



A SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY OF YORUBA-HAUSA ENDOGLOSSIC BILINGUALISM IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF NIGERIA

Sunday Lawrence Adesokan¹, Kayode Sangotoro (Ph.D.)²,

Akeem Olatunji Olajide³, and Marouffe Adeniyi Adegoke⁴.

¹Department of Yoruba, Federal College of Education, Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria.
Email: adesokanlawrence65@gmail.com; Tel.: +2348036191795

²Department of Yoruba, Federal College of Education, Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria.
Email: sunteekay@gmail.com; Tel.: +2348166474689

³Department of French, Federal College of Education, Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria.
Email: abdultunjideuba@gmail.com; Tel.: +23438035718007

⁴Department of French, Federal College of Education, Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria.
Email: Marouffe.adegoke@fcekatsina.edu.ng; Tel.: +2347041166126

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ABSTRACT: *The high degree of multilingualism in Nigeria makes bilingualism an inevitable sociolinguistic phenomenon. This study investigated societal bilingualism in indigenous languages—Yoruba and Hausa—of Nigeria which have been neglected and not studied the same way English language bilinguals have been. The respondents comprised four hundred and eighty (480) bilinguals in Hausa and Hausa sampled from Katsina and Kano States of the Northwest zone of Nigeria. The instrument of Second Language Oral Proficiency Evaluation (SLOPE) developed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics test was adopted to elicit data for the study. The findings revealed, among many others, that there is a progressive decline in the number of children who speak Yoruba as a native language in the sampled areas. Thus, a progressive gradual language shift has been initiated, and with time, Yoruba may be endangered in the language habits of such children. As a result of these findings, the study recommended that steps be taken to revive and revitalize the language habits of those native Yoruba children through literacy and other revivalist strategies in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Multilingualism, bilingualism, evaluation, language, shift, revitalize, endanger, indigenous.



INTRODUCTION

In a highly multilingual nation, such as Nigeria, bilingualism becomes an inevitable sociolinguistic phenomenon (Anyanwu, 2012). It should be realized that the linguistic ecology of any multilingual setting is always in a state of change, even if insignificantly (Asrorovna & Odiljonovna, 2022), and Nigeria is not an exception to this situation. It becomes imperative, therefore, to always document the linguistic preferences and choices of a people in order to expose the changing sociolinguistic parameters. In the words of Egbokhare (2004), this is virtually lacking in Nigeria. As observed earlier, major studies on bilingualism in Nigeria mostly focused on different aspects of bilingualism involving a Nigerian language and English. In other words, the preponderance of attention in bilingualism in English and a Nigerian language is highly commendable (Dada, 2007). This, however, can be attributed to the status of English in the Nigerian linguistic terrain (Oyetade, 2004).

However, studies of bilingualism in indigenous languages of Nigeria have not been widely circulated the same way English language bilingualism has been reported. Nevertheless, one can cite some exceptions like Oyetade (1990, 2004, 2007), and a number of scanty studies contained in Brenzinger (1992). Hence, the present study is designed to analyze endoglossic bilingualism in Yoruba-Hausa respondents in Katsina and Kano States of Nigeria.

Research Objectives

Specifically, the study will:

1. Determine the generational differences in the abilities of young and adult Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals.
2. Find out whether younger generations are as proficient in their mother tongue (Yoruba) as their adult counterparts in the same language.
3. Examine the proficiency abilities of both older generations and younger ones in Yoruba-Hausa languages.
4. Determine, from findings, if a process of gradual language and cultural shift is being initiated among Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals of Northwest Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. Are there generational differences in the abilities of young and adult Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals in Northwest Nigeria?
2. Are younger generations of Hausa-Yoruba bilinguals in Northwest Nigerian areas proficient in their mother tongue (Yoruba) as their adult counterparts in the same language?
3. What is the proficiency ability of both older generations and younger ones in Yoruba-Hausa bilingualism in Northwest Nigeria?
4. Is there a process of gradual language and cultural shift being initiated among Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals in Northwest Nigeria?



LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of bilingualism does not render itself to easy definitions (Anderson, Mak, Chahi & Bialystok, 2018). That is why Oyetade (2004:483) notes that "... virtually every definition given to it can be criticized in one way or another." However, regardless of the inadequacies of the popular definitions of bilingualism, scholars are in agreement that it is a relative concept (Grosjean & Li, 2012; Marian & Hayakawa, 2020). Thus, bilingualism should be regarded as a cline having at one end absolute unilingualism, and at the other absolute bilingualism or ambilingualism (Kremin & Byers-Heinlein, 2021). Notwithstanding, the word 'bilingual' primarily describes someone with the possession of two languages. It can, however, also be taken to include the many people in the world who have varying degrees of proficiency in and interchangeably use three, four or even more languages (Treffers-Daller, 2018; Nwagbo, 2023). To Edwards (2004), everyone is bilingual, that is, there is no one in the world (no adult, anyway) who does not know at least a few words in languages other than the maternal variety. No wonder, Baker (1998, p. 2 in Edwards, 2004, p. 8) notes:

A pupil may be able to understand spoken English and Welsh, speak English fluently but Welsh only haltingly, read in Welsh with a reading age of six and in English with a reading age of eight, write poorly in English and not at all in Welsh. Is that pupil bilingual?

Commenting further on the definitions of bilingualism, Gattardo and Grant (2014, p. 1) aptly observe thus:

The definition of bilingualism is complex and is influenced by multiple factors, such as the age of acquisition of the second language, continued exposure to the first language (L1), relative skill in each language and the circumstances under which each language is learned. Popular definitions of bilingualism conceptualize language knowledge as being a binary category, whether one is classified as having acquired two languages or not. However, bilingualism should be thought of as being on a continuum, where one can have varying levels of proficiency in two languages, regardless of how and when they were acquired.

As observed in Franson (2011), it becomes obvious that the concept of bilingualism encompasses a range of proficiencies and contexts. Hence, the use of the term 'bilingual' is dependent upon: context, linguistic proficiency and purpose (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2019).

A study was carried out (Oyetade, 2004), in which societal bilingualism was investigated in the Akoko area of Ondo State in a community called Auga in Akoko Northeast Local Government Area. The finding reveals that women are more proficient in Yoruba than their male counterparts. So also, it was discovered that there are clear generational differences in the abilities of the respondents in both Auga and Yoruba languages. Putting the results of bilingual abilities and language use in that community together, Oyetade (2004) concludes that a process of gradual language shift has been initiated, and with time, Yoruba may likely be the only language to use in that community.

Adeniran (2004) also reports on the language attitudes in a francophone bilingual community of Porto-Novo, Benin Republic. The research deals with an aspect of the study of language attitudes that touched on the attitudes of Yoruba respondents in a bilingual society of Porto-Novo to their language in terms of their behavioral intention towards the language. Part of the findings stipulates that Yoruba and other Beninois languages suffered under French colonialism as a result of neglect, denigration and contempt.



Oyetade (2007) studied the patterns of interaction between the Yoruba and Akoko languages. The following three major aspects of societal bilingualism engaged the attention of the study: language ability, language use/choice in a number of domains, and language attitudes. The study collected data from 1,187 respondents with a multidimensional questionnaire and participants' observation. Parts of the findings of the study reveal that Akoko speakers are more proficient in Yoruba than in various Akoko languages. Similarly, there seems to be a positive correlation between age, level of education, type of employment, and ability in Yoruba. The study recommends the need for collaborative efforts between communities, linguists, and government to salvage the languages from eventual death. This recommendation finds justification in Kascelan et al. (2021).

Christopher (2011) conducted research in Nigeria, where English is a second language and the official language. A questionnaire was administered to 67 primaries 4 and 6 pupils of the Staff School of the University of Ibadan towards the end of the 2007/2008 session. The children were 7–13-year-old boys and girls from different ethnic/language backgrounds, with Yoruba being the majority (70%). The finding majorly shows that many growing bilingual Nigerians are linguistically “malnourished” in both local and the English languages, endangering poor proficiency in both languages.

According to Treffers-Daller (2018), the concept and definition of bilingualism go well beyond the type of language abilities individuals have. Yet, the issue of the measurement of bilingual abilities is of central importance to researchers in the field (Champoux et al., 2021).

Nwagbo (2023) studied the linguistic experience of the Igbo students in the University of Lagos, who are bilingual in Igbo and Yoruba, a language of wider communication, Nigerian Pidgin, and two foreign languages (English and French/Chinese). The aim of the study was to delineate language use in different settings, code switching patterns, language attitudes, and identity projection. The finding reveals that Igbo, English and Yoruba were the only languages used in both formal and informal settings, while French and Chinese were used only in formal situations. Nigerian Pidgin was used exclusively in informal encounters.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study adopted a survey research design. This is a particular type of research design where the primary method of data collection is by survey. In this research design, survey is employed as a research tool to gain a greater and concise understanding about individual or group perspectives relating to a particular concept or topic of interest, which in this case is a sociolinguistic survey of Yoruba-Hausa Endoglossic bilingualism in Northwest Nigeria. This design is justifiable for the study because it is an easily accessible method for respondents to share or demonstrate their knowledge or perspectives about this particular topic.

Area of Study: The study was carried out within two states of the Northwest, namely: Katsina and Kano States, Nigeria.

Population of the Study: The population of the study comprised all bilingual endoglossic Yoruba-Hausa individuals within Northwest, Nigeria. To qualify as a sample, the individual must be bilingual in Yoruba-Hausa. The choice of the Northwest region of Nigeria finds justification in the fact that this region consists of densely populated individuals who are



bilinguals in Yoruba (their mother tongue) and Hausa (the second language). In this region, such places where societal bilingualism is the rule rather than an exception are Katsina and Kano States. It is in a situation like this that it is possible to study the different aspects of societal bilingualism.

Sample and Sampling Technique: Stratified random sampling technique was used to select four hundred and eighty (480) Yoruba-Hausa endoglossic bilinguals, that is, two hundred and forty (240) bilingual respondents from each of the two (2) states of Katsina and Kano. Thus, two hundred and forty (240) endoglossic bilingual respondents from each of the Northwest region states were randomly selected. To ensure fairness, each of the states was delimited to three zones by following the Independent National Electoral Commission model. The resultant three zones from Katsina State were Katsina north, Katsina central and Katsina south zones, while those of Kano were Kano north, Kano central and Kano south senatorial zones. Sampling was not limited to zonal headquarters because some towns were not zonal headquarters but they had sizeable Yoruba speaking populations because of large international markets located there. Examples of such towns were Dandume and Bichi in Katsina and Kano States respectively. Field assistants visited busy streets, neighborhoods, and Sabon gari areas and large markets in various parts of the two (2) states, for the purpose of data collection.

Instrument: The major instrument employed for this study was the Second Language Oral Proficiency Evaluation (SLOPE) test, an adaptation of the Foreign Service Institute test (Oyetade, 2004), which relies heavily on instructions and information for examinees. This measure of bilingualism was developed and validated by the Summer Institute of Linguistic test for measuring societal bilingualism described by Grimes (1987) in Oyetade (2004, p. 492). The SLOPE is a comprehensive and reliable tool that suited the purpose of this study well as it measures several aspects of bilingualism (including proficiency, language use in different contexts, and code switching) and through which bilingualism can be operationalised categorically or on a continuum (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2019). The SLOPE also has the advantage of providing different composite scores based on various aspects of bilingualism that cluster together, and where each item is weighted according to its relative contribution to the concept (Marian & Hayakawa, 2020; Champoux-Larsson & Dylman, 2021). The SLOPE test was supported by the instrument of unstructured oral interview in order to obtain reliable and standard data.

Administration of the Instrument: As a means of getting reliable and good representation, two hundred and forty (240) sampled respondents from each of the Northwest States Nigeria, namely Katsina and Kano, were administered with SLOPE. This sampled population comprised those who are bilinguals in their mother tongue (Yoruba) and second language (Hausa). It was a convenient sample as they were contacted in their various homes, markets and schools. However, to ensure fair representativeness, a number of respondents were assembled for the researchers by the Yoruba community leaders in two (2) states of the Northwest Region, with the help of our field workers. A family of five, which could not participate in the study because of injuries sustained from a public tricycle accident, was replaced by another family in order to bring the number of respondents back to four hundred and eighty (480).

Method of Data Analysis: Among other questions, the respondents were asked to rate their abilities in speaking and understanding Yoruba and Hausa. However, for Yoruba, they were not taken at their words. Therefore, in ascertaining their speaking ability in Yoruba, the



researchers used an interview schedule so as to allow the respondents speak freely, and in the process noticed all the linguistic concomitants of language competence. The respondents were categorized along the following rating scales: poor, fair, good and very good. They were rated from poor to very good on the basis of their scores as follows: 1–3 = poor, 4–5 = fair, 6–7 = good, while 8 and above = very good. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage calculations.

Data Analysis and Results

The results obtained from the study are as shown in the tables below. Each data obtained in a given table is analyzed underneath.

RQ1: Are there generational differences in the abilities of young and adult Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals in Northwest Nigeria?

Group Table 1: Speaking and understanding abilities of Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals by age groups

Age group	Yoruba				Hausa				Total
	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	
8–20	84.93	9.94	1.28	3.85	3.85	5.77	37.82	52.56	312
21–30	20.00	40.00	30.00	10.00	0.00	10.00	60.00	30.00	60
31–49	1.39	6.94	56.94	34.72	1.39	48.61	16.67	33.33	24
50 above	0.00	0.00	50.00	50.00	22.22	50.00	16.67	11.11	72
Total	278	60	81	61	13	77	172	218	480

Source: Field trip

N = children = 312

Parents = 168

People under the age group of age 20 are considered to be children while those under the three other groups covering age 21–50+ are considered to be adults. From the result obtained in Table 1, it shows that children of Yoruba-Hausa Bilinguals in Northwest Nigeria speak Hausa language better than Yoruba language. Only twelve respondents, which constitute Good and Very Good, speak Yoruba language well, which comprises only sixteen respondents, while the remaining eighty-four percent (84%) are fair and poor speakers of Yoruba language.

On the other hand, results showed that the same group of children are good speakers of Hausa language. Only thirty (30) respondents were poor in speaking Hausa and this constitutes only 9.62% of the respondents.



For the parents, results showed that they speak Yoruba language better than the children. Results showed that the older the parents, the better the level of proficiency in the mother tongue. The percentage of non-good speakers decreases towards the age, as shown by 1% of non-good speakers for people with age 50+.

On the Hausa language side, the result was reversed because the children were better Hausa language speakers with a high level of proficiency reaching 90.38%, while only 9.62% were not good at it. The parents were not good Hausa language speakers when compared with children because only 27.78% were considered good Hausa language speakers, whereas 72.22% were not good speakers.

The table showed good proficiency in Yoruba language, as displayed at a better level by parents, while the children have lower levels of proficiency. This is not strange in language studies where the environment and various contexts of usage are determinants in speakers' language proficiency.

RQ2: Are younger generations of Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals in Northwest of Nigeria areas as proficient in their mother tongue (Yoruba) as their adult counterparts in the same language?

Table 2: Comparison of respondents' speaking and understanding abilities in Yoruba and Hausa languages

Yoruba					Hausa				
Age group	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Total
Children	83.97	8.97	2.88	4.17	3.85	5.77	37.82	52.56	312
Parents	10.71	25.00	35.71	28.57	25.00	35.71	17.86	21.43	168
TOTAL									480

Source: Field Trip (2025)

Table 2 compares speaking and understanding abilities of respondents in both Yoruba and Hausa languages. However, the group members in Table 2 are broader on the parents' side. It is an attempt to show the proficiency level of parents at an average level as opposed to comparing sub-groups. The findings supported the position in Table 1 where Yoruba-Hausa bilingual children were found to have a low level of proficiency in Yoruba language. In table two, 92.94% (addition of poor and fair respondents) were not proficient, while only 7.06% were proficient (addition of good and very good respondents). For the Hausa language, it was a reversal: 90.38% of children were proficient while 9.62% were not proficient in it. For parents, only 39.29% were proficient in Hausa language while 60.71% were not proficient. One of the possible reasons for this language behaviour among the two groups is that some parents acquired Hausa language late while the slight rise in percentage of competency in Hausa may be due to the fact that some of the parents being measured were Yoruba children born in Hausa language environment; they are now parents. Another possible reason is



intermarriage. Some respondents were married across tribes of Hausa and Yoruba. Some parents from cross-cultural families tend to have improved levels of proficiency in both Hausa and Yoruba languages.

RQ3: What is the proficiency ability of both older generations and younger ones in Yoruba-Hausa in Northwest Nigeria?

Table 3: Parents self-report of language use (N = 168)

Context and Situation	Languages		
	Yoruba	Hausa	Hausa-Yoruba
When speaking with children	14.29	50.00	35.71
When speaking with relation	25.00	17.86	57.14
When speaking with other speakers of Yoruba	50.00	14.29	35.71
When discussing important family matters	25.00	21.43	53.57
When discussing at tribal meeting	57.14	10.12	32.74
When speaking with Yoruba spouse	35.71	28.57	35.71
Total	168		

Source: Field Trip (2025)

From results obtained in Table 3, it is obvious that Yoruba-Hausa bilingual parents in Northwest Nigeria speak Hausa language in a wider context than they speak Yoruba language. Out of the six instances that were measured, it was only when speaking with other speakers of Yoruba language and when having a discussion at tribal meetings that not less than 50% of parents speak Yoruba language. In all other instances, the Hausa language enjoyed patronage. The most surprising was when Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals were speaking with children; only 14.29 % of them used Yoruba language while 50% of them used Hausa language.

Results show that on occasions like speaking with relations, discussion of important family matters, and speaking with spouses, parents used Hausa in the range of 10.71 being highest minus lowest. For discussion at tribal meetings, it is 10.12% and 28.57% for speaking with spouses. However, it is good to note that when we add an estimate of 50% of speakers that alternate between Yoruba and Hausa in the measured instances, usage seems to weigh heavily in favour of Hausa language, which is not the mother tongue of respondents. For example, on an occasion of discussion at tribal meetings, one would expect that not less than 90% of respondents would employ the use of Yoruba language. However, 10% used Hausa language while a roughly estimated 16.37% of people that alternated between the two languages used Hausa. We now arrived at a total of 26.49% of respondents of Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals using



Hausa language for discussion at their tribal meetings. This manifested attitude, as shown by the result, has implications for Yoruba language in terms of language maintenance and shift.

Factors that are largely responsible are covered in Table 3, where various contexts of usage were measured. The school plays an important role in the Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals' level of proficiency in Yoruba language. Children attending boarding schools spend about six hours of five days each week at schools where Hausa and English are the languages they were exposed to. Outside holidays, the length of time of exposure at schools and other agencies of socialization like church, mosque, etc. improves their Hausa language against Yoruba language.

In short, this finding shows a positive attitude towards the language shift, which in this case is shifting from Yoruba language to Hausa language.

RQ: Is there a process of gradual language and cultural shift initiated among Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals in the Northwest?

Table 4: Children self-reports of language use (N = 312)

Context and Situation	Languages		
	Yoruba	Hausa	Yoruba- Hausa
When speaking with parents	9.29	52.88	37.82
When speaking with grand parents	13.14	35.90	50.96
When speaking with brothers/sisters	5.77	56.41	37.82
When speaking with other Yoruba children	7.37	58.65	33.97

Source: Field Trip (2025)

From Table 4, it is clearly shown that Hausa-Yoruba bilingual children were comfortable speaking Hausa language. On all context situations measured, scores for exclusive use of Yoruba language was between 5.77% and 13.14%, which gave an average of 8.89%. However, the same recorded an average of 35.90% and 58.65% for exclusive usage of Hausa language. This gives an average of 50.96%. By the time an estimated percentage is added from parents who used either of the two languages, percentage would be higher. The report shows a bleak future for maintenance of Yoruba language in Northwest Nigeria because one would expect that when children were discussing with their grandparents, brothers and sisters and other Yoruba-speaking children, Yoruba language would have been employed. It was not the case. The Hausa language led clearly. One may observe that they used more Yoruba language when speaking to grandparents than they did when speaking with their parents. This may be due to the fact that some of their grandparents do not speak Hausa and they may not be living in a Hausa language environment. Hence, such discussion might have taken place during visitation by grandparents or when the family visited the grandparents during holidays or festive periods.



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the aforementioned, some findings are significant. Firstly, Yoruba-Hausa bilingual children in Northwest Nigeria are less proficient in Yoruba than in Hausa language. Secondly, language patterns from this study showed that Hausa has gained prominence in and outside their homes because the result indicated that parents used it when discussing with their children at home. Thus, if data for children is carefully studied, they tilt towards the use of Hausa language both at home and at work. It is worthy to note that the children would soon become parents within the next 10–20 years and their own data would now replace that of their parents. One can easily observe that a process of language and cultural shift has started in favour of Hausa language.

Many people see bilingualism as a hindrance to development. There are contrary opinions. There are enough pieces of evidence to suggest that it is not so. The old Soviet Union was an example of a multilingual country that was developed. Canada is still a bilingual country and a developed one. Noguera (2005, p. 13 in Anita, 2013) succinctly puts it that, “Many children learn two languages simultaneously while they are growing up.” In fact, the United States is one of the few countries in the world that takes pride in the fact that we speak only one language. The position buttressed above is that parents and children should discard the erroneous belief that African and Nigerian children must jeopardize their interest in their mother tongue before they can achieve competence in another language. The fact that most children that attended formal schools in Nigeria, past and present, were able to speak English and their mother tongue, and in some instances, with addition of Arabic, proves the point that children and parents should be encouraged to speak and develop their mother tongues.

The result from the study suggests that if the trend observed continues unabated, there will be a language shift. Many Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals may end up losing their ability to speak Yoruba language. In language, the operational formula is 'practice makes perfect.' To attain good proficiency in a given language, it must be put to use covering a wide context; thus, the present trend is obviously not the best.

The findings of this study find support in Norbert (2005) in Woolfolk (2013, p, 175) who observed that dual language development is quite commendable thus:

If you mastered your own first language, then added a second or third language, you are an example of additive bilingualism; you kept your first language and added another. But if you lost your first language when you added a second one, you experienced subtractive bilingualism.

The above proposition covers bilingualism and multilingualism. If this is feasible, children, parents and policymakers should know that having a second or third language should not make you lose the first. Language development in schools and other social circles should adopt this model. After a period of time, the available linguistic and demographic data will show the way to go in the adoption of a national language. Finally, we should note that languages are the content of culture and they are the vehicle for its transmission. There are lots of hidden values in our cultural practices covering our food and medicine. Nigerian languages must be preserved and this must be done on time. A good number of them are going into extinction on a daily basis. The existence of any given language depends on its use by a given population. If the population goes into extinction, the language dies. Similarly, if the speaker and population and



others decide or refuse to use it, the language dies as well. The cost of maintaining and preserving a given language is far less than the cost of reviving it after death. All hands must be on deck to save the path of progress.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Results from the data have shown that Yoruba-Hausa bilingual children and parents in Northwest Nigeria do not communicate adequately in Yoruba language. A better part of their communication was done through the medium of Hausa language. As stated above, the simultaneous acquisition of two or more languages is a great idea here and in other places. However, it is observed from the study that Yoruba-Hausa bilinguals in Northwest Nigeria are becoming less proficient in Yoruba language. This is considered a negative development which must be checked. Since the findings showed recession in favour of Yoruba language, reasonable steps should be taken through proper education and orientation. The same gesture should be extended to other languages under similar threat.

In conclusion, results from the study provide relevant information on childhood and adult bilingualism, which are indispensable factors for consideration when planning for education, health, agriculture, local technology development, arts and culture, and other relevant national development programmes in a multilingual nation like Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Findings, such as provided in this study, should form inputs in the data for the linguistic situation in Nigeria, which are still hazy up till now.
2. Information from the study should be put together to provide a relatively reliable picture of social bilingualism rather than mere impressionistic accounts.
3. Steps should be taken to preserve the linguistic habits of these Yoruba native children through literacy campaigns, and other revivalist strategies.
4. Sociolinguistic researchers should replicate similar research efforts in other endoglossic societal indigenous bilingualism in the country.
5. Theoretical implications of this study showed that the nature of language learning, variation in language, language using abilities of native speakers, and the process involved in linguistic change, should form parts of policy formulation in Nigeria.



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