift should be encouraged in a minority language setting.

Garcia (2009) suggests that, Bilingual Language Education (BLE) could be introduced in the education system as a strategy to maintain a minority language. She notes that a bilingual education programme is aimed at using the endangered language as a medium of instruction in the area of

language use as well as an academic goal. Emphasising the merits of bilingual education, Garcia (2009) observes that the heritage language should constitute pedagogical content, and at the same time be used as the language of instruction.

Corroborating Garcia's view, Micah, a respondent, emphasised the need to educate the Itsekiri people about the advantages of bilingualism and argued that speaking Itsekiri does not prevent one from speaking English and that both languages could be acquired for their various uses and usefulness.

According to Garcia (ibid), in a bilingual education context, other subjects are taught in more than one language, while a traditional language education programme teaches a second or foreign language as a subject. For example, in the Itsekiri-speaking context, while English may be the medium of instruction and at the same time taught separately as a subject at the higher level of education, Itsekiri could be gradually introduced in schools, starting from the kindergarten and elementary levels, then moving into the primary and secondary levels. It could be taught as a subject and at the same time used as a medium of instruction.

7.6.5. Translanguaging Pedagogy

In addition to bilingual education, translanguaging pedagogy in which pupils' heritage languages are used in the classroom may help to maintain the Itsekiri language. Translanguaging pedagogy is understood as the instructional mobilisation of students' full linguistic repertoires and the promotion of productive contact across languages (Cummin 2019). If pupils are allowed and encouraged to use all the languages in their multilingual repertoires in the classroom, they may likely learn and speak their heritage languages.

In line with that, Pacheco (2016) is of the view that language learning is contingent upon prior schooling in the home /heritage language and literacy skills. In the same vein, Cummins, (1991) argues that if there is support for the development of the home language, a foundation is built not only for native-language literacy learning but also for second language learning and second language literacy acquisition. According to Cummins, a good foundation in a child's heritage language can promote language learning and cognitive benefits in the second language. In that

respect, integrating the Itsekiri language in classrooms and allowing pupils to learn in the language may not only reinforce speaking the Itsekiri language, it could sustain it.

7.6.6. Increasing visibility of Itsekiri via the internet

Furthermore, an effective way to maintain the Itsekiri language would be to bring Itsekiri into limelight by increasing its visibility through conscious efforts of individuals either on face-to-face activities or via on-line services and/or collaboration with community groups. Crystal (2002) suggests that information technology and the internet offer endangered languages, which have been written down, potential opportunities that could be explored. According to Crystal (ibid), information technology can create the needed space and atmosphere, as well as enabling environment for endangered languages to thrive especially where speakers are exposed to the use of digital devices and are able to use them to project the language online.

Crystal (ibid) further observes that young people are key to endangered language survival. He argues that no matter how much activism is engaged upon on behalf of an endangered language, if children, teenagers as well as parents of the next generation are not attracted, such efforts will be futile. According to Crystal (ibid), the internet turns teenagers on, therefore, if languages were exposed on the internet, young people would love it. He equally observes that it is possible for a minority language to make its presence felt on the internet in which case people can maintain a linguistic identity with their friends and relatives as well as colleagues wherever they may be all over the world

In the same vein, the strategy of using the internet as a tool for language learning can equally be applied in the Itsekiri-speaking community. To increase its visibility, speakers of the Itsekiri language can make use of electronic media/technology such as websites, blogs, web-forums and chat rooms, and the availability of internet for social networking sites to showcase and learn the language. This could attract children and young adults to the Itsekiri language since they are more likely to be interested in using online applications, especially, if introduced into their school curriculum.

To buttress this idea, I would like to mention an online linguistic group “Vanguard for the movement of Itsekiri language” which I created in 2013 to reach out to and encourage speakers of the Itsekiri language to use Itsekiri in their daily endeavours. In this group, members of the Itsekiri-speaking ethnic group have the opportunity not only to chat in Itsekiri, but also to post Itsekiri-related cultural activities. Activities such as quizzes or recipes for Itsekiri gastronomy, lessons on cooking basic and popular Itsekiri menus, cultural dances, classic traditional Itsekiri attires, video clips of Itsekiri dramas as well as traditional marriage ceremonies, riddles and jokes, are posted on the group chat. Equally posted on-line are basic lexical items, vocabulary and idiomatic expressions to encourage people to learn Itsekiri. The objective is to sensitize the Itsekiri people to the existence of these activities with a view to attracting and rekindling children and young people’s interest in the Itsekiri language.

With the proliferation of various social media platforms, Itsekiri-speaking individuals as well as cultural and drama groups currently upload various Itsekiri language related activities on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etcetera with the aim of encouraging those who cannot speak Itsekiri, to obtain resources that could help them learn the Itsekiri language. These strategies to ensure the survival of Itsekiri language via the internet could be veritable tools in the revitalization and maintenance of the language.

Furthermore, Crystal (2002) is of the view that endangered languages will progress if their speakers increase their prestige within the dominant community by ensuring the language has access to the media via a regular column in a daily newspaper, or an occasional programme transmitting the language on radio or television. In line with that, in the 1960s and 70s, there used to be a television programme in the then Bendel State Radio and Television broadcasting authority entitled “Tales by moonlight” transmitted in different heritage languages, including the Itsekiri language, in which tales about different types of animals and characters were told. The aim was to transmit heritage languages indigenous to a community, well as societal values to children. However, such programmes are no longer available to help children and young adults to learn and acquire their heritage languages. Such a programme, if reintroduced in the Itsekiri-speaking

community, could attract children and young adults and build their interest in their heritage language.

Additionally, events such as cultural celebrations or religious festivals are avenues through which the Itsekiri language could be transmitted. For example, Lucas, a respondent, is of the view that, for proper and increased visibility of the Itsekiri language, speakers should make a conscious effort to give prominence to the language via sociocultural contexts such as clubs and associations. He maintains that for people to feel the presence of the language within the wider community, the language could be promoted through cultural practices and social activities such as religious practices in churches and (ATR).

Added to this, Itsekiri centred activities could be showcased in social- cultural centres and in regular town hall meetings to discuss the way forward in the interest of the Itsekiri language. According to Lucas, promoting Itsekiri religious practices may be important motivations for speakers of the Itsekiri language.

Other ways to maintain the Itsekiri language may be language documentation discussed in the following section.

7.6.7. Language Documentation

A veritable strategy for revitalizing and maintaining threatened heritage languages is language documentation. Austin & Sallabanks (2011) opine that for threatened languages to survive, there is a need to document its linguistic properties for generations yet unborn to learn and acquire. They note that unless the myriads of inventive ways in which humans express themselves are documented now, future generations may have no knowledge of them.

Corroborating Austin & Sallabanks (ibid), participants in this study suggested language documentation as an effective measure in maintaining the Itsekiri language. Micah, a respondent opined that the Itsekiri language should be documented in a written document, such as pamphlets, in which Itsekiri cultural or/linguistic activities are recorded. He maintains that such documents

could serve as reference points for not only the present generation, but also the next. Micah argued that such an initiative could enhance the vitality of the Itsekiri language.

Significantly, documenting the Itsekiri language could provide traces of its cultural heritage and patrimony that may encourage members of the ethnic group to speak it. Contrary to this, where the Itsekiri language is not documented, there may be no trace of its existence.

In essence, Harrison (2007) argues that as languages fall out of use into forgetfulness, entire genres of oral traditions – stories, songs, and epic tales rapidly approach extinction. He remarks that in a situation where only a small fraction of the language is recorded or set down in books, when no longer spoken, the language will exist as a mere shadow of a once vibrant tradition. Harrison (ibid) further argues that these cultural treasures will all become extinct because they have not been passed on to children and the younger generation.

In that respect, given the current linguistic situation of the Itsekiri language, as revealed in the data, it would be necessary to document Itsekiri cultural treasures such as traditional songs, religious rituals, traditional histories, and folktales as strategies to maintain the Itsekiri language. Additionally, documenting and recording Itsekiri heritage traditional botanical names of plants, and unorthodox Itsekiri medicine names (areas to be studied in future projects), maybe other ways to maintain the Itsekiri language.

Furthermore, documenting and archiving linguistic treasures such as idiomatic expressions, rhymes and poems, songs, folktales, storytelling in the Itsekiri language, in the interest of future generations, may be other strategies to stem language shift and encourage inter-generational transmission of the language.

As an individual, I can personally relate to the question of storytelling and traditional riddles and jokes in Itsekiri. As a child, growing up in Warri in the late 60s and early 70s, I remember, it was a daily routine, after dinner, my siblings and I used to sit under the moonlight to tell stories which centred on animals and people with funny characters. In doing so, we did not only acquire the Itsekiri language, but we also learnt the Itsekiri culture and wisdom. Storytelling using the Itsekiri language, Itsekiri riddles and jokes helped us as children to learn and acquire societal values and moral conducts, which stood as life directions. Briefly put, language documentation could be a veritable strategy to maintain the Itsekiri language.

7.7. Concluding remarks

In this concluding section, I would like to borrow the quote below, which encapsulates a significant part of the doctoral study

“Socio-politico-economic developments in Nigeria favour language shift from local languages to English, a situation making local language maintenance and sustenance difficult while portending language extinction. Codeswitching between English and Nigerian languages is posited as a stage in the process of language shift to English and eventual extinction of local languages. Contributing to the evolving linguistic situation are extreme linguistic diversity, people’s mobility in the quest for survival in a poor economic environment, the absence of a viable language policy, neglect of local languages in the education of the child at home and school, and the dominance and viability of the English language. Nigeria is experiencing linguistic transition that may eventually see the extinction of many Nigerian languages if unchecked. Under the situation, language owners may be the best group to save their languages (over 500) from extinction” (Christopher, 2014: 381.)

In view of the fact that some of the findings in this research resonate with Christopher (2014), one may be constrained to agree with the above thoughts which portray what appears to be a pessimistic prediction of the linguistic situation of Nigerian languages in general and in the Itsekiri community in particular.

The declining use of the Itsekiri language resulting from family language choices and what appears to be an increasing search for a common means of communication in the Itsekiri community; as revealed in the data in this study, calls for action from the Itsekiri-speaking community.

Currently, the Itsekiri language seems to be suffering a linguistic setback as a result of low rates of use arising from language choices the Itsekiri speakers are making. There seems to be a general assumption that the Itsekiri language can neither meet the peoples’ economic, political, and social aspirations, nor take them beyond the shores of the local environment, according to the data,

meaning the language may be limited in scope since it is neither widely spoken, nor used internationally. In that light, since it appears that no solution may be proffered in this regard in the immediate, what seems plausible is to project the Itsekiri language by increasing its visibility and boosting its status and vitality.

To this end, it may be expedient for the Nigerian government to ensure implementation of the language policy embedded in the Nigeria policies of education which stipulate that heritage languages be taught in schools in the area they are situated.

In this respect, provision of adequate pedagogical material and ensuring effective teacher training may not only promote the language, it may encourage pupils to learn, appreciate and speak their heritage languages; as demonstrated in some African countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Ethiopia, Rwanda, to mention but a few; where certain heritage languages are used as languages of instruction and learnt as subjects at the lower level of schooling.

Furthermore, inclusion and use of heritage languages, alongside English in classrooms, may likely strengthen the status and increase the visibility of heritage languages such as the Itsekiri language. In effect, rather than discarding their heritage languages, as it appears currently, parents and pupils in the community may see the necessity to speak both English and their heritage language within and outside their homes. Subsequently, heritage language speakers might not only learn to appreciate one another's languages, linguistic conflicts could be reduced, linguistic discrimination stemmed, and linguistic tolerance encouraged.

In addition, recognising that transmitting a language is the responsibility of families, as parents sometimes make informed decisions concerning the choice of languages they want their children to use in their homes; conclusions drawn from evidence in the data suggest that intergenerational transmission of a heritage language is critical to the maintenance and survival of an endangered minority language such as Itsekiri.

Although, this study recognises the fact that no one can force parents to use their heritage language in their homes, it is nonetheless advisable that families use their heritage languages. To this end, it is important to create an awareness campaign initiative to not only sensitize parents and the entire

community to the importance of intergenerational transmission of Itsekiri, but also to advise parents on the type of family language policies and management to be instituted in their homes.

In that respect, creating linguistic awareness will also help parents understand the need to use their heritage language and not only English in their homes. This may help parents to not only understand the cultural advantages of retaining their heritage languages and expose the children to their cultural identity through their language; it may also stem the tide of attrition of the language seems passing through.

Contrary to this, the present generation of Itsekiri children are likely to see Itsekiri gradually being replaced by the dominant languages thus causing cultural and identity loss amongst the people, attrition and eventual extinction of the Itsekiri language.

Additionally, the strategy of giving visibility to the Itsekiri language via the internet and social media, ensuring its use at home as well as teaching it in schools appears to be an important initiative that cannot be overemphasised since it may encourage effective use of the language. Entities such as families, schools, communities, governments, and churches could explore different avenues to achieve this goal. These initiatives may not only reduce language shift and language endangerment, they may help to maintain not only the Itsekiri language, but also other heritage minority languages in Nigeria that seem to be in the same linguistic situation.

Furthermore, according to the data, speakers of the Itsekiri language translanguage and seem unaware of the advantages of supporting the development of both English and Itsekiri for their children. Admittedly, while parents are bilingual, or multilingual in three or more languages, including English, Itsekiri and NPE, as revealed in the data, children and young adults appear to be bilingual in English and NPE, excluding Itsekiri since they tend to speak both languages either in their homes or the environment.

In this regard, one may be poised to argue that, had the Itsekiri-speaking people been conscious of the realities and implications of the phenomenon of bilingualism and the advantages thereof, they might have understood the necessity and importance of speaking Itsekiri and English or Itsekiri and NPE in their homes. Such consciousness might have encouraged them to not only transmit

both languages to their children; the phenomenon of language shift might not have been significantly evident in the community.

The data collected in this study has revealed that the majority of the respondents may have limited knowledge of the concept of bilingualism and may be unaware of the importance of language transmission. In view of these sociolinguistic limitations, it may therefore be necessary to embark on a language awareness campaign to enlighten the Itsekiri-speaking people and other members of the community concerning the importance of bilingualism, as well as the extensive use of their heritage language to avert language, cultural and identity loss.

Finally, in the light of the foregoing, on the one hand, a lot remains to be done in the area of language endangerment in a heritage minority language context in Nigeria. On the other hand, subsequent prospects might be to conduct research on what constitutes the first language or mother tongue of children and young adults in the Itsekiri-speaking community. The objective would be to enlighten the Itsekiri-speaking people not only concerning the question of linguistic identity, but also to draw their attention to the consequences of abandoning their language for the dominant English language and NPE and the subsequent threat and endangerment the Itsekiri language may suffer.

In conclusion, a follow-up study of this doctoral research would be to join other sociolinguists in Nigeria to encourage the Nigerian government to consider putting in place an implementable linguistic policy that would promote heritage languages in Nigeria.

In that respect, it may be equally necessary to sensitise policy makers to recognise that heritage minority, or lesser-used languages are as important as English. They need to realise that different languages have different functions and are useful in diverse ways.

Langues minoritaires en danger: une étude de cas de la langue Itsekiri au Nigeria

Chapitre 1 Introduction générale à l'étude

1.1 Introduction générale

Les langues sont en voie de disparition dans le monde entier. Cette situation est très préoccupante, en particulier pour les langues minoritaires. On prévoit que nombre d'entre elles disparaîtront dans les années à venir. Des efforts concertés sont déployés dans le monde entier pour tenter de comprendre ce phénomène et d'inverser la tendance. Par ailleurs, de nombreux efforts ont été déployés pour préserver les langues en danger, notamment par l'Organisation des Nations unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture (UNESCO), qui a travaillé et continue de travailler à la sauvegarde des langues en danger. C'est dans ce contexte que s'inscrit cette thèse.

L'étude porte sur la mise en danger d'une langue dans un contexte linguistique minoritaire. Elle met en évidence les éléments linguistiques qui caractérisent les locuteurs d'une langue minoritaire patrimoniale existant dans le même paysage linguistique extrêmement diversifié, en tant que langue non autochtone, ex-coloniale et exogène. Plus précisément, elle explore les moyens par lesquels les langues minoritaires sont menacées et comment elles peuvent être sauvées, en utilisant la langue Itsekiri pour l'étude de cas.

Le fondement de cette recherche doctorale est que les langues sont en danger et la langue Itsekiri est l'une d'entre elles. J'essaie de comprendre comment la mise en danger se produit dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri, quelles en sont les causes, comment elle se manifeste et ce qui peut être fait pour inverser la situation.

Les attitudes et les comportements des locuteurs d'une langue ont été signalés dans la littérature sur la mise en péril des langues comme l'un des moyens par lesquels les langues sont menacées. Cette étude est donc centrée sur la manière dont cela se produit dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

Pour comprendre le phénomène de la mise en péril des langues, l'accent est mis sur la manière dont les langues sont mises en péril, sur la façon dont les gens se comportent pour mettre en péril leur langue et les exposer à un risque d'extinction.

Adoptant une approche critique et théorique dans la discipline de la sociolinguistique, en particulier dans le domaine du changement linguistique et de la mise en danger des langues, l'étude explore les concepts théoriques pertinents dans ce domaine en relation avec les langues minoritaires. Elle analyse de manière critique les modèles et discours sociolinguistiques au sein d'une communauté linguistique minoritaire. L'analyse documentaire se concentre sur la relation entre la mise en danger de la langue minoritaire, les attitudes et comportements linguistiques des personnes, y compris la famille, la politique gouvernementale et les attentes de la société- la connaissance de l'anglais est considérée comme un facteur clé de la mobilité ascendante.

L'étude du cas de la langue Itsekiri est importante parce que l'Itsekiri est l'un des principaux groupes ethniques de l'un des principaux États du Nigeria, l'État du Delta, dans la région du Delta du Nigeria, au sud du Nigeria, qui fournit la plus grande quantité de pétrole brut qui augmente les revenus du pays. Les champs pétroliers qui produisent la plus grande quantité de pétrole brut du Nigeria se trouvent essentiellement dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri, ce qui fait de ce groupe une force puissante dans le pays.

En outre, l'Itsekiri était la principale langue commerciale aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles, avant l'ère coloniale, et est restée une langue commerciale importante jusqu'à la découverte du pétrole en 1954.

Pendant cette période, le groupe ethnique Itsekiri était politiquement, économiquement et linguistiquement fort. Avant la colonisation, les Itsekiris commerçaient avec les marchands européens, notamment les portugais et les marchands britanniques. La position stratégique du peuple Itsekiri, situé dans la région côtière autour de l'océan Atlantique, lui permettait de contrôler la région. Leur contact direct avec les britanniques les a placés dans une position stratégique pour le commerce. L'économie florissante du peuple de langue Itsekiri a attiré les commerçants étrangers et locaux, ce qui a également renforcé l'attrait pour la langue Itsekiri (Ayomike, 2010). Leur pouvoir politique et économique, démontré en la personne du chef Nana Olumu du royaume Itsekiri qui commerçait avec les Britanniques, a donné de la crédibilité à la langue, qui était le seul moyen de communication à l'époque. Ayomike (ibid) rapporte que les rois et chefs Itsekiri contrôlaient le commerce des matières premières telles que l'huile de palme, les palmistes, le coton, le cacao, les arachides, l'étain et la colombite, dont les Européens avaient besoin pendant la révolution industrielle, et que la langue dominante à l'époque était la langue Itsekiri. Pendant la

période des échanges, les gens apprenaient la langue Itsekiri parce que la connaissance de la langue était courante et nécessaire pour faire des affaires dans la région côtière.

Bien qu'il s'agisse d'une langue écrite, cette recherche doctorale se concentre sur l'utilisation orale de l'Itsekiri, en mettant l'accent sur l'aspect parlé. L'Itsekiri est principalement acquis oralement auprès des parents, car c'est la langue parlée dans la plupart des foyers. La langue Itsekiri n'est pratiquement plus enseignée dans les écoles, ce qui explique que la majorité des locuteurs ne savent ni lire ni écrire dans cette langue. Seule la population vieillissante sait encore lire et écrire en Itsekiri.

Depuis les années 1980, le gouvernement nigérian n'a pas encouragé l'enseignement des langues minoritaires patrimoniales. Au lieu de cela, la langue anglaise, imposée par l'ancienne administration coloniale, a bénéficié d'un soutien institutionnel. Par conséquent, les nouvelles générations d'enseignants n'ont pas été formées à l'enseignement de l'Itsekiri. Cette lacune est à l'origine de l'absence ou de l'acquisition limitée de compétences linguistiques orales en Itsekiri, que ce soit à la maison, au sein de la famille ou de la communauté.

Cela va dans le sens de l'affirmation de Wolf (2021) sur l'implication de la présence dominante de l'anglais dans le paysage linguistique nigérian, reflétée dans ses remarques selon lesquelles les écoliers et les étudiants africains sont instruits par l'intermédiaire d'une langue étrangère, un phénomène qui met en péril les langues patrimoniales.

Le Nigeria est un pays multilingue et multiculturel qui compte plus de 500 langues minoritaires patrimoniales (Igboanusi 2011). Ces langues semblent menacées en raison de leur utilisation insuffisante et du passage à l'anglais. Austin et Sallabanks (2010) affirment que le changement de langue est souvent motivé par des facteurs socio-économiques. Dans leur tentative d'apporter une valeur ajoutée à la science linguistique, Austin et Sallabanks (2011) ont posé la question suivante : pourquoi s'inquiéter de la mise en danger des langues ? Leur réponse suggère qu'au cours de l'histoire, des langues sont mortes et ont été remplacées par d'autres, soit par contact linguistique entre des groupes de personnes parlant des langues différentes, soit par divergence due au manque de communications. Ils soulignent que le nombre croissant de variétés linguistiques que les enfants n'apprennent plus, associé à une tendance au glissement linguistique, où les locuteurs se tournent vers des langues de communication plus large, en particulier des langues majeures comme l'anglais ou l'espagnol, sont quelques-unes des raisons pour lesquelles les gens devraient s'inquiéter de la mise en péril des langues.

En outre, au Nigeria, on pense que le passage à l'anglais peut permettre aux locuteurs de trouver un emploi et d'accéder à un travail international. Awonusi (2013) affirme que 71 % des bilingues anglais-nigériens de langue minoritaire considèrent l'anglais comme la langue du progrès social et économique et que 72 % des Nigériens ne peuvent maintenir un discours dans leur langue sans mélanger les codes et passer à l'anglais.

Dans le même ordre d'idées et dans le contexte de cette étude, il a été observé que les membres du groupe ethnique Itsekiri semblent avoir cessé de parler leur langue d'origine avec leurs enfants, au profit de l'anglais, une situation qui est à la base de cette étude. Fishman (1991) est d'avis que l'absence de transmission des langues patrimoniales des parents aux enfants constitue une perte d'identité considérable qui peut être difficile à inverser et qu'une langue qui n'est pas transmise risque de s'éteindre.

1.3 Situer la mise en danger des langues dans le champ de la sociolinguistique

Diverses écoles de pensée se sont penchées sur la mise en danger des langues minoritaires. Les sociolinguistes ont utilisé des termes tels qu'extinction silencieuse, perte de langue, changement de langue, mise en danger de la langue pour décrire les situations linguistiques relatives aux langues minoritaires.

L'Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'Education, la Science et la Culture (UNESCO) s'intéresse au phénomène de la mise en danger des langues. À cet égard, le 21 février de chaque année, la question de la mise en danger des langues minoritaires est examinée lors de la commémoration de la Journée internationale de la langue maternelle par l'UNESCO.

De la même manière, les chercheurs ont des façons différentes d'envisager le phénomène de la mise en péril des langues.

Soulignant le degré de mise en danger des langues, Solash (2010) affirme qu'avec la mondialisation, plus de la moitié des 6 000 à 7 000 langues parlées dans le monde risquent de disparaître avant la fin du siècle.

Sallabanks & Olko (2021) font également remarquer qu'au moins la moitié des langues du monde pourraient ne plus être parlées d'ici la fin du 21^e siècle. Les raisons invoquées sont d'ordre économique, social et psychologique.

Pour sa part, Gordon (2005), de la Foundation of Endangered Languages (FEL), une organisation non gouvernementale (ONG), observe que, sur les 6 000 à 7 000 langues recensées dans le monde, très peu sont dominantes et sont parlées par plus de la moitié de la population mondiale. Il remarque que la plupart des langues humaines sont parlées par un très petit nombre de personnes et que la majorité des langues sont sur le point de disparaître. Suggérant que les chiffres concernant les locuteurs ne sont disponibles que pour 6 600 langues, il ajoute que sur ces 6 600 langues, 56 % sont parlées par moins de 10 000 personnes, 28 % par moins de 1 000 personnes, 83 % sont limitées à de petits pays et que 10 grandes langues parlées par plus de 100 millions de personnes sont les langues maternelles de près de la moitié (49 %) de la population mondiale. « Presque toutes les langues appelées à disparaître seraient des langues indigènes, et la plupart des langues indigènes actuelles disparaîtraient, à l'exception d'un très petit nombre d'entre elles qui sont numériquement fortes » (Gordon, *ibid.*, p. 57).

En outre, Krauss (1997) estime que 90 à 95 % des langues parlées aujourd'hui pourraient avoir disparu ou être très gravement menacées dans moins de cent ans. Selon lui, les langues comptant plusieurs milliers de locuteurs ne sont plus acquises par les enfants, et au moins 50 % des plus de six mille langues parlées dans le monde perdent des locuteurs. Selon lui, dans la plupart des régions du monde, environ 90 % des langues pourraient être remplacées par des langues dominantes d'ici la fin du 21^e siècle. Bernard (1996), pour sa part, souligne qu'environ 96 % de la population mondiale parle environ 4 % des langues du monde ; et inversement, environ 97 % des langues du monde sont parlées par environ 3 % de la population mondiale. Il ajoute que la majeure partie de l'hétérogénéité linguistique du monde est gérée par un très petit nombre de personnes.

En outre, le groupe d'experts ad hoc sur les langues en danger (UNESCO, 2003), unité du patrimoine culturel immatériel, a publié un rapport sur la vitalité et la mise en danger des langues, dans lequel il observe qu'il ne reste peut-être plus que 300 à 600 langues non menacées transmises par la génération des parents à celle des enfants. Dans le même ordre d'idées, la réunion internationale d'experts du programme de l'UNESCO sur la sauvegarde des langues en danger, qui s'est tenue à Paris du 10 au 12 mars 2003, rapporte ce qui suit :

« La mise en danger d'une langue peut être le résultat de forces extérieures telles que l'asservissement militaire, économique, religieux, culturel ou éducatif, ou elle peut être causée par des forces internes, telles que l'attitude

négligence d'une communauté à l'égard de sa propre langue. Les pressions internes trouvent souvent leur source dans les pressions externes, et toutes deux mettent un terme à la transmission intergénérationnelle des traditions linguistiques et culturelles. De nombreux peuples indigènes, associant leur position sociale défavorisée à leur culture, en sont venus à penser que leurs langues ne valaient pas la peine d'être conservées. Ils abandonnent leurs langues et leurs cultures dans l'espoir de vaincre la discrimination, de s'assurer des moyens de subsistance et d'améliorer la mobilité sociale, ou de s'assimiler au marché mondial ». (UNESCO 2003).

Dans le même ordre d'idées, les sociolinguistes et les experts en langues estiment que la plupart des langues indigènes et minoritaires d'aujourd'hui sont susceptibles de disparaître à mesure que la génération des parents abandonne sa propre langue d'origine pour une langue dominante et « prestigieuse ». Harrison (2010) souligne que lorsqu'une langue n'est pas transmise à la génération suivante, sa durée de vie ne dépasse pas celle du dernier locuteur et sa mort est presque inévitable. En outre, Austin et Sallabanks (2010) prévoient que seules 40 à 50 langues pourront être utilisées dans les prochaines années. Ils estiment qu'il s'agira probablement de langues utilisées dans les technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC). Ils estiment en outre que la répartition actuelle des langues et des populations dans le monde est fortement déséquilibrée. En d'autres termes, un petit nombre de langues très importantes figurent parmi les vingt premières langues parlées dans le monde, comme le chinois, l'anglais, l'hindi/urdu et l'espagnol, qui comptent chacune plus de 50 millions de locuteurs natifs et sont parlées par 50 % de la population mondiale. Cependant, il existe également un très grand nombre de petites langues dont les communautés de locuteurs se comptent en milliers ou en centaines. Ils estiment que les pouvoirs économiques, politiques, sociaux et culturels tendent à être détenus par les locuteurs des langues majoritaires, tandis que les milliers de langues minoritaires sont marginalisées et reléguées.

De même, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (2000) affirment que l'identification et la quantification des langues comportent des pièges intrinsèques. Dans leur analyse de la diversité linguistique dans le monde, citant Kraus, (1992), ils observent que certains faits fondamentaux montrent qu'il y a probablement entre 6 500 et 10 000 langues parlées dans le monde et peut-être un nombre égal de langues des signes, l'Europe et le Moyen-Orient représentant 4 % des langues orales du monde.

Skutnabb-Kangas et Phillipson (ibid.) estiment que sur les 225 langues européennes, 94 sont en danger. Les Amériques, du Nord, du Sud et centrale, représentent environ 1 000 des langues orales du monde, soit 15 %. Ils soulignent que 35 % des langues orales du monde se trouvent en Afrique, 30 % en Asie et moins de 20 % dans le Pacifique. Ils ajoutent que neuf pays dans le monde comptent plus de 200 langues chacun, ce qui représente plus de la moitié des langues du monde, soit un total de 3 490, tandis que treize pays comptent plus de 100 langues chacun. Vingt-deux pays, avec un peu plus de 10 % des langues du monde, représentent probablement 75 % (5 000) des langues orales du monde.

On peut en déduire que la majorité des langues minoritaires du monde sont menacées, voire en voie de disparition.

1.4 Orientation de la recherche et motivation de l'étude

La présente étude sur l'Itsekiri a été inspirée par deux facteurs. Premièrement, une expérience personnelle avec ma famille et l'utilisation de la langue Itsekiri, et deuxièmement, ma vie académique et universitaire.

La première expérience concerne un phénomène qui a attiré mon attention en 2010 lorsque j'ai visité le Nigeria à la suite du décès de ma mère. Lors de ma visite dans la ville de Warri, le contexte de cette recherche, j'ai observé que les membres de ma famille, y compris mes frères et sœurs et les membres de ma famille élargie, ne parlaient pas la langue Itsekiri, leur langue d'origine. Ils parlaient soit l'anglais, soit le Nigeria Pidgin English (NPE). Au cours de nos conversations, je parlais en Itsekiri, mais leurs réponses étaient en anglais. Plusieurs tentatives pour obtenir une réponse en Itsekiri de la part de mes frères et sœurs, de mes neveux et nièces ont été infructueuses. J'ai eu recours à une coercition subtile en Itsekiri, mais sans succès non plus. En fait, alors que les adultes parlaient anglais et NPE entre eux, mes neveux et nièces s'exprimaient en anglais standard. J'ai été stupéfaite par ce comportement linguistique. Curieuse, j'ai subtilement demandé pourquoi ils ne parlaient pas Itsekiri. Les réponses ont été étonnantes. La première réaction à ma question a été un éclat de rire euphorique. Les raisons qu'ils ont finalement données sont les suivantes : premièrement, la plupart de leurs amis ne parlaient pas Itsekiri, deuxièmement, il y avait beaucoup de langues différentes dans la communauté et dans l'environnement, donc l'anglais et le NPE étaient les langues les plus courantes qu'ils parlaient entre amis.

Ils ont également affirmé s'être tellement habitués à parler anglais et NPE qu'ils ne pensaient même à parler l'Itsekiri (un phénomène que la plupart des participants à mes entretiens ont corroboré).

En outre, de mon environnement familial, j'ai remarqué que les enfants de la communauté ne parlaient pas non plus la langue Itsekiri, et que leurs parents ne parlaient pas Itsekiri avec leurs enfants. Il semblait y avoir chez les enfants une dérive vers le monolinguisme anglais dans la communauté Itsekiri.

Pour satisfaire ma curiosité, je suis allée observer le comportement linguistique et l'utilisation de la langue dans les lieux publics tels que les églises, les restaurants, les marchés et les services de transport public. La situation était la même que dans ma famille.

C'est alors que j'ai commencé à me souvenir de certaines caractéristiques des langues en danger que j'avais lues dans la littérature sociolinguistique.

La deuxième expérience qui a motivé cette étude est liée à ma familiarisation avec certaines notions sociolinguistiques relatives à la mise en danger des langues que j'ai étudié en suivant un cours de politique linguistique en deuxième année de mon master à l'Université de Strasbourg. Les termes sociolinguistiques tels que le changement de langue, la mort de la langue, les langues menacées, la vitalité de la langue, l'attrition de la langue, le contact linguistique, l'hégémonie de la langue appris au cours du programme ont résonné avec la situation de menace ressentie de la langue Itsekiri.

En outre, les éléments indicatifs de la mise en danger et de la vitalité des langues ont également attiré mon attention et m'ont fait réaliser que les langues minoritaires du Nigeria appartenaient à la catégorie des langues susceptibles d'être menacées et en voie de disparition. En outre, mon exposition à un projet de sensibilisation aux langues (ELODIL 2003) m'a sensibilisée davantage à la nécessité de donner une chance aux langues minoritaires en présence de langues dominantes.

Par conséquent, après une réflexion profonde et continue, après plusieurs considérations, y compris mes lectures sur la mise en danger des langues, avec des connaissances empiriques considérables sur le sujet, la direction à prendre est devenue claire. À ce stade, j'ai pensé que j'avais une tâche énorme à accomplir, au-delà de ma connaissance rudimentaire de la langue et de mes inquiétudes quant à l'avenir des langues minoritaires patrimoniales au Nigéria. C'est alors qu'est apparue l'envie de mener une étude approfondie allant au-delà de la maîtrise, afin de comprendre et de déterminer en profondeur les causes sous-jacentes de ce qui semble être un changement de langue au sein de la communauté de langue Itsekiri. Après en avoir discuté avec mon directeur d'études de l'époque

et avec ses encouragements, j'ai décidé de me lancer dans une étude scientifique et sociolinguistique des langues minoritaires et de la menace linguistique en utilisant la langue Itsekiri comme étude de cas. En effet, je considère la langue Itsekiri comme un exemple de langue menacée et en danger au Nigeria.

Au vu des connaissances empiriques et théoriques dont je dispose qui caractérisent la mise en danger de certaines langues, la plupart des langues minoritaires patrimoniales du Nigeria semblent se trouver dans la même situation que la langue Itsekiri.

1.5 Énoncé du problème et justification de l'étude

D'après les observations, dans la pratique, l'anglais et la NPE sont les seuls moyens de communication efficaces entre les Nigériens d'origines linguistiques différentes. Les langues minoritaires patrimoniales semblent perdre leur place au profit de la langue anglaise et de la NPE dominantes. Nombre d'entre elles semblent menacées et au bord de l'extinction. Les résultats d'une enquête linguistique menée par Ayenbi (2014) indiquent que la présence de l'anglais, la langue dominante et perçue comme la langue officielle au Nigéria, considérée comme économiquement viable, semble être à l'origine de l'abandon des langues minoritaires patrimoniales.

L'étude a observé que la langue Itsekiri est de plus en plus en déclin en raison d'une utilisation insuffisante. Les locuteurs de cette langue semblent préférer l'anglais, qui jouit d'un statut élevé dans leurs communautés, à leur propre langue minoritaire.

Au fil des années, les sociolinguistes ont avancé de plus en plus des théories qui tendent à mettre en lumière la question du changement de langue et de la mise en danger de la langue dans un contexte de langue minoritaire. Toutefois, des études supplémentaires doivent être entreprises dans ce domaine, car les langues minoritaires semblent de plus en plus menacées par l'abandon de leurs locuteurs. En présence d'une langue dominante, les locuteurs d'une langue ancestrale peuvent avoir tendance à s'adapter aux réalités linguistiques et socio-économiques de leur environnement, ce qui semble être le cas dans le contexte de cette recherche doctorale au sein de la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

En outre, les recherches sociolinguistiques sur la langue Itsekiri sont rares et peu nombreuses. Cette recherche, qui est exploratoire, est la première tentative d'étude sociolinguistique approfondie de la langue Itsekiri.

Dans son discours d'ouverture à la conférence de 1994 de l'Association sud-africaine de linguistique appliquée, Adebija (1994) a identifié trois problèmes auxquels sont confrontés les linguistes dans le contexte multilingue africain. Tout d'abord, Adebija (ibid.) note qu'à l'exception des travaux dynamiques menés en Afrique du Sud, la recherche en linguistique appliquée est très peu développée en Afrique. Ce qui existe tend à se concentrer sur les langues ex-coloniales plutôt que sur les langues indigènes. Deuxièmement, les linguistes des pays africains autres que l'Afrique du Sud ont tendance à disposer de ressources de recherche très limitées. Troisièmement, l'instabilité politique, sociale et économique dans de nombreuses régions d'Afrique compromet gravement le travail mené en linguistique appliquée. Adebija (ibid.) souligne par exemple qu'un programme de travail commencé à une époque politique peut être sommairement interrompu à une autre époque.

1.6 Importance de l'étude

Compte tenu de ce qui précède et de la rareté des recherches en linguistique appliquée en Afrique, et plus particulièrement dans le domaine de la mise en danger des langues en relation avec les langues minoritaires patrimoniales au Nigeria en général et dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri en particulier, cette étude vise à combler cette lacune en contribuant à la base de connaissances existante en matière de recherche sociolinguistique, tout en ouvrant un nouveau champ de recherche sur la langue Itsekiri. Elle offre un aperçu de la situation sociolinguistique de la langue Itsekiri tout en ouvrant un nouveau domaine de recherche sur les langues minoritaires patrimoniales en danger au Nigéria.

Compte tenu de la pénurie de données sociolinguistiques dans l'étude des langues minoritaires patrimoniales au Nigéria, l'étude servira de point de référence pour les chercheurs nigériens qui pourraient être intéressés par la réalisation de recherches similaires.

En outre, la recherche est susceptible de sensibiliser les sociolinguistes nigériens et africains afin d'attirer l'attention sur la perte rapide de diversité linguistique en Afrique en général et au Nigéria en particulier. Elle est susceptible de fournir des orientations utiles pour des recherches ultérieures dans le domaine de la mise en danger des langues au Nigeria et dans la sous-région de l'Afrique de l'Ouest.

En tant que première étude sociolinguistique sur la langue Itsekiri, les résultats de cette recherche sont susceptibles d'intéresser un large public, notamment les linguistes, les ethnographes, les anthropologues, les sociologues, les sociolinguistes et les éducateurs qui s'intéressent aux langues patrimoniales.

Compte tenu de la rareté des études sur la mise en danger des langues mentionnée ci-dessus, les résultats de cette recherche peuvent également servir de base à de futures études dans le domaine de la mise en danger des langues dans des contextes de langues minoritaires patrimoniales. L'étude peut créer une base permettant aux futurs chercheurs de jouer un rôle actif dans les processus de maintien et de revitalisation des langues minoritaires.

Au niveau méso, l'étude ne se contentera pas de suggérer des moyens de ressusciter et de raviver l'intérêt des locuteurs de l'Itsekiri pour leur langue, elle proposera des stratégies pour inverser le glissement linguistique ressenti et la perte du discours Itsekiri en vue de réduire le déclin de la langue.

Enfin, l'étude est également importante car elle propose des stratégies pour maintenir, revitaliser et documenter la langue Itsekiri en fournissant des ressources documentaires ainsi que des stratégies pédagogiques, pour former les enseignants Itsekiri afin de stimuler l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de la langue.

1.7 Objectif, hypothèses et questions de recherche

Sur la base des considérations exposées ci-dessus, je vais maintenant formuler l'objectif général de la recherche pour guider l'enquête. Les objectifs de l'étude sont doubles. Afin d'examiner le phénomène de la mise en danger de la langue et du changement de langue en accord avec le comportement linguistique des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri, l'étude cherche tout d'abord à découvrir et à comprendre les raisons qui expliquent le phénomène de la transmission non-intergénérationnelle de la langue Itsekiri et la préférence apparente pour la langue anglaise. Deuxièmement, l'étude s'efforce de déterminer les causes du changement linguistique perçu dans la communauté Itsekiri.

Trois hypothèses clés sous-tendent cette recherche : La première est que l'Itsekiri est menacé et en danger en raison d'une utilisation inadéquate et d'une transmission non-intergénérationnelle, risquant ainsi de s'éteindre. Je souligne que dans une situation où la génération actuelle de parents parlant l'Itsekiri ne transmet pas la langue à ses enfants, ces derniers n'auront pas Itsekiri à

transmettre à leurs propres enfants parce qu'ils n'ont pas été exposés à la langue en premier lieu. Par conséquent, la troisième génération ne connaîtra pas l'Itsekiri. Il s'agit d'une menace pour l'Itsekiri, basée sur des hypothèses théoriques et empiriques. Il est donc nécessaire d'agir pour renverser la situation, et cette recherche est l'un des moyens préliminaires de relever ce défi.

La deuxième hypothèse est que la maîtrise de l'anglais est une condition préalable à la réussite dans l'éducation et un moyen efficace de mobilité sociale ; de ce fait, la langue Itsekiri n'est que rarement utilisée dans les familles et les interactions sociales habituelles.

Une troisième hypothèse, qui semble évidente compte tenu du paysage linguistique nigérian, est que les personnes parlant l'Itsekiri s'adaptent à la situation linguistique actuelle et dominante dans leur pays, ce qui nécessite non seulement une communication réussie avec leurs voisins, mais aussi une participation efficace aux sphères de la vie dans la communauté locale et internationale, compte tenu de la mondialisation.

Par conséquent, afin d'atteindre les objectifs fixés, je pose les questions suivantes dans le cadre de ma mission d'enquête, dont les réponses sont susceptibles d'orienter le processus d'investigation.

- Quelles sont les causes du changement de langue dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri ?
- Quels sont les facteurs responsables de la transmission non intergénérationnelle
- Quel est le rôle de l'anglais et de la NPE dans la communauté Itsekiri ?
- Quelles pourraient être les stratégies possibles pour revitaliser et maintenir la langue Itsekiri ?

1.8 Objet et portée de la recherche

L'étude se concentre sur les pratiques linguistiques de la communauté Itsekiri. Elle examine le modèle linguistique démontré dans ce qui semble être un passage de la langue patrimoniale Itsekiri à la langue anglaise dominante et à la NPE à Warri. Tout en analysant l'évolution des pratiques linguistiques des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri par rapport à la langue anglaise dominante dans leur communauté, elle se concentre sur les changements linguistiques illustrés par les attitudes et comportements linguistiques des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri par rapport à la diversité linguistique au Nigeria. Elle examine également les différentes manières dont la langue Itsekiri est mobilisée et utilisée comme vecteur d'identité personnelle et collective.

En outre, elle étudie en profondeur à la fois les causes lointaines et les causes immédiates de la réticence apparente du groupe ethnique Itsekiri à parler sa langue. Fournissant des preuves de l'adaptation linguistique, elle identifie l'évolution des pratiques linguistiques dans le contexte sociopolitique, socio-économique et socioculturel du groupe ethnique parlant l'Itsekiri. Le champ d'application de cette recherche est limité à la communauté de langue Itsekiri et à l'évolution de ses pratiques linguistiques.

1.9 Le chercheur en tant qu'activiste

Je m'inspire de Harrison (2007) qui estime que lorsqu'une langue est sur le point de mourir, les efforts des locuteurs ne peuvent pas la ramener à la vie. Seuls les linguistes peuvent recueillir des informations précises dans leurs enregistrements et leurs analyses, qui peuvent être utiles aux futurs scientifiques, aux futures sociétés, aux futures générations et aux enfants des locuteurs de langues patrimoniales.

A partir de ce point de vue, je considère que mon rôle de chercheur pourrait contribuer au maintien et à la survie de la langue Itsekiri, en sensibilisant les locuteurs à la menace linguistique à laquelle leur langue est confrontée dans sa situation actuelle.

En tant que chercheuse et militante pour la survie de la langue, ma position et mon raisonnement initiaux étaient de plaider pour la survie de la langue Itsekiri en proposant des stratégies pour raviver l'intérêt pour la langue des membres du groupe ethnique, y compris les enfants et les jeunes. Cependant, en tant qu'apprentie chercheuse et sociolinguiste débutante de l'ethnie Itsekiri, je me suis rendu compte que la thèse est un exercice académique qui exige des connaissances scientifiques et une objectivité dépourvue d'émotions.

Par ailleurs, je n'ai vu aucune étude sociolinguistique et ni ethnographique sur la langue Itsekiri. Je dois cependant reconnaître l'existence de quelques travaux linguistiques sur la langue Itsekiri qui seront mentionnés à la fin de l'étude.

Chapitre 2 Contexte de l'étude

Ce chapitre décrit le contexte dans lequel s'inscrit cette thèse. Il présente les macros et méso contextes que sont le Nigeria et la communauté de langue Itsekiri. Il était nécessaire de mettre en

lumière la situation linguistique générale du Nigeria, un pays situé à l'ouest de l'Afrique, afin de mieux comprendre non seulement l'ampleur, mais aussi certains des facteurs entraînant la mise en péril de la langue dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

2.2.1 Le Nigeria et la situation linguistique

L'histoire politique du Nigeria remonte à la période coloniale du XIXe siècle, lorsque la Grande-Bretagne a entrepris de coloniser le pays après la partition et la partition de l'Afrique à la fin de la traite des esclaves. Le premier groupe d'Européens à fouler le sol du Nigeria après l'abolition de la traite transatlantique était constitué de missionnaires qui ont apporté le christianisme et introduit la langue anglaise dans les écoles. Le deuxième groupe était constitué des maîtres coloniaux qui ont également utilisé la langue anglaise pour faciliter l'administration coloniale par le biais d'un régime indirect dans lequel les populations indigènes étaient utilisées comme interprètes pour perpétuer le régime colonial britannique.

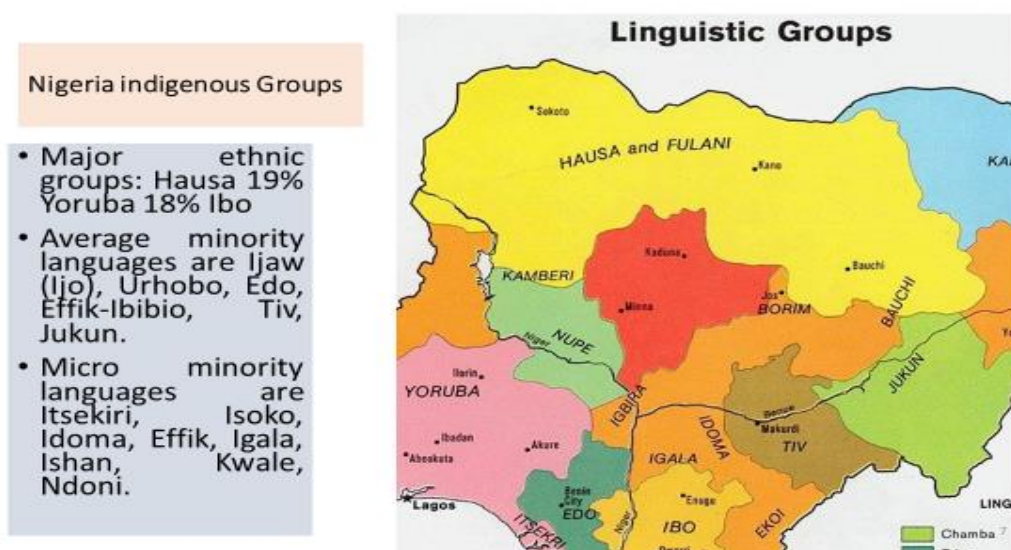
En conséquence, l'introduction de l'anglais a transformé le tissu de la société nigériane, qui a vu les Nigériens abandonner leurs langues d'origine pour parler la langue anglaise dominante dans le pays.

La figure 1 représente la carte du Nigeria.



Source: wikipedia

Figure 2 représente les principaux groupes au Nigéria



Le Nigeria est un pays linguistiquement diversifié et hautement multilingue. Bien que le nombre de langues et de dialectes nigériens répartis entre 250 groupes ethniques ne soit pas exactement connu (Babalobi 2020), les linguistes nigériens et les chercheurs en sociolinguistique nigérienne ont estimé qu'il y avait entre 500 et 650 langues. Au Nigeria, les langues majeures et mineures sont étroitement liées aux dialectes.

Roger Blench (2002) estime le nombre de langues à 678, tandis que Solash & Gregory (2010) sur le site Ethnologue estiment que 517 langues sont parlées au Nigéria.

L'haoussa, le yoruba et l'ibo, reconnus statutairement comme des langues majoritaires par rapport à leur population, sont parlés principalement dans le nord, le sud-ouest et le sud-est du pays respectivement. Les langues moyennement minoritaires (Ayomike 2013) sont le fulfulde, le Kanuri, l'Efik/Ibibio, le Tiv et l'Ijaw. Les langues micro minoritaires sont l'Itsekiri, l'Urhobo, l'Isoko, l'Idoma, l'Igala et l'Ekwere, le Chamba et le Bachama, pour n'en citer que quelques-unes. La plupart des langues ont un statut minoritaire en raison de la population de leurs locuteurs et de leur répartition géographique. En d'autres termes, le nombre de locuteurs détermine le statut d'une langue.

En outre, les politiques linguistiques nigérianes contenues dans la politique d'éducation du Nigeria (Nigérien Policy of Education 2014) considèrent l'anglais comme une langue académique, ce qui lui confère le statut de langue officielle d'enseignement non seulement dans les écoles, mais

également dans les domaines publics tels que l'administration, les médias, les relations internationales et les affaires.

2.2.2 Le peuple Itsekiri et la langue Itsekiri

La communauté de langue Itsekiri examinée dans le contexte méso de l'étude, l'objet principal de la thèse, est une communauté avec une population d'environ deux millions et cinq cents personnes (le groupe de plaidoyer 2021) située dans la région du delta du Niger, au sud du Nigéria. La langue Itsekiri appartient à la famille linguistique Niger-Congo et porte le nom du groupe ethnique. Le peuple de langue Itsekiri est géographiquement situé dans les régions côtières autour de l'océan Atlantique et dans la région du fleuve Bénin autour de la mangrove dans l'État du Delta, dans la région du Delta du Niger, au sud du Nigéria.

Selon Moore (1920) cité par Ayomike (2013), les membres du groupe ethnique Itsekiri ont des origines diverses. D'une part, Moore (1920) rapporte que des colons migrants originaires d'Ijebu et d'Ondo, dans l'ancienne région occidentale du Nigéria, d'Igala, d'Ebu et d'Aboh, dans l'ancienne région du centre-ouest du Nigéria, se sont installés à différentes époques dans différents villages Itsekiri tels qu'Omadino, Ureju, Ugborodo, Inorin et Irigbo, tous situés dans l'ancienne région du centre-ouest du Nigéria. D'autre part, Ayomike (2013) rapporte que vers la fin du quinzième siècle, une partie de la famille royale Bini a établi une monarchie composée de petites communautés autonomes dans la ville Itsekiri d'Ode, dans l'ancienne division et province de Warri, dans l'ancienne région du Midwest. Selon Ayomike (ibid.), les personnes qui vivaient dans ces communautés autonomes constituent la nation Itsekiri d'aujourd'hui.

Historiquement, les Itsekiri auraient eu des contacts avec les premiers explorateurs et commerçants européens, notamment les portugais d'abord, puis les britanniques, en raison de leur situation géographique privilégiée autour de l'océan Atlantique. Une position qui a stimulé leurs activités économiques et rendu la langue Itsekiri attrayante au XVI^e siècle.

L'Itsekiri était autrefois une langue très importante à l'époque du commerce de l'huile de palme avec les marchands européens et les marchands d'esclaves aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles. C'était la langue du commerce entre les habitants de la région côtière du Nigeria et les marchands européens. Au contact des portugais, des éléments lexicaux de ces derniers sont entrés dans le vocabulaire Itsekiri, ce qui a entraîné une évolution à la hausse de la langue. La situation s'est dégradée lorsqu'en 1914, Lord Lugard, alors gouverneur de l'administration coloniale, a fusionné les

protectorats du sud et du nord du Nigeria pour créer le pays, le Nigeria, et que l'anglais a été introduit pour faciliter la communication et l'administration.

La découverte du pétrole au XXe siècle a vu une dérive de la langue Itsekiri vers l'anglais, considéré comme une langue neutre avec plus de charge fonctionnelle et de transparence fonctionnelle. Le soutien institutionnel dont bénéficiait la langue anglaise, soutenu par la planification, la gestion et les politiques linguistiques du gouvernement, a changé les pratiques linguistiques dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri. Warri, la principale ville commerciale du peuple de langue Itsekiri, qui accueille les multinationales pétrolières, est un pôle d'attraction pour les migrants de diverses régions du Nigeria. Les demandeurs d'emploi, les personnes à la recherche de pâturages plus verts et de moyens de subsistance convergent tous à Warri. L'arrivée de ces personnes qui viennent avec leurs langues et leurs cultures a transformé la situation démographique et linguistique de la communauté Itsekiri-phone. La diversité linguistique a donc conduit à la nécessité d'un moyen de communication commun, un rôle que le NPE et l'anglais jouent dans la vie quotidienne des gens. L'NPE et l'anglais sont les principaux moyens de communication entre les communautés ethnolinguistiques de langues diverses. Ils partagent tous deux la caractéristique de la neutralité et sont utilisés par des personnes de différentes couches de la société. (Mou et al 2017).

Cela semble expliquer les changements dans les modèles et les pratiques linguistiques des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri qui utilisent actuellement de plus en plus la langue anglaise non seulement pour s'adapter à la réalité linguistique et à l'écologie de leur communauté, mais également comme tremplin pour une mobilité sociale ascendante face à la mondialisation.

Chapitre 3 Cadre théorique de l'étude

Ce chapitre examine divers concepts qui ont une incidence sur la question de la mise en danger de la langue dans un contexte linguistique minoritaire en relation avec la communauté de langue Itsekiri. Tout en mettant en œuvre l'étude, il présente le cadre conceptuel sur lequel repose l'enquête. Il se concentre sur des concepts tels que le changement linguistique, un mécanisme majeur de mise en danger du langage et de mort linguistique, ainsi que sur l'implication dans un contexte linguistique minoritaire tel que postulé par des sociolinguistes tels que Fishman (1991), Igboanusi (2010), Austin & Sallabanks (2011) et Olko & Sallabanks (2021).

D'autres concepts pertinents examinés sont l'attrition et la perte de la langue, le contact linguistique et la diversité linguistique impliquant les interactions et la cohabitation de différentes langues dans une communauté et l'hégémonie linguistique, le pouvoir de contrôle d'une langue dominante sur une langue moins utilisée et ses conséquences.

En mettant en évidence les différentes manières dont les sociolinguistes ont décrit les types de langues tout en les catégorisant en fonction de leurs statuts et de leurs vitalités par rapport à la force numérique et à la démographie, le chapitre analyse la hiérarchisation linguistique, représentative du statut et de la vitalité de la langue déterminés par l'usage et la charge fonctionnelle d'une langue.

Il présente également l'idéologie, la planification et la politique linguistiques, les attitudes et les comportements linguistiques, liée à la façon dont les locuteurs se comportent linguistiquement en raison de la préférence et du choix de la langue ; en conséquence des politiques linguistiques du gouvernement et des institutions, des pratiques et de la transmission des politiques linguistiques familiales éclairées par des décisions individuelles ou collectives sur l'utilisation de la langue à la maison, dans les familles et dans la communauté.

Tout en examinant la survie linguistique en mettant l'accent sur le maintien et la revitalisation de la langue, ainsi que sur la façon dont le changement linguistique peut être inversé, le chapitre conclut avec des concepts pertinents pour l'étude doctorale tels que le multilinguisme, le plurilinguisme, le translanguaging, le courtage linguistique et la médiation linguistique. Sans être exhaustives, ces notions forment le noyau et le cadre théorique qui sous-tendent cette étude doctorale.

Chapitre 4 Méthodologie de la Recherche

Ce chapitre examine l'approche méthodologique utilisée pour collecter les données ainsi que les différentes méthodes de collecte de données et les raisons pour lesquelles je pensais qu'elles étaient les mieux adaptées à la recherche doctorale. Le travail de terrain et la collecte de données se sont déroulés de janvier à juin 2018. Parmi un éventail de méthodes en ethnographie, compte tenu de la nature qualitative de cette étude doctorale, j'ai choisi d'utiliser l'observation participante ainsi que l'entretien semi-structuré comme méthodes de recherche pour étudier les pratiques linguistiques du peuple Itsekiri, l'utilisation de la langue, ainsi que leur comportement et attitudes

linguistiques afin de fournir des réponses à mes questions de recherche. L'utilisation de l'observation participante a fourni un éventail de possibilités d'observation dans divers contextes. D'une part, les observations que j'ai faites moi-même ont eu lieu dans une variété de contextes tels que des restaurants, des écoles, des hôpitaux, des maisons, des lacets de marché, des gares routières, des restaurants publics ou des restaurants ; ainsi que lors d'activités socioculturelles telles que les mariages, les cérémonies funéraires, les fêtes d'anniversaire et les séminaires organisés, qui ont toutes fourni des données solides. Certaines observations étaient prévues, auquel cas j'ai délibérément opté pour des contextes considérés comme importants et avec beaucoup de monde. D'autres étaient spontanés.

D'autre part, l'entretien linguistique a permis de déterminer les opinions et les croyances des personnes parlant l'Itsekiri sur leur langue. Les informations recueillies ont fourni des données précieuses qui m'ont permis d'aborder la question du changement linguistique et de la mise en danger de la langue dans la communauté. L'enquête a été menée dans la ville de Warri, dans l'État du Delta, au Nigeria, auprès de personnes de divers milieux sociaux ou de groupes tels que des hommes et des femmes d'affaires, des personnes âgées de 30 à 60 ans. J'ai délibérément choisi Warri comme lieu d'interview parce que c'est la principale ville du peuple de langue Itsekiri. À Warri, l'anglais et le NPE sont les moyens de communication entre les personnes de différents groupes ethniques qui ne comprennent pas la langue de l'autre.

La sollicitation des données s'est faite par le biais d'entretiens en face à face. Pour enrichir les données, les répondants ont été choisis dans des milieux et des statuts sociaux divers, tels que scolarisés et non scolarisés. D'autres étaient des personnes de statut élevé et inférieur, comme les fonctionnaires, les artisans, ainsi que les commerçants du marché. Il s'agit d'éviter des résultats déséquilibrés, biaisés en faveur d'un seul milieu social. Les données et les informations tirées de ces groupes ont permis d'aborder les questions de recherche et d'identifier des stratégies suggérées pour revitaliser et maintenir la langue Itsekiri participants se sont montrés très coopératifs compte tenu de la volonté avec laquelle ils divulguaient de l'information sans accumuler ni en garder pour eux. Les participants ont exprimé leurs points de vue avec un vif intérêt tout en partageant leurs opinions sur le phénomène du changement linguistique. Les questions de l'entrevue couvraient des domaines généraux tels que les questions économiques, religieuses, académiques et socioculturelles relatives aux mariages interethniques, aux crises ethniques, à la transmission familiale et à l'influence de l'anglais, ainsi qu'au rôle de l'NPE dans la communauté.

J'ai mené toutes les séances d'entretien moi-même, les participants étant interviewés oralement en anglais, en Itsekiri et en NPE. Certaines participantes à l'entretien parlaient couramment l'Itsekiri et le NPE, d'autres l'Itsekiri, l'anglais et le NPE, à l'exception de deux femmes qui ont déclaré qu'elles n'allaient dans aucune école et ne parlaient donc pas anglais. Certains parlaient couramment d'autres langues comme le yoruba, l'Urhobo, l'ibo, l'haoussa et l'Ijaw, en fonction de leur profil linguistique. Les séances d'entretien ont duré entre 25 minutes et 1 heure vingt minutes par participant et ont été enregistrées sur bande audio.

Les entrevues, qui ont été menées dans la langue qui convenait le mieux aux participants, ont été réalisées en tête-à-tête et enregistrées sur bande audio afin de recueillir des détails anecdotiques et autobiographiques. Avant de commencer un entretien, je demandais toujours à savoir dans quelle langue les répondants étaient le plus à l'aise. Les alphabétisés ont répondu en anglais standard tandis que les semi-alphabétisés ont parlé en anglais et en NPE. Les non-scolarisés parlaient en Itsekiri et en NPE, auquel cas je devais le faire dans les trois langues, l'anglais, l'Itsekiri et le NPE. Les réponses des participants comportaient des questions principales et des questions de suivi. Je n'ai pas pu suivre rigoureusement mon horaire d'entrevues, car les réponses des participants nécessitaient des questions de suivi.

De plus, un formulaire de biographie linguistique a été conçu et rédigé en anglais que les répondants ont rempli après chaque entretien. L'objectif était d'identifier et d'obtenir des informations correctes sur les participants. Le formulaire contenait des données biographiques avec des noms de code, le sexe, l'âge, le niveau d'éducation, la profession et les langues parlées. Mon travail exploratoire sur le terrain m'a emmené dans la ville de Warri et ses environs. L'accès a été facile et comme je connais très bien le contexte ; J'ai pu me rendre dans la communauté facilement et en toute confiance, sans entrave. Mais non sans quelques défis. Certains participants ont été recrutés de manière informelle par l'intermédiaire d'amis.

D'autres l'ont été par sollicitation directe, comme dans le cas de la directrice de l'école que j'ai moi-même sollicitée en me rendant dans son école. Enfin, la triangulation de différentes sources de données a permis de comprendre comment les participants ou les individus utilisent leurs ressources linguistiques tout en articulant leurs points de vue sur la situation linguistique dans la communauté.

De plus, ces différentes sources de collecte de données m'ont également aidé à comprendre les diverses façons dont les langues sont pratiquées dans l'environnement. Des transcriptions

d'entretiens, des récits lisibles des notes de terrain des observations des participants, des questions d'entretien et des formulaires de biographie linguistique administrés pendant le travail de terrain sont ajoutés en annexe dans le volume 2 de cette recherche doctorale.

Chapitre 5 Résultats de la Recherche

Ce chapitre se concentre sur les résultats de mon enquête et tente d'aborder les questions du changement linguistique, de la mise en danger de la langue et de la transmission non intergénérationnelle de l'Itsekiri. Il met en évidence les facteurs écologiques et socio-psychologiques qui peuvent être considérés comme responsables du changement linguistique et de la transmission non intergénérationnelle de la langue Itsekiri, ainsi que du domaine d'utilisation de la langue Itsekiri.

Les composantes écologiques sont en relation avec des éléments de nature linguistique, sociopolitique, socio-économique et socioculturelle. Les crises interethniques et les conflits linguistiques, les transformations démographiques et linguistiques dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri entrent également dans cette catégorie. Le rôle des institutions telles que les écoles compte tenu de la nécessité d'acquérir une éducation, un élément très crucial pour le mode de vie du peuple Itsekiri ainsi que pour les pratiques religieuses dans la communauté, a également été examiné dans cette section. Tout en s'attardant sur les facteurs écologiques, la dominance linguistique, l'hégémonie linguistique résultant du contact linguistique et le multilinguisme dans les contextes méso/macro ont été mis en évidence. L'aspect linguistique a été largement développé en relation avec l'utilisation de la langue influencée par la présence globale de la langue anglaise et de l'ENP dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

Les facteurs sociopolitiques ont été examinés en fonction de ce qui semble être un manque de volonté politique démontré dans les attitudes des politiciens locaux réticents à mettre en œuvre des politiques éducatives concernant les langues d'origine. De telles attitudes ont peut-être eu un impact négatif sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de la langue Itsekiri dans les écoles. D'autres éléments comprennent les conflits linguistiques et les crises interethniques, qui ont peut-être conduit le peuple Itsekiri à parler sa langue pour des raisons de sécurité.

Les résultats socioéconomiques ont été pris en compte par rapport à la langue commerciale dans la communauté. L'anglais et le NPE, 2 langues véhiculaires et les lingua Francas au Nigeria et dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri, sont les principales langues avec lesquelles les gens font

des affaires. Les interactions multilingues à Warri, la principale ville commerciale de la communauté Itsekiri, avec différents groupes ethniques et une hétérogénéité linguistique due à la diversité des langues, semblent avoir entraîné un changement linguistique dans la communauté.

En outre, la communauté Itsekiri accueille des sociétés pétrolières multinationales qui créent des emplois et encouragent les petites entreprises. Les activités économiques de la communauté attirent des migrants de différentes régions du pays, à la recherche de pâturages plus verts. Ces migrants viennent avec leurs langues, cohabitent, interagissent et se marient avec les personnes de langue Itsekiri. Par conséquent, le phénomène de la diversité linguistique et du contact linguistique a progressivement transformé la démographie et le paysage linguistique de la communauté. Dans le but de trouver un moyen de communication, les gens ont dû se résoudre à parler le NPE et l'anglais standard – deux langues communes à tous qui servent de moyen de communication au Nigeria.

De plus, les résultats qui sont liés à la culture s'attardent principalement sur le type de relation établie en raison de l'interaction linguistique et de la cohabitation. Les mariages interethniques ont conduit les familles à rechercher une langue de communication commune, ce qui a amené les gens à cesser de parler leurs langues d'origine.

En outre, les éléments de nature socio psychologique en relation avec la perception qu'a le peuple Itsekiri de sa langue et son comportement et attitude linguistiques sont également examinés. Des éléments qui illustrent le statut social et le prestige, la hiérarchie linguistique et les politiques, les pratiques et la transmission de la langue familiale dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri ont également été mis en évidence.

Un élément clé de cette section qui englobe tous les autres facteurs est la perception des personnes parlant l'Itsekiri envers leur langue. Les Itsekiri semblent croire que leur langue a peu d'importance socio-économique et politique, qu'elle n'a pas de valeur essentielle pour la mobilité sociale ascendante et qu'elle ne sert pas non plus à des fins essentielles telles que la satisfaction de leurs besoins ou aspirations politiques. Certains Itsekiri considèrent que la langue n'est pas viable économiquement en termes d'obtention d'un emploi et de faire des affaires. De ce fait, ils sont passés à la langue anglaise, perçue comme une condition préalable à la réussite scolaire et un atout important pour atteindre des objectifs professionnels.

En outre, les attitudes linguistiques et le comportement des ethnies de langue Itsekiri à l'égard de leur langue ont été mis en évidence. Les locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri semblent croire que leur

langue est faible en statut et en vitalité en termes de charge fonctionnelle et de domaine d'utilisation. Considérant que leur langue n'est pas éligible à l'auto-développement et à la croissance économique, les locuteurs Itsekiri ont peut-être eu recours à l'anglais, considérée comme plus viable et censée accélérer la croissance et le développement, cessant ainsi de parler leur langue.

En outre, une caractéristique commune au peuple Itsekiri est la hiérarchisation des langues, illustrée par le phénomène de la hiérarchie sociale et linguistique dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri. Les membres de l'ethnie Itsekiri semblent choisir consciemment la langue qu'ils préfèrent utiliser dans divers domaines tels que l'éducation, les affaires et l'administration publique en fonction de leur statut social.

Conscients de leur statut et de leur statut social, ils parlent de plus en plus l'anglais, la langue prédominante et la plus importante dans la société macro-nigériane. En ce qui concerne les locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri, la capacité de parler anglais n'est pas seulement prestigieuse, c'est aussi une indication d'être cultivé, éduqué et un symbole de statut.

De plus, le phénomène des politiques, des pratiques et de la transmission de la langue familiale, éclairé par le choix des langues que les parents préfèrent utiliser à la maison et transmettre à leurs enfants, a également été élucidé. Les données disponibles dans cette étude doctorale montrent que les familles Itsekiri ont pris la décision consciente de parler principalement anglais avec leurs enfants à la maison. Cela a peut-être eu une conséquence considérable sur l'utilisation et la vitalité de la langue Itsekiri.

D'autres résultats de mon enquête portent sur le domaine d'utilisation de la langue Itsekiri. En tant que marqueur d'identité, symbole d'unité culturelle et de cohésion sociale, la langue Itsekiri procure un sentiment d'appartenance, de fierté, d'affinité et de conscience ethnique aux utilisateurs. Itsekiri est le langage de l'intimité, qui sert à maintenir un certain secret. Elle est tout aussi importante dans l'expression du patrimoine culturel et du patrimoine tels que les cérémonies de mariage inter et intra ethniques, les cérémonies de baptême des enfants, ainsi que les processus de médiation linguistique, une pratique culturelle et sociale essentielle dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

De plus, Itsekiri est utilisé lors de réunions de famille et de rassemblements sociaux, essentiellement dans des activités religieuses telles que le christianisme et la religion de tradition

africaine, qui incluent les activités de l'église. Le culte des divinités et les cérémonies funéraires traditionnelles, respectivement.

En plus, l'Itsekiri sert de moyen d'exprimer les étiquettes et les normes linguistiques qui sont traditionnelles et coutumières au groupe ethnique de langue Itsekiri. Les normes sociolinguistiques de politesse dans les s'adressant aux aînés ainsi que dans l'expression de certains besoins naturels et inévitables sont visibles dans la langue Itsekiri. L'utilisation d'éléments lexicaux inoffensifs qui dépeignent la sensibilité et le respect des individus est présente dans la langue Itsekiri. Les éléments de communication sémiotiques évidents utilisés dans les communications non verbales sont des pratiques linguistiques courantes dans la communauté.

Finalement, un élément de la politique linguistique communautaire ou de groupe démontré par l'obligation d'utiliser et de parler la langue Itsekiri dans les groupes centrés sur Itsekiri a été mis en avant. L'utilisation significative de la langue Itsekiri dans le leadership de groupe et de communauté est essentielle. La capacité de parler l'Itsekiri est une condition vitale pour diriger un clan, en plus des petits groupes tels que les associations d'étudiants, les associations locales et les clubs à appartenance ethnique.

Ces résultats sont analysés thématiquement et discutés en détail au chapitre 6, conformément aux notions et concepts sociolinguistiques qui sous-tendent cette recherche doctorale et qui ont été développés dans la revue de littérature.

Chapitre 6 Discussion et interprétation des résultats de la recherche

Le chapitre de discussion porte sur l'interprétation des résultats de mon enquête en lien avec les théories sociolinguistiques qui sous-tendent cette recherche doctorale. Tout en tentant de répondre aux questions de recherche en vue d'atteindre l'objectif de l'étude doctorale, les résultats qui décrivent divers facteurs qui ont pu donner lieu au phénomène de déplacement linguistique et de mise en danger de la langue dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri et à la transmission non intergénérationnelle de la langue Itsekiri ont été examinés d'un point de vue écologique et socio psychologique.

Les perspectives écologiques ont été envisagées sous divers aspects tels que la dominance linguistique, qui présente le contact linguistique dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri,

l'hégémonie linguistique et linguistique, l'anglais et le NPE comme lingua franca, ainsi que le multilinguisme et le translanguaging.

L'aspect sociopolitique traite d'éléments tels que les crises interethniques et les conflits linguistiques, ainsi que la discrimination linguistique. L'aspect socio-économique est considéré en relation avec la quête de progrès économique. L'aspect socioculturel est centré sur le mariage mixte ou interethnique.

D'autres éléments des résultats sont la démographie, la transformation linguistique et l'urbanisation, l'attrition de la langue Itsekiri, l'emplacement des écoles et le non-enseignement de la langue Itsekiri dans l'éducation formelle, ainsi que le rôle de la religion. Ces facteurs semblent être à l'origine du phénomène de changement linguistique dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri et semblent avoir accentué la réticence apparente du peuple Itsekiri à transmettre sa langue à ses enfants.

En se concentrant sur des éléments de recherche socio-psychologiques tels que les perceptions de la langue Itsekiri par les locuteurs Itsekiri, la politique linguistique familiale, les pratiques et la transmission de la langue Itsekiri à la maison, le statut social et le prestige, la hiérarchie linguistique et le statut social sont perçus comme des facteurs contribuant au changement linguistique et à la transmission non intergénérationnelle de la langue Itsekiri en tenant compte des données recueillies sur le terrain.

De plus, malgré ce qui semble une menace pour la langue Itsekiri en raison des facteurs énumérés ci-dessus, les données recueillies dans le cadre de la recherche doctorale révèlent également des domaines importants dans lesquels la langue est déployée. La langue Itsekiri est utilisée comme un marqueur de l'identité non seulement individuelle, mais aussi de l'identité de groupe. Il est déployé dans des pratiques et des activités culturelles clés telles que les funérailles, les mariages traditionnels et les cérémonies d'enfants. Son utilisation dans divers contextes tels que les réunions de famille et les réunions, les groupes communautaires ainsi que les étiquettes linguistiques et les normes prescrites démontre son importance pour le groupe ethnique Itsekiri.

Chapitre 7 Conclusion de l'étude

Cette étude se termine par de brefs résultats de la recherche, des contributions au domaine de la mise en danger des langues dans un contexte de langue minoritaire patrimoniale, les orientations futures de la recherche, les limites de l'étude, les contraintes et les défis rencontrés lors du travail

de terrain, des stratégies et des recommandations suggérées pour revitaliser et maintenir la langue Itsekiri ainsi que des remarques mettant en évidence des réflexions personnelles sur le sujet de l'étude doctorale en général.

7. 1 Résultats clés en brèves

Les données de l'étude, recueillies à l'aide d'une méthodologie qualitative axée sur une approche ethnographique, mises en évidence dans le chapitre 4 de cette recherche doctorale, révèlent que les locuteurs Itsekiri utilisent l'anglais, introduit au Nigeria par le régime colonial britannique à l'époque coloniale, et semblent préférer le premier à leur langue d'origine, l'Itsekiri. Cela est évident dans un comportement linguistique qui révèle le fait que la génération actuelle de locuteurs de l'Itsekiri ne semble pas parler l'Itsekiri à la maison avec leurs familles, mais exclusivement l'anglais ou le Nigeria Pidgin English (NPE) en fonction du niveau d'éducation et du statut socio-économique de chaque famille.

L'étude a également confirmé que les forces de la mondialisation ont peut-être attribué à la langue anglaise un rôle mondial en tant que langue internationale, largement utilisée comme moyen de communication dans des domaines clés tels que l'éducation, l'économie, la politique, les relations internationales, les médias et les technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC), pour n'en citer que quelques-uns. Avec une large diffusion géographique, parlée dans le monde entier, l'anglais semble être devenu la langue mondiale. Ces attributs fonctionnels et les valeurs attachées à l'anglais, qui semblent attrayants non seulement pour les locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri, mais aussi pour la majorité des habitants du Nigeria, semblent en avoir fait la langue préférée de la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

En outre, l'étude a également révélé que le niveau de locuteur de la langue Itsekiri par rapport à l'anglais est étroitement lié aux valeurs que le peuple Itsekiri attache à sa langue. Les croyances du peuple Itsekiri au sujet de sa langue et les valeurs qu'il y attache, en ce qui concerne l'identité et les progrès économiques, semblent déterminer l'utilisation qui en est faite et influencer son statut et sa vitalité dans la société dans son ensemble. Cela est démontré par le comportement linguistique et les attitudes apparemment négatifs de la population à l'égard de sa langue, comme le révèlent les données recueillies. Le comportement et les attitudes des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri envers leur langue et l'évolution ultérieure des pratiques linguistiques dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri, évidents dans les données, peuvent être dus à des pressions linguistiques

résultant de la domination et de l'utilisation de l'anglais dans des domaines importants. Les politiques mises en place pour réglementer l'utilisation de la langue au Nigeria, telles que les politiques nationales sur l'éducation (NPE) associées et soutenues par le gouvernement nigérian, découlant d'idéologies linguistiques gouvernementales, ont peut-être légitimé la présence de la langue anglaise dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

De plus, il est évident, dans le discours des répondants, que, parmi les 500 langues estimées présentes au Nigeria, l'anglais arrive en tête de la hiérarchie. Les personnes parlant l'Itsekiri semblent hiérarchiser les langues dans leur communauté, l'anglais se situant au sommet de l'échelle linguistique en privilégiant l'usage, car c'est la langue dominante et légitime dans le système éducatif et dans des domaines importants. L'anglais est la langue la plus répandue et la plus privilégiée utilisée au Nigeria. Il fonctionne dans presque tous les domaines et contextes de communication mentionnés précédemment dans cette recherche doctorale. Avec son statut social et son prestige, l'anglais a plus de pouvoir politique et économique que toute autre langue au Nigeria. Le statut, la visibilité et la vitalité significatives de l'anglais en tant que langue principale de l'éducation et de l'administration publique au Nigeria sous-tendent le choix des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri et leur préférence pour celle-ci. Selon les données de l'étude doctorale, les personnes parlant l'Itsekiri semblent accorder une grande importance à l'anglais dans leur choix de langue maternelle et semblent donc réticentes à transmettre la langue Itsekiri, leur langue d'origine, à leurs enfants.

En outre, l'étude a également révélé que les situations de contact linguistique résultant de la diversité linguistique, un phénomène courant à Warri, la principale ville des personnes de langue Itsekiri, semblent avoir nécessité la recherche d'un moyen de communication commun, une lacune que la langue anglaise et le NPE comblent dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

De plus, les interactions entre les locuteurs de langues différentes peuvent avoir eu pour conséquence que les petites langues soient influencées par les plus grandes et que les plus petites semblent menacées. Par rapport à cela, les locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri, une langue minoritaire patrimoniale, semblent cesser de parler leur langue en raison du contact avec les langues dominantes telles que l'anglais et le NPE, ainsi que de la cohabitation avec des locuteurs d'autres langues présentes dans leur communauté. Par conséquent, la langue Itsekiri semble menacée d'attrition et de perte en raison de l'utilisation insuffisante perçue par ses locuteurs ainsi que de la

non-utilisation dans des domaines importants tels que l'éducation, les affaires, les médias, les relations internationales et les fonctions administratives.

Dans le même ordre d'idées, le changement apparent dans l'utilisation de la langue peut affecter la langue Itsekiri qui semble être en train de mourir, car leurs locuteurs ne semblent pas considérer leur langue comme viable et ont tendance à préférer l'anglais pour des raisons économiques et parfois des affordances sociales.

En outre, la croissance économique et le développement des équipements sociaux dans les villes urbaines ont attiré des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri des villages environnants vers les grandes villes et les zones urbaines, selon les données. L'urbanisation, que Simon et al. (2013) décrivent comme une menace importante, et un modèle de contact économique avec le monde extérieur et le développement d'infrastructures dans les villes pourraient être un pôle d'attraction essentiel pour les habitants des zones rurales. La description de l'urbanisation observée par Simon et al. (2013) semble évidente dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri, car Warri, le principal lieu d'habitation des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri et une ville commerciale accueillant des compagnies pétrolières multinationales, attire des personnes des villages voisins et des villes contiguës, ainsi que des migrants économiques d'autres régions du Nigeria. Par conséquent, l'évolution de la composition de la population autochtone et le changement linguistique radical dans le tissu de la communauté, mis en évidence dans les pratiques linguistiques, sont des exemples éloquentes. Les transformations démographiques et linguistiques qui ont pu pousser les locuteurs Itsekiri à passer de leur langue d'origine à la langue anglaise dominante et/ou à la NPE ne sont pas seulement des menaces pour la langue Itsekiri, mais aussi des indications de changement linguistique et de mise en danger de la langue dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

7.2 Contribution de l'étude au domaine de la mise en danger des langues.

Cette étude est une contribution à la recherche sur le changement linguistique et la mise en danger des langues, en particulier au Nigeria et en Afrique en général. En plus de combler le vide dans les études liées à la mise en danger des langues dans le contexte africain, la recherche ajoute de la valeur au domaine de la mise en danger des langues dans les contextes linguistiques minoritaires patrimoniaux grâce aux informations linguistiques recueillies dans les données de la recherche doctorale. Tout en analysant les comportements linguistiques, les attitudes, ainsi que les préférences linguistiques des locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri au Nigeria, la recherche contribue à la

construction d'une base de données sociolinguistique originale relative à l'utilisation des langues à Warri, dans le sud du Nigeria.

Hypothétiquement la première étude sociolinguistique de la langue Itsekiri, la recherche ouvre une nouvelle perspective à l'étude scientifique de la langue Itsekiri tout en découvrant son statut linguistique et sa vitalité dans le domaine de la sociolinguistique. Il fournit des références académiques pertinentes et des orientations utiles pour la poursuite des recherches dans le domaine du changement linguistique et de la mise en danger dans les contextes linguistiques minoritaires patrimoniaux. La recherche ouvre également une nouvelle porte pour les futurs doctorants qui pourraient vouloir se lancer dans une étude similaire d'autres langues minoritaires patrimoniales au Nigeria. Il peut intéresser un large et vaste lectorat, y compris des linguistes, des ethnographes, des éducateurs et des chercheurs dans ce domaine, et les aider à jouer un rôle actif dans le maintien et la revitalisation du patrimoine, des langues minoritaires et des langues moins répandues.

De plus, les sociolinguistes appliqués et les sociolinguistes d'Afrique et du Nigeria peuvent s'appuyer sur les résultats de cette recherche pour étudier des phénomènes similaires dans d'autres langues minoritaires patrimoniales dans les contextes Nigérian et Africain.

De plus, cette recherche attire l'attention des chercheurs travaillant dans le domaine du changement linguistique et de la mise en danger des langues sur la perte apparemment imminente de la diversité linguistique au Nigeria. À cet égard, l'étude offre l'occasion de comprendre des phénomènes fondamentaux dans ce domaine qui semble familier et qui est souvent tenu pour acquis. Un phénomène fondamental tel que le passage d'une langue considérée comme « non viable économiquement » à une langue supposée « économiquement viable », en référence aux langues Itsekiri et anglaise respectivement, en est un exemple typique. La recherche a également permis de sensibiliser à la dichotomie linguistique créée par les locuteurs de langues entre les langues minoritaires d'origine et les langues dominantes et puissantes, qui sont respectivement l'Itsekiri et l'anglais.

L'étude offre également un aperçu des connaissances limitées sur le bilinguisme dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri, un domaine qui nécessiterait des études plus approfondies.

7.3 Orientations futures de la recherche

Le fait d'entreprendre cette recherche sur la mise en danger des langues dans un contexte linguistique minoritaire patrimonial en relation avec le comportement linguistique des locuteurs

de la langue Itsekiri, en plus de passer en revue la littérature sur les concepts sociolinguistiques pertinents à cette étude doctorale, a permis d'obtenir un aperçu des pratiques linguistiques dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri. De plus, les idéologies linguistiques des membres du groupe ethnique Itsekiri en ce qui concerne le choix de leur langue et la gestion de la langue à la maison ont également été révélées par les données recueillies sur le terrain dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri.

À cette fin, une étude importante à l'avenir consisterait à retracer l'interaction historique entre l'utilisation croissante de l'anglais et la diminution de l'utilisation des langues patrimoniales en relation avec l'impact du colonialisme sur les inclinations culturelles des locuteurs des langues minoritaires patrimoniales au Nigeria. C'est-à-dire qu'il serait intéressant de mener des recherches sur l'impact du colonialisme linguistique sur la culture des peuples de langue Itsekiri en relation avec leurs choix linguistiques.

De plus, une étude diachronique de la langue Itsekiri et un projet de sensibilisation linguistique pour sensibiliser le peuple Itsekiri à l'importance de la transmission intergénérationnelle de leur langue et aux conséquences du passage perçu à l'anglais et à l'NPE, suggérés dans les données de cette étude, aideraient à endiguer la marée de changement linguistique dans la communauté. En outre, des recherches approfondies sur le translanguaging au Nigeria en vue d'explorer l'enseignement bilingue dans les salles de classe, dans lesquelles les langues patrimoniales et l'anglais sont les langues d'enseignement, pourraient accroître la vitalité des langues patrimoniales en vue d'améliorer leur statut et leur vitalité. En outre, il peut être utile d'étudier le phénomène de la politique linguistique communautaire (CLP) et son importance par rapport à la langue Itsekiri. Bien que la transmission intergénérationnelle de la langue Itsekiri semble faire défaut chez les Itsekiris, ils s'identifient à leur langue et sont conscients de l'importance de déployer la langue dans des contextes socioculturels, ce qui a abouti à l'établissement de règles explicites imposant la langue Itsekiri dans des rassemblements importants tels que les réunions de famille, les rassemblements communautaires ainsi que les syndicats d'étudiants d'Itsekiri pour n'en citer que quelques-uns, selon les données de cette étude.

7.4 Limites, contraintes et défis de la recherche

Je tiens à reconnaître que 53 heures d'observations dans 14 endroits différents et 24 heures de données d'entrevues recueillies menait pendant 6 mois dans le cadre de cette recherche peuvent

ne pas fournir de preuves suffisantes pour démontrer de manière concluante que la langue Itsekiri est menacée ou en voie de disparition. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'une étude qualitative à petite échelle, les données de l'étude suggèrent une forte indication que la langue Itsekiri pourrait être en danger. Dans le même ordre d'idées, on trouvera ci-dessous quelques limites de l'étude, contraintes et défis rencontrés lors de l'enquête sur le terrain.

Tout d'abord, en raison d'une pénurie générale de documents et de données publics au Nigeria, il n'a pas été possible d'obtenir les documents officiels nécessaires pour étayer certaines de mes affirmations sur la situation linguistique au Nigeria, car le pays semble ne pas disposer d'un système de base de données substantiel dans de nombreux domaines. Je n'ai pas trouvé de documents qui s'attardent sur la planification et la gestion des politiques linguistiques au Nigeria. Le seul document disponible est la politique nigériane de 2004 sur l'éducation, révisée en 2014 dans laquelle l'utilisation de l'anglais comme langue d'enseignement dans les écoles est mentionnée. Même si la langue anglaise semble être une langue officielle au Nigeria, elle n'est pas clairement désignée dans la constitution nigériane comme langue officielle.

De même, le contexte de la méso-recherche dans laquelle la communauté de langue Itsekiri manque de ressources et de matériel de recherche substantiels dans lesquels l'étude doctorale pourrait s'inspirer. Par exemple, il n'y avait pas d'études/recherches antérieures et existantes ainsi que d'informations de base dans le domaine de la sociolinguistique sur l'utilisation de la langue Itsekiri sur lesquelles l'étude pourrait être basée. En d'autres termes, il n'y a pas eu de recherche sociolinguistique publiée, ni d'étude doctorale sur la langue Itsekiri ; Il n'y avait donc pas de point de référence. Le manque d'études sociolinguistiques et ethnographiques sur la langue Itsekiri a fait que l'examen de la littérature sur la langue Itsekiri s'est limité à des informations recueillies à partir de livres historiques, de discours et d'articles écrits par quelques personnes parlant l'Itsekiri telles que Ayomike (2010), Brown (2021) et Erumi (2013)

De plus, certains des principaux défis de cette recherche doctorale étaient de nature académique, infrastructurelle et climatique. En ce qui concerne celles de nature académique, la transcription des données a posé des défis majeurs dans cette étude en raison de l'utilisation de l'Itsekiri et du NPE par certains répondants pendant l'entretien. En effet, les entretiens ont été menés en trois langues : Itsekiri, anglais et NPE. C'était une tâche herculéenne de traduire les données d'entretiens d'Itsekiri et de NPE en anglais. Les caractéristiques de translanguaging intermittentes des

répondants ont rendu la transcription encore plus difficile. Pour ces raisons et d'autres mentionnées précédemment, j'ai décidé de ne pas traduire complètement toutes les données de l'entretien.

7.5 Stratégies suggérées et recommandations pour inverser le changement linguistique et maintenir la langue Itsekiri

Pour aborder certaines des constatations qui semblent poser des défis linguistiques à la langue Itsekiri, cette section du chapitre final présente des stratégies et des recommandations suggérées pour inverser le changement linguistique dans la communauté de langue Itsekiri et maintenir la langue Itsekiri.

L'examen des réflexions des sociolinguistes pertinents dans le domaine du changement linguistique et de la mise en danger des langues, la réalisation d'observations dans divers contextes et l'interview des répondants de la communauté Itsekiri ont permis de fournir une orientation qui suggère que ce qui semble être des stratégies, si elles sont mises en œuvre, pourraient servir à inverser le changement linguistique dans la communauté Itsekiri et à maintenir la langue Itsekiri. Parallèlement à ce qui précède des façons succinctes d'inverser le changement linguistique, de revitaliser et de maintenir les langues minoritaires patrimoniales suggérées par d'autres chercheurs en sociolinguistique et étayées par le discours des participants dans les données recueillies dans l'étude doctorale sont présentées dans les sections suivantes.

7.5.1 Transmission intergénérationnelle de la langue Itsekiri

L'une des façons dont une langue minoritaire patrimoniale peut être maintenue, défendue par Fishman (1991) et attestée dans le discours des répondants à cette étude doctorale, est la transmission intergénérationnelle de la langue. Par conséquent, l'institution familiale jouera un rôle clé et vital dans le maintien et la revitalisation de la langue Itsekiri par la transmission verticale et latérale au sein du foyer. Outre Fishman (1991), d'autres chercheurs dans le domaine de la mise en danger des langues qui ont évoqué la transmission familiale des langues en tant que facteur clé dans le maintien des langues au bord de l'extinction sont : Spolsky (2009), Schwartz (2008), Austin & Sallabanks (2014) et Olko & Sallabanks, (2021), pour n'en citer que quelques-uns. Ces sociolinguistes ont beaucoup écrit sur la transmission intergénérationnelle des langues comme stratégie de revitalisation et de maintien des langues menacées.

De plus, le consensus des participants à cette étude doctorale est que la transmission d'Itsekiri devrait commencer à la maison. Ils étaient d'avis que les parents devraient être responsables de la transmission de la langue Itsekiri à leurs enfants. Ils croient qu'Itsekiri prospérera s'il est largement utilisé au sein et parmi les membres de la famille. Elijah, Lucas et Ruth, trois répondants, ont particulièrement suggéré que les parents devraient parler Itsekiri à leurs enfants dès leur plus jeune âge, lorsqu'ils commencent à s'exprimer, avant d'aller à l'école.

7.5.2 Enseignement et apprentissage de la langue Itsekiri dans l'éducation formelle

L'une des découvertes de cette étude est que la langue Itsekiri n'est pas présente dans l'éducation formelle car elle n'est pas enseignée et utilisée de manière adéquate dans les écoles. La non-utilisation de l'Itsekiri comme moyen d'enseignement aux premiers stades de l'éducation et l'utilisation dominante de l'anglais dans les écoles ont peut-être entraîné une diminution du domaine d'utilisation de la langue Itsekiri.

En suggérant des moyens de revitaliser les langues en danger, Spolsky (1998) observe que l'apprentissage en milieu scolaire est le principal outil de revitalisation des langues. Selon lui, les programmes scolaires sont de bons exemples de revitalisation des langues, car un grand nombre d'apprenants potentiels sont obligés d'être présents dans les écoles pendant une grande partie de la journée. Les écoles offrent l'occasion d'enseigner à une génération de futurs locuteurs d'une langue, souligne Spolsky (*ibid.*).

7.5.2.1 Écoles d'immersion

Une autre stratégie pour maintenir la langue Itsekiri pourrait consister à mettre en place des écoles d'immersion dans le système éducatif formel. L'idée des écoles d'immersion comme stratégie pour maintenir les langues menacées est courante dans la civilisation occidentale. Cummins (2000) décrit l'immersion linguistique comme l'utilisation de la langue cible comme moyen d'enseignement dans les écoles.

Outre la première école d'immersion linguistique qui a ouvert ses portes au Québec Canada en 1965, May (2005), Warner (1999), Wilson et Kamana (2001), évoque la première école maternelle d'immersion appelée Aha Punana Leo' signifiant nid de voix ou nid de langue qui a été établie en 1983 à Hawaï aux États-Unis. Selon Wilson et Kamana (2001), les écoles maternelles familiales facilitent les interactions entre les enfants et les locuteurs qui parlent couramment la langue

autochtone. « L'objectif est de cultiver la maîtrise et la connaissance de la langue et de la culture autochtones de la même manière qu'ils l'étaient à la maison » (Wilson et Kamana, 2001 : 151).

En plus, Fishman (1996) fait état d'initiatives similaires, également connues sous le nom d'écoles de survie linguistique. Fishman observe qu'il s'agit d'un programme dans lequel la langue d'enseignement est la langue en voie de disparition elle-même, soulignant que les nids linguistiques se sont avérés être un moyen simple mais très efficace d'amener les enfants à parler couramment leur langue ancestrale et de leur donner une éducation précoce à la culture et aux valeurs autochtones. Les écoles d'immersion offrent une formation et une exposition aux pratiques culturelles, aux valeurs, aux connaissances autochtones de l'environnement, à la philosophie, à la religion et aux cérémonies (Fishman, 1996).

Certains répondants dans cette étude sont ouverts à ces idées. Par exemple, d'après Aaron, un participant l'idée que la langue Itsekiri doit être enseignée efficacement dans l'éducation formelle et informelle, tout en suggérant la fourniture de matériel pédagogique pour améliorer l'enseignement de la langue. À cet égard, il faudrait envisager d'inclure l'enseignement des langues d'origine dans la politique d'enseignement des langues au Nigéria. Conformément aux résultats de ces études, le système éducatif nigérian devrait fournir du matériel et concevoir des programmes d'enseignement des langues patrimoniales afin d'encourager les élèves à apprendre, apprécier et parler leurs langues patrimoniales.

En outre, la promotion et l'enseignement efficace de l'Itsekiri en même temps que l'anglais et son inclusion dans le programme scolaire peuvent non seulement améliorer le statut et la vitalité de l'Itsekiri, mais aussi devenir attrayantes pour ses locuteurs. Cela pourrait ouvrir la voie à une étude plus approfondie de la langue Itsekiri dans l'enseignement supérieur et pourrait produire des enseignants pour enseigner la langue.

Selon les données de cette étude, doctorale, les enseignants n'ont pas la connaissance requise de la langue ; par conséquent, l'enseignement de l'Itsekiri dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur devrait être encouragé afin de fournir les qualifications requises pour l'enseigner dans les écoles primaires et secondaires. À cet égard, l'un des moyens d'y parvenir pourrait être la création de programmes de formation des enseignants dans le cadre desquels les enseignants pourraient être formés pour stimuler l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de l'Itsekiri.

Pour atteindre cet objectif, des locuteurs compétents de la langue Itsekiri pourraient être employés comme assistants d'enseignement pour aider les enseignants qui ne parlent pas l'Itsekiri en classe.

Cela correspond à l'idée d'un répondant, Aaron, qui a suggéré que des séminaires, des ateliers et des formations continues devraient être organisés pour donner aux enseignants de langue Itsekiri les moyens de les préparer adéquatement à ce travail.

7. 5 .3 Enseignement de l'Itsekiri dans l'éducation informelle

7.5.3.1 Travail communautaire

Une autre stratégie pour maintenir la langue Itsekiri pourrait être le travail informel et communautaire. L'approche est centrée sur la création d'écoles informelles ou de programmes (périscolaires) parascolaires et de programmes d'été organisés au sein de la communauté. Divers répondants dans cette étude ont préconisé l'apprentissage informel de l'Itsekiri, dans lequel les efforts des membres de la communauté seraient nécessaires dans le processus de maintenance. Micah, un répondant, a suggéré la création d'organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) qui établiraient des centres d'apprentissage des langues pour enseigner la langue Itsekiri. Dans le but d'enseigner l'Itsekiri de manière informelle, Adam, un autre répondant, a souligné que l'Itsekiri ne devrait pas seulement être transmis par une utilisation intensive à la maison, mais qu'il devrait également être enseigné efficacement dans un cadre scolaire informel. Selon Adam, les initiatives collectives ou individuelles visant à établir des centres d'enseignement et d'apprentissage informels constitueraient un pas dans la bonne direction dans le processus de maintenance. Adam a en outre suggéré que le centre pourrait également organiser des cours du soir dans des endroits proches du domicile des gens, en plus d'organiser des séminaires visant à développer la conscience linguistique pour sensibiliser les locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri aux avantages du bilinguisme dont nous parlerons plus loin dans ce chapitre.

En partageant la suggestion d'Adam ci-dessus, pour soutenir l'effort de maintenance de la langue Itsekiri, Aaron, un autre répondant, est d'avis *qu'il est nécessaire d'établir des bibliothèques communautaires remplies de ressources linguistiques produites en langue Itsekiri*. Selon Aaron, la création de centres socioculturels et de classes après l'école attirerait les enfants et les jeunes à Itsekiri. Les parents pourraient également être encouragés à envoyer leurs enfants dans de tels cours après l'école, a-t-il estimé. La plupart des participants aux entrevues étaient disposés à adopter cette stratégie si elle était mise en œuvre.

La méthodologie d'enseignement des classes informelles serait l'utilisation de fichiers audio et/ou de vidéos avec des contenus centrés sur la langue Itsekiri, ainsi que d'autres supports pédagogiques linguistiques basés sur l'Itsekiri, tels que des livres écrits en langue Itsekiri. Aaron a également soutenu que les enfants et les jeunes peuvent écouter des contes populaires, regarder des courts métrages ou des films dans lesquels la langue Itsekiri est parlée, ainsi que raconter des histoires en Itsekiri dans le but non seulement d'apprendre la langue, mais aussi de préserver le patrimoine linguistique et culturel. Aaron était d'avis que les personnes intéressées dans la communauté pourraient être encouragées à enseigner la langue Itsekiri de manière informelle afin de raviver l'intérêt et l'utilisation de la langue Itsekiri. Selon lui, cela insufflerait une nouvelle vie linguistique à la communauté linguistique Itsekiri. Il a ajouté que, pour la pérennité d'une telle initiative, le soutien du gouvernement serait nécessaire.

7.5.3.2. Principes basés sur les tâches et approches curriculaires

En plus de l'enseignement des langues patrimoniales menacées dans l'éducation formelle et informelle, Austin et Sallabanks (2011) suggèrent le principe basé sur les tâches et les approches curriculaires pour l'acquisition des langues patrimoniales menacées comme stratégies dans les efforts de revitalisation et de maintenance. Pour atteindre cet objectif, ils proposent une approche maître-apprenti dans la conception des programmes d'études pour les langues en danger.

Ils soulignent que, pour enseigner et apprendre une langue d'origine, les personnes intéressées, les parents et les familles pourraient se tourner vers les aînés et les réseaux tribaux comme ressources essentielles pour les programmes d'études. Aaron, un répondant, semble partager ce point de vue dans son discours : « une personnalité Itsekiri importante, qualifiée et capable pourrait être invitée à donner des conférences sur des sujets importants en utilisant la langue Itsekiri ».

De la même manière, Hinton et al. (2001) suggèrent l'approche californienne d'apprentissage des langues « maître-apprenti » qui pourrait être un point de référence. « Il ne s'agit pas d'une situation de classe traditionnelle où un enseignant formé décide de ce que les élèves devraient apprendre » (Hinton et al. 2001b : 223). Tout en faisant écho à Hinton, Austin et Sallabanks (2011) rapportent que l'approche maître-apprenti est une situation où les maîtres locuteurs/enseignants sont jumelés à de jeunes apprenants de langues dans un cadre d'immersion individuelle.

Contrairement à l'approche formelle de l'apprentissage des langues qui se concentre sur l'étude formelle de la linguistique et des structures grammaticales, Austin et Sallabanks (ibid) observent

que le programme maître-apprenti est axé sur la communication entre le maître et l'apprenti dans le contexte des activités et des tâches quotidiennes

7.5.4 Accroître la visibilité d'Itsekiri via Internet

En outre, un moyen efficace de maintenir la langue Itsekiri serait de mettre l'Itsekiri sous les feux de la rampe en augmentant sa visibilité grâce aux efforts conscients des individus, soit lors d'activités en face à face, soit par le biais de services en ligne et/ou de la collaboration avec des groupes communautaires. Crystal (2002) suggère que les technologies de l'information et l'internet offrent aux langues menacées, qui ont été notées, des opportunités potentielles qui pourraient être explorées. Selon Crystal (ibid.), les technologies de l'information peuvent créer l'espace et l'atmosphère nécessaires, ainsi qu'un environnement propice à l'épanouissement des langues menacées, en particulier lorsque les locuteurs sont exposés à l'utilisation d'appareils numériques et sont en mesure de les utiliser pour projeter la langue en ligne. Crystal (2002) maintient que l'internet excite les adolescents, par conséquent, si les langues étaient exposées sur Internet, les jeunes l'adoreraient. Il observe également qu'il est possible pour une langue minoritaire de faire sentir sa présence sur Internet, auquel cas les gens peuvent maintenir une identité linguistique avec leurs amis et leurs parents ainsi qu'avec leurs collègues où qu'ils se trouvent dans le monde entier.

Dans le même ordre d'idées, la stratégie d'utilisation d'Internet comme outil d'apprentissage des langues peut également être appliquée dans la communauté Itsekiri. Pour accroître sa visibilité, les locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri peuvent utiliser les médias/technologies électroniques tels que les sites Web, les blogs, les forums Web et les salons de discussion, ainsi que la disponibilité d'une interface pour les sites de réseautage social pour présenter et apprendre la langue. Cela pourrait attirer les enfants et les jeunes adultes vers la langue Itsekiri, car ils sont plus susceptibles d'être intéressés par l'utilisation d'applications en ligne, surtout si elles sont introduites dans leur programme scolaire.

Avec la prolifération de diverses plateformes de médias sociaux, les locuteurs Itsekiri ainsi que des groupes culturels Itsekiri peuvent télécharger diverses activités liées à la langue Itsekiri sur les plateformes de médias sociaux telles que Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc., dans le but d'encourager ceux qui ne parlent pas l'Itsekiri à obtenir des ressources qui pourraient les aider à

apprendre la langue Itsekiri. Ces stratégies pour assurer la survie des projets de langue Itsekiri via internet pourraient être de véritables outils de revitalisation et de maintien de la langue Itsekiri.

De plus, Crystal (2002) est d'avis que les langues menacées progresseront si leurs locuteurs augmentent leur prestige au sein de la communauté dominante en veillant à ce que la langue ait accès aux médias par le biais d'une chronique régulière dans un quotidien, ou d'un programme occasionnel transmettant la langue à la radio ou à la télévision. Si la langue Itsekiri est utilisée dans les médias, elle pourrait attirer les enfants et les jeunes adultes et susciter leur intérêt pour leur langue d'origine.

Egalement, des événements tels que des célébrations culturelles ou un festival religieux sont des moyens par lesquels la langue Itsekiri peut être transmise. Par exemple, Lucas, un répondant à cette étude doctorale, était d'avis que pour une visibilité appropriée et accrue de la langue Itsekiri, les locuteurs devraient faire un effort conscient pour donner de la place à la langue par le biais de contextes socioculturels tels que les clubs et les associations. Il a soutenu que pour que les gens ressentent la présence de la langue au sein de la communauté au sens large, la langue pourrait être promue par des pratiques culturelles et des activités sociales telles que les pratiques religieuses dans les églises et la religion traditionnelle africaine (ATR).

De plus, les activités centrées sur l'Itsekiri pourraient être présentées dans les centres socioculturels et lors de réunions publiques régulières pour discuter de la voie à suivre dans l'intérêt de la langue Itsekiri. Selon Lucas, la promotion des pratiques religieuses Itsekiri peut être une motivation importante pour les locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri.

D'autres façons de maintenir la langue Itsekiri peuvent être la documentation linguistique discutée dans la section suivante.

7.5.5 Documentation linguistique

La documentation linguistique constitue une véritable stratégie de revitalisation et de maintien des langues patrimoniales menacées. Austin et Sallabanks (2011) estiment que pour que les langues menacées survivent, il est nécessaire que les générations à venir apprennent et acquièrent une certaine forme de documentation de leurs propriétés linguistiques. Ils notent que si les myriades de façons inventives dont les humains s'expriment ne sont pas documentées maintenant, les générations futures risquent de ne pas en avoir connaissance.

De la même manière, les participants à cette étude ont suggéré que la documentation linguistique soit une mesure efficace pour maintenir la langue Itsekiri. Selon Micah, un répondant à cette recherche doctorale, la langue Itsekiri devrait être documentée dans un document écrit, tel qu'une brochure, dans lequel les activités culturelles et/ou linguistiques Itsekiri sont enregistrées. Il a soutenu qu'un tel document pourrait servir de point de référence non seulement pour la génération actuelle, mais aussi pour la prochaine. Micah a fait valoir qu'une telle initiative pourrait renforcer la vitalité de la langue Itsekiri.

De manière significative, la documentation de la langue Itsekiri pourrait fournir des traces de son patrimoine culturel qui pourraient encourager les membres du groupe ethnique à la parler. À l'inverse, lorsque la langue Itsekiri n'est pas documentée, il se peut qu'il n'y ait aucune trace de son existence. En substance, Harrison (2007) soutient qu'à mesure que les langues tombent en désuétude et tombent dans l'oubli, des genres entiers de traditions orales – histoires, chansons et contes épiques – s'approchent rapidement de l'extinction. Il remarque que dans une situation où seule une petite fraction de la langue est enregistrée ou consignée dans des livres, lorsqu'elle n'est plus parlée, la langue n'existera que comme l'ombre d'une tradition autrefois vivante. Harrison (ibid.) soutient en outre que ces trésors culturels disparaîtront tous parce qu'ils n'ont pas été transmis aux enfants et à la jeune génération.

Dans la lignée de ce qui précède, compte tenu de la situation linguistique actuelle de la langue Itsekiri, telle que révélée par les données recueillies dans cette étude doctorale, il serait nécessaire de documenter les trésors culturels Itsekiri tels que les chants traditionnels, les rituels religieux, les histoires traditionnelles et les contes populaires en tant que stratégies pour maintenir la langue Itsekiri. Documenter et enregistrer les noms du patrimoine Itsekiri (un domaine qui sera étudié dans un futur projet), les noms botaniques traditionnels des plantes et la médecine Itsekiri peu orthodoxe et peut-être d'autres moyens pourraient être utilisés pour maintenir la langue Itsekiri.

En outre, les trésors linguistiques tels que les expressions idiomatiques, les comptines et les poèmes, les chansons, les contes populaires, les contes en langue Itsekiri pourraient être archivés et documentés dans l'intérêt des générations futures. En tant qu'individu, je peux personnellement m'identifier à la question de la narration des contes, et aux énigmes et blagues traditionnelles d'Itsekiri. Quand j'étais enfant, en grandissant à Warri à la fin des années 60 et au début des années 70, je me souviens, c'était une routine quotidienne, après le dîner, mes frères et sœurs et moi avions l'habitude de nous asseoir au clair de lune pour raconter des histoires centrées sur des animaux et

des personnes avec des personnages amusants. Ce faisant, nous n'avons pas seulement acquis la langue Itsekiri, mais nous avons également appris la culture et la sagesse Itsekiri. Les contes utilisant la langue Itsekiri, les énigmes et les blagues Itsekiri nous ont aidés, en tant qu'enfants, à apprendre et à acquérir des valeurs sociétales et une conduite morale qui constituaient des orientations de vie. En bref, la documentation linguistique pourrait être une véritable stratégie pour maintenir la langue Itsekiri.

7.6 Remarques finales

Dans cette dernière section, j'aimerais emprunter la citation ci-dessous qui résume une partie importante de l'étude doctorale

« Les développements socio-politico-économiques au Nigeria favorisent le transfert linguistique des langues locales vers l'anglais, une situation qui rend difficile le maintien et la subsistance des langues locales tout en laissant présager l'extinction des langues. Le changement de code entre l'anglais et les langues nigérianes est présenté comme une étape dans le processus de transfert linguistique vers l'anglais et d'extinction éventuelle des langues locales. L'extrême diversité linguistique, la mobilité des personnes dans la quête de la survie dans un environnement économique pauvre, l'absence d'une politique linguistique viable, la négligence des langues locales dans l'éducation de l'enfant à la maison et à l'école, et la prédominance et la viabilité de la langue anglaise contribuent à l'évolution de la situation linguistique. Le Nigeria connaît une transition linguistique qui pourrait finir par entraîner l'extinction de nombreuses langues nigérianes si rien n'est fait. Dans cette situation, les propriétaires de langues peuvent être le meilleur groupe pour sauver leurs langues (plus de 500) de l'extinction » (Nkechi, 2014 : 381).

Compte tenu du fait que certains des résultats de cette recherche résonnent avec Nkechi (2014), on peut être contraint d'être d'accord avec les pensées ci-dessus qui dépeignent ce qui semble être une prédiction pessimiste de la situation linguistique des langues nigérianes en général et de la communauté Itsekiri en particulier.

Le déclin de l'utilisation de la langue Itsekiri résultant des choix linguistiques familiaux et ce qui semble être une recherche croissante d'un moyen de communication commun dans la communauté

Itsekiri, comme le révèlent les données de cette étude, appelle l'action de la communauté Itsekiri, comme le souligne la section intitulée « stratégies et recommandations suggérées pour inverser le changement linguistique et maintenir la langue Itsekiri ».

À l'heure actuelle, la langue Itsekiri semble souffrir d'un recul linguistique en raison des faibles taux d'utilisation résultant des choix linguistiques faits par la population. Selon les données, il semble y avoir une hypothèse générale selon laquelle la langue Itsekiri ne peut ni répondre aux aspirations économiques, politiques et sociales des peuples, ni les emmener au-delà des rives de l'environnement local, selon les données, ce qui signifie que la langue peut être limitée dans sa portée puisqu'elle n'est ni largement parlée, ni utilisée au niveau international. À la lumière de ce qui précède, puisqu'il apparaît qu'aucune solution ne peut être proposée à cet égard dans l'immédiat, ce qui semble plausible, c'est de projeter la langue Itsekiri en augmentant sa visibilité et en renforçant son statut et sa vitalité.

À cette fin, il pourrait être opportun pour le gouvernement nigérian d'assurer la mise en œuvre de la politique linguistique intégrée dans les politiques d'éducation du Nigeria qui stipulent que les langues patrimoniales doivent être enseignées dans les écoles de la région où elles se trouvent. À cet égard, la fourniture de matériel pédagogique adéquat et la garantie d'une formation efficace des enseignants peuvent non seulement promouvoir la langue, mais aussi encourager les élèves à apprendre, apprécier et parler leurs langues d'origine, comme cela a été démontré dans certains pays africains tels que l'Afrique du Sud, le Ghana, l'Éthiopie, le Rwanda, pour n'en citer que quelques-uns, où certaines langues patrimoniales sont utilisées comme langues d'enseignement et apprises comme matières au niveau inférieur de la scolarité. L'inclusion et l'utilisation de la langue d'origine, aux côtés de l'anglais en classe, pourraient probablement renforcer le statut et accroître la visibilité des langues d'origine telles que la langue Itsekiri.

En effet, plutôt que de se débarrasser de leurs langues d'origine, comme c'est le cas actuellement, les parents et les élèves de la communauté peuvent voir la nécessité de parler à la fois l'anglais et leur langue d'origine à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de leur foyer. Par conséquent, les locuteurs de langues d'origine pourraient non seulement apprendre à apprécier les langues des autres, mais aussi réduire les conflits linguistiques, endiguer la discrimination linguistique et encourager la tolérance linguistique.

De plus, reconnaissant que la transmission d'une langue peut être de la responsabilité des familles, car les parents prennent parfois des décisions éclairées concernant le choix des langues qu'ils souhaitent que leurs enfants utilisent à la maison, les conclusions tirées des preuves fournies dans les données suggèrent que la transmission intergénérationnelle d'une langue patrimoniale est essentielle au maintien et à la survie d'une langue minoritaire en danger telle que l'Itsekiri.

Bien que cette étude reconnaisse le fait que personne ne peut forcer les parents à utiliser leur langue d'origine à la maison, il est néanmoins conseillé aux familles d'utiliser leur langue d'origine. À cette fin, il est important de créer une campagne de sensibilisation pour non seulement sensibiliser les parents et l'ensemble de la communauté à l'importance de la transmission intergénérationnelle de l'Itsekiri, mais aussi pour conseiller les parents sur le type de politiques et de gestion de la langue familiale à mettre en place dans leurs foyers.

À cet égard, la sensibilisation linguistique aidera également les parents à comprendre la nécessité d'utiliser leur langue d'origine et pas seulement l'anglais à la maison. Cela peut aider les parents non seulement à comprendre les avantages culturels de la conservation de leurs langues d'origine et à exposer les enfants à leur identité culturelle à travers leur langue ; Cela peut également endiguer l'attrition apparente de la langue. Contrairement à cela, la génération actuelle d'enfants Itsekiri est susceptible de voir l'Itsekiri être progressivement remplacé par les langues dominantes, provoquant ainsi une perte culturelle et identitaire parmi le peuple, l'attrition et finalement l'extinction de la langue. En outre, la stratégie consistant à donner de la visibilité à la langue Itsekiri via Internet et les médias sociaux, à assurer son utilisation à la maison ainsi qu'à l'enseigner dans les écoles semble être une initiative importante sur laquelle on ne saurait trop insister car elle peut encourager une utilisation efficace de la langue. Des entités telles que les familles, les écoles, les communautés, les gouvernements et les églises pourraient explorer différentes voies pour atteindre cet objectif. Ces initiatives peuvent non seulement réduire le changement linguistique et la mise en danger des langues, mais elles peuvent également aider à maintenir non seulement la langue Itsekiri, mais aussi d'autres langues minoritaires patrimoniales du Nigeria qui semblent être dans la même situation linguistique.

De plus, selon les données, les locuteurs de la langue Itsekiri transmettent et semblent ne pas être conscients des avantages de soutenir le développement de l'anglais et de l'Itsekiri pour leurs enfants. Certes, alors que les parents sont bilingues, ou multilingues dans trois langues ou plus, dont l'anglais, l'Itsekiri et le NPE, comme le révèlent les données, les enfants et les jeunes adultes

semblent être bilingues en anglais et en NPE, à l'exclusion de l'Itsekiri puisqu'ils ont tendance à parler les deux langues soit à la maison, soit dans l'environnement. À ce sujet, on peut être en mesure de soutenir que, si les personnes de langue Itsekiri avaient été conscientes des réalités et des implications du phénomène du bilinguisme et des avantages qui en découlent, elles auraient peut-être compris la nécessité et l'importance de parler l'Itsekiri et l'anglais ou l'Itsekiri et l' NPE à la maison. Une telle conscience aurait pu les encourager non seulement à transmettre les deux langues à leurs enfants ; Le phénomène du changement linguistique n'a peut-être pas été significativement évident dans la communauté. Les données recueillies dans le cadre de cette étude ont révélé que la majorité des répondants pourraient avoir une connaissance limitée du concept de bilinguisme et ne pas être conscients de l'importance de la transmission linguistique. Compte tenu de ces défis linguistiques, il peut donc être nécessaire de lancer une campagne de sensibilisation linguistique pour éclairer les personnes de langue Itsekiri et d'autres membres de la communauté sur l'importance du bilinguisme, ainsi que sur l'utilisation extensive de leur langue d'origine pour éviter la perte linguistique, culturelle et identitaire.

Enfin, à la lumière de ce qui précède, d'une part, il reste beaucoup à faire dans le domaine de la mise en danger des langues dans un contexte de langue minoritaire patrimoniale au Nigeria. D'autre part, les perspectives ultérieures pourraient être de mener des recherches sur ce qui constitue la première langue ou la langue maternelle des enfants et des jeunes adultes de la communauté de langue Itsekiri. L'objectif serait d'éclairer les personnes de langue Itsekiri non seulement sur la question de l'identité linguistique, mais aussi d'attirer leur attention sur les conséquences de l'abandon de leur langue au profit de la langue anglaise dominante et de l'NPE et sur la menace et la mise en danger qui pourraient en résulter pour la langue Itsekiri.

Une étude de suivi de cette recherche doctorale consisterait à se joindre à d'autres sociolinguistes du Nigeria pour encourager le gouvernement nigérian à envisager la mise en place d'une politique linguistique réalisable qui favoriserait les langues patrimoniales au Nigeria.

De même, il peut être tout aussi nécessaire de sensibiliser les décideurs politiques à reconnaître que les langues patrimoniales, minoritaires ou moins utilisées, sont aussi importantes que l'anglais. Ils doivent se rendre compte que les différentes langues ont des fonctions différentes et sont utiles de diverses manières.

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