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Ibani Oral Literature: The Missing Link

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Abstract

Language has long been considered as one of the most important attributes of cultural identity. So has literature. Indeed, language and literature are so closely linked in this respect that the great Slavic poet, Constantine the philosopher said, as early as the ninth century, that people without books in their language are naked and can be compared to a body deprived of proper food. To reaffirm and consolidate the identity of the Slavic people, then under foreign domination, Constantine went ahead to develop his own vernacular dialect into a literary and liturgical language that came to be known in philology as Old Church Slavonic. This paper sought to analyse oral literature, especially as it pertains to the Ibani people. The study and appreciation of oral literature are highly crucial to the understanding of the complexity of human cognitive skills. For many people around the world, particularly in areas where history and traditions are more predominantly conveyed through speech than in writing, the transmission of oral literature from one generation to the next lies at the heart of culture and memory. It is highly essential to the survival of a culture. Very often, local languages act as vehicles for the transmission of unique forms of cultural knowledge. Oral traditions that are encoded in these speech forms can become threatened due to various factors. Such creative works of oral literature and spoken languages are increasingly endangered as globalization and rapid socio-economic change exert over more complex pressures on smaller communities; often challenging traditional knowledge practices. This could result in the near-extinction of a language, such as the Ibani language.

Key words: Culture, Language, Oral Literature, Extinct, Threatened, Culture, Identity, Tradition

Introduction

The Ibani, an offshoot of the Ijaw people is located in Southern Rivers State, Nigeria. Its alternate name is Ubani made up of Bonny Town, on Bonny Island, the Kingdom of Opobo in Opobo Island and its settlements. Both kingdoms have a strong central authority structure and a long-established royal lineage. Bonny's development was also shaped by the close interaction with European traders. It was the melting point of economic activities right from the 16th century. It served as Christianity's first port of call in West Africa. With a thriving traditional system and robust cultural heritage, it stands out as one of the foremost local communities in Nigeria.

The community is subdivided into two main segments – the mainland and the hinterland. The mainland is comprised of the Township, Sandfield, Iwoama, Orosikiri, Aganya, Agambo, Akiama, Workers Camp, Finima and some outlying fishing settlements lying along the Bonny River's coastline. The hinterland includes the villages that houses indigenes of Bonny kingdom.

The Kingdom of Opobo is in many instances a replica of the Old Bonny Kingdom but unique in its planning; showing a combination of modernity and the ancient. Yet not totally bastardized by the impact of Western influences brought into the local community as the Bonny case. Opobo Kingdom is made of Opobo Town which is the seat of authority and the outlying settlements or plantation settlements called Kalama and owned by chiefs of some main Houses in Opobo. The structure of authority revolves round the House system. The Alabo – in council is the highest policy making institution. The council members are elders – Warisenapu who constitute the council. The Amanyanabo in council is the policy making institution and the highest administrative organ. Although there are title holders, they play little or no role in governance. In recent times, specific assignments like raising funds in socio-economic development have been assigned to them.

The main town which was virtually submerged by the rising water level was sand filled in 2007. The social history of Opobo Kingdom was also shaped by interaction with Europeans and her neighbours, from the Igbo hinterland, and to a little extent by the Ibibio Ogoni and Andoni. Unlike Bonny, Opobo played little part in the oil and gas industry, thus shielding the Kingdom from the eroding influences of modernization.

Oral Literature in African Communities

In African societies, oral literature is the method by which history, stories, folktales and religious beliefs are passed across generations. Webster's dictionary defines "oral" as, "spoken rather than written," and it defines the word "literature" as the whole body of literary productions or writings upon a given subject, or in reference to a particular science or branch of knowledge, or of a given country or period; Thus, oral literature could be defined as the aspect of culture that is spoken. This refers to the language of a people, not only by communication, but passing across aspects of a culture. There can be no community without a language; neither can any culture exist without communication. For the Africans, oral literature is linked to their way of life. Most African societies place great worth in language because it is a primary means of conveying culture. It is also a mode of transmitting feelings, and attitudes. For centuries, Africans depended on oral literature to teach listeners traditional values and morals. Oral literature serves to convey explanations to the mysteries of the universe and the meaning of life. It also plays a prominent role in religion. Oral literature is non-written culture.

It is spoken word. Historically, most African societies did not have an invented alphabet. African scholar and writer, Mbiti (1991) asserted that

...Most African people did not invent an alphabet for the art of reading and writing. Therefore, they could not keep written records of their history. Instead they passed on information from one generation to another, by word of mouth.

The human voice is the key element in Oral Literature. Africans have been primarily vocal people throughout their history. Language is a powerful force. Although there are many ethnic languages that coexist in Africa, (researchers say there may be as many as 1000), African stories and folklore were communicated across different regions. Oral literature relies on the human voice to communicate varied messages. Muli Wa Kituku explained:

Voice was the vehicle in which knowledge was passed on from one generation to another. Voice unified a family, clan, or community. Enforcement of customs depended on voice. When a person died...his or her voice was no longer to be heard, it was as a whole library had been destroyed. Voice is important.

Another integral part of Oral literature is music. Music plays an important role in African societies. According to Mbiti, "Africans are very fond of music. Therefore music, dance and singing are found in every community." Music also transmits knowledge and values, and plays a part in celebrating community and personal events. Combined with oral literature and dance, a visual art form is created for the message being communicated.

The Missing Link

Language and literature are important attributes of cultural identity. Besides, the cultural identity of any tribe is, at least partly, determined by the language spoken by its people.

An endangered language is a language that is at risk of falling out of use as its speakers die out or begin to use another language. Language loss occurs when the language has no more new native speakers, and becomes a "dead language". If eventually no one speaks the language at all, it becomes an "extinct language". Although languages have always become extinct throughout human history, they are currently disappearing at an accelerated rate due to the processes of globalization and neocolonialism, where the economically powerful languages dominate other languages. More commonly spoken languages dominate the less commonly spoken languages and therefore, the less commonly spoken languages eventually disappear. The total number of languages in the world is not known. Estimates vary depending on many factors. The general consensus is that the loss of languages harms the cultural diversity of the world.

Language endangerment is a serious concern to which linguists and language planners have turned their attention in the last several decades. For a variety of reasons, speakers of many smaller, less dominant languages stop using their heritage language and begin using another. Parents may begin to use only that second language with their children and gradually the intergenerational transmission of the heritage language is reduced and may even cease. As a consequence there may be no speakers who use the language as their first or primary language and eventually the language may no longer be used at all. A language may become dormant or extinct, existing perhaps only in recordings or written records and transcriptions. Languages which have not been adequately documented disappear altogether.

Cultural/political/economic marginalization: This happens when political and economic power is closely tied to a particular language and culture so that there is a strong incentive for individuals to abandon their language (on behalf of themselves and their children) in favour of another more 'prestigious' one. This frequently happens when indigenous populations, in order to achieve a higher social status, adopt the cultural and linguistic traits of a people who have come to dominate them through colonization, conquest, or invasion. Examples of this kind of endangerment are the Welsh language which is losing relevance in favour of English in Great Britain, and Ainu which is losing relevance in favour of Japanese language in Japan. This is the most common cause of language endangerment. In addition, cultural hegemony may often arise not from domination or conquest but simply from increasing contact with a larger and more influential language community through better communications compared with the relative isolation of past centuries.

Is the Ibani Language Going into Extinction?

While there is no definite threshold for identifying a language as endangered, these main criteria are used as guidelines:

1. The number and age of current speakers.
2. Whether the youngest generations are acquiring fluency in the language.

The tool for assessing the vitality of language, which is usually based on a number of factors, is the Expanded Grade Intergenerational Disruption Scale, or EGIDS. According to the Ethnologue; Languages of the World, Ibani is spoke by only about 60, 000 people as a first language. The people that speak the languages are restricted to just about a few hamlets - Kalaibama, Finima, Oloma, Kruma, Abalamabie, Orupiri and Fibiri. The EGIDS level for the Ibani is 6a (vigorous), which is only sustained because the people in these hamlets still actively learn and speak it. However, the Ibani language is at a precarious position because it is teetering on the borderline. After "vigorous", the position that Ibani occurs on the chart, is "troubled", and this is a dangerous zone for a language to occupy.

One of the reasons for this gradual loss of the Ibani language was the injection of Igbo people (not culture) in the Ibani regions which culminated in the age-long interaction between Ibani and Ndoki people (who are actually Ijaws that allowed Igbo migrants to settle amongst them). Many of them now speak variants of Igbo and are sometimes classified as Igbo but their Ijaw culture is still very pronounced. The main reason why Bonny and Opobo regions speak Igbo dialects is because of continuous relations (mainly through intermarriage) with their Ndoki relatives. Note that the Ndoki people are Ijaw people that reside close to the mainstream Igbo who accommodated Igbo migrants and lost their language to the visitors a long time ago.

Opobo became the worst hit because they are located at the mouth of the Imo River that connects Ndoki and Ibaniland. The Ibani do not share a boundary with the Igbo people. They only share boundaries with Ibibio, Ogonis and Ndoki people who have adopted variants of the Igbo language (Ikwerre, Ekpeye, Ogba, Ndokwa etc).

Another probable reason for the dearth of the Ibani language is the absence of literary materials in the Ibani language. Written materials in a particular language, serve to preserve that language. Roger Blench had this to say in the preface of his Ibani dictionary; "despite the importance attached to literacy in the Ibani area, there are a few accessible modern publications

on the language. We have a few historical accounts which state the possible causes of the decline of the Ibani language.”

History of Ibani Literacy

Paul Hair (1967) seems to have been the first bibliographer to cite the history and citations of Ijo in early historical sources and the following is largely adapted from his essay. The first actual words of Ibani were recorded by Captain Hugh Crow, an English slave-trader who operated from Bonny around the end of the eighteenth century. From his account one would think that there was only one language, namely Eboe [Igbo] spoken at Bonny, but in his wordlist of Eboe’, a few Ibani words are found casually embedded in it. The expedition of 1832 - 34 up the Niger collected vocabularies of a number of languages but not of Ijo.

Edwin Norris, the Assistant Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society, used these when he compiled a handbook for the use of the next Niger Expedition and added materials from other sources, including numerals in ‘Bonny’, i.e. Ibani (Norris 1840).

In 1840 a German doctor spent some four months in Bonny as a ship’s doctor, and wrote a detailed account of Bonny including a long vocabulary of Ibani. (Köler 1842-43), reprinted as Köler 1848). He notes the use of two languages, Ibani and Igbo, at Bonny, and the attempts by elders to prevent boys from teaching him Ibani. This confirms what is said today, that the major reason for the decline of Ibani is the successful attempt to keep it from being learnt by outsiders, which in the nineteenth century included a large slave population. The result of this policy is that Igbo has become the common language of communication.

Two more dialects of Ijo were recorded for the first time by John Clarke (1848). These were ‘Numbe’ [Nembe] and ‘Akrika’ [Okrika], together with further lists of Kalabari and Ibani. Clarke was a Baptist missionary who, with the help of an Afro- American colleague, Merrick, collected his wordlists in an unsystematic way, some in Fernando Po and some in the West Indies (Hair 1967). Sigismund Koelle was a German scholar who worked for the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Freetown. There he compiled his Polyglotta Africana in 1850 which was published in 1854. It was a collection of vocabularies of African languages, compiled by interviewing the freed slaves who had been resettled in Freetown. Koelle used a standard wordlist of about three hundred items and added notes on his informants and their homelands, from which he was able to draw a map which is remarkably accurate for a period when no European knew the interior of West Africa. His vocabularies are grouped according to genetic relationship in so far as he could trace it from the wordlists. He has two wordlists of Ijo, grouped together as V.C., the group which conjoins Igboid and Edoid. The first list, ‘Okulma’, is a wordlist of Ibani, named for the town Okólómá, although Koelle’s informant was from Orupiri (órüpIrI). Koelle (1854:8) refers to Obäne as the name for these people given by the Ibos and Kerekas [Okrika]. Williamson (1966) discusses Koelle’s Ijo lists in detail. In the case of Ibani, she shows that some 73% of Koelle’s forms were accurate and also yield interesting information about lexical and phonological change in the language since they were recorded. In 1856, Baikie published his account of the 1854 voyage to explore the Niger. In his appendix on the languages, he states:

From the Rio Formoso to the Nun, including all the western portion of the Delta, the natives speak Orü or Ejó, and to the westward of Abó a distinct dialect is used, namely the Sóbo, Nimbe or Brass is very nearly related to the Orú, and I believe that from the Brass River to the New Kalabár, the natives dwelling on the banks of each of the intervening rivers all talk differently.

At the Sombréiro, I know positively that this is the case, but here the dialect closely approaches that of New Kalabár. Between the last-mentioned place and Ebáne or Bonny, there are well-marked differences, and I have been told that the language spoken in the intervening district of Okrika is distinct from either, while beyond Oküloma a fresh language is to be found at Andéni. (Baikie 1856:419).

No one can really pinpoint for sure the reasons for the decline in the Ibani language. So many reasons have been postulated. Here are the summary of the probable postulations;

1. Due to the intermingling of the Ibani people with the Ndoni people (who were now speaking the Igbo language), they gradually began to lose their language.
2. The Ibani felt a deep-rooted history of origin and more association with Igbo speaking peoples.
3. They refused to teach strangers and settlers in their community their language.
4. Due to their proximity with a much larger tribal group, the Igbo, they gradually adopted the language of that group.
5. Igbo was the language of commerce and communication at the time and provided easy credit and cheaper goods since parties saw themselves as kith and kin.

Many projects aimed at preventing or slowing this loss by revitalizing endangered languages and promoting education and literacy in minority languages are underway. Across the world many countries have enacted specific legislations aimed at protecting and stabilizing the language of indigenous speech communities. A minority of linguists have argued that language loss is a natural process that should not be counteracted, and that recording endangered languages for posterity is sufficient. Only a small number of speakers of endangered languages consider it a good thing that their indigenous language might be lost, although many consider that switching to a majority language is likely to alleviate social stigma and increase economic opportunities. However the vast majority of speakers of endangered languages consider the loss of their language to be a vital break from their cultural identity and tradition, and work **actively** with linguists in revitalization projects to counteract the impending language loss. Recognizing that most of the world's endangered languages are unlikely to be revitalized, many linguists are working on documenting the thousands of languages about which little or nothing is known. Their work may prove helpful both for the science of linguistics and in the future for the descendants of the speech communities, should they wish to learn about their ancestral language after it has become extinct.

Effects of Language Loss

Effects on Communities

Language endangerment affects both the languages themselves and the people that speak them. As communities lose their language, they often also lose parts of their cultural traditions which are tied to that language, such as songs, myths and poetry that are not easily transferred to another language. This may in turn affect their sense of identity, producing a weakened social cohesion as their values and traditions are replaced with new ones. This is sometimes characterized as anomie. Losing a language may also have political consequences as some countries confer different political statuses or privileges on minority ethnic groups, often defining ethnicity in terms of language. That means that communities that lose their language may also lose political legitimacy as a community with collective rights.

Effects on languages

During language loss – sometimes referred to as obsolescence in the linguistic literature – the language that is being lost generally undergoes changes as speakers make their language more similar to the language that they are shifting to, for example, losing grammatical or phonological complexities that are not found in the dominant language.

Response

Linguists, members of endangered language communities, governments, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations such as UNESCO and the European Union are actively working to save and stabilize endangered languages. Once a language is determined to be endangered, there are three steps that can be taken in order to stabilize or rescue the language. The first is language documentation, the second is language revitalization and the third is language maintenance. Language documentation is the documentation in writing and audio-visual recording of grammar, vocabulary, and oral traditions (e.g. stories, songs, religious texts) of endangered languages. It entails producing descriptive grammar, texts and dictionaries of the languages, and it requires the establishment of a secure archive where the material can be stored once it is produced so that it can be accessed by future generations of speakers.

Language revitalization is the process by which a language community through political, community, and educational means attempts to increase the number of active speakers of the endangered language. This process is also referred to as shift. Vocabulary and courses are available online for some endangered languages.

Language maintenance is the support given to languages that need for their survival to be protected from outsiders who can ultimately affect the number of speakers of a language. Another option is post-vernacular maintenance: the teaching of some words and concepts of the lost language, rather than revival proper.

The dimensions to the characterization of endangerment are the number of users who identify with a particular language and the number and nature of the uses or functions for which the language is employed. A language may be endangered because there are fewer people who claim that language as their own and therefore neither use it nor pass it to their children. It may also, or alternatively, be endangered because it is being used for fewer daily activities and so loses the close association of the language with particular social or communicative functions. Form follows function and languages which are being used for fewer and fewer domains of life also tend to lose structural complexity, which in turn may affect the perceptions of users regarding the suitability of the language for use in a broader set of functions. This leads to a downward spiral which eventually results in the complete loss of the language. The concern about language endangerment is centred around the factors which motivate speakers to abandon their language and the social and psychological consequences of language death for the community of (former) speakers of that language. Since language is closely linked to culture, loss of language almost always is accompanied by social and cultural disruptions. More broadly, the intangible heritage of all of human society is diminished when a language disappears. Secondly, those concerned about language endangerment recognize the implications of the loss of linguistic diversity both for the linguistic and social environment generally and for the academic community which is devoted to the study of language as a human phenomenon.

Active efforts are being made to revive the Ibani language. For instance, here is an account of a programme that was held to mark, the occasion of the 2013 International Mother-tongue celebrations. Monday, 04 March 2013 21:45.

Chairmen Set to Develop Ibani Language Curriculum

Written by MoI & C

The Executive Secretary of Rivers State Readers Project, Dr. Tony Enyia, has announced the willingness of the Chairmen of Bonny and Opobo/Nkoro LGAs to sponsor the development of Ibani language curriculum. He said that, so far it is only Eleme and Gokana languages that have developed curriculum. Dr. Enyia, stated this while speaking as Chairman in the 2013 International Mother Tongue day celebration. He noted that the National Museum in Port Harcourt and Rivers State Readers Project will work to stop Ibani language from extinction. Dr. Enyia said that learning one's indigenous language will help the learner to think independently. The Executive Secretary remarked that Federal Government has approved Ibani language autography while the State has enacted a law that makes the teaching of indigenous languages in the Nursery, Primary and Junior Secondary Schools compulsory. He remarked that there is a mandate to the Ministry of Education to ensure that Teachers are trained in the Local languages.

According to Dr Enyia, the fate of Ibani language lies with the Speakers and called on all concerned to leave a legacy of the language to posterity. He emphasized that the mother tongue of the people expresses their essence, as it is a tool used in expressing their cultural identity. In his address, the Curator, National Museum, Port Harcourt, Mr. Fadamiyo Omolayo, said that the United Nations, through its organ UNESCO, declared February 21st of every year as the day to celebrate language diversity. He therefore encouraged people to learn their mother tongue.

Mr. Omolayo said that the challenge before the people is on how to ensure the survival of mother tongues by getting people not only to identify with it but also to speak it. He opined that what it takes to preserve a language include to teach it in schools, printing appropriate literature books, and promoting its use publicly and privately. In his lecture, Amasenibo Eric G. Jumbo listed out the current threat to Ibani Language which includes Commerce and Christian Religion. Also speaking, Warisenibo Abinye Morgan Ogolo, challenged the people of Bonny and Opobo Kingdoms to make concerted efforts to stop speaking Ibo language. This will help to rediscover Ibani Language so that it will take its rightful place despite the damage it has suffered over the years.

The Chairman of Opobo/Nkoro LGA, represented by the Council Secretary, Mr. Sunny J. Pepple, called on volunteer experts of the Ibani language to partner with the Council to revive the language. The event featured dances, lectures and Ibani language competition among selected Secondary Schools with CSS Opobo emerging as winner while GGSS Finima and Bonny National Grammar School, emerged as runners up. Dignitaries at the event include, Professor Emeritus E. J. AIagoa, Dr. Mrs. Iyalla Amadi and the Permanent Secretary, Rivers State Ministry of Information and Communications, represented by Mr. Francis Alli among others.

Overview

The continuous exposure of youths to the influence of Western civilization and government's inaction is promoting the extinction of many Nigerian dialects. This is rampant in most Ibani

families. The prevailing situation has almost resulted in the near extinction of the Ibani language. Investigation has revealed that the end of the 20th century and the turn of the 21st century ushered in the Western culture that has been considered a serious threat to many local dialects spoken in Nigeria. Experts say that the way out of the situation is for government to do more than paying lip service to this threat against indigenous languages. Dr. George T. Teke of the Linguistics Department, University of Abuja disclosed to Newsworld that there are many factors responsible for language endangerment, maintaining that except for English and Chinese languages, all other languages were facing various degrees of endangerment. However, with a minority language like Ibani, the threat of extinction is great indeed.

Dr. Sola Sebastine, a sociologist told Newsworld that though people often speak their indigenous languages, at some points when they attain prominence at the national level, they are often tempted to express themselves in English language on a daily basis. He noted that the continuous influence of Western civilization on youths and adults at different levels of life in Nigerian schools and work places has impacted negatively on the people to the extent that individuals now go about their daily activities using the English language to communicate. He added that the regional language of many states in Nigeria is the English language in addition to that of the three major ethnic groups-Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Often times because of the diversity in the Nigerian culture, the English language becomes the spoken word even at the family level. For instance, in Plateau and Kaduna States, almost 80 percent of the people speak the Hausa language instead of their indigenous languages. Another factor responsible for this, Dr. Teke said is the urban drift. He lamented that in the urban areas, the languages are not in use a regular basis with the numbers reducing by the day. For instance, somebody who speaks his dialect to his children all the time is likely to limit its usage once he moves to an urban area. Such a person would be faced with the temptation of speaking the English language, and at best, any other major language of the area he resides. This also poses danger to some languages.

Dr. Teke further stated that among the 450 dialects spoken in Nigeria, many will not survive the next 15 to 20 years. He attributed this to the economic drift from the rural area to urban centres. For any language that goes extinct, a whole culture and volume of knowledge is totally lost. He argued that the world started from Africa, therefore the need to preserve African languages from going extinct. Of all the 600,500 languages in the world, 400,000 to 500,000 of them are spoken in Nigeria. This informs the lure of some Europeans to Nigeria to study linguistics. In 2008, ELDP of London sponsored the first ever West African linguistics programme. The programme was designed to teach the participants skills that will assist in the documentation of languages that are threatened. Dr. Teke also said that within the West African sub-region, the government is not active in either defending or supporting the preservation of these languages. He informed that so far, no government has come up with a clear-cut policy of language preservation; national policies that will support the minority languages that are at the verge of extinction. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, has also expressed concern over languages facing extinction in the past few years, stating that at least one language may go extinct every two weeks if nothing was done by municipal governments to curb the menace. UNESCO pointed out that in the next 20 years, only a few languages and culture will be left if the negative trend is not stopped. Also, German researchers on language documentations have called for recordings of languages that are most vulnerable in order to ensure availability of data on such language to form data base for research.

Conclusion

The best way to identify the level of vitality of a language has not always been clear. However, a scholarly consensus that can be applied worldwide is developing, and a global evaluation of the state of language vitality is becoming increasingly possible. Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists seek to identify trends in language use through the description of some direct measures of language vitality such as changes in the number of speakers or in the use of the language in certain domains or functions. Less directly, an increase in bilingualism, both in the number of bilinguals and in their proficiency levels, is often associated with these trends, though a high level of bilingualism is not, in itself, a sufficient condition for language shift or death. In addition, there are numerous economic, political and social factors that affect a community's self-perception and motivations.

Ethnologue reports data that are indicators of the two major dimensions of language use (users and functions). With the data, we report the following factors which may contribute to the assessment of language endangerment:

- The speaker population.
- The ethnic population; the number of those who connect their ethnic identity with the language (whether or not they speak the language).
- The stability of and trends in that population size.
- Residency and migration patterns of speakers.
- The use of second languages.
- The use of the language by others as a second language.
- Language attitudes within the community.
- The age range of the speakers.
- The domains of use of the language.
- Official recognition of languages within the nation or region.
- Means of transmission (whether children are learning the language at home or being taught in schools).
- Non-linguistic factors such as economic opportunity or the lack thereof.

Restoring the Missing Link

Some of the proposals put forward converge on one point: Imani language should be developed in order to increase its communicative capacity. To achieve this task, one must note that it is extraordinarily difficult to revitalize a language in advanced decline, even when the full resources of a nation are behind the attempt to revive the language. The following steps must be taken seriously:

- 1) Documenting the language's grammatical structure and vocabulary with the assistance of linguists.
- 2) Design teaching strategies and develop materials that can be used to teach it.

- 3) Promote its use within the community by improving practical usefulness and its social prestige (encouraging its usage by prestigious people in the society).

These steps can be carried out simultaneously. The important thing is whether (a) the community can change its attitude towards the language (b) can the powerful decision makers promote it by using it in some domain of power? Usage in entertainment - plays, songs and cultural events will help.

In our examination of the missing link, two critical variables must be taken into consideration. These are:

- a) How many native speakers still use the language?
- b) Are young members of the community still willing to use the language?

The challenge here is that they have learned and used a world language and there is no strong motivation for them to return to a language for which they see no future. Language revitalization is not only about language. It is about culture and politics. We have to think more in terms of a multi-strategy of different activities with both speakers and non-speakers that include government institutions.

Also, it should be part of the National policy, to revive ailing languages such as Ibani. Increased efforts should be made to include the Ibani language in school curriculums. The broadcast media could also do their own bit by broadcasting content that would strictly be in Ibani. More efforts should be made by writers to publish material in the Ibani language. Parents should play an active role in ensuring that the next generation learns and speaks the language. The life of a culture is in the language. If the language dies, the culture dies with it.

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