

Language Revitalization in Karai-karai: An Effective Tool Against Language
Endangerment in Nigeria.

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Abstract

The paper highlights the Karai-karai language situation as one of the threatened minority languages in northern Nigeria facing the extinction saga and the possible ways of revitalizing it. As it stands, the use of Karai-karai keeps declining drastically in almost all domains of language use: market, schools, mosques, churches, town hall meetings, and more interestingly, the home domain. A recorded interview technique was used for generating the required data from two speech communities in Bauchi and Yobe States. Results show that over 78% of Karai-karai youths barely use the language anywhere because they can't express themselves freely in the language. With this clear prospect of extinction, a drastic revitalization plan has therefore been proposed to address the matter in order to reactivate the speakers to love and speak karai-karai in order to save it from the imminent extinction. A recommendation is made for adult speakers to step up and teach younger ones deliberately and save the decline and eventual death of the language

Keywords: *Language Revitalization, Language Endangerment Language Decline, Language Extinction, Karai-karai Language*

I. Introduction

Language is the only channel by which human beings abstract realities to affect the way we think or perceive would. Language is specie-specific and specie-generic that is strictly a human preserve, it is peculiar to humans and can be both an individual's property (when it exists as knowledge) and a social property (when it manifests to perform its functions) the survival of the language of a people is very vital to the peoples survival as a whole. Banjo (1971) has this to say:

Language is not only a vehicle through which a person's culture can be expressed but also a medium of one's thoughts, imaginations, creativity, aspirations, desires emotions, indeed the entire human need and capacity. It is therefore the most important vehicle of people's culture (Oluwabamide 2003).

Saphir, (1970) sees language as purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntary produced symbols. It performs several functions for both the individuals and the society, namely:

1. It makes people full members of their community because primary language is means of communication. Perfect communication infers complete identity.
2. It allows the individual greater possibilities of self-expression.
3. It is a tool for exploration analysis of concepts and their processes and a means of understanding the experiences and emotions of others.

Language is also a means of communication against a group of people. Eze, (2011) defined language as “a form of expression which is generally conceived as arbitrary set of codess used for communication.” It is a means by which an ethnic group could be easily identified.

As such, language is a tool through which thoughts are represented and communicated. It is a process through which thoughts are established as well as elaborated. Language is one of the things that sets humans apart from the rest of the animal kindoms.to jettison one’s indigenous language is to say the least fundamental step toward losing one’s identity. This is because, without language, the identity and culture of an ethnic group is dead.

According to Baddeh (1993), “language is the hand maid of culture, the two are inseparated”, it is against this back drop that Karai-karai language, one of the minority languages, is taken as a case for this study. What this implies therefore is that for the Karai-karai culture to stand the test of time, its language must remain strong and be spoken often.

According to Hale in Orkar (2006), losing one’s language entails losing one’s culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art, etc it is just like dropping a bomb in a museum. Language captures the entire essence of man; it makes a man what he is and what he will become. Chomsky, in Bonjo (1971), summed up the attributes of language thus: when we study human language, we are approaching what some may call ‘the human essence and distinctive qualities of mind’ that are so far as we know, unique to man. Any impairment of language in an individual renders him an idiot and, for a people, the death of their language causes them to cease from existing.

The words of Lewis quoted in Algeo (1974), similarly expresses it thus: “The gift of language is the single human trait that marks as all life. Language is like nest building or hive making, the universal and biologically specific activity of beings. We engage in it commonly compulsively and automatically. We cannot be human without language. If we were to be separated from it our minds would die assuredly.” This shows that language is the most important heritage of any society, as people can always have their history traced through their language.

II. Theoretical Framework

The theory applied for this study is Cultural Marginalization Theory of Language proposed by Austin and sallabank, 2011. This theory posits that indigenous populations frequently go for the other people’s language in order to achieve higher social status. The adoption of such cultural and linguistic traits may come as a result of colonialism, conquest or invasion. Austin and Sallabank concluded that this is the most common cause of language endangerment (Austin and Sallabank 2011).

Specifically, the theory maintains that when people gradually negate and refuse to promote official and unofficial communication dynamics in their own language, consciously or unconsciously, as they are culturally marginalizing their language, such language is at risk of being in endangered. Come to face it, if indeed language is to be objectively used as a means of identification, most of Karai-karai people might probably fail the screening exercise. As such, there is indeed an urgent need for the renewal restoration of the Karai-karai language without any further delay. The warning given by Amano,that

language rapidly being lost at rate of extinction exceeding the well-known catastrophic loss of biodiversity, should be a clarion call for the Karai-karai people of good will to try and promote the language at both official and non-official interactions(Amano,2015).

III. Historical Background of the Karai-Karai Language

Karai-karai with alternative names karekare or kerikeri, is a language spoken by the Karai-karai people. The name historically is said to have been given to them by the kanuris (Beriberis) while moving from Yemen (their origin) via the plane lands of Kanem Bornu westward. It belongs to the Chadic branch of Afro-Asiatic phylum (GreenBerg 1963), and later Cohen(1983) classified it as a member of West Chadic group of language and further classified it as under what he called ‘Bole’ group which includes: Karai-karai Bole,Ngamo,Ngizim, Bade , Maha,Tangalee,Piya (Wurkum), Bele, Galambu, Kanakuru (Dera), Geruma, Deno (Kubi), Gera, Kirfi, etc.

As to the population and location, a journal (the Annuals of Borno iv 1987,P50) labeled Karai-karai as the thirty third (33rd) largest ethnic group in Nigeria. The national cencus 1952, a conference paper presented by Professor Munzali Jibril at Gusau, Zamfara state in September 2006 (P10) an estimate by the Karai-karai Bible translation committee gave the following figures as to the Karai-karai population.

Population of the Karai-karai according to some sources

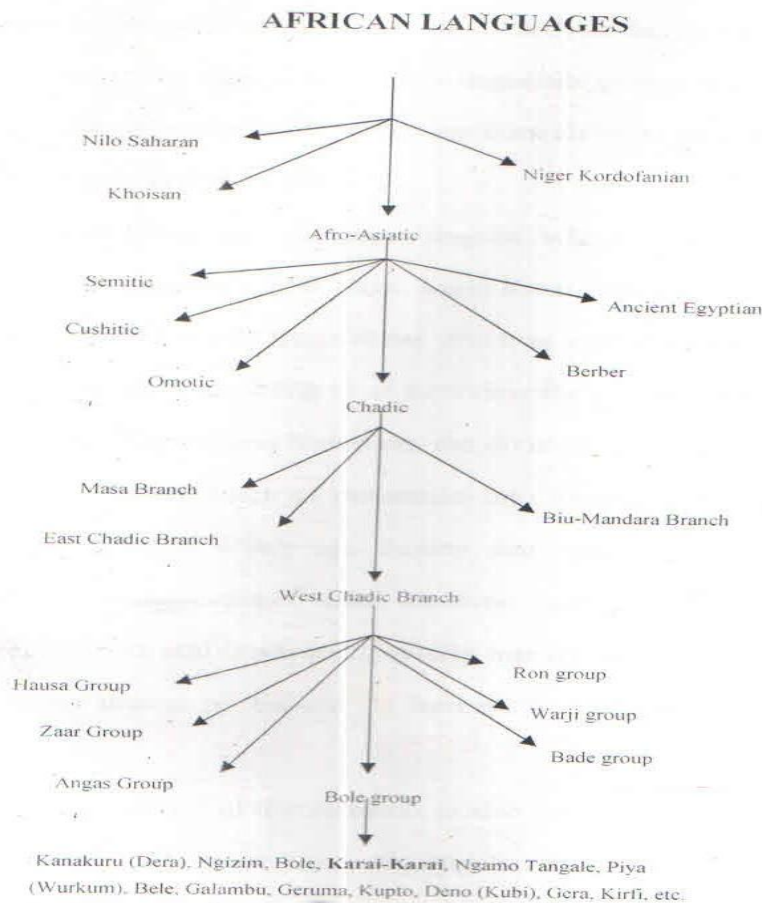
Year	Population	Source
1952	39-50,000	
1963	129,000	
1986	257,000	
2006	Over 500,000	

Source: NPC records potiskum (2009), conference paper by Prof. Munzali Jibril,2006, and Karai-karai Bible translation committee estimate 2009.

The Karai-karai people are said to have migrated from Yemen in north Africa along with some other speakers of Chadic languages, they then moved to the Chad area around 500AD and after various stages of migration in Lake Chad area and then through the Bornu empire, they finally settled on the gently rolling plains in western parts of present day Yobe state and eastern peripheral boundaries of modern Kano State as well as the north-western parts of Bauchi State where ‘Jalam’ the ancestral town of the Karai-karai people is presently located. A French written document, ‘Histoire de l’e’mpire du Borno (History of the Borno empire) has it that the Kerikeris (as earlier called) are scattered all over the borderlands of Borno, Kano and Bauchi provinces (MC Ewar P.J.M ed. African from times of 1800 1969 P.55). Today, the Karai-karais are also found in parts of Borno,Gombe,Kano and Jigawa states as well.

The following tree diagram shows the genetic classification of Karai-karai along with its closest relatives:

1.1 A tree-diagram showing Karai-Karai genetic classification



Source: Cohen (1983) *Classification of African Languages*

The Karai-Karai people live alongside Bole (Bolewa), Ngamo, Ngizim and Bade whom they are linguistically closely related, as pointed out by Meek (1963). They

The Karai-karai people live alongside Bole (Bolewa), Ngamo, Ngizim and Bade with whom they are genetically closely related as pointed out by Meek (1963). They also live with the Hausa immigrants who have now influenced the area linguistically by making Hausa the language of wider community (LWC) or lingua franca among the people (Newman 1980) There are also a handful of other ethno

linguistic groups serving as business immigrants like the Igbos, Yorubas, Fulanis and others from different parts of Nigeria. The largest town with the highest number of Karai-karai people is Potiskum in western Yobe State as it stands.

IV. Linguistic Diversity

Nigeria as a linguistically diverse country currently said to have well over five hundred languages, though the dominant ones officially recognized by the government, apart from English, remain, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The exact number of languages spoken in Nigeria is not quite certain as there are some languages which are yet to be discovered. In fact, what constitutes a language or a dialect has been debated for too long a time by linguists. Hoffman (1974) classified 396 language families in Nigeria excluding dialects that are recognized, while Hansford (1976) recognizes 395. Blench and Dendo (2003) however recognized 550 languages as spoken in Nigeria. To this effect, recent scholarship on linguistic diversity and multilingualism has been focused on language endangerment and language maintenance. Languages that are functionally vibrant and full of vitality may become endangered by losing their vitality as a result of a confluence of social, economic, political and linguistic factors and go through varying faces of attrition or progressive weakening resulting ultimately in language loss or language death (Fishman 1968), Brezinger 1992, 2007 Mackey 1997, Grenoble and Whaley 1998, Nette and Romaine 2000, Mkude 2001 Crystal 2000, Mufwene 2001, 2004, Batibo 2005 and Chambow 2009 and 2011 among others.

The negative perception of linguistic diversity therefore, serves to diminish the status of Nigerian languages, presenting them as a problem rather than an asset. A typology of the languages shows that there are three categories of languages: major minority and endangered. The major languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, etc. are spoken by larger number of speakers and are almost invariably associated with higher status and perhaps political and economic Power. Producing materials in them is certainly economical. However it is a mistake to ignore minority languages as doing so may mean exclusion and denial of the rights of speakers to use them in crucial domains such as education in general and literacy in particular.

In this regard, one of the consequences, of the negative perception toward linguistic diversity is language endangerment, a phenomenon that has become a prominent issue in sociolinguistic studies. The recognition and general acceptance that language is the major vehicle of a people's culture and that a people deprived of its language is also deprived of its culture have led to renewed emphasis in the world at large on preservation of endangered languages.

Adekunle (1976) examined the functionality of Nigerian languages and classified them into three categories as outlined below:

Class A: In this category, the Languages are classified by the government as the major indigenous languages; and they are spoken by at least six million native speakers and used widely outside their state of origin by Nigerians with different mother tongues, examples of these are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

Class B: These are officially recognized languages in Nigeria and are used at the national and federal Level but do not enjoy much usage outside the state of their origin. Under this category are: Kanuri, Fulani, Edo, Efik, Tiv, and Ijo, etc.

Class C: These are minor languages with no official recognition at the state level. Karai-karai language is an example of this class.

A decade later, Brann's more recent demographic approach to the classification of Nigerian languages has been appreciated by a good number of linguists including Emenanjo and Bleambo. In fact, most recently many scholars have adopted this method of classification. In his demographic classification, Brann (1986) identified four groups of Nigerian languages, these are:

- (i) The decamillionaires referring to languages spoken by more than ten million people (ordemolects);
- (ii) The millionaires, that is Languages spoken by more than one million people (or choralects);
- (iii) The centimils, that is languages spoken by more than 100,000 peoples (orelhnolects); and
- (iv) The minorities, that is, languages spoken by less than 100, 000 people.

Summarily, with respect to the indigenous languages in Nigeria, Brann identified 3 decamillionaire, Millionaires, a little more than 50 centimils and all others he considered as minorities.

By the current varying estimates, therefore, the figure of native languages spoken in Nigeria ranges between 250 and 400. The record which supports the latter is the most acceptable one going by the UNESCO's (2003) estimate as stated in Ouane and Glanz (2010)'s account.

V. Language Endangerment

Nigeria is the most complex country in Africa, linguistically, and one of the most complex in the world. Crazier & Blench (1992) have not only improved our knowledge of the geography of Nigerian languages but also revealed that much remains to be done on language endangerment. Confusion about status and nomenclature remains rife and the inaccessibility of many minority languages is an obstacle to many researches.

In this regard, Derhemi's (2002) work is devoted to problems of endangered languages, particularly endangered languages spoken by minorities, focusing on the sociolinguistic study of the causes, circumstances and results of endangerment, and other structural and social processes related to endangered languages and their survival. Omo-Ojugo (2004) asserts that a language can only resist death/extinction if it is able to move from the status of oracy to a written status. In his definition of endangered language, Darhemi (2002:6) avers that an endangered language is a language that may

soon vanish, ceasing to be used as a vehicle of communication, perhaps even disappearing completely from human history.

Fishman (1997) points out that it is not because languages are not being taught in schools or lack official status that make them to be endangered but that they become endangered because they lack informal intergenerational transmission and informal daily life support. In support of Fishman's argument, Wurn (1998) had recognized a live level model of language status. these levels are: (i) Potentially endangered (ii) Endangered (iii) Seriously endangered (iv) Moribund and (v) Extinct.

Grimes (2001). for her part, reports that at a colloquium held in Germany in 2000. linguists distinguished different stages of language endangerment. thus:

Critically endangered: Very few speakers, all 70 years old and older. Grandparent age.

Severely endangered: Speakers are only 40 years old and older, grandparent age.

Endangered: Speakers are only 20 years old and older, parent age.

Eroding: Speakers are some children and older people. Other children do not speak it.

Stable but threatened: All children and older people are speakers but few in number.

Safe: Not endangered languages is expected to be learned by all children and all others in the ethnic group.

NOW'S (2000) report is of the view that language endangerment arises in situations of contact between groups. Contact involves not only an exchange of cultural elements and products, but also of cultural prestige, which is often correlated with different degrees of technological advancement. There are six major characteristics of an endangered language, according to Bomgbose(2011):

- a. Very few speakers remaining, most of them old.
- b. No longer used for any meaningful purpose in the community.
- c. Not being transmitted to the younger generation.
- d. No orthography or written materials in it.
- e. Language shift has taken place such that the language has been or is being replaced by another language.
- f. On the verge of extinction.

The above view shows that when a language is moving gradually towards extinction as a result of the users' attitude, it is an indication that a culture is going out existence. It is a pointer that the story of a people is about to be lost, Karai-karai language with its rich culture of aphorisms. proverbs, folklore, folktale, oral poetry, oral tradition, moonlight stories, songs, panegyric, praise, and others is gradually losing its relevance and emphasis. On a final note. Crystal, in his introduction to *Language Death*, admits that the issue of language endangerment "is now so challenging in its unprecedented enormity that we need all hands –scholars. Journalists. Politicians, fundraisers, artists, actors" (Crystal, 2000).

VI. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach and data were collected using interview as the instrument for data collection. The data were collected from the native speakers of Karai-karai language (in testing their exposure in the language outside their homes). Eight members of the language sampled who hailed from Jalam in Bauchi state and Darin of yobe state and are undergoing their degree programmes from various faculties Yobe State University Three of these are males while the remaining five are female's students. A voice recorder was used to make the interview easier for the researcher in the cause of conducting his research.

Most of the students interviewed did not understand and speak indigenous language and generally do not use it in their interactions with friends. They were however shocked when told that their language might soon be endangered and might not survive in the next century. Further explanations as to the indices of endangerment, especially the lack of generational transmission caused confusion among many of the respondents who played "God forbid" such a fate on their language and pretended to prevent it from going into extinction.

VII. Discussions

The result of the research conducted using interview as a source format a collection revealed that 25% of the respondents feel more comfortable chatting with their Karai-karai friends in social media in Hausa and 12.5% in English. Moreover, 50% of them prefer both Hausa and English While 12.5 opt for Hausa and Karai-karai as their means of chatting. This shows that, none uses Karai-karai among them. Similarly, in response to the second question. 75% of the respondent's converse with their friends in Hausa while 12.5%. English More so, 12.5% combine the two (Hansa and English) in their conversations. In response to another question, 25% of the respondents prefer listening to Hausa music. 12.5% Karai-karai 50% in English while 12.5 go for those songs in English and Karai-karai languages respectively).

Also, when asked if they can mention at least three Karai-karai performers, only 25% of them did so while the remaining 75% could not mention even a single performer. In the same vein, when the respondents were asked whether they partook in performing songs *Nanaye* and *Dawuya* in their childhood. only 37.5% of them did partake while the whole 62.5% answered with an emphatic "NO". Furthermore, when asked to write their names and addresses in language, only 12.5% did so. However. 75% could not do so while the other 12.5% tried to write their names only but failed to write their addresses. Moreover. when the respondents were given one minute to give a story on any topic of their choice in Karai-karai language, only 12.5% of them did write. the rest, unfortunately, could not even make an attempt. Finally in response to the question as to whether they make any attempt in maintaining the language in the campus through such activities like cultural day, Yobe day etc. 50% of them responded negatively while the other 50% only pretended that they are in the process of doing so.

VIII. Revitalization of Karai-Karai Language

Language revitalization is the art of reviving or reactivating the dwindling or dormant status of language use in a speech community. As identified by Asher and Sympson (1994), factors responsible for the decline in language use can be categorized into three social factors, Economic factor and institution support.

1. **Social factors:** - These are factors like migration, urbanization, demographic, (i.e number and distribution of speakers), age, sex, religion, educational background. These have been seen to determine to a great extent the shift (from the use of Karai-karai to other languages in the Karai-karai community. In addition to these, ethnic identity transfer for perceived benefits or advantages or reasons of insecurity, intermarriage, social status of language, etc. religions for instance, plays a vital role in the choice of language use. For instance over 70% of our respondents are muslims, and mostly religions functions like preaching, prayers, walimas (wedding reception), etc in Karai-karai communities are conducted mainly in Hausa and Arabic languages. This greatly fuels the shift from Karai-karai to Hausa.

2. Economic Factors

Factors such as commercial activities, job opportunities and other activities that have to do with material gains such as local business transactions like 'dillanci' (foreman business), shop keeping, hawking, vehicle conductor work (yaron mota). etc strongly influence Karai-karai people to speak Hausa more frequently than their ethnic language. This is seen more in fairly urban Karai-karai settlements because of their heterogeneous nature. For one to be locally employed in this community, one certainly needs at least some level of Hausa proficiency.

3. Institutional Support

Every language needs institutional support in order to develop its status. Institutions or agencies like the media, education, administration, law, advertisement, etc. Karai-karai has none of such support presently. In the 1990s, there was a little time allocated to indigenous languages in "Yobe State (Karai-Karai inclusive) to present some programmes daily on the Yobe Broadcasting Corporation (YBC). That had helped a great deal for people to improve on their ethnic language use. Today however, that programme is not heard anymore. As Asher and Simpson (1994) observed, if one (or more) language (s) has more institutional support, that language would become more prestigious, thereby boosting its status. Other languages in the area would then attract less attention and speakers of such languages have to shift to the supported one. So is the situation with Karai-Karai presently.

Institution such as schools also do propagate the use of the indigenous languages by teaching them both as subjects and using them as language of instruction to teach other subjects, this is not obtainable with most minority languages including Karai-karai.

Way Forward

In order to revive the dwindling state of Karai-karai language use, the following drastic steps must be taken in order to stop and reverse the trend to save the language from going extinct.

1. Government at state and local government levels must introduce and enforce the learning and teaching of Karai-karai at pre- primary, primary and Junior Secondary Schools as provided by the National Language Policy on Education, as well as provide materials/equipments for such.

2. Government should ensure the documentation of orthographies primers and other literary materials on Karai-karai for the present and upcoming generation to lay their hands on.
This is essential because writing is one of the most important activities of a literate society and has incalculable influence on humanity as it is a common instrument dissemination of knowledge (Otagburagu 1997).
3. Conscious efforts must be made by parents and elderly people to speak Karai-karai to the younger ones both at home and outside the home (as can be seen with other ethnic groups) so that they can as well transmit it to the upcoming generations.
Other factors responsible for revitalizing Karai-karai language may also include:
(in-group)
 - a. Endogamous marriage practices.
 - b. Maintenance marriage practice traditional religion/cultural pride.
 - c. Existence of acceptable orthography.
 - d. Access to media houses.
 - e. Transmission using social media.

IX Conclusion

Goingby Brann's(1988) model, we can say that Karai-karai language is grossly endangered, having majority of urban dwellers not speaking it and worst of all, not feeling any sense of loss, also the rural dwellers are joining them in shifting from being Karai-karai to the dreadful Hausa and English languages. Although the proposed revitalization plan, if seriously adopted, may save the dwindling situation of language decline currently experienced.

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