

DISPLACEMENT OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN FAMILIES: A CASE STUDY OF SOME SELECTED NIGERIAN FAMILIES IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of language displacement in the family domain. It looks at the languages that are spoken in the families of some educated Nigerians living in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. It has been observed that Nigerian families, especially those in diaspora, do not speak their mother tongue at home, preferring to interact and socialize with their children in English. This practice results in the displacement of indigenous languages in the family domain. The study focuses on fourteen (14) Nigerian families at the University of Botswana, who are from three (3) demographically more populous language groups: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, and two (2) comparatively demographically smaller language groups (Efik and Degema), in order to find out the languages spoken by these families and ascertain the reason(s) for language choice. The fifty (50) participants in the study were purposively sampled. Two (2) research instruments were used for data collection: the questionnaire and an interview schedule. Data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, using insights from domain analysis. The most significant finding is that native languages are being displaced in most of the homes because most parents in the study preferred to interact with their children in English. The study therefore recommends that educated Nigerian parents should give their children a decided opportunity to be bilingual in both English and the mother tongue in order not to aggravate the endangerment of Nigerian indigenous languages both within and outside the country.

Keywords: diglossia, displacement, domain analysis, endangerment, shift

1. Introduction

“Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches; riches which cannot be guessed at from the other side of the door” (Engholm, 1965: p.15).

Moreover, “our language is one of God’s blessings that our forefathers received thousands of years ago. Our parents conserved (it)..., and we cannot simply cast it off as if it were worth nothing” (Fishman, 1997: p.240).

The two quotations above are pertinent to the issue under

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examination; separated though by time both opinions voice a timeless truth. Language displacement and language shift are used interchangeably in my discussion to refer to “the processes preceding the extinction of languages” (Brenzinger, 1997: p.273). Language shift can be defined as the process whereby members of a community in which more than one language is spoken abandon their original vernacular language in favour of another (Kandler et al, 2010). This study focuses on language displacement in the nuclear family domain.

Domains, according to Fishman (1964) are taken to be “constellations of factors such as location, topic, and participants” (in Fasold, 1987: p.183). Boxer (2002: p.4) explains that in sociolinguistics, “a domain refers to a sphere of life in which verbal and non-verbal interactions occur”. Greenfield (1972) identified five primary domains namely: family, friendship, religion, education and employment. Fasold (187: p.183) states that “if a speaker is at home talking to another member of the family, about an everyday topic, that speaker is said to be in the family domain”. Domain analysis, therefore, describes the use of languages in various contexts in a multilingual society. Fishman (1965) suggests that one language is more likely to be appropriate in some specific contexts than another (in Fasold, 1987: p.183). In domain analysis, some domains are more formal than others. For example, the education and employment domains are more formal than the family and friendship domains. Fasold further explains that “in a community with diglossia, the Low (L) language is the one that will be selected in the family domain, whereas the High (H) language will most often be used in a more formal domain, perhaps education”. (Ibid.)

Other terms that may need to be defined in the context of this paper include: “indigenous language”, “native language”, and “mother tongue”. An “indigenous language” (also referred to as autochthonous language) is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people, often reduced to the status of a minority language (Glavin and Montenegro, 2008). In this study, the Nigerian indigenous languages referred to are Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik and Degema. A “native language”, on the other hand, is the language that a person acquires in early childhood because it is spoken in the family and (or it is the language of the region where the child lives) (Fasold, 1997: p.267). Contemporary linguists commonly use “native language” to refer to the mother tongue (MT) of a child or the first language (L₁) that a child acquires. The “mother tongue” (also the first language) is the language

which a person acquires in early years and which normally becomes his natural instrument of thought and communication (Fasold, 1997: p.266). In this study, “mother tongue” and “native language” are used interchangeably.

1.1 Background of Study

It is an observed fact that a lot of educated Nigerians, whether resident in diaspora or living in Nigeria, communicate with their children, not in their native languages but in the English language. Adichie (2006, p.6) observes that “what is worrisome is not that we have all learned to think in English, but that our education devalues our culture, that middle-class parents don’t much care that their children do not speak their native languages or have a sense of their history.” In line with Adichie’s observation, Prah (2010: p.133) states that “this mentality has extended from the late colonial period into the post-colonial period and is prevalent in many elite families where children of parents who both speak the same African language resort to speaking English with their children and insist that English should be spoken in the house”. The apathy towards indigenous languages has a serious implication for the survival of these languages over time. The result is what linguists have termed “language endangerment”, which has become a global issue in recent times. Anderson (2010: p.131) explains that “when children reject or no longer acquire a language as their mother tongue, that language may be considered endangered and on the path to oblivion that can only be reversed, and then only with great effort”.

Brenzinger (1997: p.276) reveals that “the mere fact that only a few parents may decide not to use the minority language with their children already results in endangering the entire transmission from one generation to the next”. To buttress this point, Anderson (2010: p.130) states that a language has begun to be endangered when there has been “a disruption in intergenerational transmission of the language”. Furthermore, Crawford (1996: p.45-46) elaborates that a language is considered “threatened” when “the number of its speakers is declining”, when “usage declines in domains where the language was once secure, for example, in the home domain...”, and when “growing numbers of parents fail to teach the language to their children”. It is therefore necessary to investigate language displacement in the home domain to establish the extent to which indigenous languages are being displaced, to find out why language displacement is taking

place in homes, to highlight the possible implications of language displacement on indigenous languages in Nigeria, and explore the potential for reversing the trend.

An endangered language is a language that may soon vanish, ceasing to be used as a vehicle of communication, perhaps even disappearing completely from human history (Derhemi (2002: p.150). Blench (1998, 2007), who has done extensive work on the languages of the Middle Belt of Nigeria, has established the fact that language endangerment in West Africa generally occurs through language shift and cites Nigeria as having by far the largest number of endangered languages in Africa for the obvious reason of being the most linguistically diverse country in the continent. But language displacement is not peculiar to Nigeria; it has become a global trend. A recent BBC News report reveals that “endangered minority languages are not just a Nigerian problem. UNESCO says half the world’s 6,000 languages could disappear by the end of the century unless steps are taken to preserve and encourage their use” (BBC News, March 4, 2014). Brenzinger (1997: p.273) asserts that “in all parts of the world, we observe an increasing tendency among members of ethnolinguistic minorities to bring up their children in a language other than their mother tongue, thereby abandoning their former ethnic languages”. He goes on to say that “the replacing language is in many cases one of a few fast-spreading languages such as English, Mandarin (Chinese), Russian, Hindi-Urdu, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, French, Swahili and Hausa.”

In the Nigerian context, the regional replacing languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba before political independence have since been overtaken by English as a replacing language, after independence, and have in turn become victims and threatened. Nigeria was colonized by the British, gaining independence in 1960; English, the language of colonialism, has since served as the official language of the country. The complex language situation in Nigeria contributed to a large extent in elevating the status of English over and above all the indigenous languages. Nigeria is the most linguistically heterogeneous country in Africa with an estimated 553 languages spoken by over 150 million people (Blench 2007: p.146). The multilingual situation has made it difficult for Nigeria to find an indigenous lingua franca for the entire populace. (Adegbija, 1994; Emenyonu, 1983; Owolabi and Dada, 2012). Admittedly, language is who we are, “the human essence” (Chomsky,

1968). It is part of our “genetic structure” (Fishman, 1991), it embodies a people’s cultural heritage and serves as a marker of identity, therefore, any attempt to impose another indigenous language on a group of people is always met with resentment and resistance. For this reason, Emenyonu (1983: p.25) cautions that “it is safer to live with English, its colonial reminiscences notwithstanding, than to delve into the explosive issue of making a choice from one of the ethnic languages in the country”.

Furthermore, national language policies are meant to give direction in a multilingual polity and to determine the roles languages should play in any given nation (Batibo, 2005: p.114). In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE 1977, revised 1981, 1998, 2004) which has been heavily criticized for lack of clarity (Afolayan, 1984; Adegbija, 1994; Emenanjo, 1996) provides for mother tongue (MT) and language of the immediate community (LIC) as the language of initial literacy at the pre-primary and junior primary levels, and of adult and non formal education. The policy recognizes three major (national) languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as L2, and as languages of national culture and integration. Thirdly, the policy also recognizes English, as the official language, the language of formal literacy, the bureaucracy, secondary and higher education, the courts, etc. The policy advocates multilingualism as the national goal and to this end, the policy stipulates that:

In appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people’s culture, the government considers it to be in the best interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue... At the junior secondary school level, students should study the languages of their own area, in addition to any of the three Nigerian languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, subject to availability of teachers...

(Federal Republic of Nigeria, NPE revised 1981: p.17).

It is remarkable that decades after this policy was crafted on paper, implementation has been rather unsuccessful owing to several problems which include lack of teachers to teach the national languages in all the schools in the country, lack of textbooks in the indigenous languages, attitudes of students, among many others (Adegbija, 1994). Umunnakwe (1999: p.57) observes that “in spite of efforts to enforce mother tongue education in the pre-primary and primary schools, the practice in most private, nursery and primary institutions is the use of

English as the medium of instruction”. Furthermore, “most educated families in Nigeria use English at home and ensure that the ‘first language’ of the child is English”. The English language has therefore continued, in general, to enjoy a privileged status in Nigeria, officially and socially.

The choice of English as the medium of communication in many Nigerian homes may lie in the fact that English is an international language, the “global lingua franca” (Crystal, 2003: p.1), the language of wider communication and of international prestige. Its functionality and utilitarian value makes it the language of choice among the educated elite (Batibo 2005). In fact, Owolabi and Dada (2012:1682) believe that the positive attitude displayed towards English by Nigerians could be attributed to factors such as “education, civilization, colonization, and globalization and above all, the exoglossic language policy of the nation”. In addition, competence in the English language is seen as a gateway to employment; it ensures upward mobility and high social economic status of any individual nationally and internationally.

Over the years, the rise of education (literacy) and mastery of the indigenous language have proceeded by inverse proportions: while acquisition of the main language of education, English, is on the rise, mastery of the indigenous language is on the wane. Hence, given the centrality of the family unit to language acquisition in society, displacement of the indigenous language in the family domain is the focus of this study. What are the languages spoken in the homes of educated Nigerian families at the University of Botswana? How is the Nigerian indigenous language faring in this part of the diaspora? What lessons may be learnt in the patterns which present themselves? How can the language threat be minimized?

Some scholars have studied displacement of languages in Nigeria from different perspectives. Arasanyin (1998) investigated the extent to which Hausa has sustained its functional status among minority groups in the North (of Nigeria). Adegbija (1994, 2004) studied “patterns of language use in the office” and language shift in Nigeria from the language policy perspective. Ayeomoni (1997) looked at language use in the Yoruba speech community. Igboanusì (2008) in a paper entitled “Is Igbo an endangered language?” investigates the true position of the Igbo language with respect to language endangerment. Ohiri-Aniche’s (1990, 1997, 2007) studies have focused on the low esteem that Nigerian students and their parents accord indigenous

languages in preference of the English language. None of these studies focuses on the family domain. Thus a thorough investigation of language displacement in the home domain should provide a better insight into the problem and help linguists in the attempt to find ways and means of containing language endangerment.

1.2 Research Questions

Specifically, the following research questions guided the study:

- i) What languages are used by family members when interacting at home?
- ii) What are the reasons for using these languages at home when interacting with family members?
- iii) What are the implications of the language choices in the family domain?

2. Methodology

This investigation is a case study. It focuses on a small group of participants purposively sampled from the population of Nigerian academics at the University of Botswana. Crossman (2003) states that purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, is one that is done based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study. The characteristics that guided the selection of the sample were: “educated”, “middle-class”, “Nigerian families”, “living with their children in Botswana”. At the time of this study, the number of Nigerians working at the University of Botswana was thirty (30); twenty-one (21) of whom lived with their children. Fourteen (14) families with a total of fifty (50) participants (parents and children aged 11 and above) formed the sample size.

The instruments of data collection were the questionnaire and interview schedule which were piloted to ensure validity and reliability. The instruments were first reviewed by two professors of English who made useful comments and suggestions on the items, and these were tested on two educated Nigerian families who did not form part of the sample. Comments received from piloting the instruments helped the researcher to modify the questions to ensure that they elicited the right responses. The interviews were conducted as a follow up to the responses given on the questionnaire to enable the researcher to collect rich and more insightful data.

Two sets of questionnaires were designed and administered – one for parents and the other for children. It was necessary to collect the views of both parents and children in order to have a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study. Table 1 shows the ethnic distribution of

participants in the study.

Table 1- Ethnic Distribution of families (Parents and Children)

Ethnicity	Yoruba	Igbo	Hausa	Efik	Degema	Total
Families	7	4	1	1	1	14
Parents	14	8	2	2	2	28
Children	10	7	2	2	1	22

This selection ensured that families from both the majority (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba), and minority (Efik, Degema) languages in Nigeria were represented in the study. A total of 28 parents and 22 children formed the sample size. All the 14 families were drawn from the University of Botswana community because the study focuses on “educated and middle-class” families, who are frequently cited as perpetuating the problem of language displacement, consciously or unconsciously. For purposes of anonymity, the families were assigned numbers 1 to 14 (F1, F2, F3...F14).

The questionnaire for parents was a 12-item structured instrument divided into 3 sections – A, B and C. Section A solicited demographic information such as designation, gender, age, ethnicity, and length of stay in Botswana. Section B elicited responses on language use in the family domain for different occasions and situations; for example, language spoken with spouse, language spoken with children, language used in assisting children with school work, disciplining children, discussing family matters, and for social events. Reasons for the language choice were also solicited. Section C comprised of open-ended questions where respondents were requested to indicate what they would do differently if given an opportunity to raise their children afresh, and give suggestions on implications of their language choice on language displacement in the home.

Similarly, the questionnaire for children was a 13 item-structured instrument, also divided into 3 sections A, B, and C. Section A sought personal information on gender, age, ethnicity, length of stay in Botswana. Section B was on language use at home with parents, siblings, peers, friends and extended family in their home villages in Nigeria. Section C solicited information that would reveal attitude towards their native languages. For example, questions sought to find out if children would like to learn to speak, read and write in their native languages, how often they visited their home village in Nigeria,

and whether they felt alienated when they visited their home villages because of their deficiency in the native languages. Responses from sections B and C of both instruments were analyzed thematically. Data collected from the study were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, using insights from domain analysis (Fasold 1987; Greenfield 1972). The quantitative aspect accounts for the frequency and percentage distributions of the responses while the qualitative analysis was based on the interpretation of data.

3. Findings

The main findings of language use at home in the different contexts can be summarized as follows:

Table 2- Language use in different contexts

Contexts of Language use	Yoruba		Igbo		Hausa		Efik		Degema		Total
	Yor	Eng	Igb	Eng	H	Eng	Ef	Eng	Deg	Eng	
Language use with spouse	7	0	3	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	14
With children	5	2	1	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	14
School work	0	7	0	4	0	1	0	1	0	1	14
Discipline	3	4	0	4	0	1	0	1	0	1	14
Family matters	3	4	0	4	0	1	0	1	0	1	14
Social events	7	7	4	4	0	1	1	1	0	1	26
Total	25	24	8	20	0	6	2	5	0	6	

Key: Languages spoken- Yor= Yoruba, Eng= English, Igb= Igbo, H= Hausa, Ef= Efik, Deg= Degema.

Interaction with spouses

Table 2 indicates that all the seven families (100%) of Yoruba origin (F1 – F7) interact with their spouses using the Yoruba language. In the four families of Igbo origin (F8- F11), three families (75%) interact with their spouses in Igbo, while one family (25%) interacts in English. Furthermore, the one family of Hausa origin (F12) interacts in English in spite of the fact that both husband and wife share the same native language, which is Hausa. The Efik family (F13) interacts in Efik while the Degema family (F14) speaks English at home.

Interaction with children

Five of the seven families (71.4%) of Yoruba origin speak Yoruba to their children while the other two (28.6%) speak English to their children. Among the four Igbo families, three (75%) revealed that they interact with their children in English while one family uses English as well as the native languages. English was the dominant language in the homes of F12, F13 and F14.

Interaction with relatives

Most of the families do not live with relatives so this question was not applicable to them. However, the few families that stayed with relatives interacted with them in the native languages as well as in English and that depended on the topic and context of the speech event.

Helping children with school work

All the 14 families (100%) indicated that they assisted their children with school work using the English language.

Discipline of children

Three of the Yoruba families (43%) indicated that they disciplined their children using the Yoruba language while the other 4 (57%) instilled discipline using the medium of English. All the other seven families (F8...F14) revealed that they disciplined their children using the medium of English.

Family matters

In discussing family matters, three of the Yoruba families-(43%) revealed that they discussed family matters in the Yoruba language while the other four Yoruba families used English. The other seven families in the study (F8...F14) discussed family matters using the English language.

Social events

The linguistic code for social events (such as parties, outings, cultural meetings) depended on the occasion as well as the participants in the speech event. If the social event included members of other ethno-linguistic groups, the language of choice was English. However, the Yoruba, Igbo and Efik families indicated that they used both the native languages and English at such occasions. F12 and F14 indicated that all social events were conducted in English irrespective of who was involved in the interaction. One Igbo family (F8) revealed that if the social event was cultural, involving only participants from their ethnic

group, it was mandatory that discussions be carried out in the Igbo language, an attempt to keep that language alive in a foreign land.

3.1 *Reasons for the language choice*

With Spouses

All the seven Yoruba families interacted with their spouses in the Yoruba language because they all come from the same ethnic group and speak the same native language. Among the four Igbo families, three come from the same ethnic group so they interacted in the Igbo language. However, in the fourth family (F11), the husband and wife come from different ethnic groups so the language of choice invariably was English. F12 spoke English with the spouse as a matter of choice; F13 spoke Efik because the husband and wife speak the same language; while F14 interacted in English because the couple belonged to different ethnic groups. Here again, English became the “convenient neutral language of communication” (Nkolola, 2010: p.178).

With Children

F1...F5 spoke Yoruba to their children because they wanted their children to grow up speaking the Yoruba language while F6 and F7 spoke English at home with their children because they believed that their children needed to be competent in English, especially as they were growing up in a foreign land. F8, F9, F10, F12, F13 and F14 spoke English to their children at home also to ensure that their children were competent users of the English language. In the words of F12,

English prepares children for academic, personal and professional success in a globalizing world. Such kids become cosmopolitan and linguistically empowered to travel and settle outside their home country or village...

F11 indicated that they interacted with their son in both Igbo and Yoruba, the two languages spoken by the parents. The parents wanted their son to grow up speaking both languages to ensure that he was linguistically connected to his cultural roots.

With School work

All the fourteen families (100%) helped their children with school work using English because English was the medium of instruction in schools and using English in that context reinforced the language of the classroom. It also gave the children additional practice and helped to improve their competence in English.

For discipline

The three Yoruba families that disciplined their children using the Yoruba language did so because their children were competent users of the native language. The other four Yoruba families used English to discipline their children because they believed that their children were more competent in English than in the Yoruba language, even though they could speak Yoruba. The rest of the families (F8...F14) disciplined their children using the English language because English was more or less the first language (F1) of the children. One of the parents indicated that since discipline was a serious matter, he felt that the English language was more appropriate in dealing with such matters.

3.2 Implications of language choice

What will you do differently if given the opportunity to raise children again?

Responses to the above question were as follows:

Five families (35.7%) indicated that they would do exactly the same thing; that is, raise their children using their native languages because they believed that children should be able to speak their mother tongue as well as English. They also felt strongly that the children needed to be able to connect with their cultural roots even though they lived in a foreign country.

Four families (28.6%) indicated that they would do exactly what they did previously; that is, raise their children exclusively in the English language. They believed that raising their children in English gave them a “head start” at school, helped them to excel in their academic work and helped them communicate freely with other people who do not come from their ethnic background. These parents also indicated that since they had been away from Nigeria for a long time and do not visit home frequently, the ethnic languages were not relevant to their children.

Five other families (35.7%) indicated that they would do things differently if given the opportunity to raise children again. They revealed that they would like their children to have their native languages as L1 and English as L2 because the children need to connect with their roots and have a cultural identity.

One parent stated that:

The view that exclusive use of English produced academic excellence was a fallacy. Research has shown that mother tongue education at the primary

level produces better academic performance. Children, therefore, need English for school work and also need their mother tongue for cultural identity.

Implications of using English in the socialization of children

Four families (28.6%) maintained that for children living abroad, functionality and the utility value of languages should take precedence over cultural sentiments. According to them, native languages are not very important to children who rarely go to their home villages and who may not settle in the villages in adult life. Because these children interact more with people from all over the world, it made better sense that they speak the language of wider communication which is English. These parents believed that their children picked up enough of the native languages when they visited their home villages and that was all they needed. One of the parents asserted that:

The younger generations are technological and global natives. They may or will never settle in their native land or use their native languages so why bother or burden them? If they need additional languages as they travel around, they will pick them accordingly.

Ten families (71.4%) indicated that it was good to speak native languages to children at home to give them the opportunity to learn these languages. They stated that children should be educated on the importance of the mother tongue which they may need in their adult life. They suggested that children should visit their home villages regularly in order to expose them to the indigenous culture and ensure that the native languages are kept alive. They, however, believed that since English is also important, children should be encouraged to be bilingual and not monolingual speakers of English.

3.3 Language use in the home domain (Children)

Table 3- Language use in the home domain (Children)

Contexts of language use	Yoruba		Igbo		Hausa		Efik		Degema		Total
	Yor	Eng	Igb	Eng	H	Eng	Ef	Eng	Deg	Eng	
Language use with parents	5	5	1	6	0	2	0	2	0	1	22
Language use with siblings	0	10	0	7	0	2	0	2	0	1	22

Language use with friends	0	10	0	7	0	2	0	2	0	1	22
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Language use in the family domain- Children

A total of twenty-two (22) children (12 boys and 10 girls) aged between 11 and 21 took part in the study. They had lived in Botswana between 1 year and 11 years and above. Their ethnic distribution is as follows: 10 Yoruba, 7 Igbo, 2 Hausa, 2 Efik and 1 Degema (See Table 1). Table 3 reveals that 16 (72.7%) children interacted with their parents at home using English while six children (27.3%) spoke their mother tongue with their parents. Data from the interviews revealed that the only child that spoke Igbo at home has parents from different ethnic groups (Igbo and Yoruba). He indicated that he spoke Igbo with his father and Yoruba with his mother at home.

Table 3 also reveals that all the children (100%) interacted with their siblings and friends using the medium of English. Two reasons were given for this scenario. First, the children revealed that they had better competence in English than in their mother tongues. Secondly, they were made to speak only English at school so they had formed the linguistic habit of speaking with their siblings in English, whether at home or at school. In addition, they interacted with their friends in English because they had friends of different nationalities who spoke different languages. The only language common to them was English, the “global lingua franca”.

Degree of fluency in the mother tongue

Six children (27.3%) indicated that they can speak their mother tongue; six other children (27.3%) revealed that they can speak their mother tongue to some extent while ten children (45.4%) indicated that they cannot speak their mother tongues. The ten children who cannot speak their mother tongues revealed that their parents do not speak their native languages to them.

Attitude towards the mother tongue

Eighteen children (82%) revealed that they would like to learn to read and write in their mother tongues while four children (18%) indicated that they had no interest in learning their mother tongue. Eighteen children (82%) indicated that they visited their home villages often; three children indicated that they visited their home village not very often, while one child had not visited Nigeria since

she came to Botswana more than eleven years ago. Six of the children (27.3%) indicated that they interacted with their grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins in the mother tongue because they can speak their native languages; another six children (27.3%) interacted with their relatives in their home village in English because they can all speak English, while the other ten children (45.4%) spoke English to relatives that understood English and tried their best to communicate in the native language with those who do not speak English. At times, the children needed someone to interpret or translate whatever they failed to understand. Twelve children (54.5%) admitted that they felt alienated in their home villages because of their incompetence in the native language. Six children (27.3%) did not feel alienated because they could speak their native language and so could interact well with relatives and friends. The other four children (18.2%) said they did not care whether they were left out or not.

4. Discussion of Findings

It is evident from the study that most families interacted with their spouses using the native languages. The spouses that spoke English at home were found to be from different ethnic groups. The only exception was the Hausa speaking family that indicated that they spoke English exclusively at home in all linguistic contexts.

The study also revealed that most of the families (8 out of 14 families, i.e. 57%) interacted with their children using the English language. This finding shows that intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue is being disrupted in these homes, thereby putting the native languages at risk of displacement. However, it is important to point out that most Yoruba families (5 out of 7, i.e. 71.4%) interacted with their children using the Yoruba language.

Another significant finding is that all the families investigated (100%) used English to help their children with school work. They believed that the use of English in that context reinforced the language of education and helped children attain competence and proficiency in the English language. In both Nigeria and Botswana, as it is in most parts of the Anglophone world, English is the medium of instruction in schools; therefore, proficiency in the English language gives children an advantage and ensures that they perform better than other children who would first of all grapple with the language of instruction before struggling to understand concepts that are being taught. It is therefore

not surprising that English is the language of choice in helping children with school work.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the majority of parents disciplined their children using the English language. Since most of the children in the study are L1 speakers of English, it is understandable that their parents disciplined them in the language they are more competent in.

The study further revealed that most of the children (82%) are interested in learning, not only to speak but also to read and write in their native languages. These children have a positive disposition towards their mother tongue and need support and encouragement from their parents to achieve this goal. However, it must be noted that the number of children (18%) who have no interest in learning their mother tongue is a matter of concern. This negative attitude stems from the fact that their parents have not exposed them to their native languages, giving them the impression that those languages are not important. This tallies with the finding that four of the families (28.6%) feel very strongly that their children do not need the native languages to succeed in life. It is necessary to recall Brenzinger's (1997: p.276) comment that "the mere fact that only a few parents may decide not to use the minority languages with their children already results in endangering the entire transmission from one generation to the next". This negative attitude of some parents and their children does not augur well for language maintenance.

In addition, the study established that 55% of the children investigated felt alienated from their cultural roots because of their deficiency in speaking the native languages. This also is a serious problem which calls for urgent attention. When there is a disconnect from one's cultural roots, it creates psychological problems such as identity crisis, fragmented personality, feeling of inadequacy, and inferiority complex, among others. Surely, parents do not want to raise children who do not know who they are or where they belong. Nkolola (2010: p.180) calls such children "children at the crossroads, they are neither English nor truly African".

Finally, the study established that some of the parents were willing to do things differently if given the opportunity to raise children again. They would emphasize the use of the mother tongue in socializing with their children at home. They would ensure that the first language of their children is the mother tongue instead of English. It is gratifying

to note that some parents are willing to change their mindset as they realize the benefits of bilingualism, and are prepared to reverse the linguistic trend. This willingness for behavioural change is a positive indicator that language displacement in the family domain may be halted or stopped and indigenous languages would be maintained.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated language displacement in the homes of some selected Nigerian families at the University of Botswana. There are six main points to note in this conclusion. First, the study has established that some educated Nigerian families in Botswana interact with their children in the English language and not in their native languages. Secondly, most of the families investigated are willing to encourage their children to learn the native languages because they recognize the importance of preserving the native languages and the need to have their children connected to their cultural roots. Thirdly, most of the children in the study have a positive attitude towards their native languages and are willing to learn to speak, read and write in these languages. With both parents and children willing to use their native languages in the family domain, language loss may not be envisaged in the near future because language displacement can be halted and the situation reversed.

The fourth point to note is that the use of English in the family domain to assist children in their school work is a useful exercise as it reinforces the language of the classroom and helps improve children's communicative competence in English. As long as English remains the medium of instruction in our schools and parents' desire is for their children to excel academically, English will continue to be used at home to perform this function. The fifth point is that children who cannot speak their native languages or who have limited competence in them have a feeling of alienation and inadequacy when they visit their home villages. Finally, this study recommends that bilingualism and multilingualism should be the linguistic goal for every Nigerian child; especially, those living in countries other than their own, and one of the languages should be the child's mother tongue. This is in line with the Federal Government of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (1981: p.17) regarding language use.

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