
ETHNOLINGUISTIC CLUSTER AND CRISES OF IDENTITY IN IDOMA ETHNICITY

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ABSTRACT

Idoma ethno-linguistics is complex and unique because of its heterogeneous failure. This complexity has led to overgeneralization and factionalized views along political and linguistic interests. Some scholars view the Idoma ethnolinguistics situation as a monolith. This is erroneous. This research aims to correct this erroneous impression. The research will determine that Idoma's ethnolinguistic structure is a language and Dialectal cluster hence the title of the research will adopt quantitative and qualitative methods. The area of study will focus on the selected language cluster of Idoma, Igede, Uffia and Akweya. The source of Data is both primary and secondary sources. A random population of 20-30 respondents will be used. The instruments used include pens, paper, and phones. The methods of data collection include personal observation, interviews, and consultations with native speakers of the language cluster. The method of data presentation is based on the information collected. Lexical items are arranged in tabular form. These lexical items are examined to determine the issues of language and dialect in Idoma ethnicity. The Idoma language and dialects form an ethnolinguistic cluster. This has brought identity crises within the Idoma ethnicity. The theoretical framework for the research is the Ethnolinguistics identity theory. Conclusions and Recommendations are also made.

Keywords: Idoma; Ethnolinguistic cluster; Identity Crises; Ethnicity

1.0 Introduction

Idoma refers both to the area of homeland of proto-idoma called Idoma land, the people and the language (s). This assertion is collaborated by Sapir (1916),Dyor (1956), Green berg (1963) and Ballad (1971) quoted by Odumuh (1994) thus;

“The geographical spread of languages can be studied in conjunction with itsfairly to determine the homeland of the speaker of the proto language”.

In 1924, the British colonial administration unified southern and western Idoma districts in 1945, Idoma a native authority was created and 1976 saw the creation of Benue State. These were for administrative convince for the colonial masters. These activities no doubt entrenched obvious socio-cultural and political to linguistic affinities in Idoma ethnicity, however, overtime the affinity erroneously metamorphosed into socio- cultural, political interest to linguistic identification, germane to this discourse, is the fact that, today Idoma speaking people(s) could be found in Benue, Cross- River, Nasarawa, Kogi and Enugu states respectively.

In describing Idoma ethnicity Erim (1981) opined,
... ModernIdoma ethnicity is the result of a slow historical process which mirrors the historical experiences of the diverse ethnic groups which in several of inter-connected event have contributed to a unique Idoma culture."

In view of Erim's assertion above, the researcher presupposes that Idomaethnicity is not only unique but also complex. This is because, the name Idoma' is a collective term for a group of languages and peoples operating under a single Ethno-linguisticcultural emblem. These include Ufia (Utonkon), Idoma (Otukpo), Akweya (Akpa), Igede (igede).

The complex nature of Idoma ethnicity has ledto overgeneralization, hence misconception. It has therefore factionalizedpeople’s view about the ethno-linguistic situation of Idoma ethnicity; along political and linguistic interest. Some scholars are of the opinion that Idoma is a monolith (single language). This research aimsto correct this misconception about the ethno-linguistics situation of Idoma ethnicity. In the researcher's opinion, the ethno-linguistic nature of Idoma ethnicity is one of language cluster and dialect cluster; hence the title of the research.

In view of this complex nature, of the ethno-linguistic situation of Idoma ethnicity, attempts have been made by scholars Egren berg [963,) Westerman (1927) Bennet (1977), regarding classification, nomenclature and terminology involving African languages in general and Idomalanguage in particular; Odumuh, (1994) citing Armstrong, opined that Idoma is a member of a group of language (Cluster) referred to as “Idomoid” this cluster include Yala, (Cross River State) Doma, (Nassarawa state) and, Idoma, Igede, Akweya and Ufia (Benue State).

Ethnicity refers to common characteristic of a group of people, ie language, belief, system, dress, food etc. To Onrgu (2015) it refers to a social phenomenon that is linked to the interactions between different ethnic groups. We can talk of ethno national, ethno social and ethno-religious.

However, this research is concerned with ethno-linguistics which emphasizes a shared language and dialect. This research will be restricted to the language cluster. Idoma (Otukpo) Igode, Akweya and Ufia will be selected.

These ethno-linguistic groups erroneously identified as Idoma is a conglomeration of different linguistic entities that are mutually un-intelligible to one another. It is against this backdrop that this research is being carried out. So that with the linguistic parameters the researcher will be able to correct the misconception that Idoma is monolith. Idoma ethno-linguistics is characterized by language and dialectal clusters. The consequence of this is that the overgeneralization and factionalized opinion about Idoma ethnolinguistics has led to crises of identity. This is because, in the researcher's opinion, language is a mark of identity, therefore, an ethno linguistic society, as Idoma, that is made up of different independent and mutually unintelligible languages can be a victim of identity crisis.

Language in the words of Krishnaswamy, Verma and Nagarajan (2016) is not a monolithic system that is devoid of variations but full of network of varieties". The researcher wishes to point out that language should not be christened as dialects. Just to fulfill the righteousness of creating varieties where they do not exist. This may lead to gross distribution of independent languages.

Several scholars have attempted to distinguish language from dialect. Chambers and Peter, (2004), Huoson (2001), Toka (2017) uphold language as the collection of mutually intelligible dialects. According to Krishnaswamy et al (2016), there is no sharp demarcation between language and dialect if two varieties are mutually intelligible, they are considered dialects, if they are not, and they are considered language. Although mutual intelligibility may not be the only useful linguistic tool to determine what a language is and or what is a dialect (Richard 2001). It is still important in this distinction of both concepts. Against the above background, the research will use mutual intelligibility to account for the ethnolinguistic differences of the Idoma language cluster as independent languages.

This research aims to discard the erroneous perception that Idoma ethnicity is a monolith. The research will also determine or show that Idoma ethnicity is a language and dialectal cluster. It will also be revealed that the overgeneralization and factionalized opinion have led to crises of identity in Idoma ethnicity. The question then is, who is an Idoma person or Language?

Theoretical Frame Work

This research focuses on correcting the erroneous perception that the Idoma language is a 'monolith'. In the researcher's opinion, the Idoma ethnolinguistic structure is made up of independent languages" (Akweya, Uffia, Igede, and Idoma) and dialects that are erroneously misrepresented as one single language called "Idoma". This has led to overgeneralization and factionalized law, hence crises of identity.

Against this background, the theory of Ethno-linguistic identity (ELIT) by Henry and John, (1987) will be used as the theoretical framework for this research. Ethno-linguistic identity theory (ELIT) is conceptually derived from Henry and John's social identity theory. It addresses this relationship between socially subordinate ethnic groups and their language use in social contexts.

In the course of carrying out their study, Giles and Johnson (1987) made five major propositions relating to ethnolinguistic identity theory viz.

1. People identify themselves subjectively and strongly as members of a group that considers language an important symbol of their identity.
2. People make insecure social comparisons with the out-group (regard their group status as potentially changeable).
3. People perceive their in-group boundaries to be hard and closed.

4. People consider their own groups vitality to be high and finally.
5. They identify strongly with few other social groups. Giles and Johnson (1987:72).

Against the above five propositions that finding which the researcher finds relevant to this research is that, members of a subordinate ethnic group that considers language to be an important dimension of its identity are likely to be predisposed to acting in terms of ethnic solidarity in terms of their identity and to maintain their distinctive language features". In the researcher's view, this theory is used as a framework for this study because the theory is socio-linguistic in nature and approach. The theory also talks of language as it operates in society. It also takes cognizance of the existence of other groups in the society. Most germane of this research is that the theory acknowledges language as an essential ingredient in determining the identity of a people.

2.0 Methodology

This section is on the methodology adopted for this research. It defines the type of research, sampling technique, source of data collection, area of study, methods of data collection, presentation, and findings.

Research Method: This research adopts both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Qualitative research deals with the question of how something is while quantitative deals with how many or how much of a thing. Raising (2008) describes qualitative research as inductive. It is derived from research results which are often used in preliminary studies to evaluate the research area. The quantitative approach on the other hand which is used in deductive research is based on an already-known theory, from which we develop hypotheses and try to prove wrong or right during empirical investigations. This research investigates if Idoma ethnicity is a single language, how many languages exist in the cluster, and how these languages are faring in terms of their identity with the cluster.

Research Design: The random sampling method is used together with the observation method, when necessary, in selecting respondents. The survey method is also applied.

Sources of data: Data for this research is collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are from native speakers of the Idoma language cluster. The secondary source includes published and unpublished works by scholars, social media; internet, Radio, and Television.

Area of Study: The area focused on this research is the Idoma ethnolinguistic group found in the southern part of present-day Benue State referred to politically as zone C. They occupy the nine local government areas. They include Ado, Apa, Agatu, Obi, Ohimini, Ogbadibo, Oju, Okpokwu and Otukpo. In terms of native administration, the group is sub-divided into twenty-two districts; Adoka, Ulayi, Ijigban, Oglewu, Okpoga, Ugboju, Otukpo, Akpa, Agilab, Ito, Igumale, Oju Ocheke, Ichema, Elumoga, Onyagede, Orokam, Owukpa, Utonkon and Otukpo. The Idoma people in Benue State share common boundaries with Ebonyi in the North, Kogi in the South, and Gwer Local Government of Benue State from the west. In the words of Armstrong et al (1983), Idoma is also the language of the people.

Odumuh, (1994) posits that the Idoma language is a language and Dialect cluster. Against this backdrop, this research area is focused on some selected ethno-linguistics clusters within the Idoma ethnicity. These are Idoma (Otukpo), Akweya (Akpa) Igede (gede) Ufia (Utonkon). It is the researcher's opinion that these are independent languages existing under the umbrella name of Idoma. These language clusters are chosen for investigation to show that Idoma is not a monolith as erroneously posited by people.

Population of Study: A random population of (20) respondents from the selected language cluster are used to determine if they are mutually intelligible or not. These also determine if they are dialects of the same language or independent languages. These are Otukpo, Ufia, Akweya, and Igede.

Sample and sampling technique: Sample, simply means "a representative part or a single item from a large whole or group especially when presented for inspection or shown as evidence of quality". In this researcher's opinion, this definition presupposes that, sample and sampling refer to a process of research which the researcher selected few out of plenty elements that make up the overall population out of which attention is focused for information gathering. For this research, the sample size comprises 20 respondents, the technique of sampling was random in nature. In the words of Winner and Dominck (2011) random sampling provides researchers the opportunity to draw conclusions and view out of a minute (small) subject of data that is capable of being applied to a much bigger context.

Instruments

The instruments used for this research include a notebook and pen for jotting down information and observation, A Mobile phone was also used to make contact to get relevant information. The researcher also embarked on meeting with the targeted audience particularly native speakers of the respective language cluster.

Method of Data Collection

For this research work, the researcher is passionately involved because he is a native speaker of Idoma (Otukpo), one of the language clusters. Other method of data collection includes personal observation by the researcher, interviews, and consultations with native speakers of the language cluster.

The researcher also used the mentioned method of data collection to bring out information relating to lexical items and some phrases representing, greetings, animals, parts of the human body, and domestic equipment. This is to determine whether mutual intelligibility exists between these selected language clusters. This is to show if they are different languages or dialects of the same language.

3.0 Findings and Discussions

The method of data presentation for this research is based on the information collected. The lexical items are arranged in tabular form. These lexical items and phrases are examined to determine the issues of language dialect in Idoma ethnicity.

The following table shows greetings domestic items, the physiological part of the body, and crops/fruits and numbers across the language cluster under investigation.

Table one: Greetings table one

English	Idoma (Otukpo)	Igede	Ufia	Akeya
Good morning	n machi	Norlie	Ndiochoo	Ngbanom
Good evening	n mane	Obe obi	Ndiodidi	Nganade
Good afternoon	n maeno	Obeenu	Ndoiko	Ngbanogy

Table two: demonstrating items

English	Idoma (Otukpo)	Igede	Ufia	Akeya
Plate	Ochubu	Eja	Igbagla	Efele
Spoon eating	Ukor	Oka	Reko	Ibo
Knife	Ewa	Uchuema	Oklara	Epa
Pot/food	Ehi	Ota	Kicha	Itvu
Cutlas	Ukpaku	Ugbema	Ukpeege	Ogbendre

Table three: Numbers

English	Idoma (Otukpo)	Igede	Ufia	Akeya
One	Ee	Okpokpo	Kune	Inyi
Two	Epa	Iniyo	Ifa	
Three	Eta	Ita	Icharr	
Four	Gee	Ine	Inang	
Five	Ebo	Irwu	Kugboor	Eno

Table Four: Animals/birds

English	Idoma (Otukpo)	Igede	Ufia	Akeya
Dog	Ewo	Ebu	Ebua	Ogbo
Pig	Okome	Okomba	Okoma	Okome
Goat	Ewu	Emu	Ehe	Imobu
Cow	Ena	Ogodoo	Enomile	Elemenyi
Rabbit	Iyeji	Abia	Rigode	Efu

Table Five: Physiological parts of human body

English	Idoma (Otukpo)	Igede	Ufia	Akeya
Head	Eyi	Egbeju	Reto	Etuv
Neck	Okor	Igbido	Reko	Ache
Ear	Aho	Uru	Ukotuo	Aro
Hand	Abo	Ubo	Korbor	Owa
Leg	Okp	Eta	Kotia	Opu
Eye	Eyi	Ehi	Je	Anje

Table Six: crops/fruits

English	Idoma (Otukpo)	Igede	Ufia	Akeya
Yam	Ihi	Yu	Ketwuor	Ichi
Bean	Eeje	Achi	Eje	Acho
Pawpaw	Akpe	Ugboja	Agbo	Ichablakpa
Okra	Ikpoho	Ugbody	Iruu	Igende
Cassava	Oyila	Orakom	Orija	Icham
Rice	Ochikapa	Irisi	Isikapa	Ijikapa

Discussions

This work, having been completed made the following finding.

- 1- Idoma ethnicity and particularly ethno-linguistics are unique. This has led to overgeneralization and factionalized opinion about Idoma, and ethnicity hence the erroneous perception.
- 2- Idoma is not a monolith but a configuration of different languages and dialects under the common umbrella called "Idoma" language.
- 3- Idoma's ethno-linguistics structure is one of language and dialect clusters.
- 4- The complex nature, which has led to overgeneralization and factionalized views about Idoma ethnicity has also led to erroneous perceptions. This ultimately caused crises of identity within Idoma ethnicity. I.e who is Idoma person and language? Is it Akweya (Akpa), Uia, (Utonkon) Igede (Igede) or Idoma (otukpo)?

4.0 Conclusion

The study of the ethnolinguistics cluster and crises of identity in Idoma ethnicity has discovered that Idoma ethnicity, particularly the ethnolinguistic situation is complex and unique. This has led to overgeneralization and factionalized view about Idoma ethnicity. The study also discovered that Idoma is not a monolith or a single linguistic entity but a cluster of languages and dialects. These clusters are a political rather than a linguistic creation. Thus, in the researcher's opinion is the fact that these different languages and people have agreed to be subjected to a single language is an erroneous single political authority called the Ochi Idoma.

Conclusively, in the researcher's opinion, this has thrown Idoma ethnicity into crises of identity.

This is because language is a symbol or mark of identity. Therefore, an ethno-linguistic society like Idoma with multiple languages and dialects will experience identity crises.

Recommendation

Having taken a critical look at this study, the following recommendations are made. Though Idoma ethnicity is complex, leading to overgeneralization and factionalization, the Nigeria opinion, hence crises of identity. However, the researcher recommends federation can learn so much from Idoma ethnicity. This is because, for people of different languages and dialects to have agreed to be subjected to a single political authority, Ochi Idoma, is indeed a good example of unity in diversity.

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