

A Geo-Linguistic Survey of Minority Languages of the Benue Valley

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Abstract

Linguistic heterogeneity is the most appropriate term used to describe a multilingual speech community like Nigeria. This is a sociolinguistic truism that is prevalent most especially in the Benue valley. The minority languages in this block are so many that it is actually so difficult, to determine their number. A proactive attempt to know their number entails taking a demographic data of these languages periodically. In view of this, the researcher decided to venture into collating and determining the actual facts and figures of the different indigenous languages in the area and assessing their status and prestige in the Nigerian Babel. This is done with the aim of carving a national identity for these languages and bringing them out of oblivion into limelight. The researcher used the linguistic yardstick of mutual intelligibility to determine the differences between languages and dialects. This was done through both primary and secondary research. In achieving the main aim of the paper, the researcher used the Ethnolinguistic Vitality (E.V) theory. As for the findings, the researcher found about one hundred and fourteen (114) languages in the area of study. The researcher also established the fact that all the minority languages in the Benue Valley are endangered and some are actually dying. Apart from that there are also threats to these minority languages. Based on the findings, conclusion was drawn and recommendations made. Among other things the study has recommended that the federal government should set up a minority languages Commission.

Keywords: Benue Valley, Geo-linguistics, Language Endangerment, Language Identity.

Introduction

The Benue valley is a microcosm of the most populous African nation, Nigeria, with a myriad of so many languages which, broadly speaking, are classified into minor and major. Even among the minority languages, it is still possible to sub-categorise them into macro and micro monitories. This paper takes a brief look at these two subcategories of minority languages with a view to, determining their viability and competitiveness in a fast growing world of glocalisation. The fact is, there is a keen competition among and between languages both at the state and national levels. Just as the world is not static but dynamic, in the same way languages are also dynamically in motion and the speakers of those languages serve as a determining factor as to whether they will progress or stagnate. The onus does not only lie on the speakers it rests on the government too because she has a prominent role to play.

This paper, therefore examines the linguistic vitality of selected minority languages, explains what the Benue valley with the aid of a cartographic map. Apart from these, the import of language and identity is also considered following the Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (ELIT). Data for the paper has been collected through both primary and secondary sources. Through this, a clear picture of the minority languages of the Benue valley is available.

Statement of the Problem

The country Nigeria has so many languages. The languages, especially minority ones are so many that it is a herculean task trying to know their numbers and determine their distinct identities. It is due to the need to carve an identity for the teeming number of languages and ascertain their number that this work was embarked upon. It is hoped that at the end of this work, the recommendations made will help the Federal Government of Nigeria to plan better for her minority languages especially those from the Benue Valley. There is therefore, the need to work for the prevention of the endangerment of the minority languages in the Benue valley.

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to ascertain the number of languages (both minor and major) in the Benue valley. The objectives of the study are:

- To classify the minority languages in the Benue valley as macro and micro minorities
- To provide a geo-linguistic distribution of the minority languages in the Benue valley, local government by local government.
- To identify the threats to minority languages
- To suggest possible ways of preventing language death and reversing language endangerment.

Methodology

The method of data collection for this paper was through oral interviews. Both primary and secondary sources were appropriated. For primary data, the researcher went to the field with a set of unstructured questions which were used in interviewing respondents (see appendix I). The secondary sources were gathered from the internet, books, journals, monographs as well as periodicals. In conducting oral interviews, the researcher visited villages, universities, linguistic inclined bodies and even some media houses. Religious bodies understanding the areas of interest and researching in them were not left out. Individuals contacted spanned through the ages (young and old) to get balanced information (see appendix II).

Conceptual Clarifications

This segment is going to define some concepts associated with the ethnolinguistic survey of the minority languages of the Benue Valley. The concepts to be clarified are geolinguistics, language description, language death which include a list of dead languages and also minority languages.

Geolinguistics

Geolinguistics as a field of study came into being in the late 19th and early 20th century within the enclave of language studies (Seabra et al, 2014, P.27). This new field that emerged began to be known as linguistic geography or geolinguistics for short. This field of study combines linguistics and geography in carrying out a research. What then do other scholars have to say about geolinguistics?

Merwe (1993, P.410) posits that geolinguistics is an interface between the disciplines of linguistics and geography and adds that it “focuses on the spatial dimension, which is interwoven with political, economic, ethnic, religious and social phenomena and also relates to communication networks and the physical environment”. To Merwe, various aspects of geolinguistics are addressed at the empirical level by researchers. The aspects addressed are concepts such as location and distribution of languages, the role of language in space and place, interaction between languages, demographic profiles of minority groups as well as language status and rights vis-a-vis language planning and language policy. A geolinguistic survey or research seeks to ascertain and clarify all the concepts mentioned above thereby determining the prestige and functions of the languages under study.

To Hoch and Hayes (2010, P.23), geolinguistics is “an interdisciplinary field that often incorporates language maps depicting spatial patterns of language location or the results of processes that lead to language change”. This definition corroborates the one given by Merwe. Geolinguistic research involves the co-operation of both the linguist and geographer to bring out cogent results. While the linguist studies the languages, the geographer sketches them on a map to indicate their distribution. This is further buttressed by Breton in describing the geolinguistic process of analysis.

Breton (1991, P.19) holds that “in analysing the distribution in space and in society of the facts of language, the linguist employs the methods of geography: cartography and the establishment of co-relations and causalities between spatial phenomena.” Thus to him, embarking on a geolinguistic research entails analysing the distribution of facts about languages in both space and society. This also involves making use of cartographers whose job is to put on the maps facts gathered by linguists. This is exactly what this study sets out to achieve. The services of a cartographer have been sought and maps are being drawn to depict the facts collated by the linguist (researcher). These facts thus depicted on the map are sentimentally analysed by the linguist to give a clearer picture of the facts on ground. The facts and figures carefully assembled by the linguist are also presented in a tabular form for a better understanding to both linguists and non-linguists alike.

Indigenous Languages

An indigenous language, according to Wikipedia, “is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people, often reduced to the status of a minority language”. It is also known as the autochthonous language. Such a language is from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations. It is spoken by indigenes

of a particular speech community. This work is surveying the indigenous minority languages of the Benue Valley. Even though there are other languages spoken within the Benue Valley either by government workers or settlers who are sojourning in the area for some time after which they will go back to their native lands, this work is not concerned about them. As Nigeria is a multilingual but single nation, people of all tongues move freely and mix up with others, thus carrying along their languages. In the Benue Valley alone, languages such as Yoruba, Urhobo, Ibibio, Kanuri, Bini and a whole lot of others are spoken but not by the indigenes. In that case, they cannot be regarded as indigenous languages and are therefore, not the focus of this work.

Commenting on the survival of indigenous languages, Emenike (2017:98) posits that one major challenge they have is the negative attitude of the speakers towards their language. Indeed, many indigenous peoples worldwide have stopped passing on their ancestral languages to the next generation and have instead, adopted the majority language as a part of their acculturation into the majority culture. This has made many indigenous languages to commit linguicide (language killing). Speakers of indigenous languages who lack a sense of identification with their languages are the very ones endangering their languages and still crying wolf.

Minority Languages

Minority languages are the main focus of this study. This is because they are the languages that are more vulnerable and susceptible to endangerment. They are the languages that are despised, overlooked and relegated to the background if not outrightly trampled down upon. The owners of these languages are sometimes treated as if they do not really exist. Even when the proverbial 'national cake' is being shared, they are hardly taken into cognisance. Hurting them is taken as lightly as killing a mosquito. They are always at the receiving end. The fate of minority languages and their plight is a piteous one. Because of being looked down upon, owners of these languages decide to dump them for more 'lucrative' ones. They consider the continuous speaking of their languages as a state of backwardness and decide to pitch tent with the prestigious ones.

In talking about minority languages, Ndukwe (1990:81) describing them as linguistic minorities, refers to them as those (irrespective of race, colour or creed) who are disadvantaged in some sense by differences of language because they do not possess the background, attributes and skills, of the dominant groups and are thus distanced from the sources of power and status in the country they inhabit. He also classifies them into indigenous and immigrant minorities. In another context, he refers to linguistic minorities as "speakers of those languages which are not used as media of instruction in the primary and secondary cycles or as official languages" (p.82).

The above descriptions of minority languages by Ndukwe are very interesting. The mainstay of these descriptions is that the minority languages, or linguistic minorities as he prefers to call them, are disadvantaged on every side. This is a pitiful situation. Those languages are not used as media of instruction at the primary and secondary school levels. They are not used in

the media and it is possible their orthographies are not yet developed. The languages do not have primers and dictionaries developed in them not to talk of literature and other studies done in or on them. The languages, in short, are not standardised.

Odebunmi (2007:106) defines a minority language as

that language which is located within a community where a majority language is spoken. This language may be native or not to the geographical setting, but it should be such that is spoken by a comparatively smaller number of people. In Nigeria--- speakers of minority languages lack recognition.

Onadipe-Shallon (2015:96) tells the same line with Odubunmi. According to her (Onadipe-Shallon), “a minority language is largely discriminated against and neglected in the national, regional or even local scheme of things.” This is very true because those that are at the corridors of power feel they stand to lose nothing even if the minorities are done away with. They (those in power) therefore have no plan, neither do they have intention of planning for those languages – Odebunmi’s description of minority languages is in comparison with majority ones. It therefore implies that, while the minority languages are being deprived of certain things, the majority have everything at their disposal. This follows the same discrimination that Onadipe-Shallon talks about. At the national level, they are not recognised, at the state or regional levels, they are discriminated against and even at the local level, it reaches the point that they begin to develop some inferiority complex. This leads them into taking such negative steps as opting to go with the prestigious languages and thus, causing a shift in the use of their mother tongue which eventually leads to the endangerment of those languages. This is part of what this study seeks to establish. There is every need to correct the erroneous notion that because a certain language has fewer speakers, it has less attributes and skills that the majority languages do. Given the right sociolinguistic and *lingua-political* atmosphere, any language can develop and be standardised enough to perform any function in the society.

Adegbija (1997:150) postulates three characteristics of minority languages. They are that:

- They are comparatively or absolutely small in size
- They tend to be on the endangered language list
- They suffer national as well as regional and local neglect.

All the characteristics agree with what is already discussed about, namely: the smallness in number, their endangerment status as well as suffering of neglect.

Apart from the characteristics of minority languages, Agbedo (2011:36-37) has further sub-categorised minorities into large and smaller minorities. To him, the large minorities have millions of members (speakers) such as Ijaw, Kanuri, Fulani, Edo, Ibibio, Nupe, Tiv, Igala, Itsekiri, Idoma etc. This grouping shades into different degrees of minoritiness down to the ethnic groupings that number less than one hundred speakers. Thus, even among the minorities, some are more minor than others.

The major concern of Orngu (2015:iii) is that there are over three hundred ethnic minority groups in Nigeria that have been kept under the wings of the three ethnic majority groups –

Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba – as mere affiliates. These minority ethnic groups have variously resorted to different forms of agitations for recognition and accommodation on equal terms with other ethnic groups in the Nigerian federation.

Language Death

Language death is the final stage of language endangerment. When a language is said to be dead, it means in other words that such a language has gone into extinction. Language death is also known as language loss. Many languages have become casualties due to negligence either by the government or the speakers of such languages.

But do languages really die? To answer this question, Omachonu (2017:26) affirms that “language, like every other living thing dies. A living thing by nature is ever changing and never ceases to change until it dies” (Omachonu, 2017:27). To him, a language does not live by itself but lives through the speakers and it is the carrier of the history, culture, heritage, and the identity of its speakers. It therefore follows that when speakers of a language dies, the language equally dies. And when a language dies, the history, the culture, and heritage and identity of its speakers also die. This is a very dangerous linguistic phenomenon.

In the same vein, Emenike (2017:97) considers language death and endangerment as global phenomena that have far reaching implications on the human heritage and existence. That is to say that from one corner of the globe to the other, there are accounts of language death and endangerment. From Africa to Asia and the Americas and Europe, languages continue to die. More on this phenomenon is discussed under language endangerment. For now it is time to look at examples of dead languages in Nigeria.

Table 1: Examples of Dead Languages in Nigeria

s/No	Name	No of Speakers	State
1	Ajawa	-	Bauchi
2	Kubi	-	Bauchi
3	Auyokawa	-	Jigawa
4	Kpati	-	Taraba
5	Odu	-	Cross River
6	Bubbure	1	Bauchi (Haruna, 2000)
7	Bassa Gumna	2	Niger
8	Holma	4	Adamawa

Source: Omachonu (2017)

The above table shows the number of dead languages in Nigeria in recent times. The first five at the time of the research had no speaker left at all. The sixth one (Bubbure) had one speaker left. The seventh language (Bassa Gumna) had two speakers left and the last one, Holma had four speakers left. The truth is, even though the last three had a few speakers left, there was no hope for their continuity of the language as the few remaining speakers were already the aged who are above child bearing age. Apart from their ages, one cannot be just speaking to oneself when they happen to be the only speakers of the said languages. Language is

essentially used for communication purposes and when there is no one to communicate with, it ceases to be useful. Little wonder, Omachonu (2017:27) argues that “a language is often considered or declared to be dead even before the last native speaker of the language dies. This is because, even when the person was alive, the language could not fulfill its primary function of communicating ideas. The person may just be exercising his/her linguistic competence in dreaming and thinking. But for communicative purposes, there is no way.

Following the above dangerous phenomenon, there is therefore, every need to reverse the trend of language death and endangerment. This has informed the need to embark on this research. It should also be noted that, among the eight dead languages mentioned above, two of them fall within the territorial milieu of this work – the Benue Valley. They are: Kpati from Taraba State and Holma from Adamawa State. Very soon, nothing will be heard of them again. The culture, heritage, history and identity of speakers of these languages will, in a few generations to come be completely forgotten. This is basically so, because the languages were neither codified, standardised nor modernised. There was also neither documentation nor description of those languages. This is a very painful and pitiable linguistic reality of our time.

Language Identity

Language identity is premised on the fact that one’s language determines one’s identity. A study such as this is essentially concerned with language identity because identity dispositions are paramount in the consciousness of minority language users. In fact, a people’s language is, to say the least, their identity. In the case of a speech community (ethnolinguistic) their language serves as their identity. This manifests itself in several ways including onomastics, the clothes they wear, the houses they build, their delicacies and many other aspects of their culture. The relationship between language and identity is further seen in what the following scholars have said.

Wardhaugh (2000:490) opines that “when a language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it is generally maintained longer”. To Wardhaugh, the consciousness of the similitude of language and identity is a very strong factor that makes the owners of a language to make every effort to protect and preserve it. There is, therefore, an urgent call for ethnolinguistic identity and identification to be exhibited by the minority languages of the Benue Valley. This will serve as a constant reminder to them and as such, they will find any means available to protect their ethnolinguistic and cultural identity.

This encompasses every aspect of an ethnolinguistic group. All their activities from their thought pattern to words and deeds are done using no other medium but through the use of their language. Even the music, dress code and their rituals/worship are performed through the use of language. Their language manifests in the different spheres of their lifestyle. The entire worldview of a particular group of people is conceived, known and expressed through their language.

The above view is reiterated by Shagba (2015:120b) that “the language a people/nation speaks cannot be separated from the people themselves. This is an ethnolinguistic reality that must

not be over-emphasised.” To further buttress this point Shagba (2015:25a) opines that “people are proud to identify with other people that speak their language and one can express oneself better in one’s own language.” Some litera-linguistic performances such as folklores, folktales, proverbs, riddles, jokes, idioms and even songs make more meaning when a person performs them in their language. Worship of ancestors, traditional gods as well as performance of rituals and incantations are best done using one’s language. It is generally believed that even the gods that people/nations worship know only the language of their adherents. That is the language through which the gods communicate with the people through the chief priests to the people. For instance, it is believed that *Alekwu* speaks Idoma language, *Ifa* speaks Yoruba language and all other gods and goddesses speak the languages of their adherents.

In trying to align language with identity, Nwagbo (2016:291) has decided to personalise the relationship thus:

Language use is often analysed as having two parts; the ‘we’ verses [sic] ‘they’ code. In this distinction, the ‘we’ code represents in-group speech which connotes intimacy and solidarity and is largely confined to the home, while the ‘they’ code is associated with status and used with dominant group. Language choice is tied to the projection of image or identity.

Three issues are involved in Nwagbo’s description of language as identity. The first is the domains of language use. The second is the status of the language used and the third is language choice. The language used at home is the language of solidarity and intimacy in the family. Any other language, probably L2 or L3 used is just for the purpose of external interaction or enhancement of prestige. Another important aspect of language and identity that one must not lose sight of is the identification of individual’s proficiency in language use. Individuals’ knowledge may earn them a unilingual, bilingual or polyglot status.

Language Endangerment

The phobia of the threat and imminence of language endangerment is the driving force for this study. Language endangerment is a very dangerous sociolinguistic phenomenon that leads to the death of languages. It is the situation whereby languages are at the point of going extinct or dying. This phenomenon has different stages as can be seen from the views of the following scholars.

Omachonu (2015, p.3) postulates that

A language is said to be endangered when a particular speech community finds itself in a situation where its language (the means/medium of all round expression) faces degradation and threat of extinction. In other words, when the survival of a linguistic system or language is threatened and weakened; realistically, it is endangered.

He goes on to expatiate that language endangerment in Nigeria is no longer a mere strong possibility but a stark reality. Most languages in Nigeria suffer varying degrees of threats

suggested by the use of certain adjectives such as *receding, disadvantaged, deprived, disuse, weakened, unsafe, sickly, moribund, dying, disappearing, extinct* and *dead* languages in the literature (Omachonu, 2015, p.3). None of the adjectives used in describing endangered languages has a positive connotation. This is to show that it is a very ugly situation for a language to find itself in. But unfortunately, that is the case with most of the minority languages of Nigeria, especially those in the Benue Valley geo-linguistic area.

Agbedo (2011, p.72) opines that “endangered languages are languages that are threatened by extinction because they are not passed to a younger generation.” He equates language endangerment with lack of intergenerational transmission. He also maintains that a language with fewer speakers... is more likely to be endangered in comparison with a language with a larger population of speakers. This is cogent in the sense that if a language has few number of speakers and an epidemic or a natural disaster occurs, all of them may die and that will in turn lead to the death or extinction of that language. On the other hand, if a language has large population of speakers, even if the unexpected happens, not all of them will die. At least some of them will be spared to continue with the language’s progeny.

Discussing language endangerment from the linguist’s point of view, Dega (2015, p.17) describes it as “a term that worries not only the linguists, but also, everyone that is language conscious”. According to him, every group aspires to promote its language no matter how small or big the group is. The small groups are trying to preserve their little to catch up with the large group while the large group is preserving its lot in order to maintain the higher prestige over the little one.

In the same vein, discussing the endangerment situation in Nigeria, Erin (2015, p.319) avers that “language endangerment is prevalent in the Nigerian linguistic landscape.” He describes the Nigerian linguistic landscape as consisting of major and minor languages with the major ones usually having well developed orthographies and standard written varieties. The minor ones on the other hand are mostly characterised by a lack of standard varieties or well developed orthographies. A brief look will now be taken at UN statistics on language endangerment.

The United Nations (UN) statistics on language endangerment can be found in the UNESCO Atlas of the world’s languages in danger. This document estimates that “almost 490 of the world’s languages have disappeared since 1950, while about 57% are safe or data-deficient. A little less than 30% are in danger of disappearing mainly due to the diminishing number or ageing population of speakers.” This document is quoted in Schnass (2016, p.2).

The same document also reports that, in recognising the importance of linguistic diversity as a source of cultural richness and an element of humanity’s intangible heritage, UNESCO has undertaken projects on language vitalisation, language vitality assessment and language diversity to protect and monitor endangered languages. Such projects undertaken by the UNESCO are, however, not elaborately stated.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) theory by Giles and Bourhis. The ethnolinguistic vitality theory encourages language maintenance and discourages language shift which gradually leads to language endangerment, and consequently to outright language loss.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

The concept of Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory was propounded by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor in the 1960s and it was used by Fishman and Giles in 1977. According to Giles “the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality (E.V) allows scholars to analyse language use and change on a macro-social level. The theory uses socio-structural factors to explain language maintenance and shift within a community (Giles, 1977, p.308). Thus, the approach is used to study and explain language maintenance and language shift which are two opposite sides of the same coin. While language maintenance ensures the sustainability and vitality of a language, language shift, on the other hand, leads to the gradual disappearance and eventual extinction of a language. In this study, the researcher takes a cursory look on the languages under study and weighs them against the parameter of ethnolinguistic vitality. This is capable of showing how viable and residual they are.

Expanding more on vitality, Giles (1977) postulates that:

The vitality of an ethnolinguistic group is that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup relationship. This presupposes that ‘the higher the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group, the higher its chances of survival; the lower its vitality, the higher the risk of its ceasing to exist’ (p.308).

This means that the vitality or strength of a language to exist and grow gives it the impetus to thrive and survive even in the face of opposing forces.

In applying this theory, the writer advocates language maintenance. Parents have to be speaking their languages to their children so as to transmit it from one generation to the other. Parents are also encouraged to be giving their children names in their indigenous languages so as to maintain the identity of such languages. A person who does not have a name in his native language has no identity at all. The vitality of the languages of the Benue Valley is in the hands of the speakers who are the owners of such languages. In a nutshell, the essence of ethnolinguistic vitality theory is to encourage the speakers of indigenous languages to eschew language shift and practice language maintenance. It is only then that the languages of the Benue Valley will not suffer total extinction.

The Scope of the Study

The Benue Valley under study has River Benue which is the second largest river in Nigeria flowing through it.

The Benue valley otherwise known as the Benue trough can be traced on the relief map of Nigeria. Socio-politically, this zone comprises six states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which are Kogi, Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba, Plateau and Adamawa States. From the professional point of view, the Benue valley has been variously referred to by Abaa (2004) as:

- “The Benue Basin” – This means a broad tract of land in which the rock strata are tilted towards a common centre or an isolated or circumscribed formation where the strata dip inward [sic], on all sides, towards a centre especially applied to rocks with coal formations called coal basins or coal fields.
- “The Benue valley” which means a region drained by a single river system e.g. the Amazon basin.
- “The Benue Trough” meaning a long, narrow depression between waves or ridges.
- “The Benue Aulacogen,” meaning a linear, deeply subsiding trough extending from a continental margin of geosynclines into the interior of a foreland platform or craton (pp.1-2).

Map 1: The Benue Valley

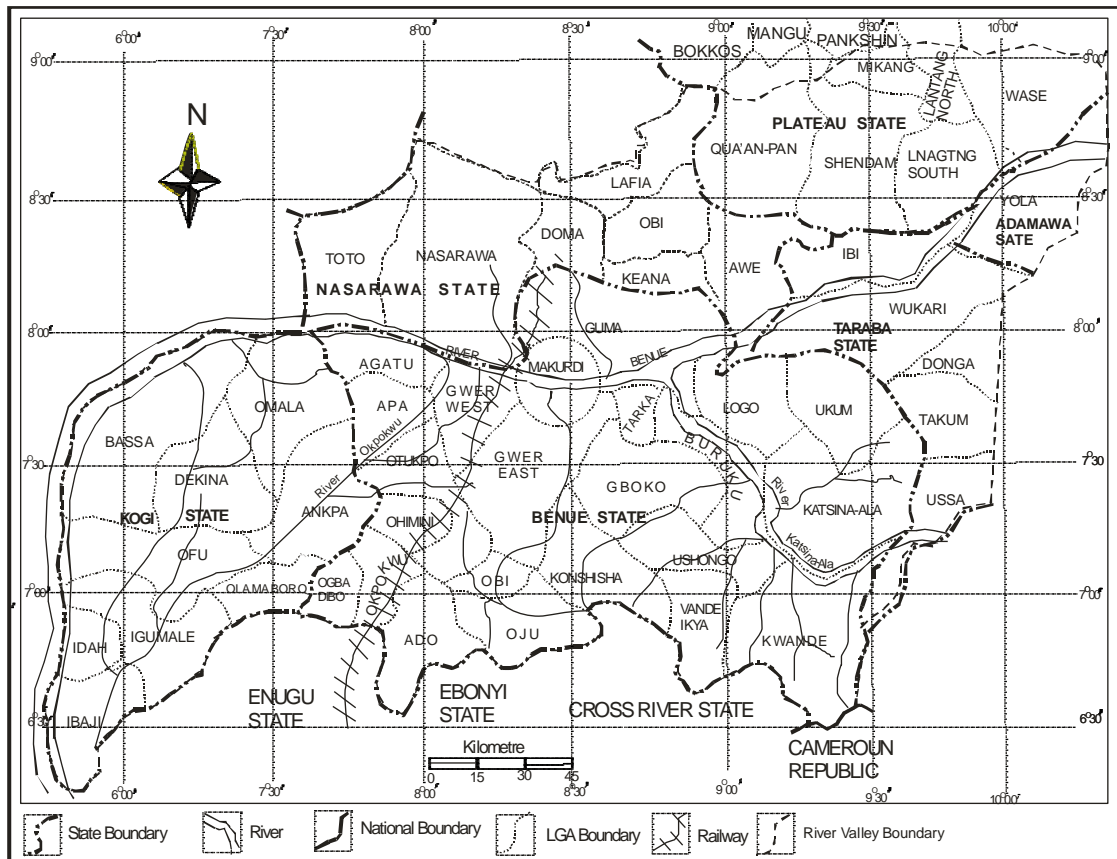


Figure 1 Map of Benue River Valley
Source: Benue/State - Lower River Basin dev. Authority

States of the Benue Valley

The area under study comprises six states namely: Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Nassarawa, Plateau and Taraba States. The summary of the Local Government Areas in the six states are:

- Adamawa: has twenty (20) LGAs
- Benue has twenty-three (23) LGAs
- Kogi State has twenty-one (21) LGAs
- Nassarawa has thirteen (13) LGAs
- Plateau has seventeen (17) LGAs
- Taraba State has sixteen (16) LGAs

All together, the six states have a total of one hundred and ten Local Government Areas.

Source: National Population Commission (2010) pp.3, 6, 17, 19, 23 and 24.

However, working closely with the cartographer, as can be seen in the map above, the research work is not covering all the 110 Local Government Areas mentioned above. Apart from Benue State whose all twenty-three LGAs are covered, the rest of the states are partially covered. The real LGAs covered in each state are:

- Adamawa state: Yola North and Yola South, two local government areas.
- Benue state has 23 local government areas. They are: Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer East, Gwer West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Oju, Okpokwu, Otukpo, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya.
- Kogi state has nine local government areas. These are Ankpa, Bassa, Dekina, Ibaji, Idah, Ofu, Olamaboro, Omala and Igala Mela/Odolu.
- Nassarawa state has seven local government areas listed thus Awe, Doma, Keana, Lafia, Nassarawa, Obi and Toto.
- Plateau state has nine local government areas, these are Bokkos, Langtang North, Langtang South, Mangu, Mikang, Qua'an Pan, Pankshin, Shendam and Wase.
- Taraba **state** has five local government areas: Donga, Ibbi, Takum, Ussa and Wukari.

A total of 54 Local Government Areas have been covered in this study.

Minority Languages of the Benue Valley

The minority languages of the Benue Valley are further graded into macro and micro minorities. The macro-minorities have a larger number and cover a larger number of local governments and states within the Benue valley. Out of the languages of the Benue valley under study, seven (7) of them happen to fall under the macro-minorities. This is verified both by their functional load and functional transparency as stated above. That is, even though they are equally minority languages, their functional load and functional transparency are higher than the rest of the languages. Those languages are all found within the area under study as listed below.

Macro Minority Languages of the Benue Valley

The languages are written in alphabetical order and not according to numerical strength of geographical spread.

- Fulfulde – is spoken in Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba States
- Hausa – spoken in eleven out of thirteen Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State.
- Idoma – This language is spoken in seven out of twenty-three Local Government Areas in Benue State.
- Igala – spoken in eight out of twenty-one Local Government Areas in Kogi State; including Igala Mela/Olodu LGA which is outside the Benue Valley.
- Jukun – Spoken in Nassarawa State, Wase in Plateau State, and Wukari, Donga, Takum, Ussa and Ibi Local Government Areas of Taraba State.
- Mada – Spoken in five out of thirteen Local Government Areas of Nassarawa State; they also occupy Jama’a Local Government Area of Kaduna State.
- Tiv – Tiv language is spoken in fourteen out of the twenty-three local Government areas of Benue State. The Tiv people are also found in Nassarawa, Plateau and Taraba states. Outside the Benue valley, Tiv language is also being spoken in both Cross River State and the Republic of Cameroon.

Micro Minority Languages of the Benue Valley

The following are the micro minority languages of the Benue Valley as captured during field work. The arrangement is state by state and the states are arranged according to alphabetical order. i.e. Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Nassarawa, Plateau and Taraba States.

Adamawa state: The minority languages in Adamawa State are taken chiefly from two Local Government Areas – Yola North and Yola South. They are:

Table 2: Micro-minority languages in Adamawa state

Bachama	Yola North
Bali	”
Batta	”
Bille	”
Boi	”
Bulla	”
Burra	”
Chamba	”
Higgi	”
Hoina	”
Janye	Yola South
Kanakuru	Yola North
Kilba	”
Koma	Yola South
Lala	Yola North
Lunguda	”
Margi	”
Mbula	”
Mumuye	”
Verre	”
Yandang	”
Yungur	”

Source: Field Work (2017), Ethnologue (2018)

Total = 22 micro minority languages from Adamawa State

Benue state: The micro minority languages of Benue State are:

Table 3: Micro-minority Languages in Benue state

Language	Local Government Area
Abakwa	Buruku
Agila	Ado
Etulo	Buruku and Katsina-Ala
Igede	Oju and Obi
Igumale	Ado
Ityuwaa	Kwande
Iyôn	”
Nyifon	Buruku
Ufia (spoken by Utonkon)	Ado
Ugbe	Kwande
Undir	”

Sources: (1) Rescue the Trophies (n.d) (2) Field Work (2017) (3) Ethnologue (2018)
Total: 13 micro minority languages from Benue state

Kogi state: The micro minority languages in Kogi state that fall under the Benue valley are:

Table 4: Micro-minority Languages in Kogi state

Language	Local Government Area
Bassa Komo	Bassa
Bassa Nge	Bassa and Dekina

Source: 1. Field Work (2017)
Total: 2 micro minority languages from Kogi state

Nassarawa state: The micro minority languages in Nassarawa state under the Benue valley are:

Table 5: Micro-minority Languages in Nassarawa state

Language	Local Government Area
Afo	Nasarawa
Akye	Lafia
Alago	Awe, Doma, Lafia and Obi
Bassa Komo	Toto and Doma
Egbira/Igbira/Egbura	Toto and Nasarawa
Eloyi (Ajiri)	Awe and Nasarawa
Gade (Ribye)	Nasarawa and Doma
Ganagana (Dibo)	Nasarawa and Toto
Gbagyi	Toto
Goemai	Nasarawa, Lafia and Awe
Gwandara	Toto, Lafia and Akwanga
Jibyal/Jibial	Lafia
Kamberi	Lafia
Kofyar	Lafia
Migili (Koro)	Lafia, Obi and Doma
Nungu	Akwanga
Wapan	Awe

Sources : CAPRO (2009), Omachonu et al (2015), Field Work (2017), Ethnologue (2018)
A total of eighteen micro minority languages from Nassarawa State fall within the study area.

Plateau state: The micro minority languages spoken in Plateau state within the research area are:

Table 6: Micro-minority Languages in Plateau state

Language	Local Government Area
Angas (Ngas)	Pankshin, Langtang North and Langtang South
Bashar	Wase
Bogghom (Borum)	Wase, Shendam, Qua'an Pan, Langtang North and Langtang South
Bole	Wase
Bo-Rukul	Bokkos
Bwall	Qua'an Pan
Cakfem or Kakfem	Mangu
Chip (Miship)	Pankshin, Mangu and Shendam
Dass	Shendam
Di-Pyem	Mangu
Doemak	Qua'an Pan
Doka or Jagateng	..
Fier/Fyer	Mangu
Fyam	Pankshin
Garkawa	Shendam
Goemai (Ankwai)	Qua'an Pan and Shendam
Horom	Bokkos
Izere	Mangu
Jiba	Wase, Langtang North and Langtang South
Jipal	Qua'an Pan and Mangu
Jorto	Shendam
Koenoem	Bokkos and Mangu
Kulere	Qua'an Pan
Kwagallak	..
Kwalla	..
Kangka (Kadung)	..
Mernyang	Pankshin
Met	Shendam and Mikang
Montol	Bokkos
Mundat	Pankshin
Mupun	Mangu
Mushere	Mangu and Pankshin
Mwangavul (Takas)	Pankshin
Nteng	..
Pai	Qua'an Pan
Pan	Pankshin
Pe	Shendam
Pyapun (Piapung)	Bokkos and Mangu
Ron	Bokkos
Sha	Pankshin
Sur	Pankshin and Mikang
Tal	Pankshin
Tambas (Tambes)	Wase, Pankshin, Langtang North and Langtang South
Tarok (Tadok/Yergam)	Mikang
Tehl	Qua'an Pan
Teng	Mangu
Vaghat-ya-Bijim-Legeri	Shendam, Langtang North and Langtang South
Wapan	Shendam, Wase, Langtang North and Langtang South

Wapha	
Yangkam	
Yiwom/Diyuom/Yuom	

Sources : CONAECDA (2017), Jos, CAPRO (2004), Field Work (2017), Ethnologue (2018)
Total: 53 micro minority languages from Plateau State.

Taraba state: The micro minority languages from Taraba state under the area of study are:

Table 7: Micro-minority Languages in Taraba state

Language	Local Government Area
Bogghom (Borum)	Wukari and Ibi
Chamba	Takum and Donga
Ichen (Chen)	Donga and Ussa
Jenjo	Ibi and Wukari
Jiba	Wukari
Kuteb	Takum and Ussa
Nyifon	Wukari
Wapan	„

Sources: Field Work (2017), Ethnologue (2018)

The total number of micro minority languages found in Taraba State is eight (8).

Threats to Minority Languages of the Benue Valley

There are certain factors that pose a threat to the minority languages in the Benue valley. They are: other languages, religion and interlingual marriages.

- **Language** – One of the languages that pose a threat to minority languages in the Benue valley is English language. The parents in the Benue valley prefer giving their children English names as against native names. This happens in almost all the states. Another language that poses a threat is Hausa language. Many speakers of indigenous languages in the region, especially in Nasarawa, Tarraba and Adamawa states prefer using Hausa language for communication rather than their indigenous languages. This has led to the death of many of the indigenous languages.
- **Religion** – Most adherents of modern religions hardly use indigenous languages. Some Christian denominations conduct their services in English and Hausa. The Muslims use both Hausa and Arabic at the expense of the indigenous languages.
- **Interlingual Marriages** – Spouses that speak different languages end up using English or Hausa in communicating with their children. This makes the children to know neither of the indigenous languages of their parents and therefore, hinders intergenerational transmission.

Findings

The study has discovered a total of seven macro-minority languages and a whopping one hundred and seven micro-minority languages. The breakdown according to states shows that there are one hundred and fourteen languages but the fact is, six of the languages have each appeared in two states. The six languages that have appeared in two states are:

- Agatu in Benue and Nassarawa states
- Chamba in Adamawa and Taraba states
- Goemai in Nassarawa and Plateau states

- Nyifon in Benue and Taraba states
- Wapan in Plateau and Nassarawa states
- Bassa Komo in Kogi and Nassarawa states.

So, all in all the study has fished out one hundred and fourteen (114) languages from the Benue valley. Also, the study has established the fact that most of the languages are endangered and some are even dying. Apart from that the study has also identified threats to minority languages of the Benue Valley like religion and other languages among others.

Conclusion

This study has surveyed the minority languages of the Benue valley and studied about one hundred and fourteen languages using the theory of Ethnolinguistic vitality. The step by step application of this theory to the aforementioned languages is not stated due to the compressed nature of this paper. The study has discovered that most of the languages studied are highly endangered and some even have the characteristics of dying languages. A good example is the Sha language in Bokkos Local Government Area of Plateau State which, according to CAPRO (2009:211) is today spoken only by elders. The situation is so pitiful that the younger generation cannot even understand it. This situation is similar to that of other languages within the Benue valley, especially in those states that use Hausa as a trade language. Most of the languages studied cannot boast of books being written in them, being used for pedagogical purposes or, even having orthography. It behooves on linguists and other well-meaning Nigerians, including Non-Governmental Organisations to arise and take proactive steps in salvaging our minority languages and preventing them from going extinct; as a people's language is their identity.

Recommendations

Looking at all the unfavourable sociolinguistic conditions in which the minority languages are languishing, it is recommended that:

- The Federal Government should establish a minority languages commission which will be saddled with the responsibility of taking stock and planning measures to revitalise the ailing minority languages.
- International organisations like the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) should liaise with institutions of higher learning in the six states in conjunction with the government to give grants to linguists willing to research into minority languages. This will boost the morale of researchers and help them to do a more thorough job within an approved time frame.
- Parents should be encouraged, not just to speak their language to their children but to also teach them (children) to be proud of their language which is their identity. This will instill a positive language attitude in children.
- There is every need for minority language education. According to Liceras and Senn (2009:159) minority language education involves the teaching of a minority group in the said minority language. The purpose of this is to educate the minority group by using their heritage language – their native language (M.T.) as a cognitive and effective instrument to make sense of their world. It makes the younger generation to understand the world view of their ethnic nationalities better.

- Primers, dictionaries and other literature should be written in these minority languages both to enhance their learning and to preserve them for posterity.
- Couples in interlingual marriages should make conscious efforts to teach their children at least one of the languages of their parents.
- This work is also recommended for scholars who have the passion of minority languages to study and fill the missing gaps.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study has surveyed and gotten one hundred and fourteen languages from the Benue valley. This is a novel feat that has not been achieved in this part of the country before. It has succeeded in carving a national identity for some of the languages which were hitherto unknown. The data provided here is vital as it provides scholars with the much sought after information on the number of languages in Nigeria. Other scholars can take a cue from here to research on languages from other geolinguistics zones too.

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APPENDIX I
UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the name of the ethnic group?
2. What is the name of the language?
3. Does it have an orthography?
4. Is it used for pedagogical purposes?
5. Are there books written in the language?
6. Is it used in the media?
7. Is the Bible translated into the language?
8. Is it used for official purposes?
9. Is it used among the youths?
10. Do children speak the language?
11. What are the domains of use of the language?
12. What efforts are being made to standardise the language?
13. What is the loyalty/attitude of speakers of the language to their language?
14. Do people from the ethnic group intermarry?
15. Is there any language that is a threat to this language?
16. What other languages do speakers of this language speak?
17. Do speakers of this language read and write in it?
18. Is there mutual intelligibility among all the speakers of the language?
19. How many Local Government Areas does the language cover in the State where it is spoken?
20. Are there other languages spoken within the State/Local Government Areas?

APPENDIX II
NAMES OF INTERVIEWEES (STATE BY STATE)

Adamawa state

S/No	Names	Phone No	Address
1	Anita Ayuba	07039519537	Jimeta, Adamawa state
2	Asmau Barnabas	-	Yola South, Adamawa state
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7	Mr. John Samaila	08053171999	Michika LGA, Adamawa state

Benue state

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6	Dr. Iya Abel	07037724330	Otukpo LGA, Benue state (lecturer BSU Makurdi)

7	Dr. Torese Agena	08129402121	Clerk Benue House of Assembly, Makurdi
8	Emmanuel Iordaah (ESV)	08034402001	Kwande LGA, Benue state
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12	Mrs. Rachael Abata	08091058299	Lower Benue Makurdi
13	Ojabo Julius	07055478765	Lower Benue, Makurdi
14	Pastor Mike Zever	08184046949	Buruku LGA, Benue State
15	Prof Gabriel S. Nyityo	08023653819	Konshisha LGA, Benue State
16	Rosemary Omojor	08062064050	Agatu LGA, Benue State
17	Simon S. Zever	08064656090	Adi, Etulo, Benue State

Kogi state

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4	Mr. Joseph Okeme	08033245531	Ankpa LGA Kogi state												
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6	Mr. Moses Ameh	-	Ministry of Education, Lokoja, Kogi state												
7	Mr. Sunday Musa	08037538673	Dekina LGA, Kogi state												
8	Mrs. Joy Ameh	08056164920	Ofu, LGA, Kogi state												
9	Mrs. Victoria Ameh	08035671482	Ogori, via Okene, Kogi state												
	Rev. Peter Ndokwo	07033821273	Ubutu, via Sheria, Bassa LGA, Kogi state												
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>S/No</th> <th>Names</th> <th>Phone No</th> <th>Address</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>Dr. Akase Ityav</td> <td>07087607161</td> <td>Dept of Lings, Nas, St Uni. Keffi</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>Dr. Bem Ianna</td> <td>08065768181</td> <td>Dept of Lings.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	S/No	Names	Phone No	Address	1	Dr. Akase Ityav	07087607161	Dept of Lings, Nas, St Uni. Keffi	2	Dr. Bem Ianna	08065768181	Dept of Lings.		
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Nasarawa state

Plateau state

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11	Mrs. Evelyn Dakogol	08065487611	COE, Pankshin
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8	Pastor Joshua Anyam	-	Christ Chapel of Compassion, Jalingo
9	Pastor Samuel Chiahemba	08021410313	Agule village, via Mutun Biu, Taraba state

Taraba state